

National Charity School Inspection Report

Cycles 1 to 3

Report published May 2010

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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.

The National Charity School was inspected in March 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, National Charity School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Grade 1 to Grade 12, aged five to 17 years. The school follows a Ministry of Education curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 5590 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was outstanding.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Almost all parents said that their children liked school and most parents were happy with their children's progress in all key subjects. Most parents thought that behaviour in the school was good and that staff expected their children to work hard and do their best, and to become independent and responsible people. Most parents agreed that teaching was good. However, only a minority thought that there was a good range of activities. A majority disagreed or did not know if the school was good at consulting them on decisions that affected their children. A majority of parents thought that staff showed concern for the care and welfare students, and the school helped children to stay safe and healthy. A majority of parents felt that leadership was good and there were good links with parents and the local community. Only a minority agreed that the school has responded positively to the recommendations of the previous inspection.

How well does the school perform overall?

National Charity School provided an acceptable education to many students, within an environment of limited resources. Strong examination results were emphasised, and a few students achieved among the highest examination scores in the country. Across all subjects students reached acceptable or better standards. Students had particularly high attainment in Islamic Education, spoken classical Arabic and spoken English in Cycle 3. Most students were highly committed to their own learning and were enthusiastic in lessons. Primary students and secondary girls behaved well, but there were several examples of poor behaviour from secondary boys, particularly outside the classroom and during assembly. Students had a good understanding of and respect for Islam, and appreciated the multi-cultural nature of Dubai. Most had an age-appropriate understanding of the environment, but few took responsibility for the school environment and many students left litter on the playground after break times.

Teaching, learning and assessment were acceptable throughout the school. However, most lessons were based on teacher talk, with insufficient account taken of the varying needs of different learners. Class sizes of up to 40 students made individual attention difficult. However, there were several examples of good lessons in which teachers built on previous learning, encouraged students to talk in pairs and groups and to justify their points of view. A reliance on textbooks and a lack of practical activities often prevented teachers from focusing on students' individual needs. Most students were keen to learn. They collaborated together well when asked, although opportunities for student research and use of technology were underdeveloped. There were regular tests and examinations, but students' work was not always marked thoroughly, and assessment data was not used regularly to plan future learning. The school followed a Ministry of Education curriculum, which provided students with an acceptable breadth and balance of learning. The evening school had one period fewer per day than the morning school, which reduced the range of activities provided. The information and communication technology (ICT) programme was poorly developed and ICT was used insufficiently in other subjects. There were few cross-curricular links. Overall, the provision for health and safety was unsatisfactory. Although most aspects of health and safety were adequately managed, unsafe practices in the storage of chemicals and practical science lessons presented a significant hazard to the health and safety of staff and students.

The leadership and management were unsatisfactory. There was no explicit vision for excellence of learning, and middle management was insufficient and not suitably empowered for the size and complexity of the school. Therefore, the school had only made minimal improvements since the last inspection, although safety arrangements with buses had improved significantly. Poor quality and overcrowded buildings and resources limited learning.

Key features of the school

- The highest achieving students were very successful in Ministry of Education exams;
- Across all subjects, students achieved acceptable or better standards. Students had particularly high attainment in Islamic Education, spoken classical Arabic and the spoken English in Cycle 3;
- Most lessons were based on teacher talk, with insufficient account taken of the varying needs of different learners;
- Health and safety arrangements with buses had improved but the organisation and storage of chemicals and equipment in the science laboratories presented a significant risk to the safety of students and staff;
- The leadership and management lacked an explicit vision for excellence of learning, and insufficient numbers of middle management personnel were not suitably empowered for the size and complexity of the school;
- The school buildings were of poor quality and were overcrowded and this, along with limited resources restricted students' learning.

Recommendations

- Address all risks to the health and safety of students and staff in the science laboratories;
- Establish governance with stakeholder participation that enables thorough strategic planning and ensures significant school development;
- Improve leadership and management to support the development and sharing of best practice in teaching and learning;
- Implement a wider variety of teaching approaches;
- Ensure that there are sufficient resources, including ICT, for all subjects, to support a wider variety of learning activities.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good at all stages in the morning school and in Cycles 2 and 3 at the evening school, and were acceptable in Cycle 1 at the evening school. Students in all classes had a good knowledge of basic principles of Islam and of manners which must be adhered to by every Muslim. In Cycle 1 almost all students were able to read short chapters of The Holy Qur'an, and could identify some traits of a good Muslim. In Cycles 2 and 3 most students recited The Holy Qur'an clearly and accurately, and understood the underlying moral messages in the verses well.

Attainment and progress in Arabic were good in the morning school at all stages. In the evening school, attainment and progress were acceptable except for Cycle 1 where progress was good. A majority of students spoke well using classical Arabic. In Grade 1 most students could read and write many common words. Most students had a good understanding of grammar. In Grade 7 most could distinguish between different kinds of verbs. By Grade 12 students could identify the main elements in a story. By Grade 9 most students could write short compositions but most had not developed extended writing skills. Students read aloud well but their reading was generally limited to small extracts from textbooks. Attainment in external examinations was good in the morning school and acceptable in the evening school.

In both the morning and evening schools attainment in English was acceptable in Cycle 1 and 2, and good in Cycle 3. Progress was acceptable in Cycle 1 and in the evening school at Cycle 2. Progress was good in Cycle 3 and in the morning school in Cycle 2. Most students in all grades were active listeners and responded well to their teacher. Students in Grades 2 to 5 knew letters and common words. By Grade 5 students could independently construct sentences. Students in Grades 6 to 9 knew grammar well, could read and they listened and responded effectively in class discussions. The least developed skill was independent writing. Students in Grades 10 to 12 talked confidently and expressed their thoughts well.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable in Cycles 1 and 2 and good in Cycle 3. By the end of Cycle 1, students had gained appropriate standards in numeracy and started to develop their mathematical vocabulary. Within the study of shape, practical skills, such as drawing, estimating and measuring, were much less secure. By the end of Cycle 2, students generally gained confidence in the use of algebra and could use formulae to find the surface area of various prisms. However, their capacity to follow rules and processes was not matched by their abilities to contextualise their knowledge and solve problems. Students made best progress and began to develop higher level learning skills in Cycle 3. This involved using prior knowledge, exploring problems independently and, in groups, devising their own solution strategies.

Attainment and progress in science were acceptable in Cycles 1 and 2 and good in Cycle 3. Grade 5 students know about weather instruments and how results from these can be used to draw conclusions about climatic conditions. By Grade 9, students could define an astronomical unit and use it to calculate distances. In Cycle 3, evening school students attained broadly in line with age-related expectations. Grade 12 chemistry students calculated the atomic weight of chemical compounds well. Attainment and progress in chemistry and biology was better than in physics. Students were only occasionally able to develop hypotheses, and students' experimental skills and critical thinking were underdeveloped.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Attitudes and behaviour were good in the evening school and Cycle 1 morning school but only acceptable in the morning Cycle 2 and 3 schools. Primary school students were enthusiastic learners and were highly engaged most of the time. Secondary girls were highly motivated to succeed and took considerable responsibility for their learning, particularly in Cycle 3. However, behaviour in the boys' section was poor at times, particularly outside the classrooms and during assemblies. Almost all teachers had positive and caring relationships with students, and attendance was outstanding. Punctuality was good in most of the school. However, lateness disturbed secondary assemblies and many secondary boys returned to classes late after break times in the morning school.

Students' civic understanding and understanding of Islam were good throughout the school. There were few opportunities for students to take roles of responsibility within the school, but a few students took part in Red Crescent activities. Students understood the relevance of Islam for daily life, including the importance of cleanliness and of having boundaries for how to live. Students also appreciated the multi-cultural nature of Dubai and of the school.

Economic and environmental understanding was acceptable. Most students had an age-appropriate knowledge of Dubai's developments. All overestimated the role of oil in the economy but with some prompting could explain some links with tourism and trade. Senior students appreciated how Dubai's economy was connected with global economy and described the impact of the international economic crisis on property development. Most students knew about forms of pollution and some classes had taken part in cleaning beaches. Students' understanding of environmental issues was frequently superficial but they recognised the importance of saving water and electricity by turning off taps and switching off lights. Students had taken part successfully in a competition making artwork from recycled materials but there was insufficient understanding about recycling. Litter was a problem throughout the school and playground areas were covered in food packaging after break times.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was acceptable in each cycle in both schools. Most teachers demonstrated a good knowledge of their subjects, though not always how to teach them effectively. In the best lessons, teachers built on previous learning, encouraged students to talk in pairs and groups and to justify their points of view. Teachers maintained a good pace, had a good rapport with their students and ensured that students were active participants. In the least successful lessons, teachers talked for too long and did not provide enough opportunities for students to ask questions or carry out investigative and problem solving activities. Very often in these lessons, students were not given sufficient time to carry out and develop their work and were hurriedly asked to complete it for homework. Lesson objectives were rarely explained at the beginning of lessons or reviewed at the end. In some lessons, particularly in English in Cycle 3, teachers supported students as they worked. However, many of the teaching groups were very large, over 40 in some cases, and this made it difficult for teachers to meet the needs of all their students, including those who required additional help with their learning. Teachers used textbooks as their principal resource and did not routinely provide students with practical activities. Teachers rarely included a conclusion to give students opportunities to say what they had learnt and to think about what they should do next to build on their learning.

The quality of students' learning was acceptable in each cycle, in both schools. Students in the primary and girls' sections were particularly enthusiastic about their learning. Students were keen to participate and clearly wanted to do well, but in many lessons the teachers spoke for lengthy periods of time and gave students tasks that did not require much thought. Paired and small group work was rare and students had limited opportunities to apply their learning in sustained ways. When students were asked to work together, they did so readily, asking and answering each other's questions and contributing ideas in discussions. Most students showed themselves to be good listeners, and older students in particular demonstrated good speaking and listening skills. However, there was little learning through practical enquiry in mathematics and science, and students very rarely used ICT during lessons.

The quality of assessment was acceptable in each cycle, in both schools. There were organised procedures for testing and recording students' attainment, though the school did not analyse students' strengths and weaknesses by subject or grade. There was some good assessment practice in the school. For example, at the end of lessons in Islamic Education, teachers gave students time to review what they had learned. In some Arabic and English lessons, teachers went from group to group to assess levels of understanding and to support those who needed it. However, the general pattern of whole class teaching and reliance upon a textbook meant that lessons were rarely planned on the basis of students' previous achievements. In the best lessons, students were given feedback on how well they were doing and what they needed to do to improve, and praise was given when students gave correct answers or tried hard. Day to day marking in mathematics consisted largely of ticks and students' work in science was not always marked.

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

The curriculum was acceptable. It complied with the requirements of the Ministry of Education, which provided for adequate breadth and balance. However, in the evening school, a shorter school day of six periods meant that the range of activities was very limited. The science curriculum did not include sufficient practical work. The physical education curriculum had a narrow range of activities because of space and resources limitations, but students' experience was broadened through several sporting competitions with other schools. The curriculum was updated according to Ministry of Education books. In only a minority of teaching was this extended and adapted to the varying needs of the students. There were a few examples of cross-curricular links in mathematics, English and science. Good examples were seen where scientific research had been written up in English. However, connections between subjects were underdeveloped and there was insufficient use of ICT to support other areas of the curriculum. The restrictions of a two-shift school meant that there were few extra-curricular activities during the week, although some activities took place on Saturdays, and there was a media club and an environmental group. Some enrichment classes took place for morning students before the school day. The school had made some use of resources in the wider community. There were annual visits to various establishments, including hospitals and writing about the gas industry for a competition.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The provision for ensuring the health and safety of students was unsatisfactory. Medical staff ensured the general health of all students. Chronic illness and obesity were checked regularly. Although there was no formal child protection policy, staff were vigilant in their care for students. Medical staff advised students on a healthy eating regime and this information was often reinforced in lessons and in posters on the walls, especially in the girls' school. In the evening school the students who used wheelchairs were well cared for and the school arranged for all their lessons to be on the ground floor. The school worked with the civil defence in carrying out emergency evacuation of the buildings and records showed that these were satisfactory. Transport arrangements to and from school were acceptable, following a determined effort by the school to implement new regulations. A few parents, however, were observed dropping off their children on the opposite side of the busy road outside school, leaving them to cross unsupervised. The school had been quick to respond to potential dangers to students from faulty electrical connections though these had not been identified through regular maintenance and cleaning checks. However, the storage and disposal of chemicals together with unsafe practice in practical science lessons presented a significant hazard to the health and safety of staff and students.

The support for students was acceptable. Staff-student relationships were generally caring and encouraging, particularly in the girls' school. Supervisors and counsellors offered good support to all students. Information was given to Cycle 3 students about application to higher education but there was no regular structured careers information and guidance. Expectations of students' behaviour were well documented and there was an escalating scale of sanctions, involving parents, in line with the severity of misbehaviour. These systems were effective in Cycle 1 and in the girls' school in promoting good behaviour but less so in the boys' school. The school had recently been able to view the attainment of students over a three year period. However, the school had not yet realised the full potential of this information in measuring progress and setting targets for students in line with their prior attainment. Attendance was checked each morning and unexplained absence followed up immediately.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was unsatisfactory. Overall, there were insufficient leadership positions in the school. Certain senior leaders did not have the capacity to ensure school improvement. However, there were several examples of good leadership in the school, including the girls' secondary school and some subject co-ordinators. The impact of subject coordinators on learning was reduced by their teaching responsibilities, their roles across many grade levels in the Dubai, Sharjah and Ajman schools and a lack of empowerment to bring about significant change. There was a strong vision for high attainment for the most able students, which produced notable examination success but little explicit vision for excellence in teaching and learning and for the school to overcome its limited resources.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were unsatisfactory. There were few formal processes for self-evaluation. Coordinators regularly monitored teaching staff and recorded their observations and recommendations in writing. However, their high workload prevented significant follow-up with individual staff. There was progress on some recommendations from the previous inspection, most notably better safety arrangements on the buses, but limited change on most other recommendations. Teachers had few opportunities to attend workshops.

Partnership with parents and the community was unsatisfactory. Mothers' and fathers' committees had been established in October 2009. The fathers' committee had met once. The mothers group had met four times and supported the recognition of distinguished students. Both parents' committees had many useful suggestions, but they had not had time to make an impact on learning. The school sent report cards to parents and ran parent-teacher conferences twice a year. It provided contact numbers for teachers, principals and other staff. The school responded appropriately when parents initiated discussion about a concern, although it was not always proactive in contacting parents. Parents were not involved on a daily basis in the school. The local community was used for one field trip per year per grade level. Students had participated in Dubai runs and walks, and sporting competitions with other schools in the area.

Governance was unsatisfactory. The school had not yet established a formal governing body to oversee the work of the school and hold the management to account for the performance of the school. Mothers' and fathers' committees had useful input for the governance of the school but this had not been incorporated into the development planning for the school. Students and teachers did not have any formal input into development planning.

Staffing, facilities and resources were unsatisfactory. There was an adequate number of teachers to cover classes. However, teachers who taught in morning and evening schools worked long hours, which made their teaching less effective. The condition of the science laboratories presented significant health and safety risks to students and staff. A few classes had up to 40 students and classrooms were not large enough to accommodate this number. This was a particular problem with the science laboratories and ICT rooms in facilitating practical work across the curriculum. Most classrooms were not equipped with computers or the Internet, and so ICT could not be used to support learning in most classes. There were few resources beyond those made by teachers.

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:	Cycle 1 morning	Cycle 1 evening	Cycle 2 morning	Cycle 2 evening	Cycle 3 morning	Cycle 3 evening
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good	Good

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

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

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?

Age group:	Cycle 1 morning	Cycle 1 evening	Cycle 2 morning	Cycle 2 evening	Cycle 3 morning	Cycle 3 evening
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?

Age group:	Cycle 1 morning	Cycle 1 evening	Cycle 2 morning	Cycle 2 evening	Cycle 3 morning	Cycle 3 evening
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Age group:	Cycle 1 morning	Cycle 1 evening	Cycle 2 morning	Cycle 2 evening	Cycle 3 morning	Cycle 3 evening
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are teaching and learning?

Age group:	Cycle 1 morning	Cycle 1 evening	Cycle 2 morning	Cycle 2 evening	Cycle 3 morning	Cycle 3 evening
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

Age group:	Cycle 1 morning	Cycle 1 evening	Cycle 2 morning	Cycle 2 evening	Cycle 3 morning	Cycle 3 evening
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?

Age group:	Cycle 1 morning	Cycle 1 evening	Cycle 2 morning	Cycle 2 evening	Cycle 3 morning	Cycle 3 evening
Health and safety	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Quality of support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

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.

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