

INSPECTION REPORT

The City School International

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Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT The City School International

Location	Nad Al Hammar
Type of school	Private
Website	www.tcs-uae.com
Telephone	04-2899722
Address	PO Box 5760, Nad Al Hammar, Dubai
Principal	Gary White
Curriculum	UK
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades	3-17 / Foundation Stage to Grade 11
Attendance	Unsatisfactory
Number of students on roll	459
Number of Emirati students	25 (5%)
Date of the inspection	Monday 21st to Wednesday 23rd November 2011

Contents

The context of the school	3
Overall school performance 2011-2012	3
How has the school progressed since the last inspection?.....	3
Key strengths	4
Recommendations	4
How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?.....	5
How good is the students' personal and social development?	7
How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?	8
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of students?	9
How well does the school protect and support students?	10
How good are the leadership and management of the school?	11
What are the views of parents, teachers and students?	12
What happens next?	14
How to contact us	14
Our work with schools	15

The context of the school

The City School International, located in Nad Al Hammar, serves a multi-national community of students, predominantly Pakistanis. Students also came from the UAE, other Arab nations, Iran, the United States, Canada, Australia and the Philippines. About five per cent of students were Emiratis. The current year saw an intake of 123 new students and a departure of about 100 students, for various reasons, including graduation. The school offered a UK curriculum leading to IGCSE examinations in Grade 11.

At the time of the inspection there were 38 teachers on staff, of whom about half were new to the school. Although almost all teachers held a first degree, only eight held a recognised teaching qualification. The high rate of teacher turnover affected the overall quality of provision at the school.

Overall school performance 2011-2012

Acceptable

How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

The City School International provided an acceptable level of education to its students. In general, it achieved its mission to 'Develop happy, inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people, who will have the skills and social awareness to help them become independent and valued members of society'. Students showed good personal and social development across a range of qualities, but the rate of absenteeism was too high. The school maintained its good provision for the health and safety of students and its links with parents and the community. Importantly, school leaders showed a commitment to, and the capacity for, continuous improvement.

Progress in Islamic Education had improved in the secondary grades since the previous inspection, but progress in Arabic as a first language had declined to an unsatisfactory level. In the primary grades, attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language had improved to an acceptable level. Progress in English in the Foundation Stage had declined to an unsatisfactory level, due to unsatisfactory teaching, learning and assessment in that phase. Governance of the school had improved to an acceptable level, as the owners of the school demonstrated greater involvement in the school and a system of accountability for school performance. The staffing, facilities and resources at the school had also improved.

Key strengths

- The students' good understanding of Islam, the local culture, civic duty, and economic and environmental issues;
- The school's arrangements to ensure the health and safety of students;
- The good links with parents and the local community;
- The commitment of school leaders to the continuous improvement of the school.

Recommendations

- Raise attainment in Islamic Education and Arabic in the secondary grades;
- Improve attendance;
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning across the school, most urgently in the Foundation Stage;
- Ensure that provision of Islamic Education and Arabic in the secondary grades meets the required number of periods each week as stipulated by the Ministry of Education.

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

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Islamic Education			
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Arabic as a first language			
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory
Arabic as an additional language			
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory
English			
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable
Mathematics			
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Science			
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

Students' attainment in the key subjects was mostly acceptable. It was unsatisfactory in secondary Islamic Education and in both secondary Arabic programmes. Attainment was acceptable in primary Islamic Education and both primary Arabic programmes. In English, mathematics and science attainment was acceptable in all phases of the school. Attainment in Arabic was uneven, as students' writing skills generally were inferior to the other language skills. Learners of Arabic as a first language did not read or write beyond the basic requirements of the course material. In English, attainment in all grades was consistent with expectations for learners of English as an additional language. Most students demonstrated effective speaking and listening skills, but writing skills were relatively weak. Most students did not write at length, for different purposes or for different audiences. In mathematics, students' abilities to investigate and independently solve 'real world' problems were under developed. In science, students at the primary and secondary phases were developing age-appropriate skills in scientific methods, including experimenting and recording results.

Students' progress in the key subjects was mostly acceptable. It was unsatisfactory in both secondary Arabic programmes and in English in the Foundation Stage. In Islamic Education, mathematics and science progress was acceptable across all phases. In English, progress was acceptable in the primary and secondary phases. The progress of students with special educational needs was acceptable in the five key subjects. In Islamic Education, students' progress in Grade 11 was hindered by many missed classes due to the accommodation of IGCSE examinations. In Arabic, students' work showed too little progress in the secondary grades since the start of the school year. In English, progress was limited in a majority of lessons by too low a level of challenge. Writing skills were inhibited in a minority of lessons due to over-reliance on worksheets that proscribed writing too narrowly. In mathematics, progress was slowed by lack of challenge in tasks set, especially for the most able students. On several occasions progress was also hindered through the poor planning of group work. In science, progress was better in Grade 5 and above due to the deployment of specialist teachers in those grades.

The attainment and progress of Emirati students in the primary grades generally matched that of the student population at large. Both attainment and progress were acceptable in all five key subjects.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Attitudes and behaviour	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture	Good	Good	Good
Civic, economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Good

Students' attitudes and behaviour were acceptable across the school. Students generally behaved well in classes and around the school. Relationships between teachers and students were positive and students co-operated and worked well with each other in groups. Elected members of the student council played active roles in supervision at break times and dismissal; they also supported other aspects of school life. A successful healthy living project had been carried out in the school and students were aware of the importance of healthy eating, but more than a few students made poor food choices. School attendance was consistently unsatisfactory. Punctuality at the start of the school day was unsatisfactory during the inspection. All students showed respect for Islam and Muslim students recognised the underlying importance of their religion in guiding their everyday lives. In discussions, students talked confidently about aspects of the UAE's national culture and local traditions. Senior students showed mature understanding of economic issues related to the development of the UAE. All students understood the importance of protecting the environment and older students understood the concept of environmental sustainability.

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Teaching for effective learning	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable

Teaching for effective learning was acceptable in the primary and secondary phases, but unsatisfactory in the Foundation Stage. Most teachers had secure knowledge of their subjects. This was used effectively in a minority of lessons in the secondary phase and in science from Grade 5 onwards, to develop students' knowledge and understanding. In the best lessons learning objectives were made clear at the outset and questions were used effectively to assess, challenge and extend students' learning. In these lessons effective class management promoted good attitudes and behaviour. In a minority of lessons, students were passive because teachers talked too much. In a few lessons teachers planned learning tasks for different levels of ability, but most lessons did not cater for students' varying needs. Teachers regularly set homework to consolidate classwork. Teaching was unsatisfactory in the Foundation Stage because teachers did not demonstrate an understanding of how best to promote the learning of young children. As a result, resources and learning tasks were not well matched to children's needs. The quality of teaching in non-key subjects, such as music and physical education, was also acceptable.

The quality of students' learning was acceptable in the primary and secondary phases but unsatisfactory in the Foundation Stage. Most students showed enjoyment in lessons where they were actively engaged. They collaborated effectively when carrying out investigations in groups in science, for example, and when working in groups in English. However, opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning were offered too infrequently. Students predominantly learned topics without considering their application to practical contexts and they made only a few connections to learning in other subjects. Learning in the Foundation Stage was unsatisfactory because children did not have enough opportunities to develop their basic skills through independent play or appropriately structured learning activities.

Assessment was acceptable in the primary and secondary phases but unsatisfactory in the Foundation Stage. The school was developing new procedures for assessing students' attainment and tracking their progress using data. Although these procedures provided more accurate information on which to base teacher interventions, they were at an early stage and their impact was yet to be seen. While students' attainment was assessed through regular tests, not enough use was made of the information to guide teaching. In consequence, most teaching did not take into account the range of students' needs in each class. However, a majority of teachers did know the strengths and weaknesses of their students. Not enough use was made of assessment information in the Foundation Stage. Teachers did not use profiles of individual progress to plan activities and consequently did not meet the needs of all children.

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

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

The curriculum was of an acceptable quality in all phases. There were few major gaps in the subjects which students learned. The time for provision of Arabic at Grades 10 and 11 was less than required by the Ministry of Education. Staff members worked well together to review and improve the curriculum in a majority of key subjects. New examination courses had been added to give more choice to students in Grades 9 to 11. Teachers had improved their programmes of study in most subjects. Arrangements for ensuring continuity and progression in learning at key transition points were effective. Senior staff members planned to develop work experience, leadership and entrepreneurial activities for senior students. While teachers had good lesson plans for providing tasks matched to the needs of all groups of students, the plans were not often implemented well. Opportunities for students to tackle challenging tasks or think critically were inconsistent across stages and curriculum areas. Enrichment activities for students in the primary and secondary grades boosted students' learning.

How well does the school protect and support students?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Health and Safety	Good	Good	Good
Quality of Support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

The arrangements to ensure the health and safety of students were good. The school site was secure, and the building was well maintained, clean and hygienic. Staff responsibilities for health and safety were clearly defined and the associated duties carried out effectively. Records of health and safety issues were detailed and kept up to date. An emergency evacuation practice had been carried out and details logged. The arrival and departure of buses were carefully supervised and due attention given to student safety. A few school buses were loaded to maximum passenger capacity and one was overcrowded. Healthy living was promoted through a series of initiatives across the school, including a healthy food project. The school canteen had increased the range of healthy food choices available to students, but fatty foods remained on the menu. The school nurse was well informed about students' medical needs and she contributed to the health education programme by giving seminars to groups of students. A local doctor had been invited to speak to students about relevant health matters. A child protection policy had been agreed, disseminated to all staff and discussed with students.

The quality of support for students was acceptable. The personal well-being of students was a high priority for senior leaders and other staff members. Teacher-student relationships were positive at all times. Teachers knew their students well and were responsive to their needs. Additional reading support was provided for selected students in the primary section. However, in-class support for students with learning difficulties was not always sufficient to enable them to make good progress. Students were provided with career advice when choosing subject options in Grade 8 and at the transition point in Grade 11. Speakers from higher education institutions were invited to the school and student visits to careers conventions and universities were organised. The school had strengthened its policies regarding attendance and punctuality, but the changes had failed to impact on school attendance levels and punctuality.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

	Whole school
Quality of leadership	Acceptable
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Acceptable
Partnerships with parents and the community	Good
Governance	Acceptable
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Acceptable

The overall leadership of the school was of acceptable quality. There had been expansion of the management team since the previous inspection, enhancing the overall leadership capacity. The Principal provided clear direction to the staff, with whom he shared many aspects of leadership. The vision for the school was shared by most, but not all teachers. Changes had been made that resulted in higher attainment and better progress for some students. The school's leadership team had made clear progress on the recommendations from the previous inspection report, and demonstrated the capacity to make further improvements.

The school's self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. Self-evaluation processes produced realistic analyses that were similar to those of the inspection team. Yet, not all leaders were skilled at identifying good teaching, or using assessment information as a tool for school improvement. The school had short, medium and long-term plans to address a range of carefully identified development issues. Planning processes included many staff members, enhancing motivation and team work across year group and subject leaders. Improvement planning was hindered by the high rate of teacher turnover, which had resulted in about half of the teachers being in their first year at the school. The new and returning teachers were observed regularly by senior leaders to monitor their performance.

The school's links with parents and the community were good. There was regular communication with parents by electronic mail and paper newsletters. The Principal's 'open door' policy was appreciated and parents made use of the arrangement. Parents visited the school regularly and attended open house nights each term. Parents had regular two-way communication with teachers regarding their children's progress, as well as term reports and progress reports as needed.

The quality of governance was acceptable. The school's owners had appointed an executive director from Pakistan to monitor the school's performance by visiting monthly. The owners had responded to the previous inspection report by improving the facilities and adding more resources for learning. The owners' internal inspection procedures had not been administered by the time of the inspection.

Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable. The school had replaced a number of teachers in an effort to improve the quality of provision, particularly in Islamic Education and Arabic. Almost all teachers were suitably qualified in their areas of responsibility. The school had established a programme of professional development to help teachers improve the skills identified as weak by monitoring them. The Foundation Stage play area had been improved, as had the science laboratories. The addition of information and communications technology (ICT) resources in many classrooms enhanced students' learning experiences. The outside play areas remained covered in concrete and brick, making them potentially unsafe for sports. There was no proper area for students to sit and eat their food during the breaktime; consequently most of them sat on the ground to eat.

What are the views of parents, teachers and students?

Before the inspection, the views of parents, teachers and senior secondary students were surveyed. Key messages from each group were considered during the inspection and these helped to form judgements. A summary of the survey statistics and comments from those who responded to the survey follows:

Responses to the surveys			
Responses received	Number		Percentage
Parents	This year	50	24%
	Last year	137	69%
Teachers	10		26%
Students	8		24%

*The percentage of responses from parents is based on the number of families.

A few parents responded to the survey, significantly lower than last year. Most parents agreed that their children were making good progress in the key subjects, with the exception of Arabic as an additional language. Most agreed that their children enjoyed school and that students' behaviour was good. Parents also agreed that their children were safe at school and while on buses. Most parents believed that their

children were well prepared by the school for the next stages of education. Almost all parents indicated that the school was well led, but a few disagreed when asked if their opinions were listened to by leaders. A majority of parents indicated that they were involved in improving the school but again, a few disagreed that this was the case. Finally, a majority of parents agreed that their children were getting the education they expected from the school, but a few indicated that they were not. A few teachers responded to the survey. Their views were broadly supportive of the school and its leaders. Their main concern was the lack of resources to do their jobs well. All teachers agreed that inspections had helped them improve their practice, and all but one agreed that the previous inspection report accurately reflected their school. A few students responded to the survey. Almost all agreed that they were making good progress in the five key subjects. Students reported that the school had improved since last year. Their responses to the survey were almost completely positive.

What happens next?

The school has been asked to prepare and submit an updated action plan to DSIB within two months of receiving the most recent report. This plan should address:

- Recommendations from DSIB;
- Areas identified by the school as requiring improvement;
- Other external reports or sources of information that comment on the work of the school;
- Priorities arising from the school's unique characteristics.

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

Our work with schools

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) inspects schools to inform parents, students and the wider community of the quality of education provided. Inspectors also give guidance to staff about how to improve the standard of education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask the principal and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan our time in school. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities in which students are involved. We also gather the views of students, parents and staff. We find their views very helpful and use them, together with the other information we have collected, to arrive at our view regarding the quality of education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of education in the school. We describe how well students are doing, how good the school is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and children work together and how they go about improving the school. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its aims.

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