

Arab Unity School Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 12

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.

Arab Unity School was inspected in January 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 Rashidiya, Arab Unity School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 12, aged three to 18 years. The school follows a UK curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 2870 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Most parents agreed that their children liked school, that the teaching was good, and that their children's progress in Islamic Education, mathematics and science was good. Almost all felt that their children's progress in English was good and a majority felt that the progress made in Arabic was also good. Most parents agreed that the school showed concern for their children's health and welfare and kept their children safe and healthy. Most parents thought that their children were treated fairly in school, that behaviour was good and that staff expected children to work hard and do their best. They agreed that they received sufficient information about their children's progress and a majority agreed that the school was good at consulting them about decisions affecting their child. They reported that they felt comfortable about approaching the school with a question or complaint. A majority of parents felt that the school's response to the last inspection report had been positive.

How well does the school perform overall?

The school provided an acceptable quality of education, although there were areas of provision which were unsatisfactory. Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable in all grades and progress was good at post-16 stage. In Arabic, progress and attainment were acceptable overall. Students' attainment in English was unsatisfactory in KG and acceptable in the primary and secondary. There was no provision in English post-16. Attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable in the KG and primary grades and good in the secondary and post-16. Attainment and progress in science in KG and primary were acceptable and good in secondary and post-16. Students' attitudes and behaviour were acceptable in KG and post-16 and good in primary and secondary. Students were well mannered and courteous. Attendance during the inspection was acceptable, although many students were not punctual. Students in KG displayed an acceptable civic understanding. In primary, secondary and post-16, students showed a good understanding of Islamic values and the diversity of Dubai's population. Students in KG had an acceptable understanding of environmental issues and in the rest of the school, students had a good understanding.

Overall, teaching was acceptable, except in KG where it was unsatisfactory. There was good practice in the primary, secondary and post-16 in all subjects but this was not consistent throughout the school. There was an over-reliance on didactic teaching and passive learning in many classes. The quality of student learning was acceptable, except in KG where children's learning was unsatisfactory. Assessment was acceptable in all phases of the school, except KG. The curriculum was acceptable in primary and secondary but unsatisfactory in KG and post-16. In KG there were insufficient opportunities for children to learn through play and for the youngest learners to develop appropriate creative skills. At the post-16 phase, the curriculum was unsatisfactory because there was too limited choice of subjects for students. The quality of health and safety in the school was acceptable at KG and primary but unsatisfactory in secondary and post-16. While the school had acceptable health and safety policies and procedures in place, there was a lack of consistency in their implementation. The quality of support for students was acceptable throughout the school. Students felt safe and secure in school. Staff had been trained on child protection issues.

The quality of leadership and management was acceptable. The senior management team had acted on the recommendations of the last inspection and showed commitment to school improvement. Arrangements for self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. The school had demonstrated commitment to improving the quality of parental involvement and had established a parent forum and partnership arrangements with parents and community were acceptable. Arrangements for governance of the school were acceptable. The school had a Board of Directors, which demonstrated a clear commitment to improvement through business planning. An Advisory Board had been established with representation from stakeholders. The views of all stakeholders were not yet fully represented on the Advisory Board and the school was not fully accountable to the Board. There was a suitable number of qualified staff but there was no strategy for staff retention. Information and communication technology (ICT) provision had been improved since the previous inspection. Teaching rooms were too small and often overcrowded for students in the upper school.

Key features of the school

- The school was orderly and friendly; students' attitudes were good and they were respectful and well mannered;
- The arrangements for bus transport had improved since the previous inspection, but poor punctuality remained and this effected curriculum provision;
- There was an insufficient range of teaching strategies across the school with a predominant style of teaching which did not promote active learning;
- The lack of appropriate curriculum arrangements to include active learning for children in the Kindergarten.

Recommendations

- Improve the quality of teaching to closely match the needs of all students;
- Improve the curriculum through providing English language learning from Grade 10 and in Kindergarten;
- Ensure staff implement school health and safety policies with greater consistency and particularly in science lessons;
- Increase stakeholder representation on the Advisory Board and ensure improved accountability from the school to the Advisory Board.

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

In Islamic Education, the overall attainment and progress were acceptable throughout the school. However, students made good progress in the post-16 grades, particularly in the girls' section. In Grade 1, the majority of students memorised short chapters from The Holy Qur'an. Across the school, in the English section, students acquired a detailed knowledge about the biography of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and other prophets. However, their skills in the recitation of The Holy Qur'an were well below age-related expectations. In higher grades, most students demonstrated limited critical thinking skills. They could discuss, compare, and make inferences from Quranic texts. Although the recitation of The Holy Qur'an improved in higher grades, it was still insufficiently developed. By Grade 12, students made good progress and their recitation skills were in line with national expectations.

Attainment and progress in Arabic was acceptable at all phases of the school. In reading, students in Grades 1 to 6 could read Arabic letters, words and short passages but they were not able to read from materials outside the curriculum. Non-Arab students had difficulty in pronouncing some letters correctly. In writing, all students wrote at the level expected. All students made mistakes in recording key vocabulary during dictation. In listening, most students understood their teachers. In speaking, most students spoke fluently at an appropriate level. However, non-Arab students used English to complete their speech. The correct application of grammatical rules by the Arab students was acceptable, especially in Grades 6 to 12, but for non-Arab students it was unsatisfactory.

In English, attainment and progress were unsatisfactory in the KG, but they were acceptable at the primary and secondary phases. No student studied English beyond Grade 10. By the end of the KG phase, students showed limited skills in forming letters and only a minority pronounced words correctly or spoke confidently. By Grade 6, students showed consistently well developed listening and speaking skills. By Grade 10, students were able to speak well in debates or through role play. They were developing a good understanding of the plays and the poetry which they were studying. At all stages attainment in reading was uneven as most students read accurately but often with limited expression. Students' extended and creative writing skills were underdeveloped.

In mathematics, attainment and progress were acceptable in the KG and in the primary stages. Attainment and progress were good in the secondary and post-16 stages. By the end of KG, most children had successfully developed an understanding of counting, ordering, reading and writing numbers. By the end of Grade 6, students showed their understanding of place value by multiplying whole and decimal numbers, though their mental calculation skills were less well developed. From KG to Grade 6, students' opportunities and ability to collaborate in carrying out practical problem activities were underdeveloped. By the end of the secondary phase, students had developed a good range of mental and written calculation skills to enable them to make good progress. Though students' responses were often brief, they were

beginning to explain how they had achieved solutions to mathematical problems. Students following the A-level course produced work of a high standard.

In science attainment was acceptable in Grades 1 to 6 where students mastered scientific knowledge appropriate to their age and began to develop scientific method and technical writing. This built on a foundation of learning to understand the world, which had been satisfactorily established in the KG. In Grades 7 to 11, students were able to form hypotheses, carry out investigations and draw conclusions. By Grade 12, most students at A-level had good science knowledge and skills. Progress in science in the KG and Grades 1 to 6 was appropriate to students' age, supported by a well-sequenced curriculum. In Grades 7 to 11, good progress enabled many students to achieve high levels of attainment in IGCSE, particularly in biology, physics, chemistry and environmental science. By Grade 12, their good progress and attainment enabled many students to enter university courses of their choice.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

The overall quality of personal and social development was good. Across the school, students had positive attitudes towards learning. They had good relationships with their peers and with their teachers. Students felt safe and protected at school. Most students behaved well with adults and among themselves. Students were self-disciplined, particularly in the girls' section. However, not all students arrived in good time for lessons, particularly in the morning and after breaks. Attendance during the previous year was slightly below expectations, especially in the KG and higher grades in secondary school.

Most students understood their responsibilities inside and outside the school. They communicated well with the wider community around them. They offered charitable help to the international community. Students, who represented thirteen nationalities, appreciated living in multi-cultural Dubai and participated in many national events. Throughout the whole school, the national anthem was played on a daily basis. Students also understood the importance of Islam but they did not have opportunities to practice their daily noon prayers due to the lack of space in the timetable.

Most students demonstrated good care for their classrooms and the whole school. They kept the school clean and tidy. The morning assemblies were effective in promoting environmental protection and energy saving. Since the last inspection, the school had increased the amount of green areas around the school campus. However, students still asked for more shaded areas and green areas. Senior students knew many of the environmental problems in Dubai and suggested practical solutions for them.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was unsatisfactory in the KG phase. Teaching was acceptable in the primary, secondary and post-16 phases. In KG, staff did not provide daily opportunities for children to choose activities for themselves and to learn through practical exploration and play. In the primary years, teaching was stronger towards the end of the phase. In the best lessons in this phase, there was a good balance of teacher talk and student activity. Teachers encouraged practical work and students were asked to show their working methods and explain their thinking to the class. In the secondary phase, whilst much of teaching was characterised by the teacher talking to the class, students had more opportunities to ask questions and to work in pairs or small groups to help develop their understanding. Teachers planned to meet students' differing needs and abilities but in many lessons, teachers relied heavily upon a textbook as the basis for teaching. As a result, activities were often insufficiently challenging, particularly for the more able students.

The quality of students' learning was unsatisfactory in KG and acceptable throughout the rest of the school. Children had too few opportunities to explore and to find things out for themselves through use of a wide range of tools and materials. In the primary phase, lessons often involved long periods of teacher direction and, as a result, students' learning was passive. However, when given interesting, relevant and challenging tasks, students responded positively and enthusiastically. In general, students demonstrated good attitudes to their work, their school and to each other. Whilst collaborative working was an underdeveloped aspect of students' learning throughout the school, students in Grades 9 to 11 were given more opportunities to work collaboratively and to develop critical thinking and enquiry skills, particularly in science lessons.

Assessment was unsatisfactory in KG and acceptable in each of the other three phases. Since the previous inspection, the school had made satisfactory progress in improving its assessment systems. Common criteria for assessing standards were being used, together with a format for recording attainment. Student progress was beginning to be measured by teacher assessment in lessons, as well as by using test and examination results. However, in all phases, students rarely received direct information about how well they were doing, what they needed to do to improve and about how to make that improvement.

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

The curriculum was of acceptable quality in the primary and secondary phases, but unsatisfactory in the KG and post-16 stages. In the KG there were insufficient opportunities for children to learn through play and thus learn actively as outlined in the curriculum documents followed by the school. Students in Grades 11 and 12 had no opportunities to study English at the school, creating a significant two-year gap in their education. The curriculum in both primary and secondary grades was broad, offering six language options as well as arts and physical education. The curriculum was reviewed annually by a team of leaders, and it had logical continuity and progression in key subjects from year-to-year. The school had developed additional local resource documents for a variety of subjects from KG to Grade 10 to enrich lesson content. Although a minority of teachers enriched the curriculum with tasks specific to students' attainment levels, this practice had not become widespread; most lessons were textbook-based and the same for all students. Consequently, more than a few students attaining above or below expected levels did not receive appropriate levels of challenge in their work. The lack of challenge for the stronger students was quite apparent across key subjects. There were some cross-curricular links within the school and extra-curricular activities once per week were available to most but not all students. Curricular links were established outside the school for boys' sports, field trips and special events.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety arrangements in the KG and at Grades 1 to 6 were acceptable. They were unsatisfactory at Grades 7 to 10 and at post-16. Accommodation was clean and well maintained. Students were appropriately supervised within the school grounds. The school carried out regular equipment checks and fire drills. However, safety procedures were not always appropriately applied. Staff had improved the movement of buses but insufficiently monitored students being dropped off by car. Students from Grade 7 upwards were taught in science laboratories without having sufficient protective equipment during potentially dangerous experiments. A room in the boys' building, containing electrical cables and circuits, was left open and unattended. Medical staff worked effectively with the school counsellor and teachers to monitor students' wellbeing. The canteen was clean and offered nutritious food. Students benefited from a well-planned health promotion programme and senior students helped deliver this as part of their community service programme.

Arrangements for care and welfare were acceptable at all stages. Most teachers and students had positive, caring relationships. Student behaviour was well monitored and incidents addressed quickly and supportively. Students' personal and academic progress was regularly monitored and this had begun to inform learning and teaching. The part-time counsellor provided effective support to students with emotional or behavioural difficulties. She provided effective careers advice to students from Grade 9 onwards. However, the demands on the student counsellor meant that she provided limited support to students applying to university. Systems were in place to monitor attendance and punctuality but they were not yet effective in addressing the increased levels of student absence and late arrival.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership and management was acceptable. The senior management team had acted on the recommendations of the previous inspection and showed commitment to school improvement. The school had a clear sense of direction as a result of the lead given by the Board of Directors and the new Executive Officer. The senior management team had clearly defined roles and responsibilities and, overall, the management structure ensured the efficient running of a large school. There was effective teamwork between heads of department. There was evidence of a need for the school's vision for improvement to be reinforced more explicitly at middle management and classroom level.

Self-evaluation and school improvement arrangements were acceptable. These had led to tangible improvements through the school's capacity to respond positively to the recommendations in the previous inspection report. The school showed a commitment to developing a culture of self-evaluation but this was yet to be embedded at all levels. Students, parents and teachers had been involved in developing the school action plan and school improvement plan. The success criteria were not sufficiently specific, however, in order to promote more effective development in teaching and learning. Monitoring of teaching by middle managers was taking place but peer monitoring of teaching was at an early stage of development. A comprehensive analysis of the outcomes of classroom monitoring against quality indicators had been successfully carried out. The monitoring, nonetheless, lacked the explicit focus necessary for it to be effective in impacting on classroom practice.

The partnerships with parents and the community were acceptable. A minority of parents, however, had complaints about the school and the school's policy on responding to these was underdeveloped. The school was committed to improving the quality of parental involvement and had recently set up a parent forum, which met senior management team every three months. Parents were happy with the school's provision of information on student progress in key subjects; termly reports were discussed and written comments held on file.

Arrangements for governance were acceptable. The school had set up an Advisory Board whose membership included a small number of stakeholders but which did not yet have wide stakeholder representation. The impact of the Advisory Board was not yet obvious and the school was not yet fully accountable to it.

The quality of staffing, facilities and resources was acceptable. The school has sufficient staff with almost all teachers qualified at degree level. The school had difficulties retaining high quality teachers and had no effective strategy to improve teacher retention. Some improvements were made to school premises since the last inspection. Teaching rooms, however, were too small for the size of the classes, especially in senior years, and the rooms were often poorly ventilated. There had been an improvement in information and communication technology (ICT) resources since the previous inspection, but resources for teaching and learning were not always of sufficiently high quality and much of the furniture was in poor condition.

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	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress over time	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable

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

Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good

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

Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attitudes and behaviour	Acceptable	Good	Good	Acceptable
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Teaching for effective learning	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Curriculum quality	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Health and safety	Acceptable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Quality of support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
Quality of leadership	Acceptable
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.

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