

Star International School, Mirdif
Inspection Report
Foundation Stage to Year 5

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.

Star International School - Mirdiff was inspected in November 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 Mirdiff, Star International School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Foundation Stage to Year 5, aged three to nine years. The school followed the English National Curriculum. The school started to admit students in August 2007 and, since the last inspection, had appointed a new Principal and the school roll had increased from 48 students to 130 students. Over half of the teaching staff were new to the school at the start of the current academic year. 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. Parents were extremely happy with the education of their children and the way the school promoted good habits of behaviour and the values of respect, honesty and responsibility. The positive interaction between parents and staff was highly valued and appreciated. All parents felt that the school had established very good links with parents. They were equally positive about the leadership and management of the school and considered the new Principal to be providing very good leadership and a clear sense of direction. They found the school approachable and responsive to their questions and concerns.

How well does the school perform overall?

Star International School – Mirdif provided an acceptable quality of education for its students with a strong capacity to improve. Attainment and progress were acceptable in each of the key subjects in the Foundation Stage and in the primary years, although a few students did not make expected progress. Students’ attitudes and behaviour were good and relationships between students and teachers throughout the school created a good environment for learning. Attendance was acceptable. Students had a growing understanding of their national identity and of Dubai’s rapidly changing way of life. Students also had a good understanding of local traditions and the values of Islam. Many had developed useful insights into the need to use resources carefully and for the need to shop wisely.

Teaching and learning were acceptable. Most teachers had good classroom management skills and displayed a suitable knowledge of their subjects which gave them confidence. They established productive relationships with students and had appropriately high expectations of them. On several occasions the timing of lessons was not well judged and did not have a clear start, middle and finish. Students’ learning was acceptable and students learned most of the things that the teachers intended but too few had the confidence to ask questions as well as answer them in many primary classes. Procedures for assessing the students’ work were acceptable. Teachers tested students’ knowledge regularly and marked their work accurately. They did not all routinely give sufficient written help and guidance on what students must do to improve further. Diagnostic assessment was not yet undertaken and used consistently. The school was also only in the early stages of analysing data on student performance with a view to adjusting teaching strategies. The curriculum was acceptable and met most, but not all, of the students’ needs well. It provided opportunities to study a broad range of subjects and good efforts were being made to adapt the curriculum to the context of Dubai. There was acceptable continuity from year to year and work was underway to strengthen links between years. Curriculum planning groups had recently been established but it was too early to judge the impact of their work. Provision for students with additional learning needs was unsatisfactory, a situation the school recognised, and had taken action to address. A useful range of purposeful and enjoyable extracurricular activities enhanced the curriculum. There were well developed systems in place to support and care for students. The care team worked closely together and provided good support for students. Health advice was regularly given by both the school nurse and the doctor. Parents were kept well informed of any issues through detailed written advice and home-school diaries. Students’ attendance and punctuality were monitored well. The school was a safe place in which students worked and played happily.

Leadership and management of the school were acceptable. The school's capacity to improve was high and seen in the important steps that had been taken to address the most important areas requiring improvement identified in the previous inspection report. Additionally, the school had evaluated many of its main strengths and weaknesses accurately and understood well the need for a stronger focus on the continuing professional development of staff. The school was very well supported by parents and links with the community were developing effectively. Governance was acceptable and the governing body provided helpful support to the school. There were sufficient qualified teachers and an acceptable balance of expertise and experience. The premises and facilities provided a clean, safe environment for learning. Resources for learning were good.

Key features of the school

- The school had evaluated its strengths and areas for development accurately and had set in place a well-judged action plan to help the school improve;
- Good relationships based on mutual respect among staff, students and parents enabled teaching and learning to take place in a productive and purposeful way;
- The partnership between parents and the school was a good feature of the work of the school;
- Effective teaching enabled most students to make at least expected progress and often better;
- The well maintained learning environment included good resources;
- Assessment was not used consistently to inform teaching and learning and data was not analysed effectively to identify areas for improvement.

Recommendations

To continue work already started to address the recommendations from the last report and, additionally;

- introduce a programme of continuing professional development based on a rigorous needs analysis related to teaching and learning;
- share good practice more productively;
- further develop the curriculum so that it addresses the needs of all students especially those who are in need of more individual support;
- improve assessment and tracking of students' progress and use the information gained from these processes to inform teaching practices.

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

Progress and attainment in Islamic Education were acceptable, overall. Non-Arab students had good knowledge and understanding of the key Islamic concepts they studied. They appreciated the Prophet (PBUH) as a role model and knew about his family. They understood how Islam impacted on their daily life practices. Most students could correctly recite and memorise the verses they studied from The Holy Qur'an. Arab Muslim students had acceptable knowledge but did not demonstrate sufficiently the application of this knowledge to everyday life practices.

Progress and attainment in Arabic were acceptable across the school. Non-Arab students in Years 1 and 2 could link sounds to letters, naming and sounding the letters of alphabet. They developed acceptable listening skills and could understand simple words. The majority of students used an acceptable range of vocabulary but their ability to write sentences and short paragraphs was very limited. Most students could read simple, unfamiliar words correctly. Most of the Arab students could read sentences fluently and developed acceptable listening and speaking skills but made less progress with developing their writing skills.

Attainment and progress in English were acceptable overall. Most students by the end of the Foundation Stage listened attentively and spoke simple sentences confidently. Their reading skills were good and most children had developed a keen interest in books and stories. Writing skills were not as well developed and a few children still had difficulty in forming letters. In the primary phase most students made acceptable progress in building on their existing skills and knowledge and made better progress in reading than in writing. Across the school, standards of spelling were too low. In Grade 5 most were confident readers with good listening and speaking skills though a significant minority were not yet fluent writers.

Students' attainment and progress in mathematics was acceptable across the phases. Most Foundation Stage children and lower primary students reached expected levels and their knowledge, skills and understanding of number, patterns, sequences and shapes were acceptable. Upper primary students utilised the basic number operations and used correct terminology. Primary students used their growing confidence with computers to enhance their skills in mathematics. A few primary students used the interactive whiteboards skilfully, along with number lines and tracking charts. Students identified basic geometric shapes and used correct terminology to identify them. Their capacity to use mathematics for problem solving and to apply what they had learnt practically was not well developed.

Both progress and attainment in science were acceptable. Primary students studied plants and the basic essentials needed for growth. They planted seeds and grew their own plants and flowers. Many used garden tools well and conducted simple investigations to meet lesson objectives. Older primary students had an awareness of the effects of air pollution caused by cars and traffic congestion. The lack of a science laboratory impeded learning in investigations into the three states of matter. Students understood aspects of science related to the environment.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good. The positive relationships between students and teachers created a purposeful and productive environment for learning. Students were self-disciplined and worked independently or in collaboration with others when required. They knew that they could ask an adult for help if needed. Attendance was acceptable and students invariably arrived on time for lessons.

Students' spiritual and civic understanding was good. Students had a clear understanding of ways in which they might contribute to the future of Dubai by becoming doctors and businessmen and businesswomen, or in doing work for others. The school celebrated the diversity of Dubai's population in a variety of appropriate ways not least by the emphasis it gave to the core values of respect and tolerance. The school had already developed a strong commitment to the local community and students were encouraged to engage with local projects. Awareness of local traditions, cultures, and Islam was well-developed through the ethos of the school and evident in the displays of children's work.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was acceptable. Students demonstrated an acceptable knowledge of money and understanding of the need to buy wisely. The school supported and encouraged students' understanding of environmental issues including recycling and the water cycle. Students responded well by respecting the facilities and keeping the school tidy.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was acceptable. Across the school a wide range of teaching approaches were used. Some of these were more effective than others. Lessons were well prepared and covered the lesson objectives competently. In the best practice, for example in certain mathematics, English and geography lessons, teachers used technology well. This helped students to remember what they had learned. The teaching was supported by sound subject knowledge that helped teachers amend commercial schemes. All teachers used question and answer techniques to check that students had understood key ideas and themes. These questions did not always make children think deeply enough and, at times, students were not given sufficient time to explain their answers. Students with particular learning needs received additional help but more learning support for these students was still needed.

The quality of students' learning was acceptable. At the Foundation Stage, children learned through an appropriate range of play activities. They were usually allowed to make choices and follow their own interests. Most students understood the purpose of lessons and how well they had achieved. They worked well with one another in pairs and groups to solve problems. Tasks generally appealed to students' interests and took account of how children learned. Students were able to explain the links they had found between the various topics investigated and almost all were enthusiastic and diligent in their efforts. Throughout the school, students worked independently and collaboratively when required and could apply their knowledge to a variety of contexts.

The quality of assessment in the school was acceptable. Teachers marked students' work regularly though a few needed to tell students more clearly how to improve their work. All teachers kept records of how well students performed in tests. They shared this information with parents but did not always use it well to monitor progress in relation to international benchmarks. Most teachers had identified the steps students needed to take to improve their work but older students did not know their learning targets nor had they begun to assess their own or one another's progress. The school was in the early stages of developing a tracking system to ensure teachers could plan effectively to meet the learning needs of all students.

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

The school provided an acceptable curriculum based on the English National Curriculum which reflected the school's core values, and supported most, though not yet all, students' needs well. Students learned through an appropriately wide range of subjects as they progressed through the school. The curriculum was regularly checked to make sure that it was meeting the needs of students and the school was well aware of its shortcomings in relation to those students who had additional learning needs and requirements, but this had not yet been addressed effectively. The curriculum offered acceptable challenge and engaged students' interests appropriately. The curriculum for both Islamic Education and Arabic met Ministry of Education requirements but was not taught in ways that really engaged the interests of most students. Students were given opportunities to apply number concepts across the curriculum, for example, in geography lessons. The investigative skills learned in science were also applied to other contexts. A programme of extra-curricular activities contributed well to students' learning and the development of their skills, although there was scope to expand links to the taught curriculum more explicitly. Visits to places of interest and special events all served to enrich the curriculum productively. The school involved the wider community well to help children understand how their learning related to their lives and the lives of others.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements for protecting students were good. All staff took their duty of care seriously and policies and procedures to ensure health and safety were in place and were followed diligently. Arrival and departure arrangements were safe and well-supervised. Security was effectively managed and student supervision at break times and during all activities was of a high standard. All staff engaged with students positively and encouraged them to be active and responsible users of their school environment. Fire drills and evacuations had been held and all records were maintained carefully, with incidents recorded and responded to effectively. The school promoted healthy lifestyles through healthy food and drink guidance and the medical assessment programme was well judged and effectively administered by close liaison between the nurse, the doctor and the Principal. The school monitored child protection issues effectively as part of its care and welfare of students.

The quality of support for students was good. Staff provided good role models and there were strong relationships between staff and students. Staff handled behaviour issues well and students understood clear boundaries and expectations. On the occasions when such expectations were not reached, appropriate sanctions were applied. Students responded positively to the schools ethos, took care of their environment and were extremely proud of their school. The school was in the process of reviewing and improving the support for students with additional learning needs. The actions taken by school leaders were timely and much needed, but had yet to have impact. Attendance was monitored carefully and students were punctual. The school had appropriate knowledge of the reasons behind almost all absences and followed up the occasional issues when necessary.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership and management were acceptable. The school had a strong capacity to improve. At the time of the inspection the Principal had been in post just ten weeks. There was clear evidence of good leadership qualities from classroom teachers but their talents and energies were not yet best used to further students' learning and attainment. Policies, procedures and reviews were being written and good progress made in taking them forward. A clear vision had been established and most teachers had responded with great commitment and competence to engage with the leadership roles they were now being asked to perform.

The schools had accurately assessed its main strengths and areas for development. The school had, for example, made good progress in addressing some of the issues raised in the last inspection report. The school improvement plan identified appropriate priorities and working groups had been established to examine how best to address the issues identified. Improving assessment practise across the school was a high priority, as was the need to ensure policies, procedures and practice that supported students with additional learning needs. Success criteria were well judged and timescales were appropriate.

Links with parents and the community were good. The 'open door' policy adopted by the Principal and all her colleagues meant that parents were able, at any time, to consult with class teachers or senior leaders about matters of concern. This ready access was greatly appreciated by parents who were very enthusiastic in their support for the new Principal and the direction in which she was taking the school. Attendance at parent consultation events was high and the involvement of parents as full partners in learning meant that their children's progress and welfare were well supported. Good links existed within the locality; the local community was starting to become a positive resource for learning which enhanced the curriculum and increased its relevance to students.

School governance was acceptable. The governing body was very supportive and committed to developing and improving the school based on sound educational practice. However, within governance, the parent voice was not yet sufficiently powerful. The school owners understood the school's developmental needs well and were supportive of the developments initiated by the new Principal.

Staffing, facilities and resources were good. Well qualified staff worked hard and productively in the best interests of students at all times and so enabled students to learn in a happy yet purposeful environment. Teachers were reflective and recognised the need to regularly update their knowledge and skills through a programme of continuing professional development. Resources for learning were good though there had been undue delays in providing the planned opportunities for play and recreation.

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	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable

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

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

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

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

How good is the students' personal and social development?		
Age group:	Foundation	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	Primary
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

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

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

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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