

INSPECTION REPORT

Sharjah American International school

Report published in May 2012

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Sharjah American International school

Location	Al Warqaa
Type of school	Private
Website	www.saisuae.com
Telephone	04 280 1111, 04 280 0666
Address	PO Box 74455, Al Warqaa 1, Dubai
Principal	Mrs Nadine Tarazi
Curriculum	US
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Grades	3 - 18 / Kindergarten to Grade 12
Attendance	Acceptable
Number of students on roll	995
Number of Emirati students	377 (38%)
Date of the inspection	16th January to 18th January 2012

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The context of the school

Sharjah American International School is situated in Al Warqaa. The school opened in September 2005. At the time of the inspection the school had a roll of 995 students, aged from three to 18 years. It was divided into four phases: Kindergarten, elementary, middle and high school. The school followed an American curriculum derived from several sources. Students completed American SAT tests at the end of the secondary phase.

There were 98 teachers, including the Principal and the senior leadership team. All teachers in the school had appropriate teaching qualifications. They were supported by 17 teaching assistants. Students were grouped in 43 classes, nine of which were in Kindergarten. 337 students, or approximately 38 per cent, were Emirati.

The Principal had been in post since the opening of the school. 28 teachers were in their first year of teaching in the school. The school prospectus indicated, as a highlight, native English speaking teachers. In fact, only 14 were nationals of English speaking countries.

Overall school performance 2011-2012

Acceptable

How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

Sharjah American International School provided an acceptable quality of education. It had a strong, supportive ethos and good relationships between teachers and students. There had been an improvement in many aspects since the previous inspection. It had a number of good features, including progress in all key subjects in Kindergarten and progress in mathematics at all stages. Attainment in mathematics and science had improved in the upper stages. Teaching was good throughout the school, which represented considerable improvement. The curriculum was also good at all stages. Apart from governance, all other aspects of leadership and management were good.

The school had made progress in addressing all of the recommendations of the previous report, but progress had been uneven. The school had continued to focus on raising attainment, with some success. There had been an improvement in the development of skills in Arabic in the elementary phase only, but

not in English. Attempts had been made to relate learning to the real world. The school had begun to develop a shared vision for effective teaching, but the analysis of attainment data had not yet fully impacted on planning and the improvement of learning. The school was aware of the curriculum areas in need of strengthening. Governance did not have adequate parental representation, nor sufficient representation from other stakeholders.

Key strengths

- The good behaviour of students, their positive attitude to learning, and the supportive relationships between the students and staff;
- The improvement in teaching;
- The progress made by students in their learning, particularly in elementary and middle school;
- The improvement in many aspects of the work in Kindergarten;
- The ability of students, for many of whom English was an additional language, to cope with the requirements of the curriculum and the development over time of their communication skills.

Recommendations

- Ensure further improvement in teaching and learning, so as to establish consistency in students' experience throughout the school;
- Make appropriate arrangements for the teaching of Arabic as a first language to Arab nationals, using guidance issued by the Ministry of Education;
- Use assessment results to direct lesson planning and to determine the next steps in learning;
- Continue to develop support for students with special educational needs, set targets which can be understood by students, and develop and implement appropriately differentiated strategies;
- Involve parents more extensively in the work of the Governing Body, as stated in the previous report.

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

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

Attainment throughout, in all subjects, was either acceptable or good. In Islamic Education, most students met expectations in most key areas of learning, and especially in memorisation of the Holy Qur'an, Fiqh Laws and morals and values. In Arabic as first language, a majority of students were articulate and accurate. In Arabic as additional language, listening and reading skills were in line with Ministry expectations. Students' ability to express themselves orally and in writing were less well developed. The understanding and use of English was inconsistent throughout the school. In mathematics, in Kindergarten, early number skills were developing well. Elsewhere, students' attainment in mathematics was based on their ability to solve problems and to apply algorithms correctly. Their conceptual understanding was less well developed. In science, in Kindergarten, children showed a good knowledge of plants. Their skills of observation were developing well, and were extended through elementary and middle schools. By high school they could solve complex vector problems in physics and explain a four-part chemical reaction.

Progress was good in all subjects in Kindergarten. There had been an improvement in progress in Islamic Education and Arabic, in elementary, where it was good. At most other stages it was acceptable. Progress in English was acceptable in the elementary, and good elsewhere. In mathematics, progress was good throughout. Progress had improved in science in the middle school, and was good. Students with special educational needs made acceptable progress, but the progress of students identified as gifted was limited because there was insufficient challenge.

Overall, attainment and progress of Emirati students was in line with the other students, and generally acceptable. In Islamic Education, they understood the key principles of faith and worship. Their knowledge was appropriate to their age. In Arabic, their skills of listening and reading were more developed than those of speaking and writing. Progress in English was good overall, but hindered by an over concentration on the technical aspects of the language. Although, in mathematics, attainment was in line with that of others, fewer Emiratis featured in the high achieving groups. Their progress in science in all stages, except in elementary, was good.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	Good
Understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good
Civic, economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good

Attitudes and behaviour were good throughout the school. Most students were respectful to staff, supportive of one another and had good relationships with another. They ate healthy foods at lunchtime, but few participated in any sporting activities. Attendance was unsatisfactory in Kindergarten, good in elementary and middle, and acceptable in high school. Students had an acceptable understanding of Islam and its impact on society. They demonstrated a good appreciation of the tradition, heritage and values of the UAE. Almost all valued the multi-cultural nature of Dubai as well as their own culture. They appreciated the importance of diversity and its positive impact on enriching people's lives. Students understood their responsibilities as members of the school community and took on key roles willingly. They had a good understanding of how Dubai had developed. The majority had appropriate understanding of the economic success of Dubai and other Emirates. Most cared for their school and the local environment. They were aware of the importance of recycling, clean energy, sustainability and conservation.

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

Teaching across the school was good. A majority of teachers had strong subject knowledge and made good use of appropriate vocabulary in their explanations. Planning was detailed and consistent, and closely linked to the curriculum framework. In Kindergarten, teachers worked collaboratively to plan for effective teaching. A majority of teachers communicated the learning objectives to their students. In many classes, there was a good variety of activities reflecting the school's efforts to accommodate different learning styles. However, there were insufficient activities to challenge the more able students. Questions were often closed, which limited the opportunities for students to develop higher order thinking skills. Teaching in other subjects was generally good, with a few outstanding examples, where teachers skillfully involved students in mature debate and discussion.

Learning was acceptable in Kindergarten and good in the elementary, middle and high schools. Almost all students were engaged in their learning and, when given the opportunity, took responsibility for their studies. This was best seen in the many projects that they researched and presented to others. In the best examples, students used criteria to evaluate their own work. However, at other times, they were over-dependent on the teacher. This was most evident in Kindergarten where children had too few opportunities to make meaningful choices or to take an element of responsibility for their own learning. Almost all students had developed strong relationships with each other and with their teachers. They were able to communicate confidently about their learning. Consequently, collaborative learning was a strength in many classes. As the students progressed through the school, there were fewer opportunities to apply their learning to real-life situations. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) was very well developed from Grade 10 onwards.

Assessment was acceptable across the school. It was used inconsistently to inform learning. The school was developing a tracking system. In the best lessons teachers knew students' abilities and assessed their understanding accurately. Self-evaluation against lesson objectives occurred, but teachers' understanding of the process was not robust. Opportunities for peer assessment were not adequately exploited. Diagnostic testing and test data identified students with additional needs. They were also used to group students by ability and by learning style, but the data was not used to plan for individualized learning. There was little evidence of assessment for learning in students' journals. However, quizzes and tests included assessment profiles, providing an opportunity for students and teachers to create specific goals. They were not used effectively, as teachers' comments were almost always congratulatory rather than developmental. Students had not been effectively coached in defining their own targets in learning.

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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good	Good

The curriculum was good in all phases. It had a clear rationale and was generally broad and balanced. It was reviewed annually to check its suitability to meet students' needs. Teachers used the American Common Core Standards for Kindergarten and in English and mathematics. Cross-curricular planning was evident in Kindergarten and elementary. In the Kindergarten classes students learned through play and enjoyed stories and activities in the activity room and outside play area. A broad range of activities was available for all students, effectively enriching their learning. There was good continuity and progression across the grades. The school arranged special displays, events and activities to support learning effectively and imaginatively. Specialist ICT lessons were available for all classes from elementary to Grade 10. However, there were insufficient opportunities for students to use ICT across the curriculum except in the senior school, where a good e-learning programme was being developed.

How well does the school protect and support students?

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

Effective arrangements were in place to ensure students' health, safety and security. The school buildings were kept clean. Teachers gave good attention to meeting students' social, emotional and academic needs. The school canteen promoted healthy eating and overall the school promoted healthy living. The school doctor, nurse and dentist provided a very good service for students. Medicines were held securely and the administration of medicines recorded carefully. The school had taken good steps to ensure that all staff members were knowledgeable about child protection procedures.

Relationships between staff and students were warm, respectful and caring. Co-ordinators played a key role in supporting students. The management of behavior was consistent. The school had established appropriate procedures to monitor attendance and ensure good time-keeping. Students had a range of opportunities for developing responsibility. Older students were involved in serving the wider community in preparation for life beyond school. They had successfully supported charities. Effective guidance from the careers counsellor assisted senior students in making decisions regarding their future education and career. Teachers identified students with learning difficulties. Individualized education plans were in place and agreed with parents, but were not written in a style that could readily be understood by students. The school worked hard to develop links with external support agencies.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

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

Leadership of the school was good. The Principal was professionally very competent. Clearly expressed views for the future of the school were communicated regularly and there was a good level of understanding of these throughout the teaching staff. Although well supported by a senior management team, there was, however, some lack of clarity around the responsibilities of some departments. The senior management team demonstrated a good capacity to improve.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. Observation of teachers, analysis of annual surveys of parents and students, and the activities of the school council all combined to identify areas where intervention and action were needed. Although the school had operational systems for tracking students and analysing performance in tests, teachers did not use the analysis to modify classroom practice in order to raise attainment. The school's self-evaluation report was comprehensive but not always objective or accurate.

Partnerships with parents and the community were good. Parents were very supportive of the school. They thought highly of what the school offered. They were particularly pleased that their children enjoyed going to school. Although they appreciated the amount of information provided, they felt that they could be better informed of exactly what their children needed to do in order to improve. Parents willingly offered assistance to the school. The regular consultation meetings were well attended. Good links with the community were in place.

Governance was acceptable. The governors provided a good strategic overview. They gave good support, after critical analysis, to initiatives that came from the school. The Governing Body, though expanded, did not contain adequate representation from parents, or of business interests. The governors had yet to explore alternative ways of ensuring parental involvement in its decision-making processes.

Management, staffing, facilities and resources were good. Timetabling was efficient. The practice of allowing younger students to leave class early in order to board buses led to a significant loss of teaching time. Good planning ensured the smooth running of extra-curricular activities. A few teachers were lacking in basic knowledge of classroom techniques and of children's developmental needs. The premises were of high quality and well maintained. Resources were well matched to students' learning needs.

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	93	14%
	Last year	106	17%
Teachers	33		38%
Students	24		14%

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

A minority of parents responded to the survey. Almost all expressed high levels of satisfaction with the school, as did students and teachers. Parents had no major concerns, though a number felt that they could be better informed about next steps in their children's learning. Some students expressed concerns about attainment and progress in Arabic as first language, the school's lack of success in promoting a healthy lifestyle, communication with school leaders and the lack of extra-curricular provision. A few expressed concerns about bad behaviour and their perception that the school did little to keep it in check. Teachers were overwhelmingly supportive of all aspects of the work of the school.

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

Our work with schools

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) inspects schools to inform parents, students and the wider community of the quality of education provided. Inspectors also give guidance to staff about how to improve the standard of education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask the principal and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan our time in school. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities in which students are involved. We also gather the views of students, parents and staff. We find their views very helpful and use them, together with the other information we have collected, to arrive at our view regarding the quality of education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of education in the school. We describe how well students are doing, how good the school is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and children work together and how they go about improving the school. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its aims.

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