

Dubai English Speaking College Inspection Report

Years 7 to 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.

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

Basic information about the school

Located in Academic City, Dubai English Speaking College is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Year 7 to Year 12, aged 12 to 17 years. The school follows the English National Curriculum. The school opened in 2005, and the roll had been growing with each annual intake. As a result, around one third of the teachers had only recently been appointed. This included all the members of the Arabic department. Senior managers had given high priority to ensuring that new staff were introduced to the standards and expectations of Dubai English Speaking College. The school had recently opened its first Year 12 class and students were commencing their AS-level courses. At the time of the inspection, there were 470 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Parents were very pleased with the standard of education and care provided by the school. Almost all thought that their children were making good progress in their learning. They praised the behaviour of students and how the school encouraged children to develop responsible attitudes. They found staff to be approachable and effective in dealing with any concerns they had. They were pleased that the school had improved teaching in a few departments. However, they did not yet think that their children's progress in Arabic was good enough. A few would value more detailed information about their children's learning. A few parents would like the school to offer a wider range of extra-curricular activities.

How well does the school perform overall?

Dubai English Speaking College provided a good and improving standard of education with many outstanding features. Students' attainment in Islamic Education and Arabic were unsatisfactory at the secondary stages. However, senior managers had taken effective action to improve the quality of teaching and students were already making acceptable progress. At the post-16 phase students had an acceptable level of knowledge about Islam but they were not progressing further in their learning because the school did not provide sufficient lessons at this level, in Islamic Education. Students' attainment in English, mathematics and science was improving. In particular, across all three subjects, students' skills of investigation and enquiry were well developed. Staff also ensured that students understood clearly the real-life applications of what they were learning.

The quality of teaching was good overall. Senior managers were effectively using the talents of the many outstanding teachers to model best practice and continue to raise standards across the school. Students were full and willing participants in their own learning. Highly motivated by the exciting learning activities they were given, they worked hard and most had high expectations of themselves. Teachers ensured that students knew the standards expected of them and what they needed to do to reach these standards. Students were well cared for by all staff and supported effectively in their learning. There was ample scope for the more able students to challenge themselves by attaining higher standards in open-ended tasks, such as projects and investigations. The curriculum provided students with a wide range of choices of subject. Their learning was further extended by a range of extra-curricular activities.

Leadership at all levels in the school was outstanding. All staff were involved in continually reflecting on what they could do better. They worked together well to ensure that the improvements they made resulted in students learning effectively and achieving high standards. Parents supported the school and were kept informed about its activities. The governing body had a clear and ambitious vision and ensured that everyone contributed to achieving this. As a result of the high quality of self-evaluation, and the outstanding use of assessment information, senior managers knew what they needed to do to further improve the school.

Key features of the school

- Students achieved high standards in many areas of the curriculum;
- Innovative approaches to assessment helped students understand what they needed to do to improve their work;
- The effective leadership of learning at all levels which nurtured the enthusiasm and creativity of staff;
- High expectations and a positive climate of support and challenge;
- Rigorous self-evaluation and improvement practices.

Recommendations

- Continue to improve provision in Islamic Education and Arabic in order to raise attainment;
- Continue to develop courses to ensure that students achieve success in the demanding requirements at Advanced level;
- Continue to monitor and improve the quality of teaching to ensure that the highest standards are evident across all departments of the school.

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

Students' progress in Islamic Education was acceptable at the secondary stages and unsatisfactory in Year 12. Students' attainment in secondary was unsatisfactory. Most students at this stage were not secure in their knowledge of basic concepts and facts about Islam. For example, students in Year 9 could not explain the revelation of The Holy Qur'an. Students' attainment in Year 12 was acceptable. Most students had an acceptable level of knowledge and understanding about the source of legislation in Islam and the importance of family relationships. They were able to quote the right verses from The Holy Qur'an to justify their responses. Their progress in further developing their knowledge was unsatisfactory as Islamic Education was not taught regularly at the school in this phase.

Students' progress in Arabic was acceptable. However, their levels of attainment were unsatisfactory. Most students in Year 7 were making acceptable progress in further building on their existing skills. They could read and write all the letters and some words and phrases. Older students were improving their skills in using the Arabic language. Their skills in listening to and understanding spoken Arabic were developing well. They could respond to simple questions and speak sentences using familiar words. Most could read simple texts confidently but these texts were not yet at a level appropriate for their age. Although they could write a few words or phrases correctly, they could not link sentences to construct a short paragraph.

Students' attainment and progress in English was outstanding at the secondary stages. The attainment and progress of students beginning AS-level studies in Year 12 was good. The school's GCSE examination results in 2009 were well above the UK averages. Throughout the school, students listened carefully to their teachers, and to each other, and they answered questions thoughtfully. In lessons, they expressed clear views and often engaged in animated group discussions. Most students read regularly for pleasure. They were skilled at selecting and using information from reference sources such as the library and the internet. Overall, students wrote well for a range of purposes. In early AS level work students' analytical skills did not fully reflect the high grades obtained in their GCSE examinations.

Students' attainment and progress in mathematics was outstanding across all age groups up to Year 11. The attainment and progress of students in the new Year 12 group was good. Students' performance in the GCSE examination and the UK national tests for 14 year-olds had been consistently well above the average for all UK schools. At all levels, students carried out mental calculations quickly and accurately. They understood and could use an appropriate range of skills, including algebra, to solve mathematical problems. Most students, particularly in Years 7 to 11, could use what they had previously been taught to carry out investigations in mathematics. In particular, they used number patterns particularly well to demonstrate how they had arrived at their answers.

The quality of students' attainment and progress in science were good. In GCSE examinations students performed much better than the UK national average. The attainment of the first group of Year 12 students at AS-level was variable. A minority had not yet developed skill in applying their knowledge in line with the demands at this level of study. Students in Years 7 to 9 demonstrated excellent skills of observation and investigation, and readily used what they had learned to explain scientific issues in society. By Year 11, chemistry students could discuss what they were observing and work out reactions for themselves. At all stages, the pace of progress of the more able students was occasionally too slow.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good, particularly in lessons. Almost all students had an excellent attitude to learning and collaborated well with each other when asked to do paired or group work. A notable feature was how well students supported one another in their learning. Students felt valued and positive relationships with teachers ensured that students could share any concerns they had. Levels of attendance for the last academic term were acceptable. Furthermore, a few students did not attend scheduled clubs or activities as was expected.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and of local traditions and culture were good. They participated in the school community by taking on responsible jobs such as bus monitors and librarians and had begun the process of electing members to a student council. Most students appreciated the multicultural aspect of living in Dubai and viewed having friends from varying backgrounds as an enriching experience. Although most students understood Islam, they only had a limited appreciation of the impact of Islam on their own lives as residents of the UAE.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good. Students in the secondary phase understood the characteristics that distinguished Dubai's economy and the recent changes, which many have witnessed themselves. Older students had a more mature understanding of the Dubai economy within a global context and all students were aware of the local and global environmental issues which characterise the twenty-first century. However, they did not substantially appreciate the impact of their individual actions on the sustainability of the environment, for example, in the littering, albeit slight, in the school grounds after lunch breaks.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching at all stages was good, with much that was outstanding. Almost all teachers explained ideas clearly and often presented information in innovative and enjoyable ways. For example, many used film clips to illustrate their teaching and games to increase student participation in learning. Teachers effectively encouraged students to take responsibility for their own learning and progress. Lessons were well paced, lively and involved a variety of activities. Such teaching methods catered very well for the different needs and learning styles of students. Teachers encouraged students to think for themselves and valued their contributions to class discussions and investigations. In a few lessons, teachers did not explain in enough detail or involve students in learning. As a result, in these lessons, students' participation and progress was less effective.

The quality of students' learning was outstanding at all ages. Students were highly motivated and had very positive attitudes to their learning. In particular, they were developing secure understanding through regular opportunities to be directly involved in their own learning. For example, they frequently used their strong literacy, numeracy and computing skills to explore concepts and find things out for themselves. When working in pairs and groups students explained their thinking clearly and helped one another to learn very effectively. They learned how to improve the standard of their work by evaluating it and giving feedback to one another. They used feedback from peers and staff to set themselves challenging targets for their learning.

Teachers' use of assessment was outstanding. Staff collected information from a wide range of sources, which helped them to understand clearly how well students were getting on. They used this information very effectively to improve students' attainment, progress and learning. In lessons, teachers made clear what they expected students to learn, and what skills they were expected to develop. They continuously assessed how well students met these expectations and used this information to plan further lessons or adapt their approaches. Teachers effectively involved students in monitoring their own progress through discussion and by providing helpful comments on their work. Most teachers used questions skilfully to assess and develop students' understanding. Systems to record students' progress enabled staff to quickly identify those who were under-achieving, and increasingly to evaluate the effectiveness of their lessons and courses.

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

The school provided a good curriculum which met students' needs well overall. Based on the English National Curriculum, it provided an appropriate range of subjects from Key Stage 3 to Advanced level. These subjects provided choice, continuity and challenge for students at all levels, particularly through the new AS level courses. Senior managers had monitored how well the curriculum met students' needs and interests and responded to students' and parents' views by, for example, providing opportunities to study Spanish. Students benefited from opportunities to extend their learning through staging exhibitions and showcasing their work. In recent years, students had achieved significant success in inter-school competitions such as The Crest Award which enabled ambitious scientists to extend their learning further. Staff had worked together to plan thematic projects which helped students to link their learning across different curriculum areas. Most ensured that students used their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills in other curriculum areas. For example, students had used ICT effectively in a mathematics lesson to work out the height of the Burj Khalifa. As a result students were learning how to use mathematics and language as tools for life. A few subjects used the local environment and community as contexts for learning. The allocation of time for Arabic was below Ministry of Education requirements.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements to promote the health and safety of students were outstanding. The school provided a clean, well-maintained and secure environment for learning. The swimming pool and sports facilities were well designed and maintained to reduce risk of injury. The Head teacher had ensured that everyone knew their responsibilities with respect to child protection. Fire and evacuation arrangements were appropriate and students knew how to respond. Staff had paid particularly good attention to ensuring students' safety on school buses. Well considered and supervised arrangements safeguarded students brought to school by car. The school nurse advised and supported staff to teach students about health-related matters. She offered counselling to students, and advice to parents on request. In biology, students were learning in great depth about issues which affect their health.

Students received outstanding academic and personal support from staff. Staff planned learning activities for their students that ensured everyone could participate and learn. In particular, personal and group research projects helped able students to extend their learning further. Staff were actively monitoring the attainment of able students and planning further opportunities to ensure that they were suitably challenged. Students who required support with their learning were effectively identified. They benefited from individual tuition and almost all teachers were aware of how to support them in lessons. The school tracked the attainment of all students rigorously and used this information to offer extra help to those who were struggling with aspects of courses from time to time. Attendance was closely monitored and staff ensured that parents were contacted about unexplained absence.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The Headteacher provided strong leadership to the school. He was respected by students, staff and parents for having high expectations and reaching these. He focused acutely on achieving the highest quality of learning and teaching. He was well supported by a dynamic and equally ambitious senior management team. Together, they had been particularly successful in improving the leadership of learning across the school. Heads of departments had effectively increased the consistency of high quality teaching in their departments and were well placed to continue to do so. Staff worked in a climate where best practice was identified and shared. As a result everyone was helping to improve the school. Staff were extending opportunities for students to exercise responsibility and develop their leadership skills.

The quality of self-evaluation was outstanding. A culture of reflection and continuous improvement characterised the school at all levels from the Head teacher to individual students. Senior managers and heads of department monitored attainment carefully to ensure that students were making appropriate progress and that the school was achieving high standards. They observed lessons and monitored the quality of students' work. They used this information to provide staff training, which was clearly linked to raising standards. They had also listened to the views of students, parents and staff when planning improvements. Staff understood what they were being asked to do and were encouraged to be creative and innovative in their teaching. They felt valued and respected and, as a result, made important contributions to improving the school. A few teachers had asked students for their feedback on lessons and used this to improve their teaching.

Parents provided strong support to the school. The Friends of Dubai English Speaking College involved students in fund-raising and significantly supported the sense of a caring community through charitable work. Staff sought parents' views on a range of matters and resolved any issues promptly. For example, they had taken prompt and effective action to improve school transport. Parents knew how well their children were getting on with their work and what they needed to improve. They could become involved in their children's learning through interesting homework projects. Staff were now in a strong position to share with parents their excellent assessment of students' skills and next steps in learning. In developing the sixth form, staff were taking into account how the wider community could contribute more to students' learning.

The governors provided strong support to the school in their commitment to provide a high quality and improving education. The board took account of recognised best practice in school governance and included an appropriate range of stakeholders, including parents. They had successfully realised their ambitious vision in establishing a successful school and aspired to achieve higher standards still. Parents understood and valued their achievements. Governors worked closely with staff to monitor their work. For example, they joined staff committees and asked heads of department to report directly to board meetings on standards and quality. They were taking active steps to ensure that the school moved towards high quality provision in line with the requirements of government legislation.

The school's estate provided a full range of educational facilities in high quality and very well maintained accommodation. In particular, the library supported investigative learning very well. Staff and students made very good use of the high quality ICT resources. Attractive grounds and indoor social space supported the social culture of the school. Well qualified staff had regular opportunities for continuing professional development. Specialist support staff enriched students' learning and ensured their care and welfare.

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:	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory

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

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

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

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?		
Age group:	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?		
Age group:	Secondary	Post-16
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good

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

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

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

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

How well does the school perform overall?
Good

Next Steps

The school has been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how it will address the main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents. The next inspection will report on the progress made by the school.

**Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau
Knowledge and Human Development Authority**

How to contact us

If you have a concern or wish to comment on any aspect of this report you should contact: inspection@khda.gov.ae.

More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at www.khda.gov.ae.

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