

INSPECTION REPORT

Dubai English Speaking College

Report published in April, 2014

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Dubai English Speaking College

Location	Al Ruwwayah, Dubai Academic City
Type of school	Private
Website	www.descdubai.com
Telephone	04-3604866
Address	P O Box 125814, Dubai
Principal	Andrew Gibbs
Curriculum	UK
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Year Groups	11-18 / Year 7 - Year 13
Attendance	Good
Number of students on roll	950
Largest nationality group of students	UK
Number of Emirati students	10 (1%)
Date of the inspection	18th to 20th November 2013

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The context of the school

Dubai English Speaking College (DESC) is situated in Al Ruwwayah. The school opened in 2005. At the time of the inspection, there were 950 students on the roll, aged 11 to 18 years.

The school followed the English National Curriculum, starting at Key Stage 3. Students were entered for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations at the end of the secondary phase. Students completed Advanced Subsidiary (AS) level examinations at the end of Year 12, and Advanced level examinations at the end of the post-16 phase.

Students were grouped in 42 classes, seven in each of Years 7 and 8, six in each of Years 8 to 11, and ten in the sixth form. Ten students were Emiratis. Forty-one students, approximately four per cent, had Arabic as their first language.

There were 81 full-time teachers, including the Headteacher and the senior management team, and seven part-time teachers. All had appropriate qualifications. They were supported by seven teaching assistants. At the time of the inspection, the Headteacher was in his third year in post and there was one new member of the senior leadership team. Twenty-two teachers had been newly appointed, including extra appointments to cater for the growing number of students.

Overall school performance 2013-2014

Outstanding

Key strengths

- The highly motivated leadership team, including the governance, committed to improve all aspects of the school at all levels;
- The incisive self-evaluation approaches resulting in continued improvements;
- The high learning outcomes for students in most subjects;
- Students' outstanding personal, community and environmental responsibility;
- The high quality provision focused on meeting the needs of all students.

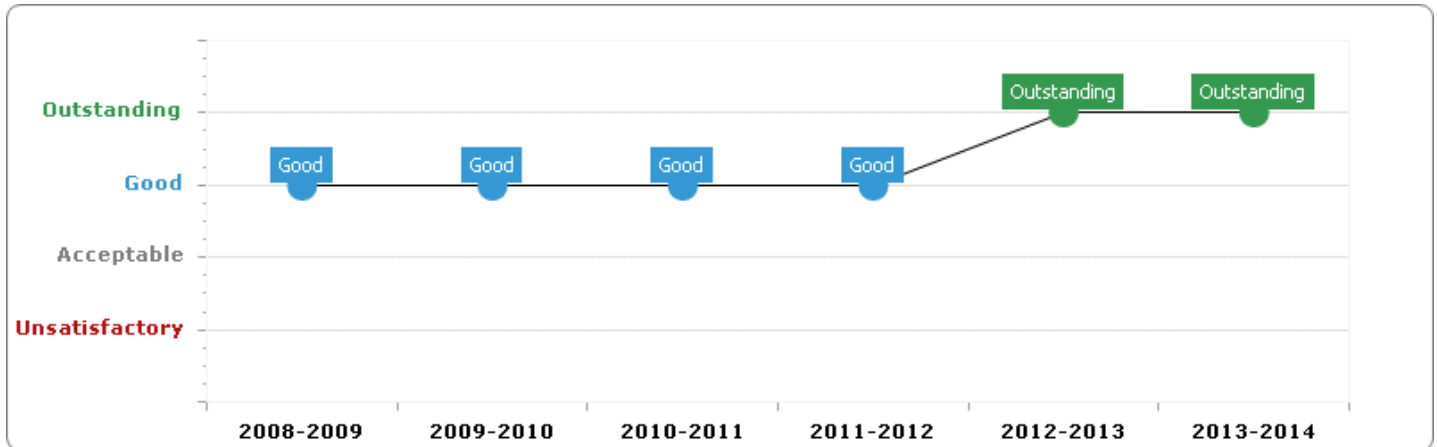
Recommendations

- Further improve the attainment and progress in Arabic and Islamic Education by:
 - expanding teaching and learning strategies to meet the needs of all learners, and
 - capitalising on the best practice observed in school.
- Increase students' use of modern and independent learning resources.

Progress since the last inspection

- The sustaining of all the outstanding grades from the previous report;
- The good progress in Islamic Education in post-16;
- The outstanding community and environmental responsibility of students.

Trend of overall performance



How good are the students' attainment progress and learning skills?

	Secondary	Post-16
Islamic Education		
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Good	Good
Arabic as a first language		
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable
Arabic as an additional language		
Attainment	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress	Acceptable	Not Applicable
English		
Attainment	Good	Outstanding
Progress	Good	Outstanding
Mathematics		
Attainment	Outstanding	Outstanding
Progress	Outstanding	Outstanding
Science		
Attainment	Outstanding	Outstanding
Progress	Outstanding	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

	Secondary	Post-16
Quality of students' learning skills	Outstanding	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	Secondary	Post-16
Personal responsibility	Outstanding	Outstanding
Students' understanding of Islamic values and their local, cultural and global awareness	Good	Good
Community and environmental responsibility	Outstanding	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

	Secondary	Post-16
Teaching for effective learning	Outstanding	Outstanding
Assessment	Outstanding	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	Secondary	Post-16
Curriculum quality	Outstanding	Outstanding
Curriculum design to meet the individual needs of students	Outstanding	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

	Secondary	Post-16
Health and Safety	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of Support	Outstanding	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

	Whole school
Quality of leadership	Outstanding
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Outstanding
Parents and the community	Outstanding
Governance	Outstanding
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the students' attainment and progress?

Attainment was acceptable in Islamic Education and Arabic. In Islamic Education, Qur'an recitation skills of most students in both phases, and particularly for non-Arab Muslims, were broadly in line with expectations. Their knowledge and understanding of the Surahs and Hadiths was adequate. Most students demonstrated a better level of knowledge of various Islamic concepts, values and rules. In Arabic as a first language, most students showed secure listening skills. In speaking, they often relied heavily on local dialects and a significant proportion of students lacked the confidence to converse in simple, standard Arabic. Students' reading comprehension skills were secure although their pronunciation of written script was not always good. Writing skills were limited overall with a significant proportion of students making frequent errors in spelling, use of grammar and word choice. In Arabic as an additional language, most students' listening skills were not developed enough. For the majority of students, speaking was within the expected level and only a few exceeded expectation. They could read simple texts, with frequent errors, but their ability to independently write in Arabic was limited.

Attainment was good in secondary English and outstanding in post-16 English, as well as mathematics and science across the school. In English, students frequently used their very highly developed speaking and listening skills to engage in lively discussion and debate about literature. Older students' written work was of an exceptionally high standard and frequently the product of independent learning. Most students demonstrated a competence in the use of mathematics and were able to relate the theory to real life situations. Highly capable senior students showed exceptional commitment and perseverance in seeking solutions. In science, students had very well developed investigative skills and strong subject knowledge of biology, chemistry and physics which they were capable of applying to a range of different challenges. Post-16 students attained particularly well at AS level.

Students' progress was good In Islamic Education and acceptable in Arabic. In Islamic Education, progress was stronger for Non-Arab Muslim students. Across the school, progress in Islamic knowledge was steady; progress with Qur'an recitation was slower. In Arabic as a first language, most students made the best progress in listening skills than in other aspects of the language. For a significant proportion of students, progress in speaking and writing was slow and was inhibited by the insufficient learning opportunities to develop these skills and the limited teacher guidance. In Arabic as an additional language, students made acceptable progress in learning an adequate range of familiar words and expressions but routine activities and low levels of challenge hindered their further progress.

Progress was good in secondary English and outstanding in post-16 English, as well as mathematics and science across the school. In English, students progressively developed confident mastery of the specialist vocabulary of literary criticism, through regular class discussions. This in turn, steadily improved the

quality and accuracy of their written work and measurably improved attainment. In mathematics, almost all students progressed at a higher than expected rate. External examination results were impressive when compared with the United Kingdom averages. Post -16 students in further mathematics made significant gains in their use of mathematics theory. In science, almost all students made very good progress in the secondary and post-16 phases. In AS level biology, for example, students made excellent progress to attain on average a grade higher than expected.

[View judgements](#)

Quality of students' learning skills

The quality of student's learning skills was outstanding. Students were highly confident, resilient and reflective learners as a result of the whole school approach to developing skills for learning. They worked exceptionally well both on their own and with each other, and supported each other to learn and make very good progress. They listened to, and acted upon feedback from their peers and teachers alike and embraced the whole school approach to assessing their own learning. For example, in Year 7, students had the confidence to perform solo in their first ever keyboard lesson and they listened intently to what their peers and their teacher had to say about their performance. As a result of this approach, almost all students knew exactly what they needed to do to improve even further and responded with maturity and enthusiasm. They took risks in their learning and felt supported to do this because of the exceptionally positive relationships they shared with teachers and peers alike. When possible, students used information and communication technology (ICT) well to support their learning.

[View judgements](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Personal responsibility was outstanding. Students across the school were very polite and courteous to each other, to staff and to visitors. They behaved very responsibly at all times and were evidently well practised in sharing and moving in and out of leadership roles in groups as part of their learning. Attendance was outstanding, and students moved efficiently around the school without the need of bells to summon them.

Students' understanding of Islamic values and their local, cultural and global awareness was good across the school. Most students expressed their respect for Islamic values and rules and were aware of the impact of these rules on everyday life in Dubai although they did not always reflect upon the key messages from these rules. Most students had a deep understanding of cultural heritage, and the history

and contemporary development of Dubai and the UAE. Students valued their international friendships, formed in Dubai's multinational and multicultural society.

Across the school, students were highly committed to meeting environmental challenges. Many were passionate environmentalists, proud of what they themselves contributed to conservation. Equally, they showed very high levels of care and concern for people, for example fundraising to support Philippine typhoon survivors. Locally, many contributed actively to community partnerships especially with other schools. The innovative 'lead learners' among older students added to the many existing leadership roles. Students across the school were clearly ready to initiate and lead further change.

[View judgements](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

Teaching was outstanding in most subjects, including English, mathematics and science in the secondary and post-16 phases. Teachers challenged students to achieve their very best in almost all lessons. Most had very strong subject knowledge and an excellent understanding of how students learn. As a result, students were engaged, inspired and motivated. Teachers planned lessons, based on a whole school approach, to meet the needs of a wide range of abilities, including those students who were gifted and talented, and students with special educational needs. They used a wide range of resources in lessons to make learning interactive, interesting and exciting. For example, in a Year 9 science lesson, students critically investigated the variables which influenced the strength of building materials by changing the amount of sand, gravel and water used to make concrete. Teachers set high expectations of what students could achieve and, as a result, students thoroughly enjoyed learning, made outstanding progress and attained exceptionally well in almost all subjects. Teachers facilitated learning for individuals and groups very well by using a wide range of effective teaching strategies. In Islamic studies, for example, independent learning through the use of ICT was promoted very effectively. Teachers used their highly-tuned questioning skills to encourage students to develop their own ideas, to extend their thinking and to make connections to other areas of learning. However, very occasionally teaching was less effective. Generally, this was when the level of challenge was not pitched at the right ability level and students were less engaged or struggling with the activities. This was especially evident in the teaching of Arabic.

Assessment procedures were outstanding. Teachers knew their students as individual learners and had excellent relationships with them. Systems and processes to assess and track students' progress and attainment were efficient and accurate, and used very well by most teachers to ensure that almost all lessons were well planned to meet the needs of all students. Teachers created opportunities for students to effectively assess each other's work and provide detailed feedback to each other. Likewise, students

and teachers used the same whole school approach to assess what they had learned and what they could do even better. As a result, students usually knew exactly what they needed to do to improve further.

[View judgements](#)

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

The quality of the curriculum was outstanding. The clear rationale that the school had adopted focused on students' needs. Senior managers, department leaders, parents and students were all active in the review process. The fully compliant curriculum offered opportunities for students to be creative and enjoy a wide range of practical and physical activities. Regular departmental meetings ensured, through effective planning, that progression from one stage of their schooling to the next was seamless. Careful preparation took account of prior learning and older students were fully informed on the next stage of their lives, whether in higher education or a chosen career. The learning and thinking skills programme helped students to identify links between subjects and effectively supported the development of transferable skills, important in all subjects. The school offered an extensive range of extra-curricular activities and experiences that included performing arts, the Duke of Edinburgh Award and Fun with French. In addition, students had the opportunity to go on study visits and gained from the many visitors to the school. There was an extremely strong sporting culture. All of these activities provided an impressive breadth of experience for students.

Curriculum design was outstanding. Provision across the school ensured that the needs of all groups were catered for. In keeping with the school's inclusive ethos, key staff had established and maintained outstandingly effective systems to identify, and address, the wide range of recognised students' needs, including those of gifted and talented individuals. The school was very aware that students progress at different rates and benefit from alternative approaches. It had, for example, provided an AS mathematics course over two years, where mathematics was not a main focus but necessary for the next phase of education. Wherever possible, the school had modified the curriculum to meet all needs, whether within the classroom or interests beyond it.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

Provision for health and safety was outstanding. The school had extremely thorough arrangements to ensure students' safety and security. Staff supervision was low-key but vigilant. Buildings and equipment were very well maintained, and students' views had influenced improvements. Regularly-held emergency evacuation procedures and well-organised transport arrangements were very carefully supervised, and updated in light of experience. Comprehensive accident prevention measures included the increased provision of non-slip surfaces in key areas. Academic and support staff had been made aware of the arrangements to ensure child protection. Staff were clearly focused on ensuring that students had a strong understanding of healthy lifestyles. The wide range of extra-curricular activities supported this.

The support for students was outstanding. Staff-student relationships were very strongly based on mutual intellectual respect, evident in lessons and throughout the school. In the context of the school's no 'bell' culture, attendance and punctuality were exemplary. Students' physical and mental well-being were accorded equally high importance. Key staff with particular expertise provided empathic support for individuals. Within the school's ethos of personalised learning, staff provided particularly comprehensive, individualised support for students with special educational needs, building on their existing strengths and aptitudes. These students' progress towards agreed goals was rigorously monitored and tracked.

[View judgements](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The overall leadership of the school was outstanding. The Headteacher was visionary and displayed high quality leadership skills. He communicated a vision that was clear and supported by all staff members at all levels. The senior management team and the middle leaders provided clear guidance and support to their colleagues. Relationships and communication at all levels of the school hierarchy were positive and professional. The school was extremely reflective and demonstrated an outstanding capacity to improve further.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were outstanding. Systematic self-evaluation processes were well embedded in the school's improvement planning. The school knew itself very well and focused on key areas identified where improvement was still needed. The school's action plans were detailed and accurate. They indicated clearly what was needed to ensure further improvement. The school continued to make good progress in tackling the recommendations from the last report, but recognised more focus was needed in Arabic. Improvement in Islamic Education showed more promise.

Partnerships with parents and the local and wider community were outstanding. The school continued to improve its communication with parents. A significant number were involved in the life of their children in school through various purposeful interventions. This was particularly true of visiting speakers and work experience. This valuable contribution helped to improve students' learning and experience throughout the school. Informal and formal contacts between class teachers and parents ensured that there was very effective communication. Parent-teacher meetings and regular reports kept parents informed of their children's progress. Links with other educational providers were good and included strong links with national and international universities. Students learned about the needs of others through taking part in fund-raising for local and international charities.

Governance was outstanding. The Board of Governors had a positive influence on the school, conducting regular meetings with senior leaders to review action plans and areas of mutual concern. This group of governors was representative of the school and local community. They continued to develop excellent monitoring systems to ensure every initiative was evaluated in terms of student outcomes. As a result, the school had sustained strong outcomes from the previous report. Standards in weaker subjects, such as Islamic Education, were showing signs of improvement.

The management of staffing, facilities and resources was outstanding. Teachers were suitably qualified, many with significant experience. A significant team of ancillary staff helped ensure the smooth running of the school. The school provided students with an outstanding physical environment. The school operated very smoothly each day. The grounds were spacious and the classrooms were large and airy. The number of students had increased but the space available was used effectively to avoid overcrowding. Teaching spaces for smaller groups was also available. Resources were excellent and every classroom had an interactive white board. Students had appropriate access to an excellent suite of desktop and portable computers. The large library was well stocked but books to promote Arabic and Arabic culture were still insufficient. There were also missed opportunities to use the library as hub to promote different aspects of learning.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school provide for Emirati students?

Students' attainment and progress were acceptable in Arabic, good in Islamic Education and English, and outstanding in mathematics and science. Attendance was outstanding. There was an increase of Emirati students in post-16 from the previous year. The small number of Emirati students in school showed great levels of confidence and interaction with their peers. They thrived through collaborative work and debates. In mathematics, especially in post-16, Emirati boys excelled. In advanced mathematics, two students

discussed complex mathematical concepts with their peers. They were very reflective and analytical. In all phases, they demonstrated robust learning skills. Some were very well supported through bespoke individual learning plans. As a result, they made at least good progress in most lessons. Reports to parents were detailed, with a range of information on current and predicted performance and areas for development. The school prepared Emirati students well for their next stages of education and offered personal guidance on careers and university choices. However, some Emirati parents felt the school could promote courses and higher education pathways within the UAE more.

How well does the school provide for students with special educational needs?

The school properly prided itself on its inclusiveness, and aimed to personalise learning for all students. Students with special educational needs were very well provided for within this ethos. Careful and precise approaches to diagnostic and baseline assessment ensured that students' needs were accurately identified. This also established starting points from which to measure progress in learning and personal development. Thorough and comprehensive planning underpinned both personal learning planning (PLP) and the compilation of individual education programmes (IEPs). Importantly, PLPs detailed these students' strengths and aptitudes as well as areas requiring support. In subjects where these students made good or better progress, staff used these plans effectively to plan appropriately personalised learning where required. In the majority of key subjects, these students achieved good or outstanding results. The school had increased provision since the last inspection, with specialist accommodation and additional staff. Learning support assistants with specialist knowledge were suitably deployed, for example in science. Clear lines of communication between home and school also supported staff and parents to work together to the benefit of students. Consequently, the range and quality of positive outcomes for students with special educational needs, both in terms of personal development and achievement, were of very high quality overall.

How well does the school teach Arabic as a first language?

Almost all teachers of Arabic as a first language had appropriate subject knowledge. Teachers' planning of lessons was often detailed and very organised, with clear objectives. However, in too many instances, the teaching strategies used were not effective enough and the planned activities did not help students develop their linguistic skills. Expectations of students were not high enough in many lessons. When

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teachers planned sufficient opportunities for active learning, students were more engaged and made better progress. Students were provided with limited opportunities to take responsibility of their own learning which hampered their progress in various language skills, particularly speaking and writing. Teachers planned for whole class discussions in most lessons observed; however, these did not often promote higher-order and critical thinking skills development and were not sharply focused on developing key linguistic skills.

The curriculum lacked the flexibility to cater effectively for the different needs of all students. The curriculum did not always provide meaningful and balanced learning experiences to ensure all language skills were targeted. It was restricted by a narrow range of textbook activities and there were minimal attempts to enrich it. However, some teachers developed their own appropriate materials.

What are the views of parents, teachers and students?

Before the inspection, the views of parents, teachers and senior secondary students were surveyed. Key messages from each group were considered during the inspection and these helped to form judgements. A summary of the survey statistics and comments from those who responded to the survey follows:

Responses to the surveys			
Responses received	Number		Percentage
Parents	This year	257	34%
	Last year	194	30%
Teachers	71		82%
Students	275		98%

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

About one third of parents responded to the survey, a slightly higher rate than last year. Almost all students and most teachers responded. Almost all parents believe the school was well led, were satisfied with the quality of education available at the college and believed that progress was good in English, mathematics and science. A few parents stated that they did not believe progress was good in Arabic as an additional language and one quarter of students agreed. Students were almost exclusively satisfied with the quality of education at the college and held positive views about the school's leadership. Almost all teachers were satisfied with all aspects of the college. During the parents' meeting with inspectors, parents recognised the need to expand the use of the library and the broadband facilities further to enable students to access mobile and electronic learning more regularly.

What happens next?

The school has been asked to prepare and submit an updated action plan to DSIB within two months of receiving the most recent report. This plan should address:

- Recommendations from DSIB;
- Areas identified by the school as requiring improvement;
- Other external reports or sources of information that comment on the work of the school;
- Priorities arising from the school's unique characteristics.

The next inspection will report on the progress made by the school.

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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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