

Mirdif Private School Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Middle

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.

Mirdif Private School was inspected in December 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 Mizhar, Mirdif Private School provides education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to the middle phase, aged three to 13 years. The school follows a US curriculum. At the time of the inspection there were 355 students on 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 were pleased with their children's progress in Islamic Education, Arabic, and mathematics. Most thought that there was appropriate progress in English and science. Almost all were pleased with the quality of teaching and the opportunities for learning. Most thought that homework was appropriate. Almost all thought that their children were treated fairly in school and that they enjoyed learning. Almost all thought that students behaved well, that the school supported their children, kept them safe and encouraged them to choose a healthy lifestyle. Most were happy with the quality of communication between the school and parents, thought that school reports were informative and that the school responded positively to parental concerns. Almost all thought that parent-teacher meetings were helpful and sufficiently regular. Most parents thought that the school was well led and that they were effectively involved in its life. A significant number of new parents who completed the questionnaire felt that they did not know enough about the school to evaluate the quality of leadership or other aspects of the life of the school.

How well does the school perform overall?

Mirdif Private School provided an acceptable quality of education for students. The school had undergone major changes since the last inspection. Student numbers had increased significantly and the school had expanded to include a middle phase comprised of Grades 6 to 8. Seventy five percent of the students had joined the school this session and thirty percent of teachers were newly in post. Major curricular and assessment changes had also been introduced, aimed at broadening students' learning experiences. As well as these developments good progress had been made overall in meeting the recommendations of the last inspection report. The introduction of the New York state standards and core curriculum and the participation of a few students in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) were helping the school link its curriculum and assessment of student attainment more directly with international standards. Further work was required to ensure that teachers were familiar with the course requirements, teaching approaches and attainment benchmarks. A staff development programme at the beginning of the session and formal observations of learning and teaching had helped induct new teachers. These approaches were at too early a stage of development to raise attainment or ensure consistently good teaching and learning. The governing body had a parent representative but did not have wider stakeholder representation. Senior and middle managers were committed to continuous improvement and were developing their capacities to meet the new demands and opportunities facing the school.

Students' attainment in Islamic Education had improved and was good, as was their progress in both the elementary and middle phases. Their attainment and progress in Arabic was good for those students for whom it was their first language but was unsatisfactory for those few students for whom it was an additional language. Students' attainment was acceptable at all phases in English, mathematics and science. Their progress was good across all phases in English. It was also good in mathematics in the Kindergarten and in both the Kindergarten and elementary phases in science. Progress was acceptable in mathematics in the elementary and middle phases and in science at the middle phase. Students achieved good levels of personal and social development across all the phases in their attitudes and behaviour, their civic and Islamic understanding and in their economic and environmental understanding. Teaching, learning and assessment were good in the Kindergarten and were acceptable in the elementary and middle phases. The curriculum was good across the school, as was the quality of support. Health and safety arrangements were outstanding, as was partnership with parents and the provision of staffing, facilities and resources. The quality of leadership and self-evaluation was good and governance remained acceptable, despite the recent improvements made to enhance stakeholder representation.

Key features of the school

- The high quality, safe and well maintained facilities and range of resources;
- The challenges facing the school as a result of significant growth;
- The improvements made in the attainment and progress of students in Islamic Education and Arabic for first language learners;
- The weaknesses in attainment in Arabic as an additional language;
- The leadership of older students in supporting the learning and well being of younger students;
- Partnerships with parents and outside agencies to extend students' learning experiences by enhancing the curriculum;
- Links with specialist providers to support students with autism and include students with other special educational needs.

Recommendations

- Raise attainment and progress for the students for whom Arabic is an additional language;
- Ensure greater consistency in the quality of teaching;
- Use the data collected on student performance to evaluate and further develop teaching and learning;
- Continue to develop the New York state curriculum standards and ensure the breadth of students' learning experiences;
- Allocate clearer responsibilities and lines of accountability to middle managers.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good across the school. Most students had sound knowledge of the main concepts of Islam and its faith. This included a detailed knowledge about compulsory and optional prayers such as the Al Doha prayer. Most had memorized and recited well short chapters and understood key aspects of the meaning of The Holy Qur'an to a level above that expected for their ages. A majority of students were making similarly good progress in their understanding of the Pillars of Islam. Most students had good knowledge about the life of the Prophets, could list the names of their families and had memorized the Prophets' sayings. Across the school only a few students could apply recitation rules correctly in reciting The Holy Qur'an.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were good across the school. A majority of students had made better progress than that expected for their ages. In the elementary phase, most students had good listening, speaking, reading and early writing skills. They

understood instructions and followed them well and expressed themselves clearly using a rich vocabulary of classical Arabic words. In the middle phase, most students showed good levels of listening and talking skills. They could read with confidence and fluency and showed a good range of writing skills, including extended writing. Across the school only a few students could apply grammar rules accurately in unfamiliar situations.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language were unsatisfactory. Across the elementary and middle phases students' listening abilities were the strongest of all their skills. Their speaking, reading and writing skills were insufficiently developed when compared with students of similar ages. Most students were able to follow basic instructions and understood and responded to directions accurately. Their ability to express themselves was limited to using simple sentences and only a minority of students used a sufficiently wide range of vocabulary. Students' reading was restricted to a few words or short passages. Across the school most students' writing was limited to copying one-word answers or simple sentences from the board. Only a few students could understand and apply grammar rules correctly.

Attainment in English was acceptable and progress good in the Kindergarten, elementary and middle grades. By Kindergarten 2, most students had developed age-appropriate standards for listening, speaking, early reading and writing. They used phonics skills well in speaking and formed and identified letters and numbers. They understood and followed simple directions. Students in the elementary grades were able to communicate effectively, using proper punctuation and good vocabulary. By Grade 5 they had developed good speaking, writing and listening skills. They delivered strong oral presentations, discussed literature and used extensive vocabulary. Middle school students read a wide range of literature and poetry well, could conduct research, write persuasive essays and explain themes, genres, character and plot development.

Attainment in mathematics was acceptable throughout the school. Progress was good in the Kindergarten and acceptable in all other phases. Kindergarten children had a very secure number sense based on the use of counting skills practised in a number of different situations. Elementary and middle school students were not so secure in their application of mathematical skills to extend their learning or solve problems. In Grade 3, students had difficulty with computations involving division. By Grade 5 the large majority of students could divide a very large number into equal parts by using arithmetical shortcuts. Most Grade 8 students could factor trinomials without a leading coefficient. New assessment processes introduced by the school indicated improved progress in the elementary and middle school grades.

In science, attainment was acceptable in all three phases. Progress was good in the Kindergarten and elementary classes and acceptable for middle school students. Kindergarten children could describe body parts, explain healthy foods and distinguish between food tastes and textures. Grade 2 students were able to describe the functions of different parts of plants and could classify living organisms. By Grade 5, they could create food chains and explain the energy transference that took place. Grade 8 students were able to demonstrate and explain how carbon dioxide had been created as the result of a chemical reaction. A significant strength was students' abilities across all grades to carry out practical tasks, although the level of investigative skills did not fully stretch the more able students.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good. They had very positive relationships with staff, visitors and each other. Almost all students were punctual, demonstrated positive attitudes to learning and behaved well in classes. Students made healthy choices including their choice of snacks from the school canteen. The attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

Students had good sense of civic responsibility, good understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture. Students were active members of the student council and senior students helped younger children, acting as peer readers and supporting the inclusion of students with special educational needs. Across the phases, students demonstrated strong understanding of Islam's values and their effects upon contemporary society. They knew about the important role that Sheik Zayed played in forming the UAE and spoke about his kindness, wisdom and generosity to his people. Students described a range of traditional culinary and sporting activities enjoyed in Dubai. These included horse and camel racing, dancing and falconry.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good in all phases. Students knew about Dubai's economic progress and were proud of its development. Middle phase students knew about the Metro and its impact and presented good arguments for building the Burj Khalifa. Students talked confidently about the challenges and opportunities facing Dubai and were eager to contribute to its future. They understood the benefits of living in a multi-lingual and multi-cultural society. Students were proud of the recognition from the Ministry of the Environment of their participation in a local clean-up day. They spoke positively about their involvement in a range of environmental and recycling activities.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching was good in the Kindergarten and acceptable in the elementary and middle grades. Most teachers demonstrated good subject knowledge. In the best lessons teachers were well prepared, used plentiful resources and developed students' understanding beyond the text books. Most teachers ensured students' attentiveness and kept them on task but this was not always the case. Student questioning was often effective in checking their understanding of new ideas. In the Kindergarten, classroom assistants were effectively deployed to support children and lead groups. In the elementary and middle phases teachers did not always plan lessons sufficiently well to meet the needs of all students, particularly the most able.

Students' learning was good in the Kindergarten and was acceptable in the elementary and middle school. Strengths of learning across all phases were the responsibility taken by students in organising tasks and their ability to work collaboratively. This enabled them to contribute ideas and learn from each other as well as develop confidence. Some students, particularly a number who were new to the school, had not adjusted to the demands of these methods of working. When tasks were more predictable, such as completing text book exercises, some students showed less involvement in their learning and were easily distracted. When students undertook independent research, the source was often the text book, although they used internet research in their homework tasks. Students enjoyed learning through practical investigation, but too much teacher support often limited the development of their planning and analytical skills.

Assessment was good in the Kindergarten and was acceptable in the elementary and middle school. Kindergarten teachers' observations of children's progress helped shape the tasks set for them. In all grades, students' work was closely checked during lessons and most teachers adjusted their input to clarify any emerging misunderstandings. The quality of marking was variable. Comments on progress were regular but suggestions for improvement were less common. Students had begun to assess their own strengths and weaknesses through the 'My Learning' project. Their work in key subjects was continuously assessed. This data, collected on a monthly basis, gave good knowledge of individual student progress, but was not being used to full effect to develop the curriculum and teaching.

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

The curriculum was good across all phases of the school. The newly adopted New York state standards and core curriculum provided breadth, balance and challenge. It had a clear rationale, reflecting the school's mission and objectives for students' learning. The curriculum met the needs of students from the Kindergarten through to Grade 8. In addition to the key subjects, the school offered the Ministry of Education curriculum in social studies, along with drama, music, art, physical education, character development, information technology and French. A developing extra-curricular programme, including ballet, singing and karate, was offered after school by third party providers, including parents. The curriculum was reviewed annually by the school's newly formed academic and curriculum committees, comprised of teachers and administrators, to ensure that all students' learning needs were met, including those with special needs. Special educational needs students were well served through an integrated curriculum. Cross-curricular links were strong, with students participating in recycling projects, charity events for autism, cultural development, thematic days, activity weeks, and community service. Parental involvement in the curriculum was strong, with a number of parent volunteers serving as guest lecturers and offering support for reading. Healthy living and nutrition concepts were taught at most levels, as well as through presentations at school assemblies.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety provision was outstanding in all phases. The school had excellent safe working practices to ensure the well-being of students, not only in the building but on school buses to and from home. The school maintained very good records of evacuation practices, the use of medicines, and incidents. The support for students with special educational needs was very well planned and included help from outside agencies. Healthy living was a part of school life. There were programmes to combat obesity and great care was taken in the selection of foods available at break times. There was effective collaboration between the school nurse and the counsellor, who planned and delivered health education lessons for students of all ages.

The quality of support for students was good across the school. Staff members knew their students well and were aware of their social, physical, emotional and academic needs. A system of monthly tracking of attainment had recently been introduced to enhance the monitoring of individual progress. The school had begun to use individual educational plans to support the learning of students with special educational needs. Good arrangements were in place to contact parents to discuss any matters of concern including student absence. The emphasis on good and punctual attendance had reduced absenteeism.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership was of good quality. The Principal and her senior management team formed a strong and committed partnership. They had made a good start to managing changes following the school's rapid expansion. Teachers were directly involved in decision-making through academic and activities committees. They also took direct roles in developing subject areas across the school. Despite these initiatives the lack of clear roles and responsibilities for these teachers was a barrier to development of their leadership skills. A well structured system of professional review identified staff development needs.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. The school had identified clear priorities and held regular staff meetings to monitor progress on them. Senior managers and teachers knew their students well. A range of tracking and monitoring approaches provided useful information on student progress. Formal observations of teaching were used to identify teachers' strengths and development needs. There was less focus on evaluating learning. The school had taken forward the recommendations from the last inspection report and was in the process of adapting them in light of the changing nature of the school. Students and their parents had recently been consulted through questionnaires on key aspects of the school.

Partnerships with parents were of outstanding quality. Parents were directly involved in students' learning, supporting early reading and enhancing sporting and other extra-curricular activities. They also worked very closely with the school to promote the inclusion of students with special educational needs, healthy eating and environmental improvement initiatives. Regular communications including written reports, newsletters, electronic messages and meetings with teachers provided parents with helpful information on their children's progress. A parent forum was proactive in academic as well as pastoral issues and was involved in discussing how it might represent more fully the views of parents.

Governance was of acceptable quality. The owner worked well with senior managers to assist the school in meeting its priorities and held it accountable through regular visits. The newly formed parent forum had a representative on the governing body who worked directly with the governors to discuss priorities. The governing body's involvement of parents was a positive step towards greater representation from all key stakeholders.

Staffing, facilities and resources were also outstanding. Teachers were well qualified and had benefited from recent development and annual reviews. The school provided high quality resources which had been improved through the recent acquisition of computer equipment. The recently opened school campus provided high quality, modern facilities including a swimming pool and well-stocked library.

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
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?			
83% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.			
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Good
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Good
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

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

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

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

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

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

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?			
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good

How well does the school protect and support students?			
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of support	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	Outstanding
Governance	Acceptable
Staffing, facilities and resources	Outstanding

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:
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More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at www.khda.gov.ae.

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