

**Star International School,
Umm Sheif
Inspection Report
Foundation Stage to Year 5**

Report published May 2010

Contents

Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report	2
Basic information about the school.....	2
How well does the school perform overall?.....	3
Key features of the school	4
Recommendations	4
How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?	4
How good is the students' personal and social development?.....	5
How good are the teaching and learning?	6
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?	6
How well does the school protect and support students?.....	7
How good are the leadership and management of the school?.....	7
Summary of inspection judgements	9
Next Steps.....	13
How to contact us.....	13

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-Umm Sheif 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 Umm Sheif, Star International is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Foundation Stage to Year 5, aged three to nine years. The school follows an English curriculum. Since the last inspection the school had grown from 88 to 229 students and around two thirds of the staff had been in post for less than three months. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to parent on-line questionnaires. Parents were very positive about the work of the school and the progress their children were making. The openness and willingness of the school to explain what it was doing and what support they were requesting was highly valued and parents greatly appreciated the work of the staff who they judged to be very committed. They spoke of the impressive progress their children were making both academically and in their personal and social development. They considered the school to be well led and managed. They felt that they could share concerns openly. They were keen to report that their concerns were acted upon appropriately and were confident that their children were well looked after in a safe and supportive environment.

How well does the school perform overall?

Star International School Umm Sheif provided a good education for its students and had made a determined start towards addressing the issues raised in the last inspection report. Attainment was good in English, mathematics and science and most students were making good progress in almost all of their other subjects and aspects. The exceptions were in Islamic Education and Arabic where attainment and progress were unsatisfactory in both subjects. The attitude and behaviour of students was of a high standard and students showed a real enthusiasm for learning and school life generally. Most had a growing awareness of their responsibilities as citizens and had a basic understanding of, and a respect for, Islam. Their economic and environmental understanding was good and they had a growing understanding of money and of its value.

Teaching was good overall and several outstanding lessons were seen. Almost all lessons had clear learning objectives which were covered effectively and reviewed well. Most teachers demonstrated good classroom management skills which helped to further students learning. A wide range of teaching strategies were used to promote interest including the regular use of information technology. Homework was set carefully in partnership with parents. In almost all lessons students made significant gains in their knowledge, understanding and skills. Procedures for assessing students' work were acceptable. Teachers marked their work accurately though the school was only in the early stages of analysing data on student performance with a view to adjusting teaching strategies in the light of any trends. The curriculum offered by the school was acceptable and met most, though not yet, all students needs well. It was regularly reviewed and updated and was imaginatively interpreted in the Foundation Stage. The schools extra-curricular provision made a useful contribution to enhancing the taught curriculum. The care provided for students was outstanding and the support for students' welfare was good. All staff took their duty of care very seriously and health and safety policies and procedures were followed thoroughly. The buildings and facilities were safe, secure and well-maintained. Healthy lifestyles were promoted and child protection procedures were well-established and implemented.

The quality of leadership and management of the school was good. There was a shared vision and the new senior leadership team had set itself a demanding improvement agenda. The school knew most of its strengths and weaknesses and had a realistic understanding of what would be involved in embedding the changes that were planned. The schools partnership with parents and the community was good. Governance was supportive and parents were impressed with the positive impact the school was having on their children. Staffing, facilities and resources were good and the school benefited from committed, well-qualified teachers and good resources.

Key features of the school

- The good progress made in addressing the recommendations of the last inspection report, especially in teaching and learning;
- The good standards of students' work in English, mathematics and science;
- The good behaviour of students and their enthusiasm for learning;
- The teaching strategies adopted to meet the needs of students of all abilities;
- Effective leadership and management at all levels;
- The involvement of parents in the day to day life of the school;
- The unsatisfactory attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic.

Recommendations

- To continue the work that had been started to address the recommendations of the last inspection;
- Improve students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Develop baseline assessments against which to measure the attainment and progress of students and the impact of the teaching on learning;
- Improve support for students with additional learning needs.

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

The overall attainment and progress in Islamic Education was unsatisfactory. Most of the Arab students could recite and read verses from The Holy Qur'an clearly and accurately and students' knowledge of Islam was acceptable. Students knew about the Pillars of Islam, the names of five daily prayers and had knowledge about the life of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and his family members and companions. Non-Arabic speaking students could read The Holy Qur'an at a level which did not meet age related expectations. In almost all years students failed to link their knowledge and understanding of Islamic values with the way they conducted their daily lives.

Attainment and progress in Arabic were unsatisfactory overall. The majority of non-Arabic speaking students knew only a few greetings and could identify a small proportion of the letters in the Arabic alphabet. By Grade 5, only a minority could speak more than a few basic sentences and most overly relied on using English in situations when they needed to speak in Arabic. Similarly, theoretical knowledge of Arabic grammar was unsatisfactory as were students writing skills.

Attainment and progress in English across the school were good. In the Foundation Stage children achieved at least in line with school benchmarks having often started from a low baseline. A majority of students were English as additional language learners. Almost all made good progress and entered their primary years well, placed to build on their first two years of schooling. Students had a good knowledge of the alphabets. They could identify and sequence letters and could listen attentively and speak confidently. Most students made more rapid progress with their reading than with other areas. By Year 5 most could write grammatically accurate prose for a range of audiences, although only the most able could present their ideas in writing fluently. Nearly all students were attentive listeners and were eager to answer questions and to take initiative. Spelling was weaker than other aspects of English.

In mathematics, overall attainment was good and progress was acceptable. In the Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2, students showed good mathematical development. They showed at least the expected understanding of numbers and computational skills with regard to addition and subtraction. Students knew patterns, sequences and basic geometric shapes. In Year 5 students were able to apply the basic rules of addition, subtraction and multiplication but had not yet started to use the process for long division. They had acceptable understanding of units of measure and using both analogue and 24-hour clocks. Mathematical terms were used accurately. Students' skills in using their mathematical learning for problem-solving and to undertaking challenging investigations were not well developed.

Attainment in science throughout the phases was good and progress acceptable and in line with age related expectations. Students in Years 1 and 2 planted seeds and used correct terminology to name or label the parts of plants. Results in national curriculum tests conducted at the end of Year 5 were comparable to UK average. Students developed competence and understanding of the processes and methods of science, from Foundation and through primary, where they increasingly understood the importance of carrying out investigations under controlled conditions. Students were able to develop basic hypotheses to given problems and discuss their simple predictions on an increasingly complex basis by Year 5.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' personal and social development was good. Students behaved very well in lessons and around the school. They attended regularly and were punctual. One of the most impressive features of the school was the way they respected one another and their teachers. They were keen to learn, took a real pride in their work and were very proud of their school.

Students' spiritual and civic understanding was acceptable. Students had an acceptable range of opportunities to develop their leadership skills, mostly within the classroom. Many could demonstrate an acceptable level of understanding of Islam and most knew the importance of Friday as a special day for Muslims. Older students were aware of the practice of fasting in Ramadan.

Economic and environmental understanding was good and was consistently encouraged by teachers. All were developing an age appropriate understanding of Dubai's rapidly changing society and many had a growing understanding of Dubai and its neighbours. Year 5 students showed an interest in, and a good knowledge of, the reasons why it was important to recycle goods such as cans and plastic bottles. These themes were well developed in geography and science lessons.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching and learning was good. Lessons were well planned and learning objectives were set and reviewed well. Teachers demonstrated good classroom management skills which contributed to the effective learning seen in most lessons. Most teachers used imaginative and well judged teaching strategies to promote interest and engagement and to ensure the lesson objectives were fully met. Approaches included the regular use of information technology. Homework was set carefully and in partnership with parents.

Overall the quality of learning was good. Students were enthusiastic learners and almost all were keen to participate and remain on task. Their enthusiasm contributed to the progress they made in lessons. In many of the most effective lessons students collaborated productively and were beginning to develop critical thinking and enquiry skills. Most students used classroom resources well to solve a problem or for example with the teachers help, conduct simple surveys to justify a conclusion. Older students in English showed that they could apply their learning in less familiar contexts when given new books to read and review. Most students shared their thinking with their peers and were confident enough to ask for help when necessary from the teacher or teaching assistant.

The quality of assessment was acceptable. The school knew its students well. This knowledge was gathered from the good interactive teaching as well as through the careful marking of students' written work. A system for benchmarking students' attainment on entry and tracking their students' progress subsequently was being developed. Teachers were not routinely using information from monitoring to adapt their lesson plans in the light of any learning trends or issues to plan future lessons.

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

The quality of the curriculum was acceptable. It was broad and balanced and met the needs of most students well. The curriculum was regularly reviewed and updated to meet changing needs and circumstances. For example, the school recognised that the curriculum did not meet the needs of students with additional learning needs as well as other students and was taking action to address this issue by staff training and the appointment of a special educational needs co-ordinator. There was acceptable continuity between years as well as linkages between topics. Appropriate attention was being given to developing cross-curricular themes. In the Foundation Stage students were given imaginative topics to stimulate their interest. For

example, children were asked who should be invited to a teddy bears picnic and what would they eat. This topic generated a lively response which provided a good framework for developing an understanding of number, language, healthy eating, creative writing and art. The curriculum in all years provided good learning opportunities for personal, social and physical development as well as Islamic Education and Arabic. The curriculum was enhanced through a growing range of extra-curricular activities after school that included dancing and a range of sporting options.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The provision for ensuring the health and safety of the students was outstanding. Staff knew the students well and were very sensitive to their needs. They understood their role in looking after children's welfare and good arrangements were made to ensure that the school building was safe and that children were protected, particularly at the start and finish of the school day. Helpful advice and guidance was readily provided to all students. Students' behaviour was very well managed.

Students' well-being was tracked well through the medical files. The school recorded, analysed and responded purposefully to the few attendance and punctuality issues which had arisen. There were effective arrangements in place to help new students to settle-in. The school nurse worked well with staff and parents to teach children about how to keep themselves safe and healthy. Careful recording and monitoring of all health and safety issues were in place. The new school buildings were immaculately maintained. Supervision of students was outstanding. The school promoted healthy lifestyles and healthy food and drink were available.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership and management of the school were good. The school had a clear vision that was shared by staff and parents and a realistic understanding of what was involved in fulfilling the schools main goals and ambitions. Teaching and support staff, were hard working, competent and committed. The leadership set clear priorities. At the top of these was the recruitment of high calibre teachers and the need to address the recommendations made in the last inspection report. In both areas good progress had been made. A new senior management team was now in place along with subject and aspect co-ordinators with responsibilities for planning and monitoring students' progress and attainment. These groups worked effectively and shared information productively. Other well judged priorities were to further develop the schools partnership with parents and to review the curriculum in the light of the large and rapid increase in student numbers.

Self-evaluation had improved significantly since the last inspection and there were now well established processes through which assessments were being made on what was working well and where improvement was still required. This progress has enabled the school to know most of its strengths and weaknesses and set demanding but achievable goals to address known shortcomings. Particularly good progress had been made towards improving teaching and learning outcomes for students. The two areas where too little progress had been made were in improving attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic. These were in part attributable to the delay in appointing two suitable teachers until the start of the current school year which meant that the full impact of their teaching was no yet evident.

Links with parents and the community were good. A Parents, Staff and Friends Association (PSFA) was well established and now acted both as a critical friend to the school as well as a strong support. Parents were informed of school events by newsletters. Links with the wider community were developing productively. Parents appreciated the caring and committed approach to the education and welfare of their children. They were actively encouraged to be partners in their children's learning and participated on educational visits and trips. Several parents, while wholly supportive of the school, expressed their concern about the lack of opportunities for primary students to play outside of lesson time and for the delays in allowing the swimming pool to open to be resolved quickly.

Governance was acceptable and provided helpful support. Regular meetings were held between the owners and the Principal to review progress on both educational and financial matters. There were plans to develop the PSFA so that it could further act in a 'critical friend' capacity and have a voice in the school's development planning processes.

Staffing, facilities and resources were good. There were sufficient well qualified teachers and they were very well motivated. There was a good balance of experience and expertise and a high staffing priority was to appoint a special educational needs coordinator to enable the school to provide additional help in this area. Teaching and learning resources were good overall and the school was committed to a continuing professional development programme that so far had greatly benefitted students.

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	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Not applicable	Unsatisfactory

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

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

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

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?		
Age group:	Foundation	Primary
Attainment	Good	Good
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	Acceptable	Acceptable
Economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good

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

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

How well does the school perform overall?
Good

Next Steps

The school has been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how it will address the main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents. The next inspection will report on the progress made by the school.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau
Knowledge and Human Development Authority

How to contact us

If you have a concern or wish to comment on any aspect of this report you should contact: inspection@khda.gov.ae.

More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at www.khda.gov.ae.

Copyright 2010

This report is for internal use only and for the self-evaluation purposes of the school. It should not be used for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement.