

# The Westminster School Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Year 13

Report published May 2010

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## Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report

**Outstanding** – exceptionally high quality of performance or practice.

**Good** – the expected level of quality for every school in Dubai.

**Acceptable** – the minimum level of acceptability required for Dubai. All key aspects of performance and practice in every school should meet or exceed this level.

**Unsatisfactory** – quality not yet at the level acceptable for schools in Dubai. Schools will be expected to take urgent measures to improve the quality of any aspect of their performance or practice that is judged at this level.

The Westminster School was inspected in October 2009 as part of the regular inspection of all schools in Dubai. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated students' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on students' progress in Islamic Education (for Muslim students), Arabic, English, mathematics and science.

### Basic information about the school

Located in the Al Qusais area of Dubai, The Westminster School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Year 13, aged three to 18 years. The school follows a curriculum based on the English National Curriculum. At the time of inspection, there were almost 60 teachers who were new to the school, including the Head of Primary. A significant number of children entering the Foundation Stage and other stages arrived without basic skills in English. At the time of the inspection, there were 5,342 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. Overwhelmingly, the parents were happy with the school. Almost all parents agreed that their children liked school and that they made good progress in English. Most parents also agreed that their children made good progress in mathematics and science, but a minority felt less progress was being made in both Islamic Education and in Arabic. Most parents felt that teaching was good and that there was a good range of activities that their children found stimulating. Most agreed that teachers expected students to do their best and encouraged them to become independent and responsible, although a few parents felt that teachers did not help parents to support their children's learning. Most parents agreed that the school helped keep their children safe and healthy, that the staff cared and were concerned about their welfare. They felt students' behaviour was good, although a few

parents were worried about incidents of boys not behaving well in the secondary school. Most parents were happy with the information they received from the school about their children's progress. A minority of the parents were unsure whether the school had responded positively to the recommendations of the previous inspection.

## How well does the school perform overall?

The Westminster School provided an acceptable quality of education. Inspectors judged both the attainment and progress in all key subjects at the end of the Foundation Stage and the end of primary as acceptable. By the end of Foundation Stage, many children understood, read and communicated in simple language and showed a basic recognition and understanding of number and shape. Students' progress and attainment by the end of secondary was outstanding in English and science subjects, good in mathematics, and acceptable in Islamic Education and Arabic. International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) results reflected this and were well above world averages, particularly in chemistry and language proficiency in English. In the very much smaller and selective sixth form, progress in each of the key subjects was good, except Islamic Education where progress and attainment remained acceptable. Students achieved A-level results that were above the world average and in mathematics they were outstanding. The attitudes and behaviour of almost all the students were outstanding. They were respectful and polite, showed enthusiasm and independence, and were eager to extend their own leadership qualities and take responsibility. They respected local traditions and understood very well the multi-cultural nature of Dubai. Economic and environmental understanding was a strength in the school. The younger students were aware of environmental issues and in primary, for example, the students were aware of Dubai's problems, and older secondary students were keen to preserve the environment and to understand sustainability.

Teaching was at least acceptable across the stages of the school except in Foundation Stage, where it was unsatisfactory. Overall, at least four out of every five lessons seen were acceptable or better with the best teaching occurring in Years 10 to 13, and the least effective in the youngest classes. Teachers had high expectations, and very often a good command of, and enthusiasm for, their subject. From a background of predominantly didactic teaching, they showed commitment to moving the emphasis towards greater student involvement but this transition was not complete. There were many examples of teaching where work was not well matched to students' individual needs and the quality of questioning varied from closed and over-directed, to very effective, open and inter-active. Students' learning improved from broadly acceptable in key subjects in Foundation Stage to securely good in secondary and in the sixth form. The students were keen to learn and built successfully on their previous skills and knowledge. They also led in the teaching of lessons to their peers and this innovation improved learning for all involved. Procedures for assessing students' work were acceptable, except in the Foundation Stage, where it was still being established. Teachers marked students' books regularly but rarely added specific comments to help students to improve further. The school was in the process of building on

a successful system used in the sixth form and had also started to analyse and use assessment data that was available to it. Overall, the curriculum was acceptable, except at Foundation Stage, where it was unsatisfactory. In primary, secondary and sixth form there was insufficient breadth and lack of balance. The school partially addressed this with a strong extra-curricular and enrichment programme ; partly through timetabled events such as the daily core values programme and suspended timetabled days or weeks on school wide topics such as Art Day, or Environment Week. The highly specialised curriculum choice in the sixth form was narrow, but successful and popular with students and parents. The arrangements for health and safety at the school, except in the sixth form, were unsatisfactory because not all staff were clear on the child protection procedures, and cramped classrooms posed significant risks to students should they need to evacuate in an emergency. Site security was good: drills were regularly practised and records meticulously kept, although a few risk assessments had not been carried out. Staff showed great care towards their students, promoted healthy life styles and provided them with guidance and support including advice regarding their transition to university.

The quality of leadership and management of the school was acceptable overall. The clear vision of the Principal was understood and shared by almost all teachers and his effective leadership was complemented by the strong management skills of the Vice-Principal and a strong leadership team. Self-evaluation was mostly rigorous; however, not all lesson monitoring was accurate. There was a high degree of effective day-to-day distributed leadership and management which enabled this very large and complex school to operate smoothly and efficiently. However, middle leadership was not consistently effective in self-evaluation, improvement planning and leading developments. Good progress was made in meeting some of the recommendations from the previous inspection. The school's partnership with parents and the local community was good. However, governance was unsatisfactory mainly because it was responsible for the over-crowding in a significant number of classrooms. This was having a detrimental effect on the quality of education children and students experienced and the level of risk they were exposed to. In other respects, the school greatly benefited from its partnership with the management board. There were other aspects of facilities which were unsatisfactory including an insufficient number of laboratories and information and communication technology (ICT) centres, insufficient shaded area for physical education and no ready access to outside play areas. Resources were often inadequate for the number of children using them. The recruitment, development and retention of staff were barriers to school improvement and a consistently high quality education.

## Key features of the school

- Classrooms used by students up to Year 8 were often cramped and, overall, facilities and resources were inadequate. This had an adverse effect on the quality of education provided;
- The excellent vision of the Principal and the strong leadership of the senior team and the high priority given to improving teaching;
- The high turnover of teachers provided the school with significant challenges to sustain its drive for improvement;
- The high degree of success in developing and promoting students' leadership qualities and high aspirations, mainly through its delivery of its Core Values programme and its staff and student leadership strategy;
- High standards in most IGCSE and A-level subjects and the students' acquisition of fluent English skills;
- The insufficient breadth of the curriculum in several areas;
- Some shortfalls in the school's management of health and safety.

## Recommendations

- Ensure, through effective governance, that the school is adequately staffed and resourced, in order to ensure consistently effective learning and middle leadership, and eliminate unacceptable risk to every students' health, safety and welfare;
- Embed the recent developments in active and independent learning throughout the school;
- Ensure that all aspects of health and safety arrangements and procedures are put in place urgently and monitored rigorously;
- Continue to review and further broaden the curriculum.

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

Students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education across the school was acceptable. By the end of primary, students' recitation of The Holy Qur'an was limited. Among the Arabic-speaking learners, the majority of the students could recite better and were able to memorise some Prophetic Hadiths. In secondary, the majority of students improved their recitation. They could identify the members of the Prophet Mohammed family (PBUH). However, students' knowledge about the conditions and the benefits of prayer was just acceptable. Only a few of them could demonstrate its performance correctly. In the sixth form, students gained a good amount of knowledge about the life of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH). However, their skill of reciting The Holy Qur'an remained acceptable.

Attainment and progress in Arabic was acceptable in primary and secondary and good in the sixth form. Native Arabic-speaking students performed significantly better than non-native speakers. In Year 6, most students read short paragraphs with difficulty. They knew the grammatical rules of the nominal sentences and were able to explain them clearly to each other but could not apply them in their speaking. However, the non-native speakers could hardly read them. In secondary, students' understanding progressed. They could read well and could express themselves well. However, the non-native speakers had difficulty when they read familiar short paragraphs. In the sixth form, most native -speaking students could discuss, argue, and express themselves very well. However, the non-native speakers' oral skills were very limited. Extended writing skills were under-developed across the school.

In English, the attainment in speaking, listening and reading was acceptable at the end of the Foundation Stage, and including writing, was also acceptable at the end of primary, outstanding in secondary and good in the sixth form. Progress was acceptable in Foundation Stage and primary, outstanding in secondary and good in the sixth form. By the end of the Foundation Stage many children understood, read and communicated in basic language. They accurately wrote letters of the alphabet and a few words. At the end of primary students progressed in listening, speaking and writing, and could, for example, make presentations and describe books they had read, identifying genres and justifying their point of view. In secondary, students expressed their opinions confidently, made presentations, wrote summaries and extended compositions, and had a good knowledge of grammar. In the sixth form, students were articulate, skilled at text analysis and writing in functional, creative and analytical genres.

In mathematics, attainment and progress were acceptable in the Foundation Stage and in primary. Children in Foundation Stage displayed a basic recognition and understanding of number and shape but problem-solving skills were under-developed. By the end of primary, students were mostly confident using number and handling data, and understood important aspects of shape, space and measures. By the end of secondary, attainment and progress were good. Students' skills in calculations and algebra were particularly strong. In the sixth form, attainment rose to outstanding, as progress continued to be good. In the sixth form students were very competent when manipulating algebra, using principles of proof or when problem-solving in probability. They, along with secondary students, had not developed investigative skills sufficiently. Trends in IGCSE and A-level showed that high standards had been broadly maintained.

In the Foundation Stage in science, attainment was acceptable, although the children's ability to question and explore the world through first-hand discovery was under-developed. Acceptable progress was demonstrated through children's increased awareness of the world around them. In primary classes attainment and progress were acceptable, with students able to describe and analyse differences between living and non-living things. Progress and attainment were outstanding in secondary, with most students in physics understanding circuit components and the working of a diode. Chemistry and biology results in IGCSE examinations were outstanding. However, students did not have the opportunity to display sufficient investigative and enquiry skills related to the wider world. In the sixth form progress and attainment were good, with students demonstrating in chemistry a strong command of polarisation and covalent bonds.

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

Attitudes and behaviour were outstanding across the school, except in the secondary, where they were good as a result of a few boys' misbehaviour and low attendance in some year groups. Nevertheless, the outstanding quality of the students' attitudes, academically and socially, was a defining strength across the whole school. Students showed enthusiasm, independence and were able to co-operate and work well with each other. Staff-student relationships across the school were outstanding and based on mutual respect. Attendance was acceptable overall but variable across the school phases.

Children's civic and Islamic understanding was acceptable in Foundation Stage. They showed their appreciation of the multi-cultural nature of Dubai through art, songs and other activities. In primary and secondary, civic and Islamic understanding was good and in the sixth form it was outstanding. Students respected Islamic and local traditions and understood the multi-cultural nature of Dubai very well and showed their pride in living there harmoniously. Class council members helped improve the social and academic fabric of the school. Students were eager to take initiatives, extend their own leadership qualities and take responsibility. The limited access to the two prayer rooms, however, limited students' opportunities to pray and further develop their spiritual life.



Economic and environmental understanding was outstanding in primary, secondary and the sixth form. It was acceptable in the Foundation Stage because of limited application of number. All students displayed a high awareness of environment issues, both locally and globally. Young students were aware of most of the environmental problems in Dubai. Their participation in the environmental awareness week and other projects such as cleaning Al-Mamzar beach deepened their understanding of sustainability and protection. All students showed care for their local environment and kept their school free from litter and graffiti. They wrote about what personally they were going to do to protect the environment and were pro-active in school and beyond. The discussions with the students across all stages showed that they had deep understanding of the economic situation of Dubai and the international economic crisis.

## How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching was unsatisfactory in the Foundation Stage and acceptable in the primary and secondary stages. It was good in the sixth form. The most effective teaching across the school was rooted in the skilful use of time, secure management of students, warm relationships and good humour. Teachers demonstrated strong subject knowledge which they communicated enthusiastically and with clarity in their language. The teachers prepared their lessons well and led classes with open, probing and inter-active questioning. They stimulated scholarship and high level enquiry. In the examination classes teachers made strong connections between what they were teaching and the demands of the IGCSE and A-level syllabuses. Where practice was less satisfactory, teaching was didactic and this led to students being passive and disengaged. Lesson objectives and outcomes were not shared with students and there was little or no attempt to match tasks to the needs of different groups or individuals. The teachers gave insufficient opportunities for Students' to check what they had learned. Teachers' use of ICT was hesitant. Teaching assistants in the Foundation Stage were not deployed appropriately.

The quality of students' learning was acceptable in the Foundation Stage and primary and good in secondary and the sixth form. Most students responded well to their teachers, showed a real thirst for learning and demonstrated strong attitudes to study. Students built successfully in lessons on their previous skills and knowledge to make further gains in their learning. In the sixth form, skilfully enabled by their teachers, students taught other students with passion, enjoyment and successful outcomes. However, children and students up to Year 11 did not have sufficient opportunities to work independently. Their progress was limited by the very few opportunities they had to handle sparse resources and materials.

Assessment was unsatisfactory in the Foundation Stage. It was acceptable in the primary and secondary, and was good in the sixth form where an effective learning profile was in place to guide assessment and target-setting. Information and data were not used effectively to inform lesson planning in the early years. This picture improved as students moved up through the school. The school had a weekly test period, and the consolidated results of this formal testing informed teachers' planning and was communicated well to parents. Although students' books were marked very regularly, there were very few comments from the teachers to indicate how the students could improve their work. The school had successfully developed a clear system to monitor the progress of individual students and benchmark their progress and attainment against international standards.

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

The curriculum in the Foundation Stage was unsatisfactory and across the other stages it was acceptable. It was based on the English National Curriculum but mainly lacked its breadth. It was, nevertheless, challenging, had a clear rationale and significantly enriched to provide distinction and the school's own breadth. From Year 9 onwards, it became increasingly specialised to reflect a strong science specialism, business or a combination of the two. This was popular with parents. There was good progression to these courses, they were well planned and sufficiently resourced with a high international success rate. Access to A-level courses was very restricted because of space and staffing limitations. The curriculum at Foundation Stage had some essential early childhood experiences missing and the classroom layout, lack of space and limited resources hindered the development of key skills. However, an urgent drive had started this year to implement the Early Years Framework Strategy. There were limitations to the primary curriculum. For example, there was no design technology and the time for physical education was limited. Information and communication technology lessons were not always practical because of a lack of computers. The primary curriculum was enhanced, however, by French from Year 3 and a Core Values programme, which included learning about healthy lifestyles, environmental issues and promotion of leadership qualities. Additionally, there were separate lessons in Arabic and Islamic Education for native and non-native speakers of Arabic.

The lack of breadth at secondary was mainly due to the lack of lessons in art, music and design technology and limited physical education. This was partially; but not fully; addressed, during Core Values, sports, extra-curricular clubs and activities, an additional choice of foreign language and qualifications in environmental management. Other innovations included a start to develop a curriculum driven by student empowerment, critical thinking, peer teaching and more active learning. There were numerous field trips and an extensive well subscribed extra-curricular programme, which included sporting, cultural and career activities.

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

Arrangements to ensure health and safety were unsatisfactory in the Foundation Stage, in primary and secondary. There were acceptable in the sixth form. Site security was good, as was supervision of students on school transport and during the school day. However, there was insufficient supervision of students who arrived early. Fire safety drills were carried out in line with regulations. The premises were clean and well maintained. Medical information was updated and kept securely. Risk assessments were carried out in practical subjects and for school trips but not for assessing risk arising from accommodation and school activities. A Child Protection policy was in place but staff were not aware of procedures to be followed. Over-crowding in Years 1 to 9 classes posed health and safety risks with loose cables and students' bags on floors impeding safe movement and this had a negative impact on well-being. Children in Foundation Stage and primary classes did not have the required access to outside play areas. The plastic floor coverings in the Foundation Stage classes posed a potential fire risk. However, healthy lifestyles and exercise were promoted well and the school had recently improved air-conditioning in Foundation Stage and girls' classrooms.

The quality of support was acceptable throughout the school. Children and students were supported in their social and academic development. There were very good staff-student relationships in all years. Teachers and managers dealt with behavioural and academic issues effectively, although some low-level disruption by boys in the secondary was not addressed appropriately by staff. Systems for offering careers and higher education advice to students, including visiting speakers, were valued by sixth form students. Attendance and punctuality were monitored effectively and parents were contacted promptly when absences occurred. The school had started to establish a robust system to track students' overall well-being and progress, rooted in effective procedures already operating in the sixth form. However, this was not sufficiently and consistently embedded in the primary and early secondary phases.

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

The overall quality of leadership and management across the school was acceptable and was strong within the senior team. The Principal's vision had placed a strong focus and high priority on active and independent learning, which was a developing feature of the school and exemplified by the innovative involvement of students in systematically teaching their peers. Senior leaders were having an impact on standards and management was extremely competent in almost all respects, and the very large and complex school ran smoothly and efficiently. School expectations were high and distributed leadership was in place. However, in spite of a high quality professional development programme, there was a wide range of middle leadership and classroom practice which was not effective.

The overall quality of self-evaluation and improvement planning was acceptable. The effective approach used by school managers and applied well in the school. Consequently, leadership knew almost all of the schools major strengths and weaknesses very well. The strong emphasis on rigorously monitoring teaching had led to improvements in teaching. Monitoring was also being increasingly complemented by the evaluation of students' performance and there was a clear school improvement plan which showed some good progress, particularly in improving learning and teaching and restructuring Foundation Stage. However, there was wide variation in improvement planning amongst middle leaders. The management of health and safety was unsatisfactory. However, the urgency and quality of the school's response demonstrated its commitment to addressing these issues quickly and fully.

The school's partnership with parents and the local community was good. Parents were well informed of their children's progress and the school involved them in the work of the school. Parents said that the school dealt with concerns and complaints promptly. Some parents felt that there was insufficient support for the less able children. The school had strong links with local schools, businesses and national sporting organisations which enhanced students' learning and social and personal development, and contributed well to civic and cultural awareness. The school council contributed very well to the local community through a good range of activities including fund-raising for charities.

Governance at the school was unsatisfactory. Decisions regarding provision had a significantly adverse effect on the safety, quality of education and curriculum development for a large proportion of students as a result of over-crowded classrooms. Furthermore, the quality and high turnover of staffing inhibited the school's achievement of its ambitious vision, and parents, as stakeholders, had not yet had an impact on school development. However, in other respects, the school benefited considerably from its partnership with the management board through the high quality and innovative range of advice, guidance and training provided. The Board had an accurate picture of the school's journey on its self-evaluation, held the school to account well and provided challenge to senior leadership through the Principal.

Staffing facilities and resources were, overall, unsatisfactory. Staff recruitment, development and retention were barriers to the school raising its quality of education enough and consistently. This also impaired the development of a more suitable and broad curriculum. Insufficient facilities, given the number of students they were intended for, further limited the curriculum quality, although the sixth form 'apple lab' was a strong and positive feature. Furniture in the primary phase was frequently not fit for purpose. The size of many classrooms resulted in cramped conditions that significantly limited learning, teaching and access to students, and compromised safe evacuation procedures. Noise from air-conditioning units also impeded learning. In Foundation Stage ready access to outdoor areas was not available, and the provision of and training for teaching assistants was unsatisfactory. Across the school, practical resources were sometimes inadequate. In physical education there was insufficient shade for students when working outdoors.

## 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 is the students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good is the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

How good is the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Outstanding	Good
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Outstanding	Good

How good is the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Outstanding
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good

How good is the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Outstanding	Good
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Outstanding	Good

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

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

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

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Health and safety	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	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	Unsatisfactory
Staffing, facilities and resources	Unsatisfactory

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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