

Dubai International School - Al Quoz 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.

Dubai International School - Al Quoz was inspected in January 2011 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 Quoz, Dubai International School - Al Quoz 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 1892 students on the roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

As part of the inspection process, Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires issued to parents. Almost all parents who responded were satisfied with the quality of education in the school and most thought the school was well led. Most considered communication with the school was effective, that the school responded well to concerns and that their child was treated fairly. In the view of the majority, extra-curricular opportunities were satisfactory or better, but a third felt they could be generally improved. The majority thought that teaching was good or better, but around a third stated that the school should focus on improving it. The majority thought that their child's enjoyment of lessons and enthusiasm for learning was good or better. Just over half of parents stated that their child needed a lot of additional help at home with their study. Most thought parents were effectively involved in the work of the school. Forty per cent of respondents, however, did not know how the school had responded to the recommendations of the previous inspection.

How well does the school perform overall?

The overall performance of the school was acceptable, with some good features. It had responded well to the recommendations of the previous report and had made a start to improving the quality of students' learning experience, supported by staff development opportunities for teachers.

Attainment and progress were good in Islamic Education, Arabic as a first language, English, and mathematics at all stages except middle school. Attainment and progress in science and Arabic as an additional language were acceptable. Students' personal and social development was good, although behaviour in the middle school boys' section gave some continuing concern. The quality of teaching and learning in Kindergarten and high school were good and acceptable in elementary and middle school. In particular, the quality of learning required improvement, to move away from teacher-led and text-book driven lessons. Learning did not consistently offer sufficient opportunities for active learner involvement, independence, collaboration and the general development of learning skills. Teachers also needed to meet better the needs of all learners, challenging the higher attaining and supporting the lower attaining, as an integral part of the daily learning experience. The curriculum was good overall, although the extra-curricular programme required further development. The protection and support of students was good overall. However, the school needed to ensure student safety from buses and other traffic in and around the school campus. Overall, leadership was good, with sound collegiate working within a model of delegated leadership. The Principal and all managers were committed to the school and school improvement and had instituted some clear thinking about the school's direction. Managers had established a number of methods for evaluating the school's development. Self-evaluation currently focused effectively on the improvement of individual teachers and of student attainment. Senior leaders now needed to set out a clearer overall vision for whole school improvement, translate it into key aims and objectives and manage the implementation of these more systematically and with greater rigour.

Key features of the school

- The good start to children's education afforded by the Kids' Academy and Kindergarten;
- The commitment of the governing board, managers and teachers to the school and to school improvement;
- The outstanding quality of curriculum in Islamic Education and in elementary Arabic as a first language;
- The improved quality of learning in some high school classes but continuing inconsistency in quality across some elementary and middle school classes;

- The sound emphasis on delegated leadership but the need to define roles and responsibilities more clearly at all levels, in particular for senior leaders;
- The need to state more clearly the vision for the school's development and agree the methods to be used for its systematic implementation.

Recommendations

- The school should focus more clearly on improving the quality of student learning and ensure a consistency of learning across classes and a progressive and broad development of learning skills across the stages;
- Teachers should build on their current practice to address the learning needs of all students during their classroom learning, supporting those experiencing difficulties and offering higher attaining students an appropriate challenge;
- Senior managers should achieve a more systematic and rigorous management of whole school improvement, ensuring an active involvement of all managers, supported by a clear definition of roles and responsibilities;
- The school should build on its current developments in international benchmarking to focus more carefully on analysis and target-setting to improve attainment;
- The school should ensure students' safety both within the school grounds from buses and around the campus from general traffic.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good in all phases. Most students were aware of the basics of Islam and the pillars of faith. Most showed high-quality recitation of The Holy Qur'an, abiding by the rules of Tajweed. By the end of elementary school, the majority of students could identify the concept of hypocrisy accurately. By the end of middle school, most students could show clear evidence that Allah is almighty through interpretation of chapters of The Holy Qur'an. By the end of high school, the majority of students could confidently infer some rules of the social system in Islam. However, there were a few students who were not able to demonstrate their understanding clearly.

The quality of attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language was good in all phases. The majority of students had generally developed appropriate skills to speak confidently and fluently. They could also express their thoughts and feelings with clarity and eloquence. By the end of elementary school, the majority of students could articulate the reasons for their love of the Arabic language. By the end of the middle school, students could analyse poetry and

answer relevant questions correctly. By the end of high school, students could express their opinions through writing short and lengthy articles. However, the writing of some students required further development.

The quality of attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language was acceptable in all phases. The majority of students had developed their speaking skills to an acceptable level being colleagues with native speakers of Arabic. Students could answer questions within texts. By the end of elementary school, they could talk about themselves with clarity and could write about themselves correctly. By the end of middle school, the quality students' dictation was inconsistent. In Grade 11, students could apply grammatical rules in sentences related to their daily lives. However, students' language skills were acceptable, compared with international standards for Arabic as an additional language..

Attainment and progress in English were good at all stages. By the end of Kindergarten, most students had developed age-appropriate standards in listening, speaking, and letter identification. They were able to form and identify letters and they understood and could follow simple directions. Elementary students were able to communicate effectively, using an extensive vocabulary. By Grade 6, they were effectively using grammar structures and punctuation, and had developed good speaking, writing and listening skills which enhanced their oral presentation abilities. Middle school students, particularly girls, read and analysed a wide range of short stories, poetry and non-fiction. They were able to explain themes, character and plot development, and their writing included autobiographical essays. High school students were proficient in writing persuasive essays, requiring critical thinking.

In mathematics, attainment and progress were good in Kindergarten and the elementary and high schools, when compared with international standards. In the middle school, attainment and progress were acceptable. Children in Kindergarten knew the features of 2-D shapes, for example; rectangle, square, triangle. Grade 6 students could determine appropriate units of measurement to use in given circumstances. Grade 8 students were competent in simplifying algebraic expressions. However, the girls achieved more highly than boys across middle school. Senior students demonstrated a greater level of independence in their work. Investigative mathematics was more evident in the upper grades than throughout the elementary and middle schools. Students acquired a range of skills that enabled them to effectively apply mathematics to everyday situations.

Attainment and progress in science were acceptable at all levels. Student performance during lessons and the results of school-based examinations indicated levels of attainment of conceptual understanding which were in line with international standards. Students in Kindergarten and elementary grades demonstrated a growing understanding of the natural world. Students in the middle grades could discuss Mendel's theory of genetics and could describe forces and motion. High school students demonstrated an understanding of the basic principles and processes of chemistry, physics, and biology. Students' skills in gathering empirical data through investigation and experimentation were developing appropriately in high school but appeared to be underdeveloped in lower grades. High school students demonstrated a growing ability to apply scientific theory and mathematical skills to real-world problems.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good in Kindergarten, elementary and high school, and they were acceptable in middle school. Relationships between teachers and students were generally positive and based on mutual respect. Most students at all levels were polite, respectful and welcoming to each other and to visitors. Students exhibited pride in their school and its programs, they demonstrated positive attitudes towards healthy living, and wanted more healthy foods for their canteen. They welcomed opportunities to serve the school community through its student council. Attendance was consistently good, but punctuality remained an issue, with many students arriving at school after the morning assemblies had begun.

Students' civic responsibility, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and culture were good in Kindergarten, elementary, and middle school, and they were outstanding in high school. Almost all students knew the main principles of Islam, Islamic culture, and recognised the Islamic identity in Dubai. They expressed their appreciation for the local customs and traditions of the UAE and felt they benefitted from attending a multi-cultural school.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good across the school. All students knew at least the basic facts about Dubai and many expressed an interest in making personal contributions to the community in the future. Most students cared for their school environment and made use of the new recycling bins that had been placed around the school. High school students were aware of the local and global initiatives to protect the environment and its resources.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching for effective learning was good in Kindergarten and the high school and acceptable in the elementary and middle grades. In general, teacher subject knowledge was good. In Kindergarten and high school lessons, and in the better elementary and middle lessons, strong teaching was characterised by an understanding of how students learn and with an emphasis on high expectations. A lack of consistency between classes, grades and gender groups impacted on the overall quality of teaching in the elementary and middle grades. In most lessons, teachers shared the learning objectives with students. In the majority of lessons, there was not an effective plenary, due to weak time management. A minority of teachers adopted a didactic style, which was successful in a few lessons, but led to student disengagement in others. In good lessons, tasks were carefully designed and adapted to meet the needs of the full range of learners. This impacted on the quality of learning opportunities, the level of challenge and the outcomes for students, in particular the higher attaining. As a result of school-based training, the majority of teachers made good use of the information and communications technology (ICT) to enhance their teaching, when it was available.

The quality of students' learning was good in Kindergarten and high school and acceptable in elementary and middle. Students from an early age could work in pairs, in groups and

independently. When given the opportunity, they generally interacted well and collaborated. In such lessons, teachers gave students opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning, think critically, discover things for themselves and use their learning in other settings. However, there were insufficient opportunities in a number of classes for students to be independent learners, collaborate with others and experience and develop a wide range of learning skills. Students in some classes were accustomed to using interactive whiteboards and when planned for, used technology to research and produce their own work.

Assessment was good in Kindergarten and acceptable in the other sections. There were systems for checking students' attainment and progress, such as formal testing and questioning during lessons, although the latter varied in effectiveness. In many lessons, teacher questioning was used for simple assessment and clarification of learning. In the good lessons, the teachers asked carefully chosen open questions to encourage thinking skills, problem-solving and discussion, and to challenge the students. The use of assessment data to plan the next steps in learning for individuals and groups was inconsistent. The quality of marking was variable. It did not consistently inform students of their next steps in learning.

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

The curriculum was good across the school. It provided programmes that were coherent and progressive at all stages. A curriculum review group met regularly and as a result, appropriate changes had been made. These changes were evident in subject areas such as science, where the school had introduced a curriculum based on the Californian model. The school had taken account of those students requiring additional support by providing remedial classes. Good cross-curricular planning helped students to recognise the transferable skills they were acquiring, for example liaison between mathematics and science to help students in the use of graphs. All curriculum areas made good use of real-life contexts. For example, mathematics students worked on a problem related to pollution. There was, however, an over-reliance on textbooks and a lack of ICT in subjects, which had a negative impact on learning. A good programme of extra-curricular activities was offered by the school, but students felt that there could be more on offer; in particular a broader range of general interest clubs in the middle and high schools. The school's emphasis on sport had resulted in considerable success at both local and regional level. Older students benefitted from visits by universities to help them to decide on the next phase of their life. A range of visits and visitors from the community further supported the curriculum and served to enhance students' learning.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements for health and safety were outstanding in Kindergarten and good elsewhere in the school. A medical doctor and a full-time nurse provided daily, vigilant care of students. Students were given physical examinations upon entry and at four grade levels thereafter. Medical conditions were carefully monitored and relevant information was shared with staff, along with guidance to meet student needs. Students with special education needs were

identified and provision made to assure their well-being and academic success. Detailed records were kept of all significant issues related to health and well-being. Fire drill and evacuation procedures were well developed, understood by students and staff, and practised. The premises were safe and included protective padding on corners and on floors of play areas in Kindergarten. High levels of cleanliness were evident throughout the school, including toilets. A sufficient number of staff supervised students exiting and boarding buses. However, improved procedures were needed to keep walking students away from moving buses, to require the use of seat belts and to ensure the safety of students arriving by car. The school had a well defined child protection policy which was understood and followed by staff.

The quality of support was outstanding in Kindergarten and good elsewhere in the school. Teachers and counsellors were well aware of students' academic and personal progress. The school provided counselling and guidance that effectively addressed a range of academic, social, and emotional needs. External agencies provided specialised support. The school gave students' complaints appropriate attention. Procedures for dealing with behavioural issues were well established. The school promoted physical activity. Procedures to support attendance resulted in high attendance levels.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The overall quality of leadership was good. The Principal was very committed to the school and had a number of personal and professional strengths. He was forward thinking and emphasised leadership at all levels to bring about change. The creation of the Vice-Principal post was recent and the incumbent was now ready to take on a full senior leader role. There was a clear commitment from supervisors, heads of department, subject co-ordinators and other leaders to the school and to school improvement, with good collegiate working. Senior leaders now needed to focus more on the key concept of leadership for learning, ensuring consistency of learning across classrooms and a progressive and broad development of learning skills across the stages. They needed to set a clearer vision for the school's future development, translate it into key aims and objectives and systematically and rigorously direct their implementation, based on a better use of self-evaluation and improvement planning and clearer roles and responsibilities at all levels.

Overall, the quality of self-evaluation was good. The school had a number of methods for evaluating its work. Examination data was analysed and the school had made a good start to establishing international benchmarking to underpin the process. However, the school did not yet analyse data sufficiently or set clear targets for raising attainment. Regular meetings of middle managers allowed a close monitoring of teaching and learning and curriculum. There was a clear programme of classroom observations and students could also offer feedback on the quality of their teachers. Self-evaluation was successful in targeting the improvement of individual teachers and student attainment. The existing improvement plan was comprehensive, but the school required a clearer set of aims and objectives to bring about

change. The process of whole school improvement was not yet managed and co-ordinated with sufficient focus or rigour at the most senior levels of management.

The quality of partnership with parents and the community was good. Communication was effective, using informative newsletters, questionnaires and parents' meetings. The Mothers' Council acted as a further channel of communication, with representatives attending key management meetings. The school had developed some good links with the community.

The quality of governance was good and the Board of Directors' partnership with the school was a supportive one. The Board set policy and strategies and the Principal kept it fully informed of the school's development. The Mothers' Council was making a growing contribution towards governance.

The quality of staff, facilities and resources was good. There were enough teachers suitably qualified to cover all subjects. The premises provided a broadly good learning environment. The provision in the pre-elementary area was bright, stimulating and safe. There were good sports facilities. There was an insufficient provision of science laboratories for the size of school. ICT provision was inadequate in certain areas of the school to enable students to use the technology as an integrated part of the learning 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?				
95% 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	Good	Good
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

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

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

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

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and safety	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good
Quality of support	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
	Overall
Quality of leadership	Good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Good
Governance	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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