

St. Mary's Catholic High School Inspection Report

Primary to Post-16

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.

St. Mary's Catholic High 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 Oud Metha, St. Mary's Catholic High School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from primary to post-16, aged five to 19 years. The school follows the English National Curriculum and students complete GCSE and A-level examinations as part of their studies. At the time of the inspection, there were 2155 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 who responded indicated that they were happy with the quality of education in the school. Almost all expressed satisfaction with teaching and stated that their children enjoyed being at school. More than half gave particular praise to the extra-curricular activities. Most spoke highly of communication between the school and home and felt that the school responded well to their concerns. A few wanted the school to establish a parent-teacher association in order to ensure better communication. Parents were confident that their children were safe and well cared for in the school. In their additional comments, a significant number of parents expressed concerns about aspects of school transport. A small number commented adversely on the cleanliness of the students' toilets. Parents of children with additional support needs spoke highly of the school's arrangements to support their children. Most felt that the school was well led.

How well does the school perform overall?

St Mary's Catholic School provided a good quality of education with some outstanding features. Senior staff had focused clearly on addressing the recommendations of the previous report. They had taken effective steps to ensure that the quality of learning, teaching and assessment was improved. They had begun a careful programme of monitoring teachers' plans and classwork. Senior management had begun to track students' progress with a view to ensuring continuous improvement. Teachers meticulously recorded students' attainment, and were beginning to use assessment strategies to evaluate teaching. On-going assessment in English and mathematics was in place. Some teaching and learning, at all stages in the school, was outstanding. The senior management team had identified the areas in which there was most need for professional development. They were also using best practice within the school as a model and guide for further development. The Principal had made careful plans to ensure smooth succession in the senior management team. At head of department level, teachers with responsibilities had been well supported to enable them to fulfil their remits effectively. Overall, based on strong management, well-judged advice and focused planning, the school had a clear capacity to continue and extend the improvements already made.

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education was good at all phases. In Arabic for native speakers, attainment and progress were acceptable, while in Arabic as an additional language they were unsatisfactory in Grades 1 to 6 and acceptable in the rest of the school. In English, attainment and progress were acceptable in the primary phase and good in secondary. In both mathematics and science, attainment and progress were acceptable in the primary phase and outstanding in secondary and post-16 phases. Students' attitudes and behaviour were good in Grades 1 to 6 and outstanding elsewhere. Their civic understanding, knowledge of Islam and appreciation of local customs and traditions were good in all phases. Teaching and learning varied from acceptable in the primary phase to good in secondary, and good in post-16, where some learning was outstanding. Assessment was acceptable in primary and good at the other phases. The school kept appropriate records of progress, but in some cases teachers did not make full use of the information to provide appropriate support or challenge. The curriculum was good in the post-primary phases, and acceptable in primary. A rich range of extra-curricular activities had been absorbed within the school day, which meant that time allocated to Arabic did not comply with Ministry requirements. Provision for health and safety and the quality of support for students were good throughout. The Principal offered good leadership, and was well supported by a dedicated and effective senior management team. Her structure for departmental and pastoral management effectively impacted on students' learning and well-being. At all levels, leaders and managers approached their task in a very professional way. The Principal had given clear direction to the school, and her vision of a multi-national, multi-cultural environment was effectively realised. The school had established a good system of monitoring teachers' planning and of visiting lessons to give formal support. Communication with parents was good, but parents were not yet sufficiently involved in the work of the school. Links with the community were not strong. The Vicariate had not established a governing body. Teachers were well qualified. A few did not have a good enough appreciation

of the developmental stages and needs of young children. The premises were adequate, with some cramped teaching areas and limited space for students to relax.

Key features of the school

- The atmosphere of tolerance and respect in a multi-national, multi-cultural community;
- The improvement in many aspects of the work of the school, as a result of the action taken to address the recommendations of the previous reports;
- Outstanding attainment in public examinations in English, mathematics and science;
- High standards of behaviour and positive attitudes, particularly in the senior and post-16 phases of the school;
- The commitment to improvement shown by the senior management team.

Recommendations

- Further develop the quality of teaching and learning in the junior school using examples of best practice as models, and thereby reduce the inconsistency of students' experience at the transition into secondary;
- Continue the good practice of tracking attainment throughout the school, using the information to provide appropriately challenging activities for all students;
- Improve standards of attainment in Arabic throughout the school and ensure that the provision of Arabic lessons meets requirements;
- Take steps to ensure the establishment of a governing body.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good across the school. In the primary phase, almost all students were making good progress in their understanding of the Pillars of Islam, fasting and Zakat. They had detailed knowledge about compulsory and optional prayers. In the secondary phase, most students had very well-developed links between what they were learning in school and their everyday lives. Throughout the school, most students were able to memorise The Holy Qur'an and recite it with few errors. However, almost all students did not apply the recitation rules correctly.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were acceptable. Most students had acceptable listening skills. In the primary phase they understood instructions and followed them well. Senior students listened respectfully to others' views. In speaking, the majority of students in senior classes used Standard Arabic appropriately. They had a rich range of vocabulary. Most could read confidently with few errors, from both familiar and unfamiliar texts. Students' skills in extended writing or free writing were underdeveloped and limited. However, at all stages, only a few students could apply rules of grammar correctly.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language were unsatisfactory in the primary phase, but they were acceptable in secondary classes. Most students' listening skills were below expectation. In senior classes, most students used a good range of vocabulary in their spoken responses, which were limited to single word answers or short sentences. Only a few students were confident readers and had acceptable comprehension skills. At all stages most students' extended writing was restricted and limited to a small number of sentences. Only a few students had a basic knowledge of grammar and its application.

Attainment and progress in English were acceptable in the primary phase and good in the senior school. At GCSE, students' attainment in English language and in English Literature significantly exceeded the national averages for all schools in England and the international average. Most students spoke confidently and used increasingly sophisticated vocabulary to express themselves clearly. They listened carefully and gave well considered responses in class and in group discussions. In reading, those in Grade 1 could recognise words and in Grade 2 they read with confidence. Students in the senior classes read with accuracy, feeling and understanding. Throughout the school writing was well formed and well presented. Students from Grade 4 upwards could write well for a variety of purposes. They were skilful in transferring their understanding and knowledge of literary techniques and critical appreciation into their own written work.

Progress and attainment in mathematics were acceptable in Grades 1 to 6. They were outstanding in both the secondary and post-16 phases. In Grade 3, students engaged with learning partners to make a series of measurements which enhanced their collaborative learning skills. Students in Grade 6 organised their work, checked results and could talk about the mathematical concepts involved in number sequences and explain their thinking to the teacher. Grade 9 students could split complex two-dimensional shapes into right-angled triangles and rectangles. Using the theorem of Pythagoras, they could determine perimeters and areas. In the post-16 classes, almost all students could research ways of solving problems and critically appraise the different methodologies used to arrive at solutions.

Attainment and progress in science were acceptable at the primary phase, and outstanding at secondary and post-16. Throughout, students exhibited a sound knowledge and understanding of key concepts, theories and ideas in science. They were able to employ reason, observation and investigation in their science lessons from the first year through to post-16. The youngest learners observed experiments, made predictions and drew conclusions. Older students used microscopes and other equipment in a laboratory setting with confidence and accuracy. They lacked grounding in the scientific method and had few opportunities to conduct in-depth, rigorous research. Secondary and post-16 students performed well above average in national examinations in physics, chemistry and biology.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Attitudes and behaviour in the primary phase were good. They were outstanding in secondary and post-16 phases. In almost all instances students went about their day in a focused and purposeful way. They were polite and respectful to adults and to each other. Students were

attentive in class and generally took their lessons seriously. They arrived at school and at lessons on time. The overall attendance rate was high. Students across all grade levels demonstrated an understanding of a healthy life-style. They knew that a proper diet and exercise are essential to good health.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and culture were good throughout the school. Most were happy and performed well when given responsibilities inside or outside the classes. The students' council played an active role in the work of the school. Most demonstrated a strong understanding of the values of Islam and its place in the culture of Dubai. The majority of students knew the traditions of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Most could give good examples of how Dubai and the UAE had changed and developed. Most were able to talk confidently about the positive and negative aspects of Dubai's multi-language and multi-cultural society.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good. They understood the political structure and interdependence of the Emirates. They identified Dubai's economic potential and what had contributed to its prosperity. Students described land reclamation projects and Dubai's world-renowned architecture. They appreciated the opportunities offered by living in Dubai and the UAE. They knew how economic decisions could impact on the environment and understood the need for conservation of world resources. Post-16 students did not have opportunities to undertake business and enterprise projects in school or work experience outside school.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching in Grades 1 to 6 was acceptable. At the other grades it was good. Most teaching was characterised by strong subject knowledge and an understanding of how students learn. In secondary and post-16 classes, activities were designed carefully to meet the students' needs and to promote independence in learning. Most teachers used a level of questioning that challenged students and supported inquiry, reflection and critical thinking. In a few lessons in key subjects in the primary and early years of secondary, teachers did not encourage students to become actively engaged in their learning or to develop independence. Most teachers planned lessons well to meet the needs of students, including those with special educational needs. They maintained a good pace in their teaching in most cases. Some were creative in their use of the limited information and communications technology (ICT) resources. Positive teacher-student and peer group relationships supported the effective teaching in many lessons.

Students' learning was acceptable in the primary stage, good in secondary and outstanding at post-16, especially in mathematics and science. Students collaborated well, challenging each other appropriately and offering mutual support. A key feature of almost all lessons was the high level of enjoyment. There were many instances of students working co-operatively and collaboratively. In English, group work and peer evaluation were used to elicit good understanding of literary techniques and the evaluation of some demanding texts. Enquiry and

research skills were also a developing feature of learning in many areas throughout the school, especially in science and mathematics.

Assessment was acceptable in the primary school and good at secondary and post-16 stages. Teachers were beginning to use assessment strategies well in lessons to evaluate learning and to suggest ways in which students might improve. Senior management had worked with some success to create a whole school approach to assessment and record keeping. They recognised that teachers' assessment and moderation still needed to be more rigorously embedded, particularly in the primary school. A key strength in the later stages was the increasing use of assessment criteria to enable students to know exactly how to achieve their targets. In primary and early secondary classes, feedback to students lacked consistency and written comments were merely congratulatory. They did not provide sufficient guidance on next steps in learning or on how students could improve.

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

The curriculum was acceptable in the primary phase and good in the secondary, and in post-16. The school followed the National Curriculum for England, contextualised for Dubai. A curriculum review had been undertaken at department and year group level, and involved all teaching staff. The leadership team regularly reviewed curriculum planning. They monitored delivery through lesson observations and scrutiny of lesson plans. They were developing clear guidelines for what students should know, understand, and be able to do, by given stages. Breadth and balance in the curriculum benefited from the long and medium-term planning, curriculum overviews and thematic approaches. Students had a good range of learning experiences up to the end of Grade 9, though there was a restricted range of courses available at the later grades. Cross-curricular links and skills were inconsistent throughout the school. Not all students' needs were regularly met in the classroom. Group work, organised by ability and preferred learning styles, was a feature of planning. In the classroom, the inconsistency of provision in some lessons led to a minority of students being inadequately supported or challenged. Many students had too few opportunities to grow as creative, critical and analytical thinkers. The counsellor and individual teachers offered careers advice. Older students received some preparation for the world of work and further education through the community service programme, but it was largely restricted to work within the school. The extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities was organised within the school's normal timetable. As a result, the amount of time allocated to Arabic lessons did not comply with requirements. Universities from the UAE and from overseas offered valuable information sessions for post-16 students.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Provision for health and safety was good across all phases. The buildings and the whole campus, including classrooms, the clinic, libraries, office areas and laboratories was clean and well-maintained. All medicines and chemicals were securely stored. Furnishings and size of classrooms were generally adequate and appropriate to the age of the students. The exception

was at the junior level where some classrooms were not of adequate size for the numbers of students present. Promotion of healthy lifestyles was well addressed. Healthy snacks were available in the canteen. The transportation system was efficiently organised. Drivers and assistants had been appropriately trained and received regular updates. Fire and evacuation drills were held on a regular basis and were well documented. Security guards were present at all times of the day both in the grounds and in the buildings. Access to the ground floor for disabled students, parents and other visitors was good. There was no lift, and so access to upper floors was restricted. Knowledge and understanding of child protection was inconsistent across the school. Although there was some informal training in this area, rigorous and ongoing training of all staff was required.

The protection and support of students was good at all phases. Students and teachers had outstanding relationships. The pastoral team, overseen by the counsellor, provided high quality support and guidance. The programme for home-class time supported younger students' emotional needs and gave them opportunities to discuss personal development issues. The personal, social and health education programme effectively addressed a range of concerns. It aimed to develop students' awareness of health issues and to build their self-esteem. Students who had learning difficulties were well supported. Teachers dealt with disciplinary matters promptly and fairly. Students felt safe and secure at school. The tracking of students' individual academic and personal development was in development.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership was good. The Principal had ensured that the school had made significant progress in meeting the recommendations of the previous report. She had given a clear sense of direction to the teachers. She had established and nurtured an ethos of tolerance, understanding and respect in a multi-national, multi-cultural establishment. She had created an effective senior management team and had ensured that an appropriate succession strategy was firmly in place. She had also developed the role of heads of department. They had taken on their responsibilities in a very professional way and were developing a collegiate style of working. Together with curriculum co-ordinators and year heads they ensured a considered approach to teaching and assessment in most areas of the school. There were still weaknesses in the junior school. Good arrangements were in place for the management of development needs, including the sharing of best practice throughout the school.

The school had established a thorough process for self-evaluation. Senior management had conducted a survey of teachers and students which offered a sound foundation for change. The school had not yet established a regular survey of parents' opinions. Teaching, learning and assessment had improved throughout. Teachers had embarked on courses to enable them teach more effectively. Good practice within the school was being shared. Senior management had reviewed staffing to ensure an effective body of teachers. They were meeting the needs of those teachers in the junior school who were unaware of the developmental stages and needs of young children.

Partnership with parents and the community was acceptable. While parents were generally supportive of the school and praised its academic success, a number felt that they could be more involved in its work. The school did not use parents to support classroom activities, and parents had no opportunity to participate in governance or in a parent-teacher association. Parents attended regular school consultation events and, when asked, offered their thoughts on how the school was working. Communication was effective and good. Parents received regular reports which included details on how they could assist in their children's progression. Links with the community were poorly developed. Opportunities for senior students to have greater involvement beyond St Mary's were missed.

Governance was unsatisfactory. No governing body had been established by the Vicariate. It was supportive and appreciative of what the school did, but was not in a position to offer strategic guidance.

Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable. In the junior school, a small number of teachers did not have an adequate grasp of appropriate pedagogical approaches, or of suitable behaviour management. A body of support staff was in place to ensure enhancement of learning. The premises were adequate, though the shared campus resulted in restrictions on outdoor play areas and sports facilities. Toilets were well maintained and clean. Resources were limited but were being extended. Up-to-date ICT equipment was being installed, starting in the junior school. The library in the junior school was acceptable, with a good range of texts. The senior library was limited, and had inadequate resources and equipment.

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:	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Good	Good	Not Applicable
Progress over time	Good	Good	Not Applicable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?			
5% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.			
Age group:	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Not Applicable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?			
Age group:	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Good	Not Applicable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Good	Not Applicable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?			
Age group:	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Outstanding	Outstanding
Progress over time	Acceptable	Outstanding	Outstanding

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?			
Age group:	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Outstanding	Outstanding
Progress over time	Acceptable	Outstanding	Outstanding

How good is the students' personal and social development?			
Age group:	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Good

How good are teaching and learning?			
Age group:	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Good	Outstanding
Assessment	Acceptable	Good	Good

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?			
Age group:	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Good	Good

How well does the school protect and support students?			
Age group:	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Health and safety	Good	Good	Good
Quality of support	Good	Good	Good

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
	Overall
Quality of leadership	Good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Acceptable
Governance	Unsatisfactory
Staffing, facilities and resources	Acceptable

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.

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

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