

The Oxford School Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Post-16

Report published May 2011

Contents

Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report.....	3
Basic information about the school	3
How well does the school perform overall?	4
Key features of the school	4
Recommendations.....	5
How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?.....	5
How good is the students' personal and social development?.....	6
How good are the teaching and learning?.....	7
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?.....	8
How well does the school protect and support students?.....	8
How good are the leadership and management of the school?	9
Summary of inspection judgements.....	10
Next steps	14
How to contact us.....	14

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.

The Oxford School was inspected in December 2010 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 Muhaisnah, The Oxford School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Foundation Stage to post-16, aged three to 18 years. The school follows a UK curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 1483 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Most parents were satisfied with the quality of education available in the school and agreed that the school treated their children fairly. Almost all parents said the school kept their children safe. A majority of parents said that the school supported them in choosing healthy lifestyles and provided good support for students with special educational needs. They felt that their children enjoyed lessons. Just over half of the parents believed that the behaviour of students at the school was good or better. They were concerned about their children's progress in Islamic Education and Arabic. Most parents felt that communication between the school and parents was effective and that the school responded appropriately to parental concerns. Parents felt that the school was well led and identified recent improvements in teaching and learning although they still had concerns about staff turnover and the provision of extra-curricular activities.

How well does the school perform overall?

The overall performance of the school was judged as being acceptable. The school had responded well to the recommendations in the last inspection report. In particular, there had been noticeable improvements in the Foundation Stage although English remains an area for further improvement. The school had worked hard to develop the quality of teaching and learning, and teachers made better use of assessment data although there was still much variability across subjects. The curriculum had improved with the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum and a greater breadth of subject choices at post-16. Self-evaluation procedures rigorously identified areas for short and long term improvements which were suitably timetabled and budgeted.

Attainment and progress were at least acceptable in Islamic Education, Arabic, mathematics, science and English in the primary and secondary phases. Attainment and progress were unsatisfactory in English in the Foundation Stage where children with English as an additional language were not sufficiently supported in the development of their English speaking skills. Attainment in English in post-16 was also unsatisfactory as students' qualifications on entry to the course were low. Progress in Arabic for non-Arabs in the primary phase and science in the secondary and post-16 phases was good. Students' attitudes to work and their behaviour in school were good. Students had a good awareness of their responsibilities as citizens and an appreciation of local and global economic and environmental issues. The quality of teaching and learning was acceptable with some variation across the school but better than reported at the last inspection. The curriculum, based on the English National Curriculum, was acceptable. Arrangements for ensuring the health and safety of children and students were good and staff were aware of their responsibilities regarding child protection. The quality of leadership and management was good with strong leadership from the Principal. Senior staff were not complacent about the need for further improvement and had the ability to bring this about.

Key features of the school

- The vision, perception and determination of the Principal, supported by a committed group of senior leaders;
- The school's positive response to the recommendations of the last inspection report and improvements in the Foundation Stage and the quality of teaching and learning;
- The positive attitudes and behaviour of students as well as the strong relationships existing between students and staff;
- The supportive arrangements for ensuring the health, safety, security and welfare of students in the school;
- Students' cultural and civic understanding as well as their appreciation of local and global economic and environmental issues.

Recommendations

- Continue the improvement in teaching and learning by ensuring that lessons develop students' independent learning skills as well as catering for the full range of ability;
- Improve students' ability to speak English using extended sentences, especially in the Foundation Stage and in Grade 1, in English lessons and other subject areas;
- Ensure that available assessment data is used to plan lessons and set appropriate learning targets which are personalised for all students;
- Enhance learning by ensuring the availability of classroom resources, increasing the number of support staff and improving the retention of teaching staff.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable. In the primary phase, students were able to identify the five prayers and their importance as well as their conditions. In the secondary phase, students discussed key Islamic concepts like Halal and Haram. They discussed the social factors and current issues from an Islamic perspective. Post-16 students were able to analyse important Islamic events from Seerah, extract meanings from a few examples of Hadeeths and apply them to a few aspects of their own lives. All students displayed an understanding of Islamic values but were unable to demonstrate adequate skills in memorising and reciting The Holy Qur'an and in memorising Hadeeth texts.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were acceptable. Students in Grades 1 to 3 developed adequate skills in reading and writing. In Grade 5 they were able to recite and extract meaning from poems. In the secondary phase, most students were able to analyse literary texts but they lacked fluency in reading in Grade 8 and accuracy in writing in Grade 9. In all phases, students' writing skills were restricted to completing textbook exercises with limited opportunities for extended writing. Students were not able to apply grammatical rules they had learnt in speaking, reading and writing. Post-16 students were able to identify poetic techniques as well as make critiques of literature.

Attainment in Arabic for as an additional language in the primary and secondary phases up to Grade 9 was acceptable. Progress was good in the primary phase and acceptable in the secondary phase. In Grade 1, students were able to link pictures, words and sounds. In Grade 3, they were able to identify new shopping vocabulary and use this in sentences. Students in Grade 5 were able to read texts aloud and a few students were able to summarise texts. In the primary phase, students memorised and recited three songs. In Grade 9, students were able to discuss their sporting interests but they were not fluent or accurate in their pronunciation. Writing skills in the secondary phase were underdeveloped and were often limited to completing textbook exercises.

Attainment and progress in English in the Foundation Stage were unsatisfactory. Children join the Foundation Stage with little English and struggled to communicate orally because of a lack of teacher expertise. By the end of the primary phase, attainment and progress were acceptable. Listening and speaking were stronger than reading and writing. Attainment and progress were acceptable in the secondary phase where students demonstrated oral fluency, literal comprehension and a secure grasp of vocabulary. Higher attaining students showed good understanding of the way characters and plot were developed and were able to deduce relationships between characters. Attainment in the two recently introduced post-16 courses was unsatisfactory although progress, while slow, was acceptable.

Students' attainment and progress in mathematics was acceptable in all phases. In the Foundation Stage, children could count objects in the classroom up to the number ten. They identified a range of mathematical shapes including square, rectangle, triangle and circle. In the primary phase, students' knowledge, skills and understanding of number, patterns and statistical averages were in line with expectations. Secondary students' examination results were in line with international standards. Students, at all levels, learned mathematical techniques and memorised facts but lacked a deeper understanding of how to apply these to the real world. Post-16 work covered pure mathematics, statistics and mechanics with students demonstrating high levels of engagement in their work on differentiation and integration. However, too much work was presented in an abstract rather than practical way with too few opportunities for students to develop independent learning skills.

Attainment in science was acceptable in all phases. Progress was acceptable in the Foundation Stage and in the primary phase. In the secondary phase and post-16, progress was good. Students' attainment was in line with age-related expectations overall. Most students had good knowledge and understanding. They had a secure grasp of scientific knowledge, from the parts of plants in the Foundation Stage to the periodic table in Post-16. Students' ability to carry out simple experiments had improved but varied from class to class in the early years. Secondary phase students were able to carry out their own experiments and investigations. Post-16 students rapidly appreciated difficult concepts such as particle decay. Students in some lessons had difficulty relating scientific problems to the real world.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good, with some outstanding features. This was the result of good relationships with adults who demonstrated high expectations and ensured high standards. Many older students demonstrated self discipline and responsibility for their own well-being and that of other students around them. Relationships between students were characterised by high levels of care and tolerance. Students said that they felt safe and supported in school. They spoke highly of their teachers and were grateful for their advice and support. Attendance in the primary, secondary and post-16 phases was good overall but acceptable in the Foundation Stage.

Students' Islamic, civic and cultural understanding was good across the school. In the Foundation Stage, students were knowledgeable about the seven Emirates and made links with national day. All students were active in assisting the school in different activities, events and responsibilities. Students demonstrated an appreciation of Islam, and they all showed respect during the daily prayer calls which were led by students. Displays in classrooms as well as around the school highlighted Islamic values and features of Dubai and the UAE. Students appreciated the multi-cultural nature of Dubai and how it promoted safety and equality.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good. They understood the political structure and interdependence of the Emirates and were able to identify Dubai's economic potential and what had contributed to its prosperity. Students described land reclamation projects and Dubai's iconic buildings as well as the need for tourism to support the economy. They appreciated the opportunities offered by living in Dubai and the UAE. Older students knew how economic decisions could impact on the environment and understood the need for conservation of natural resources. Opportunities for older students to engage with other schools and the wider community in debates about conservation as well as an enterprise project in school had heightened their awareness.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching and learning was acceptable. It had improved since the previous inspection as a result of the greater focus given to developing and sharing good practice in teaching and learning. In most lessons teachers had secure subject knowledge as well as high expectations of their students. Training for Foundation Stage teachers had improved their understanding of how children learn. Teachers, especially in Grades 9 to 12, had begun to encourage open-ended discussion and research, particularly in science, where examples of exciting and challenging teaching were observed. A minority of teachers did not give students sufficient opportunity to think for themselves or to relate their work to other subjects or the real world. Planning was acceptable but, too often, did not cater for the spread of ability or take account of low levels of English.

In almost all lessons, students were engaged in their learning. They were keen to succeed and listened attentively to their teachers and to each other. In a minority of lessons, where the demands were too limited or the teacher's organisation was poor, they became restless and misbehaved. Students took care with their presentation and wrote effective notes although, too often, their writing was copied. They responded well to opportunities to work co-operatively and, when given the opportunity, could think and investigate independently.

The overall use of assessment information was acceptable and teachers systematically assessed and recorded students' learning. As a result, teachers knew the strengths and weaknesses of their students and, in a few lessons, provided different tasks for students of differing ability. In general, however, all students were set the same tasks. Students' books were marked regularly but comments were brief with too little explanation about how to improve. Assessment through open-ended questioning, end of lesson evaluations, self-assessment and peer assessment were underdeveloped.

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

The curriculum was acceptable in all phases of the school. It followed the National Curriculum for England, adapted for Dubai. A curriculum review had resulted in the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum and a greater breadth of subject choices, including vocational studies, in the senior school. The school regularly reviewed the curriculum but there were no clear guidelines for the development of cross-curricular skills. Students experienced a good range of learning experiences but not all students' needs were regularly met in the classroom. Some students still had too few opportunities to develop their creative, critical and analytical skills although the school was addressing this through a full and varied programme of additional activities. Counsellors and teachers offered good careers advice. Older students received appropriate preparation for the world of work and higher education including links with UAE universities. The range of extra-curricular opportunities was organised within the school's normal timetable and to a lesser extent out of school time.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The arrangements for health and safety were good. There was a health and safety policy but this was not rigorously followed by teachers and students in the classroom. Supervision and security was good and the transportation arrangements at the beginning and end of the day were outstanding. Evacuation drills were conducted once a month with fire extinguishers and smoke alarms checked regularly. The building and grounds were maintained systematically and kept clean throughout the day. The school nurse ensured that detailed medical records were updated regularly and information was shared with teachers. Promotion of healthy lifestyles had resulted in improvements to the range of healthy food choices available in the school canteen. Students were encouraged to take part in physical activity and the results of a recent health survey were discussed with overweight students and followed through with parental meetings. A child protection policy had been recently introduced under the guidance of a designated teacher.

The school provided acceptable support for its students. Staff had established positive relationships with students. The school organised careers fairs for older students to support them in making wise choices for further study. The recent introduction of a student complaints procedure via 'suggestion boxes' had provided confidential access to the senior leadership team in addition to support arrangements from class teachers and other staff. The school kept records of school test and examination results. Systems for tracking individuals' academic progress were evident but did not yet focus consistently enough on identifying and setting achievement targets for students, except in English. Support for students with special educational needs was in the early stages of development. The absence of a reliable means of identification of these needs limited teachers in supporting students' progress more thoroughly.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership and management were good. The Principal had a clear vision and direction for the school which was shared and understood by staff. Other senior staff were beginning to take responsibilities for their own areas and their sharing of expertise was having a positive impact on sustained and ongoing improvement. Staff professional development needs had been acted upon swiftly resulting in a clearer focus on developing and sharing good practice in teaching and learning. Senior staff and subject supervisors were not complacent about the need for further improvements.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. The Principal and senior staff were familiar with the strengths of the school and areas for further improvement as a result of their own classroom visits and from regular feedback obtained from parents as well as questionnaires completed by parents, students and staff. The monitoring of teaching and learning in the classroom had contributed to the improvements observed during the inspection. The school had made substantial progress in the short time since the last report on improving the areas identified.

Partnerships with parents and the local community were acceptable with some good features. Communication with families was frequent and informative. The new initiative of inviting parents to visit the school and observe lessons had further developed relationships with the school. Many parents supported their children well at home with their learning, with reading in particular, and some were able to help their children set targets from assessment information received from the school. There were a variety of links with the local community including environmental and charitable activities.

The school governors and owners met monthly and some of the group maintained an advisory role within the school. The governors' support for the school was acceptable, both as advisors and as critical friends especially in offering support for curriculum development, resources and staffing. The school was fully accountable to the governing body for its actions, academic successes and development planning.

The quality of staffing, facilities and resources was acceptable. There were sufficient qualified teachers in the school but staff turnover was high with over a third of teachers joining the school since the beginning of the academic year. Although staff deployment had been reviewed and improved, there was still too little support for students with additional needs or with English as an additional language. Some learning spaces were inappropriate for larger classes and insufficient for subjects requiring experimental or practical work. Resources in the school library had been updated and each classroom had been provided with a data to enhance students' learning experiences. However, small items of equipment and resources were not readily available and students were regularly required to share limited resources.

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:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
12% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Not Applicable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
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:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
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:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Health and safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
	Overall
Quality of leadership	Good
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:
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More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at www.khda.gov.ae.

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