

Al Safa Private School Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Primary

Report published May 2011

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Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report

Outstanding – exceptionally high quality of performance or practice.

Good – the expected level of quality for every school in Dubai.

Acceptable – the minimum level of acceptability required for Dubai. All key aspects of performance and practice in every school should meet or exceed this level.

Unsatisfactory – quality not yet at the level acceptable for schools in Dubai. Schools will be expected to take urgent measures to improve the quality of any aspect of their performance or practice that is judged at this level.

Al Safa Private School was inspected in October 2010 as part of the regular inspection of all schools in Dubai. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated students' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on students' progress in Islamic Education (for Muslim students), Arabic, English, mathematics and science.

Basic information about the school

Located in Al Safa, Al Safa Private School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Foundation Stage to primary, aged three to 11 years. The school follows the English National Curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 436 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was outstanding.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Parents were very happy with the school and the quality of education provided. They said that their child enjoyed lessons and they identified good progress in English, mathematics and science. Parents believed that the behaviour of students at the school was good. They agreed that the school kept their child safe and supported them in choosing a healthy lifestyle. Parents felt that communication between the school and parents was productive and timely. Parental concerns were dealt with appropriately, parent-teacher meetings were helpful and school reports were regular and informative. Almost all of the parents agreed that teaching was a real strength of the school along with behaviour and the attitudes of students. They felt that the provision of sporting and outdoor facilities were areas for further improvement.

How well does the school perform overall?

The school had not responded fully or effectively to all of the recommendations in the last inspection report. The school had developed effective self-evaluation procedures through questionnaires and observation and this had started to help improve teaching and learning. Arrangements to track students' academic progress were not developed sufficiently and the accuracy of some of the data raised concerns about its validity. The implementation of a skills based curriculum provided more opportunities for students to learn through first-hand experience and open-ended tasks as well as motivating staff to work together in identifying cross-curricular skills and sharing good practice. The school had increased the time offered for Islamic Education and Arabic but Ministry of Education requirements were still not being met. The quality of teaching and learning was acceptable in Islamic Education but unsatisfactory in Arabic.

The overall performance of the school was judged as being acceptable. Attainment and progress required improvement in Islamic Education and Arabic. Self-evaluation was not yet fully embedded and the needs of almost all students, especially Arabic students and gifted and talented students were not fully addressed. Students' attitudes to work and their behaviour in school were outstanding. They had a secure awareness of their civic, economic and environmental responsibilities as evidenced in their generous contribution to charities and their determined efforts in recycling. Students' awareness of living in a multi-cultural society was strong but they lacked an appreciation and understanding of Islam. The quality of teaching and learning was good overall but inconsistencies existed across subjects especially in the teaching of Islamic Education and Arabic. Arrangements for ensuring the health and safety of students were outstanding and staff were aware of their responsibilities regarding child protection. The curriculum, based on the English National Curriculum, was good in the Foundation Stage and acceptable in primary, where key subjects had not all been allocated the appropriate amount of curriculum time. Partnerships with parents and the community were outstanding. Parents were committed to the school but their involvement did not extend to the governance of the school. Leadership and management were acceptable and the extended senior management team had a clear vision for the direction of the school. They were well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and about the need for further improvements.

Key features of the school

- Good attainment and progress in English, mathematics and science;
- The outstanding arrangements for the health and safety of students;
- The strong and mutually supportive partnership between the school and parents;
- The attractive and stimulating learning environment which validates students work;
- Students' attitudes and behaviour as well as their civic, economic and environmental awareness.

Recommendations

- Ensure full compliance with Ministry of Education requirements for Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Further develop provision in the school curriculum to help all students gain an improved appreciation and understanding of Islam;
- Improve the consistency of teaching, learning and assessment across all subjects and raise attainment in Arabic so that all students make sufficient progress;
- Develop more rigorous and consistent assessment practices to ensure that teachers and students have an accurate view of attainment and progress;
- Inform parents about the role and responsibilities of the governing body and extend governance to include parent representation.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable. Most students could memorise, recite and explain the meaning of short chapters of The Holy Qur'an which they learnt. Students in Years 1 and 2 knew about and understood the importance of the five Pillars of Islam. They named the five daily prayers and knew their timings. Most students had a basic knowledge and understanding of the main events in Prophet Mohammed's (PBUH) life. Students in Years 5 and 6 understood a few key Islamic values and made links between these and their own lives. Students memorised a few, short Hadeeths and explained the meaning of the Prophet's (PBUH) words.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were unsatisfactory. Students listened attentively but were not able to follow instructions without translation and support. They provided memorised responses to a few familiar repetitive questions. They named a few letters and memorised a few simple words, but were unable to read unfamiliar words because they did not know the sounds of letters. All students could copy and write a few simple words from memory. Only a few could write their names in Arabic. Their progress was limited by their lack of basic knowledge of the alphabet and sounds.

Students' attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language were unsatisfactory. Most students were unable to understand simple instructions without translation. They understood a few spoken words, responding from memory with single-word answers. Most students struggled to match the names of a few objects to their pictures but could not recall these words later. Students did not know about feminine and masculine forms of words and students could write a few familiar words with letters being poorly formed. Limited understanding of sounds and letters meant that reading and writing were under developed. Progress was poor in all areas of Arabic learning.

The attainment and progress in English was good in Foundation Stage and in primary. In Foundation Stage, students listened carefully and repeated phonetic sounds. They followed adults' directions and, in their emergent writing used correctly formed letters. Primary students

listened respectfully to each other and their teacher. They followed complex verbal instructions and spoke fluently with developed vocabularies. Students summarised key ideas from texts and predicted future events. They identified literary elements that distinguished one genre from another. A new programme to improve upon the use of vocabulary, connectors, openers and punctuation had enhanced their writing.

Attainment and progress in mathematics was good across both phases. Students in the Foundation Stage were able to count from one to 10 accurately in English and Arabic. In Year 1, all students could explore the property of addition for numbers up to 10 and write mathematical sentences using appropriate signs. By Year 3, all students could add a single digit number to a two digit number across a multiple of ten. In Year 5, students could accurately draw and identify lines of symmetry in a variety of regular shapes. All students demonstrated a good mathematical vocabulary and used terminology accurately. Mathematical clubs helped students to further develop their mental mathematical skills.

Attainment in science was good across the school. Through their play activities Foundation Stage children understood that mixing materials changed their state when making play dough. Children in Year 1 carried out simple investigations using their senses. Year 3 students could distinguish between man-made and natural objects and identified materials according to their properties. In Year 6 students explored the concept of scale in relation to micro-organisms and could give examples of organisms such as viruses, bacteria and fungi. Students did not always use appropriate scientific vocabulary and their scientific skills were less well-developed compared to their scientific knowledge. Progress was good as most students made better than expected progress in relation to their starting points.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students displayed outstanding standards of behaviour throughout the school. They understood the importance of promoting good behaviour within the school and moved around the school with a minimum of supervision. Students were self-disciplined and some were known to report voluntarily their breaches of discipline to the Headteacher. Student-staff relationships were very well developed in a caring inclusive way. Students demonstrated an excellent understanding of healthy living and a very good knowledge of what foods were healthy to eat. Students took part in a range of games including physical education lessons, swimming lessons and after school activities. Attendance was outstanding and students arrived punctually to school.

Students' Islamic, cultural and civic understanding was good. Students throughout the school took their responsibilities very seriously. Members of the student council were highly proactive in their roles and had shared valuable feedback from their peers on how the school facilities might be improved. Students demonstrated a basic level of understanding of Islam and their awareness of the importance of Islam in contemporary society was under developed. Students celebrated the culture and traditions of Dubai through National Day, displays and projects. They understood the multi-cultural nature of Dubai and were respectful of the identity of the UAE.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was outstanding. Students in Year 6 had organised companies to raise money for an orphanage in Romania. Students had also benefited from opportunities to apply for classroom jobs including formal letters of application. A number of students offered examples of how they intended contributing to Dubai when they reached adulthood. Students had an excellent understanding of environmental issues and talked about their responsibility for saving energy and recycling. A range of initiatives had been developed to raise students' awareness of energy-saving techniques at home and in the school.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching across the school was good with the best teaching observed in English, mathematics and science. Most teaching was characterised by strong subject knowledge and a good understanding of how students learn. This was particularly apparent in Foundation Stage where activities were designed expertly to meet the needs of very young learners and promote independence. Lessons were well planned and teachers provided good pace to the learning in most cases. Most teachers were creative in their use of resources, including interactive white boards to enhance teaching. Positive teacher-student relationships and effective questioning developed learning well in many lessons. However, critical thinking was only a common feature of the best lessons and challenge was lacking in too many lessons across all subjects.

The quality of students' learning was good overall. In most lessons, students were well motivated, took responsibility for their own learning and collaborated well with each other. Mostly, students made good connections to the real world, for example in a lesson related to evaporation, they drew on their first hand experience of Dubai weather conditions. Connections were less well-developed and opportunities for collaboration were lacking in a few lessons across all subjects. In English lessons critical thinking was a key strength and led to high quality understanding of texts but this was a developing feature of learning in other subjects.

Assessment was good in Foundation Stage and acceptable in primary. Most teachers used assessment strategies to monitor the achievements of students and suggested ways in which students might improve, although this practice was inconsistent across most subjects. In English and mathematics, students were involved in evaluating their own and each others' work but this was not a strong feature in other subjects. Leaders had worked hard to increase the range of assessment information available to teachers and, especially in the Foundation Stage, this was being used consistently to monitor progress and inform teaching. Organised procedures for record-keeping were very strong features in Foundation Stage, English and mathematics. Feedback to students was excellent in English and good in mathematics but was a weakness in Islamic Education, Arabic and science where written feedback to students failed to provide guidance on how to improve. The extent to which teachers knew individual students' strengths and weaknesses was variable

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

The curriculum was good in Foundation Stage and acceptable in primary. It was based on the English National Curriculum and had been appropriately reviewed and adapted to reflect the rationale of the school and give a greater emphasis to skills by providing more opportunities for students to learn through first-hand experience and open-ended tasks. In Foundation Stage the curriculum had good breadth and balance and was promoted through a variety of well considered cross-curricular themes. In particular, very good use was made of the Rainbow Room where children undertook role-play to stimulate their interests, develop their experiences and encourage their inventiveness. In primary, the use of cross-curricular themes was being embedded in the school's curriculum through theme weeks and enrichment activities. For example, students in Year 6 were required to write a newspaper article based on Howard Carter's discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamen which challenged their social and academic skills across a range of subject areas. The school had increased the time offered for Islamic Education and Arabic but the number of lessons and the length of lessons did not comply with Ministry of Education requirements. Students with special educational needs were well supported through the curriculum but the needs of first language Arabic students and gifted and talented students were not yet fully addressed. The school arranged a very wide range of extra-curricular activities for students and links with the local community were well established.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements for the health and safety of the students were outstanding. Excellent supervision in all areas of the school and on buses provided a safe and secure learning environment for students. Students stated that they felt safe and secure at school. The facilities and equipment were maintained to a high standard and walls of the school were decorated with posters, interesting displays and student work. The Foundation Stage integrated basic hygiene skills and healthy living into the curriculum. The school nurse made presentations to primary classes on age-appropriate health topics while physical education and after school programs provided opportunities for the development of physical fitness and sport. The clinic staff included a full-time nurse and part-time doctor who maintained comprehensive health records. Fire drills were held three times per year. The nurse and nutritionist provided very good advice to students and their parents on healthy food choices. Child protection arrangements were well understood by all staff but the recently produced policy document had not yet been widely disseminated.

Support for students' personal and academic development was good. Relationships between students and teachers were warm, friendly and supportive. Students received well-informed guidance and support from class teachers, the nurse and the special education teacher. Student behaviour was modelled on the school's rules and, where necessary, corrective action was delivered in a positive way. Student's well-being was tracked regularly by class teachers and reviewed by the head of school. However, systems for tracking academic progress were not

well developed across all phases and all subjects in the school. Students with special educational needs were admitted to the school and effective arrangements were provided to meet their needs. All students with learning needs had Individual Education Plans (IEP's) that were annually reviewed. Close contact between the special education teacher and class teacher's ensured additional support was made available where necessary. The needs of Arabic students and gifted and talented students were not yet fully addressed. Student attendance and punctuality was very well managed through strong links with parents.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership and management were acceptable. The Headteacher had a clear vision and direction for the school which was shared and understood by all staff. Leaders were increasingly sharing responsibilities with middle managers and effective teams were evident in many areas of the school including English, mathematics and the Foundation Stage. Feedback from staff regarding their professional development needs had been acted upon swiftly resulting in a more robust system of performance management and a clearer focus on developing and sharing good practice in teaching and learning. Senior staff and middle managers were well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school but progress since the last inspection in key areas of the work of the school required further action.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. Senior members of staff were knowledgeable about the strengths of the school through regular classroom visits. Feedback from parents and focussed questionnaires for students and staff had been collected and analysed to inform this process. The monitoring of teaching and learning in the classroom had contributed to the improvements evidenced during the inspection. The school had made only limited progress in improving the areas identified in the last inspection report. The integrated curriculum offered greater opportunities for cross-curricular and investigative work. Tracking was beginning to impact on teaching and learning. However, strategic planning required wider focus beyond issues arising from the last inspection report. There had been some improvement in the quality of Islamic Education but provision for Arabic remained unsatisfactory.

Partnerships with parents and the community were outstanding. There was a productive two way communication between the school and parents including regular newsletters and extensive information on the school website. School reports and frequent parent-teacher meetings, as well as home-school communication books in the Foundation Stage ensured that parents were knowledgeable regarding their child's progress. Informative and well considered workshops covering literacy, numeracy and the Foundation Stage were provided to explain recent changes in education and support parents in appreciating how they might best help their child. Links with the wider community covered music, sport and arts as well as various groups who were given access to the school site.

Governance was acceptable. Since the last inspection, the school had expanded the governing body to include representation from teachers at the school as well as a nearby school. Members of the governing body visited the school regularly and met with teachers and students but have not acted decisively enough in ensuring that statutory requirements were met. The governing body enjoyed supportive relationships with the schools' active Parent Teachers' Association (PTA) but did not include representation from any parents nor formally provide information to parents about its structure and responsibilities.

The school provided a rich and stimulating learning environment. All staff were qualified and experienced and worked well collegiately. Information and communication technology was well developed and was widely used by teachers and, at times, by students. The library was well stocked although the number of bi-lingual and Arabic books was limited. The school made good use of the space and resources available. Very good use was made of the Rainbow Room in the Foundation Stage but there were no prayer facilities for Muslim students.

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:	Foundation Stage	Primary
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?		
2% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.		
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?		
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary
Attainment	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?		
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary
Attainment	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?		
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary
Attainment	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good

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

How good are teaching and learning?		
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?		
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary
Curriculum quality	Good	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?		
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of support	Good	Good

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

How well does the school perform overall?
Acceptable

Next steps

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

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau
Knowledge and Human Development Authority

How to contact us

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

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