

Al Mawakeb – Al Barsha Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 12

Report published May 2010

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Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report

Outstanding – exceptionally high quality of performance or practice.

Good – the expected level of quality for every school in Dubai.

Acceptable – the minimum level of acceptability required for Dubai. All key aspects of performance and practice in every school should meet or exceed this level.

Unsatisfactory – quality not yet at the level acceptable for schools in Dubai. Schools will be expected to take urgent measures to improve the quality of any aspect of their performance or practice that is judged at this level.

Al Mawakeb School in Al Barsha 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 Al Barsha, Al Mawakeb is a private school providing education for boys and girls, Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 12, from ages three to 18 years. The school follows an American curriculum. There were 2,496 students enrolled at the time of the inspection. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. From the responses received, it was clear that both parents and children felt positive about Al Mawakeb School. Additionally, most respondents believed that student behaviour was generally good and a majority believed the staff cared about the well-being of their children. Despite efforts by the school, a minority of parents reported that they did not know how the school responded to the previous inspection. A major area of concern from parents was regarding the limited range of additional extra-curricular activities for all students. Students also voiced this concern.

How well does the school perform overall?

Overall, Al Mawakeb Al Barsha provided an acceptable quality of education. Student attainment and progress in key subjects were mostly acceptable across the school. Attainment and progress in Arabic in certain stages of the school and in mathematics and science in the high school, were good. Attainment and progress in science in the KG were unsatisfactory. The

students' personal and social development was good overall. Attitudes and behaviour were mostly good with acceptable behaviour in elementary. Students showed acceptable cultural and civic understanding in KG and elementary and older students had a good understanding of these aspects and a well-developed appreciation and understanding of Islam. There was a similar picture in the quality of students' economic and environmental understanding throughout the school.

Teaching was acceptable across all grade levels, although it was mainly teacher directed and textbook driven. Similarly, learning and assessment were acceptable overall, despite inconsistencies and a lack of opportunities for learning beyond the textbook. The Al Mawakeb curriculum was acceptable with the exception of KG, which was unsatisfactory and failed to meet the needs of young children. However, the overall curriculum was too narrow and sometimes lacked engaging activities designed to meet the needs of the range of learners. The arrangements for protection and support for students were good with all staff taking their duty of care seriously. This was noted by parents in surveys and interviews to be a feature of the school. Arrangements to ensure health and safety were good across the school but acceptable in KG, where supervision at break times needed improvement. Records relating to health and safety were well kept and acted upon and the school promoted healthy lifestyles through a range of activities. Staff were aware of child protection arrangements. The quality of support for students was good and reflected in positive staff-student relationships and effective advice and guidance.

The quality of leadership and management of the school was acceptable in all aspects. The team were committed to the care and welfare of the students but the monitoring of teaching and learning and the use of student data to improve attainment was inconsistent. The school had made acceptable progress in addressing recommendations from the previous inspection and notable progress had been made in the inclusion of parent representation on the governing body. The school enjoyed a positive partnership with parents but could still involve parents more effectively in the evaluation of the school, which also lacked the involvement of all staff. The staffing, facilities and resources were also acceptable with appropriate premises and resources for learning as well as suitably qualified staff. Whilst older students had access to laptops there was a lack of information and communication technology (ICT) resources throughout the rest of the school. Although adequate, other resources were not used effectively to support learning and this was particularly apparent in KG and in lower elementary classes.

Key features of the school

- Teachers had good subject knowledge;
- The four clinics and full time doctor provided comprehensive health care;
- Staff and students were proud of their school;
- Good protection and support of the student's overall well-being was a priority for almost all staff;
- Opportunities were given to senior students to take up leadership roles within the school;
- Language acquisition in French and English in the early stages was effective;
- The lack of cross-curricular options limited student achievement;
- Leadership had an evolving awareness of how to manage high priority initiatives but failed to include staff and parents in school improvement;
- Attainment and progress in KG science were unsatisfactory and the KG curriculum did not meet the needs of young children.

Recommendations

- Raise attainment in key subjects in line with international expectations;
- Develop teaching strategies to meet the needs of all students, including students with special educational needs and the more able learners, through work in the classroom which is matched to their learning needs;
- Devise a framework to support curriculum continuity and progression and meet the needs of all students;
- Review the KG curriculum and its delivery to ensure there are meaningful learning experiences for young children such as imaginative and inquiry-based learning;
- Improve the support and tracking of students' academic progress and relate the findings to school improvement;
- Ensure all staff are engaged fully with the development of the school and ensure that parent representation on the governing board of Al Mawakeb - Al Barsha leads to their effective involvement in accountability and improvement planning.

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

Overall attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable across the school. Most Grade 1 students knew the five prayers and the number of sessions in each one. Grade 4 students knew the conditions that make prayer invalid, whilst Grade 6 students had acceptable knowledge about the life of Prophet Moses. Students also made links between the Qur'anic text and understood ways they could help within the community. Most Grade 7 students were able to evaluate each other's prayer and suggest corrections. In Grade 8, students knew the istikharah prayer to be used when making a decision. Grade 12 students had acceptable understanding of human rights in Islam.

Attainment and progress in Arabic were good in the elementary school and acceptable in the rest of the school. Kindergarten students acquired a good inventory of words, phrases and short sentences. Grade 1 students could distinguish between short and long vowels whilst most Grade 2 students could read and write short sentences. Grade 3 students were able to read a short paragraph and deduce the main idea. Grade 4 and 5 students were able to distinguish between the nominal and verbal sentences and their standards in reading and dictation were often good. Students in Grade 6 understood stories and could identify their main elements clearly. Grade 9 students had limited ability to analyse text. In higher grades, students were able to divide poetic stanzas into the correct meter. Grade 12 students could identify narration within a poem.

At KG, overall attainment in English was acceptable and progress was good. From Grades 1 to Grades 12, attainment and progress were acceptable. In Grades 1 to 8, attainment levels were inconsistent across grades. In Grades 9 to 12, a few students attained well. Reading and listening skills were acceptable overall. Speaking required further development across all stages. A significant number of students had poor skills in extended writing, spelling and grammar. By the end of KG, most children could understand instructions and use language in a range of activities and games. By the end of Grade 8, the majority of students were confident in listening and reading. By the end of secondary stages, many students were able to make confident oral presentations and discuss literature.

The students' progress and attainment in mathematics were acceptable from KG to Grade 8 and good in Grades 9 to 12. In KG, children could identify patterns and put numbers in order. At the elementary level, students mastered the basic operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. They also made progress in developing skills in shape, space, measurement and handling data. At the middle-school level, they could work with variables and solve equations and inequalities, word problems and real-life applications of mathematics. At the high-school level, they mastered real-life applications and problem solving through algebra, geometry, trigonometry, probability and statistics and calculus.

Attainment and progress in science in KG were unsatisfactory. Although children learned facts about science, they made little progress in discovering and exploring through their senses. In the elementary and middle phase, attainment and progress in science were acceptable whilst in the secondary phase, both were good. In the elementary phase, student attainment and progress were limited. In Grades 6 to 8, students made acceptable progress in understanding the function of the heart and the respiratory system. Students in Grades 9 to 12 knew a range of scientific facts and vocabulary and understood various processes and principles within specialist science subjects. Overall, in lessons where students had opportunities to learn through investigation, their understanding of science in the real world was good.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good throughout the school apart from Grades 6 to 8 where they were acceptable, due to teachers' inconsistent expectations. In most lessons, however, relationships were positive and students demonstrated mature behaviour. Most students were developing a range of personal skills and self-confidence and felt safe and valued by the school. Attendance was good. In Grades 9 to 12, students were developing a sense of responsibility and approached the management with ideas for events and activities. Student council meetings offered them some sense of contributing to the life of the school. However, there were too few opportunities for all students to show responsibility.

The school encouraged a broad awareness of Islamic festivals and events and non-Muslim students demonstrated a basic knowledge of Islam and respect for its beliefs. Students were aware of the multi-cultural character of Dubai's society and felt that everyone was equal and equally respected. They retained a clear awareness of their own national identity but understood the importance of local heritage to the people of the UAE.

Students had a basic awareness of how Dubai had developed. They could describe some of the important aspects of Dubai's economy and discuss, in simple terms, the place of Dubai in the global economy together with some of the effects of the recent world financial crisis. They were less sure of their own potential role in contributing to Dubai's future. Students had an acceptable level of awareness of a range of environmental issues, both local and global, such as pollution and water conservation.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Overall, teaching and learning were acceptable in all phases. However, learning in the KG was over-dominated by adults and children rarely had the opportunity to work independently. Opportunities were missed to build on children's early development in writing. Where open questions were used by teachers to promote thinking, this resulted in KG children giving more than one word responses. However, this was insufficiently widespread. Throughout the school, a few teacher-student interactions were of high quality and included the use of effective dialogue and questions. This was particularly the case in English, where there were a few examples of high expectations of students especially in high school classes. In the elementary, middle and high school phases, teachers often had good subject knowledge but did not always have a good understanding of how students learn and how to meet the needs of the full range of learners. Teaching was often textbook-based and there was a lack of variety in activities in many classes resulting in students lacking sufficient involvement in their learning. In the primary phase, lessons were usually teacher-led with students sitting for long periods answering questions or completing written exercises with limited opportunity for exploration and independent learning, this was especially the case in science. Overall, the teaching strategies did not encourage active learning and the development of students' independence as learners. Teaching strategies failed in too many cases to meet the needs of all students, including, in particular, students with special educational needs and the more able learners.

Assessment was acceptable in Grades 1 to 12, but unsatisfactory in KG. Regular testing provided overall assessment data for each student and year group. However, this was not yet compared with external standards. Staff did not use ongoing assessment to develop learning and teaching. A few teachers knew their students well but this knowledge was not consistent across the school. Constructive oral or written feedback was inconsistent and students were not clear about how well they were doing or what they needed to do to improve. There was limited evidence of self- or peer-assessment by students. Test data were not generally well used to modify work because of the pressure to cover the syllabus in key subjects. Problem solving was used effectively in Grades 9 to 12 as a means to assess progress over time.

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

The curriculum was acceptable, overall. However, the curriculum in KG was unsatisfactory. The rationale for the KG curriculum was characterised by a tri-lingual approach to language acquisition. It did not systematically seek to develop a broad and balanced range of learning experiences. There were too few imaginative, expressive and enquiry-based learning opportunities. The syllabus used was narrow in focus and did not promote language acquisition consistently across the three languages used. An excessive amount of time was spent in KG on non-instructional activities. Curricular review did not identify the needs of all KG learners. Throughout the rest of the school, there was a better understanding of the curriculum as everything the school taught and not just a syllabus. Curriculum review had begun to impact on the range of teaching strategies used. In the key subjects, teachers had introduced non-textbook based activities that engaged the learners meaningfully. Music, practical scientific experiences, in both the laboratory and classroom, and problem-solving activities were all used effectively in some parts of the school to enhance the curriculum. No significant gaps in content existed but the range of subject choices was limited and cross-curricular links were poor. Clubs in school time helped to extend and enrich student learning. However, after school activities were too limited and not accessible to all students. Students had organised a wide range of charity events and field trips were undertaken at all grade levels. However, the impact of trips on learning was not clear.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The quality of protection provided to students was acceptable in KG and good in Grades 1 to 12. Conscientious guards monitored the external gates and all members of the school population felt, and were, secure. However, the lack of effective supervision of KG children during break time and in toilets was a health and safety risk. The building and outdoor facilities were clean play areas but were littered after breaks. A full-time doctor and two full-time nurses ensured good medical care. The nurses kept accurate health records and communicated well with parents, making referrals to Dubai Community Health Centre as necessary. Health records and medication were kept in locked cabinets. A newly created written emergency evacuation plan was in place and evacuations had taken place in some parts of the school with the cooperation of the local authorities. The buses were tracked by satellite and each bus had an adult monitor who ensured student safety. The boarding of buses was efficient but too many students, including KG children, did not wear seatbelts.

The quality of support provided to students was good. The staff-student relationships were positive and the students felt free to approach their teachers and the co-directors if they needed support in school. Students received advice and guidance relative to college application and placement from the guidance counsellor. Students' concerns, needs and questions were usually dealt with effectively. On that rare occasion when serious student misbehaviour occurred, the parents were immediately contacted and involved in the resolution. Tracking and supporting students' overall academic progress were not consistent throughout the school. Student attendance was good and managed well. However, a large number of students arrived late to school.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of the leadership and management was acceptable. All members of the leadership and management team demonstrated a high degree of care and respect for students, which was appreciated by parents. There was inconsistent use of student data to enhance teaching and learning and inform school evaluation and improvement. Although this was apparent in some curricular areas, it was not a school-wide practice.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable and had resulted in an action plan being created and presented to staff. However, the lack of whole school involvement in this process rendered it an administrative exercise rather than a real means to bring about improvement. The lack of a comprehensive system for capturing data and tracking progress meant that the leadership did not have a clear idea of areas for improvement or the impact of developments on students' outcomes. Similarly, the lack of a systematic programme of professional development and sharing of good practice meant that teachers relied too heavily on the textbook and lacked a range of teaching strategies. Acceptable progress had been made in addressing the recommendations from the previous inspection. For example, there were plans to involve parents in a proposed Advisory Council and the school self-evaluation and improvement planning process.

The school's partnership with parents was acceptable but links with the community were lacking. The relationship with parents remained strong as expressed in parent interviews and survey responses. Parents were highly supportive of the school and the leadership team. The parents saw the school as having an 'open door' policy. The website provided parents with access to school announcements and other items of importance to their students. Parents expressed satisfaction with the amount of communication from the school and felt engaged when appropriate. Communication with parents was effectively achieved through various means such as SMS; face-to-face, in the case of concerns or issues with behaviour or learning, by circular or letter, and through group meetings. Parents and students expressed a desire for more extra-curricular activities as well as more opportunities to learn outside of the school environment.

Governance was acceptable due to the plans and agreement of the existing board to widen its membership to include representatives from the parent community from January 2010. It is important that this decision is developed to include representatives from the parent body of the Al Barsha School.

Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable. Staff were suitably qualified and appropriately deployed. However, the understanding of KG teachers of how young children learn was limited. Premises were clean and facilities adequate. Resources for learning were also acceptable but often these were not used effectively to support learning. This was especially so in KG. Information and communication technology resources were not accessible to all students to support and develop learning.

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	Elementary	Middle	High School
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:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High School
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

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

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

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

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High School
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

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

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

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.

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