

# Sharjah American International 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.

Sharjah American International 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 Al Warqaa, Sharjah American International 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 US curriculum. The school reported that during this academic year there had been a significant increase in enrolment of new students throughout all grades. Many of these students had come from different schools in Dubai. At the time of the inspection, there were 720 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. Overall, the parents were very positive about the school. Most said that their children liked coming to school. A majority of parents said they thought progress in Islamic Education and Arabic was good while almost all parents felt that progress in English, mathematics and science was good. Most wrote that they thought the teaching was generally good. A few parents responded to say that they were unsure about the levels of expectation and independence promoted by the school. Almost all felt their children were treated fairly and most said there was a good range of activities for the students. A minority of parents expressed concern about the school's consultation with parents. Almost all felt that the children were safe and healthy, that they knew how to help their children at home and that the school was well led. A significant minority of the parents were unsure about the links the school had with the local community and also about the quality of the school's response to the last inspection report.

## How well does the school perform overall?

The overall performance of Sharjah American International School was acceptable. Attainment and progress in Islamic Education was acceptable in most grades with the exception of the High school where progress was unsatisfactory. While attainment in Arabic was good in the Elementary school, both attainment and progress were acceptable in all other phases of the school. Attainment and progress in English were good in the High school and acceptable in the other grades. Attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable throughout. Attainment in science was acceptable in all grades in the school but progress in this subject was unsatisfactory. The attitudes and behaviour of the students were acceptable, with positive staff student relationships. Although attendance and punctuality were overall acceptable, there was poor attendance in the KG and the high school. Students displayed acceptable understanding in discussion of their civic responsibilities and of Islam and local traditions, although this was more developed in the higher grades. Students knew about Dubai and its development and they expressed pride in its achievements.

Teaching, learning and assessment were acceptable overall. Teachers knew their subjects well but did not always understand how their students could best learn. Students were enthusiastic about their learning and asked good questions when they were given the opportunity. Teaching and learning in the middle grades were unsatisfactory. Here there was an excessive focus on didactic teaching methods and an overall lack of interactive learning opportunities. Active learning was not sufficiently evident in the students' experience at the school. The school collected a large amount of assessment data using a number of different strategies; however, its use was limited and the information was not used well to ensure that the needs of all students were met. The school followed a US curriculum, which was acceptable, with sufficient breadth, balance and progression, although there were limited subject choices for some students in the upper grades. There was a few cross-curricular links, for example between history and English, but overall there was little provision for creative arts and this hindered students' overall development. Arrangements for the protection and support of the students were acceptable. While the students' health was monitored and managed, meticulous plans to ensure speedy emergency evacuation of the building were not in place. The school had begun to carefully track student progress.

Leadership and management were acceptable, overall. While the Principal led a team that was very committed to the personal development of the students, there was a lack of clarity around how the leadership roles were aligned to the attainment and progress needs of the students. Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. The school had completed significant professional development workshops since the last inspection and a planned programme to expand the teaching strategies was in place. However, the arrangements to ensure that these strategies were implemented and effective required improvement. Partnerships with parents and local community were acceptable. While very supportive of the school and the accessibility of the Principal and the teachers, a few parents felt that there was potential for greater parental involvement in the operation and management of the school. Governance was unsatisfactory. There was no evidence of the

impact of a new board appointment in the school. The role of parents remained undefined. Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable.

## Key features of the school

- Powerful presence of the Principal in the school seeking to implement a student-centred vision;
- Good teaching of English in the high school;
- Positive student-teacher relationships;
- Unsatisfactory teaching in Islamic Education and mathematics in the Kindergarten and in most key subjects in the middle school;
- A very supportive and co-operative parent body.

## Recommendations

- Raise attainment and progress in all key subjects;
- Improve teaching and learning across the school by:
  - making better and consistent use of strategies that actively engage students in their learning, particularly in Islamic Education, some areas of the KG and in the Middle school;
  - developing a coherent and consistent approach to assessment and how assessment data is used;
  - applying agreed coherent whole school approaches to lesson planning and structure including identifying learning objectives and learning outcomes;
- Restructure management responsibilities to ensure accountable implementation of the school's vision;
- Develop governance further to ensure that all stakeholders have meaningful and accountable impact on the future direction of the school.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education overall were acceptable though progress was unsatisfactory in the high school. However, the boys' progress was better than that of the girls. The majority of students in the elementary grades could recite short chapters from The Holy Qur'an with few errors in pronunciation and they knew a Hadith about the importance of prayers. Students in middle and high school had age-appropriate knowledge about the Prophet Mohammed's (PBUH) life. Most students in Grade 11 had limited knowledge about the Islamic rulings they studied on conditions in contracts. The attainment and progress of non-Arab

students were unsatisfactory; their recitation of the Quran verses they learnt was weak and inaccurate. In Grade 6 most could name the Pillars of Faith and the Pillars of Islam. In Grade 12 they had very limited knowledge about Prophet Mohammed's (PBUH) life and the main events in it.

Overall, attainment and progress in Arabic for all grades were acceptable, with good attainment in the Elementary school. For students of Arabic as an additional language, listening skills were developed to an acceptable level so that most students understood well what teachers said. In speaking, most students throughout the school spoke with a level of fluency appropriate to their ages. However, non-Arab students used English to complete their speech and also faced difficulties in pronouncing some letters correctly. Most students read from the material at the expected levels. Students in Grades 1 to 6 read letters, words and short passages but they were not able to read independently to an appropriate standard. In copying, all students wrote at the expected levels. Students in Grades 6 to 12 were able to complete some extended writing exercises. Arab students had an acceptable knowledge of grammar especially in Grades 6 to 12 but the level of attainment of non-Arab students was unsatisfactory.

Attainment and progress in English were acceptable in the KG, elementary and middle phases and good in high school. In the KG children listened attentively, answered teachers' questions and followed directions. Most wrote their name and simple words correctly and a few could read and write full sentences. Students in the elementary and middle phases had variable oral language skills, though they progressively developed their reading skills. Despite wide differences in language experience, most students read textbook selections with fluency and almost all enjoyed reading. In the high school, students expressed their ideas with depth and formulated insightful questions. They read in all genres and identified literary devices such as personification, metaphor and symbolism. Writing skills were less well developed and some writing samples had a number of basic grammatical errors.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable at all phases of the school. Children in KG knew the numbers and recognised them individually. They could identify shapes and write their numbers well. Older students could carry out operations using place value and in older grades, calculus. However, the level of understanding was limited. Students were not able to apply the concepts out of context. Little problem-solving was developed and students' abilities in this area did not meet international standards. Computation skills were acceptable.

Attainment in science was acceptable and progress was unsatisfactory in all phases of the school. Progress was poor because students of all ages did not carry out science investigations. Children in the KG were not able to examine seeds with a magnifying glass and Grade 7 boys could not follow procedures to explore gas expansion. Students had more confidence handling apparatus in the high school but there was little opportunity for the students to carry out their own independent investigations. Better attainment and progress was seen in the acquisition of theoretical knowledge and scientific concepts. The majority of Grade 6 girls could explain the difference between velocity and speed. By Grade 12 almost all students could use oxidation numbers to solve problems.

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

Behaviour and attitudes throughout the school were acceptable. Good relationships between teachers and students were evident throughout the school. Students were well behaved and treated staff, visitors and one another with respect. Students in almost all classes were on task and behaved well. Students reported that there were no bullying problems in the school. Students said that they felt safe in school and would not hesitate to approach staff members for help. Attendance during the inspection was acceptable overall but was unsatisfactory in the KG and in Grades 11 and 12. Some students were not punctual and did not arrive in good time for lessons at the start of the day.

Civic understanding, understanding of Islam and the appreciation of local traditions and culture were acceptable in the KG and Elementary and good in the middle and high schools. Students spoke about how the local culture was changing as Dubai grew and how important it was, for instance, to protect the heritage in the desert. They were very positive in their views of the impact of Islam in improving lives. They also felt that there was respect for other religions in Dubai. Senior students could discuss aspects of Dubai's development and Grade 7 to 12 students showed some insights into Dubai and its progress.

Economic and environmental understanding was acceptable. Most senior students were committed to their futures in Dubai. Students developed their awareness of community responsibility by involvement in a range of community projects, some of which also enhanced their environmental understanding. Students did not take sufficient responsibility for their school environment, dropping litter, making the boys' playground, for example, untidy at times. However, students had some responsiveness to the importance of the sustainability of resources through, for example, their awareness of Earth Day.

## How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching was acceptable across the school except in the middle school where it was unsatisfactory. Most teachers used strategies to engage students in active learning with a varying degree of success. In English, in the higher grades, teachers used imaginative methods well to develop critical thinking. However, in Islamic Education, in the middle school and in mathematics in the KG, teaching was unsatisfactory. Most teachers had good subject knowledge and they often followed the school's model for lessons. This included a brief review of previous learning and sharing the purpose of the lesson, although this was rarely seen in Islamic Education. Staff did not consistently match work to the students' broad achievement bands and this was particularly notable in Arabic in the middle school. The best lessons engaged students' well and had good pace and challenge. Teachers used good questioning to check learning and to probe understanding, particularly in mathematics and science lessons in the KG,. However, some questioning by teachers was much less effective and did not target individual students enough or provide students with sufficient time to reflect, think or respond. Teaching was also over-directed and limited students' independent learning. In KG mathematics, for example, it was too formal and sometimes inaccurate.

Learning was acceptable across the school except in the middle grades where it was unsatisfactory. Students learned actively in a variety of ways in most lessons, for example, through group work, presentations and research. They were often self-motivated and keen to learn. Older students asked challenging questions of teachers when they knew they had difficulties, for example in science. They also made effective use of their school laptop computers in various subjects. However, there was some rote learning. For example, little active learning was seen in both Islamic Education and in the middle school. Furthermore, on a few occasions, insufficient challenge led to unsatisfactory learning, particularly for higher achieving students.

Assessment across the school was acceptable. Students' attainment and progress were regularly recorded and monitored, for instance to identify high, average and low achieving students and to modify lessons. Quizzes and tests were used well and further enabled teachers to know students' strengths and weaknesses. However, other opportunities for assessment of students' work were under-developed. In KG science, academic and social skills were monitored and reported well and throughout science, attainment over time was tracked. In English, students sometimes effectively used rubrics to evaluate their own writing. Overall, however, there was insufficient coherence and consistency across the school. In some lessons assessment to promote learning was superficial and marking rarely included specific written comments. Students did not always know how well they were doing and what they needed to do next to improve. Feedback given to students contained at times, important inaccuracies. Assessment data were not always available to teachers to help monitor or review the curriculum but useful standardised tests had just been introduced in certain stages. Data on progress lacked external validation, reference to curriculum standards or international benchmarks.

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

The quality of the curriculum was acceptable, guided by a set of comprehensive curriculum mapping documents. The curriculum was reviewed annually and regular school meetings were held for further refinement and sharing of best practices. There was a continuity and progression of skills across the grades and subjects. Provisions were made for students who were in need of additional support in English and mathematics. Besides the key subjects, French was also taught from Grade 1. Although there were examples of creative writing and special project work, there was little provision for the creative arts. High school students effectively used computers as learning tools but information and communication technology (ICT) was not integrated with teaching and learning across the school. There were a few cross-curricular links between history and English and in KG mathematics and English, but such linkage was not a common practice throughout the school. Links with the community supported the curriculum. These included field trips to museums, parks, the botanical garden, a dolphin show, speakers from Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (DEWA) and special events such as National and International Day. Students participated in a variety of community service

projects and their academic programme was enhanced by participation in the spelling bee, science fair, photo contest and sporting competitions. Extra-curricular activities were provided across the school but were limited in range.

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

Arrangements for the health and safety of students were acceptable. The school was a safe place for students, who were well known and well cared for by staff. There were improved arrangements in place for the boarding of buses at the end of the day. However, there were some concerns over the procedures for the safe evacuation of children from the building in an emergency. There was an urgent need to work with the civil defence authorities to establish how internal security could be maintained as well as ensuring that students could leave the building quickly. Students experiencing difficulties had access to school medical staff and a counsellor in addition to their teachers. Students were encouraged to eat healthily and adopt healthy lifestyles through the knowledge they gained in the curriculum. The majority of staff members were aware of the contents of the written child protection policy.

The quality of support was acceptable. Staff-student relationships were good. The staff and especially the Principal took an individual interest in all students. Parents were adequately informed about attainment of their child at a least once a term but they were not told what the student needed to do to improve. Students received good guidance on university admissions with large number of institutions visiting the school. The school was starting to develop tracking of student attainment during the current academic year but the systems did not allow easy comparisons to be made with previous year's performance. The school was unaware of the relatively poor attendance of different grades and had no additional plans in place to reduce absences.

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

The leadership and management of the school were acceptable. Senior leaders in the school displayed a very strong commitment to the care and welfare of the students. Parental and student accessibility to the Principal was a high priority and the school community benefitted from this approach. Any difficulties were attended to promptly, sensitively and conscious of the need to balance the ethos of the school with the needs of the student. Leadership roles had been defined. However, the capacity of the school to analyse the effectiveness of these roles in the context of the growth in student numbers and the evolving complexities of the needs of the school was limited.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning was acceptable. The school knew the majority of its strengths and some of its weaknesses. A detailed action plan had been formulated since the last inspection. The plan was primarily based on the outcomes of the inspection and did not reflect analysis of internationally benchmarked student performance. The school used test and quiz results, surveys and teacher appraisals to determine the success of its action plan objectives. Teachers used the data collected in a few subject areas to plan different approach

to learning. Heads of departments and curriculum co-ordinators reviewed the plans and outcomes of the work of the teachers and the learning experiences of the students. However, this information was not used in a systematic manner through a formal accountability structure to ensure that the school vision was understood, valued and implemented effectively.

Partnerships with parents and the local community were acceptable. Positive relationships were in place between the school and parents in all phases. Parents found the teachers and senior leaders very accessible and responsive to any problems that arose. The school sought the views of the parents on a range of topics and had informed all families about the outcomes of the last inspection. The resulting action plan had also been shared with the parent body. Communication on students' attainment and progress was regular and appropriate. There were acceptable links with the local community. Students made frequent field trips and visits to places of interest. They visited homes for the elderly and engaged with the local community to expand some aspects of the curriculum.

Governance was unsatisfactory. Since the previous inspection, the school had expanded the board representation to include a member from the American University of Sharjah. The impact of this appointment had yet to be felt in the school. The owner of the school acted as the main source of communication between the education board and the main board. This arrangement did not appropriately support the need for role definition and formal accountability structures among senior leaders in the school. The development of the full range of facilities to meet the needs of all students, particularly in science, was hindered by a lack of clear planning, budgeting and implementation structures at board level. Awareness of the need to involve the parents and other stakeholders in the management of the school was only developing.

Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable. All staff members were fully qualified and deployed appropriately. The school had recruited several new members of the teaching staff during the year and while there was an appraisal system in place, the focus on ensuring that teachers reflected the vision of the school was not fully developed. Facilities were well maintained and clean. Science classes were restricted to one laboratory and this limited the range of practical scientific skill development for all students. Resources were acceptable. The school had begun a development programme to build library stock. Resources for ICT were good for older students, but throughout the rest of the school classrooms were not sufficiently equipped to cater for a range of teaching and learning styles.

## 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:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Not applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Not applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

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

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

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

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

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

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and safety	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
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	Unsatisfactory
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](mailto:inspection@khda.gov.ae).

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

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