

INSPECTION REPORT

Star International School - Mirdif

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Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Star International School - Mirdif

Location	Mirdif
Type of school	Private
Website	www.starschoolmirdif.com
Telephone	04 288 4644
Address	PO Box 51008 Mirdif, Street 24B, Dubai
Principal	Deborah A Lloyd
Curriculum	UK
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-12 / Foundation Stage to Year 7
Attendance	Acceptable
Number of students on roll	304
Number of Emirati students	39 (13%)
Date of the inspection	Monday 9th to Thursday 11th January 2012

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The context of the school

Located in Mirdif, Star International School is a private school providing education for boys and girls aged three to 12 years, from Foundation Stage to secondary. The school follows an English National Curriculum for most subjects; it follows the Ministry of Education curriculum for Islamic Education and Arabic.

At the time of the inspection, there were 304 students on roll from a variety of nationalities. In all, 39 were Emirati. There was a small minority of students with special educational needs. Students were grouped into 17 classes with eight classes in the Foundation Stage, eight in primary and one in the secondary phase.

The school had 32 full-time staff from a range of nationalities; the majority were of British origin. Teachers had a range of academic and teaching qualifications and most were suitably qualified for the subjects and age group that they were teaching. They were supported by 18 teaching assistants. The Principal was in her third year of office.

Overall school performance 2011-2012

Acceptable

How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

Star International School, Mirdif, provided an acceptable quality of education for its students. The school had several good features, including the good standards of teaching, learning, attainment and progress in the Foundation Stage. Elsewhere, teaching and learning was more variable and had remained of a good quality in some areas of the school. The school was committed to a targeted programme of staff training in those areas that required further development. Other good features were the standards of behaviour and respect by students across the school and the high quality of health, safety and support the school provided for all members of the school community.

The ethos of the school was well defined and supported by a good curriculum in most sections of the school. However, it was also a school that had undergone considerable changes since the last inspection. These included the appointment of 15 new members of staff, the restructuring and development of the new senior and middle management teams, the physical reorganisation of sections of the school, as well

as the introduction of a secondary phase. A number of strategies had also been introduced to improve the curriculum, specifically in supporting students with special educational needs and for students to learn an additional modern foreign language. Despite some improvements, the school had made little progress in addressing the four recommendations from the previous report, although an appropriate set of priorities had been made to sustain further development. However, the school was non-compliant in meeting the Ministry of Education requirements for Islamic Education and Arabic.

Key strengths

- The Foundation Stage provided a stimulating and engaging environment;
- Good levels of attainment and progress in Foundation Stage;
- Exemplary attitudes and behaviour founded on good relationships between staff and students;
- High-quality arrangements to ensure students' health and safety;
- Effective links between parents and the school.

Recommendations

- Raise the level of attainment in Islamic Education in the secondary phase and in Arabic as an additional language in primary;
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in the primary and secondary phases to raise students' attainment;
- Continue to develop assessment information to fully inform curriculum planning and teaching;
- Develop leadership capacity and communication at all levels to support school improvement;
- Establish a more rigorous and systematic approach to monitoring the school's work by senior leaders and governors, in order to better inform self-evaluation and improvement planning;
- Ensure that the school is fully compliant with the curricular requirements of the Ministry of Education for Islamic Education and Arabic.

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

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Islamic Education			
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Arabic as a first language			
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Arabic as an additional language			
Attainment	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
English			
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Mathematics			
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Science			
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

Attainment was mostly acceptable in primary and secondary; it was good in all subjects in the Foundation Stage. In Islamic Education, most primary students were able to attain levels of knowledge, skills and understanding that were in line with curriculum standards. Attainment was unsatisfactory in secondary because the majority of students had an inadequate knowledge of Islamic concepts and interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadeeth. In Arabic, students displayed adequate listening and initial reading skills but their

writing skills were less well developed. Attainment was unsatisfactory in primary for those learning Arabic as an additional language. In English, children in the Foundation Stage communicated well, could identify and use letters, sounds and blends to make words and short sentences. They confidently explained their ideas and their writing was of an acceptable level. Attainment in English in primary showed a developing independence and self-assurance in speech and reading; writing was the least developed skill across all phases. In mathematics, the majority of Year 6 students could calculate using decimals and fractions, and had appropriate understanding of statistics and probability. In science, the majority of Year 7 students showed appropriate knowledge of life processes and living things, and could describe food chains in different habitats. However, despite a fully equipped science laboratory, scientific enquiry was the least developed skill in primary and secondary science.

The progress of students was acceptable in all key subjects in primary and secondary. In the Foundation Stage, however, progress was consistently good. In this section of the school, children made particularly good progress in language even though, for a significant majority of them, English was an additional language. In this phase, students quickly developed effective language skills and an understanding of how to use number. Their speaking and listening skills rapidly improved as their social skills blossomed. The rate of progress in language development was not sustained in the later stages of the school and students made least progress in their writing skills. In lessons, most students made expected progress against the learning objectives set by the teacher; however, progress was sometimes constrained by a lack of differentiated tasks to provide challenge and stimulus for all students, especially for the more able. Students with special educational needs made broadly acceptable progress in most key subjects, although progress for these children in the Foundation Stage was rapid.

The attainment and progress of Emirati students were mostly the same as those of other students in most subjects. The students were well integrated and individual language needs were mostly well met through effective differentiation and support in the better lessons. Emirati students who began school in the Foundation Stage had little proficiency in English, but their progress followed a similar pattern to their peers.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good
Understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture	Good	Good	Good
Civic, economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

Students' behaviour and attitudes were good across the school. In class, almost all students were polite and well behaved, and demonstrated self-control. They had good relationships with their peers and staff. Most students demonstrated positive attitude towards healthy living. Attendance was acceptable in the most recent term. Students' understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture were good across the school; they could give examples of UAE life-style in the past. Students had a basic understanding of Islam and its impact on the local society. They appreciated the nature of Dubai's multi-cultural society and gave examples of how they benefited from it. Students' civic and environmental understanding was acceptable in all phases. Most students were aware of their responsibilities. Students had a rudimentary understanding of Dubai's economic and development, and demonstrated basic understanding of environmental issues such as pollution.

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

Teaching for effective learning was good in the Foundation Stage and acceptable in the primary and secondary phases. Most teachers had good subject knowledge and well-structured planning. Effective teaching in the Foundation Stage incorporated active learning and activities linked to real life; as a result, most children were stimulated and engaged. In the primary and secondary phases, teachers tended to talk too much and did not allow students enough scope to learn for themselves. Teaching strategies were acceptable but did not provide sufficient differentiation for the varied needs of students, so that not all students were challenged enough. Teaching rightly focused on the learning of facts but not enough on the development of skills. Students were not always asked to reflect on and explain their learning. The use of critical thinking and enquiry was not routinely part of lessons. Not all teachers understood how students learn best.

Learning in the Foundation Stage was good and was acceptable in the primary and secondary phases. In the most effective lessons, students were active, engaged and interested. Application of learning to the real world and making connections between areas of learning were features of learning in most subjects. In Foundation Stage, most children took responsibility for their learning with often chose activities for themselves. Productive learning resulted from the opportunities for enquiry and critical thinking. There was a high level of collaboration and shared understanding amongst children. In the majority of primary and secondary lessons, learning was often fact gathering with limited opportunities for further enquiry and critical analysis. Students worked productively on their own or co-operatively, but did not do enough of this. They could explain their learning but were not able to elaborate on their understanding. Students were capable of finding things out for themselves but research, enquiry and critical thinking were not frequently featured in lessons.

Assessment was good in the Foundation Stage and acceptable in primary and secondary. In the Foundation Stage, the system for tracking children's progress was well developed and included the assessment of children on entry to the school and work portfolios. Elsewhere in the school, examinations were set by class teachers to collect information on students' progress. However, this assessment information was not used effectively enough in planning lessons in order to meet the needs of all students. Plans were in place to develop students' self-assessment and target setting, but these had yet to be fully implemented. In the better lessons, teachers used questioning effectively to assess students' learning in class. Since the last report, the school had improved the quality of marking and feedback given to students in their workbooks.

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

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Acceptable

The curriculum was good in the Foundation Stage and primary, and acceptable at secondary level. The Foundation Stage curriculum prioritised language and numeracy development, and provided a wide range of opportunities for children to learn through exploration, creativity and play. At primary and secondary level, the English National Curriculum ensured appropriate progression as students moved up through the school and provided breadth and balance by incorporating the humanities, arts and sport. The basic curriculum was enhanced within a number of subject areas, for example, through the use of data-show projectors and computer software in mathematics. However, across primary and secondary phases, there was insufficient provision made within the curriculum to accommodate the needs of all students, including the most and least able. The school provided a wide ranging extra-curricular programme, involving clubs within school and a variety of additional activities offered by external providers.

How well does the school protect and support students?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Health and Safety	Good	Good	Good
Quality of Support	Good	Good	Good

Effective policies and clear procedures in the school ensured that all students were healthy and safe. Security staff monitored the school entrance and exit doors. There were effective arrangements for school transport and students were monitored carefully to and from the buses. However, there was insufficient vigilance with the parking of cars and direction of traffic at the end of school. Members of staff were actively involved, and contributed towards, the safe and protective environment for students. The premises were clean, well maintained and suitable for all students including those with special needs. Students were well supervised at all times in classrooms, playgrounds and as they moved around the school. Routine checks were carried out by the school nurse and accurate records kept. Incidents were reported to all relevant parties, files were up to date and any issues arising from investigation were acted upon. Good procedures were in place to promote a healthy life-style, supervising students' choice of food, physical activities and displays which raised awareness of healthy choices. Child protection arrangements were in place formally, although there was no written policy.

The quality of support for students was good overall. Staff knew most of their students well and, under the direction and guidance of senior leaders, provided support for their social and emotional needs. These relationships underpinned the management of behaviour and care, as well as developing the confidence of students to ask for staff help if, and when, they needed to do so. Guidance concerning transfer between phases and to other schools was underdeveloped. Identification of students with special educational needs was established and monitoring firmly embedded. However, provision for students in the withdrawal lessons and in their normal lessons was not focused enough to secure good progress. The school monitored attendance and punctuality regularly with absences followed up, reasons being recorded and parents contacted if school attendance was of concern.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

	Whole school
Quality of leadership	Acceptable
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Acceptable
Partnerships with parents and the community	Good
Governance	Acceptable
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Good

The leadership of the school was acceptable. Under the direction of the Principal, the restructured senior leadership team was competent and, through the continued development of policies and procedures, provided clearer direction for a school undergoing significant change. The newly established middle management team had started to make developments in assessment processes, numeracy and the provision of support for students with special educational needs. However, leadership roles had yet to be fully understood and embedded into the working life of the school. Working relationships and professional dialogue had not been developed enough to support whole school improvement and the school's capacity to improve further.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. The school had undertaken a review of provision with parents and in consultation with the governing body, which had led to the identification of priorities. Consultation with teaching staff had yet to be fully implemented to support the school in its drive to achieve its mission and promise to parents. Senior staff carried out lesson observations to share teaching experiences but the outcomes were not sufficiently rigorous to ensure significant change and improve standards. The school had made little progress in addressing the recommendations from the previous inspection report.

The school's partnership with parents was good. The school had initiated positive steps towards parental involvement which had contributed towards their child's learning especially in the Foundation Stage. Parents gave their time freely and, when invited to do so, helped at the school with activities and supported visits and events such as National Day. The recent restructuring of the website had enhanced home-school communication further, as had the regular use of the home-school diary. As a consequence, parents felt that they were better informed about school events and their child's curriculum. They were also appreciative of the school's drive to increase more formal opportunities for more regular discussion

about their child's progress. Written reports to parents were regular and included targets for further development. Local and wider community links, other than links with sister school within the consortium, were underdeveloped.

Governance of the school was acceptable. Governors were fully aware of the strategic vision of the school and were supportive in trying to achieve it. For example, they were involved in the appointment of teachers, school development planning and in providing a 'listening ear' to parents. They were in regular contact with the Principal and often visited to see at first-hand how the school operated. However, whilst they monitored the activities of the school they did not hold the school to account with enough rigour. In addition, their intention to involve a wider representation in the process of governance had not yet been fulfilled.

The school ran very smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Teaching staff were suitably qualified and mostly well deployed with specialist teachers for most subjects. School facilities were modern, clean and in a good state of repair. A few sections of the school benefited from bright and informative displays of students' work. The senior library had now been developed and the science laboratory was fully equipped for learning. However, the outdoor play area still required further development for the primary and secondary phases of the school, including the completion of the swimming pool. In some lessons, there were insufficient learning materials to support the curriculum. At the time of the inspection, the ICT suite and science laboratory were not exploited to their full potential to support students' independent learning and research.

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 follows:

Responses to the surveys			
Responses received	Number		Percentage
Parents	This year	100	66%
	Last year	89	41%
Teachers	14		60%
Students	There are no upper secondary-aged students in the school		

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

Two thirds of parents responded to the survey which represented a higher rate than last year; just over half the teachers also responded to the survey. Almost all parents were happy with the overall quality of education. Most considered that their child was making good progress in English and mathematics but less considered that progress in science was good. A minority of parents were concerned about progress in Islamic Education and Arabic. Almost all parents felt that teaching was good, that their child enjoyed lessons and was safe at school. All teachers agreed with this but also considered that there were effective procedures for dealing with any incidents of bullying if it should occur. A few parents expressed concerns about the incompleteness of the swimming pool, limited activities programme and choice of modern foreign language provision. However, most parents felt that the school was well led, that communications were effective and their opinions listened to; most teachers also agreed that parent-teacher meetings were productive and supportive. Whilst most teachers acknowledged that they felt part of a collegiate team and a majority considered they had sufficient professional development opportunities within the school, only a minority considered that they were part of the school's consultation process in supporting whole school improvement.

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.

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.

Our work with schools

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) inspects schools to inform parents, students and the wider community of the quality of education provided. Inspectors also give guidance to staff about how to improve the standard of education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask the principal and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan our time in school. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities in which students are involved. We also gather the views of students, parents and staff. We find their views very helpful and use them, together with the other information we have collected, to arrive at our view regarding the quality of education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of education in the school. We describe how well students are doing, how good the school is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and children work together and how they go about improving the school. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its aims.

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