

School of Research Science Inspection Report

Foundation to Year 12

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 School of Scientific Research was inspected in February 2010 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 Al Qusais, the School of Research Science is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Year 12, ages three to 18 years. The school followed the English National Curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 1087 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Overall, parents were pleased with most aspects of the work of the school but a minority of parents considered the school could do better in consulting with them and providing clearer information about actions taken by the school in response to their concerns. Most parents were strongly supportive of the progress the school had made over the last year and almost all were pleased with their children's progress in key subjects. Where concerns were expressed they centred on the relative high levels of staff turnover and the way the school communicated with them. A few commented on the need for more detailed guidance on how they could help their children at home.

How well does the school perform overall?

The School of Research Science provided a good education for its students and had the capacity to make further progress. It was a rapidly improving school. This was evident in the speedy response made towards addressing the issues raised in the previous inspection report. Attainment was outstanding in science in Years 9 to 12 and good in each of the other key subjects in the secondary and post-16 years. Progress across the school was never less than acceptable and was often good. The attitude and behaviour of students was good. Students were keen to learn and enjoyed coming to school. Most had a growing awareness of their responsibilities as citizens and had a good understanding of, and a respect for, Islam. Their economic and environmental understanding was acceptable and most were developing an understanding of the way Dubai was changing and of the environmental challenges it faced.

Teaching was good and several outstanding lessons were seen. Lessons were well planned and effectively taught helping to ensure that students' learning and progress was good. Most teachers had good classroom management skills and used a wide range of teaching strategies, though providing opportunities for students to use information technology was not yet one of them. Procedures for assessing students' work were acceptable. Teachers marked their work accurately though most did not routinely analyse data on student performance with a view to adjusting teaching strategies in the light of any trends. The curriculum was acceptable and met most students' needs well. It was regularly reviewed and updated and was imaginatively interpreted in the Foundation Stage. The school's extra-curricular provision made a useful contribution to enhancing the taught curriculum. The care for students was good. All staff took their duty of care seriously and health and safety policies and procedures were followed thoroughly. The buildings and facilities were safe, secure and well-maintained. Healthy lifestyles were promoted, and child protection procedures were well-established and implemented.

The quality of leadership and management was good. There was a shared vision and the new senior leadership team had set itself a demanding improvement agenda. Morale was high. The school had evaluated its strengths and weaknesses accurately and had a realistic understanding of what would be involved in embedding the changes that had been introduced. The school's partnerships with parents and the community were acceptable. Most parents were very supportive of what the school was doing for their children, though many wanted better access to teachers and more guidance as to how they could help support the school with the education of their children. Governance was good. It was supportive and had played a constructive part in helping the school to address the recommendations of the last inspection. The staffing, facilities and resources were good, overall. Staff turnover was lower than in recent years and was being managed pro-actively to help the school develop a better match of teaching skills to the needs identified.

Key features of the school

- Students' high attainment in all external examinations;
- Students' enjoyment of school and their positive expression of the school's Islamic values;
- The good teaching and learning found in most classrooms;
- The school's capacity to improve;
- Effective governance which contributed greatly to the school's well judged response to the issues raised in the last inspection report.

Recommendations

- Improve the consistency of assessment practices so that reliable data can be used to track and improve students' progress;
- Improve communications with parents so that they are better informed of the progress their children are making and how they can help their children to succeed;
- Develop a school overview of the curriculum to improve continuity and progression and develop systems of accountability across the school.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good. Year 1 students developed an acceptable understanding about cleanliness in Islam and, by Year 2, they understood about expectations of good behaviour according to the teachings of Islam. They memorised and understood the prayers to be said after and before meals. Most Year 3 students understood the nature of the messages of all the prophets and how they were linked to one another. By Year 6 students were able to extract the features of paradise from the verses of The Holy Qur'an and the Prophets' Sayings they learnt. However, they did not always link what they had studied in class to their everyday lives to improve their behaviour and dealings with others. Year 8 students could convincingly explain the features of Makki and Madani chapters of Qur'an. During the course of the secondary phase students developed a basic knowledge of the place of the family in Islam and could explain the events of Hajj.

Overall, attainment and progress in Arabic were good. In Years 1 and 2 students developed their speaking and listening skills well and their writing improved in line with expectations. Year 4 students understood the meaning of poetry and could use their own words to explain poems they had studied. By Year 5 most students were able to write in paragraphs with an acceptable understanding of grammar. Both reading and writing skills continued to develop as students progressed through the school so that by Year 11 students could write extended essays and short stories.

Progress and attainment in English were acceptable in the Foundation Stage and primary years and good in secondary and post-16. Almost all children entered the school with little or no English but achieved good results in first language International General Certificate of Education (IGCSE) and Advanced Subsidiary (AS) Level. In Foundation Stage they read and wrote letters with accuracy and knew letter sounds. By the end of primary, most students demonstrated well-developed speaking, reading and writing skills, which they applied to different genres with success. Students in Year 8 showed good use of point, quote and explanation in relation to Macbeth. In Year 9, students wrote effective rhetorical questions to initiate persuasive writing, whilst older students wrote well and analysed text critically.

In mathematics attainment was acceptable in the Foundation Stage and primary phases and good in Years 7 to 12. Progress was acceptable throughout the school. By the end of Year 6 students were achieving in line with expectations but, in Years 7 to 11, attainment was good with IGCSE students attaining above UK benchmarks. Students made appropriate progress in developing their numerical and algebraic skills from simple counting and recognition of numbers in the Foundation Stage to complex use of mental mathematics to solve algebraic problems in Year 12. Throughout the secondary years, students developed their skills in using increasingly complex data sets and their work was increasingly supported by investigational work though problem solving approaches to develop independent analytical thinking were underused.

Attainment and progress in science were acceptable in the Foundation Stage and primary years. However, in Years 7 to 12, attainment was outstanding and progress good. This was confirmed by both internal and external benchmarks. In IGCSE all students gained a grade in the A* to C range. In the Foundation Stage children were able to classify animals by whether they lived on the land or in the sea. Development of scientific knowledge and concepts through the school enabled students to understand, for example, the meaning of pitch and tone by Year 5, and debate the potential safety hazards of 'wi-fi' in Year 10. All students, particularly in the secondary years, developed their theoretical understanding well through practical and investigation work.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good across all phases. Students were polite, courteous and well behaved. Almost all were totally committed to learning and keen to participate actively. Students responded well to requests from teachers. When working collaboratively, they were enthusiastic and worked well with their peers, providing support and challenge to each other. Most were confident, articulate and able to share their opinions in a sensitive and mature way. They showed a tolerance and understanding of others' experiences and viewpoints. From an early age students took on responsibilities and the prefect system worked well to promote independence for a few students. Attendance was acceptable but a minority of students arrived late to school.

Students' civic understanding and their understanding and appreciation of Islam were good. Students participated in decision-making through the students' council which had raised several initiatives and points of concern with a view to improving the quality of school life. Islamic understanding was a strong feature of the school and all students had an appreciation of Islam. However, students were not so involved with the wider community. Students valued the diversity in Dubai's community and were aware of the challenges they faced to protect their national identity as Muslims and Arabs.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was acceptable. Students understood the main sources of income in Dubai and understood some of the economic challenges. They understood, for example, the importance of recycling and were occasionally involved in doing this around the school. Similarly, they looked at the school's electricity consumption and discussed practical ways of saving electricity. However, they were less appreciative of the need for sustainable development, either in Dubai or at a global level.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was good and, in most lessons, resulted in effective learning. Teacher subject knowledge was good and lessons proceeded at a brisk pace ensuring maximum engagement of students. Teaching in the Foundation Stage provided children with sufficient opportunities to choose activities for themselves and to learn through practical exploration and play. In the best lessons, there was a good balance of teacher talk and student activity and students enjoyed their learning. Often, teachers promoted language through skilled questioning. Teachers used a wide range of resources to support learning and students used information and communication technology (ICT) innovatively in a few lessons. For example, in Year 8, girls produced and presented films of their own advertisements and analysed their impact on the viewer. However, whilst inter-active white boards were used well by most teachers, students did not use technology regularly to develop learning. Many teachers planned well for the range of students' needs. Challenge was lacking at times and support for the least able students was lacking, overall.

The quality of students' learning was good throughout the school and the school had made significant progress in developing learning since the last inspection. Learning was mostly

student-centred with collaborative activities encouraging thinking through dialogue and investigation. In the Foundation Stage children enjoyed independence and choice in their learning and, without close teacher direction, children had worthwhile opportunities to explore and to find things out for themselves. Attitudes to learning were positive throughout the school but, on occasions, students were too passive and challenge was lacking. When given interesting, relevant and challenging tasks, students responded positively and enthusiastically, especially when they were asked to work together. This was particularly evident in drama where students explored issues through dramatic skills and dialogue. Enquiry and research skills and critical thinking were strong features of the best lessons but, in a few cases, opportunities to investigate and solve problems were limited.

Assessment was acceptable overall, with strengths in individual areas. For example, in the Foundation Stage careful observations led to systematic data collection in relation to early learning goals. In the school as a whole, skilled questioning was used to evaluate students' understanding and then to modify teaching. There was a lack of assessment information on the past performance of students for primary teachers to use to track students' progress. However, the current assessment information that was available was well used to analyse attainment and progress. In secondary science and in English assessment processes were well developed and consistently applied so that students had a clear idea of strengths and weaknesses and how to improve. This quality and consistency was also developing in mathematics. However, whilst significant improvement had been made in response to the previous inspection, assessment practices lacked consistency which led to a lack of reliable, whole school data on attainment and progress. The introduction of an information management system was a positive step towards achieving a complete picture of student attainment and progress throughout the school.

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

The quality of the curriculum was good in the Foundation Stage and acceptable in other years. The school broadly followed the structure of the English curriculum. A good range of learning experiences for students was provided up to the end of Year 9, though student numbers restricted the range of courses available after then. Curriculum review was ongoing at both a phase and subject level but lacked a school overview. This resulted in a lack of continuity between phases, but particularly between primary and secondary. Considerable progress had been made in improving the Foundation Stage curriculum over the last year and children were now offered a curriculum in line with the English Early Years Foundation Stage programme. Elements of the International Primary Curriculum had been introduced in early primary years to good effect. These initiatives ensured good links between subjects but these were under-developed in the rest of the school. This meant that students had too few opportunities to grow as creative, critical and analytical thinkers. Appropriate provision was made to ease the transition of students from one stage of education to the next. Children in the Foundation Stage had a 'welcome' afternoon whilst advice regarding course choices and opportunities beyond school was available to secondary students. All students were offered the opportunity

to extend their learning beyond the classroom through an extensive range of extra-curricular activities that catered for a wide range of interests. In addition, camping trips and visits to foreign countries were frequent. Opportunities to bring relevance to learning through links with the community and environment were increasing and determined by curriculum need.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Provision for health and safety was good. All staff understood the importance of maintaining a safe and healthy environment and adhered to established policies and procedures. Efficient arrivals and departures were supervised by caring staff members. Students stated that they felt safe at school. Well maintained buildings, facilities and equipment enhanced the learning environment. Spacious classrooms were clean, colourful and furnished appropriately but some furniture was in need of repair and the narrow, low, uneven passageway between the primary wing and open area was unsafe. A full time nurse and visiting doctor provided good levels of support for students. Comprehensive medical records were continuously updated. Healthy life styles were promoted through the curriculum, after-school activities, school assemblies, and lunch box checks. The canteen offered nutritious food to students. Procedures for evacuation, child protection and distribution of medications were followed.

The quality of support for students was good. Teachers knew each student's personal and academic needs and relationships were good. The student welfare team provided informed academic and sensitive personal advice to students. Students stated that there were many staff members they could speak to if they had a problem. The counsellor organised career guidance activities and also counselled students based on their response to the student questionnaire. Clear behavioural expectations and consequences were implemented in a fair and respectful manner. When behavioural interventions were required, improvement goals were set and students self-evaluated their progress along with daily teacher feedback. Continuous academic tracking was a strong feature in most subjects. Responsible learners tracked their own progress and, when appropriate, improvement goals were set supported by special needs teachers and after school tutoring. However, reporting to parents on student progress was under-developed. Accurate attendance and punctuality records were kept. Daily parent contacts and prompt actions ensured improvement, if levels of attendance fell.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The leadership and management of the school were good. Staff worked with a common sense of purpose and morale was high reflecting the high quality of much of the leadership at both senior and department levels. The strengthened senior leadership team and other staff with management responsibilities had a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Their work over the last year had had a positive impact on most areas of school life, including attainment and progress. The departmental leadership in subjects such as English, science and art was effective in helping the school set appropriately high standards for students.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. A highly effective self-evaluation process took into account the views of students, parents, the governing body as well as the teaching staff. Clear priorities had been established and these were reflected in the school action plan and development plan. The task of developing leadership roles across the school was proceeding well and staff benefited from regular guidance and support to fulfil their roles and responsibilities to a high standard.

The partnerships with parents and the community were acceptable. Links with the community were developing slowly but steps had been taken to try to address some of the communication issues raised by parents. The school was aware that community links needed to be improved and was keen that they should do so.

Governance was good. The governing body played a most constructive role in helping to shape and monitor the school's response to the last inspection's recommendations and shape future plans. Over the last year the governors had developed their quality assurance role effectively. Most governors were also parents which helped the governing body to be sensitive to the needs and concerns of parents.

The staffing, facilities and resources were good, overall. There was sufficient appropriately qualified staff. Expertise in teaching students with additional language learning needs was being developed through focused professional development. Buildings were spacious, attractive, accessible, safe, mostly well-kept, and allowed for flexible seating arrangements. Primary and Foundation Stage rooms provided stimulating learning environments with high quality resources used well to support learning. The primary library provided a comfortable learning space with attractive and appropriate books. Sports facilities and laboratories were well utilised. However, the lack of a designated performing arts space restricted drama teaching. Teaching rooms benefited from electronic whiteboards and Internet access and this enabled the development of enquiry and research skills. The recent increase of learning resources had impacted positively on learning, especially in primary.

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 are the students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post 16
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good

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

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

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

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

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

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post 16
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

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

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

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
Quality of leadership	Good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Acceptable
Governance	Good
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.

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