

INSPECTION REPORT

Dubai International Academy

Report published in May 2012

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Dubai International Academy

Location	Emirates Hills
Type of school	Private
Website	www.diadubai.com
Telephone	04 3684111
Address	PO BOX 118111, Emirates Hills, Dubai
Principal	Julian Wilcock
Curriculum	IB
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-18 / Kindergarten to Grade 13
Attendance	Good
Number of students on roll	1,873
Number of Emirati students	24 (1%)
Date of the inspection	30th January to 2nd February 2012

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The context of the school

Dubai International Academy is a three-programme International Baccalaureate (IB) school located in Emirates Hills. There were 1,873 girls and boys ranging from three to eighteen years of age attending the school at the time of the inspection, representing a highly multi-cultural and multi-national population.

The school delivered the Primary Years Programme (PYP), the Middle Years Programme (MYP) and the Diploma Programme (DP) covering the entire IB continuum. Students took the Higher Level and Standard Level DP courses as well as the Diploma Studies courses.

A senior leadership team of six supported 206 teachers, of a total staff of 247, which included specialist teachers for students with special educational needs (SEN) and English as a Second Language (ESL). Two assistant teachers supported teaching staff in each kindergarten (KG) classroom and younger students in PYP. Eighty two nationalities were represented in the school population. Twenty four Emirati students were enrolled in the school.

The school had received accreditation visits from NEASC and CIS during this academic year. Students in Year 11 were on work placements and field trips for part of the inspection visit.

Overall school performance 2011-2012

Good

How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

Dubai International Academy provided a good quality of education. Since the previous inspection several aspects of the school's work had improved. Student outcomes had been raised in Arabic as an additional language in MYP, and in English, mathematics and science. The highly committed leadership and staff had worked effectively to develop greater levels of consistency across all phases. The focus on global understanding and personal development was firmly established. Productive curriculum review, supported by improved assessment methods, had led to more purposeful transition between phases. Furthermore, strategies to assist students with special educational needs and greater cohesion between governors and the school community, had also benefited from further development.

The quality of teaching had improved. However, this was less established in Islamic Education and Arabic in PYP than in other subjects. Whilst learning was good overall, there was still a need for more

independent learner-led enquiry experiences to be incorporated into all classroom settings. Effective self-evaluation had ensured that the school knew itself well, remained highly committed to the IB Learner Profile, and was ready to prioritise classroom learning experiences that were consistently student-directed. Assessment practices had also improved. Teachers and students regularly evaluated their objectives and outcomes in terms of enhancement of skills, better quality understanding and a sense of knowing the next steps. The school had worked diligently to address the recommendations from the previous report and had a strong capacity to improve.

Key strengths

- Attainment and progress had improved in English, mathematics and science;
- The students demonstrated outstanding levels of personal development;
- There was improved teaching across all phases, particularly in Kindergarten;
- The curriculum was excellent throughout the school;
- Relationships with parents and the wider community were extremely effective, and supported by outstanding governance.

Recommendations

- Raise PYP student outcomes in Islamic Education and Arabic to reflect the principles of IB more closely;
- Focus self-evaluation and improvement planning to ensure that inquiry and critical thinking are central to every lesson;
- Develop the application of assessment information so that it contributes accurately to the school's improvement journey.

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

	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Islamic Education				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Arabic as a first language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Arabic as an additional language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Not Applicable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Not Applicable
English				
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good	Good
Mathematics				
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good	Good
Science				
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good	Good

Overall, attainment had improved in English, mathematics and science. A majority of students displayed focused inquiry skills, appropriate use of technical and imaginative language and met specific challenges purposefully. They had good knowledge and understanding, in line with Learner Profile expectations. However, this improvement was not mirrored in PYP Islamic Education where students displayed acceptable levels of memorisation, recitation and application skills. PYP students of Arabic as a first

language had not made significant development in using formal Arabic; their writing capacities were limited. PYP students of Arabic as an additional language listened and spoke with improved competence; reading and writing skills remained in line with expectations. Older students of Islamic Education and Arabic exceeded the age-appropriate expectations across the key skills. Overall, attainment was not outstanding because too few students were attaining well above international expectations.

A majority of students made good progress across all the skills, except in Islamic Education and Arabic in PYP. In subjects where progress was good, individual students understood their expectations, and enquired independently to master comprehension, speaking, mathematics and scientific skills. A majority of students now applied these skills in lessons, exhibitions, projects and extended essays. Progress was not outstanding because too many students did not know how to meet their own learning needs and overall trends were not consistently ahead of international expectations. Students with special educational needs made excellent progress in whole-class and small-group settings. They progressed well to reach carefully prepared goals that matched their skill levels.

Attainment and progress of Emirati students for the majority was similar to other students across all subjects and in all phases of the school. Emirati students reported that they enjoyed attending school and they appreciated how they were helped on their learning journey at the school. Each student's attainment level was checked upon entry. The levels were recorded on the student tracking program, and progress was monitored. As such, most students had a developing understanding of their learning targets and were devising appropriate strategies to ensure they achieved them. Links with parents were effective and timely and supported the students' overall development.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Attitudes and behaviour	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture	Good	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding
Civic, economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding

Attitudes and behaviour were outstanding. Relationships were positive and affirming. Most students were self-assured and responsible individuals. As critical thinkers, leaders and risk-takers, students initiated activities and charitable events. They engaged in sports and chose healthy meal options. Attendance and punctuality were good. DP and MYP students had an outstanding understanding of Islam and its impact on society. However, this aspect was not as strong among the younger students and especially with the non-Muslims students. Most students had an excellent appreciation of the traditions, heritage and values of the UAE and most valued the multi-cultural nature of Dubai. Most DP and MYP students understood diversity and how it enriched people's lives. Their awareness of their roles as global citizens and how these were reflected in life at their school was firmly established. Older students had an excellent civic understanding. Student council members were active in communicating concerns to school management. Almost all students had a deep understanding of Dubai's development as well as a thorough understanding of environmental sustainability, which had enabled them to lead high-quality projects. Younger students were enthusiastic but their understanding was less established.

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Good	Good	Good

Teaching was of a good quality in all phases. Most teachers had strong subject knowledge and most were developing an understanding of how students learn. The quality of planning was generally high with learning objectives stated and, in most cases, shared with students. Enquiry and higher order thinking opportunities, including problem solving and investigations, were becoming embedded within lessons. A broad range of activities, including whole class, group and pair work and the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), developed further the learning opportunities for students. There was a strengthening commitment from teachers to learning and the belief that all students were able to achieve at high levels. However not all lessons were learner-focused. In PYP structured purposeful inquiry was not yet fully developed. At times, teachers did not cater for the learning needs of all. The teaching of Arabic and Islamic Education, especially at PYP, was only of an acceptable quality. Teaching in other subjects including Spanish, French, Art, Psychology, Creativity, Action, Service (CAS) and Units of Inquiry was generally good. Although a minority of lessons over-emphasised teacher-talk and worksheets, most used a wide variety of activities to promote students' learning effectively.

The quality of learning was good in all phases of the school. The IB Learner Profile was providing a framework which demanded that teachers at all phases empowered students as directors of their own learning. Consequently, as students progressed up the school, they strengthened their understanding and use of the ten IB attributes. They were motivated and increasingly took charge of their own learning. In both independent and collaborative work, most students actively supported each other to ensure that quality learning occurred. They increasingly asked questions to clarify understanding, and debated their points of view. For instance, kindergarten children investigated the effects of oil pollution, using inquiry

and critical thinking skills. These skills were progressively, but not consistently, developed across the school.

Assessment was good overall. Effective self and peer assessment strategies were routine features of lessons. Teachers' records were detailed and methodically maintained. In Kindergarten, the systematic assessment and recording of the development of basic skills underpinned children's good progress. In all years, teachers had a good knowledge of individual students' strengths and weaknesses so they were able to implement effective intervention strategies to support students who experienced learning difficulties. However, there was inconsistency in teachers' use of assessment information to ensure learning tasks were appropriately challenging for all groups of students. Assessment criteria were shared with students and there were many examples of the very effective marking of students' work with clear guidance on improvement through oral and written comments.

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

	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Curriculum quality	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

The International Baccalaureate provided a common purpose for learning and a rich range of learning experiences and opportunities for choices and options at all stages throughout the school. Carefully planned transition processes between phases ensured continuity of learning in English, mathematics and science. A highly effective curriculum review process was in place, which led to significant improvements in students' academic and personal development. In addition, extensive cross-curricular links through trans-disciplinary units in the elementary school, inter-disciplinary units in MYP, and connections made through Theory of Knowledge (TOK) in the Diploma Programme supported students' learning of inquiry and critical thinking. Enrichment opportunities included field trips and an extensive extra-curricular activities programme, including sports, the arts, service learning, and a well-developed mother tongue support initiative.

How well does the school protect and support students?

	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Health and Safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of Support	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Good

The school provided an exceptionally safe and secure learning environment. Provision was guided by a clearly understood range of policies covering maintenance, fire, transportation and health promotion. Bus safety arrangements were stringently followed; arrival and departure arrangements were carefully supervised. The premises were litter-free and maintained in excellent condition by all, reflecting students' environmental awareness. Appropriate fire drills were carried out and advice was taken from the Civil Defence on evacuation procedures. Students reported that they felt very safe in school. Medicines were stored safely and administered responsibly by the medical staff. Students made excellent choices to enhance a healthy lifestyle and the cafeteria provided healthy food. The building was decorated with reminders to students about healthy living. Staff members were regularly updated on child protection arrangements and aware of students' medical needs.

Support for students was outstanding except in the Diploma Programme where it was good. Almost all staff enjoyed positive relationships with students. However, this was not always the case in the diploma classes where greater attention was required to ensure that students' welfare was consistently secure. In all phases of the school, an excellent behaviour management policy effectively promoted good attitudes. The schools' support for educational, medical and emotional needs was of high quality. An extensive guidance programme prepared students for the next stage of education. Students with special educational needs were admitted into the school and detailed individual education plans were in place. Close monitoring of progress enhanced overall provision for support of students. The school had improved its management of attendance and punctuality.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

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

Leadership was good. Committed senior leaders worked tirelessly to develop the potential of all staff. They communicated a clear vision for the development of specific personal qualities of the students. A well-distributed model of leadership was in place. However, the impact of this distribution was inconsistent across the key subjects. Leaders communicated well with staff and ensured accountability. The school's priority of promoting learner-driven experiences across all subjects and phases was not fully understood and implemented. Nevertheless, the school had a strong capacity to improve further.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. Comprehensive and detailed processes ensured that the school had significant amounts of information on the development of many aspects of its work. The culture of reflection and review was firmly established and most areas in need of improvement had been addressed well, including the raising of standards. However, there was not a sufficiently sharp focus on learner development in order to merge ambition and realism appropriately. For example, while the school knew it wanted to improve learning its target emphasised teaching. Individual learners were yet to be empowered to be genuine directors of their own learning journeys. Teacher appraisal was comprehensive, but it was inconsistent in its attention in ensuring that teachers consistently prioritised effective learning for all ability levels.

Relationships with parents and the local community were outstanding. PADIA, (Parents' Association), and a variety of focus groups, worked regularly with the school to provide effective communication channels that resulted in a well informed and participative parent and school culture. Parents made an outstanding contribution to the personal development of the students across the school. Links with community were made in all phases. These purposefully reflected the mission of the school to embrace global values, occupational awareness and economic and environmental understanding.

Governance was outstanding. A highly informed and knowledgeable Advisory Council was in place that had effective parental representation and held the school to account. Governors and owners used the

accurate and relevant advice from the council to make effective strategic decisions. A realistic understanding of the journey of the school from its beginning, to the challenges and opportunities now confronting DIA was firmly established. Student, teacher and parent access to this work, and influence upon it, was very well developed.

Management procedures were highly effective. The school had sufficient numbers of well-qualified staff and support specialists who were skilfully deployed. Middle management, whilst effective, did not always plan innovatively to develop the key subjects. The school premises were well-maintained, optimised learning and supported school life purposefully. However, some classes lacked appropriate space to promote enquiry-based learning. Facilities and resources for sport and ICT were easily accessed by the entire school community and supported learning.

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	202	16%
	Last year	591	44%
Teachers	70		48%
Students	42		9%

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

A small minority of parents responded to the survey, far fewer than last year. About half the teachers responded to their survey, but only a tenth of senior students responded to theirs. Most parents who responded reported high satisfaction levels with school leadership and the quality of education their children received. They felt their children were safe and that they enjoyed school life and made good progress. However, many parents reported that the curriculum did not support their children's progress. Class size was also an area of concern. Teachers, while overall satisfied with the most aspects of their work, expressed concern about the amount of administrative tasks to be completed and that this impacted negatively on progress. Student respondents stated that their learning experiences were very positive and

that they were well supported by almost all staff. However, a few Diploma students reported concerns over their feelings of occasional disrespect with staff.

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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