

**Raffles International School**  
**(South Campus)**  
**Inspection Report**  
**Kindergarten to Grade 9**

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.

Raffles International School (South Campus) was inspected in November 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 Suqeim, Raffles International School (South Campus) is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 4, and for girls only from Grade 5 to 9, ages four to 14 years. The school followed a UK curriculum. The school was organised into three phases; Kindergarten, junior and middle/high. At the time of the inspection, there were 417 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 the on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Parents were very positive in their views of the school. Most agreed that their children liked school and made good progress. They reported that their children were encouraged to work hard and to become independent and responsible. The highest proportion of negative responses referred to how well the school informed parents of the progress their children made, and how they could help them. A few parents responded that they did not feel comfortable about approaching the school with a question or complaint, and that the school was not good at consulting them about decisions affecting their children. Many parents wrote comments and these were, in the main, concerned with the provision for Islamic Education and Arabic. Inspection evidence found that teaching was good and that students made good progress in these subjects. Parents also expressed concerns about the safety of students in the parking area at the beginning and end of the day.

## How well does the school perform overall?

Raffles International School South provided, overall, an acceptable quality of education for students. Its aims and mission were clear and it fulfilled well its promise to develop a holistic education in an international setting. The promise to help all students achieve their potential was not yet fully realised. Students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education and in Arabic were good. Second language Arabic learners, many in the early years of learning the language, were developing a good command of the language. For non-Arab Muslims the study of The Holy Qur'an helped them to gain a better understanding of the Arabic language. All children in KG were introduced to Arabic culture as part of their everyday learning. Attainment and progress in English were good across all stages of the school. Many students were second language English speakers and, by the time they reached the high school, they could express themselves fluently and with confidence. For those students joining the school with limited English, the effective language support team ensured they quickly developed a sufficient grasp of the language to fully take part in lessons. Attainment and progress in mathematics and in science were good in the KG and acceptable in the rest of the school. Children's ability to count and identify numbers of objects was above the expected level for their ages. In science, students were not given enough opportunities to find things out for themselves and to apply their knowledge. Students' attitude to school showed itself in mature and responsible behaviour at all times. However, there was a small minority of students who did not arrive on time and often there was a lack of urgency in moving to the next lesson. Although students could speak about the importance of limiting the effects of global warming and the poor state of cleanliness of the beaches, they were less knowledgeable about the current economy of Dubai and how they might contribute to its growth. They had responded to appeals to raise funds for charity but they did little to initiate activities on their own.

Teachers knew their subjects well and students appreciated their willingness and patience in explaining work and providing them with extra support. Learning, however, was not as good as teaching. Students did have enough opportunity within the school day to explore and find things out for themselves, particularly through the use of information and communication technology (ICT). The school had reviewed the curriculum it offered and had adopted the UK-based Cambridge model. This was proving to be more suitable for the international student body. In the middle and high school, students claimed that their choice of subjects for International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) was restricted because of the small numbers and they regretted the lack of music and drama to give greater breadth to their studies. The care and support for students' well-being was given a high priority by the staff and procedures were in place to support this. However, although there were several sources of information about students' academic and personal development, there was no overview held by the school management to track this and ensure that all students reached their full potential.

The school had begun to deal with the recommendations from the previous inspection by putting in place procedures and policies. These included a common approach to lesson observation for teacher performance appraisal. The teaching complement had increased significantly and, while there were induction arrangements, new teachers had not yet been included in the lesson observation schedule. There were weaknesses in the senior leadership team, and there was not a good match between professional competencies and roles and responsibilities. Subject leadership in the middle and high school remained unsatisfactory. The school's capacity for further improvement was acceptable.

### Key features of the school

- The celebration of Islam and the Arabic language through students' good progress;
- The excellent start to children's schooling in KG;
- The responsible behaviour of students in lessons and around the school;
- The warmth and trust in the relationships between staff and students.

### Recommendations

- Collate and then analyse all the information collected from the assessment of students' performance;
- Track students' attainment and progress across all subjects, together with their personal development and use this information to generate targets and specific actions for improvement;
- Improve the quality of students' learning and their ability to think critically;
- Provide more opportunities for the students to investigate and research independently, particularly through the use of ICT;
- Collate the evaluation of students' performance, stakeholder views and monitoring of all aspects of the school's performance and use this information to identify strengths and weaknesses and to prioritise the next steps of school improvement.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good throughout the school. Almost all students were able to read and recite The Holy Qur'an accurately with correct pronunciation. Junior students knew the five daily prayers and their different times. They also knew the five pillars of Islam. Middle and high school students understood the importance of the belief in their life and were able to understand key beliefs. They knew the qualities of a good Muslim as one who performs his or her obligations. However, only a few students could link the Islamic values taught with their daily lives.

Overall, students' attainment and progress in Arabic were good. Students could discuss and express themselves confidently. In all grades students' listening skills were good. They understood the instructions of their teachers and responded well to them. Middle and high school students had good knowledge of grammar and could write about a variety of topics, applying the rules of grammar correctly, including paragraphing. Most students' reading skills were good. Their skills in extended writing, however, were underdeveloped and younger students could only write a few short sentences.

In English, attainment and progress at all stages were good. Students listened respectfully to teachers and one another. Most children in KG were able to conduct informal conversations in English during paired work. However, junior, middle and high school students engaged only infrequently in class discussions; when they did so they responded with clarity and confidence. Middle school students presented research projects orally on literary genres and high school students discussed setting and characterisation. Students read aloud with varied fluency. Students at all levels wrote accurate factual responses to their teachers' and workbook questions. At all grades, students wrote creatively, using correct punctuation and grammar.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were good in the KG and acceptable in the rest of the school. Children in KG had a secure understanding of numbers to 10 and they could count objects and match totals to written numbers. They could also identify simple shapes. In the junior school, students' knowledge of number and shape was in line with their ages. Students were proficient in arithmetic but the majority did not have a good understanding of the underlying principles. In both the junior and high school, many students had difficulty in solving problems and applying mathematics to new situations. Students' skills in algebra were in line with the expectations for their age.

Students' attainment and progress in science were acceptable. In KG children's attainment and progress were good. Children could identify plants and name animals. Students in the junior school applied their knowledge effectively, which was in line with school and international benchmarks. Students were able to discuss the different stages in the life cycles of plants and animals. Students in the middle and high school knew the reactions between metals and acids and, with guidance, could produce different compounds. Students' ability to link their knowledge to the real world was not so well developed. Students could recall scientific information but they were less accomplished in finding things out for themselves.

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

Attitudes and behaviour of students throughout the school were good. Students spoke positively about student-staff relationships and said that their teachers provided the help and guidance they needed. All students felt safe. However, older students said they wanted more opportunities to be helpful to younger students. Attendance in the last term was acceptable.

Students' civic understanding and appreciation of their culture and of Islamic traditions was acceptable at all stages of the school. They understood their civic responsibilities in school, but could offer few details about what roles they could play in their community in the future. Middle and high school students had a basic knowledge of Islam. They were knowledgeable about Islamic principles but offered few details about the role of Islam in their daily lives. Skilful artwork and colourful displays throughout the school were evidence of students' appreciation of local traditions and culture.

Economic and environmental understanding was acceptable. Junior students could make comparisons between Dubai and other countries where they had lived. They discussed the Burj Khalifa, the Metro and the desert. Older students had limited knowledge about industries and the economy in Dubai, although they were able to identify the eventual shortage of oil as one economic factor. They all recognised their responsibilities in improving the environment; junior students spoke with enthusiasm about all of the ways they could help in conservation. All students identified the recent beach clean-up project as an important event in raising their awareness of environmental issues.

## How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was outstanding in KG and good throughout the rest of the school. In KG, teachers used their very good knowledge of how children learn to plan effective learning experiences. The other teachers used their professional knowledge well to plan lessons. However, only a few teachers explained clearly at the beginning of each lesson what they expected students to learn by the end of that lesson. Students generally used a satisfactory range of resources, with the exception of ICT. Teachers engaged students well in lessons and they regularly checked their recall of knowledge. They did not consistently ask questions to probe students' understanding and extend their thinking. In the KG and in a minority of other classes, teachers used good approaches to meet the learning needs of students.

The quality of children's learning was good in KG and acceptable in the rest of the school. Almost all children in KG could work independently for concentrated periods and took responsibility for looking after their own resources. At all stages of the school, students had a positive attitude to learning. They could recall earlier work and explain what they were doing. Only a few students were aware of their strengths in learning and what they needed to do to improve. They did little practical work and often did not apply their learning to the real world. Students had few opportunities to carry out investigations and explore new topics. They usually worked as a class or individually and they had little experience of taking different roles in groups. Students did not often demonstrate creativity or advanced thinking skills such as analysis or critical evaluation.

The quality of assessment was outstanding in KG and acceptable in the rest of the school. All teachers in KG analysed their written observations of children and planned the next day's activities for each child. In the junior school and high school, teachers were building a profile of students' attainment in key areas of the curriculum and they used this information to plan learning and report to parents. Teachers in the junior, middle and high school marked individual students' work but did not provide sufficient written feedback. The quality of oral feedback varied and, as a consequence, most students did not have a good idea of their strengths and what they needed to do to improve.

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

The KG provided outstanding opportunities for children to learn and grow in the early years of their schooling. The integration of the areas of learning, including Arabic culture, combined with individual programmes based on rigorous assessments ensured that every child reached his or her full potential. In the remainder of the school, the curriculum provided an acceptable level of challenge and a broad range of subjects. It was enriched by opportunities to pursue personal interests or receive remedial teaching in the after-school activities. However, in the middle and high school, choices of subjects were restricted by the small class sizes. For example, all five students in Grade 9 were obliged to follow the same IGCSE course. An acceptable level of progression across school phases was achieved by teachers noting the requirements, preparing and following up to ensure that students did not miss important knowledge. For example, Grade 8 teachers were mindful of IGCSE demands when planning their schemes of work. Although the curriculum was kept under review on a weekly basis in the junior school, a whole-school evaluation of the effectiveness of what was offered had not yet taken place. A strong feature of the curriculum was the way subject coordinators had chosen topics and texts to reflect the international nature of the school within the context of Dubai. As was noted during the previous inspection, the high quality of students' art displayed around the school was very strongly influenced by the buildings and sights of Dubai. Field trips and visitors into school from among the parent and local community were part of the schemes of work that supported students' education and understanding of the world. Cross-curricular links were explored by many teachers and English was developed across all subjects. However,

students' access to ICT was only available in a dedicated suite and not identified as a tool for learning across various subjects.

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

The quality of health and safety provision was outstanding. Regular safety checks were carried out and good security arrangements were in place. Evacuation procedures and fire drills were practised every term, with the school having regard for the advice of the Civil Defence authorities. High quality record keeping was in place and medicines were securely stored. Students' welfare was regarded as paramount with excellent procedures in place to monitor health matters. All members of staff were caring towards students and made excellent arrangements for their welfare. The school nurse, counsellor and teaching staff were readily accessible. The nurse held sessions about health matters, especially healthy life choices, and had made presentations on healthy eating. The nurse liaised with the catering staff on suitable menu options. Transport arrangements were well monitored and organised. A senior member of staff was responsible for child protection and all staff understood the process.

The quality of support for students was outstanding in the KG and acceptable in junior, middle and high schools. Staff-student relations were outstanding across the school. Students had ready access to all staff. Tracking of students' academic progress was not fully in place and the detailed information that teachers had for their classes was not coordinated at a whole school level. Teachers assessed students' work but few gave detailed guidance on what each individual student knew and needed to learn next. Behaviour was generally excellent and was managed well by the school. The management of attendance and punctuality was acceptable.

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

The quality of leadership was acceptable. The professional competence of leaders across the phases of the school was varied. There were significant weaknesses at the senior level, where leaders did not have a realistic view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The good practice seen in leadership of the KG and middle years was not shared across the whole school. All staff members were committed to the key aims and mission of the school, in particular the importance and value of its international qualities. Arrangements for performance management of teachers were in place, but not all teachers, including those new this term, had been observed. Subject leadership in the middle and high schools was still linked to the Raffles West campus and it remained unsatisfactory.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were unsatisfactory. Information about students' performance was not collated and analysed in order to provide a firm basis for school improvement. The school had taken the recommendations from the previous inspection and these formed the basis of a development plan. However, measures used to determine the success of the plan did not show how they would improve students' attainment and progress. The evaluations from lesson observations had not been analysed. The school had collected a lot of data but these were not analysed in order to provide a realistic view of the strengths and weaknesses.

Partnership with parents and the community was good. Parents reported productive communication links between teachers and parents, particularly at the KG level. All cited receiving information through email, texting and the school newsletter. Parents were informed about their children's academic programs, and agreed that teachers gave them information on strengthening learning. Although there was no parent representative group, parents said there was a process in place to address concerns and there was general satisfaction with it. Parents agreed that their children in KG and the junior school were receiving a good education, but they were less certain in the middle and high schools.

Governance of the school was acceptable. The governing board provided strategic direction and the aims and mission of the school were shared with other schools in the organisation. The international character of the school was closely guarded, supported by an admissions policy limiting the proportion of any one nationality. The school was held accountable to the governing board through the performance management of the Principal. However, there were weaknesses in ensuring that all senior leaders discharged their duties adequately. The governing board regularly sought parents' views and there were plans to develop more formal representation from stakeholders.

Overall, the management of staffing, facilities and resources was good. There were sufficient qualified teachers, all of whom had good command of their subjects. All staff members were effectively deployed, but teachers' assistants were not always effective in helping students learn. The quality of classrooms and specialist accommodation, together with the grounds, was outstanding. The spaciousness and functionality of the premises provided an excellent educational environment. However, ICT facilities within classrooms were generally limited to one laptop computer and there was insufficient integration of ICT across different subjects.

## 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:	Kindergarten	Junior	Middle High
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Junior	Middle High
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Junior	Middle High
Attainment	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Junior	Middle High
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Junior	Middle High
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good is the students' personal and social development?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Junior	Middle High
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are teaching and learning?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Junior	Middle High
Teaching for effective learning	Outstanding	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Outstanding	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Junior	Middle High
Curriculum quality	Outstanding	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Junior	Middle High
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of support	Outstanding	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

How well does the school perform overall?
Acceptable

## 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](mailto:inspection@khda.gov.ae).

More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at [www.khda.gov.ae](http://www.khda.gov.ae).

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