

INSPECTION REPORT

American School of Dubai

Report published in April, 2014

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT American School of Dubai

Location	Al Barsha
Type of school	Private
Website	www.asdubai.org
Telephone	04-3950005
Address	P O Box 71188, Dubai
Principal	Dr. Brent Mutsch
Curriculum	US
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	4-18 / Kindergarten 1-Grade 12
Attendance	Outstanding
Number of students on roll	1654
Largest nationality group of students	US
Number of Emirati students	less than 1%
Date of the inspection	17th to 20th March 2014

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The context of the school

The American School of Dubai is located in Al Barsha. It was operated by Dubai Petroleum Company from 1966 until 2004 when ownership was transferred to a not-for-profit foundation. The technologically advanced buildings were completed in 2010. There are three buildings housing the Kindergarten, elementary, middle and high school sections, in addition to specialist areas. The school had 1,654 students at the time of inspection, representing 55 nationalities. Seventy-five per cent of the students were from the United States and Canada. Emirati students comprised less than one per cent of the student population.

The school offers a US curriculum. It does not provide the required Ministry of Education (MoE) curriculum of Islamic Education for Muslim students or Arabic for Arab students. Student progress was judged utilizing numerous assessments, including but not limited to the SATs, PSATs, Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), Advancement Placement (AP) examinations and Developmental Reading Assessments (DRA),.

The school had an American configuration with Kindergarten 1 and 2, the elementary school with Grades 1 to 5, the middle school with Grades 6 to 8, and the high school serving students in Grades 9 to 12. Each school was served by student counselors, a Principal and at least one Associate Principal. Nearly all teachers were well qualified and most were experienced in teaching a US curriculum.

Overall school performance 2013-2014

Good

Key strengths

- Outstanding student performance in a range of high-level external examinations;
- The exemplary learning skills, including strong motivation and engagement, of students across the school;
- Students' outstanding levels of personal and social development;
- Outstanding levels of partnership between parents and the school.

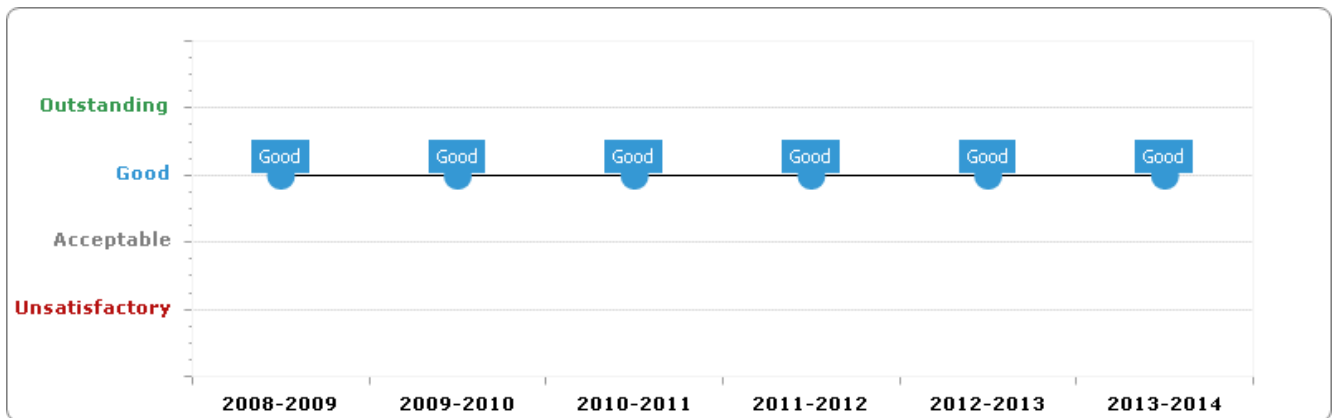
Recommendations

- The Governing Board and school leaders should urgently ensure compliance with the MoE requirements for Islamic Education for Muslim students and for Arabic instruction for Arab students.
- Leaders should provide increased supervision and guidance for teachers to promote consistency of high quality teaching.
- Improve teachers' awareness of how to make adaptations to their teaching in order to meet the needs of all students, including those with special education needs.
- Use externally validated assessments to moderate the school's own assessments and to give staff, the students and their parents, a realistic view of students' attainment in an international context.

Progress since the last inspection

- The school had taken no steps to ensure compliance with MoE regulations regarding the teaching of Islamic Education for Muslim students, as stated in the previous inspection report.
- The school remained non-compliant with MoE requirements regarding the teaching of Arabic as a first language and Arabic as an additional language.
- Although the school had provided professional development to teachers regarding teaching methodology, there remained inconsistency in the quality of teaching.

Trend of overall performance



How good are the students' attainment progress and learning skills?

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Islamic Education				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Arabic as a first language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Arabic as an additional language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
English				
Attainment	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Progress	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Mathematics				
Attainment	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Progress	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Science				
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Outstanding
Progress	Good	Good	Good	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Quality of students' learning skills	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Personal responsibility	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Students' understanding of Islamic values and their local, cultural and global awareness	Good	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Community and environmental responsibility	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Outstanding	Outstanding	Good	Good
Curriculum design to meet the individual needs of students	Good	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

[Read paragraph](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and Safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
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
Parents and the community	Outstanding
Governance	Acceptable
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the students' attainment and progress?

In Islamic Education, students' attainment across all phases was unsatisfactory. Students' knowledge and understanding of key principles and values of Islam were well below the expected level due to the lack of provision for the subject in the school. Similarly, the school did not provide a dedicated curriculum aimed at meeting the needs of students in Arabic as first language and their attainment was below the expectations of the MoE curriculum in all aspects of the language. In Arabic as an additional language, students' attainment was acceptable in the elementary phase and unsatisfactory elsewhere because the school does not provide for mandatory enrolment of students in Grades 6-9. Students recognised and understood an appropriate range of vocabulary but their ability to use what they had learnt to communicate was less developed. Attainment in English was outstanding in all phases. Almost all students had developed very good skills in all aspects of literacy. From Kindergarten onwards, they read widely for pleasure, although their attainment in external examinations in English literature was not consistently strong. Attainment in mathematics was also outstanding across the school. Kindergarten children showed strong numeracy skills. They counted, used manipulatives and found number patterns. Elementary students used enquiry well and had strong problem solving abilities, while older students were skilled in using a range of strategies to analyse and apply what they were learning. Attainment in science was outstanding in the high school and good elsewhere, and all groups of students achieved similarly well. Students, especially the oldest ones, demonstrated a high level of knowledge and investigative skills.

The quality of students' progress in all subjects was exactly the same as their attainment. They made little or no progress in Islamic Education and Arabic as a first language. In Arabic as an additional language, elementary students made acceptable progress in learning simple words and phrases, and in developing listening skills. Older students were less successful. Progress in English was swift, from the acquisition of early reading skills to higher order reading and speaking. However, some older students did not reach their potential in the appreciation of literary texts. In mathematics, Kindergarten and elementary students were motivated to learn and easily made connections between new information and mathematical concepts learned earlier. They used prediction well to increase their accuracy. Most high school students were performing at levels significantly above expectations in external examinations. In science, elementary and middle school students made good progress in knowledge acquisition and application of skills. High school students improved performance on external assessments and showed an increased ability to employ science and mathematics to analyse social and geopolitical issues.

[View judgements](#)

Quality of students' learning skills

Students at all levels had outstanding learning skills. They had a strong sense of personal responsibility and demonstrated an enthusiasm for learning that resulted in successful outcomes. They were persistent learners who were not defeated by failure. Through reflection, they ensured a sustained improvement in their work. They collaborated very well with other students to compare and contrast ideas, as well as to secure outcomes. They were also comfortable working independently. They frequently made connections to other curricula and made real world applications from their new knowledge. They used many resources, including information and communication technology (ICT), as research and explorative tools to dig deeply into their projects. They were skilled at designing experiments to test their hypotheses. They applied critical thinking skills and, as they progressed through the school, developed a wide range of learning strategies.

[View judgements](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' personal responsibility was exemplary across all phases. Students displayed positive attitudes towards learning. They demonstrated responsibility and a strong sense of self-reliance, and thrived on critical feedback. Students across all phases showed respectful attitudes and high levels of maturity. They had positive relationships with other students, teachers and staff. Students demonstrated good understanding of healthy living and took part in various activities that promoted health and fitness. The overall attendance was good.

Students in Kindergarten and the elementary phase had a good understanding of Islamic values and showed how these values impacted on everyday life in Dubai. They had good appreciation of the UAE culture and heritage. This was less evident amongst the middle and high school students who made limited links between Islamic values and their local community. Students across all phases were positive about their personal life experience in Dubai. Most students demonstrated good awareness and appreciation of global cultures, including the cultures of student's within the school.

Students across phases displayed an outstanding sense of responsibility towards the school and local communities. They were actively involved in school and student initiated projects with social and environmental causes. They had an excellent work ethic and were aware and engaged in different acts of environmental responsibility.

[View judgements](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

The quality of teaching was outstanding in the Kindergarten and good in the other phases. Teachers had deep understanding of their subject matter. They mostly prepared quality lessons that provided sufficient depth and breadth of challenge and expectation of students. Lessons were strongly based on the curriculum standards and required students to review their progress at regular intervals. Teachers interacted with their students well to ensure that their lessons were meaningful and relevant. A wide variety of supplemental materials were used by teachers to facilitate student learning and, frequently, students had to use ICT to access them. Lesson strategies varied from classroom to classroom; teaching was most consistent in the Kindergarten. Almost all lessons involved the use of inquiry learning that encouraged students to explore real world applications for their new knowledge.

The quality of assessment was outstanding in all phases. Individual student learning was regularly, objectively and comprehensively assessed across the school. Assessment included international benchmark data, standardised tests, student self-assessments and teacher evaluations. Teachers monitored student progress efficiently using these data, and an online tracking system provided an overview of individual students' performance. This information was made available to both students and parents. However, the implications of some assessment findings were not always used to inform curricular provision for certain groups of students. Teachers supported students through regular feedback aimed at highlighting their areas of potential growth and optimising their learning outcomes. The student-led conferences provided a worthwhile opportunity for them to discuss their achievements with their parents and they facilitated student mentoring.

[View judgements](#)

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

The curriculum was outstanding in Kindergarten and the elementary phase, and good in the middle and high schools. The structure of the curriculum, its breadth and the wide and varied enrichment opportunities, electives and extra-curricular activities were very good. Students were given opportunities to develop athletic strengths, artistic talents, academic challenges and leadership skills through the full curriculum. It used the US Common Core state standards in mathematics and English, and American Education Reaches Out (AERO) for science. The curriculum did not include Islamic Education and Arabic as a first language, and so failed to meet the needs of a significant number of students. Similarly, the provision for Arabic as an additional language was not extended to Grade 9. Careful planning by teams of teachers ensured the best practices for collaborative teaching and learning took place in the elementary school. Transition arrangements were carefully considered.

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Curriculum design was good in Kindergarten, but unsatisfactory elsewhere. Although the curriculum was very well planned to meet US requirements, it was not modified to meet the requirements of the society in which the school operated. A significant number, about one third, of students did not have their needs met with regard to provision for Islamic Education. Arabic was offered as an elective, rather than as a compulsory subject, at middle and high school. However, other options within the mainstream curriculum were extensive. Most teachers knew their students well and many adapted the curriculum to fit different learning needs. While there was provision to meet the special needs of some students, the curriculum was not inclusive and essentially catered for the able.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety arrangements were outstanding. The school campus was safe and secure, contributing to a positive learning environment. Policies and procedures were well considered, detailed and clearly understood, with routines set in place for fire, evacuation, maintenance, health and student supervision. Transportation arrangements for buses strictly followed safety requirements. Arrivals and departures by car largely followed set routines. The premises were clean, orderly and aesthetically pleasing. Athletic fields and play areas were designed with safety features. Fire and lock-down drills took place regularly. A medical team provided care both within the school day and after hours at sporting events, and supported health education for all students. Child protection policies were clearly set, and counsellors in each section of the school provided guidance, care and support.

The quality of support was good. There was, throughout the school, an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. Relationships between students and staff were very good, and between students they were tolerant and supportive. While incidents of unacceptable behaviour were rare, structures were in place to take firm action if necessary. Teachers kept accurate records of attendance. Admission procedures were not fully inclusive. Students with special educational needs were identified after referral by teachers or parents, and appropriate action taken. However, not all teachers were aware of the students so identified, nor were they fully aware of appropriate adaptations to their teaching approach in order to cater for their needs. The specialised support team did not liaise effectively enough with their colleagues.

Counsellors provided high quality support, both social and emotional, when necessary. Students received very good guidance for life beyond school and for their continuing education.

[View judgements](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership was good. Senior leaders were highly qualified and had demonstrated the capacity to make significant improvements. For example, they had provided teachers significant professional development in English literacy, mathematics and teaching of Arabic. Leaders had also arranged teacher participation in a workshop on best practices in curriculum development. Leaders implemented a planning process to develop a strategic improvement plan well aligned with the school's vision. Roles and responsibilities of subject co-ordinators were not well defined, which limited those leaders' effectiveness in improving the quality of teaching. Leaders' observations of lessons to provide guidance to teachers were relatively few in number.

The school's improvement planning included extensive data gathering and analysis. Results of international assessments of student progress were used to evaluate the need for changes in curriculum and teaching practices. The school systematically gathered the views of staff and parents regarding the school's quality of service and the improvements needed. Leaders, together with the governing board, engaged the school community in the development of a long-range and visionary improvement plan. The school had implemented a manageable number of key initiatives successfully but it had not made significant progress regarding the improvement recommendations from the previous report. Compliance issues concerning the teaching of Islamic Education and Arabic had not been addressed. Although the school had provided professional development to teachers on teaching methodology, there remained inconsistency in the quality of teaching.

The quality of partnership with parents was outstanding, resulting in productive support for student progress. Parents were enthusiastic supporters of the school, and many volunteered to serve on committees and as project volunteers. Communication between school and home was excellent. Parents frequently received emailed bulletins. Reporting of student progress was based on attainment of specific standards and commonly included steps students could take for improvement. Parents could access information about the school on the school's website, where they could also see their child's test scores and grades on homework. The school collected parents' views through surveys and through parent participation on committees. Parents reported that school leaders listened well to their concerns and took appropriate action. The school had many productive links to the greater Dubai community.

A seven-member governing board had strong parent representation. The board actively monitored the school's needs and improvement activities, and held leaders accountable for the school's performance. It worked collaboratively with leaders in the development of improvement plans. The board provided ample resources for the school. The board had not taken action to meet the statutory requirements to provide Islamic Education to Muslim students and students whose first language was Arabic.

The school's routines and procedures were effective and efficient. Nearly all staff were well qualified, appropriately experienced and well deployed. The school's attractive, modern building was well designed for learning activities. The library contained a wide variety of materials for independent research. Classrooms were well supplied with high-quality equipment and materials, including ICT.

[View judgements](#)

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

Provision for students with special educational needs (SEN) was effective although, in practice, the school did not deliver a comprehensive programme. The learning support team was experienced and very well qualified. There were specialists for each phase, together with an involvement in Kindergarten. The team conducted direct observations of the youngest children to assess their levels of developmental readiness. In addition, teacher and parental referrals ensured that action was taken as soon as issues were identified. The team produced suitably detailed student action plans. These plans identified the individual educational programmes needed for students. They advised their colleagues on appropriate classroom techniques in addition to withdrawing some students for individual or small group tuition. The school viewed parents as partners and provided them with the results of any tests. Parents frequently met teachers to discuss their child's progress. The school had not fully developed a system to support the gifted and talented students, or indeed accurately to identify them. Although the school claimed not to modify the curriculum, adjustments were made in order to accommodate students with SEN. In the high school, support classes appeared as a non-departmental elective option. These courses did not carry any credits. Overall, provision to support students was uneven. In some classes, teachers provided differentiated work and materials while, in others, students with SEN did exactly the same work as the rest of the class. Some teachers were fully aware of the needs of the SEN students in their class, others appeared to be unaware that there were students who required support. The learning support team effectively monitored the progress of students in their care.

How well does the school teach Arabic as a first language?

The curriculum did not include dedicated classes for Arabic as a first language in any phase. Therefore, it was in breach of the MoE regulations for this subject. Elementary students of Arabic as a first language attended classes of Arabic as an additional language with non-native speakers. In middle and high schools, Arabic was offered as an elective subject and only a minority of Arab students were enrolled in these classes. The work set in these classes was below the levels expected by the MoE for first language students.

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	290	28%
	Last year	174	25%
Teachers	133		87%
Students	216		57%

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

Almost all parents and teachers believed that school was well led. Parents stated that their children find work across the school interesting, and they were well prepared for their lives after school. Almost all parents reported good progress in all subjects, especially English and mathematics. They agreed that their child enjoyed life at school, and believed that the teachers provided good quality education to the students. Almost all students reported feeling safe at school. They were able to choose from a wide range of subjects or activities, and used a wide range of technology in their learning. However, most students said that school leaders did not listen to their opinions. Almost all teachers believed that students' behavior was good across the school, and they thought that the school guided students very well towards their future career paths.

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

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