

Dubai International Academy Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Year 13

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 International Academy was inspected in January 2011 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 Emirates Hills, Dubai International Academy is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to Year 13, aged three to 18 years. The school follows an International Baccalaureate curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 1840 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

As part of the inspection process, Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires issued to parents. There was a high level of satisfaction from parents who responded to the questionnaire. Most parents were happy with student's progress across all key subjects, particularly English. There was an appreciation of their children's enthusiasm for learning and the school's concern for safety and well-being. A few parents were concerned about the teaching of Arabic and large class sizes for younger classes.

How well does the school perform overall?

Dubai International Academy provided, overall, a good quality of education for students. Leadership had demonstrated an energetic approach to school improvement and an ability to develop systematic plans to take the school forward with clear strategic development. The school had developed comprehensive development plans in order to address previous recommendations. However, these had yet to successfully address all specific, improvements within the school, such as the daily teaching in mathematics and science.

Student attainment and progress was good or acceptable in all key subjects with consistently good progress in the Diploma Programme (DP) stage but varying attainment in all subjects across both the Primary Years Programme (PYP) and Middle Years programme (MYP) stages. The quality of teaching was acceptable in the primary school and good in the secondary school although a significant number of lessons lacked challenge and interest. Learning was good throughout all stages, as the students developed as independent learners who were capable of working collaboratively. They were able to undertake enquiry and research projects. The school had useful assessment data which was comprehensive and which supported learning. The curriculum had a clear rationale and was underpinned by the International Baccalaureate learner profile. Health and safety were a high priority and the school provided a safe and secure environment for its students.

Key features of the school

- A nurturing school which developed responsible and happy learners;
- Cultural diversity was highly appreciated and valued throughout the school community;
- The extra-curricular programme was extensive;
- There was a high level of care for students' safety and well-being;
- The quality of teaching was inconsistent in PYP and MYP, but strong in DP;
- Senior and middle managers were not consistently successful in ensuring that standards of achievement were raised across all stages of the school.

Recommendations

- Raise attainment and improve students' progress in key subjects across identified phases of the school;
- Streamline action planning and increase the impact of middle management to ensure that all teachers improve progress and raise attainment;
- Ensure that the quality of teaching is consistently good or better, so that all students are fully engaged and have consistently high level of challenge.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good in Years 7 to 13, and acceptable in the lower grades. Younger students had age-appropriate knowledge about the life of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and understood the forms of worship in Islam. The majority could recite and memorise a few short chapters from The Holy Qur'an. They recognised purification and impurity in Islamic practices and learnt how to perform ablution. Most students in the higher grades had a growing awareness of Islamic teachings and culture. For example, in Year 11, students could explain the role of the mosque in Islam and made connections between the teachings of Islam and the contemporary world. They also discussed Islam's views on the consumption of drugs and its impact on society.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were good in Years 7 to 11 and acceptable in the lower grades. In the higher grades most students demonstrated skills of a good quality in their extended writing. Most of them had good reading comprehension skills and could analyse unfamiliar literary texts to a good standard. However, a few students struggled with correct grammatical structure when required to write independently. In the lower grades, the majority of students could read aloud and respond accurately to simple dictation exercises. Many students demonstrated a limited knowledge of grammar and lacked fluency and accuracy with expression orally and in writing.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language were acceptable across the school. Overall, most students listened well and had a good understanding of set work. However, their oral language skills, their response to dictation and grammatical skills were limited in all grades. Younger students were developing age-appropriate skills and learning to connect words, sounds and pictures. In the middle school, students could read elements of a specific genre when learning about advertisements and many were able to compare aspects of Arabic grammar with that used in the English language. In the higher grades, students wrote and spoke about their countries in limited sentences, their writing was weak in structure and they displayed limited ability to respond accurately to dictation exercises.

Attainment in English was acceptable in the Kindergarten and PYP stages but progress was good. Both attainment and progress were good in the secondary school, with girls' performance generally higher than that of boys. Listening and speaking skills were better than reading and writing in Kindergarten and primary. By Year 6, students could interpret meanings in set texts but there was not enough extended writing of appropriate quality. All students participated well in discussions. Across the secondary school students showed good understanding of texts they were studying although critical appreciation was less well developed. Recent results in the diploma were broadly average but the performance of current students showed improvement.

Attainment in mathematics was acceptable in Kindergarten where students made good progress. Most children could count up to 10 and had some understanding of bigger and smaller. Attainment at entry was more variable but by the time children left Kindergarten 2, it

was broadly in line with international standards. Attainment in the primary and secondary years was acceptable. Progress was acceptable in the primary phase and good in secondary. Problem solving and investigative skills were a particular strength of classes provided for more able students and in these classes progress was good. Attainment and progress for students in the Diploma Programme were good. .

Attainment in science was acceptable in Kindergarten, PYP and MYP and good in the DP. Progress was acceptable in Kindergarten and PYP and good throughout the secondary school. Kindergarten students were able to apply good observational and inquiry skills to phenomena such as the sense of taste. Primary students had a broad knowledge of topics such as plants and animal classification. They were less skilled in thinking critically about the knowledge they collected and applying it to new situations. Students were only beginning to develop scientific investigative skills. In the middle school students were developing sound scientific knowledge and experimental skills. Their ability to think analytically about their learning was not consistent applied across the subject. Diploma students could review and improve experimental designs and discuss chemical and biological effects of medicines, drugs and placebos on the body, as well as related ethical concerns.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good. They reported that they felt highly valued and safe in school. Children from different backgrounds worked well with each other and appreciated the different cultures evident in the school. Behaviour in the school was well-managed and clear policies and practices were in place to encourage positive actions as well as to prevent disruptions to learning. The students enjoyed their lessons and the many extra-curricular opportunities that were provided for them. Attendance was acceptable and students were punctual to lessons.

Students' civic, and Islamic understanding, were acceptable in Kindergarten, good in Years 1 to 11, and outstanding in Years 12 and 13. Students in the DP classes demonstrated a highly proactive response to their roles and responsibilities through the work of the student council and prefect system. Most students across the school showed considerable respect for, and appreciation of, local tradition and heritage, as well as understanding the importance of diversity and values of their country. Whilst the majority of students could discuss the future of Dubai with maturity and insight, younger students had little knowledge about Dubai and the unique features of the emirate.

Students' economic and environment understanding was good. Older students showed very mature attitudes and students in general were very positive about the benefits of living in Dubai. They were able to make a range of thoughtful suggestions about what they would like to see improved in their country. They had a good knowledge of local culture and Islam, but their grasp of current economic issues was less well developed. Students took part in a well-developed recycling programme and took initiative in caring for the environment.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching was good in MYP and Diploma Programme and acceptable in Kindergarten and PYP. Lessons for older students were usually brisk, well focused and with good expectations of students. Teachers used their good subject knowledge to motivate and inform students in all subjects, and used resources shrewdly to reinforce new learning. Planning took students' individual needs into consideration and provided ample scope for students to investigate and take command of their own learning. Therefore, students could learn at their own pace and in their own way. This was often the case elsewhere in the school, but not consistently. Many teachers used technology well to support learning. However, often, work in primary years and Kindergarten lessons were too similar for all students to enable them to make good progress. Teachers did not routinely expect enough from students or ask sufficient questions to trigger their interest and assess their understanding. Not all topics were stimulating enough and some teachers, did too much for students, so that they did not always have the freedom to develop their own ideas.

Learning was good throughout the school. It was especially good for older students who had more opportunities to think for themselves, research in greater depth and develop enquiring minds. Mostly, students co-operated well and sustained good concentration. They enjoyed sharing ideas and exploring new ideas, and were adept at using a range of sources, especially the Internet. However, younger students had less self-discipline in coping with uninspiring lessons and did not always work quickly enough. In addition, these students did not always apply their learning to the real world.

Assessment reflected the quality of teaching. It was good in middle years and the Diploma Programme because there were extensive systems to monitor the progress of students. Results were well analysed and, although some systems were quite new, they were beginning to have a positive influence on, for example, standards in writing and in grouping students more accurately. Assessment in primary years and Kindergarten was acceptable and having some impact, for example in setting for mathematics, but not significantly enough to ensure good progress by students. Test data were not analysed well enough to focus support and to drive improvement in all subjects. Overall, the guidance and marking of students' work were acceptable but the practice was variable, often without enough guidance to show the students how they could improve.

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

The curriculum was good in Kindergarten and PYP and outstanding in MYP and DP. It was a broad and balanced curriculum with a clear rationale, underpinned by the philosophy of the International Baccalaureate programme. In the primary phase students had a choice of modern languages and there were many options for IB Diploma and certificate students. Technology was integrated well in other subjects and developing research and study skills, including academic integrity, was a feature of the school. A regular programme of review ensured that

the curriculum was well referenced to MYP and DP assessment criteria. The mathematics curriculum had been reviewed to produce clear progression from Year 1 to 9 and helped to prepare Year 10 and 11 students for entering the DP stage. Primary science had been reviewed to add further scientific inquiry and conceptual understanding, although this was not yet fully embedded. Secondary curricular review was increasing the role of assessment-based learning. Recent curriculum developments ensured a smooth transition from MYP to DP, although curricular transitions from PYP to MYP were overall, less well-developed, except in mathematics. There was clear progression in most of the school, although some aspects were not fully articulated in the primary school. A number of cross-curricular links supported coherence in learning throughout the school. A broad extra-curricular programme enriched learning, and included sports, the arts, mother tongue classes and Model United Nations. The curriculum was enriched by a range of excursions and camps, visiting experts, on-going community links and long-term service projects.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety arrangements in the school were outstanding. Procedures for keeping students safe were rigorous and extensive. All buses had trained escorts and the arrival and departure of students was well-supervised despite the problematic layout of the three entry to the site. Fire drills were held twice a year. However, the rapid growth in student numbers over the last few years had resulted in significantly larger class sizes. Record-keeping was detailed and thorough. The medical centre, with a doctor and two nurses, provided full-time monitoring of the health of all students. Child protection procedures in the school were clear and well-known and training was a high priority. The school was actively seeking a solution to potential traffic dangers with local authorities.

The quality of support for students was outstanding. The excellent relationship that existed between staff and students impacted positively on every aspect of school life. Career guidance was extensive and began towards the end of the secondary school phase. As a result of careers counselling, all of last year's leavers had been placed in further education. Rigorous tracking systems, which detailed students' academic achievements, had been developed and enabled early intervention and effective support. As a consequence, students with special educational needs made good progress.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership in the school was good. Senior leaders were energetic with a strong ambition for the school's development. They promoted a clear sense of values and had highly systematic approaches, which led to a strong sense of organisation, further supported with well-documented procedures on all areas of school life. There had been frequent changes in middle management staffing and this had impacted on the effectiveness and impact of teaching and learning. However, the creation of additional leadership positions had increased the role of areas of interaction in the MYP.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. There had been extensive self-evaluation to prepare an accreditation self-study. Parents' views were included in this study through an annual survey and focus groups that led to improvements, for example, with homework policy. Extensive action plans ensured that appropriate systems were in place for almost all aspects of school life. However, extensive documentation inhibited sharper action in raising the overall quality of teaching throughout the school. There were detailed plans to address previous recommendations but these had yet to address all the specific, practical improvements within the school such as, for example, the quality of daily teaching in mathematics and science.

Overall, partnership with parents and the community were outstanding. An active parents' association made many contributions to the life of the school. Parent communication was very strong in the primary school, where parents and teachers were in regular contact through personal contact, e-mails and newsletters. Communication was less effective in lower secondary grades, yet outstanding at the diploma stage. The ICT system provided a well-organised internet communication tool but was not used consistently to develop communication. There were productive links with local companies, who supported the school, for example, with the annual technology fair. Community resources such as field trips and visiting speakers were used on a regular basis to improve the quality of learning.

Governance was good. The board comprised four owners and a board member with international school governance experience. An advisory council included two board members, senior leaders, educational representatives and two parent representatives. Students and staff attended on an invited basis. The board met twice a year and held the leadership accountable through success criteria that identified priorities. The advisory council met three or four times each year to bring wider perspectives to school planning. However, many parents were unaware of the advisory council and few knew how to raise any governance issues that may arise.

Staffing, facilities and resources were good. There was a suitable teacher-student ratio but some larger classes in the school did not support the ability to provide individual attention for some students. Additional management positions had improved the quality of leadership in some areas of the school and all teaching staff were appropriately qualified. Facilities in the school were good with the exception of a few classes in the primary stage and included two pools, gyms, information and communication technology (ICT) laboratories, a well-managed library and media centre. Throughout, the school ICT resources were excellent.

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	PYP	MYP	DP
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
9% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.				
Age group:	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Not Applicable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Not Applicable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Progress over time	Good	Acceptable	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Acceptable	Good	Good	Outstanding
Economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of support	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

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	Good
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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