

Horizon School Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Year 6

Report published May 2010

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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.

Horizon School was inspected in October 2009 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 Safa, Horizon School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Foundation to Year 6, aged three to 11 years. The school follows the English National Curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 471 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents, almost all of whom were highly supportive of the school, its policies, procedures and quality of education.

How well does the school perform overall?

Horizon School provided a good quality of education for students and showed several areas of outstanding achievement and practice. The school's consistent encouragement of personal and social development was complemented by a largely stimulating curriculum, rich in experiences that included art, music, drama and physical education. This encouraged learning, especially the development of independent learning skills. A key factor in building this stimulating learning environment was the inspirational leadership of the Headteacher, who encouraged students, staff and parents alike to achieve ambitious personal goals. All students showed very good behaviour, high levels of motivation and great respect for their teachers and other learners. They were keen to extend their learning and showed great confidence. Good attainment and progress were apparent in most subject areas, with attainment in primary

mathematics being a particularly outstanding feature. However, both Arabic and Islamic Education were the exception to this. In these subjects both attainment and progress were unsatisfactory.

Teaching and learning in the school were good. Teachers had a clear knowledge of their subjects and used a wide range of teaching strategies that interested and engaged students. However, in Islamic Education and Arabic the school did not provide teaching activities with sufficient appropriate challenge for all students.

The school had developed an extensive programme of self-evaluation activities, most of which had positive impact on the learning process. Nevertheless, action planning required further development, particularly in the area of establishing clear indicators and sources of evidence of achievement of planned objectives. Thus school development planning and annual implementation planning required greater clarity. Relationships with parents and the wider community contributed strongly toward the successes of the school. Parents' support for the school extended to participation in classroom activities such as guiding play or assisting with reading, organising social and cultural activities and introducing new parents to the school. Home-school links were highly effective. Whenever children were starting new phases of learning most parents participated in induction sessions which allowed them to support their child's learning at home. The use of the home-school journal was outstanding. Often updated and monitored on a daily basis its use added significantly to the quality of learning and teacher-student relationships. The owners maintained a high level of interest in the school and understood the need further to gain the involvement of parents and the wider community in school governance. Overall, the school showed a high capacity to gain further improvements.

Key features of the school

- Excellent encouragement of personal and social development within a supportive school ethos;
- Students were making good progress in their English, mathematics and science lessons;
- The school offered a wide range of curriculum enrichment activities;
- Staff provided a stimulating learning environment and used high quality resources to enhance learning;
- Students' weak attainment and progress in Arabic and Islamic Education.

Recommendations

- In line with other subject areas in the school, improve attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Further develop action planning to include clear success criteria and outcomes;
- Directly involve stakeholders in the process and structure of governance and further develop ways by which the school could be accountable to the governing body.

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

The overall attainment and progress in Islamic Education across the school was unsatisfactory. Students did not demonstrate the ability to recite The Holy Qur'an verses they were studying. They had a limited understanding of the meaning of the verses. Only a few students could memorise short chapters of The Holy Qur'an in Years 1 to 3. In the later stages, a few students had a limited general knowledge about Islam and used the Islamic greetings. Very few could explain what they had learned and how it related to their own lives.

The overall quality of attainment and progress in Arabic across the school was unsatisfactory in comparison with national and international standards. Students learnt the alphabet from Year 1 to Year 6 and their progress was too slow. Their listening skills were inhibited by the excessive use of English in class. Therefore, students did not have opportunities to develop their skills in Arabic inside the classroom. Students' speaking skills were almost ignored, apart from the recitation of the daily morning greetings. Writing was also very limited. Until Year 4, the development of students writing skills was confined to copying some letters on the board or in their exercises book. In general, students' progress was too slow and limited.

Students' attainment and progress in English were good across all stages. Their speaking and listening skills were good. For example, Foundation Stage children accurately described the effect of mixing together sand and water and they responded immediately to each other's suggestions for creating a suitable sandcastle mix. Reading was good in all year groups, and students had good knowledge of their favourite authors. Good writing skills enabled the students to produce a variety of creative work, diaries and stories. Although some presentation was good, most was immature because many students did not join their letters.

Progress in mathematics was good throughout the school. Students' attainment was outstanding by the end of the primary phase. At Year 6 all students achieved expected standards and a majority exceeded these levels. Detailed planning by staff ensured continuity and progression of learning. Students, as a consequence, were confident in all aspects of number and demonstrated very good skills in mental calculation and problem-solving. Foundation Stage children developed their numeracy skills well through a range of practical and stimulating activities and they confidently discussed their work with adults and peers.

Attainment and progress in science were good across the school. Year 6 students performed well in an external test and, in lessons and in their recent work, students across all stages demonstrated levels of knowledge, skills and understanding above international age-related expectations. Throughout the school, most students understood the basic processes of scientific inquiry. They were able to form questions for investigation, make predictions, conduct fair tests, record observations, and draw conclusions about their original questions. A few students did not make sufficient notes as they proceeded through their lessons. Most students were able to explain concepts such as insulation, stability, load, solubility, heating and cooling at age-appropriate levels of sophistication.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' personal and social development was outstanding. In all year groups, the students had excellent attitudes to learning. Their behaviour was excellent in classrooms and in the open areas of the school. They responded warmly to visitors, smiling at all times and making numerous offers of help. They were very happy in school, and all relationships were excellent. At morning break, inter-year friendships were stimulated by group activities, including football and conversation. In Year 6, students enthusiastically fulfilled their roles as prefects and house captains. Attendance was good, and students travelling independently of the bus service arrived punctually for morning school.

Students celebrated Dubai's multi-cultural society, while retaining their national identities. They appreciated, and benefited from, local traditions, cultures and religions. Students' excellent knowledge of Dubai's recent economic history was stimulated by a whole-school topic about the UAE. All students demonstrated great respect for the Islamic faith, and had good knowledge of the rituals of prayer and fasting. They had good understanding of the lives of people in areas of deprivation. On sponsored non-uniform days, they raised funds for numerous charities, including Romanian orphans.

Students at all stages demonstrated excellent understanding of environmental issues. They had been actively involved in a number of projects organised by staff to help understand the need for conservation. The students had enthusiastically supported Dubai's drive for community recycling projects.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching from Foundation Stage to Year 6 was good, but there was inconsistent practice. A majority of lessons observed were good or outstanding but a few were unsatisfactory. The most effective teaching was observed in English, mathematics, and science lessons, where creative teachers used a wide variety of strategies and resources to help keep students engaged and stimulated. Almost all teachers knew their subjects well and knew effective ways to teach them. Most lessons were relevant to students' lives, and thus meaningful to them. Teachers made enquiry and critical thinking skills central to most lessons, and most were skilful at the art of questioning to promote learning. The needs of individual students were addressed in planning; both same-ability and mixed-ability grouping of students was planned to good effect. Teacher-student interactions were always positive and good class management prevailed throughout the school.

As a consequence of good teaching, learning was good overall, but uneven in quality and was dependent upon the subject observed. Almost all students enjoyed learning; they worked well independently and in groups, and took on roles within those groups to the benefit of others. Students were aware of their personal strengths and weaknesses as learners and helped each other correct misunderstandings. Importantly, most students knew what they had to do next in order to improve. The use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) was integrated in a majority of lessons and this was effective in allowing students to learn at their own pace. Students frequently made connections between learning in different subjects around a central theme, and applied learning to new contexts.

Assessment was good. Most teachers practiced daily on-going assessment of students' progress as lessons unfolded. As was the case with teaching and learning, assessment practices varied between subjects, and specific information about students' progress and attainment in science was incomplete. Almost all teachers knew their students' strengths and weaknesses well. Marking of students' written work often included guidance about how to improve. The school had good general policies and practices to assess learning and communicated the results effectively to students and parents. The school had begun the process of using assessment information to modify teaching but this was not yet fully embedded in an overall strategy of curriculum planning and updating.

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

The curriculum was good and contained some outstanding features. However, provision for Arabic and Islamic Education was poorly planned and the quality of provision was weak. In all other aspects the curriculum was stimulating, creatively planned and encouraged high achievement and successfully developed students' independent learning. This enabled most students to integrate knowledge, skills and understanding. Almost all subjects were well planned and monitored, which ensured breadth, balance, continuity and progression. Homework was regularly provided in the primary school and included research for topics and extending ideas begun in classes. Curricular plans matched work to the range of students' learning needs. This was effective in providing support and challenge for students in most subjects. An excellent variety of extra-curricular activities widened primary students' practical skills and experiences. Links with the local and global community were excellent. They included support for Romanian students with two staff visiting the partner school each year. Students were knowledgeable of cultural differences in Dubai and the Gulf and some visited a local mosque. Links with a UAE nursery had been developed and links with feeder secondary schools were good. The well-planned curriculum gave high priority to students' personal development and was a major strength of the school.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Outstanding health and safety procedures maintained a secure and safe environment for students and staff. The school buildings were clean, and presented no apparent risk. Outdoor play areas were of good size, and in good condition. Students were not allowed into the playground without sun hats. Regular fire drills were practiced, and refined to overcome minor difficulties. The school nurse kept detailed records of students' health and well-being, and she had significant input to the school's programme for personal, social and health education. The school's active support for healthy eating influenced parents to evaluate the contents of students' lunchboxes. Each child travelling by bus had an allocated place, and supervision was excellent at despatch and in transit. The school had a detailed and effective pastoral policy, including clear procedures for child protection.

Personal relationships were excellent between students, and between students and teachers. All classroom relationships were excellent. Teachers keep careful records of students' personal development and detailed records of their academic progress. The school's mid-term and annual reports to parents included grades achieved and examination marks. Teachers comments were detailed, and clearly showed how children might improve their work.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The Head teacher provided effective leadership to the school. Clear directions were set and within the secure context of the school teachers were encouraged to use their professional expertise to the full and to make constructive innovations. Through this approach, the Head teacher had gained commitment from students, staff and parents. Performance management systems were thorough and the operation of this process enhanced the atmosphere of collective responsibility. Effective teams were evident in most areas of the school and leaders showed a high capacity to take responsibility in securing further improvement. However, weaknesses in Islamic Education and Arabic required urgent improvement.

There were effective whole school self-evaluation procedures, including the regular use of questionnaires and other strategies with students, parents and teachers. The process of observation of teachers by senior managers was complemented by the widespread practice of teachers learning from each other by mutual observation and discussion. Overall, a great quantity of valuable data was gathered by the school. However, activities were sometimes described as being achieved when some of the indicators and sources of evidence indicated the need for further development. There had been significant progress in addressing the main recommendations of the previous inspection report, but the curriculum and teaching in Islamic Education and Arabic had not been satisfactorily addressed.

There were outstanding links with parents. Parents were regularly involved in the daily life of the school, for example, by acting as classroom helpers and assisting on visits to outside events. Parents were highly supportive of the school and its leadership. There were many

opportunities for parents to meet with senior staff or teachers, including a regular series of coffee mornings for specific grades hosted by the Head teacher. Parents were regularly consulted about school developments. They were well informed of their child's progress through personal contact with teachers and through exchange of information contained in the home-school diary which was regularly updated, often on a daily basis, by teachers and parents. Whenever a student was about to experience new aspects of the curriculum, nearly all parents took the opportunity to attend briefing sessions organised by the school. There were strong links with local secondary schools and extensive use of the local business community to enhance the curriculum.

The owners had a clear interest in the educational success of the school and were keen to further involve other stakeholders. They were regularly informed about the implementation of the strategic plans of the school and planned a more structured approach to holding the school to account for its performance in key areas.

The school had a high quality environment and a wealth of well-used learning resources and specialist areas including a gymnasium, library, swimming pool, music and art facilities and an extensive and accessible ICT provision. Despite a large turnover in staff over a two-year period, in general there were sufficient numbers of well qualified teachers, although in Arabic and Islamic Education further development of teachers' skills was required.

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	Primary
Attainment	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?		
Age group:	Foundation	Primary
Attainment	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?		
Age group:	Foundation	Primary
Attainment	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?		
Age group:	Foundation	Primary
Attainment	Good	Outstanding
Progress over time	Good	Good

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

How good is the students' personal and social development?		
Age group:	Foundation	Primary
Attitudes and behaviour	Outstanding	Outstanding
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Economic and environmental understanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

How good are teaching and learning?		
Age group:	Foundation	Primary
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Good

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?		
Age group:	Foundation	Primary
Curriculum quality	Good	Good

How well does the school protect and support students?		
Age group:	Foundation	Primary
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of support	Outstanding	Outstanding

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

How well does the school perform overall?
Good

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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