

Dubai College Inspection Report

Secondary to Post-16

Report published 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.

Dubai College was inspected in November 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 Um Suqeim, Dubai College is a private school providing education for boys and girls from secondary to post-16, aged 11 to 18 years. The school follows the English National Curriculum and students complete GCSE and A-level examinations as part of their studies. At the time of the inspection, there were 794 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

How well does the school perform overall?

Dubai College provided an outstanding quality of education. It had made very good headway in addressing the recommendations of the last inspection. Provision for Islamic Education had been improved and students were now attaining the expected standards. Assessment had been further developed to create an outstanding system for tracking students' progress and this information was used exceptionally well in planning lessons and setting individual targets. Following restructuring of the governing body, governors were better able to hold the school to account. The school had an excellent capacity for further improvement.

Students were making excellent progress and their attainment was outstanding. This was the result of their exceptionally positive attitudes, the outstanding quality of teaching and learning, and was underpinned by the excellent use of assessment and the rich curriculum. Students were extremely well cared for and supported. The success of the school owed much to the outstanding leadership and management.

Key features of the school

- Students' personal development was outstanding in every respect;
- Students were making excellent progress and reaching outstanding levels of attainment in English, mathematics and science;
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was outstanding;
- The outstanding curriculum provided wide ranging opportunities to enrich students' learning and develop their individual interests and talents;
- Provision for students' safety, health and welfare were outstanding;
- Relationships across the school were excellent and there was a strong sense of community;
- Outstanding leadership and management ensured a continuous drive to sustain and build on the school's success;
- Attainment in Islamic Education had improved;
- The provision for Arabic was not always sufficient to ensure that students with varying levels of confidence, including those for whom it was their first language, built well on their prior attainment.

Recommendations

- Improve the provision in Arabic so that all students build well on their prior attainment;
- Sustain the emphasis on improving attainment in Islamic Education.

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

Students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable. Most students had acceptable knowledge about Islam such as the Pillars of Islam and Faith and the prayers. They understood how Islam relates to their daily lives and could give examples to illustrate this. Most students had a basic knowledge and understanding of the Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) life and influence. Students in Year 7 understood the core Islamic values. In Year 8, students were able to list some facts about the Hajj and understood the meaning behind some of its rituals. In Year 12, the majority of students could recite few short Surahs from The Holy Qur'an

making few errors in pronunciation. However, recitations skills of The Holy Qur'an were below the expected levels across the school.

For Arabic as a first language in the secondary phase, both attainment and progress were acceptable. Listening comprehension skills were in line with expectations. Students were mostly able to converse using simple phrases of Arabic yet struggled to express opinions using standard Arabic. Students were able to read extended texts and answer direct comprehension questions, both orally and in writing. However, they needed to further develop their skills in writing for a wider range of purposes. Acceptable progress was ensured mainly through differentiated provision for the learning of Arabic as a first language.

For Arabic as an additional language, both attainment and progress were good. Students in Years 7 and 8 understood spoken language clearly and could answer simple questions using familiar words and expressions. They were beginning to use their knowledge of grammar to substitute words while making sure their verbs agreed with the gender and number of the subject. In Year 9, most students were able to read short texts and answer reading comprehension questions, although these were mostly in English. By this stage, the majority of students were able to use their language skills to compose concise descriptive paragraphs about familiar topics. There were evident long term gains in students' language skills on the whole, but short term progress in lessons was at times compromised due to the lack of proper provision to address the varying abilities present in each class.

Attainment and progress in English were outstanding in listening, talking, reading and speaking across all phases of the college. GCSE and A-level results were well above UK and international standards. Almost all students listened very well and older students understood challenging concepts and could apply their knowledge and understanding of literary technique in discussion and in their written work. They spoke confidently using extended vocabulary beyond that expected for their age. By Years 9 and 10 students skilfully questioned each other's oral presentation on a text they were reading. Almost all students read with fluency and feeling. They wrote imaginatively and gave evidence in support of their ideas about a text they were studying, as well as applying appropriate grammar rules in their creative, imaginative and report writing.

Students' attainment and progress in mathematics were outstanding across the school. In 2010, half of the Year 11 cohort achieved A* at GCSE and three quarters of the Year 13 students reached A* and A at A-level. These examination results overall were significantly higher than the national averages of all schools in England including selective schools. Students made outstanding progress, usually one full National Curriculum level each year which was above the expected rate. By Year 9 most students were working at Level 8 in number and algebra, with some demonstrating exceptional performance when solving simultaneous equations. In a Year 12 lesson on differentiation calculus, students were able to find the gradients of tangents. Year 13 students used elimination strategies during a topic on collisions to explore the changes in energy due to an impact.

Attainment and progress in science were outstanding. Students achieved consistently high results in A-level and GCSE examinations over the last few years, far above the national

average for UK schools. The quality of work seen in the classroom was no less than outstanding. Students in Year 13 had strong knowledge and high levels of understanding of theoretical issues and concepts. Students in Year 11 analysed the effects of long-term weightlessness with strong imagination. Those in Year 7 had excellent understanding of the specialist structure of cells. Students at all stages had very good recall of previous work and applied this well to new situations. They demonstrated well-developed practical skills, showing strong ability to plan their investigations and evaluate their results.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were outstanding in both the secondary and post-16 phases. Students in all year groups had very positive attitudes to learning, and in the upper years, students were so responsible for their own learning that teachers were often just catalysts providing minimum input and direction. Students reported that they valued their positive relationships with teachers and staff and they felt individually valued, protected and supported throughout their learning journey at the college. All students demonstrated an excellent understanding of what constitute a healthy lifestyle and they participated in regular physical exercises. Attendance levels for the last academic term were good and all students arrived to school and to lessons in good time.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local culture and traditions were outstanding in both phases. Students were presented with extensive opportunities through which they could contribute actively to the life of the school and the wider community, indeed often beyond Dubai. The Liaison Program was hailed by parents to be an excellent example of this contribution where departing Dubai College learners helped with the induction of those beginning on this positive journey. Students were respectful of the rituals and practices of Islam and were aware of its importance in Dubai's contemporary society. Their knowledge of the history of Islam and its contribution was growing through initiatives such as the Muslim Students Association. All students demonstrated a mature appreciation of the cultural diversity found in Dubai.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was outstanding in both phases. Students in the post-16 phase had a mature understanding of the factors that underpin Dubai's economic success and were all eager to further contribute to this success in the future. In the secondary phase, students were developing excellent knowledge about how Dubai and the UAE had developed, through lessons in Arabic, history and geography. All students showed care for their school and most took part in schemes to conserve and sustain the environment.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was outstanding throughout the school. Lessons were very well planned, with content and a level of challenge that were particularly well suited to the needs of students, and highly effective in stimulating their learning. Teachers used their excellent subject knowledge very well, and used it to provide alternative perspectives on the subject material and present ideas in a stimulating way. They were well aware of students' needs and were flexible in altering their approach in the light of their assessment of students' understanding. The choice of learning tasks was exceptionally good, often stimulating research and presentation skills, and encouraging collaborative and independent learning. Resources were used very well, seen to particularly good effect in Year 13 biology for example, where students prepared animated film clips with plasticine models to represent changes in the development of animal species. Where the teaching was not quite up to the standard of the best, planning did not fully cater for the wide learning needs of some mixed-ability classes.

The quality of students' learning was outstanding. They showed strong interest and enthusiasm in lessons, and clearly enjoyed learning for its own sake. They were curious about the world around them. Students invariably made a strong effort and were very keen to do well. They responded in a mature and disciplined way to the many opportunities to work on their own and in groups, showing strong skills of analysis, reasoning and initiative. They were inspired and excited in an art lesson, for example, when required to draw from memory. They developed strong relationships with their teachers and exhibited exemplary behaviour. Students were able to explain their thinking, especially when dealing with unfamiliar situations. They showed strong speaking and listening skills, were able to link cause and effect in many subjects, and were able to learn from their mistakes. Students were reluctant to let an idea go until they had understood it fully.

The collection of large amounts of assessment information and data and the way it was used throughout the school were outstanding. In lessons, teachers used skilful and probing questions to assess students' understanding and promote their learning. They set clear targets for improvement, and encouraged students to assess their own performance, in order to stimulate further progress. Teachers marked students' work effectively, provided them with perceptive feedback, and frequently encouraged them to assess each other's performance and skills. At whole-school level, formal diagnostic testing at fixed intervals enabled the school to measure and track students' progress from year to year and set appropriately challenging targets for them.

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

The curriculum was outstanding and successfully met the aim of the college to provide a high quality education. It provided coherent, broad and progressive programmes of study at all stages. The college consistently reviewed and amended its curriculum to meet the varying needs of students and to promote independent learning. An analysis of students with

additional support needs had helped the school meet the needs through a combination of organised classes and targeted support. Significant features of the curriculum included emerging cross-curricular thematic approaches to learning in the lower end of the senior school which built on the transition from Year 6 to Year 7 and ability grouping in mathematics from Year 7 and science from Year 10 to better support learning. In the secondary stages, a suitably wide range of course options led to certification in English national examinations at GCSE, AS level and A-level. Higher attaining and gifted students were able to sit English national examinations early in French and mathematics. The college had successfully resolved the compliance issue between Islamic Education and other subjects in the secondary stage which now enabled students' to study this subject for an appropriate period of time while continuing to have a balanced choice of other subjects. An extensive range of extra-curricular activities and community based activities was offered to students across the college. The ethos of personal achievement from these activities and the recognition that they are an integral part of the curriculum had a supportive impact on the development of almost all students.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The quality of protection and safeguarding was outstanding. The college provided a very safe, hygienic and secure environment with a high degree of supervision. The premises and facilities constituted an exceptional learning environment, effectively managed and maintained to a very high standard. The cafeteria offered healthy choices, and the personal, health and social education curriculum and health and nutrition policy further ensured that links were made between diet, healthy bodies and lifestyles. Most sporting extra-curricular activity was available to all students who could, therefore, compete at an appropriate level. Detailed and recently updated policies, systems and records were in place for every aspect of health and safety including emergency evacuations and accidents. Bereavement counselling, medical advice and anti-bullying guidance were all available, with students encouraged to raise any personal concerns in confidence. Clear procedures existed in respect of any actual or suspected child protection issues.

The quality of support was outstanding. Relationships between and amongst staff and students were exemplary and based on trust and mutual respect. Year 13 students mentored those newly admitted to the school to support their induction and this led to a smooth transition into Year 7. Specialist sixth form tutors gave excellent advice on university choices leading to career pathways. Experience of the world of work was gained by post-16 students through the Young Enterprise companies' programme which involved establishing real businesses. Appropriate strategies were used to manage behaviour effectively which were underpinned by a strong pastoral network and a culture of self-discipline and personal responsibility. Detailed and effective tracking systems were in place to monitor students' well-being and academic progress. Students identified by departments as falling behind their target grades and levels were provided with extra support; similarly the highest achievers benefited from additional challenge. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities received exceptional assistance to accelerate their progress from a teacher qualified in educational psychology and

with expertise in counselling and learning mentoring. Student attendance and punctuality were well managed and reflected in the good attendance and outstanding punctuality rates.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership and management were outstanding. Under the excellent leadership of the Headteacher, the school management team demonstrated a high degree of drive and ambition to sustain high standards. They successfully promoted a collegiate approach, so that their colleagues, at all levels, felt valued and knew their efforts were appreciated. There was a remarkable degree of consistency in the way subject leaders based their monitoring and review on the school's agreed priorities. This contributed significantly to the highly effective self-evaluation and strategic planning, and the very good headway made in addressing the recommendations from the last inspection.

Assessment data and information from classroom monitoring was carefully analysed and the views of students were taken into account in order to identify strengths and address any emerging issues. Small working parties of teachers met regularly to research best practice and share ideas. This made a significant contribution to self-evaluation and ensuring the high quality of learning and teaching. Questionnaires for parents and students provided the school with feedback and helped to inform the college development plan.

The school had extremely positive relationships with parents. They held the school in high regard. An excellent web-site provided a wealth of information and parents were kept very well informed about how their children were doing. There was a thriving friends association. Attendance was high at consultation evening, concerts and social events. Links with other schools both locally and overseas were very strong; for example, the school had organised a conference about the teaching of Islamic Education and Arabic to which staff from other local schools were invited. Guest speakers from local companies enhanced students' learning.

Governance was good. The sub-committee structure enabled governors to keep well informed about the work of the school, hold the leadership to account and to make a strong contribution to strategic planning. Individual governors liaised with certain subject areas, meeting with subject leaders and other teachers to discuss developments in their subject specialisms. This helped governors to keep aware of current issues and plan accordingly. Governors also held meetings with parents to seek their views. Parents welcomed the appointment of the chairman of the friends' association to the governing body. Governors were planning to expand their membership to widen further the representation of the community.

Staffing, facilities and resources were outstanding. Students benefitted greatly from the breadth of expertise, experience and enthusiasm of their teachers. Staff, including highly skilled sports coaches, were deployed highly effectively and provided excellent support for students' academic and personal development. The high quality library facilities were used extensively to support students' learning. In addition to a wide range of books, on-line resources were drawn on increasingly; for example, educational material to support the

teaching in Islamic Education. Computing resources had been transformed since the last inspection to provide extensive high specification equipment for learning and administration. The attractive campus included outstanding facilities for recreation and sport which were extremely well maintained.

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	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?		
1% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.		
Age group:	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Good	Good
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Good	Good

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

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

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

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

How good are teaching and learning?		
Age group:	Secondary	Post-16
Teaching for effective learning	Outstanding	Outstanding
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	Outstanding	Outstanding

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?	
	Overall
Quality of leadership	Outstanding
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Outstanding
Partnerships with parents and the community	Outstanding
Governance	Good
Staffing, facilities and resources	Outstanding

How well does the school perform overall?
Outstanding

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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