

Al Ittihad School – Mamzar Inspection Report

Kindergarten 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.

Al Ittihad School, Mamzar 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 Al Mamzar, Al Ittihad is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 12, aged three to 18 years. The school is licensed to follow an American curriculum. It was an English language medium school with teaching and learning materials drawn from those used within an American curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 1701 students on roll. Students' attendance in the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Almost all, parents reported that they were satisfied with the quality of the school's provision. Almost everyone said that their children liked school, that the teaching was good and that the school was well led. They thought their children's progress in Islamic Education, Arabic and English was good, though some were unsure about progress in science and mathematics. Most felt that behaviour was good and that their children were expected to work hard and do their best. Equally, most parents felt that their children were being encouraged to become independent and personally responsible. They said that, in the main, the children were treated fairly at school and that school did what it could to keep children fit and healthy. However, a significant minority reported that teachers were not good at explaining how parents can help at home with school work. Similarly, several parents did not feel they were getting enough information about their children's progress and that the school did not consult them sufficiently on matters affecting their children. Most felt that there was a

good range of enjoyable and stimulating activities at the school. A majority reported that they believed that links with parents and the local community were good. A majority of parents felt that the school had responded positively to the recommendations in the previous inspection report.

How well does the school perform overall?

Al Ittihad School, Mamzar offered an acceptable quality of education. The school had some strengths but some significant weaknesses which needed to be addressed in order to give the students the education to which they were entitled. In particular, standards of attainment and the attitudes and behaviour in the boys' high school section required attention. Nonetheless, throughout the school the attainment and progress in Islamic Education and in Arabic were good. In the other key subjects, attainment and progress were acceptable except in English where, although progress in the KG was good, both attainment and progress in the high school section were unsatisfactory. In science, attainment and progress were unsatisfactory in both the elementary and middle school sections. Overall, students' attitudes and behaviour were acceptable across the school, but there were several examples of unsatisfactory behaviour of boys in the high school section where their conduct and demeanour detracted from the quality of learning and limited attainment and progress in several lessons. Many students took positions of responsibility in the school and they showed a good awareness of Dubai's economic situation and in the need for taking care of the environment locally and globally.

Teaching quality was acceptable. Effective classroom management was a problem for many teachers in the boys' high school section. Students' learning, while acceptable overall, was restricted by the limited amount of extended written work and investigation which students were required to undertake. The assessment of students took place regularly by way of quizzes and frequent knowledge-checks, but there was insufficient assessment of deeper knowledge and understanding. Since the school had only recently begun to measure students' attainment against external benchmarks, it was difficult to equate their performance at the school with international standards. The arrangements to ensure students' health and safety were acceptable but the school allowed adults to enter the school premises at will at the beginning and end of the school day which represented a potential risk, since their verification as parents or guardians could not always be assured. Behaviour issues were not consistently addressed appropriately and the tolerance of inappropriate behaviour detracted from the schools commitment to high standards. Guidance relating to progression to university was not well developed, since students were not consistently given an idea about the qualifications they would need to progress to universities other than those in the UAE.

The leadership and management of the school were of an acceptable standard, but there was too much variation in quality and expectations between the different sections of the school. Progress in addressing the recommendations made in the previous inspection report was limited and many of the areas requiring improvement, particularly with regard to external benchmarking and using international examinations remained. Governors needed to have a clearer idea about what was happening in the school in order to help them be able to fulfil their role as critical friends of school management. Overall, the school was only partially successful in realising its ambitious vision. Standards in Islamic Education and in Arabic were good, but elsewhere there was considerable variation in quality and standards of achievement.

Key features of the school

- The high quality of teaching and learning in Islamic Education and Arabic and good standards of attainment and progress achieved by students in these key subjects;
- The children's good progress in English in Kindergarten;
- The students' good civic and Islamic understanding and their appreciation of economic and environmental issues;
- The good partnerships with parents and the local community;
- Students' poor punctuality and lateness at the beginning and throughout the school day;
- The poor behaviour of some of the boys in the high school section.

Recommendations

- Raise standards of attainment and levels of progress in English, mathematics and science by:
 - Providing lessons where teaching is more closely aligned to students' learning needs;
 - Requiring students to undertake more extended writing and to undertake research to develop their analytical and higher-order thinking skills;
 - Providing opportunities for students to apply their knowledge to real life problems;
- Improve boys' attitudes and their behaviour in the high school section through setting higher expectations and ensuring everyone adheres to the code of conduct;
- Improve punctuality at the start of the school day and from lesson to lesson;
- Use international benchmarks in order to verify that students' achievements are in line those of students across the world;
- Strengthen leadership and management so that there is more consistency of practice in the different sections of the school.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good throughout the school. Students in all grades knew the meaning of the verses from The Holy Qur'an they read. Most students demonstrated the ability to accurately recite the verses they learnt. Most students discussed the main principles and values of Islam and understood their importance and the impact they had on their daily lives. In KG and Primary, most students understood and could explain the Pillars of Islam and what the behaviour expected of a good Muslim child was. In the upper grades, most students had good, detailed knowledge of the forms of worship, divorce laws in Islam.

Attainment and progress in Arabic were good in the elementary, middle and secondary sections of the school. Almost all KG students read and wrote letters, numbers and explained what they were learning. They enjoyed reciting some of the sayings of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and sang morning songs in classical Arabic. By the end of Grade 5, almost all students accurately wrote and read words, sentences and phrases. Most students from middle and high school made good progress with their writing skills and by Year 12 they were able to write stories and research in many subjects and held extended conversations. Almost all students' oral responses to their teachers' questions were good and most of them also made good progress with learning grammar rules and how they are applied. Most students read and could explain correctly the meaning and the resonance of the Arabic poetry which they heard and recited.

Attainment in English throughout the school was acceptable, except in high school, where it was unsatisfactory. Progress was acceptable throughout the school except in KG where it was good and in the high school, where it was unsatisfactory. Most children started school with little or no English language, but their good progress through KG meant that by the time they left they could confidently identify the initial letter sounds of many words. By the end of Grade 5 boys and girls could discuss punctuation, and knew why an author used speech marks in a story. Listening skills were well developed, and students could accurately repeat teacher's phrases. Their writing skills were less well developed. By Grade 8, girls were consistently achieving higher standards than the boys. In the high school, attainment and progress were unsatisfactory. Although girls made acceptable progress, boys did not. Girls undertook good quality research projects which they presented fluently and with confidence. In direct contrast, boys did not display the level of independence expected when speaking or responding to texts.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were variable across the school, but overall they were acceptable, with some weaknesses. Attainment was particularly good in the upper elementary part of the school and throughout the girls' sections. It was unsatisfactory in some lower elementary classes and amongst boys in Grades 5 to 10. Overall, students' general subject knowledge was good but they showed consistent weaknesses in their ability to apply mathematics to real life. Most students developed an acceptable level of understanding of the

four operations of number, algebra, geometry and early calculus. Many students had good number manipulation skills. A minority was capable of completing work at a higher level. Their investigation skills were consistently underdeveloped in all sections of the school. As a result many students were not given enough challenge to transfer their acquired skills and knowledge in different settings. A minority of students took the American Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) at the end of Grade 11 and most gained scores which were below average.

Attainment and progress in science in KG and high school sections were acceptable. In the elementary and middle schools they were unsatisfactory. Kindergarten children had an age-appropriate knowledge of animals and plants. They knew how living and non-living things differ and had a developing awareness of healthy living. However, in the elementary and middle schools, several topics were conceptually beyond the majority of students and learning was by memory and easily forgotten. Practical, experimental and investigative skills were almost completely absent. Students knew about science rather than understanding the key requisites for all scientists, such as the development of critical thinking. In the high school section, where students had opted to study science, most students reached age-appropriate expectations in knowledge and understanding but their practical and investigative skills were below international expectations. They could not observe and measure accurately, limit variables or draw conclusions based upon scientific theory.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Most students were well behaved as they moved around the school and there were many examples of good behaviour and respect for teachers and peers, particularly amongst the girls and in the early sections of the school. For example, they listened attentively when their peers were leading discussion sessions. However, there was a problem with the behaviour of boys from Grades 5 to 12 where there were several instances of students' disrespect towards teachers, coupled with poor behaviour in class. Attendance was acceptable but, whilst the punctuality of most students was good, a significant number arrived late for assembly and to lessons. A lack of urgency and pride in their school was evident in a casual attitude towards classroom cleanliness in the boys' section. Students welcomed the growing responsibility entrusted upon them as they moved through the school, for example as student councillors or as leaders. They demonstrated their allegiance through aspiring to universities in the UAE to enable them to stay and play their part in the future of Dubai.

Students were all very conscious of the importance of Islam upon their lives. Displays around the school raised awareness about Islam, the special features of Dubai and its cultures and heritage.

Students were aware of the place Dubai holds in the regional and the world economy and they recognised the importance of recent developments. They expressed how important it was to move to a more sustainable economy and to make better use of their natural resources in the future. They had good environmental awareness.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching, overall, was acceptable. There were, however, several common weaknesses and much of the teaching in boys' high school section was unsatisfactory. There were, additionally, examples of unsatisfactory teaching in most other sections of the school. However, approximately one lesson in three was graded as good or better. In the best lessons teachers' objectives were clear, they used resources effectively, and they made sure that the students were fully engaged in their learning. In the unsatisfactory lessons teachers, although their subject knowledge was good, did not demonstrate they had a good understanding of how children learn. Their questioning techniques were very restricted, often requiring only one word responses from the students, and their interactions with the students were brief and superficial. A common weakness across most lessons in all sections of the school was a lack of differentiation that is matching lesson objectives, classroom materials and teaching techniques to the needs of all learners in a class.

The quality of learning was acceptable throughout the school. Few students were developing their skills as independent learners. They were almost wholly dependent upon their teachers for the pace, quantity and quality of learning. There were few opportunities for students to undertake research or project work, since teachers' expectations in this regard were low. The presentation of students' written work was often untidy and there was little pride evident in their work. Too often, teachers were too prepared to accept work which was poorly presented. The most significant feature of the quality of learning was the casual attitude and occasionally rude behaviour in the boys' section. Students were often late for lessons. They were poorly motivated and too many showed a lack of respect for teachers and visitors. In both boys' and girls' sections, the students were not being well prepared for higher education since their curiosity was not being nurtured, their research skills were weak and a love of learning was not being fostered.

The assessment strategies were weak throughout the school and, in the high school sections, they were unsatisfactory. The overriding approach to assessment consisted of the regular administration of short knowledge-check tests, or quizzes. The administration and conduct of these quizzes took up a great deal of curriculum time and the outcomes served merely to confirm student capacity to learn facts and recount them to order. The sort of short-term knowledge acquisition which this approach promoted did not consistently develop deeper understanding. While the school's tracking of students' progress was thorough and detailed, the measure of progress was based almost wholly on the results from the quizzes and, therefore, was not sufficiently grounded in students' deeper understanding or the consolidation of their knowledge. Students did not routinely take any external examinations of international standing, for example the American Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) or the more complex and challenging Advance Placement tests (AP) for the more able students. There was, therefore, no way of knowing how well the students had achieved by the end of Grade 12.

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

Whilst the school was licensed to run a US curriculum, in practice, there was very little choice and few arts options, both of which feature strongly in the American curriculum model. The art course was an option choice only against physical education from Grade 11 onwards. However, within these constraints the school otherwise provided an acceptable range of courses and programmes for almost all stages of the school. Key subjects were delivered through American teaching and learning materials. Students in the high school section had insufficient opportunity to gain certification in internationally accredited external examinations. Whilst some review of the curriculum took place, students at all stages of the school were not consulted enough on what was being taught. Some cross-curricular work took place, such as a Treasure Hunt activity led by the English department at the elementary stage aimed at developing students' research skills. However, cross-curricular activities like this were still at an early stage of development. The school provided a well planned range of extra-curricular activities. This included a focus on national celebrations and cultural themes as well as providing students with educational opportunities through visits to places of interest within Dubai and abroad. The establishment of soccer and taekwondo academies provided to the students from the school and from further afield with specialist sports training.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The provision for the health and safety of the students was acceptable. There were good medical facilities staffed by a full-time nurse and a part-time doctor. The health of all students was routinely checked throughout the school and health records were systematically maintained. The students' heights and weights were monitored regularly. Families were advised about healthy lifestyles and the school cafeteria provided healthy food options. Nevertheless, this was only partly successful in reducing the number of overweight students in school. Opportunities for physical education throughout the school were limited. Arrival and departure of students on school buses was supervised well. However, a large number of adults entered unchecked onto the campus at the start and end of the school day and constituted a potential safety risk to the students. Fire drills had been held and fire-fighting equipment had been checked although fire exits were routinely locked during the day. Overall, the premises and facilities were well maintained.

The quality of support was acceptable. Staff-student relationships were generally good. The school counsellors and supervisors provided good support in personal and academic matters. Tracking records were updated daily by supervisors, who responded quickly to causes for concern. However, inconsistencies in teachers' expectations of behaviour, and the thoroughness with which they completed the daily records, resulted in variability in support across the school and occasionally students requiring support were not identified soon enough. The involvement of parents had a positive effect in helping students to achieve. However, despite the well established process for dealing with lateness, a significant minority of students repeatedly arrived late and this detracted from the schools' aspirations for high standards. High school students received guidance about higher education and career choices but the ambitions of some students were not fully supported by the opportunities provided by the school. Since the students did not take any external examinations this was a potential barrier towards gaining access to the top international universities.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership and management varied across the school but, overall, it was acceptable. The different sections of the school operated with a good deal of autonomy and the standards and expectations in the different sections were not consistently high. The lack of a whole school approach to punctuality meant that lateness was widespread both between lessons and at the start of the school day. There was not a consistent approach towards addressing lateness and poor attendance. The school leaders were competent and committed but the shared vision was not always focused upon high standards. In the KG and elementary sections expectations were high, but in the other sections, the highest academic achievement and best personal conduct were not consistently promoted.

The self-evaluation of the school's own performance had not led to significant improvements since the previous inspection; there had only been modest progress in addressing a few aspects from the recommendations. There were few examples of students undertaking extended writing and reading tasks and the boys' attainment in English in the high school section remained well below the attainment of the girls. Several teachers were still struggling with classroom management and control and formative assessment was almost completely absent. The school's action plan arising from the previous inspection was not sufficiently succinct and well-focused to address these important issues. The use of external benchmarks to verify students' performance against international standards was something the school had only recently implemented.

Partnerships with parents were good. The school reported home to parents on their children's progress on the basis of the students' performance in the regular quizzes. Most parents felt happy about approaching the school with any matters or concerns, they appreciated the "open door" policy. Parents greatly valued the school's graduation ceremonies and the other annual social events. These events were also successful in raising the school's profile with the local community.

The arrangements for school governance were acceptable with some representation of key stakeholders, for example parents, on the key decision-making committee. However, governors were not yet sufficiently well informed about the performance of the school and could not, as a consequence, contribute in an informed way to help hold the school to account.

There were sufficient qualified staff, but the buildings in the girls' section were shabby and in need of renovation. There were insufficient resources for learning; the book stock in the boys' and girls' libraries was poor and in need of rejuvenation and there were not enough computers for a school of this size for ICT to be used routinely or extensively in all areas of the curriculum.

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:	KG	Elementary G1-5	Middle G6-8	High G9-12
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary G1-5	Middle G6-8	High G9-12
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary G1-5	Middle G6-8	High G9-12
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary G1-5	Middle G6-8	High G9-12
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary G1-5	Middle G6-8	High G9-12
Attainment	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary G1-5	Middle G6-8	High G9-12
Attitudes and behaviour	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary G1-5	Middle G6-8	High G9-12
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary G1-5	Middle G6-8	High G9-12
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary G1-5	Middle G6-8	High G9-12
Health and safety	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
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	Acceptable
Partnerships with parents and the community	Good
Governance	Acceptable
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.

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

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