

Dubai American Academy 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 American Academy 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 Barsha, Dubai American Academy is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12, aged three to 18 years. The school follows a US curriculum to Grade 10, followed by the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP). At the time of inspection, there were 2272 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. Overall, parents were supportive of the school, with few negative comments. A few parents commented on the need to improve students' preparations for the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme. Almost all parents were satisfied with the overall quality of education provided by the school, and particularly pleased with their children's progress in English, mathematics and science. They were less sure about progress in Islamic Education and Arabic. They were clear that the quality of teaching and learning and the provision of extra-curricular activities were good and that students' behaviour was very good. Almost all parents were strongly of the view that the school kept their children safe and healthy, although they were less knowledgeable about how the school supported students with special educational needs. There was strong agreement from parents that communication with families and school reports were both effective and timely. Almost all parents indicated that the school was well led, and the majority considered that the school had responded positively to the recommendations of the previous inspection report.

How well does the school perform overall?

Dubai American Academy provided a good quality of education overall. The leadership team and staff members had responded positively to the previous inspection and had made significant progress in addressing its recommendations, notably in the provision for Islamic Education and Arabic. The school demonstrated an excellent capacity to improve further, particularly at the senior level.

Attainment in Islamic Education was unsatisfactory in elementary and high, but acceptable in the middle grades. Progress was acceptable in the elementary and high levels and good in middle school. In Arabic as a first language, attainment was unsatisfactory in the elementary and high schools, but acceptable in the middle school. Progress was unsatisfactory in the elementary phases and acceptable in the middle and high school. In Arabic as an additional language, attainment was unsatisfactory in the elementary and high, and acceptable in the middle school. Progress was acceptable in all three sections. This marked a considerable improvement in outcomes since the last inspection. In English, mathematics and science, attainment and progress were good across the school; improvements in English in the middle school since the last inspection were evident. Students' personal development and their appreciation of the rich multi-cultural and diverse multi-lingual composition of the student body were a real strength of the school. Their understanding and appreciation of local traditions and cultures was good, and students in the middle and high school had an outstanding awareness of economic and environmental issues in Dubai and internationally. Teaching, learning and assessment were good across the school, with middle school much improved in consistency in these aspects. The curriculum was good, and the extra-curricular opportunities for students were outstanding, particularly evident in the wide range of sporting activities before, during and after the school day. Health and safety were outstanding, and the quality of support for children and students across the school was consistently good. The management of student attendance and punctuality was meticulous and highly effective. The senior leadership team was highly effective in promoting ambitions toward high attainment for all students. Communication between different sections and staff teams in the school had rightly been identified as an aspect for further improvement. The school's overall good provision indicated that it was well placed to act on the recommendations for further improvement.

Key features of the school

- Significant progress in the provision of Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Students' deep appreciation of the school's multi-cultural community;
- Outstanding provision for health and safety, with a strong focus on healthy lifestyles;
- A rich array of extra-curricular visits and activities for students;

- Excellent partnerships with parents which supported the development of the whole child;
- Outstanding resources for learning;
- The leadership team's determined vision to secure continued improvements for the school.

Recommendations

- Continue to develop the quality of teaching and learning in Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Regularly monitor students' progress and curriculum experiences as they move from elementary to middle to high school, particularly as they prepare for the demands of the IB programme;
- Use the available assessment information to plan and deliver lessons which more effectively meet the students' full range of abilities.

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

In Islamic Education, attainment was unsatisfactory in the elementary and high school, while acceptable in the middle school. The majority of students made acceptable progress in the elementary and high years, and good in the middle years. The younger students in elementary grades made acceptable progress in learning about the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and recited a few verses from short chapters of The Holy Qur'an. In the middle school most students made good progress with their knowledge and understanding of the main principles of the Pillars of Islam and the Pillars of Faith. High school students' knowledge about the history of Islam, Hadith and their recitation skills were below the expected levels. However, they made acceptable progress in developing their understanding of the key values of Islam and the links between Islam and science.

Attainment in Arabic as a first language was unsatisfactory in the elementary and high schools while acceptable in the middle school. Progress was unsatisfactory in the elementary school but acceptable in the middle and high schools. The majority of older students in elementary grades were still struggling to read and write words and a significant minority could not follow instructions in Arabic. Across the middle and high schools, reading and writing skills were below the expected levels for Arab students, but the majority made acceptable progress in writing words, sentences and short paragraphs. In listening, the majority had acceptable comprehension skills and the majority made acceptable progress in increasing their vocabulary and developing their oral skills.

Attainment in Arabic as an additional language was unsatisfactory in the elementary and high schools, while acceptable in the middle school. Progress was acceptable across all phases of the school. The majority of students made acceptable progress in reading and writing Arabic. Most elementary students were beginning to recognize letters and sounds and were learning to use a few common words and phrases. In the middle school, most students learnt and used an acceptable range of vocabulary and sentence patterns and could produce short sentences orally and in writing. However, a significant number of students across the school who had studied Arabic for some time still struggled to read, write or pronounce basic words or simple sentences.

Attainment and progress in English were good across all sections of the school. A significant minority of the students spoke English as an additional language, and made good progress orally and in their everyday writing skills. Almost all children in the Kindergarten had developed confident oral skills. In the early years of elementary, most students spoke and listened with assurance, read appropriate texts with accuracy and fluency and could structure sentences with grammatical accuracy. The majority of students in the middle and high schools demonstrated strong independent reading skills above international standards, sustaining responses to a demanding range of texts. The majority of senior students were able to analyse the works of Shakespeare and poems with insight. Extended writing skills throughout the school were below international standards.

Attainment and progress over time in mathematics were good at all grades. Children in Kindergarten 2 could perform simple arithmetic with two-digit numbers and by Grade 5 students were able to explain how they solved simple algebraic equations. In the middle school, students demonstrated command of algebraic and geometric concepts. By Grade 8 students were able to identify and solve linear function problems, as well as compare and contrast decimals and fractions and change them into percentages. At the high school level, students attained good levels in geometry, algebra and trigonometry. At the higher IBDP level students were able to work on complex mathematical situations, identifying constraints and specifying assumptions, then communicating their interpretations with accuracy.

In science, attainment and progress were good across all sections of the school. Students made good gains in their knowledge and understanding and wisely started their practical investigations at an early stage. In the Kindergarten children could discuss how different materials were suitable for different jobs. At Grade 4 students could explain the likely effect of the movements of tectonic plates. By Grade 5 they could identify sub-atomic particles in diagrams. Middle school students in Grade 8 were able to explain how the Periodic Table could help in working out the transference of electrons in metals. By Grade 12 students were confident enough to design investigations into enzymes and the digestion of starch. Particularly strong features were the acquisition of scientific vocabulary in the early grades, and the balance between theoretical knowledge and challenging practical work in the high school.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Attitudes and behaviour across the school were outstanding. An ethic of inclusion in this multi-cultural school community helped students feel protected and valued from the moment they arrived. Friendships outside the classroom contributed substantially to students' social and cultural learning. The well developed sporting culture contributed to a healthy lifestyle. Students prioritised their personal health by encompassing nutrition, a balance of activities, and social and psychological well-being. Attendance and punctuality were good.

In all sections of the school, students had good understanding of Islam and their civic responsibilities. They had positive and respectful attitudes towards the local community. Older students mentioned how positive interactions within the local culture had challenged their preconceptions of the region and stimulated curiosity about Islamic values and customs. Students were eager and proud to accept responsibilities within the school. They progressed from helping roles in the elementary school to sharing responsibility for organizing school events in the middle and high schools.

Both the children in the Kindergarten and elementary students demonstrated good economic understanding for their ages. Older students reflected on how local visits enhanced their deeper appreciation and environmental awareness. In the middle and high schools this aspect of their education was outstanding. Students were enthusiastic about the opportunities afforded by the 'Week without Walls' to engage with community and environmental issues. Students were familiar with topics of concern to Dubai; they had a developing understanding of the scientific or social background to such issues. They participated enthusiastically in recycling and a number of special events organised to raise awareness of environmental issues.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching was good across the school in most subjects. In Islamic Education and Arabic it was acceptable overall, although with some variations. Teaching of mathematics in the high school was outstanding. Much of the teaching was enthusiastic and lively. Particularly effective teaching was rooted in very good relationships between teachers and their students, affording students the confidence to ask questions and offer their ideas. Most teachers taught creatively beyond what was offered in the text books and brought variety to their lessons, often linking their teaching to real life contexts. They challenged their students to take responsibility for their learning through collaboration, discussion and research, helping prepare them for higher levels of study. Less inspiring lessons featured extended teacher-talk, with too few opportunities for students to put their knowledge and skills to work. A minority of teachers did not consistently differentiate their lessons to support the least and most able students.

The quality of students' learning was good overall. In almost all classes students were keen and responsive, particularly when teachers challenged them and presented varied activities. From the early classes through to the high school, students demonstrated the ability to cooperate and collaborate on tasks. Both individual and group research was a regular feature

of learning and students grew steadily in their abilities to source and assemble information. Students were often mutually supportive in their learning, with high attaining students offering help to those less skilled. Most students showed the confidence to ask for help or clarification when unsure; this led to the productive use of time in class. However, when teaching was less stimulating a few students were distracted from a proper focus on learning.

Overall, assessment was of good quality. The school generated a significant amount of data on students' performance, and could demonstrate the progress they were making over time and the value that the school was adding. Incisive analysis of the data enabled the school to adjust its curriculum appropriately, based on what had been shown to work well. Many teachers were good at assessing how well students were responding to their lessons and adjusted their teaching accordingly. There were strong examples of students evaluating both their own work and that of others against rubrics. Marking was of variable quality, more effective on special assignments than on everyday work. The school was less effective in using student performance data to enable teachers to plan their lessons so that all students were challenged at the right levels.

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

The quality of the curriculum at all four levels of the school was good and, since the last inspection, the school had increased the time allocation for Islamic Education and Arabic so that it met the requirements of the Ministry of Education. The curriculum offered breadth, had a clear rationale and was well balanced. The Kindergarten creative curriculum was fit for purpose in developing children's early learning skills and dispositions. Regular use of a software system by all teachers allowed the curriculum leaders to monitor the scope and sequence of each course taught, and the numerous assessments associated with them. Progression was planned and all older students had some appropriate choices in their courses. Links within the various disciplines of the elementary, middle and high schools were weak. The IBDP programme had developed well, and the school had prepared students and their parents for its particular academic demands. The cross-curricular links embedded in the school's overall curriculum remained a very strong feature, particularly at the elementary level. The excellent library, which served the middle and high schools, played a pivotal role in developing students' strong independent learning habits across disciplines. Enrichment through the extensive and varied extra-curricular programmes, particularly in sports, was outstanding and contributed significantly to students' personal and social development and awareness of the local community and wider world.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety arrangements across the school were outstanding. Security of the campus and safety within it were well organized and effective. Electronic supervision of buses and passengers, and provision of conductors and student bus monitors ensured students' safety. The premises were spacious, clean and generally well-maintained. Close supervision of

students in the elementary school evolved to an appropriate overview in the middle and high schools. Medical personnel provided comprehensive services to all students, with careful oversight of students with special health needs. Counsellors contributed to students' social and emotional learning, as well as being available to provide support to individuals. Staff members were well informed about child protection measures.

Arrangements for the protection and support of students were good throughout the school. Adults were viewed as approachable and friendly; there was mutual respect between staff members and most students. Students were eager to be successful, but a few were in need of support in maintaining the serious and organized focus on learning that is required for success in IBDP courses. Well developed tracking systems existed to support students' academic and personal development. Students identified as requiring additional support were well-served through literacy support services in the elementary school. In the Writing Centre volunteer student tutors provided assistance to other students in the upper stages of the school. Counsellors were active and accessible in their guidance of students' personal development and career choices. The management of attendance and punctuality was exemplary.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership and management of the school were good overall and leaders showed the capacity to take the school forward. The Superintendent provided excellent leadership and a clear sense of direction for the further development of the school. The senior team members were focused on current priorities and knew their various sections well; their attention to management detail was meticulous. They enabled heads of departments, grade level coordinators, administrators and counsellors to share responsibilities to facilitate students' progress and attainment. However, communication between the different schools about students' progress was not strong. Performance management systems were suitably focused on individual staff needs and the wider demands of the whole-school community. Enhancing engagement with parents was a priority for all staff members. A skilfully differentiated programme of in-service teacher training had been designed for the current academic year.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. Parents' views were taken into account in the planning process. Each section of the school had produced its own development plan, with appropriate strategies, success indicators, resources and timelines. The Superintendent and principals had identified the need to ensure greater links between these development plans, focused on the learning journeys of every student. Significant progress had been made in addressing all of the recommendations in the previous inspection report.

Partnerships with parents and the community were outstanding and served to improve students' learning and raise standards. From the Kindergarten to the high school, teachers had initiated a number of innovations to forge highly effective links with parents. The on-line home-school learning communications were especially valued by parents, as were weekly newsletters. Parents of older students shared in the reading of novels in order to support progress in English. Regular reports to parents included detailed comments from teachers

about students' next steps for improvement. The school had strong partnerships with other schools and the wider community of Dubai that gave students increased opportunities for learning and social development.

Governance was of acceptable quality. Statutory requirements were met and the advisory board played an appropriate role in supporting the school's improvement, in particular having encouraged the Superintendent's initiatives on improved parental engagement.

Staffing, facilities and resources were good. Just under a third of the teachers were new to the school at the start of the school year; they were provided with appropriate induction, were well qualified and their deployment was generally efficient and effective. A few assistants in elementary classrooms did not understand their assigned responsibilities with students. The resources for learning were extensive and of excellent quality. The library in the middle and high schools provided a high quality learning space which promoted students' independent research skills. The information and communications technology resources were well used by teachers and students.

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	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
8% 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	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory
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	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good	Good

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

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

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	KG	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:	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	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:
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More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at www.khda.gov.ae.

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