

School Of Modern Skills 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.

The School of Modern Skills 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 Mohaisinah, School of Modern Skills 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 880 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was outstanding.

There was a high level of satisfaction indicated in the parental responses to the parent survey. Almost all parents agreed that the school communicated effectively with them. Parents reported that the senior management team and staff were accessible and responsive to questions and concerns. Most parents shared a high degree of satisfaction with the new Principal. Support for the Mother's Council, along with the new interactive website was shared. Most parents were satisfied with the amount of extra-curricular offerings. A minority of respondents felt that their children needed too much assistance with their homework at home. All parents agreed that the school was a safe place for their children. Most parents felt that the previous school report led to improvement in the school.

How well does the school perform overall?

Overall, the school provided an acceptable level of education with many good features. The previous inspection report recommended three specific areas for improvement and progress had been made in each, however, not enough time had passed since the report to permit full implementation to be realised.

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good across the school. Arabic attainment and progress were good across all phases of the school, apart from in the middle grades, where progress was acceptable. Attainment in English was good in Kindergarten and acceptable in primary, middle and high school. Progress was good in Kindergarten and high school and acceptable in the primary and middle schools. In mathematics, at Kindergarten, attainment and progress were good. Attainment at all other phases was acceptable. Progress in primary was acceptable and in all other phases it was good. Science attainment and progress were good in Kindergarten, acceptable in primary and middle school while in high school attainment was acceptable and progress was good. Student's attitudes and behaviour were good in Kindergarten, middle and high school and acceptable in primary. In Kindergarten, primary and the middle grades students' civic understanding was good and, in secondary, it was outstanding. Students' economic and environmental understanding was good in the high school level and acceptable at all other levels. The quality of teaching in the Kindergarten and high school was good and in all other phases acceptable. When teaching was only acceptable, teachers did not encourage most students to become engaged in their learning and develop independent skills. Lessons that were well planned met the needs of the majority of students. The quality of students' learning was good in Kindergarten and acceptable in the primary, middle and high school. Teacher-led lessons provided less opportunity for students to share and discuss their learning. Assessment was good in Kindergarten and acceptable in primary, middle and high school and had improved since the last inspection. Leaders had improved overall assessment processes. New policies had been written as part of the action plan developed in response to the previous inspection report. The quality of the curriculum was good in Kindergarten while acceptable across the rest of the school. The school's curriculum committee had recently reviewed the curriculum and produced a comprehensive set of standards to ensure progression and continuity in different subjects. The school's health and safety provision was good. The facilities were modern, clean and safe. Students were supervised at all times. The quality of student support was good. Teachers and students had positive relationships. The school's leadership was judged as good. Parent partnerships were overwhelmingly positive and also judged as good. During interviews with parents, support for the new Principal and confidence in the school as a caring and protective environment were shared. The governance committee was rated as good and parents were represented on it. Staffing, facilities and resources were good. Teachers were appropriately certified; however, the large number of new teachers compromised the continual progress of the school.

Key features of the school

- Student's civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of the Arab traditions and culture was clearly evident;
- Parents expressed high levels of confidence in the new school leaders;
- Almost all students were English second language learners.

Recommendations

- Encourage and show all students how to take an active role in their own learning;
- Improve the quality and frequency of on-going student assessments to direct the instructional program;
- Promote the use of the library and information and communication technology (ICT) as resource tools, especially for upper grade students.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good. Students demonstrated good skills in the memorisation of The Holy Qur'an. Most students could memorise long chapters from The Holy Qur'an and recite them correctly. Students could also explain the meanings of the memorised verses. Students knew the life of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and they were fully aware of his impact as a role model on their lives. In general, students had good understanding of the rulings and the etiquettes of Islam, particularly in Grade 8 where they could rehearse the rituals of Umrah, practically. By Grade 11, all students were aware of the importance of consultation in their life as Muslims. By the end of secondary, students' knowledge about Islam had significantly progressed.

In Arabic as a first language, attainment and progress were good across all phases of the school, apart from in the middle school, where progress was acceptable. Examination data showed most students to be above expected levels. Most students could listen well to others and respond to the teacher's instructions. Younger students used a range of vocabulary when they spoke in full sentences. High school students described their emotions using good Arabic structure. They also described what they had seen and confidently presented ideas about a text and author. Student's reading skills were good; most students could read text and poetry accurately with mostly correct pronunciation. Most students' writing was in line with expected international standards. Students wrote paragraphs with some errors in grammar and spelling. Middle school students made less rapid progress than others.

Attainment in English was good in Kindergarten and acceptable in primary, middle and high school. Progress was good in Kindergarten and high school and acceptable in primary and middle school. Kindergarten children listened to and followed directions properly. In primary, most students listened attentively and answered teachers' queries with one-word or short answers. Older students read simple passages and correctly answered workbook questions. Students progressively developed reading skills and wrote simple paragraphs. High school students actively participated in discussions. They identified literary elements in stories and used a six step writing process. International benchmarking for English as a second language was under development.

In mathematics, Kindergarten attainment and progress were good. Attainment at all other phases was acceptable. Progress in primary was acceptable and in all other phases it was good. Children in Kindergarten counted to ten, used and identified different shapes. Younger children recognised and wrote the numbers one and two and counted to five. In primary, students learned about simple equations and older students used negative and positive numbers on a number line to solve negative number additions. In middle school, students worked together to support their understanding of numerical and algebraic expressions. High school students calculated linear functions and graph lines using the intercept.

In science, attainment and progress were good in Kindergarten, acceptable in primary and middle school, while in high school attainment was acceptable and progress was good. Most children in Kindergarten made good progress in learning parts of the human body and face. Most students in Grades 1 to 5 demonstrated acceptable levels of knowledge of the different life forms. Middle school students had acceptable levels of observation and recording skills and developed their understanding of the basic scientific concepts. High school students had good understanding of how bacteriophages worked and developed their understanding of thermal equilibrium. However, across the school, the majority of students had limited ability to make a hypothesis, investigate, interpret observations or draw conclusions.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Attitudes and behaviour were good in Kindergarten, middle and high school and acceptable in primary. Reported attendance was outstanding. A minority of students were late to school. Student-staff relationships were strong. Students knew healthy eating habits but did not always make good choices. The school nutritionist provided dietary advice that families followed. The physical fitness report card was motivating to students. Students responded to directions from teachers and supervisors but some primary boys did not follow rules in the canteens and the classrooms.

In Kindergarten, primary and middle phases, students' civic understanding was good and in secondary it was outstanding. Almost all students throughout school understood their responsibilities in school and in the wider community. Secondary students played an important role in the school council, such as improving food in the canteen, monitoring uniforms and organising celebrations in school. Students demonstrated a very good understanding of Islam and its impact in their dealings with others in Dubai and the world. Students had good

understanding and appreciation of the multi-cultural nature of Dubai, and they knew a good deal about traditional and local heritage, especially games and sports.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good in the senior high level and acceptable at all other levels. Most students knew "Reduce, Reuse and Recycle" and pointed out the bins in the canteen areas for paper, plastic and aluminium. High school students shared thoughts for alternative energy sources and demonstrated a good knowledge of global warming and alternative fuels for automobiles.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching in the Kindergarten and high school was good and in all other phases acceptable. Most teaching was characterised by strong subject knowledge and a growing understanding of how students learn. This was seen in Kindergarten, where activities were planned to meet the needs of the majority of young learners and develop their independence. Good teaching included questioning that challenged students and supported inquiry, reflection and critical thinking. However, when teaching was acceptable teachers did not encourage most students to become engaged in their learning and develop independent skills. Lessons that were well planned met the needs of the majority of students and featured good pace. Most teachers used information and communication technology (ICT) and resources to support teaching but very few students used ICT to support their learning.

The quality of students' learning was good in Kindergarten and acceptable in primary, middle and high school. Students' discussions and presentations supported good learning in mathematics. Teacher-led lessons provided less opportunity for students to share and discuss their learning, resulting in a slower pace of learning and a loss of interest. High school students shared inquiry and critical thinking when graphing linear functions. However, overall, full student engagement in the learning process was missing and this inhibited students' progress and attainment at higher levels.

Assessment was good in Kindergarten and acceptable in the primary, middle and high schools and had improved since the last inspection. Leaders had worked hard to improve overall assessment processes and policies had been written as part of the action plan developed in response to the previous inspection report. Regular testing was undertaken, including an annual international test. The school was working towards external student examinations to support admission into higher education. Grades 1 and 2 students did not undertake an external international test in English, mathematics or science. Despite teachers consistently marking work, their comments did not inform students how they could improve and students did not know their end of year learning goals. International assessments were not closely aligned with the curriculum, textbooks and documents, especially for those learners for whom English was an additional language.

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

The quality of the curriculum was good in Kindergarten while acceptable across the rest of the school. In Kindergarten, it provided good opportunities for children to develop their skills through Islamic Education, mathematics and science which were well embedded in Arabic and English sessions. Elements of choice were evident and appropriate levels of challenge were provided for almost all children. Throughout the rest of the school, the curriculum was largely broad and balanced. An appropriate range of subjects was offered with good time allocation provided for the key subjects. There were frequent opportunities for students to learn within the community through field trips and guest speakers, who were regularly invited to talk to the students about Islam, healthy lifestyles and safety. There were new curriculum initiatives to promote reading for pleasure and The Holy Qur'an recitation and an acceptable range of extra-curricular activities and clubs was available. A few remedial and special classes for English as a second language (ESL) were organised. The school's curriculum committee had recently reviewed the curriculum and produced a comprehensive set of standards to ensure progression and continuity in different subjects. However, in the classrooms, there was excessive reliance on text books to determine what each student or groups of students learned next. Cross-curricular links were limited and there were only a few opportunities for the use of ICT as a learning tool by the students.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The school's health and safety was good. The facilities were modern, clean and safe. Students were supervised at all times. The clinic was staffed by a full-time nurse, part-time medical doctor and part-time nutritionist. Medical records were on file and continuously updated. All students received a physical examination upon entry, at Grades 1, 5, 9 and before leaving school. Students followed the dietary recommendations provided by the school nutritionist. The canteens were clean and offered nutritious food although students did not always purchase it. Transportation was conducted safely and students followed procedures and used seat belts. The school had good security and good policies and procedures for emergencies, including regular fire exit drills. Some doors were locked, creating a potential hazard during an emergency. Although informal procedures were in place, there was no formal child protection plan.

The quality of support was good. Teachers and students had positive relationships. Overall, behaviour was good with the exception of inappropriate behaviour among a minority of primary boys. Students reported that their parents utilised the new student information system to track their academic progress. A comprehensive career counselling program was under development and personal counselling needs were addressed by a new full-time psychologist. Student profiles provided teachers with comprehensive information about students' strengths and weaknesses and their academic and personal histories. Special needs students attended weekly clubs for enrichment or academic support. All students attended weekly ESL classes. Attendance and punctuality were well monitored.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The school's leadership was judged as good. The notable feature of the leadership team was the high rate of turnover in the Principal's role. The current Principal had only been in post since March 2010. Significant improvements had been noted though not enough time had passed to accurately judge the effects of the programs that had been instituted. The senior leadership team demonstrated good capacity to implement change and was well respected by parents and students. Subject area co-ordinators and instructional leaders demonstrated good knowledge in their respective areas.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning had been addressed in response to the previous inspection report and was found to be acceptable. An international assessment instrument was selected and data was beginning to be collected on student achievement.

Parent-school partnerships were positive and were judged as good. During interviews with parents, support for the new Principal and confidence in the school as a caring and protective environment was shared. Parents were kept informed of school events through the website, through notes from teachers and face-to-face conversations with school personnel. Some parents indicated they would like more extra-curricular activities for their students.

Governance in the school was good. The governance committee was open and knowledgeable about the school's needs and purpose. A large number of improvements had been initiated in response to the previous inspection report. Parents were represented on the committee, which consisted of three members. The governance committee responded to requests from the senior leadership team for programming and facilities improvements.

Staffing, facilities and resources were good. Teachers were appropriately certified, however, the large number of new staff members compromised the continual progress of the school. The school was attractive, clean and well cared for. However, the library was under-utilised and lacked sufficient computer stations to facilitate independent research. The addition of a laboratory assistant in the science laboratories was noted as this was effective in ensuring a safe and organised learning environment. A new website software program was demonstrated that will be interactive and give parents greater access to their children's grades and progress. ICT was being installed in every room but was not yet being effectively used in the teaching process.

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	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
98% 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	Good	Good
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Good
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

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

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

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

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Acceptable	Good	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Good	Outstanding
Economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

How good are teaching and learning?

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Good	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	Good	Good	Good	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	Good
Governance	Good
Staffing, facilities and resources	Good

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.

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