

Dubai College Inspection Report

Year 7 to 13

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 College 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 Um Suqeim, Dubai College is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Year 7 to Year 13, aged 11 to 18 years. The school follows the English National Curriculum. The Headmaster had been in post for one year. At the time of the inspection, there were 785 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 questionnaires completed by parents. Parents were very positive about the college. All those who responded to questionnaires believed that staff encouraged their children to work hard and become independent and responsible. A few expressed disappointment at the quality of their children's learning in Arabic. Parents emphasised the impact of the co-curricular programme on their children's personal development and wider achievement. They praised how well students were supported to achieve their potential, both personally and academically. They felt that the college sought their views and that the college was transparent about what it did well, and how it was improving.

How well does the school perform overall?

Dubai College provided a good quality of education. It had made very good progress in addressing all of the recommendations of the last inspection report. Students' attainment and progress were outstanding in English, mathematics and science and good in Arabic. In particular, the college ensured that students' learning was broadened beyond the knowledge of the examination courses. As a result, students could confidently apply their learning in real-life contexts. Inspectors noted how well students used English in their learning and communication across their subjects, and how well they used one subject to help them to understand another. The school did not make sufficient provision for Muslims to study Islamic Education. The timetabling arrangements, teaching and accommodation had not given this subject sufficient priority, and students' attainment in this subject was therefore unsatisfactory. Across the school the quality of teaching was outstanding. Teachers were skilled and knowledgeable, and they taught students how to be effective learners. They assessed students' skills regularly and used this information to identify any weaknesses and provide additional support or more challenge. They also used assessment well to encourage students to become responsible for their own learning by helping them to track their own development and set targets.

Students benefited from learning in an environment of mutual support and high standards. The school's curriculum was under review. Staff aspired to develop it further to provide a wider range of subjects and more choice by using technology more as a medium for learning. At present, the school's information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure was not sufficiently well developed to allow this. The school's co-curricular activities contributed significantly to producing mature and confident young people with positive attitudes to health and leisure. There was scope to develop further their awareness of the influence of Islam on the society they lived in, and to provide opportunities for students to be active in environmental stewardship.

Parents were pleased with the school and said that it delivered its aims well. The school involved them well in supporting their children's learning. The school had implemented rigorous systems for assessing students' progress and evaluating the work of the school. A system of department reviews had challenged teachers to reflect on how they could raise standards further. New self-evaluation and improvement processes were already beginning to ensure that the school achieved the highest standards. The governing board supported the school well, and the Headmaster reported to the board on standards. Managers and governors had not yet addressed important weaknesses in provision for and attainment in Islamic Education, a key curriculum area.

Key features of the school

- Outstanding academic standards and progress;
- The high quality of teaching across the school;
- Students' skills in learning independently and co-operatively;
- The contribution of the co-curriculum to students' learning and development;
- Teachers' high expectations and the quality of support students receive;
- Systems for involving students in tracking their attainment and progress and setting targets;
- Effective leadership across the school.

Recommendations

- Improve provision for Islamic Education and attainment in this subject;
- Continue to develop consistent high quality assessment and self-evaluation systems which assure high quality outcomes for learners;
- Continue to develop the role of the Governing Body to hold the school to account.

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

Students' attainment in Islamic Education was unsatisfactory. However, the students were making acceptable progress in their learning at both the secondary and post-16 stages. Very few students could demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge about key figures and events in Islam. By Year 10, students did not have sufficient understanding of the Pillars of Islam and Pillars of Faith. Their skills in recitation were also below expectations for students of their age and stage. All students were enthusiastic about their faith and interested in the subject matter. They asked probing questions to strengthen their understanding.

Students' attainment and progress in Arabic were good. All students studied Arabic as a second language. Most students attained levels that were above average for this subject. Students had good listening skills. They could answer spoken questions in complete sentences. They could read fluently and understood the main points and some of the details in short passages. By Year 9, most students were able to write properly structured sentences. Their handwriting of Arabic script was developing well. They made good use of grammar and vocabulary in their writing. However, they needed to develop their skills further in writing for a wider range of purposes.

Students' attainment and progress in English were outstanding at all stages. The school had maintained consistently high standards of attainment in examinations over several years. Students entered the college with well developed skills in English. In particular, they had reading skills beyond normal expectations for their age. Dubai College ensured that they made very good progress on building these skills further. All students spoke confidently and used sophisticated vocabulary to express themselves clearly. They listened carefully and gave well considered responses in class discussions. Students read widely and demonstrated deep understanding of a wide range of texts. They were particularly good at using examples from texts to illustrate their points of view in discussions. Students could identify the key features of different styles of writing and regularly used these features in their own writing to add effect. Notably, teachers in other curriculum subjects used and further developed students' skills in English to help them to achieve success.

Students' attainment and progress in mathematics were outstanding across the school. Students performed very well in examinations, and most achieved or exceeded ambitious personal targets. At both General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Level, the number of students achieving the highest grades was much better than the national averages of all schools in England. Students from Dubai College also achieved exceptionally well in the Mathematics Olympiad and in international mathematics competitions. Students were making outstanding progress in learning across the whole range of mathematics skills. In particular, they demonstrated exceptional investigative and higher order thinking skills. They could apply their mathematical skills and knowledge in a wide range of contexts across their learning in other subjects. For example, older students could solve challenging problems in physics using applied mathematics without support from staff.

Student's attainment in science was outstanding. In biology, chemistry and physics, most students achieved A to C grades at AS-level, with the majority achieving A or B grades in biology and physics. At all levels, the schools results were better than averages for other schools. These high levels of attainment had been sustained over recent years and, in physics, there were signs that attainment was continuing to improve further. Most students made outstanding progress on their prior learning. At Key Stage 3, students could independently design and carry out experiments based on sound hypotheses. Almost all chose appropriate formats to present their findings. Older students had well developed investigative skills. They thought scientifically and linked concepts well to understand how science was applied in the real world.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students behaved in a mature way and engaged openly and confidently with visitors. They treated their peers with understanding and respect and demonstrated very positive attitudes to their learning. In particular, they supported and challenged one another well in their learning and this helped them to achieve high standards. Levels of attendance were good.

Students demonstrated good civic understanding and appreciation of local traditions and culture. They viewed the multi-cultural nature of Dubai as a positive and enriching influence. Almost all had additional responsibilities within the school community which developed their wider skills and qualities well. Most students had a basic understanding about Islam, although they did not fully understand the impact of Islam on their lives as citizens of Dubai.

Students at the secondary phase had a good understanding of the characteristics of Dubai's economy through the continuous progress they had witnessed themselves. In the Sixth Form, this understanding was enhanced through courses such as economics and geography. Students were aware of the current environmental concerns and participated in recycling activities. However, they did not fully appreciate the impact of their individual actions on the sustainability of the environment.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The overall quality of teaching across the school was outstanding. Teachers were highly qualified and enthusiastic, with excellent subject knowledge. They knew how students learn effectively in their subjects and how to motivate, engage and sometimes inspire them. Almost all lessons were well planned and structured. Teachers demonstrated their high expectations to students through providing well-paced and challenging lessons. They made very good use of resources to provide examples and practical learning activities. Almost all teachers asked questions which challenged students to think deeply and extend their learning further by asking questions themselves. Teachers were skilled at teaching very able students. For example, they used enquiry and critical thinking activities to enable students to apply their learning in real contexts. In a few lessons, the teachers did not give the students enough opportunity to learn independently.

The quality of students' learning across the school was outstanding. Students were ambitious for themselves and were highly motivated to learn. They took responsibility for their own learning. In consultation with the teacher, they set themselves challenging targets and knew what they had to do to achieve these. They were increasingly carrying out independent research and presenting their work to their classes. Students worked independently of the teacher and collaborated effectively in pairs and small groups. They often made good use of ICT at home to research and present their work. This deepened their learning and increased their progress. A significant feature of students' learning in Dubai College was how well they made learning connections across subject areas. In the Sixth Form, students were becoming increasingly independent learners, and occasionally led the teaching. They were becoming less reliant on teachers to direct their learning and preparing well for higher academic study.

Across the school, teachers used assessment well as part of learning, and there were examples of exemplary practice. Teachers knew their students' strengths and learning styles very well. Almost all teachers ensured that students understood how they were expected to perform in tasks. Teachers regularly reviewed students' work and provided helpful comments which students used to improve their work. In best practice, teachers regularly checked that everyone was understanding and continuously adapted the lessons to support and challenge individuals. When students assessed one another's work they learned from their mistakes and from each other. Most heads of department used test results to track students' progress and to set and monitor their targets. The way the school engaged students in developing learning skills was innovative and highly effective practice. However, in a few subjects, teachers were not yet using assessment effectively to ensure that students were always challenged.

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

The curriculum successfully met the aim of the college to provide a high quality British-style education. Students could study an appropriate range of subjects at all levels. Staff were reviewing the curriculum to bring it up-to-date and ensure that it responded to the needs of its students and its community. For example, staff had begun to investigate how alternative learning and accreditation approaches could further broaden opportunities for students and link them with learners beyond Dubai College. Significant features of the curriculum included some very productive curricular links with industry and commerce. In many departments, students were highly successful in national and international competitions and events. The college recently won the regional final of the schools Formula-1 engineering competition. They fielded successful sports teams and highly acclaimed musicians. The college considered the wide range of opportunities for personal achievement to be part of its curriculum and these had a positive impact on the development of almost all students. There were weaknesses in the timetabling arrangements for Islamic Education, which meant that Muslim students missed out on other learning.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The college had outstanding arrangements in place to ensure the health and safety of students. Staff were reflective and vigilant. They anticipated potential hazards and responded effectively to these. The high standard of maintenance enhanced the stimulating learning environment. Students were well trained in safe practices and risk-assessment, particularly in science. The college cafeteria provided healthy choices and students learned about healthy lifestyles through personal, social and health education. They were encouraged to adopt healthy leisure habits through the wide range of sporting and physical activities. All staff, including support staff, were clear about the college's policy on child protection.

All staff, and particularly tutors, provided effective pastoral support to students. They knew their students very well and were alert to anything that might be affecting their learning or

welfare. Skilled and knowledgeable staff helped students to build a profile of their skills and knowledge. As a result, almost all students secured places at their preferred universities, and were well prepared for independent living. A tracking system was in place across the school and was very effective in monitoring students' progress. Almost all teachers were effectively using this data to support and modify individual students' target-setting. Students regularly reviewed and set their own learning targets. Those who were not reaching expectations were promptly identified, and given additional support.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership across the school was outstanding. The Headmaster had quickly evaluated the key strengths of the college. He had effectively shared his vision for improving the school and involved everyone in achieving this. Senior managers worked closely with staff to ensure that they understood how, for example, to use self-evaluation and assessment effectively to raise standards. The heads of departments and pastoral teams were supporting agreed priorities and led their departments effectively. The culture of leadership in the school encouraged innovation and ensured continuous improvement. Almost all staff had high standards and worked together well to improve the college. Many took a leading role in local, national and international initiatives. Those who ran co-curricular activities took significant responsibility for achieving high standards. Students were developing leadership skills well in a supportive environment and using these to serve the school.

The school had implemented effective systems to evaluate the quality of its work and plan improvement. The views of parents, students and staff had been gathered and a five year improvement plan produced. This plan identified almost all of the areas in which the school had room for further improvement. The plan was well understood by staff, and well supported by department development plans. Departments themselves had looked closely at students' attainment and had started to continuously review their teaching, learning and courses. Senior managers had begun a cycle of challenging academic reviews to support this process.

Parents had appropriate opportunities to find out about their children's progress, including regular reports and parents evenings. They were pleased with the level of detail they received about their children's targets and praised how well their children understood what they had to do to reach these. They reported that tutors and senior managers were always accessible. Friends of Dubai College supported the college well, for example through offering seminars and work experience. They organised social and fund raising events, and maintained the school's positive profile within the community. The college worked well with a wide range of partners including industry and commerce in Dubai and the wider English-speaking world.

The governors supported the college well, by providing their professional advice and support with projects. For example, they had contributed expertise to the music centre and auditorium building and had supported students to represent the college at international events. They had started to link more closely with subject departments. However, they did not yet seek wide enough representation from parents. The Headmaster provided a clear account of the college's

activities to the governors. However, they had not yet provided sufficient challenge to the college to conform to the highest standards and legislation in all curriculum areas.

The teaching staff were high quality skilled teachers with advanced subject knowledge. The Bursar monitored the work of support staff closely and provided appropriate training. The college estate provided a wide range of facilities, many of an outstanding quality. There was an appropriate number of well appointed classrooms which were fully resourced for their purpose. Significant features included a new auditorium, a spacious swimming pool and a full range of sports facilities, a well-designed music centre and drama studio. The college did not have a 21st century ICT infrastructure and this limited students' opportunities to use ICT in school as part of their learning. The arrangements for lunch did not include an indoor space dedicated to eating. There was inadequate prayer space and no dedicated classroom for the teaching of Islamic Education.

Summary of inspection judgements

In their evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the college, the inspection team made judgements about the following aspects of the college's performance.

Four descriptors are: Outstanding; Good; Acceptable; Unsatisfactory.

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education?		
Age group:	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?		
Age group:	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?		
Age group:	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Outstanding	Outstanding
Progress over time	Outstanding	Outstanding

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

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

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

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

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

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

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
Quality of leadership	Outstanding
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Outstanding
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.

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