

INSPECTION REPORT

The Westminster School

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Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT The Westminster School

Location	Al Qusais
Type of school	Private
Website	www.tws-dxb.sch.ae
Telephone	04 298 8333
Address	PO Box 27016, Dubai
Principal	Neville Sherman
Curriculum	UK
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Grades	3-18 / Foundation Stage to post-16
Attendance	Acceptable
Number of students on roll	4,973
Number of Emirati students	137 (3%)
Date of the inspection	Sunday 13th to Thursday 17th November 2011

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The context of the school

Situated in Al Qusais, The Westminster School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Foundation Stage to post-16, aged three to 18 years. At the time of the inspection, the roll was 4,973.

The school follows the English National Curriculum. Students are entered for IGCSE at the end of the secondary phase and Advanced Level examinations at the end of the post-16 phase.

There were 320 teachers, including the Principal and senior leadership team. At the time of the inspection, the Principal was in his fourth year in office. Eighty six percent of teachers had teaching qualifications. Seventeen teaching assistants supported learning in the Foundation Stage. Students were grouped in 165 classes. 137 students, approximately three percent of students, were Emirati. Seventy two different nationalities were represented among the student population.

Overall school performance 2011-2012

Acceptable

How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

The Westminster School provided overall an acceptable quality of education, but with some significant strengths. These included the very good examination results at senior level in English, mathematics and science, students' attitudes and behaviour and the school's very good focus on their personal and social development. The quality of teaching and learning was good at post-16, but was still inconsistent across the other phases. The school was focusing on improving this area and used a good range of self-evaluation methods to monitor this. However, senior leaders were not managing change systematically enough to improve the learning experience of all students across the whole school.

The school had made acceptable progress towards addressing the recommendations from the previous inspection. Most middle managers were more clearly developing the necessary knowledge, skills and confidence to play their part in promoting, driving and supporting change. The school had encouraged teachers to focus on improving quality of learning and provided broader experiences for students at times. However, this remained an area for further development. The school had begun the process of identifying

students with special educational needs and raising staff awareness, but had made limited progress in implementing plans to improve this important area. It had recently established a Parent Forum, but had not agreed upon its scope of activity and its potential involvement in supporting the school's plans for improvement.

Key strengths

- The academic performance of post-16 students in English, mathematics and science and the range of their community service involvement;
- The cultural harmony across the school and students' personal and social development, including their attitudes and behaviour;
- The quality of teaching and learning at the post-16 stage;
- The commitment of the Principal and senior leaders to the school and its students, and the Principal's innovative approaches to broaden and enrich students' experiences;
- The range of methods used by the school to evaluate its work.

Recommendations

- Improve the attainment and progress of students in Islamic Education and Arabic as an additional language;
- Ensure greater consistency in the quality of learning across the school;
- Improve the planning and delivery of the curriculum in the Foundation Stage, so that time is used to best effect to enhance children's learning;
- Implement plans to improve the management and quality of support for students with special educational needs;
- Develop the role of middle managers in leading whole school improvements in teaching and learning, supported by a systematic management of change by senior leaders;
- Manage enrolment of students to ensure it is commensurate with the school's ability to provide good quality learning experiences.

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

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Islamic Education				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Arabic as a first language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Arabic as an additional language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
English				
Attainment	Acceptable	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding
Progress	Acceptable	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding
Mathematics				
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Outstanding
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Outstanding
Science				
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Outstanding
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Outstanding

Attainment in English, mathematics and science was acceptable in the Foundation Stage. Attainment in all key subjects at primary was acceptable, but good in English. At secondary, attainment was acceptable in Islamic Education and Arabic as an additional language, good in Arabic as a first language, mathematics and science, and outstanding in English. At post-16, attainment was acceptable in Islamic Education, good in Arabic and outstanding in English, mathematics and science. In Islamic Education at post-16, the

majority of students could not link the meaning of Qur'anic verse to their lives. In Arabic as a first language, students demonstrated good language skills, although these were acceptable at primary. In Arabic as an additional language, most students had limited speaking and writing skills; listening and reading were stronger. In English, by the end of secondary and post-16, the majority of students achieved well above international expectations. Students showed very well developed mathematical skills by the later stages. Foundation children and primary students were not developing appropriate investigational skills in science.

Progress at Foundation Stage and primary was acceptable in all subjects, except for the good progress in English in primary. In secondary and post-16, progress was good or better in the majority of subjects. At post-16, it was outstanding in English, mathematics and science. In Islamic Education, students' knowledge of the biography of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) had been developed over time but their memorisation skills were underdeveloped. Extended speaking and writing were underdeveloped in Arabic. In English, the majority of students made better than expected progress in relation to their starting points. High levels of challenge in secondary and post-16 mathematics and science classes resulted in outstanding progress. At all stages, the progress of students with special educational needs was broadly acceptable. Teachers included them well, but there was no targeted additional support available to improve their attainment.

Overall, the attainment and progress of Emirati students were acceptable. In the early years, lower levels of ability in English restricted the attainment of some students. In later years, their oral attainment was generally acceptable but written work was weaker. In Islamic Education, students' engagement in lessons was limited and this constrained their achievement. From their starting points in English, students' progress overall in English was good, but attainment was weaker. At primary and secondary stages, extended writing skills, for example, were underdeveloped. Attainment and progress in mathematics and science were broadly acceptable.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attitudes and behaviour	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture	Acceptable	Good	Good	Outstanding
Civic, economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

Attitudes and behaviour across the school were outstanding. Relationships were based on high levels of mutual trust and respect. Students had many opportunities to lead and show responsibility, and responded to them enthusiastically. They initiated and took part in activities that successfully promoted healthy living. Attendance for the last term was acceptable. Students demonstrated excellent respect for Islamic values. In post-16, they could explain how these values have impacted on Dubai's society. In primary and secondary, students could describe the local traditions and they demonstrated a good appreciation of it through their art-work. Foundation Stage children, including those from the UAE, had limited knowledge about their own culture. Across the school, students celebrated their differences. Students undertook a number of responsibilities through their leadership programme, resulting in a clear development of their leadership skills. Students in post-16 contributed well in the wider community with different activities. In secondary, they could explain confidently the features that made Dubai successful and how Dubai had fared in the global economic downturn. They also could provide solutions for environmental issues.

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

The quality of teaching was acceptable from the Foundation Stage to secondary. Teaching in the Foundation Stage showed clear improvement since the last inspection and it was good in the post-16 phase. The teachers' knowledge of their subjects was good. In the good and outstanding lessons, discussions encouraged the students to think critically. When teachers had high expectations, they set challenging tasks while ensuring students were broadly supported through their good classroom management. There was an improvement since the last inspection in teaching in the middle grades. However, overall, a significant number of teachers were not secure in their understanding of how young people learn. Consequently, in too many lessons, there was limited development of independent learning, problem solving and investigative skills. Teachers did not always meet the needs of the range of students in their classroom. The quality of teaching in other subjects, including social studies, information and communication studies, history, music, geography and art, was also acceptable.

The quality of learning was acceptable in the Foundation Stage, and primary and secondary phases. At post-16, it was good, as a consequence of good teaching and the students' dedication to their studies. Most of the students were keen to learn and they enjoyed the opportunity to discuss things. The school organised a stimulating one day multi-subject project for students from Years 4 to 13. Good learning was observed as the students explored new concepts and wider issues surrounding their subjects, carried out research and solved problems. They presented their findings in the form of a published newspaper, songs, dance, poems and discussions. In normal classwork, however, they did not always have sufficient opportunity to collaborate, use information and communication technology (ICT) or develop as independent learners.

The quality of assessment was generally acceptable. There were regular standardised tests for all students in the key subjects in the Foundation Stage, as well as the primary and secondary phases. In mathematics, English and science, tests were related to English National Curriculum attainment targets. In the best practice, teachers used the results of assessment in discussion with students to inform them of their progress, and to agree next steps in learning. In Islamic Education and Arabic, students took standardised tests as set by the Ministry of Education. The results were not individually discussed with the students to set targets. Parents were informed of their children's progress on a regular basis. There was inconsistency across the school in the quality of monitoring and tracking of students' progress. Books were marked regularly but there were too few comments to help the students improve.

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

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good

The curriculum was acceptable in the Foundation Stage and primary, not better because the curriculum standards were not fully understood by some teachers. In addition, students had too few chances to become independent learners and to share, explore, investigate and work together. The curriculum was good in secondary and post-16. The English National Curriculum ensured a curricular continuity throughout the school. The curriculum was regularly reviewed and monitored. However, the school did not always appropriately meet the needs of the least able and more able students. Other than at post-16, there were not enough opportunities to encourage research and critical thinking. Cross-curricular links and better learning opportunities were offered through activities such as the primary science week, the "Digi Day" event and topics at Foundation Stage. A broad range of sporting activities was available. Community links had some impact on students' learning and were most effective at post-16.

How well does the school protect and support students?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Health and Safety	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of Support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

Arrangements for ensuring students' health and safety were acceptable. The site was secure and there were detailed policies covering all aspects, which were rigorously applied in most areas. The school had recently appointed an Operations Manager to oversee all areas of health and safety and had initiated a programme of refurbishment and improvement. The premises were clean and hygienic; there had been improvements to one of the playgrounds for younger students since the last inspection. Fire drills were held appropriately. Two doctors and three nurses in two separate clinics supervised all matters relating to medical care and hygiene, including the promotion of healthy living. Children were very well supervised at times of high movement and especially for bus departure. Child protection training was part of the induction programme, but the school acknowledged the need for further development to ensure consistency in approaches across the school.

The quality of support for students was acceptable. Strong features included warm, respectful and caring staff-student relationships, the guidance provided to senior students on future education and career options, and the highly successful management of students' behaviour. Gifted and talented students received good additional challenge to extend their learning. Appropriate steps were taken to monitor students' attendance and time-keeping. The quality of support for students with special educational needs was acceptable. A counsellor helped families, teachers and students with advice to help overcome barriers to learning. Teachers did their best to identify students with learning difficulties, but there was no strategy to assess their needs and no specialist staff to meet these needs and advise teachers how to support students. Individualised educational programmes were not in place to guide learning. Links with external support agencies were not sufficiently well developed.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

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

The leadership of the school was good and there was a clear capacity for improvement. The Principal demonstrated a number of personal and professional strengths, was highly committed to the school and its students, and had earned the respect of teachers and students. He empowered managers at all levels to take on a collegiate role in bringing about change. The senior leaders had a sound vision for the school and gave a strong lead in their areas of responsibility. Most middle managers were developing the necessary knowledge, skills and confidence to play their part in promoting, driving and supporting change.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. The school had developed a wide range of ways of monitoring and evaluating its work, with managers at all levels involved. It had produced a thorough and realistic whole-school self-evaluation document. There was a significant focus on monitoring teaching and learning, including a commendable annual school-based inspection. Leaders did not sufficiently analyse the findings of monitoring to identify the next steps for improvement. The school's plan and its priorities were reviewed regularly. The school had made acceptable progress in addressing most the last report's recommendations. However, it had made only initial progress in supporting students with special educational needs.

Partnerships with parents and the community were good. There was generally good two-way communication between school and individual parents, and the school offered parents a good range of information on its work. The parent consultation days offered good opportunities to discuss students' progress. Parents were well involved in the life of the school and the school was currently working to devise effective ways of involving them more in their children's learning. There were strong links with the community, particularly in the upper school.

Governance was acceptable. There were clear opportunities for the school to present progress reports during the academic year and for the board representative to hold leaders accountable. The school was also well supported in a range of expected ways, including ensuring opportunities for teachers'

professional development. The recently established Parents' Forum offered parents the opportunity to be involved more meaningfully in the school's further development.

The overall management of staffing, facilities and resources was acceptable. Key personnel ensured that this very large school was efficiently managed. Staff were well qualified. Each year, there was a significant turn-over of teachers and the school maintained a sound focus on their induction. The range of resources was limited. Overall, the accommodation was insufficient for the large numbers of students. Rooms were small and over-crowding was common, which restricted the way many students learned. Further liaison was required between governors and school leaders to ensure the accommodation was suitable. Leaders had made creative efforts to maximise the use of the very limited accommodation, but it remained an issue throughout the school.

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	250	5%
	Last year	433	8%
Teachers	74		23%
Students	137		32%

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

A relatively small percentage of parents responded to the survey representing a smaller rate than the previous year. Of these, most expressed satisfaction with the overall work of the school and quality of education provided for their child. Teaching staff who responded to the survey – a third of the staff and from all sections of the school – were in accordance with this view. Both groups agreed that students were safe in the school environment, enjoyed school and had a positive approach towards learning. The minority of students who completed the survey agreed with parents and teachers that the school was well led, although their main concern was that they wanted school leaders to listen to their opinions and provide more assistance in helping them to understand how well they were doing. Other additional comments, from a few parents and teachers concerned potential problems caused by overcrowding in some classrooms; a few parents also expressed the wish to have clearer information about, and opportunities to be involved with, school improvement planning.

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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