

Dubai Scholars Private School Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Grade 12

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.

Dubai Scholars Private School was inspected in October 2009 as part of the regular inspection of all schools in Dubai. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated students' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on students' progress in Islamic Education (for Muslim students), Arabic, English, mathematics and science.

Basic information about the school

Located in Al Qusais, Dubai Scholars Private School is a private school providing education for students from KG to Grade 12, aged 3 to 18 years. The school follows an English National Curriculum.

At the time of the inspection, there were 1365 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on – line questionnaires completed by parents. Parents were positive about the school. Almost all parents felt that the school listened and acted well on their concerns and provided an education which prepared students well for university. A minority of parents had concerns about hygiene in toilets and safety on buses which the inspection team investigated and judged to be unfounded. The parents appreciated the commitment and dedication of the leadership and the involvement on a day-to-day basis of the owner.

How well does the school perform overall?

The overall performance of the school was acceptable. A number of good features were identified by inspectors and some unsatisfactory elements. The school's leadership was committed to high standards, and recognised the importance of ensuring that students' social and emotional development matched their academic development. Students from primary age upwards demonstrated good knowledge of the core subjects, and this was reflected in outstanding General Certificate of Education (GCE) results in all grades. Students' outstanding attitudes and behaviour benefited their studies and their enjoyment of all aspects of school life. Students showed acceptable civic understanding. Most students showed good economic and environmental understanding and could apply this to their lives and globally. Teaching and learning were of acceptable standard overall, although teacher-directed lessons predominated. There were insufficient opportunities for students to work in groups, independently of the teacher. Students displayed positive attitudes to learning and were highly motivated to succeed. Older students had good private-study skills. The curriculum was acceptable overall but formal review processes were not sufficiently well established to adapt the curriculum to meet the educational needs of all students.

Arrangements for health and safety were good. The building and facilities were clean, well maintained and secure. Evacuation procedures were adequate and met Civil Defence Authority requirements. Staff-student relationships were extremely positive, and students enjoyed coming to school. Secondary age students had recently benefited from the appointment of a careers guidance counsellor and from a few work placements in local businesses and organisations. The quality of support provided to students was acceptable, with good staff-student relationships and careful management of attendance and punctuality. Systems for tracking student progress were in the very early stages of development.

Leadership and management in the school were acceptable. Processes for self-evaluation and improvement planning, however, were unsatisfactory. There was no clear strategy for improvement and efforts to develop the school had yet to impact on students. The leadership team had recently introduced a middle management structure, involving subject leaders in identifying good practice. However, monitoring of teaching and learning was not yet well established. The school's links with parents were acceptable. Plans to develop a parent consultative group were yet to be realised which meant that the leadership lacked support or the means to share evaluation and improvement more widely with stakeholders. The school's facilities were adequate, but basic resources to support learning were severely limited. The difficulty in securing a full team of teachers with the necessary skills and expertise together with a lack of sufficiently rigorous monitoring strategies had limited students' attainment and progress in Islamic and Arabic Education.

Key features of the school

- The positive relationships, respect and outstanding behaviour and attitudes of students which contributed to a very harmonious multi-cultural learning community;
- Students achieved very high standards in external examinations in a wide range of subjects;
- Excellent nursing and medical care arrangements which ensured that students were helped to keep healthy and safe;
- There was an open attitude to the development of teaching and learning but teachers understanding of what characterises good learning was limited in many cases;
- Parents were supportive of the school and many were keen to be involved in an advisory body to act as a critical friend to the school leaders.

Recommendations

- Improve the quality of students' learning and ensure that all teachers develop appropriate strategies to support learning;
- Develop assessment strategies so that teachers can plan each step of learning, leaders can compare the schools performance against international standards and students know what to do to improve;
- Increase sporting and creative activities and make these accessible to all students;
- Establish an advisory group to be a 'critical friend' to the leadership, support self-evaluation and ensure the school is fully accountable for standards;
- Improve the amount and quality of resources to support learning throughout the school, especially in science, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Early Years;
- Ensure that the school is compliant with Islamic and Arabic Education requirements in all grades.

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

Attainment in Islamic Education was good and progress was acceptable. Students displayed Islamic values and related behaviour. In lower grades students knew the five pillars of Islam. They could discuss Allah's creation and His greatness. In upper grades students cited facts about the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) life and knew about other Islamic characters. A few students were unable to list correctly the order of the stages of ablution. Students had basic knowledge about pilgrimage and purification. Students' recitation of The Holy Qur'an was mostly good although almost all students had some difficulty with pronunciation.

The progress of students in Arabic across the primary school was acceptable and good in the secondary school. Students' reading was less well developed in the lower grades as students memorised words often without being able to read them. However, students' skills reading familiar texts improved as students progressed through the school. Students' reading was accompanied by good comprehension. Standards of listening were acceptable across the school. Students' writing skills were good in the upper grades as most were able to write independently. Most students displayed good grammatical knowledge although their application of rules to unfamiliar texts varied. Attainment throughout the school was good. For students learning Arabic as a third or fourth language, most demonstrated good levels of knowledge and understanding.

Students' attainment and progress in English were acceptable in the Foundation Stage, good in primary and outstanding in secondary. Year 11 English examination results in 2009 maintained the school's record of outstanding achievement. Students in all year groups were articulate and often used advanced vocabulary. Listening skills were less developed in a few classes in primary classes. Most students read fluently from textbooks or their own work. Poetry studies were a feature of Grade 6. In Grades 7 to 11, students understood, and commented on, complex texts. Students in Grade 10 wrote creatively and fluently. Personal writing was a weakness in certain grades of the secondary school and throughout the primary school.

Progress in mathematics was good in all phases, with the exception of the Foundation Stage, where it was acceptable. Students completed basic calculations and formulae up to, and often beyond, their age, particularly in secondary and post-16 departments. Attainment was acceptable in the Foundation Stage, good in primary and outstanding in secondary and posts - 16 phases. Most students understood and confidently explained their work. The majority of students made significant gains in their knowledge and understanding. Their practical and problem-solving skills were less well developed. Most students could accurately explain key points, and were good at remembering factual information.

In science, students' attainment improved from acceptable at the Foundation Stage to good in the primary stage and outstanding at the secondary stage and Post-16. In recent years, the GCE A to C grades pass rate has been 100% in all subjects. Students demonstrated an understanding of scientific knowledge, and concepts in line with, and often beyond, expectations for their age group. For example, Grade12 students discussed in some detail the moral challenges of stem cell developments. Although research was often a feature of homework, students had too few opportunities to improve their investigative skills. Similarly, limited access to individual practical work resulted in students' weaker experimental skills.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Throughout the school, students' attitudes and behaviour were outstanding. Students were pleasant, welcoming and self-disciplined at all times. They were respectful to all teaching and non-teaching staff. Students were mature, and they proudly accepted responsibility for caring for the younger children in the school. Older students were aware of their responsibility as role models for the young students, especially on school buses and at break.

Students had an acceptable understanding of Islam and of local traditions and culture. Most students were aware of their role in the school and wider community, but they had few opportunities for involvement. They all showed respect and pride during the playing of the national anthem in the morning assembly. The majority of students could discuss the impact of Islam on contemporary society in Dubai. Few opportunities were provided for them to explore the personal or wider impacts of Dubai's multi-cultural society.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good. Students had good knowledge of Dubai's development over the past few years in comparison with other emirates. They were able to describe Dubai's contribution to the overall development of the UAE. Students took pride in their school, and ensured that their classrooms and the school grounds were clean and tidy at all times. They consistently used the recycling bins located around the school. However, only a minority of students appreciated the steps taken by Dubai to encourage community recycling. Across the school, students displayed age-appropriate understanding of the global economical crisis and its impact on their lives.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching and learning were acceptable overall, and benefited from the positive relationships between staff and students. The majority of lessons were planned, the allocated time managed and appropriate resources utilised, to ensure students made progress. However, across all stages and subjects, there was an over-reliance on teacher-led activities, text books and worksheets. In the few outstanding lessons seen, teachers used good pace, clear aims and a range of exciting activities to meet the learning needs of all students. Nevertheless, in most classes, outcomes were inhibited by whole class teaching where learning was not designed to meet the needs of all students. In the Foundation Stage, particularly, this resulted in children sitting for long periods of time listening to the teacher. The use of ICT to enhance learning was rarely observed. Almost all teachers had very secure knowledge of subject matter and

curriculum content. This enabled them to prepare lessons ensuring the acquisition of knowledge and concepts. Although teachers extended learning through good responses to students' questions, they were less secure in their understanding of how students learn.

The quality of students' learning was acceptable. Almost all students were keen, committed and enthusiastic learners. In a few lessons, students made progress despite weak teaching. They responded well when teachers enabled them to be active participants in their own learning. For example, in physics, Grade 9 students worked collaboratively to test their own ideas measuring acceleration due to gravity. In a Grade 6 English lesson, inspirational teaching encouraged students to use advanced vocabulary when meticulously analysing the poetry of William Wordsworth. Similarly, when teachers challenged students' thinking, they often demonstrated good critical faculties and powers of analysis. However, the prime use of questions was to reinforce knowledge and facts.

Assessment was acceptable, but inconsistent across the school. Teachers generally recorded students' progress, and kept ongoing records. Exercise books were regularly marked but teachers provided little developmental guidance. Regular assessments and analysis led to support for certain students. However, apart from outcomes at GCE, results were not compared against schools in similar circumstances. Students were not set appropriate targets on entry to each stage to help track their progress. Consequently teacher's plans were not always sufficiently well informed and students were not given regular feedback about how to improve their work.

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

The curriculum was acceptable overall, was generally broad and balanced, and provided continuity and progression. However, the school did not meet government requirements regarding allocated time to Islamic and Arabic Education. The curriculum was relevant to the needs of most students, although the choice of subjects for older students was limited. The Foundation Stage curriculum had been developed and improved and was beginning to match activities more closely to the needs of young children. Curricular planning was adequate overall but lacked challenge for higher attaining students and support for lower attaining. The Islamic Education curriculum was not coherent and lesson plans provided limited challenge and was not sufficiently well matched to the range of students' learning needs. Limited ICT resources severely affected the scope of the curriculum to develop students' independent learning skills. Subject co-ordinators met each month to plan and review teaching and learning. However, key data from assessments was not analysed to focus on learner outcomes and improve future curricular planning. Recent staff appointments for arts subjects had quickly improved breadth of the curriculum. Monitoring processes identified general areas for development but lacked rigour in terms of detailed planning, success criteria, timescales and funding. A few cross-curricular links were established. The curriculum was enriched when teachers supplemented text books with practical activities. Within a limited range of extra-curricular activities, students had achieved a four-year series of successes by winning most

categories in the annual inter-school rock challenge. However, transport restrictions limited extra-curricular activities after school. Students participated in a small number of community innovations, including writing letters to local officials about recycling issues, and they visited community centres for the elderly and local places of interest.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The school provided good care for all students. Child protection procedures were secure. Medical staff effectively monitored students' well-being and were fully prepared for emergencies. They led the curriculum for health education, and promoted healthy eating and exercise regimes. Outdoor play areas were of adequate size, and in good condition. In the Foundation Stage play area, awnings protected children from the sun. Buses provided for students were generally of good quality, and the complex system of arrivals and departures was efficiently managed. An attendant on each bus ensured safety in transit and on homeward journeys. Staff members liaised with the adult carer meeting each student. Students' attendance and punctuality were good. The school held an annual fire drill. The school management were aware of the need to improve administrative procedures when monitoring health and safety on the school site.

Teachers had good personal relationships with students, although classroom harmony was sometimes affected by excessive noise. Although teachers had good knowledge of the personal and academic development of individual students, assessment information was not used well to identify students' needs and enable teachers to give focused advice for improvement. The school's mid-term and annual reports to parents included grades achieved and examination marks. Teachers' comments were brief and rarely informed students how they might improve their work.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The leadership and management of the school were acceptable. The Principal and Head teacher were dedicated, competent leaders who communicated the schools aims effectively but lacked focus on certain key initiatives. The school leaders had clearly defined roles but these were not always linked well to the school's key priorities. A focus on improving students' learning experiences in the Foundation Stage had developed teachers' questioning techniques and their dialogue with children.

Many teachers at the school were committed to implementing strategies for school improvement but a significant minority required further professional advice and support to improve their teaching skills. A strong commitment to improvement was undermined by a lack of systematic assessment processes and tracking systems. Consequently, the analysis of assessment data was erratic and had little impact.

Staff and parents were aware of the school's values and aims, and supported the school in new initiatives. However, parents wanted to be more fully involved in the school's decision-making process.

Several subject departments did not work collegiately. In these departments, not all staff were committed to school improvement or to beneficial changes in their own practice. Teachers had limited access to the professional development necessary to improve teaching and learning. Training had led to some support for teachers but opportunities to share good practice within the school were limited. Middle management roles were in the early stages of development. All teachers were included in an appraisal process based on self-evaluation and observation by the Principal and Headteacher but this process was not yet fully aligned with school improvement targets. The school's post-inspection action plan, together with recent changes in the school, had led to some improvements to teachers' understanding of effective practice but had not yet significantly improved outcomes for students.

Governance of the school was unsatisfactory. An advisory body had not yet been established by the school.

The number of staff and the quality of accommodation were acceptable but resources for learning, and particularly the provision of ICT, were limited in all departments.

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	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Not Applicable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Not Applicable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Not Applicable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Good	Outstanding	Not Applicable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Good	Outstanding	Not Applicable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding
Progress over time	Acceptable	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding
Progress over time	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attitudes and behaviour	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Health and safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

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.

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