

# INSPECTION REPORT

## St. Mary's Catholic High School

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Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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## GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT St. Mary's Catholic High School

Location	Oud Metha
Type of school	Private
Website	<a href="http://www.stmarysdubai.com">www.stmarysdubai.com</a>
Telephone	04 3370252
Address	PO Box 52235, Dubai
Principal	Mr. Paul Joseph (Acting)
Curriculum	UK
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	5-19 / Grade 1 to Grade 12
Attendance	Good
Number of students on roll	1,966
Number of Emirati students	4 (less than 1%)
Date of the inspection	Monday 14th to Thursday 17th November 2011

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## The context of the school

St Mary's Catholic High School opened in 1968 and is situated in Oud Metha. The school follows the English National Curriculum and students complete UK examinations as part of their studies. At the time of the inspection there was a total enrolment of 1,966 students, aged five to 19 years. Students were grouped into 66 classes; four to six classes at each year group of the school from Grade 1 to Grade 12. Four students, less than one percent of students, were Emirati. A large range of nationalities were represented among the student population. Those from India were predominant, followed by those from the Philippines, other Asian countries and Pakistan. Approximately three per cent had been identified by the school as having some form of special educational need. All of those students received some learning support from specialised staff in addition to regular classroom support. There were 141 full-time teachers, including the Principal and a senior leadership team. The 130 teachers in the school had appropriate teaching qualifications and were supported by 21 assistants and four Catholic nuns. At the time of the inspection, the Acting Principal had been in post for one year.

## Overall school performance 2011-2012

Acceptable

## How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

St Mary's Catholic High School provided an acceptable quality of education. It had a number of outstanding features. At the post-16 phase these included attainment and progress in mathematics and science as well as students' economic and environmental understanding. The quality of teaching for effective learning was good in the senior school, but acceptable in the primary school. Strong teacher subject knowledge in almost all subjects permitted teachers to effectively address the learning needs of the school's senior students. The ethos of the school was strong and was supported by the good curriculum and quality of support for students.

Since the previous inspection, the school had established a representative Board of Governors, continued to employ an external consultancy group, and provided professional development to all staff members on teaching, learning and assessment. A number of strategies had been introduced to improve the curriculum, specifically in Arabic for additional language learners. The school remained non-compliant in meeting the Ministry of Education requirements in this subject.

## Key strengths

- The outstanding attainment in external examinations in English, mathematics and science;
- The well-behaved, enthusiastic students who were committed to learning and took pride in their school and community;
- Post-16 students' deep understanding of civic, environmental and economic issues;
- The exceptional progress in spoken English which enabled students to communicate effectively across the curriculum.

## Recommendations

- Improve attainment in all key subjects in the primary school and in Arabic across all phases;
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, so that it becomes consistently good across all subjects and phases;
- Align assessment criteria directly to the curriculum so that teachers can track progress effectively and students know their strengths and weaknesses and how to improve;
- Improve the quality of the school's self-review and improvement planning so that initiatives are implemented consistently across the school;
- Ensure that the school is compliant with Ministry of Education requirements for Arabic in all phases of the school.

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

	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
<b>Islamic Education</b>			
<b>Attainment</b>	Good	Good	Good
<b>Progress</b>	Good	Good	Good
<b>Arabic as a first language</b>			
<b>Attainment</b>	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Progress</b>	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Arabic as an additional language</b>			
<b>Attainment</b>	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
<b>Progress</b>	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Not Applicable
<b>English</b>			
<b>Attainment</b>	Acceptable	Good	Not Applicable
<b>Progress</b>	Acceptable	Good	Not Applicable
<b>Mathematics</b>			
<b>Attainment</b>	Acceptable	Good	Outstanding
<b>Progress</b>	Acceptable	Good	Outstanding
<b>Science</b>			
<b>Attainment</b>	Acceptable	Good	Outstanding
<b>Progress</b>	Acceptable	Good	Outstanding

Attainment in Islamic Education was good in all phases of the school. The majority of students could demonstrate attainment above the Ministry of Education expectations in relation to factual knowledge and explaining the Hadeeth of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). Students' skills in extracting rules from Islamic resources, and analysing their meaning, was developing. The majority of students could link their knowledge to their lives and show examples. Attainment in Arabic was acceptable in all phases in Arabic

as a first language. However, in Arabic as an additional language was unsatisfactory in both the primary and secondary phases. Attainment in primary English was acceptable overall. Writing skills were less well developed than other aspects of language. In the secondary years, students' English skills developed rapidly and were good overall with outstanding attainment in GCSE language and literature examinations. In post-16 classes, students demonstrated high level skills in all aspects of English although they did not sit external examinations in the subject. In primary mathematics, number knowledge was acceptable. Most students in Grade 1 were able to identify simple shapes and their features in terms of numbers of corners and sides. By Grade 6 students were using equivalent fractions to solve real life problems. In secondary classes, where attainment was good, and in Post-16 classes, where attainment was outstanding, students could solve challenging calculations, requiring skill in using calculators and mathematical knowledge of order of operations, with accuracy. In primary science classes, where attainment was acceptable, most students attained levels of knowledge, including scientific vocabulary, that were in line with international standards. However, their knowledge was often superficial and learned by rote. They lacked deeper understanding and did not usually learn through direct observation, inquiry, and scientific investigation and experimentation. These skills had improved by the secondary phase, where attainment was good and the post-16 years, where attainment was outstanding.

Students' progress was outstanding in mathematics and science in post-16 classes. It was good in Islamic Education, secondary English, mathematics and science. Progress was acceptable in Arabic as a first language across the school and in primary Arabic as an additional language, but unsatisfactory at the secondary phase. Progress in English, mathematics and science in primary years was acceptable.

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

	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding
Understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture	Good	Good	Good
Civic, economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Outstanding

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good in the primary years and outstanding in the secondary and post-16 years. Almost all students were well-behaved, courteous, sensitive to others' needs and had an excellent work ethic. Relationships between teachers and students in the secondary and post-16 phase were mutually respectful and enhanced students' learning. Older students were encouraged to get involved in a range of leadership roles and they managed them sensitively. Attendance was good across the school.

Students' civic and Islamic understanding was good across all phases of the school. Almost all students had a good understanding and appreciation of Islamic values, such as charity, and how they affected their daily lives. They were knowledgeable about the UAE's heritage and traditions. Students showed an acceptance of other cultures, recognising differences from their own, and were confident about the benefits of the cultural diversity in Dubai.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good in the primary and secondary years and outstanding in the post-16 years. Almost all students were able to describe the reasons for Dubai's economic success and how it had influenced the region. Older students were able to analyse and predict the changes that were currently taking place in the Emirate and identify how they might be affected. Students in the post-16 phase demonstrated an impressive commitment to the environment, taking an active role in the annual fashion show and the conservation project which supported communities in the Philippines.



## How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Good	Good
Assessment	Acceptable	Good	Good

Teaching for effective learning was acceptable in the primary years and good in the secondary and post-16 years. Most teachers had strong subject knowledge, but the extent to which they understood how students learn was variable. It was better in the secondary and post-16 phases than in the primary phase. Primary lesson plans included objectives, activities and expected learning outcomes but they were not always followed effectively to ensure students made the expected progress. In secondary and post-16 lessons, planning was better and a few teachers included appropriate activities, which ensured that the needs of groups and individuals were met more effectively. Time was not always managed well in lessons. The less effective lessons often stopped abruptly, limiting the review of learning. Overall, most lessons were dominated by teachers' talk, which limited inhibited students' involvement and progress. In the better lessons, for example in Islamic Education, teachers interacted well with students through dialogue and open questioning. In a few high quality lessons in the upper secondary and post-16 classes, teachers were true facilitators of learning. Students were expected to be independent, critical thinkers who were able to collaborate and support each other in their learning.

The quality of learning was acceptable in the primary phase, good in secondary classes and outstanding in the post-16 classes. When enabled by their teachers, students collaborated well and often supported each other's learning. However, students did not have enough opportunities to collaborate over a range of learning situations. Most students were enthusiastic learners. Older students took responsibility for their own learning. The application of learning to the real world was variable across the school and better developed at the secondary and post-16 phases than in the primary years. Students made excellent links with other learning in a few high quality learning situations, mainly in mathematics and science in upper grades. Enquiry, research and critical thinking skills were not strong features of learning, but there were

isolated examples throughout the school, which led to better progress. Information and communication technology (ICT) was rarely used by students to support and develop their learning.

Assessment was acceptable in the primary years and good in the secondary and post-16 years. The school carried out regular assessments of students' progress in the key subjects. Analysis of this information was thorough at in the secondary and post-16 phases, which led to changes in teaching. However, in the primary years assessment data was not always aligned to the National Curriculum levels and therefore did not help teachers identify students' strengths and weaknesses. Primary-aged students and their parents had insufficient information about how well they were doing or how to improve. On-going assessment in lessons was a school-wide weakness. In a few more effective lessons, questioning was used well to determine the extent of students' learning. Verbal feedback to students was also under-developed. There were a few examples of useful self-assessment in a minority of lessons. Students' notebooks and regular internal tests were marked but written comments did not give consistent guidance to students on how to improve. In Grades 10 to 12, assessment practices were more consistent and enabled students to evaluate their progress against external examination criteria.

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

	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Good	Good

The curriculum was acceptable at the primary phase and good in the other phases. Senior staff members regularly reviewed the curriculum. They had worked, with some success, to improve key aspects of it. Provision of Arabic had been increased to be in line with Ministry of Education requirements at most but not all primary years and one secondary year group. The time allocated to other subjects was suitably broad and balanced. Teachers were helping students to make links between the different areas of learning. The curriculum was planned well to allow different groups of students to make good progress, but it was not implemented to effectively to meet the learning needs of all students. Skills including research and independent thinking were developed more effectively at the senior stages than in primary classes. Students benefited from a range of activities, including sport and environmental conservation pursuits. Senior students received good advice about moving from school to university, but work experience for them was limited to activities within the school.

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

	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Health and Safety	Good	Good	Good
Quality of Support	Good	Good	Good

Provision for health and safety was good. All areas of the school were clean, well-maintained and checked daily by senior managers. Students knew about keeping safe and behaved in an orderly manner in classrooms and corridors. However, science laboratories were sometimes left unlocked and students did not always use suitable safety equipment when doing science laboratory work. Some areas of the school were very crowded, particularly at break time, which compromised safety. Students' health was rigorously monitored by the school doctor and medical staff. The school followed all of the Ministry of Health guidelines. Healthy lifestyles were encouraged. Students took part in sport and were successful in some inter-school sport matches. Students' emotional and personal wellbeing was given high priority. Students had opportunities to discuss areas of concern in class times or in confidence with their counsellor. There was a child protection and safe-guarding policy in place. Students could also report personal concerns to the school doctor. There was detailed documentation about staff and occupational health checks had been completed. Health and safety responsibilities were included in job descriptions, but training teachers in child protection procedures was at an early stage.

The support provided to students was of good quality across the school. Teachers managed behaviour well and relationships with students were good. There were well organised systems for monitoring students' punctuality and attendance, and this resulted in high attendance. Students received guidance on career choices and university placements. The school encouraged them to attend career fairs with their parents. The school had begun to organise support for students with special educational needs, but it was not fully effective. They were mostly integrated into mainstream classes and learned alongside their peers. Students with physical or sensory disabilities were supported with appropriate equipment, and teachers received advice from specially trained staff. A few students had intensive, individual support on a regular basis either in the classroom or in specialist teaching rooms. This helped them to make more rapid progress. However, in many lessons teachers did not plan to meet students' academic needs effectively, and not all students were making the progress of which they were capable. There were effective procedures in place for monitoring and tracking the behaviour of particular students in the primary phase, which was shared with parents and improved behaviour.

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

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

The leadership of the school was acceptable. The Acting Principal and senior management team were developing a vision of the school that included academic excellence, plus a holistic education based on strong values. The vision was yet to be explicitly shared amongst all stakeholders; consequently, the direction of the school was not clear. Senior managers, heads of departments and leaders of groups had been partially successful in maintaining educational outcomes and in bringing about improvements.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. The school had started to develop comprehensive and detailed self-evaluation procedures. Most staff members were involved. Their views were carefully collated; however the views of parents and students were not incorporated. Consistency of documentation from key subject areas was still required. There was a programme of professional review, however it lacked consistency across all areas of the school, and required greater rigor. There was some progress in addressing the recommendations from the previous inspection report; however, the school was still not compliant with the Ministry of Education requirements for the provision of Arabic in the timetable.

Partnership with parents was acceptable. Parents were supportive of the school and its senior managers. They obtained regular information on matters relating to their children. There were established means of communication. Reporting on student progress was regular, but reports did not give an accurate indication of student's achievements against the curriculum standards. In the primary grades the reports did not give parents sufficient information about strengths and areas requiring improvement.

Governance of the school was acceptable, with a number of improvements having taken place since the last inspection. A broadly representative governing body had been formed and was beginning to establish itself. They had begun to review the performance of the school, but had not ensured that all statutory requirements were met.

Management, including staffing, facilities and resources was acceptable. Most teachers were well qualified and suitably deployed. Resources for learning were acceptable. Libraries were well stocked, although the school council reported that the senior library lacked a sufficient range of age-appropriate modern fiction. The premises were of a good quality and were well maintained, although overcrowding was evident in the girls' section during break times. Throughout the school corridors there were some displays of good quality student work.

## 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	741	51%
	Last year	352	24%
Teachers	81		57%
Students	51		10%

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

Around one half of all parents responded to the survey. Over half of the teachers but only a few students responded to their surveys. Most parents were satisfied with the quality of education available at the school and believed that their children were making good progress in Islamic Education, Arabic for non-Arab students, English, mathematics and science. Parents were less positive in their views of progress in Arabic for native speakers, a lack of extra-curricular activities, and a lack of effective involvement in the work of the school. Teachers were positive in their views of the school and indicated that inspection had led to improvements. The students were positive in almost all aspects of the school. Concern over lack of extra-curricular activities was noted by more than half of the students. In addition, concern over instruction in Arabic for Arab-speaking students and the desire that leaders to listen to their opinions about the school were raised.

## 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](mailto: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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