

Dubai English Speaking School Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Primary

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 English Speaking School 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 Oud Maitha, Dubai English Speaking School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Foundation Stage to primary, aged three to 11 years. The school follows the National Curriculum for England. At the time of the inspection, there were 797 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Overall, parents were very positive about the work of the school. Many expressed delight in their children's progress, praising in particular the school's ethos. The vast majority were pleased with their children's progress and felt that the teaching was very strong.

How well does the school perform overall?

Dubai English Speaking School provided a good quality of education and had a number of significant strengths. The school had responded well to the recommendations from the last inspection report; in particular, the use of assessment. Despite improvements to staffing and resources, the school was not fully compliant with requirements regarding the time allocated to Islamic Education and Arabic within the curriculum.

Attainment in English, mathematics and science was outstanding both in the Foundation Stage and the primary phase. All students were making at least good progress in English, mathematics and science; primary students made outstanding progress in mathematics. In Islamic Education and Arabic, primary students' attainment was unsatisfactory. Their progress

was acceptable. Students' behaviour and attitudes were outstanding and they were supported by good systems to ensure their safety. The quality of teaching and learning was good with outstanding features. School leaders managed the school effectively. There was a strong sense of purpose and a strong capacity for improvement.

Key features of the school

- Relationship between staff and students were excellent and behaviour was outstanding;
- Students reached high standards in English, mathematics and science;
- Attainment in Islamic Education and Arabic was below expectations;
- The time allocated for Islamic Education and Arabic did not meet the requirements of the Ministry of Education;
- Students were developing a good awareness of Dubai's traditions and culture;
- The shared determination to raise standards was reflected in improved teaching, learning and assessment;
- Outstanding enrichment opportunities made a significant contribution to students academic progress and personal development;
- There were not enough opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning and work at their own pace;
- There were insufficient opportunities for all stakeholders to express their views to the governing body.

Recommendations

- Raise standards in Islamic Education and Arabic and ensure the time allocated to these subjects meets ministry requirements;
- Maximise opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning;
- Provide opportunities for parents to express their views to the governing body.

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

Attainment in Islamic Education was unsatisfactory while progress was acceptable. Students showed increased interest in Islamic Education across all grades but their knowledge still remained superficial and was below expectations for their age. They were unable to link their learning to their lives appropriately. Students' recitation of The Holy Qur'an in lower grades was acceptable. However, skills in recitation were below expectations in upper primary. Students in higher grades knew that Muslims should follow The Holy Qur'an but they did not have sufficient knowledge about the Prophet's Hadeeths. By the end of Year 6, students knew that they had responsibilities towards their families but they could not specify them.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were unsatisfactory throughout the school. Students had an acceptable knowledge of grammar. However, students could not respond confidently using standard Arabic, whether to express an opinion or in response to a reading comprehension question. Furthermore, students had insufficient opportunities to write for different purposes. Students did not make sufficient gains in their language skills as provisions for the teaching and learning of Arabic as a first language were often not sufficient to guarantee progress.

Attainment for Arabic as an additional language was unsatisfactory overall; progress was acceptable. Students' attainment in the lower primary was broadly in line with expectations. Most students understood a few words and phrases and could say and repeat the same. Students could copy and write simple words. Students were beginning to understand grammar, which was exemplified in their ability to agree the verb with the gender and the number of the subject. In the upper year groups, students' listening, reading and particularly writing skills were below expectations. Many students in Year 6 were still copying letters and words. There was evident improvement in students' speaking skills however, and the majority of students could converse simply using familiar phrases and expressions.

Students make good progress in English though the school. Their attainment was outstanding in the Foundation Stage and primary phase. Children had good speaking and listening skills in the Foundation Stage. They could follow instructions easily and give simple reasons for their ideas and actions. They acquired an extremely good grasp of letters and sounds. Older students were mostly articulate speakers, had a good vocabulary and read skilfully. They had very good technical skills in writing, especially in their spelling, punctuation and sentence structure. Their writing was expressive but this attribute was tempered by limited opportunities to write independently in English lessons and in other subjects.

Attainment in mathematics was outstanding throughout the school. Students made good progress in the Foundation Stage and outstanding progress in the primary phase. Year 6 students applied their skills and knowledge of angles and symmetry when designing an adventure camp. Realistic contexts were also explored in Year 4 when calculating the timings of journeys across Dubai. Year 2 students recognised the properties of shapes and used them to solve geometric problems. In Year 1, students confidently measured the size of objects using uniform non-standard units. The youngest students counted and used numbers in familiar situations; for example, when calculating food quantities needed for a birthday party in the Foundation Stage.

Throughout the school attainment in science was outstanding and students were making good progress. In the Foundation Stage, they were inquisitive about the world around them; acquiring skills essential for subsequent work in science. They were able to observe closely and were learning how to collect information by tallying and to illustrate their findings using bar charts. By the end of Year 6, students' skills, knowledge and understanding were high. They had an excellent grasp of how opposing forces interacted; for example, during various fairground rides. They made insightful comments when using simulation software to design the most efficient bridge and when planning experiments to explore the weight of objects in and out of water.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

All students had very positive attitudes to learning. Behaviour was outstanding in lessons and assemblies, and in the open areas of the school. Students were very supportive of each other. Students understood that their teachers valued their contributions to lessons and other activities, and were confident of adult support in any difficulty at school or at home. Through the programme for personal, social and health education, they gained outstanding knowledge of the requirements for a healthy lifestyle. Attendance was acceptable.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and culture were good overall. Students in the Foundation Stage behaved responsibly in their classrooms and were aware of their duty to keep their belongings and those of the school in good condition. The majority of students had a good understanding of Dubai's landmarks. Students in the primary phase were proud and enthusiastic about being students at DESS and readily assumed roles of responsibility around the school, such as being members in the student council and in various clubs. The majority of students had a basic understanding of the rituals and practices of Islam. Almost all students had a positive view about how they were personally growing and benefitting from being surrounded by friends from various cultures and backgrounds.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good in the Foundation Stage and primary phase. Students in the Foundation Stage had a good knowledge of Dubai's terrain and some of its fauna and flora. They readily participated in clean-up activities and consequently classrooms and play areas were virtually litter free. Foundation Stage students had a good understanding of the economy as they participated in planning events and had to work on a budget. Students in the primary phase had an acceptable knowledge of the nature of Dubai's economy and its progress which they knew were reflected in the famous landmarks. Most students were aware of local and environmental issues and participated in recycling activities when and where available.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was good with outstanding features across the school in most subjects, the exceptions being Islamic Education and Arabic where it ranged acceptable to unsatisfactory. Teachers planned their lessons thoroughly in teams and this helped to achieve consistency of approaches across year groups. Increasingly, student attainment and progress data was used effectively to plan lessons and units of work to meet the individual needs of the students. The subject knowledge of the majority of the specialist and class teachers was very good and this had a significant impact on the quality of the students' learning. Teachers spent a high proportion of time interacting with students and, at best, asked them pertinent and differentiated questions. Good use was made of the wide range of accessible and well organised resources available within rooms.

The quality of learning was enhanced in the majority of lessons by the emphasis given to the 'learning to learn' strategies which were becoming embedded across the school. Students were learning and applying skills and qualities such as resilience and reflection whilst engaged

in problem-solving and other types of activities. They collaborated effectively in groups which maximised opportunities for discussion. Outstanding learning occurred where students were given real-life contexts for their tasks. For example, a group of students designed an adventure camp to be an improvement on the one they had stayed at recently. Progression in learning was promoted through 'success ladders' whereby students moved through success criteria in carefully graded steps to achieve their specific objectives.

Assessment had improved since the previous inspection as a result of the further embedding of a range of strategies. Moderation arrangements had enhanced the accuracy of teacher assessments. Good use was made of the comprehensive student tracking data, with teachers setting challenging targets based on the data analysis overview provided by the senior leadership team. These targets were generally communicated to students, except in Arabic where targets were rarely set to improve writing. In a minority of lessons across the school, assessment information was not used consistently to ensure an appropriate match of work to individual needs and this slowed down the learning. Self and peer assessment were developing well, with students using agreed criteria to make this an accurate process. For example, in Physical Education (PE), Year 3 students assessed each other's progress in a range of fitness exercises. Teachers generally checked on students' understanding periodically during lessons, often through asking pertinent questions. Marking was regular, constructive and diagnostic, and usually highlighted the next steps in the learning.

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

The curriculum was good throughout the school with some outstanding aspects. Teachers planned well to ensure that students learned progressively and with an increasing emphasis on skills development. Lessons often featured a blending of subjects to make learning meaningful and more relevant to everyday life; the school was developing this further in the main subjects, including Arabic. Weekly planning was well structured but did not provide enough flexibility for students to take responsibility for their own learning and work at their own pace. The enrichment of the curriculum was outstanding, with a host of interesting activities, visitors and visits, such as a residential trip to Dibba and after-school clubs that included netball, chess, orchestra, and ballet. The curriculum was further enhanced by the expertise of specialist teachers, especially for older students, and by a celebration of the culture of Dubai. The school did not meet the requirements in terms of the proportion of time that should be allocated to Islamic Education and Arabic. However, it had reviewed and updated the Arabic curriculum for students for whom it was a second or third language. A strong focus on speaking and listening meant that less time was given to reading and writing. Loosely based on expectations of a foreign language in the National Curriculum, the school had been successful in developing clearer expectations for speaking, reading and writing in Arabic.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety arrangements were good. Premises were suitably maintained. Healthy eating was prioritised through the curriculum and special events, for example, the planning of a birthday party in reception, and the health related fitness aspects of PE. Effective arrangements were in place to ensure a safe and secure environment with an appropriate level of supervision. Staff had received recent training on the identification of students who might be at risk and clear protocols existed for logging concerns with the child protection officer. Procedures for checking and reporting on health and safety had been reviewed and monitored since the last inspection and these were incorporated within a detailed policy and guidelines. Comprehensive risk assessments were in place for school trips including residential visits. A practice fire alarm during the inspection resulted in an extremely prompt and orderly evacuation of the building, with registers taken at the assembly point.

The quality of support for students was good. Adults had a high regard for students' individual needs and well-being, and provided them with sensitive guidance in personal matters. As a result, there were excellent relationships between adults and students. Guidance in lessons was constant and well-focused so that students clearly knew how well they were doing and how they could improve. Support for students with special educational needs in lessons was good. Although inconsistent across the school, it was highly effective in the Learning Support Centre. The school had a good system for collating details of students' academic progress and used them well, for example, to support those who were at risk of underachieving. The school did not analyse data sufficiently to assess how well all groups of students were doing. Staff handled behavioural issues decisively and effectively but the school was less vigilant about attendance.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was good. The school community shared a strong sense of purpose in sustaining success and meeting ambitious targets. The Headteacher was well supported by other senior staff in establishing an extremely positive ethos. Through systematic and rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning, school leaders gained an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses. This information was used to provide further training opportunities for staff. However, there were missed opportunities to share the successful strategies used to promote learning and progress in English, mathematics and science with the staff teaching Islamic Education and Arabic.

Self-evaluation was good and used to identify key priorities for improvement. Careful tracking of students' progress helped in this process. For example, although students were making good progress in English, staff identified potential for improving their writing skills further and were exploring how this could be achieved. The school improvement plan was comprehensive but links between the key targets, performance indicators and the planned initiatives were not clear.

The school's partnership with parents and the community was good. Parents held the school in high regard and appreciated the open-door policy. Home-school booklets provided useful day-to-day contact and information about students' individual targets. Parents were kept well informed about how to support their children at home and felt welcome when visiting or working as volunteers in the classroom. This was abundantly clear during the inspection when parents of reception children joined the children in celebrating 'teddy's birthday'. A thriving parent teacher association provided an important dimension to the life of the school and the local community and raised substantial funds each year. However, there was no formal mechanism for consultation with the parent body or for gathering their views.

The quality of governance was acceptable. Board members played a significant role in and ensuring the school met its commitment to parents. They were rigorous in holding the school to account. They kept themselves informed by inviting subject leaders to their meetings and through regular updates from the Headteacher. Although plans were in hand to seek the views of parents through meetings and questionnaires, there was no formal representation of parents on the governing body. Parents remained uncertain about its work, despite the recommendation of the previous report. Strong links had been established with the sister secondary school through the amalgamation of both governing bodies.

The staffing, facilities and resources were outstanding. There were sufficient, well-qualified qualified teachers in each section of the school; for example, staff in the Foundation Stage had a good understanding of how young children learn. The specialist teaching was of a consistently high quality. Resources for information and communication technology were excellent and included two computer suites, banks of mobile laptops and data-logging equipment. The well-stocked library was attractive and provided an excellent resource for learning, and was used frequently by classes and individuals.

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
Attainment	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?		
2% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.		
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?		
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary
Attainment	Outstanding	Outstanding
Progress over time	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?		
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary
Attainment	Outstanding	Outstanding
Progress over time	Good	Outstanding

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?		
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary
Attainment	Outstanding	Outstanding
Progress over time	Good	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?		
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary
Attitudes and behaviour	Outstanding	Outstanding
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good

How good are teaching and learning?		
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Good

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?		
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary
Curriculum quality	Good	Good

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

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

How well does the school perform overall?
Good

Next steps

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

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau
Knowledge and Human Development Authority

How to contact us

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

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

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