

The English College 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 English College 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 Um Sequim, The English College is a private school providing education for boys and girls aged from three to 18 years. The college follows an English curriculum. At the time of the inspection there were 963 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents, most of whom showed very high levels of support for the College.

How well does the school perform overall?

From Foundation Stage to Year 13, the consistently high quality of support across the college complemented the well behaved and positive approach of all students. Coupled with outstanding parental involvement, this led to a purposeful working environment where most students fulfilled their potential. There were excellent staff-student relationships which encouraged the development of dialogue and developed wider horizons for students. A strong pastoral system enhanced this feature. High quality guidance was provided to students. The energetic and positive approach of the two headteachers gave a strong underlay to these features. This key element of leadership needed to be complemented by much greater support and involvement of the governors if this success were to continue. Since the last inspection the governors had admitted the primary headteacher to their meetings, and whilst this was a step forward, the level of involvement of the two headteachers required further development. Overall, despite their general support, the governors did not sufficiently hold the college to account in most key areas of activity.

Standards of teaching and learning were generally good, with areas of outstanding achievement, notably in the Foundation Stage and in English across all phases of the college. Overall, despite being acceptable, the standards of teaching and learning in Islamic and Arabic Education did not meet those seen in other areas of the curriculum and would have benefited greatly from increased contact with the more dynamic approaches that were seen in these other areas. Since the last inspection, although some progress has been made in Arabic, further measures were needed to ensure compliance with government requirements. The core curriculum was complemented by a rich variety of activities, including a wide range of sporting activities including the opportunity to study physical education at GCSE and Advanced levels. Despite this, very few opportunities existed for those who might have wished to follow vocational education routes. There was clear and detailed assessment in the Foundation Stage and this characteristic continued to a great extent in the primary school. However, in the secondary school and post-16, assessment tended to become more variable and target-setting arrangements for individuals sometimes lacked the overall clarity and direct relevance established earlier in the college. Students with special educational needs were supported effectively and measures to identify and provide for the gifted and talented were taking increasing effect throughout the college. There was a clear and appropriate child protection policy in place. Students and staff were aware of procedures. Site security arrangements, however, needed to be reviewed. Among issues identified were the opportunities for unauthorised persons to gain access to the site and the buildings and the traffic regulation on internal roads.

Key features of the school

- A purposeful learning environment.
- Uniformly respectful and constructive relations between students and teachers;
- Strong parental support;
- A rich provision of extra-curricular activities, including sport;
- Effective leadership of the two headteachers;
- Outstanding provision in the Foundation Stage.

Recommendations

- Ensure compliance with requirements in Arabic;
- Raise attainment in Islamic Education;
- Continue to extend and share best practice in teaching and assessment across the College;
- Review and improve the security arrangements during the school day;
- Encourage significantly deeper involvement of the governing body in holding the college to account.

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

Students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education in the primary, secondary and post-16 phases were acceptable. All students, across the phases, were enthusiastic about their faith and related lessons to real life experiences. Most students in the secondary and post-16 phases had acceptable knowledge of influential figures and key events in Islam. At the primary phase, almost all students understood the Pillars of Islam and responsibilities expected of them in relation to their age. Across the phases, students' recitation skills were weak and they did not memorize enough of the required verses from The Holy Qur'an.

Progress and attainment in Arabic in the primary and secondary phases were acceptable. In the primary school, students were developing acceptable speaking skills. They repeated simple phrases and sentences with correct pronunciation, and could answer simple questions. Students were acquiring and consistently using new vocabulary. In the secondary phase, students were using their knowledge of grammar correctly to structure sentences. Across the phases, students' writing skills were underdeveloped. In the primary phase, students' fine motor skills were not sufficiently developed for Arabic writing. In the secondary phase, the majority of students could not structure and connect sentences to form a cohesive short text.

Attainment and progress across all stages in English were outstanding and was supported by good planning for the range of student needs. In Foundation Stage, from varying standards on entry, children progressively developed speaking, reading and listening skills beyond expected levels. In the primary school almost all students were working above the expected National Curriculum levels. By the end of Year 6, most showed the use of a rich vocabulary in their oral and written work. At secondary and post-16 level, almost all students responded well to the increased challenge of their GCSE and Advanced Level courses. Last year's examination results were well beyond national and international averages. GCSE A*-C was achieved by 100% of students entered in English, and 95% in English Literature. At Advanced Level, 86% achieved grades A to C. Particularly in Year 12 and Year 13, most students' oral and written showed outstanding knowledge of the set texts, creative writing styles and outstanding analytical ability.

In mathematics, at Foundation Stage, children's attainment and progress were outstanding. Through practical activities children rapidly developed an understanding of basic number, shape and pattern. Primary students made good progress and attainment was also good. Students demonstrated competence with key skills in number, calculation, handling data and particularly in shape, space and measure. However, problem-solving was less developed in various contexts and across different years. Across both secondary phases, progress was good, while attainment was outstanding by the end of secondary and good in the sixth form. Students competently calculated, drew and interpreted graphs, and handled data. Both at Advanced Level and at GCSE, students' higher order thinking was not as well developed. Practical work significantly promoted learning, particularly in the younger primary years. Trends at GCSE continued to improve, and, at Advanced Level, previously high standard of several years ago had again been achieved.

Attainment and progress in science in the primary and secondary schools were good. Students built on their subject knowledge, attained the levels expected of them in the primary school and made good progress in developing their practical skills. By Year 6 the majority of students understood fair tests and the need to repeat measurements to increase the reliability of their observations. A minority offered plausible explanations for differences in repeated measurements. Students in the lower secondary school were gaining greater confidence in practical work and results in the international examinations at the end of the Key Stage 4 were good. In Advanced Level, the relatively small cohorts were making acceptable progress in all three sciences. In physics, students demonstrated advanced thinking and reasoning skills in their practical investigations. Last year's Advanced Level results were broadly similar to UK averages.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

The attitudes and behaviour of all the students at the English College were outstanding. At the Foundation Stage, children interacted positively with each other, followed safety rules and took turns. Across the other phases, all students were respectful, mature and eloquent. They communicated their ideas clearly and respected each other's opinions even when they disagreed with some of them. Students reported that they feel safe and supported by peers and staff.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions were good across the college. Students contributed actively to the life of the school through an extensive extra-curricular programme and participated in many charities. Students understood the significance of Islam for Muslims living in the UAE and on their lives as individuals. Although most students were non-Muslims, they showed understanding and respect to practised rituals, such as when their peers were fasting during Ramadan. Students, especially in the secondary and post-16 phase, appreciated the multi-cultural nature of Dubai, and thus their school. Although Year 12 and Year 13 students readily assumed responsibilities as monitors during breaks and on buses, there were limited opportunities for a pro-active role through which students across the phases could have impact on their school lives.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was outstanding in Foundation and post-16 phases, and good in the primary and secondary phases. Almost all students could identify landmarks and projects which reflect Dubai's prosperity, such as the metro and the Burj. Most students related this prosperity to the fact that their parents found employment in Dubai. In the post-16 phase, students had a more thorough understanding of the economic progress of Dubai and the global economic situation, enhanced by their course studies. Although most students in the primary and secondary phases showed an understanding of basic environmental concepts and participated in recycling activities when presented with the opportunity, they had limited understanding of the impact they had as individuals on global sustainability.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the Foundation Stage was outstanding. Children enjoyed the activities at the different learning centres and were confident when explaining what to do. They shared resources and respected each other. Their social skills were developing well. Teaching was inclusive; all children were brought into the learning activities. There was good emphasis on language development. Effective teaching methods using rhyme, colour, songs and play generated interest and teachers provided high quality feedback on the children's progress. Teaching and learning in the primary and secondary schools, and in post-16 provision, were good. Most teachers had very good subject knowledge and structured lessons well. Teaching was consistently outstanding in English in the secondary school where the pace of lessons was appropriate to the needs of almost all students. The teaching techniques encouraged all students to participate and helped develop their skills of critical analysis.

Very good relationships existed between teachers and students and between the students themselves and these contributed to the high quality of interaction and group-work that took place. When appropriate, teachers and students made good use of inter-active whiteboards. This was often the case in the primary school where students engaged actively with animated learning materials. Occasionally, primary students were given opportunity to peer-teach by conducting parts of lessons themselves. Good use was made of group-work in the secondary school, for example, to gather factual information in science and to present arguments and different viewpoints in psychology. These activities boosted students' confidence and presentation skills, and sometimes involved peer assessment. The best lessons incorporated a range of approaches and developed cross-curricular skills, for example, writing for a specific audience in a health education lesson. However, despite the good range of activities in the majority of lessons, some lessons were dominated by teacher exposition. On these occasions, the pace of learning slowed. Although most students behaved well even when uninterested, in some cases, the physical environment of the classrooms was not conducive to learning. For example, some of the science facilities prevented students from facing the teacher. Some rooms were long and narrow and irregularly shaped which made watching demonstrations difficult. In addition, the noisy air conditioning units hindered hearing.

Assessment in the primary school was good. The teachers knew the students well and gave constructive oral and written feedback regularly. In the secondary school and in the post-16 provision, assessment practice was variable. In some cases, students were given feedback regularly to inform them what to do to improve and to set targets relating to curriculum standards. In other cases marking was infrequent and limited to ticks and broad quality comments. Several factual mistakes and spellings of subject specific words had gone uncorrected. Most lessons were planned with clear learning objectives. However, in some lessons, objectives related to the activity rather than the intended learning, and this lack of clarity made effective monitoring of learning difficult.

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

The curriculum in the Foundation Stage was outstanding, and good with outstanding features elsewhere in the college. In the primary phase there was an increasing use of a themed approach and this was used effectively by staff. The curriculum was also well sequenced and met the needs of all students well in many respects, but cross-curricular links could still be further developed in some areas. It was particularly responsive to the children's needs in the Foundation Stage. At the secondary stages, the curriculum included distinctive elements. For example, students had many opportunities to learn, often through sport, within the local community, and additional qualifications had been introduced, often targeted to the gifted and talented students. Planning for progression was now beginning to be extended across the whole school with Enhanced Studies and PE taking the lead. The curriculum was regularly and systematically reviewed and this often led to significant developments and innovations. PSHE was also taught throughout the school and made a notable contribution to the students' academic and personal well-being. Extended Services departments effectively supported aspects of learning in Key Stages 1 to 3, and Directed Studies more broadly in Key Stage 4. This learning support included English and mathematics, except in Key Stage 3 where mathematics was not directly supported. The special needs of the gifted and talented students were also beginning to be well provided for. Across the school, there was an outstanding and extended programme of extra-curricular activities which attracted a very high participation rate. This included a broad and impressive sports programme which also often enabled students to be successful in local and national competitions, such as the Dubai Rugby Sevens. There was, however, insufficient coverage of Arabic in the primary and secondary phases, absence of design technology in the secondary stage and very few vocational courses in the sixth form.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety across the school were acceptable. Appropriate policies, risk assessments and records in the relevant areas were in place and staff responsibilities and roles were clear. Storage of chemicals and medicine was safe, fire drills were regularly held and records showed that accidents were, most recently, at a low level and rare. Students with special educational needs were very well supported. Healthy lifestyles were promoted through a range of activities and programmes. There was a clear and appropriate child protection policy in place and all students, and a great majority of the staff, were aware of procedures. Site security arrangements, however, needed to be reviewed.

The quality of support across the school was outstanding. There were excellent staff-student relationships and a strong pastoral system. High quality guidance was provided to students, and where appropriate, to parents to support students when they are new, through key transitions within the school and when applying to universities. Almost all Year 13 leavers were currently attending universities world-wide, though mostly in the UK. A tracking system was now in place across the school and was effective in monitoring students' progress. Teachers were using the data to set targets, or involve students in setting their own targets, and to provide guidance and support to promote progress and well-being. The use and communication of this data, however, were not fully developed as there was no school-wide management information system in place. Parents received comprehensive information, including updates on the progress of their children, and spoke highly of the quality of this. In the secondary school, arrangements to contact parents about absences sometimes occurred on the second day of absence rather than on the day itself.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The leadership qualities of the two headteachers were outstanding. They were dedicated professionals who set clear directions and consistently encouraged middle managers, teachers and students alike. Their example and positive behaviour helped to sustain the supportive learning environment and atmosphere of mutual support. They made themselves freely available to teachers and parents and enhanced the atmosphere of collaboration and co-operation that was encountered in the College.

Progress toward self-evaluation and improvement planning remained good and involved school leaders, parents and students. However, work remained to be done, especially at the level of annual and term planning in relation to specific objectives, where activities, indicators and sources of evidence were sometimes too broad in nature, or indeed absent.

Links with parents were outstanding. Almost all parents who responded to the questionnaire readily gave evidence of a positive nature, using actual examples of their own involvement, not only in their own child's development but also in other activities of the College. Parents were well aware of their individual child's progress and of how to assist their learning. A range of introductory sessions had been provided for parents whose children were new to the phase of learning or to the subjects for study. There were extensive partnerships with industry, commerce and sporting organisations. Constructive relations existed with all partner primary

and nursery schools. Links with higher education institutions were well developed and therefore beneficial to prospective undergraduates.

Progress in leadership and management was restricted by the relative lack of structured arrangements which would allow the governing body to review and evaluate the work of the college on a systematic basis. Whilst in general terms this body was supportive of the college, it had yet to develop clear and effective means of holding the college to account for its performance. For example, individual members of the governing body did not hold specific responsibilities for challenge and support in key areas such as teaching and learning, assessment, curriculum and student support. They were not sufficiently involved in the formulation and testing of the planning, particularly at the level of specific or developmental objectives.

Almost all teaching staff were well qualified, but in the areas Arabic and Islamic Education not all staff were sufficiently aware of modern methods of teaching, learning and assessment. Laboratory technicians required further development of their skills and knowledge. Overall, support staff were well deployed, with some outstanding examples in the Foundation Stage and in the area of special educational needs. In these areas of best practice, lesson objectives were shared with support staff, clear roles allocated and follow up agreed.

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	Not Applicable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable

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

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

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

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

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

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

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Health and safety	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of support	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
Quality of leadership	Outstanding
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Outstanding
Governance	Unsatisfactory
Staffing, facilities and resources	Good

How well does the school perform overall?
Good

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.

More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at www.khda.gov.ae.

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