

German International School Dubai Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 11

Report published May 2011

Contents

Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report.....	2
Basic information about the school.....	2
How well does the school perform overall?	3
Key features of the school	4
Recommendations.....	4
How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?.....	4
How good is the students' personal and social development?.....	6
How good are the teaching and learning?.....	7
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?	7
How well does the school protect and support students?.....	8
How good are the leadership and management of the school?	8
Summary of inspection judgements	10
Next steps	14
How to contact us.....	14

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.

German International School Dubai was inspected in December 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 Quoz, German International School Dubai, is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to Grade 11, aged three to 19 years. The school follows a German curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 382 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

As part of the inspection process, Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires issued to parents. Most parents felt that the school kept their children safe, that the school was well led and that communication between the school and parents was effective and timely. The greatest strength of the school was considered to be the teaching. Teachers were thought to be motivated and believed to provide the students with a successful learning environment. Parents praised the quality of the teaching of Arabic as an additional language and its improvement following the arrival of new teachers and the introduction of new methods. However, concerns were raised about the lessons in Islamic Education and Arabic that were placed at the very end of long school days and also about the planning of English to take into account the school's international environment. A minority of parents wished for improvement in activities outside the classroom and in the facilities; a few wanted better promotion of Emirati culture and values. Most parents thought that the school had made considerable progress in a short time, especially with regard to leadership. A few parents were concerned about the limited facilities for information and communication technology (ICT).

How well does the school perform overall?

The German International School Dubai provided an acceptable quality of education overall with good key features and the capacity to improve. In Islamic Education, students' attainment and progress were acceptable. In Arabic, as a first language and as an additional language, students' attainment was also acceptable. Progress by primary students was good, but acceptable in secondary. However, the timetabling of lessons in Islamic Education and Arabic was not conducive to good learning. Attainment and progress in English were good throughout the school and surpassed what was expected of German schools in Germany. There was also improvement in the attainment and progress in German, which were judged as good for Kindergarten, the primary and lower secondary grades, whereas in the upper secondary grades they were acceptable. In mathematics, attainment and progress in Kindergarten and in the upper secondary school were good, in primary and lower secondary acceptable. Significant improvement was found in students' attainment and progress in science; these were now good across the school.

A strength of the school was the very positive, secure and friendly atmosphere for students' learning created by the school community to support the development of the whole child. The behaviour and attitudes of the students across the school were good; students were responsible, self-disciplined and respectful towards each other and their teachers and punctual to lessons. The students' spiritual and civic understanding, as well as their economic and environmental understanding, were good in all phases. Teaching and learning were good in Kindergarten and acceptable in the rest of the school. Supported by significant improvements in the school premises and the specialist facilities, the teaching and learning in art, music and physical education were a strength of the school. A significant minority of teaching was good but practice was inconsistent. The curricular was good but teachers used textbooks and worksheets too much, particularly in language lessons. In a majority of lessons, students were not enabled to direct their own learning enough. Partnerships with parents, and the outstanding governance were also strengths of the school. Improvements in the facilities and the appointment of a new Principal had stimulated a process of prioritising learning for all students. The school had yet to develop the management skills of middle leaders, including subject leaders, to enable them to improve learning in agreed areas across the school. The school had not yet established a whole-school management information system, to track students' progress, which had been a recommendation from the last report. In addition, the school had not fully implemented effective arrangements for self-evaluation.

Key features of the school

- There had been significant improvements in the progress and teaching of Arabic and science;
- Although the school met statutory requirements for curriculum entitlement, on some occasions Islamic Education and Arabic were inappropriately timetabled;
- Science, music and art were strengths of the school;
- The quality of the spoken English surpassed comparable attainment in Germany;
- Teaching and learning were inconsistent but at least acceptable with a significant minority of it being good;
- There had been improvement in the premises and facilities;
- The school community had created a very positive, secure and friendly atmosphere, to support learning and the development of the whole child;
- The leadership of the school had successfully begun the process of prioritising learning for all students;
- Governance of the school was outstanding.

Recommendations

- Raise standards in Islamic Education;
- Fully integrate Islamic Education and Arabic into the timetable;
- Improve learning and teaching so that it is at least consistently good and better meets the learning needs of all students, particularly higher achieving students;
- Implement an effective whole-school management information system to track students' progress;
- Develop further the leadership skills of middle management to enable them to improve learning in agreed areas.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable. Most students could memorise and recite short chapters from The Holy Qur'an with a few errors in their recitation and pronunciation. Most students developed their knowledge about Allah; they recognised some of the many attributes of Allah as the creator of all things, and as Giver and Sustainer. Most students could recognise the five pillars of Islam. Most students in primary could realise the virtues of fasting. In secondary, the majority of students understood the meaning of Hajj and knew its three types. Most students developed their understanding of the behaviour expected of a good Muslim in their local communities as well as the world.

Attainment in Arabic as a first language was acceptable and progress was good in the elementary stage. Almost all students listened well to their teachers and others in their groups. They could easily answer questions orally. A majority of students could read aloud and expressively, recognising punctuation rules. Most students developed their speaking skills, for example, most students in Grade 5 could successfully take part in extended conversations. They could discuss and speak confidently about their presentations. Overall, students made acceptable progress in writing skills. Primary students could copy and write short sentences applying grammatical rules correctly; secondary students could write short paragraphs to describe pictures in neat handwriting with only few spelling mistakes.

Attainment in Arabic as a second language was acceptable throughout school. Progress in primary was good and acceptable in secondary. Most students listened well to teachers' instructions but they needed some support in translation at times. Students' speaking skills were still developing. They could say simple sentences and respond to daily greetings. The majority of students could read sentences correctly. Almost all students could copy sentences correctly with neat handwriting. Students in primary developed their writing skills so that they could write unfamiliar words correctly.

Attainment and progress in German, the language of instruction, were good in Kindergarten, primary and lower secondary grades; they were acceptable in the upper secondary school. The children in Kindergarten and primary communicated well with the teachers and their peers. They were also able to use written German with adequate correctness and range of vocabulary. In lower secondary, students were able to recite poems in front of the class and also to evaluate their peers' presentations. In the upper secondary grades, the majority of students could analyse texts as well as demonstrate critical thinking and defend their arguments. The students' writing showed a wide range of ability: however, only a few students showed a good understanding of complex texts and were able to put their analysis and arguments into balanced, correct and convincing writing.

Attainment and progress in English were good throughout the school. School-based tests indicated that most students had good levels of attainment. Kindergarten children had good listening and speaking skills. They could answer teachers' questions accurately and create their own questions. They made three- and four-word sentences independently and identified a range of simple sight words. Primary students spoke fluently and read confidently. They used their understanding of text to support opinions and listened to other points of view effectively. Lower secondary students used their well-developed speaking and reading skills to complete grammatical tasks effectively. Upper secondary students could debate, analyse and reflect, on complexities of style and language on a range of topics. While writing to a functional capacity was good, most students' abilities in imaginative writing were underdeveloped.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were good in Kindergarten, and acceptable elsewhere. Children were able to name simple 2D shapes, such as circles, rectangles and triangles, and to find examples of them in the classroom. Students in Grade 3 could write lengths using centimetres and metres, in a variety of formats and find information from a bar chart. In Grade 7, students were confident in using percentages to solve money problems. Attainment and progress in the upper secondary phase were good. Students were comfortable in their understanding of a variety of functions; they could plot them and explain the properties of the graphs that they drew.

Attainment and progress in science in the Kindergarten and primary were good, and acceptable in secondary. Primary students showed a good understanding of environmental problems and their responsibility and place in a fast changing world. In the lower secondary grades, attainment and progress were acceptable. In their lessons, the students demonstrated an acceptable level of knowledge, skills and understanding of the density of different materials. In the upper secondary grades, attainment and progress were good. Students were able to understand complicated chemical reactions. They showed great skills in biological model building and developed a range of models in their practical work. An overall strength within the school was investigative and experimental science.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

The attitudes and behaviour of the students were good throughout the school. Students were focused on their work, helped one another consistently and were polite to everyone they met. Almost all students followed the school rules and behaved in line with the school rules in the corridors and at break time. Students had good relationships with their teachers. Positive attitudes to healthy living were firmly embedded in the students' behaviour. Almost all students demonstrated a commitment to physical fitness and eating appropriately. Attendance and punctuality were good.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam, and their appreciation of local traditions, were good. Most students took their responsibilities in school and the wider community. The majority of students demonstrated a good understanding of Islam and its impact on Dubai and the world. They understood and respected the customs and significance of Islam for Muslim students and families and they explained the importance of Friday prayer in Muslim lives. Students had a good understanding and appreciation of the multi-cultural nature of Dubai and secondary students had a good knowledge about the history of Dubai and how people lived and worked.

Economic and environmental understanding of the students across the school was good. In primary grades, students showed a clear understanding of economic and ecological issues. The school actively promoted ecological thinking. For example, there are separate collecting points for different types of solid waste in the school. Almost all students knew about the economy of Dubai, its main economic sectors and export products. The students demonstrated a good understanding of their place in society and their world and considered it a privilege to live in the UAE.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching was good in the Kindergarten and acceptable in the primary and secondary grades. In Kindergarten, there was an appropriate range of learning activities. These activities involved learning with sand, construction apparatus, art and craft media, cooking materials as well as big books, charts and equipment to develop physical co-ordination. Teachers' subject knowledge was good throughout the school. In primary and secondary grades, lessons were well structured and time was used to appropriately. Good practice was seen in science, German, art and music. The use of a variety of strategies and resources typified these lessons. In the majority of lessons, teachers overused text-books and worksheets. As a result, students became passive learners and the more able students received insufficient challenge. Teachers did not do enough to identify what students already knew and understood in order to provide appropriate activities to extend learning further. Planning the work to meet the different needs of students was not well developed except in the Kindergarten.

Learning in the Kindergarten was good. It was variable in the primary and secondary phases but acceptable overall. The main focus in the early days of schooling was on personal, social and creative development. This provided the prerequisite foundation for learning. As a result of this, it was clear that one of the strengths across the whole of the school was that most students enjoyed their learning and were engaged in the learning process. They were confident and able to communicate their learning to others. However, in the majority of lessons, students were not enabled to direct their own learning nor did they have the means by which they could identify the next steps in their learning process. A general weakness across the school was the absence of ICT to develop and enhance students' learning.

Assessment systems across the school were good. The individual student progress reports (Beobachtungsbogen) charted personal and academic strengths and weaknesses clearly from Grade 1 to Grade 11. Regular testing in class, analysis of competence tests in Grades 3, 6 and 8, and external examinations in Grades 9 and 10, all contributed to provide useful data on students' performance. Much of this information was held by individual teachers in their own format and it was difficult to see quickly which students were making expected progress. Twice-yearly reports shared progress well with parents and the reports and portfolios of students' learning were kept in the school for future reference. Feedback to students, through the teachers' comments in books, was generally thorough and helpful. The opportunity for students to assess and support their academic progress was underdeveloped.

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

The curriculum was good at all levels. It had a clear rationale, and was broad, balanced and challenging. The school followed the German overseas school curriculum which facilitated transfer back to Germany. In compliance with the German authorities, the school had enriched the curriculum by including teaching units in history, geography and biology about Dubai and the Middle East area.

The transition arrangements from Kindergarten through pre-school to primary and through primary into the secondary phase were good. In line with the established practice in German schools, the curriculum was revised annually. A teaching plan, on a two-week basis throughout the year for all subjects, complemented the curriculum and facilitated progress reporting and supporting. Cross-curricular themes were evident in the Kindergarten and primary grades, and there was an extensive programme of extra-curricular activities. The combination of the German and the Dubai curriculum requirements resulted in a large number of lessons. The school's leadership had spread them over the timetable taking into account the number of students in the particular subjects. This resulted in a long school day. The timing of lessons in Islamic Education and Arabic at the end of the day was a concern raised by parents. The leadership was sympathetic to this concern and was preparing to make important changes.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety throughout the school were good. The premises were suitable, healthy and safe for all students. All students with special needs were well supported. A nurse was permanently stationed at the school, a doctor came twice a week and a dentist visited annually, in support of the regular health checks provided for the students. An outstanding feature of the school was the provision of healthy choices for school meals. The students were well aware about the safety arrangements of the school including child protection provision. Since the last inspection, the school had made significant progress updating its premises and the equipment used for physical education.

The quality of support for students was generally good throughout the school. An outstanding feature was the respectful and trusting relationship between the students and their teachers throughout all grades. Behavioural issues were addressed in an effective manner. The teachers kept a file on each student showing personal, social and academic development. The careers guidance function was being developed. There was an internship programme with local employers. Teachers did not ensure that students had a clear understanding of the next steps in their academic development.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The new Principal had a good vision for the school and gave clear direction for improvement. His leadership had been the driving force in sustaining the many improvements in the school since his arrival in September 2010. Although school leaders shared responsibilities to ensure everyone was focused on improving the students' learning, it was the Principal who shouldered many of the responsibilities himself. There had been insufficient development of the leadership skills of middle management including the subject leaders to improve learning in agreed areas across the school and to manage their teams' performance.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning was acceptable. There had been significant progress in the school's response to the recommendations from the last inspection in the short time available. The leadership increased the number of lessons in Islamic Education and Arabic to meet government requirements and improved the quality of teaching and learning in Arabic, science, German, physical education, art and music. An electronic tracking system had now been prepared to provide easy access of information about students' attainment and progress.

The school's partnership with parents was good. Particular strengths were the elected class parents, regular meetings of all class parents and parental involvement on the quality management steering committee. The parents' representative on this committee wished to see the international and intercultural aspects of the school intensified in an action plan. By organising a successful competition, Dubai Youth Science Challenge, for a good number of local schools, the school had found a first means of reaching out into the wider community to explore the opportunities for curriculum enrichment afforded by the local community in Al Quoz.

Governance was outstanding. Strategic guidance on future development was provided through informed and achievable target-setting. This was developed through external consultation by German curriculum officials who knew the school well. A governing body representative of the school community and its specific context was in place. The school governors held the leadership to account through annual reviews and contributed effectively to all decisions on the school's direction, mission and values. It ensured that on-going change and the efficient deployment and use of resources were managed well.

The quality of staffing, facilities and resources was acceptable. There was a sufficient number of suitably qualified staff with good subject knowledge. The school had improved the facilities for learning, especially in art, music and physical education. For example, the new outdoor plastic pitch enabled students to play a range of sports, and there were good amounts of shade alongside. However, the resources for ICT remained under-developed.

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	Secondary
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?			
6% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.			
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Secondary
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable

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

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

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

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

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

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

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?			
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Secondary
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good

How well does the school protect and support students?			
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Secondary
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	Acceptable
Partnerships with parents and the community	Good
Governance	Outstanding
Staffing, facilities and resources	Acceptable

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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