

INSPECTION REPORT

Modern Skills School

Report published in April 2014

جهاز الرقابة المدرسية في دبي
Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Modern Skills School

Location	Al Muhaisnah
Type of school	Private
Website	www.dubaism.net
Telephone	04-2887765
Address	DUBAI , MUHAISANAH FIRST-P.O.BOX: 57475
Principal	Huda Al Samkari
Curriculum	US
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	4-17 / KG 1-Grade 12
Attendance	Good
Number of students on roll	1457
Largest nationality group of Students	Emirati
Number of Emirati students	1280 (87.85%)
Date of the inspection	3rd to 6th February 2014

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The context of the school

The School of Modern Skills, located in Al Muhaisnah, is a private school for boys and girls aged three to 18, from Kindergarten to Grade 12. At the time of the inspection there were 1,457 students on roll. There were 1,280 Emirati students representing just under 90 per cent of the total. The school had identified 131 students with special educational needs.

The school was structured around four phases, which were Kindergarten, elementary, middle and high school. It provided a US curriculum and a Ministry of Education (MoE) curriculum in Islamic Education and Arabic. The curriculum consisted of the Common Core Standards in English and mathematics and a textbook curriculum in other subjects. The first year of Kindergarten used the New York Pre-Kindergarten Standards. Students were awarded an internal school certificate after completing Grade 12. International testing included IBT tests in English, science and mathematics in the elementary, middle and high school phases. Grade 12 students took the TOEFL, IELTS, SAT and CEPA examinations.

The school had retained almost all the teachers in the current academic year. The school structure included heads of department in all key subjects. Most teachers had a post-secondary qualification and a minority had a teaching degree. There were no senior management posts other than the principal.

Overall school performance 2013-2014

Acceptable

Key strengths

- The continual drive for improvement
- The strong Islamic ethos and provision across school leading to students' outstanding understanding and progress in high school
- The good attitudes and behaviour of students across the school
- The accurate self-evaluation processes in place

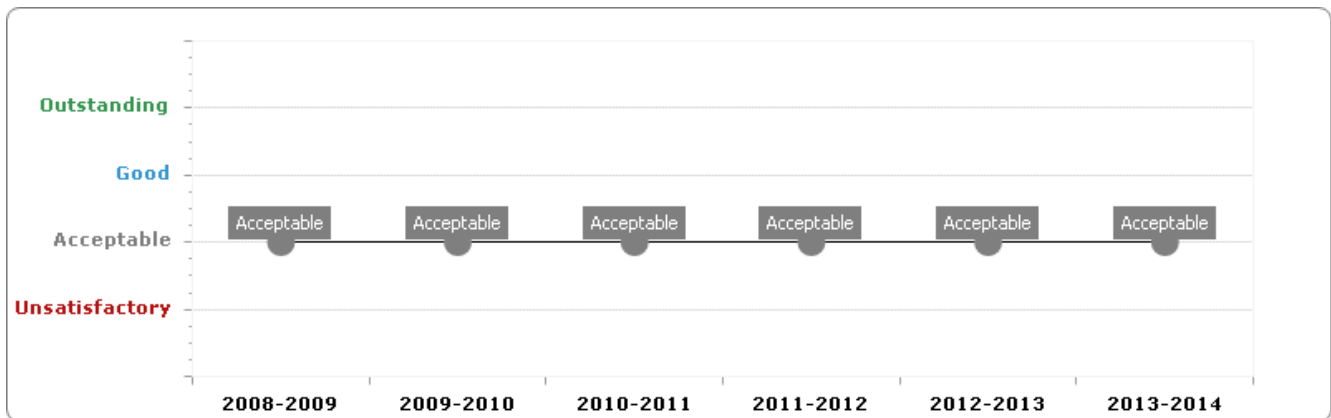
Recommendations

- Raise attainment and progress in mathematics, English and Science in the first three phases by:
 - promoting good English skills in key subjects
 - aligning tasks, activities and assessment of students' progress more closely to curriculum expectations
 - ensuring students' learning outcomes take into consideration the different needs of students.
- Improve tracking of students' progress against international benchmarks:
 - to ensure all students, teachers and parents are aware of students' strengths and weaknesses and their next steps in learning
 - to improve the information available to support teachers' planning and curriculum modification
 - ensure that all staff identify and implement individualised educational programmes to meet the needs of all students fully
- Revise the school curriculum so that:
 - the expectations of the US curriculum in English, mathematics, and science are fully integrated into the school's curriculum;
 - the Kindergarten (KG) curriculum offers a broader and more comprehensive provision
- Provide a better leadership structure by creating additional roles between the Principal and her middle managers.

Progress since the last inspection

- The outstanding progress in Islamic Education in high school
- The good attainment in English, mathematics and science in high school.
- The good attitude to learning across school.
- The good assessment in high school.
- The good care, guidance and support in high school.
- Improved self-evaluation.

Trend of overall performance



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How good are the students' attainment, progress and learning skills?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Islamic Education				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Outstanding
Arabic as a first language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Good
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Good
Arabic as an additional language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Progress	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
English				
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Mathematics				
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Science				
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Quality of students' learning skills	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

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How good is the students' personal and social development?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Personal responsibility	Good	Good	Good	Good
Students' understanding of Islamic values and their local, cultural and global awareness	Good	Good	Good	Outstanding
Community and environmental responsibility	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Curriculum design to meet the individual needs of students	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and Safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of Support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

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

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the students' attainment and progress?

In Islamic education, most students attained consistently high levels of knowledge, skill and understanding. Students had good understanding of how to apply what they learnt in lessons to their daily lives. Holy Quran recitation and memorisation skills were a clear strength for most students. In Arabic as a first language, students had strong listening skills. Although speaking was better developed in the lower elementary and high school grades, there was a noted use of colloquial Arabic across all phases. In reading, higher order and critical thinking skills were not consistently developed. Writing was inconsistent in the elementary and high school and was weakest in the middle school. Attainment in English was only acceptable because students' speaking and reading skills were not fully developed to meet the challenges being planned for them in lessons. There was good attainment in the high school with students using a wider vocabulary in reading, writing listening and speaking. Most children in Kindergarten had acquired appropriate abilities in counting and recognising shapes. Elementary and middle phase students showed good skills in statistics, but a minority had difficulty in applying their knowledge of other topics to solve problems. High school students were good at applying their skills in algebra, geometry and advanced topics including complex numbers. Most students had a strong recall of knowledge and an in-depth scientific vocabulary. However, in spite of increased practical sessions in the laboratory, they had less developed scientific skills and little experience of determining their own fair tests.

In Islamic education, most students in elementary and middle phases made good progress. Students in secondary made the best progress in acquiring knowledge and understanding of Islamic concepts and values. They made considerable progress in developing higher order thinking skills. Most students, particularly in high school, were developing strong connections with the real world and learning in other subjects. In Arabic as a first language, students made steady progress in listening, reading texts aloud, learning vocabulary, and grammar. Students made slower progress in writing in the upper elementary and middle school grades. Progress with speaking was hindered by the frequent reliance on colloquial language. Across three phases, progress in English was acceptable. Opportunities for assessment were missed, lower expectations and limited speaking and reading skills slowed progress. In the high school, assessment was used effectively and expectations were higher allowing for progress in reading, writing listening and speaking skills to be good. Most children and students were making appropriate progress in mathematics. Progress during the first three school phases was hampered due to a lack of sufficiently challenging tasks and activities in lessons. Students in the high school phase were making good progress in acquiring understanding of advanced topics such as complex numbers and limits of sequences. The progress of students in physical, natural and earth sciences was most rapid in the High school, where boys made up ground and overtook the performance of the girls. The development of scientific skills, however was less rapid throughout the school.

[View judgements](#)

Quality of students' learning skills

The quality of students' learning skills was acceptable in Kindergarten (KG), Elementary and Middle and good in the High school phase. Most students were engaged in their learning and had a positive attitude to school. Students worked well collaboratively as well as independently, when given the opportunity. This was particularly true with the older students in Islamic Education, English, science and mathematics. When collaboration was less effective, it was because the level of challenge was too low or, in the case of KG, where tasks did not develop children's oral language skills. Students, in the Elementary phase and above, were able to communicate their learning well and most were confident to share their learning with their peers and the teacher. In the better lessons, students were able to make connections with learning in other curriculum areas and to apply it to real life. A case in point was the strong links between learning in Arabic and Islamic Education. There were many good examples of students using IT routinely in their learning; photographing their experiments and researching new information.

[View judgements](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good across the school. Most students behaved well in classes and during break times, following the boundaries set for them. Relationships between teachers and students were often very positive and students worked well together in most situations. The student council members supported teachers in the smooth transition of students between classes, breaks and assemblies. Attendance was good in classes and students, through the choices they made, were able to show they understood healthy lifestyles. The school supported students in developing a strong respect for Islamic values. Almost all students recognised the importance of Islam and its influence on life in Dubai. The school fostered and recognised the importance of learning about and celebrating UAE's national culture and Emirati traditions. Students were aware of the multicultural nature of the Dubai society but their awareness and appreciation of worldwide cultures was less well developed. Older students had a stronger awareness of global issues and how they related to the community of Dubai but were not as informed or aware of how this applied to their local school environment. Lack of ownership or responsibility of current initiatives, like recycling, showed that most students did not understand the importance of environmental sustainability or conservation. Despite a positive work ethic, students lacked a proactive approach.

[View judgements](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

The quality of teaching was acceptable in KG, Elementary and Middle and good in the High school phase. Most teachers had good subject knowledge and teachers in KG had a better understanding of how young children learn best. Most teachers produced effective lesson plans, which identified students with differing abilities. They had effective relationships with the students and knew them well. The quality of questioning varied from closed questions with students responding in unison to more probing questions which sought to clarify older students' thinking. Teachers were employing a variety of strategies in lessons, including group and partner activities. In some instances the activities did not enhance the quality of the learning sufficiently. In spite of the identification of different ability groups, the needs of all students were not always met, particularly with regard to challenging the more able in KG, Elementary and Middle school phases. In the better lessons, teachers provided opportunities to develop students' critical thinking skills. Provision for research had been extended to include students in the Elementary and Middle phases of the school. Learning environments were attractive and supportive and the majority of teachers were using IT well.

Extensive systems were in place to gather, analyse and aggregate student data. These were used in the teachers' planning for the setting of three ability groups. The data was mostly numerical. This was particularly apparent in KG where the measurement of the personal and social development of the young children was subsumed in an attainment grade. The quality of data varied, with greater accuracy in the Middle and High school phases. The school used externally validated, standardised testing in English, mathematics and science in order to provide some international benchmarking. This process was at an early stage. Student progress was determined through the use of a commercially produced scheme of tests, which were administered at the beginning of the year and part way through. Oral feedback was strongest in the High school phase, with teachers guiding students on future learning. Peer and self-assessment were successful features of most of these lessons. However, there were some good examples of self-assessment in other phases of the school. The majority of teachers had a good general knowledge of their students although it was insufficiently detailed to effectively modify planning and the curriculum for all groups of students.

[View judgements](#)

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

The quality of the school's curriculum was acceptable at all levels. It was reasonably broad and balanced. The curriculum in Arabic was well structured. The curriculum in Islamic Education was well designed, as it contained effective integration of skills and knowledge. The curriculum in English was aligned with the US Common Core Standards. The mathematics curriculum was also linked to the Common Core but inconsistently. The school's mathematics curriculum lacked the Common Core focus on critical thinking and

applications to real life problem solving. Similarly, the science curriculum, based on the US Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), did not contain the investigative skills featured in NGSS. Cross-curricular links were weakly developed. The school conducted a formal review of the curriculum each spring based on students' needs. The school also made minor adjustments to the curriculum from time-to-time in response to assessment data. Extra-curricular clubs in Grades 5-11 provided students with opportunities to broaden their knowledge and skills.

The school made some adjustments to the curriculum to meet the different needs of its students. Students with special needs were identified, and lesson plans included some provision to meet a range of learning needs. Such provision typically included extra assistance from a teacher or teacher assistant and/or modified assignments. The school provided a limited number of choices for students to study to meet their needs and aspirations. Interest based clubs in Grades 5-11 offered students extra-curricular choices such as drama, poetry, journalism, and cooking. Grade 11 students had an option to take coursework in economics and business.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

The quality of the school's arrangements for health and safety was good at all phases. Staff implemented appropriate procedures for ensuring that students were safe in the school and when travelling to or from the school on buses. The school buildings and grounds were well maintained to reduce hazards and make the environment hygienic. Some doors leading to maintenance areas were on occasion inappropriately left open. Record-keeping, including logs of incidents and clinic referrals, were kept carefully. The doctor and two nurses made a positive contribution to the school's programme on personal, social and health education. Social workers looked after students' welfare and supported staff to exercise their duty of care. They were reviewing the school's policy on child protection and had carried out training for staff. Despite this there was a degree of confusion among staff about the appropriate procedures to follow.

The quality of support was acceptable at KG, elementary and middle phases, and good at the high school phase. Relationships between staff and students were positive, and instances of poor behaviour among boys were rare. A system of 'contracts' between the school and parents had led to improved attendance. New students were supported effectively, particularly at the high school phase. Social workers monitored the personal and social development of students and cared for those in need of support. Students moving on to other destinations from the high school phase received advice about careers and universities.

[View judgements](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The leadership in school was acceptable. The vision of the school was shared effectively across the different levels of the leadership team. Responsibilities were shared between the principal and her middle managers. However, the absence of deputy principals hindered the development of the school. The roles and responsibilities of some key leaders were not always clearly defined. The principal had high expectations and was dynamic. Most of the staff shared a strong commitment and drive for improvement. Increasingly, staff and students knew what was expected of them. As a result, the school had achieved some success in improving students' outcomes. The leadership team had the capacity to improve further.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning had improved and was now acceptable. The school had focused on the recommendations following the previous inspection and improvement plans were now fully in place. The school was becoming data rich and self-reflective. A new tracking system enabled teachers, parents and students to measure progress but benchmarks were not always accurate. Performance management was meaningful and informed some aspects of continuous professional development. However, the sharing of best practice was not always systematic. Nevertheless, there had been some progress in addressing a few recommendations from the previous report.

Partnerships between the school, parents and the community were good. Links between the school and parents were well established. The interventions of parents were purposeful. For example, the school trained mothers on how to read effectively to groups of young children. Communication between the school and parents was effective. It included online systems where parents could discuss issues or monitor the progress of their children. Reporting on students' progress was regular, however teachers did not always indicate the next steps for students to improve their learning. Links with other schools and businesses were limited.

Governance was good. The board sought the views of different stakeholders. This included parents and educational experts. This enabled them to gain a good understanding of the school strengths and weaknesses and support the leadership in identifying ways forward. For example, they recognised the need for additional roles to support the principal and were proactive in recruiting new staff. They were realistic about the performance of the school and were able to hold the school leaders to account. They had started to invest resources more strategically and as a result, some areas of school had improved.

The management of staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable. School's procedures and routines were effective. Classrooms and overall facilities were of good quality, but the number of students in each KG class was increasing fast. Although teachers were well qualified their job descriptions were not aligned to the priorities within the school's improvement plans. The deployment of key staff was usually effective, but key roles needed to be created between the principal and middle managers. The quality of learning resources

were improving with increased use of modern technologies such as interactive whiteboards, computers and 'bring your own device'. Nevertheless, the provision of 21st century technology was still insufficient for the number of students and their different age ranges.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school provide for students with special educational needs?

The school had an inclusive approach to enrolling students with special educational needs (SEN). Specialist staff had improved the way in which they identified students' special educational needs. They used an outside agency to confirm their provisional identification based on observations in the school. The school had identified over ninety students who were regarded as gifted or talented. Provision for those students was mainly based on work in the classroom, and they were not always challenged sufficiently or given opportunities to develop their talents to the full. Specialist staff were involving parents more and staff had drawn up individualised educational programmes. These programmes gave broadly helpful advice to teachers, although some needed to be further personalised for individual students. Teachers did not implement the advice fully, or modify the curriculum significantly to support students with SEN. As a result, progress of these students varied from class to class, and though acceptable overall, was, on some occasions, unsatisfactory. Staff needed to track students' progress more closely. Some of the leadership team were new to the school, and they were beginning to develop teamwork. Roles and responsibilities needed to be clarified.

How well does the school teach Arabic as a first language?

Almost all teachers demonstrated secure subject knowledge; however their understanding of how students learn languages was inconsistent. Teachers delivered activities that did not promote good language development in too many lessons, particularly in the middle phase. Most lessons had been planned well but lesson objectives and learning outcomes were not always of a high enough level of challenge for all students. The planned group work activities were not always matched well to learners' different needs. In the elementary and high school, teachers made appropriate use of different resources, including ICT to support learning in most lessons observed. Teachers in most lessons, interacted well with their students. Whole class discussions were utilised appropriately, and teachers' questioning provided some opportunities for developing students' thinking skills. However, the level of challenge and language development was insufficiently high.

The school reviewed its Arabic curriculum which was fully compliant with Ministry of Education requirements. The curriculum included clear expectations at each grade level and detailed scope and

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sequence maps. The curriculum was not, however, modified for special groups of students who had special educational needs. There was still an observed lack of alignment between the curriculum standards, lesson planning and assessment of students' achievement.

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	76	10%
	Last year	76	15%
Teachers	37		39%
Students	90		61%

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

Less than half of the teachers, most students, but only a few parents completed the questionnaire. Most parents and students were satisfied with the overall quality of education in the school. Most parents thought that their children were making good progress in the key subjects, although they were slightly less positive about progress in English. The majority agreed that their children used a range of technology tools, benefited from a wide range of subjects, and found work interesting and challenging. Most parents and staff felt that the school dealt well with bullying, and that students were well looked after and safe. Almost all parents felt that reports and meetings were helpful. A majority of parents and teachers felt that the school was well led and that leaders listened to their opinions. Only a minority of parents and around half of the teachers, were aware of the schools performance on international assessments. Most teachers felt that they were involved in improvement activities and were supported well in professional development and in meeting the needs of students with SEN. Students' views were generally less positive than parents or staff. They were particularly concerned about what they saw as too much homework in English.

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

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