

INSPECTION REPORT

Dubai National School

Report published in April 2014

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Dubai National School

Location	Al Barsha
Type of school	Private
Website	www.dnsalbarsha.com
Telephone	04-3474555
Address	P O Box 24060, Dubai
Principal	Ossama Yahya Ajoul
Curriculum	US
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-18 / Kindergarten 1-Grade 12
Attendance	Good
Number of students on roll	2770
Largest nationality group of students	Emirati
Number of Emirati students	1804 (65%)
Date of the inspection	20th to 23rd January 2014

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The context of the school

Dubai National School is situated in Al Barsha and at the time of inspection had 2,770 students on roll, 65 per cent of whom were Emiratis. Most students spoke Arabic as their first language. Many nationalities were present in the student community including students from other Arab countries and from European, North American and South African countries. The school had identified 68 students with special educational needs, 40 of whom were gifted and talented.

The school followed a US curriculum and students took the SATs and TOEFL tests. Students also took the IBT (ACER) tests in Grades 3 through 10. Students were organised into four phases: Kindergarten, elementary (Grades 1-5), middle (Grades 6-8) and high (Grades 9-12).

At the time of the inspection there were 216 teachers at the school. The school had accredited status with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges and was due for re-accreditation in 2014.

The position of Principal in the school was in transition; there was an interim Principal at the time of the inspection. An administrative and an academic principal worked collaboratively with the Principal and a team of other senior staff to lead the school.

Overall school performance 2013-2014

Good

Key strengths

- The impact of Islamic values on all aspects of the school, especially on students' understanding of Islamic culture;
- Good attitudes to learning by students throughout the school;
- Good self-evaluation and improvement planning.

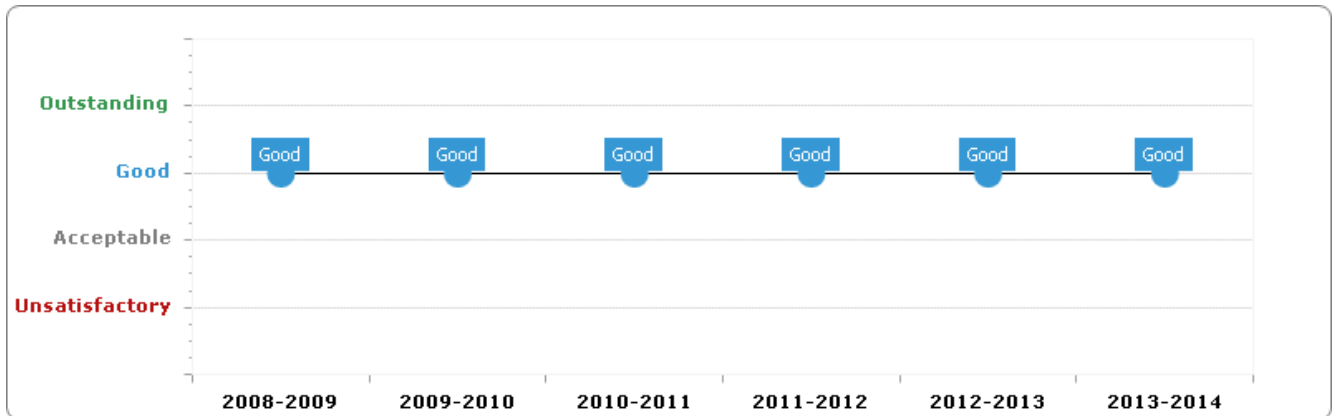
Recommendations

- Ensure that teachers use assessments to provide instruction that challenges all students to attain knowledge and develop critical thinking skills;
- Fully match the new curriculum and teaching practices to ensure consistently good teaching and improved attainment for all students;
- Refine assessment practices to identify the specific skills and learning needs of all students;
- Attend to safety issues.

Progress since the last inspection

- The school had revised existing assessment processes to ensure that attainment and progress data were comparable between and within key subjects and that data was more accessible.
- It had improved the use of information communication technology (ICT) for students by extending access to learning support sites for accessibility from home. It was also investigating the use of computer tablets in the school.
- While the school had begun to improve its system of identifying and monitoring students with special educational needs (SEN), it had not clearly identified learning targets for these students.
- Although it had begun to implement some actions to improve punctuality at the start of the school day, there was little evidence of success during the time of the inspection.

Trend of overall performance



How good are the students' attainment progress and learning skills?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Islamic Education				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Arabic as a first language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Arabic as an additional language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
English				
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good	Good
Mathematics				
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good	Good
Science				
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Quality of students' learning skills	Good	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Personal responsibility	Good	Good	Good	Good
Students' understanding of Islamic values and their local, cultural and global awareness	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Community and environmental responsibility	Good	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good	Good
Curriculum design to meet the individual needs of students	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and Safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of Support	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

	Whole school
Quality of leadership	Good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Parents and the community	Good
Governance	Good
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the students' attainment and progress?

Students' attainment was good in all subjects across the school. In Islamic Education, most students showed good knowledge and application of recitation rules with the chapters they studied from the Holy Qur'an. They had good knowledge and understanding of the Prophet's Seerah and made good connections between what they learned and life. Students of Arabic as a first language had fluent speaking skills and good levels of listening comprehension; reading skills were inconsistent across the school. Writing was less developed. In Arabic as an additional language, most students had well-developed listening and responding skills. Reading and understanding written Arabic script was appropriate and writing skills were secure for the majority of older students. In English, students had good speaking and listening skills. Their reading and writing were less effective because they did not have enough opportunities to read for pleasure and develop structured writing. In mathematics, students had a good understanding of number and algebra but their skills in reasoning and mathematical modelling were less developed. In science, most students worked well collaboratively; they had good practical and investigative skills, and used good technical language.

Students' progress was good in all subjects across the school. In Islamic Education, most students, particularly in the girls' section, made good progress with their understanding of Islamic values and concepts as well as the Prophet's Seerah. In Arabic as a first language, progress in listening and speaking was significantly stronger than in the other language skills. Deeper reading and critical thinking skills were developing slowly. Progress in extended writing was limited. In Arabic as an additional language, most students made strong progress in developing their listening and speaking. In most lessons and over time, progress with reading and writing was less pronounced. Similarly in English, progress was good in speaking and listening. Research and critical thinking skills were developing, especially in the high school where progress in writing was improving most. In mathematics, students made good progress when they were challenged; however, more able students were not always challenged enough. In science, most students made good gains in knowledge, skills and understanding. The majority of students made effective links with prior knowledge and learned to apply their skills in unfamiliar contexts.

[View judgements](#)

Quality of students' learning skills

Learning skills were good in all phases. Almost all students collaborated well and had positive attitudes towards learning. Students who were given challenges and opportunities for independent learning were able to take charge of their own learning. Students often made connections to prior learning and experiences. When asked, most students demonstrated the ability to think critically and to apply their newly

learned knowledge and skills. In some cases, students were able to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses, and were able to reflect upon how to improve their attainment.

[View judgements](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' personal responsibility was good. Most students across the school showed positive attitudes and behaviour in lessons. They were polite and respectful to adults and each other and supportive to students with special needs. However, when unsupervised, a minority of boys showed a lack of self-discipline in the outdoor areas and corridors. Attendance was good but the school had a continuing issue of lateness in the morning with students who arrive by cars.

Students' understanding of Islamic values and local, cultural and global awareness were outstanding. Across the school, students understood and adopted the values of Islam in their lives and knew about how these were reflected in the society in Dubai. All students had strong knowledge and understanding of UAE heritage and culture. Most students were well aware of the connections between other cultures.

Students' community and environmental responsibility was a strength of the school. It was good in the Kindergarten and elementary phase, but outstanding in the higher phases. Students gained many benefits from the diversity of opportunities offered. These enabled students to adopt key roles in which they learned organisational and leadership skills. A structured programme of activities ensured consistent involvement. Students had a strong sense of caring for local people in need as well as a pride in the school environment.

[View judgements](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

Teaching was good throughout the school. Teachers had good subject knowledge and often used that knowledge to develop challenging prompts for class discussions. Lessons were well planned and were designed a week at a time. Increasingly, teachers were modifying their plans to meet the needs of all learners. At times, teachers were able to extend student learning, especially for the most able students, by asking probing questions which required students to think critically. To improve learning, teachers challenged students and provided opportunities for students to apply their knowledge beyond worksheets. The leadership team's strategic plan to improve teaching and learning, including the extensive amount of professional development, resulted in improving practice in a number of classrooms. The teaching observed in other subjects during the inspection was good.

Assessment was good in all phases. There were consistent and effective assessment systems in place for recording students' attainment. Parents and students valued the opportunity to access marks via the internet and through reports. Since the last inspection, the school had successfully addressed the issue of comparing information within and between subjects. The school recognised the need to develop the assessment of students' skills using curriculum standards. Teachers and leaders made good use of the information to identify underachievement and provided extra support. However, systems were not yet fully in place to evaluate students' progress in depth through monitoring trends. Teachers knew their students' strengths and weaknesses, but did not make enough use of the assessment data in their planning of the students' next steps. Students had limited opportunities to assess their own and others' work. Teachers did not always provide effective feedback in lessons or through marking about how students could improve their work.

[View judgements](#)

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

The curriculum quality remained good across all phases of the school. The conversion to the Common Core US curriculum for mathematics and English, and the National Science Education Standards for Science had taken place and meant that the curriculum was now fully aligned and consistent from Kindergarten to the high school. The Islamic Education curriculum was found to be outstanding. Weekly meetings took place between the Academic Principal and heads of departments, and between heads and teachers to ensure consistency. The curriculum was reviewed regularly and somewhat modified, informed by student achievement data. Some cross-curricular links had been developed and implemented combining English, mathematics, science and social studies. Many enrichment and extra-curricular activities were providing links to the community. Other activities included holding a Model UN and an Arabic week, and running several excellent sports programmes.

The curriculum design was acceptable in all phases of the school. Although most lesson plans included curriculum adjustments to address the differing abilities of students, effective curriculum modifications that precisely targeted the individual needs of identified SEN students were still underdeveloped. All students participated in a broad curriculum but opportunities to study subjects specifically to further fulfil their talents and interests were limited to the after-school activity programmes and special competitions. High school students were provided a choice between two streams of study but curricular options were not a feature of the high school programme.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety were good in all phases. The school environment was well maintained and clean; students were well supervised. Access to and from buses was well organised. There was significant congestion in the parking lot, complicating bus entry and exit. Health and Safety policies were in place and carefully followed. Maintenance and safety contracts were current. The clinics were well staffed; detailed records were kept for all students. Healthy lifestyles were promoted in classes by medical staff and by the foods offered in the canteens. Student care was well supported by counsellors, social workers and the medical staff. A child protection policy was in place and school personnel, as well as, parents were informed.

The quality of support for students was good in school and outstanding in the Kindergarten. There were strong student-staff relationships. Academic advisors, section supervisors, teachers, aides, school counselors and the SEN co-ordinator provided a comprehensive support network. Of note was the KG staffing of two teachers and one shared aide for each class. Although the revised attendance and punctuality policy was consistently implemented, student lateness continued. Students with special needs were admitted into the school. Although the school had adopted assessment strategies to ensure early identification of students with special needs, the strategies were not extensive enough to identify SEN matters fully, especially underachieving gifted students. Shared information and frequent conferences between parents, students and staff allowed staff to co-ordinate efforts to best serve the needs of all students.

[View judgements](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of the leadership was good with distribution of responsibilities through an effective team at a time of transition with an interim Principal. Although there were separate academic and administrative leaders, there were shared areas of responsibility such as teacher supervision and evaluation. The School Council, a group of mid-level managers, was included in decision-making and served as a liaison for the teachers. Senior leaders had a shared vision and set a clear direction for the school but progress towards improvement was slow. Most leaders had good capacity to devise practical strategies and had developed good plans to move forward. Senior leaders had improved the lesson evaluation instrument to monitor lesson quality though this was not consistent throughout the school. Relationships and communication between all levels of leadership were professional and effective.

The school had good systems for self-evaluation and monitoring. Key priorities were set to meet the recommendations from the previous report and long-range plans to address these and other major school initiatives were in place. The systems for self-evaluation and monitoring had enabled the school to make

steady improvement. The school had a good professional development programme that was driven by the information from lesson observations. It was gathering assessment data but not analysing and using it fully enough to improve teaching and learning significantly. There had been sufficient progress in addressing the recommendations from the previous inspection report.

The partnerships with parents and the community were good. Most parents were pleased with the effective online system to check on student progress and behaviour. There was good school guidance on the use of internet programs to internet programs that enabled them to assist in their children's learning at home. There were effective links with the wider community, particularly with field trips and access to local organisations.

Governance was good. The board consisted of six members. There was no formal parent representation on the board although one member was a parent in the school. The board received information on the school's progress in February and at the close of school where students' attainment was also reviewed. Governors held the school accountable for its actions well and ensured that statutory requirements were met.

The school was well managed. It had a large campus which was well suited to all age groups. There was good deployment of staff for teaching and insuring safety and security of students. Resources for teaching and learning, including ICT, to vary lessons and match the needs of a variety of learners were available but were not used sufficiently.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school provide for students with special educational needs?

The school had a clear and comprehensive admissions policy that was inclusive of SEN students. Since the previous inspection, significant progress had been made in the identification of SEN students. Teachers completed identification checklists to assist in early identification of the individual needs of students. Academically gifted students and those with special talents were identified separately. The school readily accepted assessments from outside agencies and the SEN co-ordinator conducted further assessments as necessary. The school initiated a three-tier identification system – students under observation, students awaiting further assessment and students with individual education plans. Teachers received training from their heads of departments and from the SEN co-ordinator. Parents were actively involved in the development of individual education plans and met with the SEN co-ordinator and classroom teachers twice per term to review these plans. Most individual education plans did not provide targeted, specific interventions and modifications tailored to the specific needs of each student. Students generally

made acceptable to good progress in all subjects. However, the inclusion of challenging activities to meet the needs of the gifted and talented students was not a common feature in most classrooms.

How well does the school teach Arabic as a first language?

Teachers demonstrated secure subject knowledge; however, their understanding of how students learn best was just developing. Teachers tended to control students' learning too much. Lesson planning was regular and organised, but lessons plans did not show skill-related objectives and learning outcomes. In too many instances, activities were not always based on students' needs. Teachers used various resources, including ICT which introduced some variety into lessons and raised levels of interest. However, there were too few opportunities for students to use such resources to enhance their language development. Teachers involved students in discussions but did not provide all students with sufficient thinking time or provide opportunities for all to participate. Most teachers implemented appropriate strategies for basic reading skills although there was less focus on developing active and independent learning.

The Arabic curriculum was broad and balanced and met the key MoE requirements. However, work given to students in the classroom and the assessment of their achievement was not always closely aligned to MoE expectations. The curriculum was heavily focused on covering the textbook content rather than developing students' skills. Modification of the curriculum to cater for students' different needs was rare. However, there were some initiatives to promote reading for pleasure and focus on teaching writing techniques and ways of writing.

What are the views of parents, teachers and students?

Before the inspection, the views of parents, teachers and senior secondary students were surveyed. Key messages from each group were considered during the inspection and these helped to form judgements. A summary of the survey statistics and comments from those who responded to the survey follows:

Responses to the surveys			
Responses received	Number		Percentage
Parents	This year	323	23%
	Last year	235	18%
Teachers	178		86%
Students	309		79%

*The percentage of responses from parents is based on the number of families.

A minority of parents responded to the questionnaire. This was a small increase over the previous year. Most parents were satisfied with the quality of education at the school and with the open-door policy for communication with leaders. Almost all agreed that their children enjoyed life at school, were safe and that the school was led well. Most agreed that the teachers provided a good quality of education. Almost all agreed that their children were making good progress in Islamic Education. Most agreed that their children were making good progress in English, mathematics and science. The majority agreed that their children were making good progress in Arabic.

What happens next?

The school has been asked to prepare and submit an updated action plan to DSIB within two months of receiving the most recent report. This plan should address:

- Recommendations from DSIB;
- Areas identified by the school as requiring improvement;
- Other external reports or sources of information that comment on the work of the school;
- Priorities arising from the school's unique characteristics.

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

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