

Star International School - Mirdif Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Primary

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.

Star International School - Mirdif 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 Mirdif, Star International School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Foundation Stage to primary, aged three to 11 years. The school follows the English National Curriculum. At the time of the inspection there were 221 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires sent to parents. Parents were very positive about the school and its leadership. Almost all were pleased with the progress being made in the key subjects of English, mathematics and science. They were less positive about their children's progress in Islamic Education and Arabic. Almost all parents were pleased with the quality of teaching. They thought that their children were treated fairly and stated that their children enjoyed lessons and were enthusiastic to learn. All thought that their children were safe, while almost all thought that students' behaviour was good. Almost all parents thought that there was good communication with the school. Most parents stated that reports on their children's progress were regular enough and informative. A similar number felt that the school responded appropriately to their concerns. Almost all said they were effectively involved in the work of the school. Almost all were positive about the leadership of the school. Parents were positive about the way that the school had responded to the last inspection report and most thought that the report had led to improvements in the school.

How well does the school perform overall?

Star International School - Mirdif provided a good quality of education for its students, overall. The school had worked diligently and effectively to address the recommendations from the previous inspection report. There was very good capacity and commitment to improve the school further.

Across the school, in all key subjects, attainment was acceptable and progress was good with the exception of Arabic as an additional language. In Arabic as an additional language students' attainment and progress were both acceptable. Attitudes and behaviour were good across the school. Students were friendly, polite, and were eager to learn. They were well behaved, helpful and committed to doing their best. Teaching and learning were good across the school. Teachers planned lessons well, using a broad range of activities that allowed students to be involved in lessons. Interactive white boards enhanced instruction. Almost all teachers had good classroom management skills and suitable levels of knowledge about their subjects. Assessment strategies were good in the Foundation Stage but acceptable in the primary phase. The curriculum provision was good; there was an appropriate balance of activities and academic learning. It closely followed the English National Curriculum. It provided opportunities to study a broad range of subjects as well as many sporting and extra-curricular activities. Most key curriculum areas had been successfully adapted to ensure a strong Dubai context. There had been improved provision for students with additional learning needs. Protection and support of students were good. The school provided a safe and secure learning environment that was colourful, lively and celebrated students' achievement; there were high quality displays of student's work and their achievements throughout the school. The school was well led by the Principal, who was committed to raising the attainment of the students. Appropriate systems were in place to monitor and evaluate the work of the school and they were beginning to have positive effects upon learning. Subject co-ordinators had participated well in the self-evaluation process. Links with parents and the wider community were good. Governance was acceptable and the governing body provided support to the school. The staffing, facilities and resources were of good quality and together provided an attractive and stimulating place of learning.

Key features of the school

- The improved progress across the school in almost all key subjects;
- The improved teaching and learning across the school;
- The high quality of leadership provided by the Principal;
- The positive relationships at all levels between students, teachers and parents;
- There remained acceptable levels of attainment across all phases of the school in all key subjects.

Recommendations

- Improve students' attainment in all key subjects and their progress in Arabic for additional language learners;
- Improve the quality of marking of students' work so that parents and students know how well they are doing and what requires development;
- Make better use of assessment information to plan lessons to meet the needs of all students, particularly in classes with a wide age range;
- Enhance the curriculum in Islamic Education and Arabic to ensure it is suitable for all year levels.

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

Attainment in Islamic Education in the primary phase was acceptable and progress was good. Most students achieved standards in line with the Ministry of Education's requirements. They showed significant progress when using new information, and linked it well to real life. In Years 1 and 2 most students knew Allah is one, identified the Five Pillars of Islam and the Six Pillars of Faith. They understood their impact on a Muslim's life and also knew about being considerate to animals. In Years 3 to 6 all students had sufficient understanding and application of the belief that Allah is gracious and their creator. They know the relationship and consequences of good and bad deeds for paradise and hell. They used the Prophet's (PBUH) sayings and The Holy Qur'an to demonstrate their understanding. Most students memorised many chapters of The Holy Qur'an and could read it, applying some recitation rules.

Attainment in Arabic as a first language in the primary years was acceptable and progress was good. The majority of students displayed listening speaking and reading skills that were in line with expectations. Years 1, 2, 5 and 6 students made significant progress; they could comprehend new information and they spoke with spontaneity and read with clarity and expression. Most students displayed knowledge of the rules of grammar and could apply them in writing. In Years 5 and 6 most students described their definition of happiness and used an appropriate range of vocabulary. In Years 3 and 4 students made less progress in all four language skills.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language in the primary years were acceptable. In Years 1 and 2 most students had memorised the alphabet and could recite it. They could distinguish letters, read, write, and use appropriate words in short sentences. Most students identified short vowels in their reading and had sufficient vocabulary in their speaking. For example, they named different kinds of food and tools for cooking. In Years 3 to 6 a significant number of students were attaining below the expected levels in listening, speaking, and reading comprehension skills; all students had weak writing skills.

In English, attainment was acceptable and progress was good across the school. In the Foundation Stage, where a majority of children had English as an additional language, they

were able to listen to stories and songs and identify verbs of different tense. By Year 6 only a few students attained listening and speaking skills that reached expectations. Most Foundation Stage children developed good word recognition skills and used new words in short sentences. Primary students made good progress in reading and comprehension skills were well developed,, despite the narrow range of texts used. In the primary years, the majority of students wrote at an acceptable level. Some higher attaining students were able to write with more creativity and analysis. Extended and imaginative writing skills were underdeveloped.

Attainment in mathematics in both phases was acceptable and progress was good. Younger children had age-appropriate skills in counting and by the end of Foundation Stage most children could count confidently, with a few knowing their numbers to one hundred. In the primary school students showed development expected for their ages. They wrote and had an acceptable understanding of number. By Year 6 students could add, subtract, multiply and divide. They were able to add numbers up to a thousand and, when multiplying simple decimal fractions, could place the decimal points correctly. Their use of mathematical terms was as expected for their ages. Students' mental arithmetic skills were less well developed. In a few lessons, higher achieving students were not adequately challenged by the problems provided.

In the Foundation and primary phases, attainment in science was acceptable, while progress was good. In the Foundation Stage, all children demonstrated an acceptable level of understanding of materials, space, forces and plants. In Foundation Stage 2 most children were excited to see the growth of bean plants and could explain the factors that might limit growth. In Year 1 students demonstrated good understanding of earth, space and light. They could explain why one part of the world was day and the opposite night. In Year 2 most students could use their scientific knowledge to predict and test the factors that accelerated ice melting. By Year 3 they understood a fair test and could test soils for porosity. They gathered basic data, drew graphs and wrote conclusions. By Year 5 most used skills of observation, calculation and discussion well. Only a few students across the primary school were involved in independent study, conducting investigations based on fair testing, or analysing data.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good in both phases. Almost all students demonstrated good behaviour in lessons, assembly and break times. They exercised self-control and involved adults whenever they needed to solve personal problems. Positive relationships with staff members allowed them to enjoy their time at school and to feel safe. Students displayed good understanding of healthy living approaches and how they influenced their growth. Attendance was acceptable overall and was good during the inspection although too many students arrived late in the morning.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and culture were good in both phases. In the Foundation Stage, most children had a good knowledge of Islam and appreciated the multi-culturalism in Dubai. They had good knowledge of Dubai and they actively sang the UAE national anthem. They respected others

and contributed fully to the life of the school. Most of the older students took their leadership roles seriously and were proud to be involved. They knew about Haj and Ramadan and they respected Islamic values. They respected Dubai's traditions, beliefs and culture. Opportunities for further student leadership were yet to be implemented.

Students demonstrated good economic and environmental understanding in both phases. Children in the Foundation Stage understood the value of money and identified products that could be bought with different amounts of money. Most students in the primary years displayed a good knowledge of Dubai's economic progress, and understood the role of oil and leadership in this process. Students across the school were keen to keep their school clean. They understood the importance of recycling and reducing their use of water and electricity. Only a few older students were able to link their understanding with global environmental issues and solutions.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was good, overall. It was stronger and more consistent in Foundation Stage than primary. Teachers in the Foundation Stage demonstrated a very good understanding of the best approaches to teaching young children. Almost all teachers had secure subject knowledge and planned their lessons well. Clear learning objectives of almost all lessons enabled links to previous learning. In the primary years a majority of lessons did not finish with an effective plenary to highlight and evaluate learning. In good lessons across the school teachers provided a variety of worksheets and practical activities designed to meet the differing needs of students. Effective questioning techniques in a few lessons invited students to think critically. In the majority of lessons there were too few planned opportunities for students to solve problems, think critically or carry out independent enquiry. A lack of challenge for a significant minority of students was evident.

Student learning was good across both phases of the school. Most students were motivated, showed high levels of concentration and were keen to succeed. In almost all lessons students gained new knowledge and skills. In many topics students made good connections between their learning and other subjects, education and life. For example, an experiment in science to discover the permeability of various soils used mathematical measurement and graphing. In the Foundation Stage some children could independently follow instructions to achieve their learning goals. However, in the primary school, their abilities to work independently, do research, and think critically were under-developed. Most students did not use information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning.

Assessment was good in the Foundation Stage and acceptable in the primary phase. In the Foundation Stage there were well developed systems for tracking children's progress. In the primary phase assessment procedures were less well developed and had yet to fully influence teachers' planning and the curriculum offered. There was insufficient analysis of the available data to modify lesson planning and thus meet the needs of all students. In the majority of primary classes students were clear about their strengths and weaknesses. Students received regular oral feedback from their teachers but the quality of marking in exercise books was

variable and did not regularly inform students about how to improve their work. Students' self-assessment or peer-assessment were not yet part of the schools' formal assessment procedures.

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

The quality of the curriculum was good in both phases. Based upon the English National Curriculum, it was broad and balanced and provided a wide variety of experiences to students. For example, individual and group enrichment lessons were conducted for learners of English as an additional language. It was regularly reviewed and amended to meet students' needs. In the Foundation Stage there was continuity and progression and these were supported by the imaginative use of the play area and many visitors. Themes and projects led to progressive development of skills and challenges. In the primary phase, where progression was less developed, teachers planned together to ensure that students were ready for the next stages. Homework and the 'Principal's Challenge' offered opportunities for independent work and cross-curricular links. Students enjoyed a good range of field trips and specialist lessons in art, music and physical education. They actively participated in the after-school clubs such as judo, French, ballet, tennis and rugby, some of which were delivered by community organisations. In the primary school the curriculum did not provide sufficient challenge to the wide range of students, especially in Islamic Education and Arabic.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety arrangements were good in both phases. Procedures to ensure health, safety and security were effectively embedded. There were high levels of supervision across the school. The arrival and departure of buses met all safety requirements. However, the school needed to manage the arrival and departure of private vehicles more effectively. The school building and facilities were kept clean, regularly checked, supervised and maintained. Records of medicines, maintenance, fire drills and incidents were rigorously kept. The school nurse played an effective role in monitoring students' health and in promoting healthy life styles during assemblies. The self-hygiene awareness programme was effective and contributed toward student welfare. Procedures for child protection were in place and effectively monitored.

The school provided a good quality of support to students in both phases. Relationships between staff members and students were positive and effective; adults understood their roles in providing students with support when needed. The clear behaviour policy was communicated to parents and students and assisted teachers in handling behaviour issues effectively. The school monitored students' well-being and teachers and parents received immediate notifications of any concerns. A system for academic tracking was developing but was not effective in all phases of the school. Arrangements for students with special educational needs were well-developed and embedded. The school monitored daily attendance although there was a need for the school to reduce the number of late arrivals.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership was good. The Principal and senior leadership team ensured there was a clear and realistic vision in place. This was supported enthusiastically by the school community. Through sound leadership skills the Principal inspired all to improve in many aspects of the school's work. This has led to improved arrangements for planning, teaching, assessment and curriculum development. There was a developing focus on guiding the students through improved attainment, cross-curricular learning experiences, improved knowledge of current progress rates and the development of skills for consistent growth.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. Leaders had initiated reviews of all key curriculum areas as well as a mid-year assessment report. They were beginning to know the overall performance of the school well through these shared processes. After recording data on a wide variety of outcomes, it evolved into meaningful information. This was starting to be used by some teachers in their lesson planning. Teacher appraisal was being developed to focus on specific improvements. The school had worked diligently and effectively to address the recommendations from the previous inspection report. There was very good capacity and commitment to improve the school further.

Partnerships with parents and the wider community were good. Parents were increasingly involved in the work of the school. They supported the school in the implementation of its vision. They provided practical support for teachers and students. They understood the importance of continuously raising attainment and how school reporting could be made more relevant to their children's progress. They also understood how they could contribute to class and home work, as well as co-curricular activities. There were a wide range of links with the local community. Students engaged productively with many visitors.

Governance of the school was acceptable. The governing body had maintained a very supportive and committed approach to the school's continuous development. Regular communication and identification of planning steps for the leaders ensured that support from the governors was appropriate and effective. It held the school to account for its performance and quality. However, membership of the governing body did not include a broad enough range of stakeholders.

The staffing, facilities and resources at the school were good. Almost all teachers were fully qualified and effectively deployed. There were suitable numbers of support staff to enhance learning in most areas. The premises were very well maintained. There was a highly conducive atmosphere for learning throughout the school. Learning spaces were well planned and the school used local resources very effectively. Students did not use the library and ICT resources to best advantage in their independent studies.

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
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic? 17% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.		
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable

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

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

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

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

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

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

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