

# Philadelphia Private 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.

Philadelphia Private School was inspected in October 2009 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 Muhaisnah, Philadelphia Private School is a private school providing education for students from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 12, aged from three to 18 years. The school follows an American curriculum. A new Principal had been appointed just before the beginning of the school year and the whole of the senior management had been restructured. Additionally, a board of trustees had been set up to provide governance. This board was supported by an educational consulting company, which had been working with the school since March 2009 in order to implement the recommendations made in the previous inspection report and help improve the school. At the time of the inspection, there were 458 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Almost all parents felt that their children liked school. Most were of the opinion that their children were making good progress in Arabic, English, mathematics and science, but a minority felt they were not progressing well in Islamic Education. Almost all commented positively about behaviour at school, that staff expected their children to work hard, to do their best and to be independent and responsible. They thought that teaching was good with a good range of stimulating activities and that children were treated fairly. Most felt comfortable approaching the school with a question or complaint, but a significant minority thought that the school would not deal with the issue or concern satisfactorily. Most thought that the school was caring and that it kept their children safe and healthy. Most said that teachers explained to parents how they could help their children. They stated that the school was well led and had good links with parents. A minority made less favourable comments

about links with the local community and about the school's response to the recommendations of the last inspection. The inspectors agreed with most of the parents' views with the exception of the links with the local community and progress made since the last inspection, both of which were judged to be good.

## How well does the school perform overall?

Philadelphia Private School was found to be a good school. Attainment in Islamic Education and Arabic was acceptable in the Elementary and Middle schools and good in the High school. Progress in these subjects was acceptable in the Middle school. In the Elementary school, progress was good in Islamic Education and acceptable in Arabic. Attainment and progress in English were outstanding across the school. In Mathematics and science, attainment and progress were good in KG and Elementary, and acceptable in Middle school. In the High School, progress was good. In Grade 12 students reached good attainment levels in science and acceptable levels in mathematics. Attitudes and behaviour were good across the school and outstanding in Elementary school. There were good relationships between students and staff. Students showed respect for school regulations and rules. The students' civic understanding was good. Students showed that they understood their responsibilities at school and in the community and a students' council had just been formed. Almost all non-Muslim students showed adequate understanding and respect for Islam and the local traditions. They also appreciated the multi-cultural nature of Dubai. Students' economic and environmental understanding was outstanding in Elementary but acceptable in the rest of the school. Students were proud of Dubai's development and could articulate many of its unique economic features. They were also aware of its role in the world.

Teaching and learning were good overall and there was a very high proportion of good and outstanding lessons. Nearly all of the teachers had expert knowledge of their subjects and helped their students to learn effectively. The assessment of students' progress and attainment was good. Students were evaluated carefully upon entry to the school and, in addition, there was ongoing assessment of students' performance. Consequently, teachers were well aware of students' strengths and weaknesses and could adapt their teaching and aspects of the curriculum accordingly. The curriculum was good with outstanding features. It was based on an American curriculum and the standards used in the Florida Public Schools. The school had made considerable changes to the curriculum as a result of the recommendations and findings outlined in the last inspection report. The new curriculum addressed multiple intelligences and different learning styles. It had breadth and balance and ongoing assessment, which ensured that the needs of students were met. Health and safety provisions for both students and staff were outstanding. The school facilities were modern, well maintained, and kept secure. The quality of support for all students was good. Counselling services, career days and university fairs for secondary students were scheduled to support students preparing for post-secondary education. There were satisfactory processes for monitoring and tracking student achievement.

The leadership and management were good and the school was working hard to ensure that the recommendations made in the previous inspection report were carried out in full. The newly appointed Principal, senior staff and members of the restructured middle management team shared a common purpose and had a clear vision. The commitment, high motivation and competence of the new management team ensured the engagement of all staff in working towards common goals. There were very close and productive links with the parents and good links with the community. The board of trustees, which consisted of the school owners and a representative from an external educational consulting company, played a key role in supporting the school in identifying priorities, clarifying its vision and mapping out strategies to achieve its aims. All teachers were well qualified and most of them were experienced, with a good match of expertise and experience to teaching responsibilities. Facilities and resources were good overall, but the library was not fully equipped.

### Key features of the school

- The total immersion of students in the English language from KG to Grade 12 resulting in all students acquiring very high levels of English language skills, which enabled them to achieve well in a US-based curriculum;
- The focus on high standards of behaviour, positive attitudes and respect for others from KG to Grade 12 which resulted in students being well prepared to take their role in society as responsible and caring citizens;
- The clear and focused guidance and support from the board of trustees and external consultants ensuring that the school started to implement all of the recommendations in the last inspection report;
- The empowerment of students, members of staff and parents through the new student councils, the decentralised management structure and the formation of an elected parent group;
- The high motivation and determination of the new senior and middle management to effect change.

### Recommendations

- Raise attainment in Islamic Education, particularly for the non-Arabic speaking students;
- Continue training workshops for staff on aspects of teaching and learning and develop a bank of critical thinking activities to help improve the quality of students' learning;
- Continue to gather a wide range of assessment data to help inform curriculum development and address weaknesses in assessment in Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Monitor closely all aspects of the work of the school to ensure that the recently implemented structures and policies effectively produce the desired outcomes.

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

Students' attainment in Islamic Education was acceptable in the elementary and middle stages of the school. By the later stages attainment and progress was good. Among the Arabic-speaking students, the standards were almost in line with Ministry of Education benchmarks whereas the standards of the non-Arabic speaking students were acceptable. In the KG children could respond to the Islamic greetings with adults but they did not explore Islamic themes. In Grade 1 most students could recite the opening chapter of The Holy Qur'an collectively but few of them could recite it individually. By the end of elementary stage, most students could provide solid examples of worship and could relate them to their lives. In the Middle school stage, the majority of students knew Islamic rules and etiquettes of marital relationships and could provide good examples. However, in Grade 11, most non-Arabic speaking students could read only a few lines of The Holy Qur'an. Moreover, students' extended writing across school was very limited and was confined to comprehension questions.

The overall quality of attainment and progress in Arabic was acceptable, though good in the High school. In KG, students could repeat with the teacher some songs about family members and the days of the week. In Grade 4, most students could answer some questions in short sentences. By Grade 9, most students could read a whole paragraph and some poetic lines in an acceptable manner and they could copy paragraphs from the board well. However, their writing within dictation was weak. By Grade 12, most students could read a one-page text. However, most students did not apply the grammatical rules in their writing. Students had the ability to analyse, infer meanings from the text, and interpret results. Students' workbooks showed that they undertook limited extended writing.

Attainment and progress over time in English were outstanding throughout the whole school. Most KG and Elementary students expressed themselves clearly in language and arts activities and were able to understand and follow lessons conducted entirely in English and respond to all classroom instructions. Elementary students wrote imaginative stories well and in their descriptive essays, used correct paragraph structure and grammar. Most Middle school students mastered grammar, punctuation and vocabulary, and they made very good progress in creative writing. Students in the high school revealed outstanding progress in many literary areas. They were articulate, confident and creative and were able to do extensive research using information and communications technology (ICT) within a challenging English curriculum.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were good in KG to Grade 4. From Grades 5 to 9, there was a slight decline in attainment and progress. From Grades 10 to 12, progress was good. The younger students had a good understanding of odd and even numbers, basic computational skills and the four mathematical operations; they were able to solve simple addition equations. Secondary level students were able to utilise all mathematical operations to solve complex equations and increasingly complex mathematical functions. Students were learning to relate and apply their learning in mathematics to the real world.

Attainment and progress in science were good, except in the Middle school where they were acceptable. In the KG and Elementary school students acquired knowledge of animals and their habitats and made good progress developing scientific methods, including safe practices in practical work. They used large picture books and other visual aids as well as simple investigations and experiments to attain lesson objectives. Middle school students had a heightened awareness of the effect of pollution, use of plastic bags, and the impact of the lack of adequate sewage treatment facilities.

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

Students' behaviour in classrooms and around the school was good. They were self-controlled and disciplined. Good relationships between students and staff dominated the school. Students showed respect to their teachers and to their peers. Working in a team was a common feature among students throughout the school. They were courteous and welcoming and most were eager to learn, contributing positively to lessons. Moreover, there were no cases of bullying reported at school. Students also showed good respect for school regulations and rules. Except for a few cases in the Kindergarten, attendance and punctuality were good.

The students' civic and Islamic understanding was good. Classroom observation and interviews with students showed that they understood their responsibilities at school and in the community in which they lived. Almost all non-Muslim students showed adequate understanding and respect for Islam and the local traditions. They also appreciated the multi-cultural nature of Dubai. At the end of last year the school celebrated an 'International Day' which involved students visiting their respective embassies and inviting representatives to the school for the international celebration. They developed an understanding and appreciation of their national identity through assemblies, activities and relevant lessons. The students made donations to local charities and visited orphanages and care homes in the vicinity. All students from Grade 9 onwards spent 30 hours a year doing community service.



Overall, the students' economic and environmental understanding was acceptable. In the elementary stages students demonstrated advanced knowledge and understanding. They were proud of Dubai's development and could articulate many of its unique economic features. They were aware of its role in the world. Students played a role in keeping the school clean and litter-free. Environmental issues were discussed in a few lessons, but students' roles were not sufficiently developed. However, students kept the school free from litter and graffiti. School annual calendar and displays reflected students' understanding of the economic role of Dubai. Although the school did not provide recycling bins, students spoke of their awareness and understanding of environment issues and their concerns about pollution, congested traffic and recycling in Dubai.

## How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching and learning were good. There were a very high proportion of good and outstanding lessons throughout the school. The number of unsatisfactory lessons was very small. Nearly all of the teachers had expert knowledge of their subjects and helped their students to learn effectively. In the upper school teachers were familiar with the requirements of international examinations. Most teachers skilfully planned their lessons to include a variety of activities and resources and most lesson plans included work for high and low-attaining students. Details of lessons and homework assignments were also available online for students and parents to access. In KG and Elementary school, students had ample opportunities to express themselves freely on a range of personal and nominated topics and could also choose different group activities at clearly identified workstations. In the Middle and High schools students worked individually, in pairs and in groups on a range of interesting tasks, which required them to think critically and to solve problems. In science, students did practical activities in the laboratory and in classrooms. The pace of good lessons was brisk, and students often worked in groups and pairs. They did not just rely on textbooks. In several subjects they used a variety of resources and equipment such as flash cards, real objects, illustrations, CD players and ICT. Students had the opportunity to do short presentations or take over the role of the teacher. Many teachers helped students to improve by skilful questioning techniques which probed and extended their knowledge. Teachers also made helpful comments on written assignments and gave individual oral guidance to students which helped them to progress.

Almost nearly all students were actively involved in and took responsibility for their learning. They concentrated hard on set tasks, worked well collaboratively in pairs and groups and communicated their ideas and opinions well. Most students were keen to participate orally in class and asked and answered questions. They also engaged enthusiastically in class discussions and debates. Very occasionally a few students were not fully engaged and displayed inappropriate behaviour. Some high attaining students displayed very high level language skills when presenting ideas in front of the class.



The assessment of students' attainment and progress was good. Students were evaluated carefully upon entry to the school and in addition to regular tests and quizzes there was continuous assessment of students' performance during lessons and on homework assignments. Additionally, students evaluated their own progress. Consequently, teachers were well aware of students' strengths and weaknesses and could adapt their teaching and aspects of the curriculum accordingly. Very good use was made of international benchmarking although this was not a feature of work in the Islamic Education and Arabic departments.

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

The curriculum was good, with outstanding features. It was based on an American curriculum, drawing from the international standards American Education Reaches Out (AERO) and the standards used in the Florida Public Schools. The school made considerable changes to the curriculum as a result of the recommendations and findings outlined in the last inspection report. The curriculum had been re-designed and implemented. Members of staff were engaged in curriculum development training since last year's report, and they made outstanding progress in delivering these curriculum changes. The new curriculum addressed multiple intelligences and different learning styles. It had breadth and balance, ongoing assessment, regular review, an ICT component and ensured that the needs of all students were met. In addition to the core curriculum the school offered a wide range of complementary subjects. Also, learning support classes were provided for students whose first language was not English. There were many other learning opportunities offered within the community and local environment, including community service. There was a wide range of extra-curricular activities including sports as well as outside educational visits. The primary curriculum had been completely redesigned and students had the opportunity to take greater responsibility for their own learning through the development of the new learning centres, which offered students exploration and a choice of activities, such as computer work, role-playing, arts and crafts, practical maths and reading activities. There were also many opportunities for group and individual learning to supplement the teacher-led activities. Practical application of the curriculum was evident in science, with increased use of the physics and chemistry laboratories.

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

Health and safety provision for both students and staff was outstanding. The school facilities were modern, well-maintained, and secure. Outdoor areas were well-maintained and shaded. Indoor temperatures were controlled by an efficient air conditioning system. Students were encouraged to keep their bodies hydrated. Emergency evacuation drills were increased to two per term. One of the drills was completely unannounced. Certain medications and chemicals were securely locked in storage areas. Students working in the science labs were provided with protective and safety measures. Medical personnel were diligent in providing necessary health care and promoting a healthy lifestyle.

The quality of support for all students was good. Parents and students spoke positively of the school staff, facilities and programme. Relationships between staff and students were positive. Rare incidents of misbehaviour were dealt with swiftly and fairly. Character education and psychology classes had been implemented to provide students with coping skills and suggestions for dealing with difficult situations, behaviours or individuals. Counselling services, career days and university fairs for secondary students were scheduled to support students preparing for post-secondary education. There were satisfactory processes for monitoring and tracking students' progress. The counsellor had made excellent progress in assessing students who had specific needs and appropriate provision was put in place.

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

The leadership and management were good and the school was working hard to ensure that the recommendations made in the previous inspection report were carried out in full. The newly appointed Principal, senior staff and members of the restructured middle management team shared a common purpose and had a clear vision which had its central focus on ensuring effective teaching and learning throughout the school. The commitment, high motivation and competence of the new management team ensured the engagement of all staff in working towards common goals. There was very effective delegation of responsibilities to heads of subjects and divisions in the school, who were accountable for implementing whole school policies in areas such as the dissemination of good practice, ensuring professional development and implementation of school policies.

Self-evaluation was good. The Principal and middle managers were accountable for monitoring teaching and learning and ensuring that some specific initiatives recommended in the previous inspection report were carried out effectively. However, it was too early to establish the impact of all of the initiatives introduced. School leaders knew the school and its students very well partly because of a 'walk about' style of management, which ensured that they had a high profile round the school, especially during breaks. The leaders of the school had the capacity to analyse and solve problems in order to further the school's development.

There were close and very productive links with the parents, who were involved in students' learning in numerous ways, for example making presentations in assemblies and supporting students with their reading. Additionally a focus group of parents advised on the students' and parents' handbook. Elections for a new parent committee were scheduled for the month following the inspection. The school organised surveys to seek parents' views on a wide range of issues and feedback was very positive. The new school website was designed to offer parents the opportunity to be more involved in their children's learning by having details of lessons and homework assignments on line. There were good links with the community. There were good links with other schools, which included activities such as inter-school conferences on internationalism. Local businesses came to the school on careers days.

The board of trustees, which consisted of the school owners and a representative from an external educational consulting company, played a key role in supporting the school in identifying priorities, clarifying its vision and mapping out strategies for achieving its aims. The consultancy company which was appointed by the board of trustees to support the school acted as 'critical friends' to the leaders of the school. The board of trustees had firm plans to establish an additional advisory group to support the school which was to consist of a wide range of stakeholders, including parents, representatives of local companies and community leaders.

All teachers were well qualified and most of them were experienced, but over half had been in the school for only one year or less. There was a good match of expertise and experience to teaching responsibilities. Facilities were good in terms of offices, classrooms and specialist rooms and outside areas. The library was not fully equipped, however, resources were also good. Corridors were wide and facilitated movement around the school. Facilities were good throughout the school, but they were outstanding in the KG and lower grades.

## 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 is the students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Good

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	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?	
Quality of leadership	Good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Outstanding
Governance	Acceptable
Staffing, facilities and resources	Good

How well does the school perform overall?
Good



## 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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