

Al Khaleej National 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.

Al Khaleej National 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 Garhoud, Al Khaleej National School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to Grade 12, aged three to 18 years. The school follows a US curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 1475 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was outstanding.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to an on-line questionnaire completed by parents. Most parents were satisfied with the quality of education provided by the school for all subjects including Islamic Education and Arabic. Most thought that student behaviour was good and that their children enjoyed school. A few parents felt that reporting student progress to parents was inadequate and a few wished to be consulted more on school decisions. Most parents were satisfied with the quality of teaching and leadership in the school.

How well does the school perform overall?

Al Khaleej National School was an acceptable and improving school. The school implemented a number of initiatives that have led to improvements in its overall performance. A detailed school development plan had been formulated that resulted in additional professional development for teachers, increased teacher evaluation, re-alignment of the curriculum, and increased involvement of parents. Attainment and progress of students continued to improve, but further upgrading of instructional practice is required to move to the next level. Students, parents, staff and school managers worked well as a team to set the stage for further progress.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language, English, mathematics and science were acceptable across all phases of the school. Attainment and progress in Islamic Education in the elementary stage were good, while attainment in Arabic as a second language in middle and high school was unsatisfactory. Students generally demonstrated good attitudes and behaviour throughout the school and they were supported by well developed and effective systems of safety and care. The quality of teaching varied throughout the school but was acceptable overall. The curriculum was broad, with a variety of extra-curricular activities to provide enrichment and students with special educational needs were supported well. The school leaders managed the school effectively and demonstrated a clear vision for ongoing improvement.

Key features of the school

- Attainment in Islamic Education had improved at the elementary phase;
- The leadership modelled the school motto “excellence through teamwork” by recognising academic staff, support staff, students and parents;
- There was a high commitment amongst parents, the school administration and teachers to implement school improvement;
- Professional development practices were not yet effective in creating required improvements in classroom instruction;
- The school was a caring and inclusive environment for learning; student attitudes and behaviour were positive.

Recommendations

Improve school development plans by creating targets that are specific and measureable;

- Create a curriculum plan that has enough detail to guide instruction for subjects at all grade levels and which includes cross-curricular links;
- Develop more effective strategies for professional development;
- Shift instructional practice from a teacher-centred, knowledge-based approach to a student-centred, inquiry-based approach.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good in elementary yet acceptable at the middle and high school levels. In Grade 5, most students made good progress in the recitation of The Holy Qur'an. They could also explain the meaning of familiar Qur'anic verses. They developed good knowledge about the messengers, the angels and the day of resurrection. In Grade 8, students' knowledge about Islam was good; however their skills in reciting The Holy Qur'an were limited. In Grade 12, students' recitation was in line with the expectations but the majority of students made a few errors and their knowledge of Islam was acceptable. There was inconsistent quality of recitation by students in middle and high school levels, particularly among the non-Arabic speaking students.

The level of students' attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language was acceptable throughout the grade levels. Almost all students spoke Arabic clearly and confidently at an age-appropriate level. In Grade 3, students extracted and expressed main ideas from pictures. In Grade 5 students could specify the main ideas of written passages. In Grade 9 students had the ability to classify a variety of writing types. In Grade 12 students could communicate effectively using a variety of methods. Most students could listen to a passage of text and specify the main and secondary ideas, although some of them required help from the teacher. Almost all students could read passages and poems at the level presented in grade-appropriate textbooks. Students across the grade levels had difficulty in maintaining the proper rhythm when reading poems. Although they could write short sentences, errors were common and the ability to write extended passages was limited. Dictionaries and other writing tools were rarely used to aid in writing.

The level of attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language was acceptable at the elementary level, but were unsatisfactory at the middle and high school phases. In elementary grades, most students spoke Arabic clearly. Students in Grade 2 pronounced words and simple sentences, but in middle and high school Arabic lessons, lacked confidence speaking in detail and at length. In Grade 3 most students understood what the teacher said and they could match words with the appropriate pictures. Most Grade 9 students could only say a few words in Arabic and relied on English for verbal communication. In Grade 4 most students could read words and short passages from their textbook but in middle and high school grades students' ability to read was very weak. In elementary levels writing ability was limited to copying words from the textbook. In high school, students could write answers to questions in short sentences and most students were able to distinguish between singular and plural nouns.

Overall, attainment and progress in English were acceptable. Most children entered Kindergarten with very little English and for almost all students English was their second language. As English was the language of instruction, students' listening, understanding and speaking skills developed rapidly. The younger children were not always required to respond in sentences, however, and the use of the primary textbook provided limited opportunities to express their thoughts. In the senior school, attainment and progress were acceptable overall but listening and speaking skills were good. Students expressed themselves clearly, gave

directions and discussed written passages. Their writing used past, present and future tenses and conveyed meaning, but included several inaccuracies of tense, grammar and spelling. Teachers mostly covered the same activities and passages with all students which restricted the progress of the more able and those requiring additional support with their learning.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable and results on international tests had improved over the past three years. Students were able to carry out calculations that were in line with their age expectations. The ability to solve problems was generally lacking and became poorer through middle and high school levels. Kindergarten students were able to identify basic shapes and numbers and follow simple directions. By Grade 5, students were able to perform basic number calculations, understand fractions, shape and measure and, by Grade 9, they could simplify radicals. Grade 12 students were able to solve formulas for rational functions related to limits but struggled with the resulting graphical analysis.

Attainment and progress in science were acceptable. In Kindergarten, children could name animals and say whether they fly, swim or walk. In Grade 1, students were able to name parts of plants and, by Grade 4, they used simple laboratory tools and procedures. By Grade 5, students were able to examine cells, commenting on their structure and they understood asexual reproduction. Grade 7 students understood that the nature of substances was determined by the arrangement of atoms. Grade 10 students could conduct laboratory experiments and relate the results to required calculations. While students generally acquired the basic science knowledge appropriate for their grade level, students were not consistently able to appropriately apply the scientific method or to carry out extended project work at an age-appropriate level.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

The attitudes and behaviour of the students were good in Kindergarten and high school. Students expressed pride in their school and demonstrated a confident and friendly attitude. Relationships among students, teachers, school leaders and parents were congenial and supportive. Attendance was high and there was some lateness in arriving to class. However, this did not significantly interfere with the routines of the school. Some student misbehaviour occurred during a few middle school classes and in the corridor areas.

Students demonstrated dedication in practising Islamic principles and a responsible approach to life in the school and in their community. The mixture of nationalities in the school was welcomed by students and served to enrich the school community. Students were thoughtful and realistic in their approach to choosing a career, and they generally expressed a wish to contribute to their community. They had constructive ideas about how to improve school life, including improving the quality of food in the canteen, increasing physical education classes and suggested that an effective student council would allow them to make positive contributions to the school.

Students had an acceptable level of understanding of Dubai's economic and social development. This aspect of the school had improved due, in part, to the provision of a business and accounting course for high school students that offered effective practical learning experiences. Although business principles were generally understood, only a few students understood Dubai's relationship to the global economy. Environmental awareness among the younger students had been raised by some adjustments to the curriculum.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Overall, teaching and learning were acceptable. Most teachers had good subject knowledge and the majority held students' interest throughout the lesson. Many used electronic whiteboards effectively; these enhanced learning, especially when students were able to use them for demonstrations or for peer instruction. However, the pace of lessons was often slow, limiting the rate of student learning. Lessons were planned, but extended activities or adapted tasks to cater appropriately for weaker or more able learners were rarely observed. Although effective group work was rare, the setting of groups in some lessons, led to appropriately increased pace and challenge for the most able. Most students were able to recall facts and some were able to apply newly learnt skills in different situations. They sometimes benefitted from exchange of ideas in group work and their confidence was increased when they were required to make class presentations. The presentations were not evaluated by their peers, against criteria, or linked to examination criteria for older students, thus missing opportunities to develop peer and self-assessment.

Students' learning was acceptable. Since lessons were often teacher-centred, students' progress in independent and co-operative learning was limited. Lessons and homework relied on attainment of knowledge or on routine skills such as computations, resulting in a decreased ability in problem-solving and critical thinking. The lack of practical work, such as laboratory assignments or extended projects, limited students' ability to apply knowledge to real-life situations and to develop life-long learning skills.

Assessment of student attainment and progress was acceptable. Assessment began in the Kindergarten and children showed pride when praised after they had acquired a new skill. Students' work was regularly marked and up to date. Marking of class and homework in extended writing often identified errors, but there was no clear evaluation of the overall quality of the work and no targets for improvement. Students were not required to make corrections or to improve their work. The lack of comments hindered students' ability to improve. There was no evidence that students were provided with criteria against which to check the quality of their work. The school administered the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, SATs and TOEFL which provided a benchmark for the school against which to measure improvement in student achievement. Students were provided with extra help if they were falling behind, but there were no individualised plans for students in the average or gifted range.

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

The curriculum for the school was acceptable. Within subjects there was a progressive development of the students' knowledge and skills. The school had embarked on a comprehensive review of the curriculum and had examined data to inform planning. The review process for Kindergarten to Grade 5 had been completed and had been implemented with some good results. The curriculum throughout did not sufficiently indicate learner outcomes. In the secondary school, departments were working to document their own curriculum but cross-curricular planning was not sufficiently evident. The curriculum provided a good range of subjects with art, music, physical education and information and communication technology (ICT) skills in the elementary school and a range of subjects in the secondary school including business and accounting. In the secondary school, students were able to study for the International Computer Drivers License and for the Certificate of Professional Business Studies. Regular art, music and physical education classes enriched and provided breadth to the curriculum. The school had worked to accommodate the needs of all learners with the implementation of crash courses in skill areas of weakness, enrichment classes during after-school hours and the inclusion in its program of students with special educational needs. Students at all levels spoke highly of the extra-curricular arrangements in the school but provision of classes for girls did not always match that for boys. Options within the extra-curricular program included chess, games, sports and PE, swimming, photography and karate. There were fewer options for students to develop their creative talents. The school had developed numerous ties with the local community and students participated in artistic, social and economic opportunities within the community.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety arrangements were judged to be good across all phases of the school. There were daily inspections of the school. Security of the site was good as was the supervision of the transport for students. The school had a child protection policy and fire safety procedures were in effect. The morning drop off at the elementary entrance required review to ensure student safety and the school was working to improve the situation. The school did not ensure that all swimming personnel were properly certified and appropriate safety equipment was not provided in the swimming pool area. The school employed a full time doctor who was assisted by two registered nurses. There was a well-developed system for the administration and storage of medications and teachers were informed of those students who had medical issues that require monitoring. Healthy lifestyles were promoted with displays throughout the school and assemblies.

The quality of student support was judged to be good at all stages. There was a process for the identification and monitoring of students who were identified with special educational needs. Arrangements for tracking and supporting students were good and provided focused support for students' academic progress and their personal development. There were very good staff-student relationships in all years and students were able to identify faculty whom they would consult on an informal basis. The school had developed a strong program for career development. Attendance and punctuality were monitored and parents were contacted promptly when absences occurred.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Quality of leadership in the school was good overall. The motto of the school, "excellence through teamwork" was enthusiastically practised by school leadership, staff, students and parents. The school ran efficiently with a warm, friendly atmosphere. Staff at all levels were appreciated and recognised for their contributions. There were extensive professional development opportunities for teachers and leaders within the school. However, training arrangements required further improvement and review to ensure that such led to better teaching quality across the school.

Self-evaluation was acceptable. The school had implemented an extensive school improvement plan that addressed the recommendations from the previous school inspections. Regular and detailed staff evaluation was in place, including peer evaluation among teachers, and evaluation of the leadership team members by Global Education Management (GEMS) managers. Self-evaluation documents prepared by the school included input from staff and were detailed and complete. In order to achieve a better rate of school improvement, self-evaluation needed to be more accurate and school development plans should include specific and measurable attainment targets.

Partnership with parents and community was good. The school had made every effort to communicate with parents and consider their views when implementing change. Initiatives such as the addition of International Computer Drivers License to the curriculum and adjustments to the school timetable had been implemented as a result of suggestions from parent groups. The on-line parent questionnaire indicated that a significant minority of parents felt that they did not have enough influence in decision-making for the school.

Governance in the school was acceptable. The owners of the school provided supervision and a high level of support. For example, they facilitated regular meetings among a group of principals to allow for collegial collaboration. A parental engagement group was formed this year but had yet to impact fully on the wider work and governance of the school.

The school's facilities and resources were good. Teachers had appropriate educational qualifications but a few demonstrated weaker skills in classroom management and teaching skills. Teacher retention, although very high in the past, was improving. This eased some of the challenge in implementing staff development. The school made effective use of support staff. The use of smart boards in classrooms and laboratories enhanced the integration of ICT. Science laboratories were too small for some classes and did not have enough equipment to involve all students in carrying out experiments.

Summary of inspection judgements

In their evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the school, the inspection team made judgements about the following aspects of the school's performance.

Four descriptors are: Outstanding; Good; Acceptable; Unsatisfactory.

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
81% 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	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

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

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

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	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
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	Acceptable
Partnerships with parents and the community	Good
Governance	Acceptable
Staffing, facilities and resources	Good

How well does the school perform overall?

Acceptable

Next steps

The school has been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how it will address the main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents. The next inspection will report on the progress made by the school.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau
Knowledge and Human Development Authority

How to contact us

If you have a concern or wish to comment on any aspect of this report you should contact:
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More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at www.khda.gov.ae.

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