

# Al Mawakeb School - Al Garhoud Inspection Report

Kindergarten to High

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.

Al Mawakeb School - Al Garhoud was inspected in October 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 Garhoud, Al Mawakeb School - Al Garhoud is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to High School, aged three to 18 years. The school follows a US curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 2365 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 most aspects of the school's work and thought that the school was well led. Almost all thought that the school kept their child safe and most agreed that it responded well to parental concerns and kept them well-informed about academic progress. Almost all thought that the quality of teaching was satisfactory or better and that children enjoyed their lessons and were enthusiastic. Despite this, a quarter of respondents thought that the school should continue to focus on improving the quality of teaching. Almost a fifth wanted to see a better range of activities and opportunities outside the classroom. The majority of parents felt that the school was good at helping their child to choose a healthy lifestyle and they appreciated the new healthier menus provided at lunchtime. A significant proportion of parents did not know how the school had responded to the previous inspection report. A few parents felt that the school could be better at explaining its plans for improvement and expressed the desire to make a more direct contribution to supporting the school's development.

## How well does the school perform overall?

The school had made good progress in addressing the recommendations of the last report. It had now adopted an international assessment framework which would enable benchmarking and allow the school to measure students' performance better. Testing would begin in January 2011. There was a better focus on evaluating the quality of teaching and learning, with an appropriate emphasis on supporting further improvement through workshops and discussion. However, self-evaluation across the school required more rigorous and systematic management. The school had also undertaken an external accreditation this year. There had been a comprehensive review of the curriculum, with a resultant sound focus on learning objectives and teaching methods. There was a clear intention to involve all stakeholders in the development of the vision for the school and in its improvement, but the school had not yet implemented many of these ideas. With more systematic and rigorous management by senior leaders, the school had the clear capacity to continue to improve.

The overall performance of the school was acceptable, with some clear strengths. Inspectors judged the attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic to be acceptable, but with some good progress in Arabic as a first language. Attainment and progress in English and mathematics were good, except in elementary where it was acceptable. Attainment in science was acceptable, but progress good from elementary to Grade 12. The attitudes and behaviour of most students were good. Their civic understanding, understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture were acceptable to good between differing phases of the school. The quality of teaching and learning was acceptable from Kindergarten to middle school and good at high school. Most teachers had sound subject knowledge and used good questioning. The majority of lessons, however, were teacher-led and there was an over-reliance on the textbook. Teachers assessed regularly but did not use assessment information to create learning opportunities that were well matched to the varying needs of the students. The school had undertaken a comprehensive review of the curriculum. Participation in extra-curricular activities remained limited. The quality of the school's approaches to health and safety was good. Students were well supervised throughout the day. In partnership with parents, the school needed to ensure the safety of students from traffic outside the school at the start and end of the day. Healthy living was promoted throughout the school. The quality of support services was broadly acceptable. The overall quality of leadership was good. All school leaders were committed to the school and to the concept of improvement and leadership was shared across the school. The quality of self-evaluation was acceptable, with some clear strengths. Overall, the school had taken a more focused approach to monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. Senior leaders required to manage the process of evaluation more systematically and with more rigour. The quality of partnership with parents was acceptable. There was regular two-way communication. Parents were not sufficiently aware of the school's priorities for improvement. The governance of the school was acceptable. The governing board, established in June 2010, had not yet met. The quality of staffing, facilities and resources was acceptable. The school premises required refurbishment in most areas. There were not enough science laboratories for the size of school.

## Key features of the school

- The commitment of all managers and teachers to the school and its students and to school improvement;
- The very good overall culture of the school with its emphasis on caring for students and developing their personal skills and self-confidence;
- The quality of self-evaluation at the level of the classroom and the good range of strategies to support improvement;
- The inconsistency of support for the varying needs of students across classes;
- Sound language acquisition across the three languages in Kindergarten;
- The process of review of the curriculum undertaken by the school.

## Recommendations

- The school should continue to ensure a focus on improving the quality of student learning and classroom management to achieve consistency across the school;
- Senior managers should build on the strengths of the current system of self-evaluation, to achieve a more systematic and rigorous management of the whole school's ongoing improvement;
- The school should extend its overall provision of science laboratories to enable key activities to be more integrated into the learning process;
- The school should build on its partnership with parents to give them clearer information about its priorities and involve them more in planning for further improvement;
- In partnership with parents, the school should ensure the safety of students from traffic outside the school at the beginning and end of the day;
- The school will wish to review the curriculum after the planned assessment in January 2011 and analyse the results to identify areas for improvement in teaching and learning.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable across the school. In Grade 3, most students developed acceptable understanding about the importance of concentration during prayers. In Grade 5, most students had acceptable knowledge about the procedures of Friday prayer, while most Grade 6 students were aware of the travelling prayer. Most Grade 9 students developed good understanding of the procedures of 'Omrah'. In Grade 10, students knew facts about the lives of prophets Dawoud and Sulaiman. Most Grade 11 students developed acceptable knowledge about Islamic battles to establish the Islamic state during the prophet's time. Most Grade 12 students demonstrated acceptable knowledge about divorce in Islam. Qur'an recitation skills were acceptable across the school with a few good examples in the upper grades.

In Arabic as a first language, attainment and progress were good in elementary and in the middle school attainment was acceptable while progress was good. In high school, both attainment and progress were acceptable. Most students in Grade 1 were able to identify short and long vowels. They were also developing good listening skills. In Grade 3, most students were able to read aloud, with high accuracy. By Grade 5, students' grammatical knowledge was good. In Grade 8, most students continued their good progress in grammar and they were able to write a paragraph as extended writing. By Grade 12, their writing slightly improved. However, most of their writing was limited to familiar topics. Their comprehension of poetry was in line with expectations.

In Arabic as an additional language, attainment and progress were acceptable across the school. By Grade 3, students' skills were under-developed. They were limited to writing letters and matching words with pictures. In Grade 5, the majority of students could understand the meaning of a familiar paragraph. The students also had limited grammatical knowledge and their dictation was less well developed. In Grade 9, students could not express themselves confidently in Arabic. They used English to convey meaning. However, they could read aloud in line with expectations. By the end of secondary school, only a few students could read very fluently. Their writing ability was under-developed. Only a few students could write short paragraphs about familiar texts.

Attainment and progress in English were good at the Kindergarten level and acceptable at the elementary level. Attainment and progress were good at middle and high school. By the beginning of Kindergarten 2, most children were able to understand and follow oral directions in English and could respond appropriately to questions and commands. Throughout the elementary phase, reading, writing and speaking skills varied, depending partly on the quality of teaching. Alternative instruction was available for students who required support with English as a second language. By Grade 8, students were confident in their reading, speaking and writing abilities. High school students displayed good inquiry and higher order thinking skills in English classes. By Grade 12, many students could discuss literature and present points of view in a mature manner.



In Kindergarten, attainment in mathematics was good and students made good progress in recognising and writing numbers. In elementary, attainment and progress were acceptable. Here students were becoming proficient in using multiplication tables and applying their computation skills to solve problems. In Grades 6 to 9, attainment and progress were good and students exhibited good understanding of fractions and decimals, measurement of angles and solving linear equations. In Grades 10 to 12, attainment and progress were good and students had developed a depth of knowledge about complex formulae. They were resourceful in the way they used and applied higher order thinking skills to solve increasingly challenging problems.

Attainment in science was acceptable across all sections. Progress was good, except in Kindergarten where it was acceptable. Students were generally able to collect, organise and display data. They were able to use their senses to collect information. Elementary students could accurately classify animals. Middle school students were able to discuss and sketch key concepts such as cell division and changes in matter. High school students could conduct calculations with formulas, using calculators and laptops. Progress over time and the quality of students' learning were evident in their clearly laid out notebooks. Students' attainment in science would benefit from better access to practical work in the laboratory.

## How good is the students' personal and social development?

Attitudes and behaviour were good across the school. Students responded well to their teachers and were enthusiastic about learning. However, in a number of lessons, collective answers caused unnecessary noise. Student-staff relationships were good overall, with almost all students showing respect to their teachers. Moving between lessons was smooth and almost all students arrived at lessons on time during the school day. However, a few students were late in the morning. Attendance had been good since the beginning of the academic year. Students had acceptable awareness of healthy living.

Civic, Islamic and cultural understanding was acceptable in both Kindergarten and primary while it was good in the other phases. A few students took a number of leadership roles around the school through the students' council. Students participated in a number of events to develop cultural understanding of the UAE. Most students appreciated the multi-cultural nature of Dubai and valued its diversity. The school planned a joint programme with Dubai Police to develop civic and national understanding.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was acceptable in all phases except in Grades 9 to 12 where it was good. A number of students participated in the Young Entrepreneur Program and the Arab Environment Conference. Students participated in a tree planting initiative around the school with Rashid Paediatric Centre. There were a limited number of planned environmental programmes, with only few students participating.

## How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was acceptable overall but in the high school it was good. Most teachers had sound subject knowledge and were committed to improving students' performance by being good role models and creating positive learning experiences. In the majority of lessons, there was an over-reliance on the content of the textbook to direct students' learning. Students were regularly given the same work to complete, with limited account taken of their different abilities or starting points. Consequently, high attaining students found the work lacking in challenge while lower ability students found it difficult to keep up with their peers. In some classes, teachers talked for too long while students passively listened. In these lessons, the pace of learning was slow and there were too few opportunities for students to apply their knowledge or practise their skills. Where teachers motivated students, stimulating work challenged them to think either as individuals or to work collaboratively to solve a problem. Here, effective questioning skills prompted students to think deeply and encouraged a progressive learning experience.

The quality of learning was generally acceptable, except in high school, where it was good. In the high school, students were confident to express themselves, communicate what they had learned and take responsibility for developing their skills and knowledge further. Here students were able to apply their learning to the real world and make connections between other subjects and with their prior learning. This was not consistent, however, across the school. Opportunities for students to work collaboratively and share ideas were very limited. Whilst working in groups, students at times lacked the skills necessary to co-operate to produce good work. In a minority of lessons, where behaviour management was not sufficiently secure, students shouted out answers and disrupted the learning of others.

Assessment was acceptable across the school. Teachers rigorously assessed students' performance through quizzes and tests and used this to check students' knowledge, understanding and overall progress. Teachers knew their students' strengths and weaknesses and were sensitive in the way that they provided feedback. However, the use of assessment outcomes to plan students' next steps to learning was not consistent. While teachers provided sound verbal feedback and praise regarding students' homework, the marking of students work and the quality of written feedback was far less consistent. In addition, insufficient on-going assessment took place during lessons, which would lead the teacher to modify the lesson delivery in order to meet students' needs.

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

The quality of curriculum had improved since the last inspection and was now acceptable overall from Kindergarten to Grade 12. The revised curriculum now included Islamic Education, Arabic and science courses in Grades 1 to 3 and more coverage of social studies, mathematics and arts in Grades 1 and 2. In addition, the school had increased the number of periods in physics, chemistry and biology in Grades 10 to 12. The school had undertaken a



comprehensive review of the curriculum from Kindergarten to Grade 12. The curriculum was now reviewed annually and was linked to a set of learning objectives and standards of attainment for each grade. There was an appropriate focus on the pacing of learning and on methodology. The outcome of curricular review fed in to development and the curricular planning had improved continuity and progression. For example, Kindergarten was now better aligned to Grade 1 expectations, which had improved the overall quality of transition. At Grade 12, the school had also established good transitional links with international universities. Cross-curricular opportunities did exist, such as drama in science, mathematics and information technology in upper science, and topic based work in Kindergarten but such opportunities for broader learning needed to be further developed across the curriculum. Some new extra-curricular opportunities had been introduced, including for example, journalism. However, participation remained limited. In terms of community links, regular opportunities to work with local police offered students a context for discussing issues of safety and health. More community partnerships should be established to build upon the work already undertaken by the school. Local environment links were supported through tree planting, gardening projects, and school-based recycling.

## How well does the school protect and support students?

The quality of the school's approaches to health and safety was good. Staffing was good in the school's clinic, with a full-time nurse and doctor in place. Health records were comprehensive and well maintained. Healthy living was promoted throughout the school. The facilities were adequate in size and well maintained. Students were well supervised throughout the day, including during the time they were boarding and leaving school buses. In partnership with parents, the school needed to ensure the safety of students from traffic outside the school at the start and end of the day.

The quality of support services was judged to be acceptable at Kindergarten, elementary, and middle school and good at the high school level. There was a strong career and college counselling programme. Supported by this programme, all students pursued their studies in college. The positive teacher/student interactions produced a majority of mature students who were focused and ready to move on to higher education with the skills and attitudes needed for success. Teachers knew their students well and were respectful toward them. Advice and counselling was provided to students in all grades by teachers and co-directors and in Grades 11 and 12 by a career and college counsellor. There was no dedicated learning specialist in the school. However, outside agencies worked closely with parents and teachers to plan programmes and strategies for students with special educational needs. The school did not use individualized education plans (IEPs). However, a general lesson plan was developed jointly by the English co-ordinator, classroom teacher and English as a second language teacher to support individual students' needs.

## How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The overall quality of leadership was good. All school leaders were professional and clearly committed to the school and to the concept of improvement. The Acting Director had a number of personal and professional strengths. He had established and maintained a positive family culture within the school and encouraged good teamwork. Leadership was shared across the school and the co-directors and co-ordinators were empowered to effect improvement in their areas. The curriculum co-ordinator fulfilled her role effectively, mapping out the philosophy of the development and encouraging understanding of it at all levels. The co-directors and co-ordinators effectively fulfilled a key role in monitoring and improving the work of teachers and the attainment of students.

The quality of self-evaluation was acceptable, with some clear strengths. Overall, the school had taken a more focused approach to monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. There were clear expectations of the role of co-directors and co-ordinators in this process, with regular observation of teachers being the norm. The school had made good progress in addressing the recommendations of the last report. Currently the main focus of self-evaluation was on improving individual teachers' practice. However, the school should focus more on improving all aspects of the school over time. This needed to be managed and co-ordinated with greater focus at the most senior levels of management and with more rigour. An end of year self-evaluation report was lacking, which would make clear what had been achieved and the required next steps. The improvement plan did not have sufficiently clear priorities and objectives, supported by timescales and responsibilities.

The quality of partnership with parents was acceptable. There was regular two-way communication which was supported by an open-door policy, giving parents access to key personnel, as required. The school website offered clear information about the school and access to reports and term assessments. Parents were involved in the life of the school through events. They were not, however, sufficiently aware of the school's priorities for improvement. Nor did the school currently seek their views on the school's development.

The governance of the school was acceptable. The management board regularly held the school accountable on a number of fronts. They had also set up a governing board in June 2010, which included two parents and an academic staff member, but it had not yet met. A clearer focus on an annual self-evaluation would offer an anchor point to ongoing discussions.

The quality of staffing, facilities and resources was acceptable. There were enough suitably qualified teachers to cover all subjects, with a good mix of younger and more experienced teachers. The school premises were broadly fit for purpose but required refurbishment in most areas. There were not enough science laboratories for the size of school and there was a need to improve the availability of interactive whiteboards in classrooms.

## 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	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

### How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?

83% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Acceptable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Acceptable	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Acceptable	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

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:  
inspection@khda.gov.ae.

More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at [www.khda.gov.ae](http://www.khda.gov.ae).

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