

Al Arqam Private School Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Cycle 3

Report issued May 2011

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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 Arqam Private School was inspected in March 2011 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 Arqam Private School provides education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to Cycle 3, aged three to 17 years. The school follows a Ministry of Education curriculum. At the time of the inspection there were 837 students on the roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

As part of the inspection process, Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires issued to parents. Only a few parents completed the survey. Almost all were positive about most aspects of the school's work. They appreciated the additional religious studies offered by the school and the supportive caring environment. However, they had concerns about the school's performance, particularly the quality of the teaching and learning. They requested more engagement with the local community and more extra-curricular activities. They also expressed their willingness to be more involved in the school's work.

How well does the school perform overall?

Al Arqam Private School provided an acceptable quality of education. The school placed strong focus on Islamic Education and social initiatives. It had developed long term plans and an action plan to respond to the recommendations from the last inspection. The school had made acceptable progress in responding to these recommendations. It had the capacity to make further improvements in its work.

Almost all students were achieving good levels of attainment in Islamic Education, Arabic and English. However, in other key subjects their attainment was mostly age-appropriate and therefore acceptable. Attitudes and behaviour were good throughout the school. The quality of teaching was acceptable. Teachers had good subject knowledge and used this effectively in their explanations and questioning. Most students enjoyed lessons and interacted well with their teachers. However, in too many lessons, students were passive and there were insufficient opportunities made available for students to be active in their learning. Lessons were characterised by long periods of teachers' talk. Assessment was acceptable. Teachers knew their students well but assessment was not used sufficiently to respond to the varying needs of the students. The curriculum was acceptable across the school, but it was restricted by the teachers' over-reliance upon textbooks. The quality of health and safety was good in Kindergarten, Cycle 1 and Cycle 3. It was acceptable in Cycle 2 due to issues related to child protection. The quality of support across the school was acceptable. The quality of leadership and self-evaluation was acceptable. Relationships with parents and the community were good. Governance was acceptable. There was a very limited representation of stakeholders though the governing body had some impact on the school's performance. Staffing and facilities were acceptable. There had been recent improvements in the organisation and resources in the Kindergarten's learning corners and school information and communications technology (ICT) provision.

Key features of the school

- The strong commitment to the school's vision by the school community;
- The strong partnership between parents and the school;
- Good student behaviour and attitudes;
- Good relationships across the school;
- Over-reliance on textbooks for teaching and learning;
- The underdeveloped leadership structure in the girls section.

Recommendations

- Develop the curriculum beyond the reliance on textbooks by setting clear expectations and enriching the learning experiences;
- Ensure an active role for students in lessons by providing a variety of planned activities to raise challenge and improve lesson pace;

- Make better use of assessment information to ensure that lessons meet the various learning needs of students;
- Use a wider range of assessment information to check students' progress and their attainment against international standards;
- Develop the leadership structure in the girls section and continue to enhance leaders' roles to improve teaching and learning across the school.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good across the school. Almost all students had well-developed Qur'an recitation skills. They understood core Islamic values and principles. Almost all students in Cycle 1 developed a good understanding of the types of worship in Islam and distinguished between optional and mandatory prayers. They understood the significance of the five pillars of Islam. Cycle 2 students explained types of Hadeeth confidently and gave examples of these. They also explained the rules for classifying the types of Hadeeth. They were familiar with the contributions of several significant personalities in Islamic history and the sacrifice they made to spread Islam. Cycle 3 students were able to explain the objectives of Islamic law. However, they did not make sufficient links between what they studied, their lives and the possible impact on the community.

Attainment and progress in Arabic were good across the school. Most students were able to practise speaking, listening and reading skills confidently and fluently. In Cycle 1, most students were able to read long paragraphs with few errors. They were able to speak, discuss and give opinions about the lesson's content using simple language. They had limited opportunity to focus on writing skills. In Cycle 2, most students were able to read lines of poetry correctly. They could discuss and ask questions about the key ideas in the poem. Most students had a good knowledge of grammar and could analyse sentences correctly. In Cycle 3, most students were able to recognise different types of text in standard Arabic. In general, the students' opportunity to complete extended writing for a range of purposes was limited.

Attainment in English was acceptable in Kindergarten and good in Cycles 1, 2 and 3. Progress was good across the whole school. Most Kindergarten students listened well and answered questions with simple sentences. From Grade 1 upwards, most students answered confidently, with an age-appropriate range of vocabulary and correct sentence structure. By Grade 12, students were able to obtain information from text books to prepare responses to questions. In reading, most students up to Grade 5 could understand short stories and factual texts. Most students from Grade 6 upwards could understand a range of texts that included some complex sentences and unfamiliar language. A majority of students in Cycles 1 and 2 could write simple sentences accurately without errors in spelling, though their skills were generally underdeveloped and limited to simple sentences. Writing in Cycle 3 was good, with correct grammar and a wide range of vocabulary.

Attainment in mathematics was good for Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 and acceptable for Kindergarten and Cycle 3. Progress over time was acceptable across the school. Almost all students showed a good understanding of number and calculations. Most Kindergarten children could count using numbers to 20 and order numbers to 20. Almost all Grade 3 students could solve whole number single digit multiplication and derive the associated division sum. In Grade 9, almost all students could calculate the surface area of cones and pyramids, applying formula with understanding. All Grade 12 students understood how to calculate the diameters of an ellipse and applied the formula accurately. Across all stages of the school, students' problem solving and investigative skills were underdeveloped. Too great a reliance upon calculators resulted in a minority of older students' skills of mental mathematics and estimation being weak.

Attainment and progress in science were acceptable throughout the school. Most students had a sound knowledge appropriate for their age. For example, in Grade 4, they knew the planets in the solar system. In Grade 6, they understood the cause of tidal waves and in Grade 8, they knew how humidity and air pressure could be measured. In Grade 12, students demonstrated a basic understanding of genetics. Students' scientific skills had improved since the last inspection, particularly in planning and carrying out individual experiments. However, students had insufficient opportunities to develop effective research and investigative skills.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good across the school. Relationships between students and staff were strong and based on mutual respect. Students had a well-developed awareness about healthy lifestyles. Almost all students respected one another and collaborated well. Most students responded well during morning programs in the school's assembly. Most students moved to lessons on time, but a few students were late to morning assemblies. Student attendance was acceptable overall.

Student's Islamic and civic understanding was good across the school. Most students showed understanding of their responsibility in the school and the community. Almost all students performed noon prayer in the school courtyard, with one student usually leading the prayer. Students had well-developed knowledge about modern issues of the Islamic world. They showed detailed knowledge about how Islam accomplishes the principle of justice and equality between all people. They understood the importance of positive relationships in the multi-cultural community of Dubai and they understood the link between Islam and good relationships and safety in Dubai.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good. Students spoke in detail about major projects in Dubai, such as the Metro and Khalifa Tower. They offered explanations as to the cause of the global economic crisis. They participated in competitions for water and electricity conservation. They looked after their school and kept the courtyard and the classrooms clean. They participated in raising environmental awareness around the school and took part in a water conservation competition in Dubai municipality.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching for effective learning was acceptable across the school. Almost all teachers demonstrated good subject knowledge, but did not consistently employ a sufficient range of teaching strategies which were appropriate to their students' needs. In Kindergarten, for example, most teachers spoke at too high a volume, which raised the noise levels in all rooms. This resulted in children shouting answers and not listening to each other. Most lessons were organised and structured, although a few teachers' time management was poor. Some students completed set tasks quickly and were not given additional work. In most lessons, teacher- student interactions were effective. However, too much teacher talk and direction of activities prevented students' active involvement in achieving meaningful and relevant learning. Teachers' use of ICT was developing. There was too little use of the environment or practical activity to enhance student progress. An exception was the use of the activity centre and ICT in Kindergarten. Although most teachers recognised that different groups and individuals had different learning needs, there was insufficient adaptation of methods and resources to meet these needs effectively.

The quality of students' learning was acceptable across the school. Students had positive attitudes to learning and responded well to teachers' directions, although too often they were passive listeners or watchers. They were unclear, at times, about what they needed to do to improve and took too little responsibility for their own learning. There was limited use of ICT by students to improve enquiry and research skills and learning outcomes. Students co-operated and worked collaboratively when encouraged to do so. There were insufficient opportunities provided for students to practise their listening skills and to engage in extended dialogue with one another. In Grade 12 mathematics teachers made effective use of discussion between students regarding the properties of an ellipse. In Cycle 3 English there was good dialogue between students and good use of paired work to enhance learning. However, there were too few opportunities for students to develop their critical thinking skills and relate their learning to real life situations.

Assessment was acceptable across the school. Almost all teachers checked students' progress and understanding during lessons, using questioning and short assessment activities. However, this and other assessment data was not used effectively by teachers to plan students' next learning steps. The quality of marking and feedback to students was limited to ticks and praise. Written feedback rarely told students how well they were doing and what they needed to do to improve. Limited self or peer-assessment was seen.

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

The curriculum was acceptable throughout the school. The use of the Ministry of Education curriculum ensured a continuity and consistency in the programmes of study. There was a strong focus on Islamic Education and English. There were suitable opportunities in the Kindergarten for children to learn through play and exploration. The school enlivened the curriculum with some extra activities after school. However, there was little enrichment on a day-to-day basis and most lessons followed the course books too closely. Most activities involved the completion of worksheets rather than practical, hands-on activities. Students had too few opportunities to link learning with real life, think for themselves or develop investigative skills, especially, but not exclusively, in science and mathematics. Most teachers did not maximise links between subjects to reinforce learning. Activities after school broadened the curriculum. For example, weekend workshops in mathematics and science supported the less able and more able students. The annual review of the curriculum by staff highlighted particular issues. However, ideas for development were modest and did not focus enough on how to diversify and strengthen students' learning experiences. There was insufficient communication between the girls' and boys' sections to enable staff to learn from one another and share expertise. Links with the community were acceptable, particularly through environmental projects.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Provision for health and safety was good in Kindergarten and Cycles 1 and 3, and acceptable in Cycle 2. The premises and facilities were suitable for all students. They were generally clean, although at the time of the inspection not all girls' washrooms were hygienic. Some fire safety equipment had not been checked recently. Students were supervised well around the school and on the buses and there was good monitoring and record keeping of their health by the school nurse. Medicines were stored safely. The social worker provided a high level of care for students through counselling programmes in self-esteem and emotional development. The provision of healthy food in the canteen and opportunities for sport and physical activities encouraged healthy living. Child protection procedures were acceptable though, in Cycle 2, there were a few examples of inappropriate management of students' behaviour.

The quality of support for students was acceptable throughout the school. Teachers knew their students well. Positive relationships between staff and students resulted in students always having someone to talk to about their concerns. The social workers worked with the teachers to provide social and academic support to students. They also provided career guidance and preparation for students moving to the next phase of education or work. Most teachers handled behaviour issues well and implemented the school's policy. Special timetabling arrangements were in place to offer extra teaching and learning opportunities to students who as required additional support. There was little evidence of teaching methods, resources and support during lessons being adapted to ensure quality learning for students with identified additional needs. The school kept records of students' results in tests, which were shared with

students and their parents. Teachers monitored students' current performance, but this was not always linked to tracking and setting appropriate academic and personal targets to be shared with students. The school had limited awareness of international educational standards to help compare and check progress from stage to stage. The school management of attendance was acceptable though punctuality was a concern and students arriving late at times affected the quality of teaching and learning.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was acceptable. All school leaders had a strong commitment to the school's vision of religious education. This was supported by strong relationships within the leadership team and the staff. The daily operation and management of the school was adequate. However, the leadership structure was weaker in the girls' section, as the Principal lacked support. Department leaders had a limited role in planning for improvement.

The quality of self-evaluation and improvement planning was acceptable. The school had developed detailed plans in response to inspection recommendations. A five-year development plan had been created. Plans were starting to lead to some improvements in mathematics and English. However, staff were not sufficiently involved in the process of developing and reviewing improvement plans.

Partnerships with parents and the local community were good. The school had two active parents' councils that were fully supportive of the school's vision. The mothers' council led school camps and helped in various school activities. The school had several partnerships projects with other schools and community and government organisations. A number of education experts, including former school principals, were closely involved in the work of the school. The school communicated well with parents to inform them of their children's progress. However, reports to parents had too few details about strengths and weaknesses in students' performance.

The quality of governance was acceptable. One representative of the nine owners was regularly present at the school. He communicated with the Principal regularly and had a strong presence in the school community. He was highly respected by leaders, parents and students. There was on-going communication with the parents' councils to improve school performance. However, there was insufficient representation from all stakeholders, especially parents, on the governing body. The governing body did not yet have clear criteria for holding the school accountable.

Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable. There were sufficient teachers who were appropriately qualified and deployed. In Kindergarten, teaching assistants supported all classes and the facilities offered opportunities for children to use ICT, learn through play and carry out investigations. However, in other parts of the school, for example in mathematics and science, there were insufficient resources for all students to engage in hands-on practical learning. Additionally, the library was inadequately stocked. Similarly, there were not enough resources for students to develop independent research skills in the classroom. Outside areas were used well for sport.

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:	KG	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
100% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.				
Age group:	KG	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	KG	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Attainment	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	KG	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Attainment	Acceptable	Good	Good	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	KG	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	KG	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	KG	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	KG	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	KG	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Health and safety	Good	Good	Acceptable	Good
Quality of support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
	Overall
Quality of leadership	Acceptable
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Acceptable
Partnerships with parents and the community	Good
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:
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More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at www.khda.gov.ae.

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