

# INSPECTION REPORT

## Sharjah American International school

Report published in April 2013

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

## GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Sharjah American International school

Location	Al Warqa'a
Type of school	Private
Website	www.saisdubai.net
Telephone	04-2801111
Address	P O Box 74455, Dubai
Principal	Nadine Tarazi
Curriculum	US
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades	3-18 / Kindergarten 1 to Grade 12
Attendance	Acceptable
Number of students on roll	1,253
Largest nationality group of Students	Emirati
Number of Emirati students	461 (37%)
Date of the inspection	7th to 10th January 2013

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## The context of the school

Sharjah American International School is situated in Al Warqaa. It opened in September 2005. At the time of the inspection, the school had a roll of 1,253 students, aged from three to 18 years. This was an increase of 258 since the previous inspection. Around 30 nationalities were represented by the student body. Students were divided into four phases: Kindergarten, elementary, middle and high school.

The school followed a US curriculum derived from several sources. Students were expected to complete the US Student Aptitude Test (SAT) at the end of the high school. Only around half of the Grade 12 students actually completed the SAT in the previous session.

Staff numbers had increased and there were now 119 teachers, including the Principal and the senior leadership team. All teachers in the school had appropriate teaching qualifications. They were supported by 25 teaching assistants. Students were grouped in 54 classes, 12 of which were in Kindergarten. From Grade 5, boys and girls were educated in separate classes. The number of Emirati students had risen by 150 in the school year and there were now 461 students (37 per cent) on roll. The Principal had been in post since the opening of the school. A third of the teachers were in their first year of teaching in the school. The school prospectus highlighted the fact that the teachers were native English speakers. In fact, only 15 were nationals of English-speaking countries.

## Overall school performance 2012-2013

Acceptable

### Key strengths

- Students' good attainment and progress in English, mathematics and science in the middle and high school;
- Students' good behaviour, their respect for others, positive attitude to learning and the warm and caring relationships between students and staff;
- The improvement in additional support for students with special educational needs;
- The development of students' communication skills where English was an additional language;
- Steps taken by the Principal and subject leaders to provide teachers with professional development, including good induction procedures.

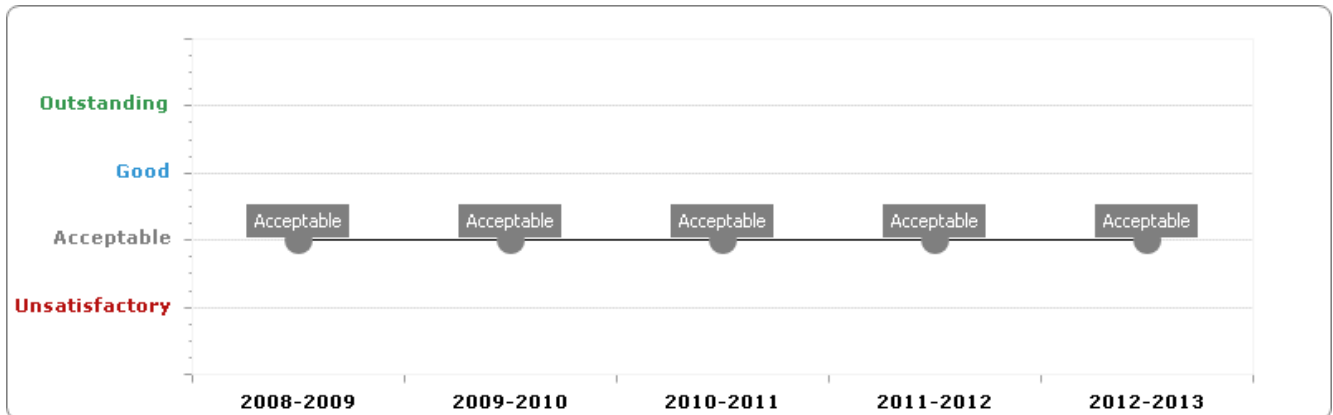
### Recommendations

- Improve the quality of learning and teaching in Kindergarten and early elementary by ensuring children have more opportunities for learning through exploration, investigation and play;
- Identify and share best practice to ensure students experience consistently high quality teaching;
- Develop a rigorous assessment system that enables students' attainment and progress in key subjects to be tracked successfully and measured against international standards relevant to a US curriculum;
- Use information from assessments to impact on future lesson planning and to inform students and their parents of students' next steps in learning;
- Ensure more effective links between co-ordinators and heads of department to enable students' learning to be developed systematically across the curriculum;
- Implement plans to involve parents more extensively in the work of the Governing Body, as stated in previous reports.

## Progress since the last inspection

- Good steps had been taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning through staff training but the large number of new staff meant that there remained work to be done to ensure consistency in students' learning experiences;
- Arrangements were now in place for the teaching of Arabic as a first language to all Arab nationals;
- The school had not succeeded enough in ensuring that teachers used assessment results systematically to direct lesson planning and to determine the next steps in learning;
- Good progress had been made in developing additional support for students with special educational needs, including the appointment of several new staff with relevant specific remits;
- Little had been done to involve parents more extensively in the work of the Governing Body, but the Principal now had plans to address this.

## Trend of overall performance



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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
<b>Islamic Education</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Progress</b>	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Arabic as a first language</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Progress</b>	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Arabic as an additional language</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Progress</b>	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>English</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good
<b>Progress</b>	Good	Acceptable	Good	Good
<b>Mathematics</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good
<b>Progress</b>	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good
<b>Science</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good
<b>Progress</b>	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	Good
Understanding of Islamic values and local, cultural and global awareness	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good
Community and environmental responsibility	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)



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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and Safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of Support	Good	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

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

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

[Read paragraph](#)

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

Students' attainment in key subjects in Kindergarten and elementary were acceptable, with the exception of Arabic as a first language in elementary, which was good. In Kindergarten, attainment was restricted by limited opportunities to learn actively through planned play. In the middle and high school phases, attainment was acceptable in Islamic Education, and Arabic, both as a first language and as an additional language. It was good in English, mathematics and science. Particular strengths were students' knowledge in elementary of the five pillars, Islamic values and morals. In Arabic, students' listening skills were the strongest skills across the school and writing skills were weakest. In English, most middle and high school students were skilled in classroom discussions and written work. Elementary students did have enough opportunities to use their spoken and written English across subjects. In mathematics, most high school students were working above the levels expected for their age. In Kindergarten, children had learned some science skills but had few opportunities to develop these further through exploration. In the middle and high schools, students' demonstrated an improved rate of acquisition of scientific skills and knowledge.

Students' progress in the key subjects varied across each phase. It had improved in English in the middle school and in science in the middle and high schools since the last inspection. However, progress in Arabic as a first language in the high school and in mathematics and science in the Kindergarten had regressed to acceptable. In the Kindergarten, for example, children were not developing their basic skills enough through investigative play. Students with special educational needs made acceptable progress across the curriculum, except in science where they made good progress due to motivational tasks and relevant support.

[View judgements](#)

## How well does the school provide for Emirati students?

Emirati students' attainment and progress were acceptable overall and good in science. The majority of students entered the school with low levels of English. This restricted their ability to learn other subjects until they had acquired sufficient command of English to engage meaningfully in lessons. Children in Kindergarten made good progress in their acquisition of language and learned by listening carefully to teachers and other children who spoke English. As students progressed through the school, they were increasingly able to access the curriculum. A few Emirati students who have studied and lived abroad did not have sufficient Arabic language skills. The school had recently created additional classes to help these students work together to make appropriate progress. Attendance was acceptable but in the Kindergarten and for a few senior boys this remained an issue which disrupted their learning. Most engaged in lessons

well but the work ethic of a few was weaker than that of their peers, as was their application to homework activities. Reports on progress to parents were regular. In common with all students, teachers' feedback to Emirati students on their written work was poor and did not give them an understanding of how to improve their work. Preparation for higher education and career paths was good. The Governing Body contained Emirati parents but it was not representative of the school's parent body. An increased number of Emirati parents were choosing the school for their children's education.

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

Attitudes and behaviour were good across all phases of the school. Most students demonstrated self-reliance, displayed positive attitudes and behaviour, and showed respect to other students, teachers and staff. Most students chose to eat healthy foods during break and to exercise regularly. Attendance during the last semester was good overall, but during the inspection week, immediately after a holiday break, it was acceptable, except in high school where it was unsatisfactory. Most students had a good understanding of Islamic values, and showed an appreciation of the relevance of those values to life in Dubai and elsewhere in the UAE. They were respectful to others. Students were able to talk about local traditions, recognised their importance to modern society and celebrated these enthusiastically. They embraced and valued the multi-cultural life of Dubai, which students said helped them to understand cultures in other parts of the world. Students understood their responsibilities in the school, undertaking tasks such as monitoring the hallways with care. They carried out projects where they interviewed people from other countries who live in Dubai, learned of other cultures for International Day, and explored through literature how to be friendly to people away from their homelands. Students showed care and consideration for others through various charity initiatives. They had a positive work ethic, and made independent decisions. Most students took part in activities and projects related to the environment or conservation, while a few groups took on tasks to maintain the school environment. One class had explored the concept of global warming and conservation through research and a field visit.

[View judgements](#)

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

Teaching was good in elementary, middle and high schools. It was acceptable in Kindergarten because not all teachers demonstrated an understanding of how young children learn. Although teaching in the elementary phase was good overall, there were some weaknesses that were, in some part, due to the

high turnover of staff. Almost all teachers had good subject knowledge and this was used well in many classes to ask students challenging questions. This aided the development of critical thinking skills and was particularly evident in English, mathematics, and science in the high school. Lesson planning was closely allied to the curriculum and contained learning objectives and differentiated activities. However, appropriate work for students' different levels of ability was not always delivered in a minority of the lessons observed. Teaching seen in art and physical education was acceptable and good in French and accountancy. The teaching of Islamic Education and Arabic as a first and as an additional language was good in the elementary school. It was acceptable in the rest of the school because teachers had lower expectations of what the students could achieve.

Learning was good in the elementary, middle and high schools. It was acceptable in the Kindergarten because children had limited opportunities to develop their independent learning skills through investigation and exploration. Too many lessons were over directed. In the middle and high schools, most students took the many opportunities given to assume responsibility for their own learning. This good practice included students preparing science laboratory reports, analysing literature in English and taking the lead in learning in mathematics. In other subjects, the quality of learning was variable. For example, learning in art and physical education was only acceptable because there was a lack of focus on the development of skills. Learning in Islamic Education and Arabic as a first and as an additional language was good in elementary and acceptable in middle and high schools. In the higher grades, students had little opportunity to learn independently. Almost all students developed good relationships with teachers and each other. This contributed significantly to their enthusiasm for learning.

Assessment was acceptable across the school. Staff had developed some robust systems for monitoring the attainment of students against internal benchmarks. However, this did not measure students' attainment and progress in key subjects against international standards relevant to a US curriculum. Assessment was not a daily part of learning from a student perspective in the majority of lessons and assessment to support learning was not widely used. Consequently, students were not given enough opportunity to understand their next steps in learning or how to improve. There were a few good examples where students maintained assessment records, which indicated their current status and outlined what needed to be done for success. Students' involvement in self- and peer-assessment was underdeveloped. Correction of students' written work was inconsistent in quality and rarely informed students how to improve. There were several good examples where students were given very helpful feedback comments, notably in English in the middle and high schools.

[View judgements](#)

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

The quality of the curriculum was good across all phases of the school. It was aligned with Ministry of Education (MoE) standards in Arabic and Islamic Education and with common core state standards in English and mathematics, but did not align with state standards of any one of the United States for the other subjects. The curriculum was soundly planned and generally was broad and balanced. However, creative arts courses and time in physical education classes were limited. Progression and continuity were supported by detailed curriculum maps and unit plans in most subjects. Transition arrangements between the Kindergarten, elementary, middle, and high school phases of the school were adequate but underdeveloped. The curriculum was reviewed regularly and updated. It was planned to meet the needs of almost all students and was interesting. Cross-curricular links and extra-curricular activities, including field trips and projects, enhanced students' learning.

[View judgements](#)

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

Provision to ensure students' health and safety was good across the school. An appropriate range of health and safety policies were in place. Supervisory responsibilities had been clearly delegated to specific staff members. A written child protection policy was in place and shared with appropriate personnel. The organisation of the school buses exiting and entering the school campus ensured that students were safe from traffic. Regular emergency evacuation drills had been carried out and results were recorded. The school nurse kept detailed records on students requiring specific care as well as daily health room activities. Healthy living was promoted well within the school. The food served in the school canteen was generally nutritious and purchased by the students.

The quality of support had improved and was good across the school. There were good behaviour management systems in place. Staff-student relationships were very positive. Monitoring students' well-being and personal development was managed diligently by the co-ordinators who knew each of the students in their care exceptionally well. Students valued the care that was afforded them. There was good advice and guidance for students. Robust systems were in place to ensure students attended regularly and arrived punctually.

[View judgements](#)

## How well does the school provide for students with special educational needs?

The school had an open admissions policy for students with special educational needs. Improved systems had been developed which enabled students' individual needs to be accurately identified. Under the guidance of the experienced co-ordinator, the support team was able to monitor the progress of students. The support provided by the team was not as well established in Islamic Education and Arabic as in other subject areas. Individual education plans were user-friendly, comprehensive and, where necessary, the curriculum was modified appropriately. Across the school, acceptable progress was made by students with special educational needs.

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

Leadership of the school was good. The Principal provided her staff with a clear direction for school improvement and teachers, and parents held her in high regard. She gave her senior leaders good opportunities to contribute to school developments through distributed leadership. Senior leaders had clear job descriptions. However, they were not consistent enough in monitoring students' classroom experiences and progress throughout the school. The senior management team demonstrated a good capacity to improve.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good overall. Classroom observation of teachers, annual surveys of students and parents, as well as meetings of student representatives helped to identify aspects for improvement. Evaluation of data concerning student performance did not consistently impact on future lesson planning or classroom practice. The school used mainly internal tests to track students' progress but comparison against international standards was lacking. Student self- and peer- evaluation were limited. The school's self-evaluation report was detailed but not accurate in several aspects.

Partnerships with parents and the community were good. Parents received termly progress reports about their child and most took advantage of several opportunities each year to meet formally with teachers. Parents were not always sure about what their child's next steps in learning were or how they could support them. The school operated an 'open-door' policy and many parents availed themselves of this to meet with staff to discuss their child. Parents were very supportive of the school. They were encouraged by staff to volunteer to assist in many ways. The school website provided a good method of communication with families. Good community links were in place.

Governance was acceptable. The Governing Body, which also had responsibility for overseeing the work of another school, and the Education Board each provided the school with strategic overview, direction and support to implement initiatives. However, parents at the school had no formal forum for their representatives to inform decisions made or to raise issues for consideration. The Principal was now considering how best to ensure appropriate parental involvement in the decision-making processes.

Management, staffing, facilities and resources were good. Management of most aspects of the school's procedures and routines was good, although the early departure from classes by younger students for transport home disrupted teaching and learning. Staff were suitably qualified and had access to some good professional development. High-quality and well-maintained premises provided an appropriate learning environment. Display of students' work to support and extend learning was strong at the early years but weaker in the middle and high schools. Resources, including a well-stocked library, met students' learning needs.

[View judgements](#)

## 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	65	9%
	Last year	98	16%
Teachers	45		39%
Students	27		14%

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

A minority of students and parents responded to the survey. Most parents said their child enjoyed school. Almost all students and parents thought that the quality of teaching and learning at the school was good and that students were safe and well looked after in school. The majority of students and parents thought that students' behaviour was good. Most students felt that they were making good progress in their learning. Over a fifth of students and parents felt that students were not actively involved sufficiently in community projects in Dubai. A third of parents wanted better home-school communications and a third of students and parents did not feel sufficiently involved in the decision-making processes regarding the school. Most teachers felt that inspection had led to school improvement and almost all said that the school was well led.



## 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)

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