

Al Diyafah High School Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Post-16

Report published May 2011

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Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report

Outstanding – exceptionally high quality of performance or practice.

Good – the expected level of quality for every school in Dubai.

Acceptable – the minimum level of acceptability required for Dubai. All key aspects of performance and practice in every school should meet or exceed this level.

Unsatisfactory – quality not yet at the level acceptable for schools in Dubai. Schools will be expected to take urgent measures to improve the quality of any aspect of their performance or practice that is judged at this level.

Al Diyafah High School was inspected in March 2011 as part of the regular inspection of all schools in Dubai. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated students' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on students' progress in Islamic Education (for Muslim students), Arabic, English, mathematics and science.

Basic information about the school

Located in Al Qusais, Al Diyafah High School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Foundation Stage to post-16, aged three to 18 years. The school follows a modified UK curriculum. At the time of the inspection there were 1,464 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable. Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Almost all were pleased with their children's progress in Islamic Education, Arabic as a first language, English and mathematics. Most were pleased about the progress being made in science, but only a majority were happy with Arabic as an additional language. Almost all parents thought students behaved well and that the school treated them fairly and kept them safe. Almost all thought that the school was well led and were pleased with teaching and learning and extra-curricular opportunities. Most parents thought their children were being helped to choose healthy lifestyles. Almost all thought that communication with parents was good and that parent-teachers' meetings and school reports were regular and informative. Most thought that the school responded effectively to parental concerns. A few thought they could be encouraged to become more fully involved in the work of the school.

How well does the school perform overall?

Al Diyafah High School provided an acceptable quality of education for its students. A number of initiatives had recently been introduced to develop students' independent learning and higher-order thinking skills. Staff development and analysis of students' progress were focusing teachers more fully on supporting students' varying learning needs. However, many of these initiatives were at an early stage of development and there was uneven progress and impact on students' learning. The school had met, or made good progress towards addressing, the recommendations from the last inspection report. The Principal showed high quality, dynamic leadership. This had helped staff members develop their leadership and management skills. As a result, the school was well placed to ensure continued improvement.

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good in the primary phase and acceptable in the secondary and post-16 phases, where students were not sufficiently skilled in applying knowledge to their lives or to the wider world. There were significant improvements to attainment and progress in Arabic for both first and additional language learners. Attainment and progress of students in English, mathematics and science had improved in the primary phase. With the exception of those students studying English in post-16 levels, attainment and progress were consistently good across all phases in all three subjects. It was particularly strong in aspects of science. Post-16 students' attainment and progress were acceptable in English. All three aspects of students' personal and social development were good. Teaching and learning remained good in Foundation Stage. Teaching had improved in the primary phase. However, the quality of teaching and learning was still variable across the school and was acceptable at the primary, secondary and post-16 phases. Assessment remained acceptable at all phases. The curriculum had improved significantly and was good across the first three phases, but remained only acceptable at the post-16 phase, where the choice of subjects at A-level was too limited. Health and safety was outstanding, with a good quality of support for students. Self-evaluation had improved and was good, as were leadership and partnerships with parents and the community. Governance and staffing, facilities and resources remained acceptable.

Key features of the school

- The well behaved students and their positive relationships with their teachers;
- Improvement in the attainment and progress of students in Arabic;
- Improvement in the quality of teaching in mathematics and science in the primary phase and in Arabic across the school;
- The strong leadership and vision of the Principal and the developing quality of shared leadership across the school;
- The high quality support for students' well-being and the growing emphasis upon developing students' independent learning and personal growth;
- The inconsistent quality of teaching, learning and assessment, particularly in Islamic Education.

Recommendations

- Continue to enhance students' collaborative work and develop their critical and higher order thinking skills across the school;
- Continue to improve teaching, learning and assessment, particularly in Islamic education;
- Increase the breadth and range of choices for post-16 students to fully meet their learning needs;
- Continue to develop the role of the governing body to include parental representation in holding the school accountable for its performance.

How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good in the primary phase and acceptable in the rest of the school. Most students had good understanding of Islamic values. Their Holy Qur'an recitation skills were underdeveloped. Most primary students knew about the life of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), prayers and ablutions, and worship in Islam. In the secondary phase, students had acceptable knowledge about The Holy Qur'an and the rewards gained from reading it. By the post-16 phase, most understood the varying approaches to interpreting The Holy Qur'an, as well as the significance of the mosque to the Muslim community. However, students' abilities to link their learning to their daily lives were not well-developed and their knowledge was limited to what was in their textbooks.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were good in the primary and acceptable in both the secondary and post-16 phases. In the primary, students listened for information, spoke short sentences and read poems fluently above the levels expected for their ages. They understood the characters of a story and read and wrote appropriate passages. Their grammar skills were well developed. In the secondary phase, students listened and spoke effectively. They read poetry, essays and local newspapers accurately and wrote to appropriate standards. By the post-16 years, students wrote at length with sound knowledge of grammar. Students' progress on internal tests showed an improving trend across all phases.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language were acceptable in the primary and secondary stages. In Grade 2, students could say short sentences about themselves and the school. By Grade 6 they understood their teachers without using English. However, their speaking skills were not as well developed. They read long sentences with acceptable fluency and wrote the answers clearly and without mistakes. Secondary students listened, spoke and read effectively and wrote to appropriate lengths. Across all stages, students had very limited writing skills.

Attainment and progress in English were good in Foundation Stage, primary and secondary phases and acceptable in post-16. Almost all children in Foundation Stage demonstrated good listening skills and spoke confidently. They had good phonics knowledge in reading and writing simple words. In the primary years, both attainment and progress had improved since the last inspection. Students spoke confidently and used an impressive range of vocabulary. They read age-related texts, poems and play scripts with fluency, good expression and comprehension. Students wrote at length in a range of genres. At secondary and post-16, students wrote well, but grammar and punctuation were not always accurate. Post-16 students spoke with variable confidence. Results were consistently high in English National Curriculum examinations.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were good. Foundation Stage children recognised numbers up to 20 and simple shapes. Primary phase students made good progress and frequently exceeded international standards. The majority had good number skills and applied these correctly to everyday examples. Most secondary stage students achieved standards above those expected internationally. In the 2010 IGCSE examinations, the majority of those presented achieved grades above international averages. Across the phases, students were progressing well in algebra, trigonometry and data handling, but were weaker in number skills. Attainment of post-16 students was very strong in both AS and A-level examinations. Mathematics AS results had improved over the last three years, culminating in a majority of students achieving high grades.

Attainment and progress in science were good throughout the school. Attainment in the Foundation Stage, primary and post-16 phases was above international age-related standards and were well above in biology, chemistry and physics at the secondary phase. The majority of primary students were able to categorise, classify and clearly communicate their observations. Overall, students had good subject knowledge. By the post-16 phase, students displayed good investigative skills and recorded findings accurately, analysed data and predicted outcomes. Students' independent investigative work and their critical thinking skills were underdeveloped and this limited their abilities to formulate well thought-out hypotheses.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Attitudes and behaviour were good. Almost all students were well behaved around the school and in lessons. They showed respect to visitors and had purposeful and positive relationships with their teachers and their colleagues. Most students made healthy food choices and had well-developed awareness of healthy life styles. Students moved to lessons promptly, but usually a few minutes were lost due to travel around the school. Attendance during the last full term was acceptable.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and culture were good. Students took responsibility for school life through the student council or as class leaders in monitoring behaviour. Students led daily assemblies, where there was a focus on self-esteem, environmental conservation and health and behavioural issues. They actively raised funds for charities within Dubai and abroad and

donated blood. Most students had developed a good understanding of Islamic values and principles and welcomed the diverse nature of Dubai. They appreciated the UAE's culture and its main characteristics.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good. Most students had a developing economic awareness about Dubai's progress and its position in the world. They were familiar with major projects in Dubai and knew significant personalities in the history of the UAE. They were aware of their potential contributions to the community and took part in several initiatives, such as volunteering at a local hospital. Students developed good environmental awareness through participation in various activities to look after the environment.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching in the Foundation Stage was good. It was acceptable in the primary, secondary and post-16 phases. Most teachers had good subject knowledge and used appropriate teaching strategies. Most lessons were well planned, with clear learning objectives supported through the use of information and communication technology (ICT). The pace of instruction was good throughout most lessons. Teachers were developing their skills in using open questions to promote thinking. This was effectively done in only a minority of lessons. Opportunities for independent learning were limited and learning activities were not sufficiently challenging to meet all learners' needs. Commendably, the school had initiated self, peer and student evaluation of teaching, as well as reviews of homework correction. These initiatives were beginning to impact positively on teaching across the school. Teaching in the key subjects was most effective in English, mathematics and science. The teaching of Arabic had improved significantly. However, the teaching of both Islamic Education and Arabic were still dominated by the respective text books.

The quality of student learning was good in the Foundation Stage and acceptable in primary, secondary and post-16. Good learning was evident in all phases. In the key subjects, it was stronger in English, mathematics and science, but was less effective in Islamic Education and Arabic. Almost all students were enthusiastic learners. When given opportunities, students worked well collaboratively. Learning expectations of students were high, which was reflected in the quality of their work. Students responded well to their teachers' questions. However, they were only asked to think for themselves in a minority of lessons. Students benefited from setting their own learning goals through the use of progress charts.

Assessment was of acceptable quality. In all lessons, teachers' questions and observations were used as the main means of assessment. Most teachers regularly checked students' work and gave informative oral feedback. In the Foundation Stage, detailed assessment was most developed in English and mathematics, but was not as rigorously applied to the other key areas of children's development. In the primary years, a continuous assessment programme was in place, with examinations at the end of each term and year. Quizzes and teacher reviews of lessons added to the assessment data. In the secondary and post-16 phases, teachers had devised a range of tests which were carried out regularly. The school used a

number of international examinations for assessment purposes, with very good results. However, the extensive data generated was not used sufficiently well to inform students on the specific steps required for improvement.

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?

The curriculum was good in the Foundation Stage, primary and secondary phases. It was acceptable in the post-16 phase. Adapted from the National Curriculum for England, it had a clear and appropriate rationale and was broad and balanced. It was reviewed annually to ensure good continuity and progression of learning. At both the Foundation Stage and primary phases, it provided good levels of challenge for all students. There were well-planned learning experiences that included appropriate emphasis on basic numeracy and literacy. In the secondary and post-16 phases, students were well prepared for the various international examinations. However, despite improvements, the curriculum for both Islamic Education and Arabic was too focused on knowledge from the textbook and gave insufficient emphasis to thinking skills, which limited students' progress. Subject choices at the post-16 phase were insufficiently broad to ensure sufficient progression from subjects at the previous level. The school's extra-curriculum programme had expanded since the last inspection and included a wide range of well-attended clubs and sporting activities. In particular, the personal enrichment programme and the challenge-based learning initiatives offered all students good opportunities to develop their research, interpersonal, team building and problem-solving skills. Students experienced academic, social, creative and aesthetic activities through art, music, elocution, and debating options. Students had excellent involvement with the local and wider community through, for example, visits to a local centre for special educational needs and through their involvement in environmental activities. Older students had contributed to projects assisting schools in Nairobi and the Philippines and had supported the Pakistan flood relief fund.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety provisions were outstanding. Bus transport was safe, with excellent supervision upon arrival and departure. The school maintained a very safe and secure environment; buildings were clean, well maintained and fire drills regularly undertaken. The medical team were dedicated to the students' needs and provided them with an extensive health education programme. Regular physical checkups included monitoring students' eyesight and weight. Teachers and support staff were visible and vigilant, ensuring students were very well supervised. Students were trained in safe practices and risk assessments were conducted in all required areas. The school canteen provided a wide choice of healthy foods and healthy living was integrated into the life and work of the school. The school had a child protection policy and procedures were well known to staff and students.

The quality of support was good. Very positive relationships existed between teachers and students. Staff members ensured that the well-being and academic needs of almost all

students were being met, including good university and career guidance. Students' emotional and personal needs were well supported and monitored by social workers and psychologists. Good tracking of academic attainment was ensured through rigorous recording of individual students' marks. Recently developed assessment criteria helped identify students' educational needs. Individual educational plans had been produced for only some students with significant needs. They had insufficiently defined details of how the progress of a few students would be monitored. A number of additional students had been assessed, but had not been provided with individual education plans.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership of the school was good. The Principal was a highly effective leader. Her strong vision and drive for continuous improvement had resulted in greater shared responsibility across the school. Over the three years of her leadership the school had met its promises to parents. A clear agenda for further improvement was communicated to staff and the wider community. Senior and middle management teams had expanded. They were at varying stages of implementing recently introduced initiatives. Most managers were ensuring greater consistency in teaching and the quality of students' learning, whilst sustaining students' high grade levels in external examinations. Staff members were fully committed to the vision of the school's future.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning was good. An increased range and quality of monitoring systems had helped the school identify strengths and areas for improvement. Students' academic performance was being more systematically analysed. This information was used increasingly to target support to individuals and groups of students. A range of international benchmarks was beginning to be used to measure students' attainment and achievement. Planning at phase and departmental level reflected the priorities of the school, but the impact of the plans varied. Robust systems for observing and evaluating teaching and learning included peer observation and student evaluations. However, they had yet to lead to consistency in the quality of teaching and learning.

Partnerships with parents and the wider community were good. Improvements in the quality and range of the school's communications with parents included more information on course content, homework and teaching approaches. The frequency of reporting to parents had increased. However, reports to parents did not provide sufficient information to help them support their children's learning. Parents helped with a range of social activities and external trips. They were becoming involved in the life of the school through events like family sports days. Links with the wider community were strong.

Overall, governance was acceptable. A governing body had been established that included limited parent representation. It had met regularly, leading to improvements in some aspects of school life. Board members rigorously monitored academic performance and priority planning. The board had yet to ensure the full involvement of the wider parent body and other stakeholders in holding the school accountable.

Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable. Teachers were suitably qualified and effectively deployed. Recent training included a greater focus on supporting students'

independent learning and higher order thinking skills. The school made good use of the limited facilities to provide activities and facilities which just met the demands of the school roll. Resource enhancements since the last inspection, such as interactive whiteboards and internet access in classrooms, additional sports equipment and books, were having a positive impact on teaching and learning.

Summary of inspection judgements

In their evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the school, the inspection team made judgements about the following aspects of the school's performance.

Four descriptors are: Outstanding; Good; Acceptable; Unsatisfactory.

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
5% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Acceptable
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of support	Good	Good	Good	Good

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
	Overall
Quality of leadership	Good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Good
Governance	Acceptable
Staffing, facilities and resources	Acceptable

How well does the school perform overall?
Acceptable

Next steps

The school has been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how it will address the main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents. The next inspection will report on the progress made by the school.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau
Knowledge and Human Development Authority

How to contact us

If you have a concern or wish to comment on any aspect of this report you should contact: inspection@khda.gov.ae.

More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at www.khda.gov.ae.

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