

# Our Own High School, Al Warqa'a Inspection Report

Grades 1 to 12

Report issued February 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.

Our Own High School was inspected in December 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 its 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 Warqa'a, Our Own High School is a private school providing education for boys from Grade 1 to Grade 12, aged six to 18 years. The school follows an Indian Curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 4,593 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. The great majority of parents that completed the questionnaire were overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Almost all parents agreed that their children liked school and that they made good progress in their studies. Similar proportions agreed that behaviour at the school was good and that staff expected students to work hard and to do their best. Most parents agreed that teaching was good overall, but a minority said that not all school activities were enjoyable and stimulating enough for their children. Almost all parents felt that their children were treated fairly at school and that the school helped them to keep safe and healthy. However, a few felt the school should do more to improve its links with parents. A similar proportion did not feel assured that the school acted on matters of concern they had raised. About one in five parents felt that teachers could do more to explain how they could help their child at home with their schoolwork. Most parents felt that the staff at the school showed concern for their child's care and welfare. Most parents felt that the school was well led.

## How well does the school perform overall?

Our Own High School provided an acceptable standard of education, with some good features. The students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic were acceptable overall. Attainment and progress were good throughout the school in science and mathematics. In English, attainment and progress were acceptable in the primary grades and good in the secondary grades. Some aspects of the students' personal and social development were acceptable and others good. Their attitudes and behaviour were acceptable overall. Relationships with teachers were respectful and cooperative and the pattern of attendance over recent semesters was acceptable. Students showed a good understanding of the principles of Islam and they showed strong respect for the cultures of others. They valued Dubai's history and heritage. Many saw their longer-term future in seeking job opportunities in Dubai as part of the country's economic development.

The quality of the teaching was good in the secondary grades and acceptable in the primary grades. High quality lessons were often associated with the teachers' good subject knowledge and their ability to employ methods that involved students actively in learning. The better teaching made use of additional resources, rather than relying solely on textbooks, and took into account the students' differing abilities. Some teachers were better than others at engaging students in discussion to deepen their learning. These teachers tended not to overshadow the students' own contributions. The use of assessment to plan challenging lessons also varied among teachers, although their knowledge of how well students were performing in regular tests was generally good. The curriculum was of acceptable quality. It offered students some choices and was planned to ensure progression as students moved through the school. The school offered students a range of additional opportunities, but visits to other locations were not a strong feature of the curriculum. The health and safety of students was a high priority in the school. The buildings were clean, secure and well maintained. Staff took their duty of care very seriously but some procedural matters were insufficiently robust. There was only limited provision and support for students with additional learning needs. In general, the quality of support for students was good, and so were staff-student relationships. The students' behaviour was managed effectively.

The Principal provided strong direction and good leadership. The entire senior management team shared the school's vision, which included a commitment to provide a well-ordered environment for students to learn. The school did not involve parents enough in planning its future direction, but senior staff had made a start on the process of self-evaluation.

## Key features of the school

- Above average public examination results at Grade 12, especially in science, mathematics and English;
- The students' good understanding and appreciation of local culture and traditions and their knowledge of Dubai's position in the modern world;
- Inconsistent teaching quality;
- The good quality of support offered to students in helping them to achieve and succeed;
- The efficient manner in which the school was managed and led.

## Recommendations

- Improve consistency in teaching quality within and across grades by:
  - ensuring that students are more engaged in lessons
  - improving the use of assessment to guide teachers' planning, so that activities are relevant and stimulating for all students
  - ensuring that activities and tasks match the interests and abilities of all students;
- Engage parents more fully in the work and future direction of the school;
- Improve resources for learning, particularly in lessons and in the libraries;
- Improve systems for monitoring and recording the progress and welfare of individual students.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable. By Grade 4 most students had learned a few short chapters of The Holy Qur'an and a few students could recite them accurately and clearly in morning assemblies. As students progressed through the school, most had developed a good knowledge of the basic principles and forms of worship of Islam. However, only a minority of students had good knowledge of the life of Islamic figures, and the Prophet's companions (PBUH). By Grade 11, students had an acceptable knowledge of some Islamic laws about crime and punishment. Attainment and progress in Arabic were acceptable. Most students in Grades 1 to 5 could read letters and some words, with weaknesses in pronunciation. In Grades 6 to 8 students continued to make progress and could read from longer texts to an acceptable standard. Students generally found reading outside textbooks difficult. The standard of speaking Arabic in the earlier primary grades was acceptable. By Grade 10 they could speak well for longer periods of time. Listening skills in Grades 1 to 3 were, however, unsatisfactory, but by Grade 8 they had improved. By Grade 10, they had developed their writing to an acceptable level.

Attainment and progress in English were acceptable in the primary grades and good in the secondary grades, reaching above average standards by Grade 12. Speaking and listening skills were strong throughout the school. By Grade 3 students could construct simple sentences and read simple texts clearly and with understanding. By Grade 5, students were able to participate in role-play and dramatisation and by Grade 8 they were beginning to develop a rich vocabulary through participation in group discussions. Students were able to write paragraphs and reports independently and with accuracy. Reading and writing skills were developing well, but creative writing was weak. As students moved through Grades 9 to 12, speaking and reading were better developed than writing. Nevertheless, sentences were usually grammatically correct, and most students were able to write well with a good range of vocabulary for their age.

The attainment and progress of students in mathematics were good. By Grade 3 students could confidently undertake calculations involving the four rules of number. By Grade 5 they knew about integers, decimals and fractions and could factorise quadratic expressions. They were also able to link measurement to real-life situations, although their practical skills were not well developed. From Grade 9, students were able to manipulate polynomial expressions, although some relied too heavily

on using mechanical techniques instead of developing an understanding of the underlying ideas. Problem solving techniques were not systematically developed, nor were the skills needed to use computers to develop conceptual understanding. By Grades 11 and 12 students were able to apply a range of mathematical theorem, although some in the commerce stream found it hard to absorb complicated algebraic expressions. Results in national examinations in Grades 10 and 12 indicated a good and above average level of performance.

Attainment and progress in science were good throughout the school. By Grade 2 most students could identify wild and domestic animals and were able to differentiate between herbs, shrubs and trees. By Grade 6 almost all students were able to understand the property of thermal conductivity of materials and could name appliances used in daily life that used this property. Although progress was good overall, it was inconsistent across grades, being weakest in Grades 7 and 8. As students moved through Grades 9 to 12, their progress accelerated to reach above average standards by the end of Grade 12. By this time most students were able to formulate hypotheses, investigate and carry out scientific experiments.

## How good is the students' personal and social development?

Some aspects of the students' personal and social development were acceptable and others good. Their attitudes and behaviour in and around the school were acceptable overall and, on occasions, good, such as during assemblies and in the better lessons. Almost all students were punctual to lessons and moved between locations in an orderly way. Students were courteous and polite. Behaviour in circulation areas, particularly at break times and in the library, could have been better. Staff-student relationships were mostly good. In most lessons, students respected their teachers and cooperated well with one another. Attendance over recent semesters was acceptable. Most of the students used school transport and the number of latecomers was very few.

The students' understanding of their civic responsibilities was good. They showed good comprehension of the principles of Islam, a strong respect for local traditions and an appreciation of the cultures of other people. This was particularly evident in the well-organised assemblies. Students saw Dubai as offering a multicultural society, tolerant of the faiths of others.

The students demonstrated good economic understanding. Senior students said that they were proud to live in Dubai and most of them were aware of the current economic changes. Almost all students were highly positive and aware of the contributions that they could make to the continuing prosperity of the UAE. Although the senior students had plans to go elsewhere for higher education, most said they intended to return to Dubai for employment opportunities and to enable them to contribute to its economy in appreciation of what it was currently offering them.

## How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching in the primary phase was acceptable and in the secondary phase it was good. The teachers' subject knowledge was good for the most part, and in science it was occasionally outstanding, particularly in the older grades. Students felt respected and, as a result, they were

confident to question their teachers as they strove for excellence in their studies. There were some good examples of extended, targeted questioning to challenge thinking and enhance learning, especially in Grades 9 to 12. Teachers planned collaboratively but their methods varied considerably, resulting in variation in learning outcomes for students, particularly in Grades 1 to 8. When the teaching was good, there was a balance of activities, skilful questioning and rapid pace, leading to good learning. When it was less effective, teachers relied too much on textbooks and worksheets and, as a result, the pace of learning slowed. Individual students were not always well catered for: for example, in many lessons students were all given the same work, which was too difficult for some but too easy for others. This prevented too many students from making sufficient progress in their learning.

The quality of the students' learning in the primary phase was acceptable and in the secondary phase it was good. Students in both phases were engaged in their lessons for most of the time because they were generally well behaved and respectful. However, in too many lessons there were missed opportunities for group and paired work, particularly in mathematics, and for students to be able to learn independently of the teacher. Learning was supported in some science lessons by the use of data projectors.

Assessment arrangements were acceptable. It was good when teachers gave feedback to students in lessons about how to improve their work. There were examples in English lessons of students evaluating one another's work, finding and rectifying errors in their speaking and writing. Whilst the teachers had good knowledge of students' performance emerging from regular tests, they did not use other types of assessment sufficiently to help them match their teaching to the learning needs of individuals. There was, consequently, insufficient challenge for the more able students and too little support for those who found learning difficult.

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

The curriculum was of acceptable quality. It was broad and balanced, based on the guidelines of a National Indian Board. From Grade 1, all students studied a third language in addition to English and Arabic, but physical education was limited to two short periods each week up to Grade 8 and one period subsequently. In Grade 11, students opted for either the science or the commerce stream. This prepared them well for further or higher education; however, the school's approach to careers education was insufficiently systematic. Teachers planned work collaboratively to ensure progression, but the content of lessons was very closely linked to the textbooks being used, with insufficient additional ideas introduced. There was limited attention paid to cross-curricular links, for example, to the students' use of computers as tools for learning in different subjects. Independent and creative learning were not systematically promoted. The modest programme of extra-curricular activities was limited to sport for older students and a few activities for the younger ones, regularly involving well under a tenth of students. There were few external trips to local museums and other places of interest, and limited references were made to local surroundings in lessons, though Dubai did feature in school assemblies. In interviews with students they raised concerns about extra-curricular

provision, and so did their parents in comments in response to the questionnaire. Nevertheless, there were a number of useful co-curricular activities held during the year, including music and public speaking at prize days, as well as participation in international robotics competitions. The school had performed very well in national sporting events, such as the Dubai national athletics competition.

## How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements for protecting students were acceptable overall. Health and safety were of a high standard, especially the cleanliness of the school premises. Health and safety checks, including fire and emergency procedures, were regularly conducted. Security was given high priority and basic facilities, including transport, were appropriate and safe. Dispersal of students at the end of the day was very well organised. Effective medical records were maintained. However, documentation of incidents and disciplinary issues was not evident. Healthy lifestyles were promoted through school assemblies, although space for physical activity was limited. Child protection arrangements were in place but were not widely known among the staff. Although the senior staff dealt with serious breaches of student welfare, they did not record the details.

The quality of support for students was good across the school. Staff-student relationships were positive and encouraged respect. Teachers were friendly towards their students and students felt confident when approaching them for guidance and assistance. However, although students with special learning needs were identified, specialist teachers were not available to support them and offer advice to teachers. Acceptable guidance and advice were provided for students of Grades 10 and 12 regarding their future careers, including support when applying to universities. Teachers used regular assessments of students' work to monitor their academic progress, but did not track their personal development and general progress. Attendance and punctuality were recorded but analysed inconsistently. Parents were provided with helpful feedback each term about the academic progress and attendance of their children

## How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The Principal provided strong direction and good leadership to the school. He showed commitment, commanded respect and provided support and guidance to his team. The senior staff fully supported the school's vision; they had well defined roles and responsibilities and discharged their duties competently. This small but effective group of individuals were active in decision-making and were committed to the general direction of the school. They maintained a clear focus on improving learning outcomes for all students.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were of acceptable quality. The school gathered information regarding its strengths and weaknesses. However, evidence was gathered from limited sources and restricted to feedback from senior staff. Consequently, it provided insufficient insight into the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school did not consult other stakeholders such as parents or students in its review process in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of what needed to be improved. The preparation of a school improvement plan had been delayed pending the arrival



of the new Principal early in 2010. Performance management systems were in place, but had yet to be linked directly to the professional development of the staff.

The school had established an acceptable partnership with parents, involving productive links with some of them. The school informed parents each term about the academic progress of their children. Most parents who attended parents' meetings were happy with the school and concurred that the open door policy enabled them to meet the teachers when required. However, about one in six parents who completed the questionnaire did not agree that the school had good enough links with parents. The school had strong links with the other schools in the Global Education Management Systems (GEMS) group and participated in their activities within the community.

The governance of the school was acceptable. The school was accountable for its performance and progress to the Global Educational Management Systems (GEMS) Board, who played a key role in monitoring aspects of the school's work such as the identification and recruitment of key personnel. The Board reviewed the performance and progress of the school twice a year but did not contribute strategic guidance to the school. The school recognised the need to involve parents as stakeholders in governance to make it more representative.

Staffing, facilities and resources were of acceptable quality. Although the school had most of the qualified and trained personnel it needed, it did not have staff to provide support for students with additional learning needs or for those with difficulties in English. The school's premises and facilities were acceptable, clean and maintained well. Considering the limited space, optimum use was made of the playground, with staggered timings for students of different ages. The school had adequate resources except for the libraries, which were poorly stocked. It also had too little general classroom equipment and materials for learning, such as microscopes and measuring equipment. Effective use was not always made of all available resources, particularly information and communication technology equipment.

## 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.

The four descriptors are: Outstanding; Good; Acceptable; Unsatisfactory.

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education?		
Age group:	Primary (Grades 1 – 8)	Secondary (Grades 9 – 12)
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?		
Age group:	Primary (Grades 1 – 8)	Secondary (Grades 9 – 12)
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?		
Age group:	Primary (Grades 1 – 8)	Secondary (Grades 9 – 12)
Attainment	Acceptable	Good
Progress over time	Acceptable	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?		
Age group:	Primary (Grades 1 – 8)	Secondary (Grades 9 – 12)
Attainment	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?		
Age group:	Primary (Grades 1 – 8)	Secondary (Grades 9 – 12)
Attainment	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?		
Age group:	Primary (Grades 1 – 8)	Secondary (Grades 9 – 12)
Attitudes and behaviour	Acceptable	Acceptable
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good

How good are teaching and learning?		
Age group:	Primary (Grades 1 – 8)	Secondary (Grades 9 – 12)
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Good
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Good
Assessment	Acceptable	Good

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?		
Age group:	Primary (Grades 1 – 8)	Secondary (Grades 9 – 12)
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?		
Age group:	Primary (Grades 1 – 8)	Secondary (Grades 9 – 12)
Health and safety	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of support	Good	Good

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
Quality of leadership	Good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Acceptable
Partnerships with parents and the community	Acceptable
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](mailto:inspection@khda.gov.ae).

More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at [www.khda.gov.ae](http://www.khda.gov.ae).

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