

Cambridge International School Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Year 13

Report published May 2010

Contents

Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report	2
Basic information about the school.....	2
How well does the school perform overall?.....	3
Key features of the school	4
Recommendations.....	4
How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?.....	5
How good is the students' personal and social development?.....	6
How good are the teaching and learning?	7
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?.....	8
How well does the school protect and support students?	8
How good are the leadership and management of the school?.....	9
Summary of inspection judgements	11
Next Steps.....	15
How to contact us.....	15

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.

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

Basic information about the school

Located in Al Garhoud, Cambridge International School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Foundation Stage to Year 13, aged three to 18 years. The school follows an English curriculum. The school's Vice-Principal was out of the country at the time of the inspection, replaced by a consultant seconded from the proprietor. At the time of the inspection, there were 2,140 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Parents had a positive view about the school and almost all thought their children liked the school and were making good progress in English. Strong confidence was expressed in their children's progress in the key subjects, though a few parents felt that their children were not making sufficient progress in Arabic. Parents agreed that behaviour was good and that their children were encouraged to work hard.

How well does the school perform overall?

The Cambridge International School provided a good quality of education for students. It fulfilled much of its promise to parents. Attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic had improved since the previous inspection and were acceptable throughout the school. Attainment and progress in English, mathematics and science were outstanding in secondary and at the post-16 stage in mathematics. There had been significant progress in areas identified as requiring improvement at the time of the last inspection and the school recognised that further improvement in teaching and learning methods were required. In lessons, students' progress was uneven, particularly in the Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2, where many teachers had not fully understood the methods required for the English curriculum. There was evidence, however, that the school's major training drive had led to improved teaching quality across other sections of the school and that the basis existed for further improvement. Most students were well-behaved in classes and around the school, and confident and courteous towards both staff and visitors. They related well to each other and to staff, although a few older students complained that their views tended to be ignored. Students were knowledgeable and well informed about Dubai, its Islamic values, economy and its place in the region and wider world.

The quality of teaching and learning in secondary and post-16 was good. In the Foundation Stage and primary phase it varied considerably, though it had improved since the previous inspection and was continuing to improve. At its best, it was challenging and interesting, but there remained a minority of lessons which were unsatisfactory because they lacked variety or provided too little opportunity for students to express themselves at length or go beyond the repetition of prescribed information. The school had improved assessment arrangements and had introduced more effective ways to analyse data and identify strengths and weakness in relation to individuals, groups and subjects. This had given the school a largely realistic view of existing standards of attainment. The school offered a well-planned and well coordinated curriculum, which was broad, balanced and extended by a comprehensive range of extra-curricular activities. It was highly inclusive, in welcoming students with learning difficulties and physical disabilities and providing good support for them. Its strongest features included the range of vocational options available between Years 9 and 13, including the newly introduced BTEC in Business. For the older students, the range of opportunities for them to be involved in projects in the community and the wider world, for example, by helping children in Mauritius, had an invaluable influence on their development as young adults. Pastoral arrangements to support students operated well in the lower part of the school, but did not consistently provide the individual support needed by certain students, and only a few older students were able to identify adults to whom they would turn with a personal problem. The school took due care regarding health and safety, although the time taken for fire evacuation was too long. The procedures for child protection and safer staff recruitment were known to staff but they lacked sufficient written procedure and guidance.

The school was strongly and effectively governed and its school's leadership at all levels was energetic and innovative. Leadership had been very effective in moving the school forward. Good progress had been made in improving assessment and monitoring. Some improvement had been made in the quality of teaching and learning in Foundation Stage and early primary phase and the basis for further improvement was in place. The quality of Islamic Education and Arabic remained a key challenge for the school.

Key features of the school

- Strong and innovative leadership at all levels;
- Confident, mature and well-educated young people with a good understanding of Dubai, its Islamic values and economy;
- The good and outstanding attainment and progress in secondary and post-16 phases in English, mathematics and science;
- Students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic required improvement and teaching strategies in these lessons were not sufficiently varied to fully meet the needs of all students;
- Cambridge International was an inclusive school that effectively supported students with both learning difficulties and physical disabilities;
- The arrangements for supporting, guiding and protecting individual students were under developed.

Recommendations

- Improve attainment and progress in Islamic Education and ensure that teachers:
 - are not over- reliant on standard text books;
 - employ a wider variety of teaching resources and strategies;
 - engage students in discussion and reflection about how Islam applies to their own lives;
 - extend and improve the recitation of verses from The Holy Qur'an.
- Improve attainment and progress in Arabic by making sure that teachers;
 - use Arabic as the language of instruction as much as possible and as early as possible;
 - raise expectations for students' progress in writing and reading;
 - provide more opportunities for students to converse in Arabic.
- Continue to improve attainment and progress in Foundation Stage and primary phase by further developing teachers' understanding of the English National Curriculum and appropriate approaches to learning;

- Improve the effectiveness of school's arrangements for pastoral care and guidance, seeking ways to give students, especially older students, a stronger and more effective voice;
- Embed systematic written procedures and guidance for child protection and safer arrangements for staff recruitment.

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

The attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable. Throughout the school most students had consistently achieved in line with age-related expectations. In a minority of lessons, however, particularly in the primary phase, students did not consistently demonstrate and explore their understanding. Most students had a sound knowledge of The Holy Qur'an and an appropriate grasp of the principles of Islam and of their duties in their daily lives. For example, girls in a Year 11 class discussed the role of women in Islam with informed maturity. A few students could recite and read verses of The Holy Qur'an clearly and accurately and most students successfully memorised and recited verses with correct pronunciation.

Students' attainment and progress in Arabic were acceptable overall and most achieved in line with age-related expectations. Arabic speakers, as they progressed through the school, were able to read, write, speak and understand with increasing fluency, and demonstrated a growing mastery of correct grammar. Additional language learners of Arabic acquired sufficient knowledge of Arabic to succeed in the set tests and were able, increasingly, to speak and respond to words and short phrases. The majority of older students could answer simple questions confidently. In the junior classes, students could read simple words while secondary students could read more complex text. Most students could complete grammatical exercises efficiently. However, they did not write creatively and often used English as a means of communicating their ideas.

In English, attainment was acceptable in Foundation Stage and primary phase, outstanding in secondary and good at post-16. In the Foundation Stage and earlier part of primary, levels of attainment had improved since the previous inspection. Children made acceptable progress to secure a solid platform in literacy in Foundation Stage. Good progress through primary ensured that students could use advanced reading skills to enjoy a wide range of books. In the secondary phase, progress was outstanding for all groups, including those for whom English was an additional language. Students, particularly girls, were highly articulate and older students expressed complex ideas with clarity and conviction. Students were avid readers and wrote well with a good understanding of the grammar of English. Their analytical writing was often sophisticated and provided the foundation for the good progress made at post-16.

Attainment and progress in mathematics in the primary phase were good and in secondary and post-16, outstanding. In Foundation Stage, attainment was good but progress acceptable. Examination results at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 were above age-related expectations, though only a few students were achieving at the higher levels. International General Certificate of Education (IGCSE) and Advanced level results were well above international benchmarks and the trend in IGCSE over the last six years was upwards. Throughout the school, students used and applied numbers with confidence; this was a particular strength among the older students, where students were often adept at manipulating scientific equations in science or interpreting graphs in business studies. However, at all stages, students lacked confidence solving mathematical problems.

Attainment and progress in science at Foundation Stage were acceptable and students made acceptable progress through primary so that, by Year 6, students gained above average results in assessments. However, while their scientific knowledge was strong, their understanding of scientific thinking was inconsistent. In secondary and post-16, attainment was outstanding in IGCSE and Advanced level examinations. Students at the secondary and post-16 stages made good progress as they moved through the school, acquiring secure foundations in their subject knowledge and skills, enabling them to pursue their IGCSE and Advanced level courses with confidence. For example, in a Year 12 chemistry lesson, students showed a ready knowledge and application of chemical bonds.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good. At their different levels, they took their work seriously and were eager to take part in school life. They responded well to the many opportunities to take responsibility for others. In Year 12, students regularly and conscientiously supported learners in Years 1 and 2 as part of their community service. Prefects approached their roles with great maturity. Behaviour was good in the open areas of the school and in most lessons, except where teachers' management of behaviour was weak. Students were unfailingly polite and friendly to staff and to visitors and showed themselves to be both confident and well behaved. Relationships between students and staff were good in primary and in most respects in secondary. A few older students were concerned at what they saw as the lack of an effective student voice despite the regular meetings of the school council. Attendance was acceptable in all year groups.

Students responded well to the many opportunities offered by the school to develop their civic understanding. All had some knowledge of Dubai's multicultural society, and they appreciated and benefited from local traditions and cultures. They had good knowledge of the requirements of the Islamic faith and, concerned by the experiences of people less fortunate than themselves, raised significant funds for charity.

Students were well informed about Dubai's economic history. For example, a group of students confidently named the leaders of each of the Emirates, and the recent slowdown in construction projects and understood well the basis for Dubai's development and their part in it. However, although they know the main features of these developments they were less informed about their impact on the global environment. Students took care of their immediate environment by, for example, clearing up litter or recycling paper.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was acceptable in Foundation Stage and primary phase and good in secondary and post-16. The good teaching at the later stages of the school helped students to develop their knowledge and skills and challenged reflection and critical evaluation. For example, in a Year 12 English lesson, scholarly teaching helped students to extend their understanding of dramatic irony in relation to a scene from Twelfth Night. The teaching was at its weakest in Islamic Education and Arabic and in Foundation Stage and the early years of primary, where many teachers were prescriptive in their approaches. The school was aware of this and was providing intensive professional development for teachers to support and improve their teaching, particularly in relation to teaching the English National Curriculum.

Learning was good throughout the school. Students were highly motivated, almost invariably well behaved in lessons and were keen to succeed. As they moved up the school, they took increasing responsibility for their own learning. Students' learning was often improved in lessons by opportunities for discussion or reflection. In a Year 10 biology lesson on the parts of the eye, for example, students gained from being involved in a lively question and answer session.

Arrangements for assessment had improved since the last inspection and were now acceptable. The school had developed more rigorous procedures for assessing and tracking students' progress. Management were using data with increasing effectiveness to identify trends and steer priorities for improvement. Profiling was becoming well established in Foundation Stage. The increased use of objective testing for analysing and predicting students' performance in key subjects throughout the school had helped to focus teachers more on what students needed to do to improve. Students were aware of their targets and took them seriously. Marking was good and often, though not always, included helpful guidance on further improvement. Teachers were aware of the academic progress of students but did not always take sufficient account of assessment information in their planning and teaching to help to extend the more able students or support those who were struggling.

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

The curriculum throughout the school met the educational needs of all the students well in most respects. The blend between the English National Curriculum with Islamic Education and Arabic had a clear rationale and provided a secure framework for a broad and balanced education, leading to increasing opportunities for individual choice at IGCSE and then in post-16. As at the last inspection, students' experience was extended by a comprehensive range of sporting, academic and recreational activities. The school had been offering an increasing wide range of vocational courses to IGCSE and Advanced level and had just introduced a BTEC course, which was proving very popular with students. Management had systematically reviewed the core curriculum areas and effectively pinpointed priorities for improvement, especially in secondary and post-16. An innovative structure was in place to coordinate the management of key subjects across the school, ensuring smooth transitions and curricular continuity and progression. Processes were also in place, across the school, to ensure curriculum continuity and progression. Good practice was exemplified in mathematics, where the Year 7 curriculum had been streamlined in light of the learning that had taken place in Year 6, allowing a greater breadth to be added to the curriculum. Curriculum areas in the Foundation Stage were effectively linked together and transitions to primary were becoming well established. Links with the community were especially strong in the secondary and post-16 phases of the school, through schemes like 'Clean up Dubai', and all classes made use of local resources to enhance learning.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements for students' health and safety in the school were acceptable. Medical records were maintained well. The premises were kept secure from intrusion and were safe and in good order. Fire drills were carried out and relevant training provided for all of the school community. However, evacuation times were high and no clear fire evacuation notices were displayed. School transport arrangements were efficient, carefully managed and recorded. Staff were aware of the need to protect the welfare of students, but were not sufficiently supported in this by systems and guidance. For example, there was no policy for welfare and child protection in the school policy handbook, or guidance in the staff handbook. The school's recruitment checks were carried out in accordance with policies laid down by the proprietor but had not been translated into rigorous procedure for safe recruitment. The school promoted healthy lifestyles but did not provide enough information on healthy eating options or provide a suitably healthy range of items for purchase in the canteens. Physical activities and regular exercise were promoted in the curriculum and steps were taken to ensure that all students took part.

Support for students was acceptable. Arrangements for pastoral care were in place, with heads of years in primary and form tutors in secondary, and teachers knew their students well. However, older students felt they could not readily identify an individual to whom they could turn for support and guidance. An acceptable level of guidance on further education and career paths was provided, often supported by subject coordinators, well-connected with higher education. Most staff handled behaviour issues efficiently. Academic tracking systems were in place to ensure the school knew their students as well as possible. The school managed attendance and punctuality effectively.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership and management was good. The senior leadership team had been re-organised since the last inspection with revised and clear definition of roles and responsibilities. These fully reflected the vision of a single all-through school, with a common sense of direction, evident in the school's action and improvement plans. The school leaders had been able to combine the innovative development of vocational education post-16 with action to raise standards and the quality of teaching. These priorities had been effectively communicated and were becoming embedded in the school. Evidence from lessons showed improvement since the last inspection. Accountability systems were well developed and all senior leaders were clear in their understanding of implementing policy to practical effect.

Since the previous year, the school had markedly improved its ability to recognise its strengths and weaknesses, through the increasingly sophisticated analysis of data and through systematic monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning, accompanied by very good professional development. The school had made good progress in addressing many of the issues raised in the previous report and had demonstrated the capacity to improve further.

Partnerships with parents and the community were good. Regular reports on students' learning provided parents with clear information about the progress of their children, and were supplemented by weekly parent forums led by the Principal. Parents were largely supportive of the school and had established a Friends and Family of Cambridge International School organisation, which the senior leadership and governors of the school were working to involve in the strategic management of the school. Strong community links had been established so that students were well-informed about their potential contribution to Dubai and the wider world.

The quality of governance was good. Positive influences on leadership, management and the role of the teachers and parents in raising standards were evident. Governors have effectively supported the senior leadership through its improvement agenda arising from the last report. Clear accountability structures were in place for all staff which were practical and attainable.

The school had acceptable levels and quality of staff, facilities and resources. Most teaching staff were suitably qualified and deployed and the school had been taking effective steps to make sure that any without teaching qualifications or experience of the English curriculum received suitable further training. The premises, despite significant limitations in its size and adaptability to conditions, were acceptable. However, some classrooms were at times overcrowded. Adequate resources were available to support the curriculum.

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	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

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

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

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Good	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	Good	Good	Good	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good

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

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

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

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	Good
Governance	Good
Staffing, facilities and resources	Acceptable

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.

Copyright 2010

This report is for internal use only and for the self-evaluation purposes of the school. It should not be used for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement.