

School of Modern Skills Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 10

Report published May 2010

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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.

School of Modern Skills was inspected in October 2009 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 Muhaisnah, School of Modern Skills is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 10, aged three to 16 years. For this report, the inspectors referred to the following departments of the school; KG, elementary (Grades 1 to 5), middle (Grades 6 to 8) and high (Grades 9 to 10). The school followed a US curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 730 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Almost all parents were supportive of the school and the leadership. Most parents felt that their children made good progress in the key subjects. They reported that behaviour was good overall and that staff expectations of the students were high. Most parents felt that teaching was good, that students were treated fairly and that the school was approachable and accessible to parents. A minority of parents thought that the school could do more to link with the community and that it could respond more positively to the recommendations of the previous inspection.

How well does the school perform overall?

Overall, the School of Modern Skills was performing at an acceptable level with some good features. Attainment and progress in Islamic Education throughout the whole school was good. In Arabic, the attainment and progress of children in KG was good. In the other sections of the school it was acceptable. In English and mathematics, the attainment and progress of students in the elementary, middle and high school sections was acceptable, while in KG attainment and progress were good. In science, both attainment and progress were acceptable throughout the school. Good behaviour and positive relationships were evident throughout the school. Students were punctual and attendance was good, overall. Almost all students had a good understanding of Islam, its importance in the modern world and their civic responsibilities. They displayed a good appreciation of Dubai's multi-cultural nature. Economic and environmental understanding was acceptable. Students were aware of their potential contributions to Dubai's progress and they had knowledge of local and global environmental issues. While there was some promotion of this behaviour in the school, students did not apply this knowledge to their everyday lives.

In KG, teaching was good and it was acceptable in the other sections. Most teachers had good knowledge of their subjects but did not always understand how the students learned it. In KG classes, lesson objectives were appropriate and achievable. Most teachers used questioning to determine the knowledge acquired but did not systematically challenge students' opinions or assist in developing their higher order thinking skills. Teaching strategies in KG ensured that children were active learners, consistently challenged by a variety of tasks and encouraged to work co-operatively. In middle and high school sections the students could explain what they have learned confidently. They made limited cross-curricular connections. Assessment in KG was good. Here, children's performance was consistently recorded and reported to parents. They were regularly given good feedback on the next learning stage. In the rest of the school, assessment was unsatisfactory. Feedback from teachers was inconsistent and only in a few cases, gave students a clear idea of the next steps in their learning. While large amounts of summative data were collected, this was not used to inform teaching and learning. Consequently, students were unclear of what was expected of them. No use was made of international data to inform the students, parents and the school of the level of progress being made by the students. In elementary, middle and high school sections, the curriculum was acceptable while in KG it was good. In most parts of the school there were no significant gaps but the range of options for some students was narrow. A curriculum committee has just been formed. There was a clear understanding of the need to provide greater subject choice, a more tangible link to the local community and training for the teachers to refine their understanding of curriculum. Health and safety were good throughout the school. The environment was well managed and supervision of students was good in most parts of the school. Staff and students were aware of child protection arrangements and school transport was well organised. In KG, the support for children was good. Well-developed systems for tracking progress were in place. Staff handling of behaviour issues was good. In the other sections of the school support for the students was acceptable. Teachers knew their students well.

The quality of school leadership was good. Senior school leaders were committed to school improvement, raising standards and had a clear sense of direction. Effective teams were evident in various sections of the school. There was a high degree of accountability to the owners and the parents. Self-evaluation and improvement planning was acceptable. While a strong focus was placed on the monitoring of staff performance, there was insufficient attention paid to the impact of this on the learning experiences and outcomes of students. Good partnerships with parents were evident. The board of governors exerted a positive influence on the work of the school. It had a clear sense of the school's future direction and had well developed plans to involve the parents. Other stakeholders provided input to the decision-making processes of the school. Staff members were held accountable. Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable.

Key features of the school

- Committed and professional leadership that effectively promotes partnerships with parents;
- Well-informed governance that includes stakeholders in its strategic planning;
- Effective teaching, learning and leadership in KG;
- Good attainment and progress in Islamic Education;
- The positive approach of the students to their learning.

Recommendations

- Improve assessment arrangements so that;
 - the assessments provide students with regular feedback on their progress and attainment and include details for the areas for improvement;
 - student attainment is verified against international standards and recognised with qualifications of international validity.
- Use self-evaluation and improvement planning to improve the curriculum and provide a wider range of learning opportunities;
- Raise students' attainment and improve progress in Arabic, English, mathematics and science.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good. Students' memorisation of The Holy Qur'an progressed well as students progressed through the school, as did their recitation. Most students learned the appropriate recitation rules and were able to talk about the Islamic values they had learned. They were able to talk respectfully about the meaning of the Holy verses. Most students were able to give examples of how the rules were applied in their lives. They showed respect for the school mosque and were keen on keeping prayer times. Most students in lower grades were able to understand and appreciate the attributes of Allah.

In Arabic, throughout the school, attainment and progress were acceptable. Almost all students were confident in applying the grammar to familiar texts. Although the students were articulate in spoken Arabic, their answers and responses were brief. Students' writing was mainly limited to copying answers from the board. Writing in the upper grades was mostly functional. Most students read fluently from textbooks. In elementary, a majority of students struggled with spelling and made repeated mistakes.

Attainment and progress in English were good in KG. Children developed initial reading skills. Listening skills were good. They correctly repeated words with teacher prompting. In other grades attainment and progress were acceptable. Elementary students could follow teacher instructions and respond orally to questions with single words or short phrases. However, most students were unable to participate in an extended conversation with fluency. Writing was limited to filling in blanks in exercise books and worksheets. Students were able to use proper grammar during lessons but did not apply this in their writing. Students could read short passages, and successfully answer recall questions about the content. A majority of students was unable to summarise what they read. Middle and high school students were able to converse with their teacher and speak informally with each other. Students could read selections from their textbook and answer short comprehension questions with some grammatical mistakes. The majority of students did not produce extended written responses.

In KG, attainment and progress in mathematics were good. Children could recognise shapes, count and write numbers to 10. In the other sections of the school, attainment and progress were acceptable. Students in elementary, middle and high school had acceptable understanding of the use of the four number processes. Elementary students could recognise odd and even numbers, identify and manipulate place value. Middle school students could solve algebraic expressions. High school students were able to solve advanced algebraic problems independently. Elementary and middle school students did not display effective problem solving skills.

Attainment and progress in science were acceptable. Overall, most students demonstrated an acceptable understanding of scientific knowledge, and concepts in line with expectations for their age group. Lower elementary students could identify living and non-living things. Middle school students could list in correct order the stages of the life cycle stages of a plant. Most high school students understood fundamental chemistry principles such as ionic bonds. Students did not display investigative and enquiry skills. Their scientific knowledge and understanding was mainly limited to the acquisition of factual information.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Throughout the school, students' attitudes and behaviour were good. Students were pleasant and respectful to all staff. Staff had developed positive and co-operative relationships throughout the school. Students enjoyed being at school and exercised appropriate self-control. Their attendance and punctuality were good.

Students had good civic understanding. Their respect and appreciation for Islam and local traditions and culture were good. Most students were aware of their role in the school and wider community. They had few opportunities for community involvement due to the lack of a formal student council in which students could play a role in developing the school, give their ideas and make their voice heard. Some students did, however, display good leadership qualities in their support for others. They could discuss the impact of Islam on contemporary society, in Dubai and in their lives. For example, they recited the appropriate Do'aas (prayers) before doing a task and after ending it. Students were proud when they spoke about the heritage and traditions of the UAE. They exhibited an awareness of the need to protect and maintain their culture.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was acceptable. The majority of students were able to talk about the basic economic development of Dubai. However, their understanding of Dubai's current economic situation was limited and there was little awareness of the impact of this on the UAE. Girls took better care of their immediate classroom environment. The playground was not always clean after break times. The students displayed a limited understanding of the importance of recycling and few knew what they had to do in order to protect the environment. There were limited opportunities in the school to promote recycling. Additionally, few students displayed appropriate understanding of the global environmental issues such as global warming, and its impact on their lives.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching was good in KG and acceptable throughout the rest of the school. Most teachers had good subject knowledge. However, with the exception of KG, few teachers displayed a sufficient understanding for how their subject was learned. Most lessons were didactic in nature and teacher led. Teaching worked well when it was student-centred. Overall, teacher talk was excessive and there were few opportunities for students to interact with the resources to enhance their learning. In the majority of lessons, students did not have enough time to work quietly and independently without teacher intervention. This resulted in a large number of students becoming reliant on the teacher. The students had few opportunities to manipulate the materials and explore them as they were rushed through the lesson in order to complete the work assigned from textbooks or worksheets. There were limited teaching strategies used and most of the lessons were textbook driven. Across the school, planning rarely took into account the development and application of skills that students were expected to learn at a specific grade or age. Teacher assistants in the KG were used well by a few teachers and there was potential for them to be used more effectively to enhance teaching and learning.

The quality of students' learning was good in the KG and acceptable throughout the school. Most students responded well to their teachers and were keen and eager learners who wanted to participate in the lesson. However, most teachers did not fully encourage their students to be active learners and to take responsibility for their own learning by identifying their strengths and areas for development. Work was not well matched to the levels of ability of different students and this meant that the learning needs of most students were rarely met. Teachers used Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in lessons, but this was mainly as a display tools. The setting up of the teachers' laptops disrupted the start of lessons and meant that valuable teaching and learning time over the course of the year was lost.

Although assessment was found to be good in KG, it was unsatisfactory across the rest of the school. In KG, student progress was regularly monitored, reported and carefully analysed. Results informed planning and the setting of appropriate objectives. The school had a set system to formally test students and the results of the assessments were regularly reported to parents. However, there was little evidence to indicate that this information and data was analysed on a regular basis across the school to inform future planning. The quality of both oral and written feedback to students was poor. Although students' books were marked, there were no comments from the teachers to indicate how the students could improve their work. The school had not yet developed a system to monitor the progress of individual students and compare their attainment and progress to international standards expected of students of the same curricula and age.

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

In KG the quality of the curriculum was good. It had been planned to encourage both group and individual teacher input to the syllabus documents. A broad and balanced curriculum was in place and this catered for the needs of all children. Teachers had adapted the curriculum to ensure sufficient challenge and support where needed. Efficient and informed monitoring of the design and implementation of the KG curriculum ensured that continuity, progression, breadth and balance were evident. There was clear evidence of the timetable being adapted to suit the Arabic and English language needs during the school day. Throughout the rest of the school, the curriculum was acceptable. There was evidence of repetition, excessive reliance on textbooks to define the curriculum available and limitations on the choices available for students as they progressed through the school. There was insufficient development of the curriculum from year to year to address identified weaknesses or gaps in provision. Students' social skills were developed in the school as a separate subject for all grades. However, the lack of systematic tracking and assessment of the outcomes limited its impact. Extra classes were available for the gifted and talented students and also for those experiencing some difficulties in their learning. Competition and cooperation were promoted through sports and extra-curricular activities such as the "math marathon", "Little Teachers Programme", the Thalassaemia Centre Visit Programme, the DEWA electricity and water-saving competition, The Science Fair and other activities. The school had established a curriculum committee. Work was underway on defining curriculum in the school more progressively. While this committee was in place the impact of this work was not yet evident.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety arrangements throughout the school were good. Supervision was good in most areas of the school. Evacuation drills were handled through a partnership with the Fire Department who checked equipment four times a year. Drills were held once a year but needed to be held more frequently so that staff and students could become more familiar with the procedures. There were no evacuation routes posted in corridors or in classrooms. Students benefitted from an attractive learning environment that was maintained at a high level of cleanliness, hygiene and repair. School toilets were clean. A full-time school doctor attended to the health of the students. They benefitted from ongoing vaccination and health review programmes. The school doctor kept thorough records regarding medical history and first aid. The canteen served healthy food and appealing snacks and healthy eating was effectively promoted. The PE program and morning exercises promoted healthy life styles.

The quality of support was good in KG and acceptable in the other grades. Here, students were well supported in their social and academic development. Academic progress was tracked effectively. There were good staff-student relationships throughout the school. In the elementary, middle and high grades supervisors dealt with behavioural, academic and attendance issues effectively. Supervisors maintained complete records on student referrals, actions taken, parent contacts and student conferences. Students reported that they liked their supervisors and believed they were fair. There was no whole-school method to track students' overall well being and progress for Grades 1 to 9. However, the English department was using a new tracking system that has potential application across the school. Attendance was good and supervisors monitored student punctuality by speaking with them and contacting parents when absences occurred or when students were late to school.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership in the school was good. The senior school leaders all shared a common sense of direction for the school. They had developed a good working relationship and the responsibilities delegated among other management post holders in the school were achievable, relevant and clearly defined. School leadership personnel were focused on raising standards and teaching performance was monitored regularly. Clear accountability structures were in place. The challenge to extend this good practice to the entire school was well understood. A focus on ensuring that teaching methodologies develop into a broader range of more effective learning opportunities for the students was in place. Staff training in this area has begun.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning was acceptable. The school understood the challenge it faced. Significant effort has been put into the implementation of the previous report and some progress was evident. The school action plan had used the recommendations as the basis for its improvement strategies. However, the impact of this plan in classes was not clearly defined and there was still work to be done to ensure that the success criteria of the plans objectives were clearly understood by all teachers.

Partnerships with the parents and the community were good. Communication of the progress of students was thorough and parents reported that they felt well-informed of the progress of their children. KG had a well developed system to involve the parents in the continuous improvement of the childrens' learning. This had strengthened learning and contributed effectively to the good standards there. The parents were closely involved with the governance of the school. There were clear examples of the links the school had made with the community. The school planned to extend this to working with other schools to assist the preparation of the students for future educational pathways and careers. The appointment of a co-ordinator to manage this work was an important and positive step.

Governance in the school was good. The owners held the school personnel to account and exerted a positive influence on the development of the school. Parents had easy access to the owners and the inclusion of the opinions of these and other stakeholders was welcomed and supported. Plans had been drawn up to formalise this process and to facilitate appropriate decision-making opportunities for all relevant stakeholders in partnership with the owners. The board had supported the school with funding for a range of resources and activities.

Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable. Staff numbers were sufficient and the staff were, in almost all cases, appropriately qualified. The school building was very well maintained. Specialist facilities, such as the science laboratories, were small and could only accommodate small numbers of students for practical lessons. The school had significant resources, particularly in the KG section. However, the use of the resources throughout the whole school did not always support maximum student engagement in active learning opportunities.

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:	Kindergarten	Grade 1 to 5	Grade 6 to 8	Grade 9 to 10
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grade 1 to 5	Grade 6 to 8	Grade 9 to 10
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grade 1 to 5	Grade 6 to 8	Grade 9 to 10
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grade 1 to 5	Grade 6 to 8	Grade 9 to 10
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grade 1 to 5	Grade 6 to 8	Grade 9 to 10
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grade 1 to 5	Grade 6 to 8	Grade 9 to 10
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grade 1 to 5	Grade 6 to 8	Grade 9 to 10
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Good	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grade 1 to 5	Grade 6 to 8	Grade 9 to 10
Curriculum quality	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grade 1 to 5	Grade 6 to 8	Grade 9 to 10
Health and safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of support	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

How well does the school perform overall?
Acceptable

Next Steps

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

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau
Knowledge and Human Development Authority

How to contact us

If you have a concern or wish to comment on any aspect of this report you should contact: inspection@khda.gov.ae.

More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at www.khda.gov.ae.

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