

Dubai British School Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Post-16

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.

Dubai British 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 Emirates Hills, Dubai British School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Foundation Stage to post-16, aged three to 18 years. The school follows the English National Curriculum and students complete GCSE and Advanced level examinations as part of their studies. At the time of the inspection, there were 1151 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

As part of the inspection process, Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires issued to parents. Parents were very happy with the school. They were pleased with their children's progress in English, mathematics and science and attributed this to good teaching and effective leadership. A few parents felt that progress in Arabic was not as good as in other subjects, but many commented positively on the improvements in this subject. Parents were appreciative of wide range of extra-curricular opportunities, although a minority felt that opportunities for younger students were lacking especially participating in sports teams. They rated highly students' behaviour and attitudes to work, and felt that support for their health, safety, well-being and special educational needs were exemplary. Parents were very happy with the much improved communication between the school and themselves, and felt very well informed through meetings and reports. Almost all parents had positive views about the inspection process although a few were unsure of how the school had responded to the previous inspection. A minority of parents thought that the facilities could be better, especially for sports.

How well does the school perform overall?

Dubai British School was a good school with outstanding features. It was a rapidly improving school which had embraced the inspection process and targeted key areas for improvement well. The school was characterised by an inclusive, caring and purposeful ethos. The school had responded positively and effectively to the recommendations of the previous report with improvements in key areas such as attainment and progress, the curriculum and leadership. The school's determination to overhaul completely, the teaching and status of Arabic, and raise attainment and progress, had begun to pay dividends. The culture of improvement which pervaded the school meant that the capacity to further improve was very high. However, consolidation in key initiatives was now needed to ensure further improvement in key areas such as Arabic and attainment in Foundation Stage and post-16.

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good in all phases apart from secondary and post-16 where progress was acceptable. In Arabic, both as a first and an additional language, attainment and progress were acceptable. English attainment was outstanding in primary and secondary and good in Foundation Stage and post-16. In mathematics and science attainment and progress were outstanding in the primary and secondary phases and good in the Foundation Stage and post-16 phase. The students displayed outstanding attitudes and behaviour. Personal and social development was supported by well-developed systems to ensure health, safety, care and support. The Extended Learning department provided high quality support and challenge for students requiring additional help or extension in their learning. The quality of teaching and learning was good overall but with some inconsistencies in approach. Assessment practices were outstanding and impacted positively on attainment in most key subjects. The curriculum had undergone significant enhancement and was outstanding. The excellent devolved leadership demonstrated a clear vision for ongoing improvement. Staffing, facilities and resources were good overall but growing student numbers were increasing pressure on teaching space.

Key features of the school

- The school had an excellent, inclusive ethos with outstanding relationships between all adults and students, and a high quality of care and support;
- Students had impeccable behaviour, impressive attitudes to work and made a powerful contribution to the school and local community;
- Students' learning was enhanced by an exciting, diverse and rich curriculum and excellent assessment practices including student self-assessment;
- Outstanding leadership and management by senior staff, together with the very clear commitment of all staff, ensured a strong culture of improvement and innovation;
- Partnerships with parents provided a major contribution to students' learning; communication between school and families was outstanding;
- The school's total commitment to improving Islamic Education and Arabic had led to improvements in teaching, learning, attainment and progress.

Recommendations

- Continue to raise attainment in the Foundation Stage and post-16 phase across all subjects, and especially in Arabic, to match the high attainment in the rest of the school;
- Fully embed the progress made in teaching and learning to ensure that all students are independent learners and creative thinkers;
- Further refine the role of subject leaders and co-ordinators to monitor and share best practice across all subjects and phases of the school.

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

Attainment in Islamic Education was good in all phases with good progress in primary and acceptable progress in secondary and Post-16. In primary the majority of students could memorise and recite short chapters from the Holy Qur'an with a few errors and they could explain the meaning of verses. Students in Year 5 understood the value and the benefits of group prayers, especially Friday prayer. In Year 9 the majority of students could explain the concept of belief through their discussions on the meaning of chapters from The Holy Qur'an. Students throughout the school developed their understanding of the behaviour expected of a good Muslim. The progress made by primary school students was better than that of secondary and post-16 students, especially in Qur'an recitation.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were acceptable in the primary and secondary phases. Most students had acceptable speaking skills and could answer questions using limited vocabulary and they occasionally expressed themselves relying on English phrases. Listening skills were acceptable. Students were able to follow familiar instructions correctly. However, a few of the younger students needed the instructions to be translated. The majority of students could read simple sentences with a few errors. By the time students reached Year 11 they were able to read familiar texts with confidence and reasonable comprehension. Across the school most students' skills in extended writing were underdeveloped and limited to a few sentences.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language were acceptable in primary and secondary phases. Most students listened well to teacher instruction with support in translation at times. Students' speaking skills were developing well. They could say simple sentences and repeat simple phrases in response to what they saw from pictures and heard from their teachers. The majority of students could recognise masculine and feminine forms of the words. They could answer simple questions. Almost all students could read a few familiar words based on memory but were dependent on visual prompts or objects to read. Students' writing skills were below expectation across all phases. They could copy words and short sentences but with errors in spelling. Students could not write short sentences accurately independent of the teacher.

Attainment in all aspects of English was good and progress was outstanding in the Foundation Stage. Attainment and progress were outstanding across all aspects of English in the primary and secondary phases and were good at the post-16 phase. GCSE results were well above international averages. By the post-16 phase, attainment in Advanced and AS level was good as the number achieving the higher grades was less than expected. Almost all students across all phases listened very well and older students understood challenging concepts. They spoke confidently using extended vocabulary beyond that expected for their age. By Year 7, students skilfully questioned each others' oral presentations. Almost all students read with accuracy and feeling. They wrote imaginatively, applying appropriate grammar rules in their creative and report writing.

Attainment and progress in mathematics in the Foundation Stage were good. Children knew basic 2D shapes including rectangles and squares; they knew colours and could make a repeat pattern. Primary students' attainment and progress were outstanding; they attained well above international standards in end of key stage tests. Year 6 students could estimate and measure accurately. In the secondary phase attainment and progress were outstanding. GCSE results were well above international levels. Students in Year 11 understood the properties of circles and worked confidently with the related theorems. Attainment and progress at post-16 were good. AS and A-level results were above world averages. Students had developed an understanding of mathematical principles that enabled them to appreciate mathematics as a logical and coherent subject.

Attainment and progress in science were good in the Foundation Stage and post-16 and outstanding in the primary and secondary phases of the school. Foundation Stage children could name parts of the body and applied such knowledge in investigative activities. Most children displayed scientific skills and enquiry in their learning. Primary students understood the importance of fair testing, and had a basic understanding of forces and friction. GCSE results were well above international averages. Secondary and Post-16 students had developed a very good understanding of scientific processes and skills. They knew and understood how metals react with acids. However, at A-level, results were better in biology and physics than they were in chemistry.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were outstanding at all phases. They showed exemplary commitment to learning, particularly when working on self-directed tasks such as researching information or studying in the library. They were courteous and considerate and had very good relationships with each other and with teachers and visitors. They were very knowledgeable about healthy options and made healthy choices in their diet. Attendance was good and punctuality was outstanding.

Students had an outstanding appreciation of the nature of Dubai's economic progress, its place in the UAE and globally. Members of the school council and the Eco-Charity Committee were active in bringing about changes. This team suggested opportunities for enhanced recycling processes around the school and implemented this initiative by involving their peers. Students were very proud to live in Dubai and spoke of its iconic buildings, cultural achievements with knowledge and with high levels of understanding about its unique nature.

Students were active in their commitment to the environment and keen to protect the desert in particular. Students were able to discuss, at a high level, the impact of global and local economic pressures on industries in Dubai, such as the construction industry. They enjoyed the variety and richness that living among so many different nationalities brought to their lives. Various groups such as the Global Community Group were active in making a difference to the local community and international communities through specific charitable and environmental projects. They also cared well for their school.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching across the school was good. Teachers knew their subjects well. Effective planning, open questioning and good support ensured that the needs of students were met in most lessons. Learning was well paced which ensured high levels of engagement, although, in a few lessons, time for students to reflect on their learning was limited. Teachers made excellent use of questioning that challenged students and encouraged their thinking. Critical thinking was a feature of many lessons. Information and communications technology was well used as a tool for learning by both students and staff; for example, interactive whiteboards and laptops

were common features of lessons. A range of teaching strategies was used, including independent, paired and collaborative group work; a good example was seen in Year 2 International Primary Curriculum topics. In the less effective lessons, teachers over-directed students and gave little opportunity for them to contribute and take ownership of their learning. Where this occurred, students became less attentive. On occasions, teaching assistants were not deployed effectively enough to maximise the support for students with special educational needs.

The quality of learning was good. From their very first days in the school, students showed a keenness to take responsibility for their own learning. In a few lessons in Foundation Stage, over-direction by the teacher restricted the independence of the children. In almost all lessons, levels of enjoyment were a feature promoted by the good relationships between students and teachers. Students were able to apply their learning in a variety of ways making use of both the indoor and outdoor environments. For example, Year 6 students improved their ability to estimate measurements by considering aspects of the school grounds and outdoor equipment. There were many instances of students working collaboratively. There was an established culture of everyone as learners. Research and investigation were embedded within the learning process in most lessons. Students used resources well to enable them to make progress. Critical thinking and listening skills were features of lessons; good examples were seen in Year 7 Arabic and Year 6 mathematics.

The quality and use of assessment for learning were outstanding. Throughout the school assessment, including self and peer assessment, formed an integral part of the learning process. The frequency with which the school carried out assessments and the effective systems of recording, ensured highly accurate monitoring and review. For example, in English and French, students understood fully the criteria being used to evaluate their work. They used this these to evaluate each other's presentations. All students were informed of how well they were doing against the assessment measures and what they needed to do to improve. The quality of marking and feedback to all students was comprehensive and gave clear guidance on how to improve. The extensive assessment data ensured that teachers had an extremely good knowledge of individual students' strengths and weaknesses and were able to implement timely intervention strategies.

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

The curriculum was outstanding. It provided coherent, broad and progressive programmes of study in all phases of the school. The school consistently reviewed and amended its curriculum to meet the varying needs of students and to promote independent learning. A thorough analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of students with additional needs had led to excellent intervention on a personalised basis. At the primary phase a combination of the International Primary Curriculum and English National Curriculum effectively encouraged problem-solving and creative learning experiences and linked well with the foundation and secondary programmes of study. Primary students studied science as a discrete subject in

order to maximise progress. Students studying English from Year 7 onwards had been organised in ability groups for better support of their learning. At the secondary and post-16 stages, students benefited from a suitably wide range of course options leading to GCSE, AS level and A-level. Higher attaining and gifted children were able to take external examinations early. The course for Arabic had been improved and students were benefiting from this subject being aligned with the Modern Foreign Languages Department. The school had successfully resolved the time clash between Islamic Education and other subjects in the secondary phase. This enabled students to study this subject for an appropriate period of time while continuing to have a balanced choice of other subjects. An extensive programme of extra-curricular activities and community-based learning opportunities enriched the curriculum across the school.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The arrangements to ensure students' health and safety were outstanding. Bus transport was safe and orderly on arrival and departure. The school maintained a safe and secure environment; buildings were clean, well maintained and fire equipment was updated regularly. Two full-time nurses, a counsellor and a visiting doctor were responsible for the medical welfare of the students and records were maintained and procedures carried out extremely thoroughly. Staff were vigilant, reflective and cared about students' welfare; they anticipated potential hazards and responded effectively to such situations. Students were trained in safe practices and risk assessments were conducted in all required areas. Students were encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles through personal and social education, physical activities and the healthy choices of food from the school cafeteria. Members of staff were clear on child protection procedures which were very comprehensive and sensitively followed.

The quality of support provided by the school was outstanding. Very positive relationships existed between teachers and students. Teachers were responsive to the range of students' needs. The leadership structure of the school ensured that all the social, emotional, academic and career guidance needs of the students were met. Comprehensive assessment and tracking systems enabled teachers to track the progress of individual students and provide meaningful targets for further development. This data was also used to support, modify and extend individual students' learning. Those not reaching expectations were identified and given additional support, as were those students who required extension or restriction of the curriculum. Effective systems were in place to monitor punctuality and attendance.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was outstanding. Under the innovative and incisive leadership of the Principal and senior staff, the school continued to develop the curriculum, teaching and learning. Recent initiatives had already had impact on students' outcomes. This was notable in Arabic where improvements had resulted in students being more motivated to learn the language. The dedicated and collegiate approach of all senior leaders ensured that staff were valued highly and empowered to bring about change. All staff showed professional attitudes to their work. Students appreciated staff as positive role models. The senior leadership team was integral to developing the excellent atmosphere that pervaded the school. This ethos led to a calm, focused and cohesive approach to school improvement.

The school had a good understanding of its own strengths and weaknesses, and drew up comprehensive and evidence-based action plans to address any concerns promptly and effectively. For example, senior and subject leaders had completely overhauled the timetabling and length of the school day to ensure higher status and better positioning of Arabic and Islamic Education in the curriculum. This initiative, together with careful assessment of the Arabic language levels of students, had ensured more effective groupings and improved motivation and progress of students. The leadership had also involved inspirational external experts to lead training and development sessions in the school. Nevertheless, self-evaluation processes and data analysis required further refinement to ensure the range of initiatives are fully embedded and applied consistently.

Partnerships with parents and the local community were outstanding. Communication with families was regular, very informative and much appreciated by parents. Parents felt that they were listened to and that their opinions made a difference. Parents responded very positively to the creation of the Advisory Board and had been at the centre of the initiative to lengthen the school day. Parents supported their children well at home with their learning, if necessary, and many were directly involved in supporting learning in school especially in reading and swimming.

Governance was good. The Foundation Board provided a comprehensive system of support linked tightly to the school's needs and enabled cross-school initiatives. The Principal was responsible for the school's development, but worked closely with the parents, directly and through the Advisory Board, to ensure quality. The Foundation Board held the school to account and was involved in major decisions. The Board was responsive to the Principal's request for increased staffing for Arabic and it acted effectively as a critical friend. The school had extended governance to include representatives from all stakeholders, for example community members. It was now in a strong position to increase the decision-making role to include the Advisory Board at a more strategic level and so achieve full accountability.

Staffing, facilities and resources were good. Staff were well-qualified, experienced and committed to students' learning. Experts in special educational needs and additional language learning enhanced and supported learning. In the earlier years, the more experienced teaching assistants provided good support for students with additional needs. Rigorous recruitment practices had led to some strategic teaching and leadership appointments. Premises and specialist facilities were well maintained and very effectively utilised to support, promote and enhance students' learning. Space was used effectively. However, as the number of students was growing year on year, facilities such as science laboratories and the sports fields were beginning to restrict learning. The school managed well without a dedicated area for school assemblies. The school had recognised the need for a wider selection of Arabic books in both school libraries.

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	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
4% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding	Good
Progress over time	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding	Good
Progress over time	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding	Good
Progress over time	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attitudes and behaviour	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Good	Outstanding
Economic and environmental understanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

How good are teaching and learning?

Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

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

Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Curriculum quality	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of support	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

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

How well does the school perform overall?
Good

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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