

Philadelphia Private School Inspection Report

Kindergarten to High School

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.

Philadelphia Private School was inspected in October 2010 as part of the regular inspection of all schools in Dubai. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated students' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on students' progress in Islamic Education (for Muslim students), Arabic, English, mathematics and science.

Basic information about the school

Located in Al Muhaisnah, Philadelphia Private School provided education for 692 students from Kindergarten to Grade 12, aged between three and 18 years. The school followed a US curriculum. There was a significant turnover of staff at the start of this school year. The student attendance in the last academic session was good.

As part of the inspection process, Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires issued to the parents. Almost all parents were satisfied with the quality of the education their children were receiving. Parents stated that their children enjoyed school. Most felt that teaching and learning were good and that their children were making good progress in Arabic, English, mathematics and science. However, a minority did not believe they were progressing well in Islamic Education. Most thought that children showed good behaviour and were treated fairly. Similarly, parents reported that the school acted satisfactorily to keep children safe, though a majority did not feel that the school consistently helped their child choose a healthy lifestyle. Most parents' stated that communication through reports, meetings and response to concerns was good. The improvement of teaching was seen by a significant minority as the school's greatest strength. However, teaching was also highlighted by a similar number of parents as an area of the school that most needed improvement.

How well does the school perform overall?

The Philadelphia Private School provided an acceptable level of education for students. The school had responded to the last inspection report using a well-targeted action plan. In response to the proposal to raise attainment in Islamic Education the school had recruited a number of new teachers. At the time of the inspectors' visit there had been no noticeable change in the levels of attainment. The school had continued to focus on the improvement of teaching and learning by working closely with its consulting partners who had provided a series of training sessions as well as coaching and mentoring services. A bank of strategies for more interactive teaching and learning had been developed. However, the majority of teachers had yet to develop an understanding of how to integrate these strategies into lessons to stimulate active learning and critical thinking. Standardised assessment data had been collected and was used to inform curriculum development. However, assessment data was not used well to adjust teachers' day-to-day planning to meet the needs of individual students. Teachers' skills in observing their students' learning and giving relevant feedback required further development. Monitoring of the work of the school was shared among a number of middle level leaders. This had a positive impact on students' social and personal development because issues such as punctuality had been targeted and monitored rigorously. The school had admitted a large percentage of new students and had recruited many new and inexperienced teachers. This had had a negative impact on the schools' progress towards achieving its vision of becoming a school characterised by interactive, student-centred learning. Self-evaluation was not well developed and was not sufficiently well linked to careful and comprehensive evaluation of student learning across the school. The school had the capacity to improve but there was a need to maintain a better balance between growth and improving, and supporting the quality of teaching and learning.

The school had responded to most of the recommendations from the last inspection. However, actions had not led to noticeable improvements in student attainment and progress. Students' personal and social development was good and the school provided well for this important aspect of the students' learning. Students had the opportunity to take on responsibilities and to have a voice in the development of their school. Teaching and learning sessions in the key subjects did not offer students sufficient opportunities to be independent and active in their learning. The curriculum was broad and balanced. The school provided a safe and secure environment. It also provided good support for students with additional needs. However, the arrangements for older students, who were beginners in the language of instruction, did not adequately help them to make the progress needed and be successful in all areas of the curriculum. Leadership in the school exhibited many good features, notably the action taken to share decision-making with a wide range of stakeholders and to distribute leadership functions. The current challenge to leadership was a need to take into account the changing requirements of the school at a time of change resulting from rapid growth.

Key features of the school

- A well-integrated, multi-cultural school community;
- A good, broad and balanced curriculum;
- Outstanding health and safety provision;
- A strong partnership with parents;
- The senior leaders had not ensured that the required improvements in teaching, learning and assessment had been consistently embedded in classroom practice and consequently, the vision of the school, to teach for understanding and through discovery, was not fully realised.

Recommendations

- Ensure that teachers across all grades use information and communication technology (ICT) as a key element of their work and expand the existing good practice in the use of ICT in science lessons across all grades and subjects;
- Integrate on-going assessment into all teaching sessions and ensure that all teachers develop appropriate learning objectives in lessons;
- Implement the curriculum more successfully, particularly in Kindergarten;
- Improve the capacity of senior leaders to evaluate their school and its programs, especially regarding the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

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

Students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education was acceptable in all phases of the school. Most students showed sincerity in carrying out their Islamic duties and enthusiasm sharing information about the Prophet with their peers in assemblies. Students demonstrated a good general knowledge of the content of The Holy Qur'an and an acceptable level of knowledge about the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and his life. In the upper grades, students could explain how their faith related to their lives. The recitation and memorisation skills of most students were weak, and pronunciation skills needed improvement, particularly among non-Arab students.

Attainment in Arabic as the first language was acceptable in the elementary school and good in the middle school. Progress in Arabic as the first language, in the elementary and the middle school was acceptable and in line with curriculum standards. In the high school, attainment and progress were good. Most students in Grade 1 were able to identify a few letters at the beginning, middle and end of familiar words. They also differentiated between short and long vowels. In Grade 5, most students read paragraphs correctly. They were able to differentiate between types of verbs. In Grade 7, the majority of students understood the content of texts they had read silently. In Grade 9, most students wrote extended pieces; these were usually confined to familiar topics. In Grade 12, most students were able to read and use mind maps. In the high school phase most students were confident reciting poetry with

expression. The use of grammar in the students' speech and writing was generally weak across the school.

Students' attainment in Arabic as an additional language was acceptable in the elementary school, unsatisfactory in the middle school and acceptable in the high school. Progress in Arabic as an additional language was acceptable in all phases. Grade 1 students could identify a few letters at the beginning, middle and end of familiar words and Grade 4 could speak and understand short dialogues. There was little progression in the skills of Middle School students, particularly in Grade 9. The knowledge, understanding and skills of students were limited to prescribed textbooks. The oral and written skills of the majority of students in Grade 10 remained very limited.

Attainment and progress in English were good across all phases of the school. Most Kindergarten students were able to listen, follow directions, form letters and identify simple words. Elementary students developed good writing and grammar skills and grade-appropriate literature knowledge and understanding. Most Grade 5 students were confident in their listening, speaking, writing and presentation skills. They read a wide range of literature and knew themes, genres, characters and plot development. Most Middle School students displayed good vocabulary knowledge and correct punctuation in narrative writing. Almost all high school students had good research, organisational and presentation skills. They read and analysed texts appropriate for their grade level.

At Kindergarten and in the middle school, levels of attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable. In the elementary and high school phases, attainment and progress were good. Kindergarten students copied the teacher in sorting by size and accurately identified patterns. In the elementary school, students' skills, knowledge and understanding were in line with international standards. In Grade 5, students made acceptable progress in solving simple algebraic equations. In the middle school, a majority of Grade 6 students could develop a mathematical table, but not apply or explain it. Grade 7 students could accurately solve algebraic equations. Grade 8 students solved equations with unknowns on both sides. High school students solved linear equations and graphs and held age-appropriate discussions about the mathematics problems.

Attainment and progress in science were acceptable across all phases of the school. Most students achieved expected levels of knowledge for their ages and were beginning to develop their investigative skills in the science laboratories. Kindergarten children could identify the five senses. They did not display the age-appropriate skills for exploration, investigation and analysis. Elementary students could classify various reptiles and knew how plants grew in different conditions. Middle grade students used their knowledge to make models of plant and animal cells. High school students understood rates of reaction, velocity, displacement and the conductivity of different solutions. Students did not have well-developed, independent experimentation skills to expand their laboratory practices.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good across all the phases. Students were generally well-behaved and demonstrated positive attitudes at all levels in the school. Students reported that the many newcomers to the school in the current academic year had been welcomed and quickly became part of the school community. Almost all students showed tolerance and respect towards each other and towards adults. Students were aware of their responsibilities in the school community and a minority held roles of responsibility to assist in the organisation of the school. Attendance was well-managed and was good in the last session. Active steps were being taken to improve the current levels of punctuality.

Students' understanding of Islam and local culture was acceptable at all levels. Muslim students had a good understanding of Islam and the role it played in guiding their lives, but non-Muslim students were aware of only a few basic facts. They could not name the two Muslim Eids or associate them with the key events that preceded them. Students showed a positive view of their lives in Dubai and were appreciative of the many opportunities available for participation in the local community. A few students spoke about the opportunities available to take part in voluntary activities and charity work.

Economic and environmental understanding was acceptable in the Kindergarten and good in the elementary, middle and high school phases. Students were able to describe examples of various forms of water extraction and conservation and care of the environment. The school council had been instrumental in leading improvements in the use of the school's resources through its recycling procedures and cultivation of the school grounds.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching was acceptable across all phases of the school. Most teachers had good subject knowledge. A majority of teachers also knew how their subjects were learned, but there were significant exceptions to this. Almost all teachers began their lessons with clear objectives but only a minority reviewed the objectives. The level of challenge was too low in a few lessons. Teachers' use of time varied, as more than a few lesson plans exceeded or fell short of the time available to deliver them. Teachers used a variety of resources to enrich lessons, particularly in mathematics and science. Teacher-student interactions were positive almost all of the time, but a few teachers managed their classes with raised voices. The majority of teachers used dialogue and questions acceptably to promote thinking by students, but more than a few lacked these skills, especially in Kindergarten. Most teachers delivered the same lesson to all students at the same pace, but a few provided different tasks to better meet the needs of students.

The quality of learning was acceptable across all phases of the school. Almost all students were attentive and engaged. They complied with their teachers' requests consistently. Students were not truly independent learners who found things out for themselves. Even the oldest students waited for directions from their teachers to begin tasks and they did not use the opportunities presented in good lessons in science to learn independently. Almost all

students interacted well and a few collaborated on tasks to achieve common goals. The application of learning to the real world was seen in only a minority of lessons and links across the curriculum were rare. Students' enquiry and research skills were being developed to some extent in English and science. Students' critical and higher order thinking skills were promoted in a few lessons, but learner-centred research was not widespread.

The quality of assessment was acceptable across all phases of the school. Diagnostic testing was done in mathematics and science but not in all subjects and grades. Assessment information was analysed to generate class averages but was not used well to analyse individual levels of attainment. Although assessment information was centralised, subject leaders were unaware of attainment trends outside those of their own students. Assessment of learning during lessons was inconsistent, as was the quality of marking in students' books. The school had begun to use external tests to benchmark the attainment of students, but this work only involved a minority of students. Overall, the use of assessment information did not inform teaching practices to a significant extent.

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

The curriculum throughout the school was good. It had a clear rationale. It met students' educational needs and ensured that challenge was available for students in their lessons. Its breadth and balance was developing and it offered individual choices including national education, personal development, character education, physical education, art, music, drama and French. The curriculum had clear progression through the grade levels. However, purposeful transitions between Kindergarten, elementary and middle school did not consistently ensure continuity. Collaborative teams of management and subject leaders systematically reviewed the curriculum on an annual basis. They identified priorities for improvement and also made on-going adjustments. Grade level and subject level meetings were held to help align instruction and assessment. Cross-curricular links among subjects were inconsistent. The parallel personal and social development and Islamic Education courses enabled all students to receive instruction in personal growth and responsibility. A wide range of extra-curricular activities was in place at the elementary level and limited at the secondary level, due to the high interest in varsity sports. Community volunteers taught character education classes as part of the middle and high school curriculum. The student council planned and led activities in community projects and local and school environments.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety arrangements for all students were outstanding. Students reported they felt safe in school and on buses. Security personnel and a well-maintained learning environment, managed by caring adults contributed to the positive school ethos. Maintenance staff members were responsive in correcting any potential safety hazards; this was ensured through regular checks. A full-time nurse and part-time doctor were available. The clinic was well equipped, and the nurse maintained all health records securely. Medicines were locked and stored

appropriately. Fire equipment was checked regularly and drills were conducted according to regulations. Bus transport was managed efficiently. The canteen offered healthy foods and snacks, and physical activity and exercise were encouraged to promote healthy living.

The quality of support for all students was good. Staff-student relationships were generally positive and mutually respectful. A full-time counselor provided personal counseling and special education administration. There was good use of teacher assistants to support learning, particularly in Kindergarten and science. College counseling was provided by the secondary Deputy Principal. Discipline issues were minor and were handled proficiently by teachers and administrators. They also shared responsibility to track progress. Learning support was offered in English and mathematics, and contributed to some improvement in the attainment of non-English speaking students. Special education services were offered and monitored frequently. Attendance and punctuality were very well managed.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership and management were acceptable, overall. The central purpose of the leadership team was to implement a broad, learner-centred education for all students. This vision had been shared with all stakeholders. The middle management structure had been developed and additional specialised positions had been created to broaden the support to students, particularly those with special educational needs. School leaders were active in their roles and exhibited many important features, notably the action taken to share decision-making with a wide range of stakeholders and to distribute leadership functions. However, school leaders had yet to take into account the changing requirements of the school at a time of development resulting from rapid growth.

The quality of self-evaluation and improvement planning was judged to be acceptable. The Principal and Deputy Principals were responsible for monitoring teaching and learning and ensuring that initiatives recommended in the previous report were carried out. The consulting company also had a significant and continuous role in defining training needs and providing recruitment services. The evaluation of teaching and learning by the school leaders was not consistent with the observations made by inspectors. Most teachers were committed to implementing the school's vision in their classrooms but a significant minority lacked the necessary skills.

Partnerships with parents and the community were outstanding. Parents reported that they were well informed about their children's learning and social and personal development. They were supportive of the breadth of the school's vision. The active Parent Association informed the development of the school facility and the curriculum. The school initiated links with business and community groups as well as with other schools. Initiatives for school and external community activities were also proposed by students.

Governance of the school was good. It ensured that all statutory requirements were met. An Advisory Council had been established with direct links to the board of owners and this

comprised of parents, students and community representatives. The decision to set ambitious targets for growth in student numbers and to recruit a large number of teachers requiring training had a negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning, overall.

Staffing, facilities and resources were of an acceptable standard. A current leadership vacancy impacted upon the implementation of curriculum and quality of teaching and learning in the elementary and Kindergarten. The quality of science and mathematics teaching in the upper section of the school was adversely affected by the absence of permanent staff. Buildings and grounds were used to enhance learning and there was adequate access for all students, including those with additional needs. The library and resources were stocked with appropriate materials and the quantity was steadily being increased. The library required further enhancement. A few ICT resources were available but were not yet being used to their full capacity across the curriculum and by all teachers.

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.

The 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	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

65% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	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	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable	Good
Progress over time	Acceptable	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	Good	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good

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

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
	Overall
Quality of leadership	Acceptable
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Acceptable
Partnerships with parents and the community	Outstanding
Governance	Good
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:
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More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at www.khda.gov.ae.

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