

Sharjah American International School Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 12

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.

Sharjah American International school was inspected in January 2011 as part of the regular inspection of all schools in Dubai. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated students' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on students' progress in Islamic Education (for Muslim students), Arabic, English, mathematics and science.

Basic information about the school

Located in Al Warqaa, Sharjah American International School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to Grade 12 aged three to 18 years. The school follows a US curriculum. At the time of the inspection there were 894 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

As part of the inspection process, Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires issued to parents. A low percentage of parents responded to the on-line survey. Almost all parents were satisfied with the school overall, with only a few areas of concern being noted. Parents felt that communication between the school and the home was good and they appreciated the development of the new internet portal which enabled them to be more involved in their children's learning. Whilst most parents felt teaching was good overall, a few were concerned about the quality of teaching in Islamic Education and Arabic. Parents felt that the school kept their children safe and secure.

How well does the school perform overall?

Sharjah American International School provided an acceptable quality of education overall. The Principal, working with the senior leadership team and the governing board, had responded to all recommendations from the previous report. Continual improvement was planned for and the school's priorities were based on an in-depth analysis of its previous performance.

Student attainment and progress were acceptable in Islamic Education across all phases apart from high school where progress was unsatisfactory. In Arabic as a first language attainment was good in elementary and acceptable at other stages. Progress was acceptable in elementary and middle and good in high school. Attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language were acceptable. Students' attainment and progress English was acceptable in all phases apart from the high school where they were good. In mathematics attainment was acceptable across the school as was progress in Kindergarten and elementary. Progress in middle and high school was good. In science, attainment and progress were acceptable across all phases and progress was good in the high school. The quality of teaching for effective learning was acceptable except in the high school where it was good. Leadership was good with a clear vision and good capacity for improvement.

Key features of the school

- A significant commitment to improvement had resulted in a greater focus on learning and improved health and safety;
- Relationships between students were positive and supportive;
- There was inconsistent delivery of the Arabic curriculum;
- An increase in the number of students in the upper grades was impacting on student attainment;
- A majority of students had English as an additional language.

Recommendations

- Continue the focus on raising attainment and progress in all key subjects;
- Improve the development of skills in Arabic and English, including reading comprehension and writing;
- Ensure consistency in relating student learning to the real world;
- Identify a shared vision for what effective teaching in the school and consistently share good practice across all phases of the school;
- Make better use of student attainment data to inform planning and improve learning;
- Use available test results to effectively identify curriculum areas to be strengthened in addition to measuring student learning; Expand governance to include parents and ensure there is a formal process for including their views.

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

Students' attainment and progress were acceptable in Islamic Education, apart from in high school, where progress was unsatisfactory. The majority of students in the lower grades made acceptable progress in learning about the basic principles and Pillars of Islam. They made acceptable progress in learning key facts about Prophet Mohammad's early life (PBUH) and recited a few short chapters of The Holy Qur'an from memory. In middle and high school, the majority of students continued to develop their knowledge and understanding of the forms of worship in Islam and of the meaning of Hadeeth studied. However, students' ability to link what they were learning to their own lives at school and in the wider world was less well developed, particularly in the girls' section in the high school. Students in the high school did not make the progress of which they were capable.

Students' attainment in Arabic as a first language was good in elementary and acceptable in middle and high school. Their progress was acceptable in elementary and middle and good in high school. Most students in elementary read well and pronounced Arabic accurately. Handwriting and spelling skills were also good; they followed and responded to instruction in standard Arabic to a good level. The majority of students in middle school developed their knowledge of grammar, steadily increased their vocabulary and wrote short paragraphs. In high school, most students improved their application of grammar and their understanding of poetry. However, extended writing and independent reading skills were less well developed.

Students' attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language were acceptable in elementary, middle and high school. Across all grades, most students made good progress in identifying letters and words in Arabic script. Their handwriting was legible and their pronunciation of words and short phrases was accurate. They steadily increased their knowledge of an appropriate range of vocabulary. They developed their understanding of a few basic grammar rules well and could follow instructions in Arabic. Student's ability to use the vocabulary they had learnt to effectively communicate in Arabic, whether orally or in writing was less well developed.

Attainment and progress in English were acceptable in kindergarten, elementary, and middle school levels and good in high school. Listening and speaking skills were developing appropriately for learners of English as a second language at all levels. A majority of students in early grades, Kindergarten to Grade 2, could read orally with acceptable accuracy. A majority of students in Grades 1 to 8 developed reading vocabulary and comprehension skills at an average level and attainment was in the low average range. Reading test scores of high school students were typically higher. Most students across the levels could organise ideas and compose writing with good fluency, although the quality of the writing was variable. Writing and speaking skills of most high school students were good. On average, girls were more advanced than boys in their reading and writing skills.

Attainment in mathematics was acceptable across the school. Progress was acceptable in Kindergarten and elementary grades and good in the middle and high school grades. In

Kindergarten children could count, read and write numbers securely to 20, create repeating patterns and identify basic 2-D shapes. Grade 6 students were developing the ability to use the four processes to calculate decimals. In Grades 7 and 8, most students made acceptable progress in solving increasingly difficult equations. In Grade 9, a large majority of students made good progress in finding the magnitude and direction of a vector and knew the relevance of this in the real world. A majority of students were able to solve increasingly complex problems and, by Grade 12, they could find the derivative of a function starting from the definition.

Students' attainment and progress in science was acceptable across all stages, except for progress at the high school level which was good. Kindergarten children had limited scientific skills. Most children in Kindergarten 2 knew the life cycle of a butterfly and relevant vocabulary and facts. Most elementary students knew facts about the solar system and were able to perform simple teacher led experiments. Most middle school students had an acceptable level of understanding of scientific terms such as 'ionic bonds' and 'electrons' and 'protons.' Senior high school students actively completed laboratory and class work on geothermic cycles and resistors in series and parallel circuits. Students in the elementary and middle school had under-developed skills and understanding of the scientific process.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Attitudes and behaviour were acceptable in Kindergarten and middle school and good in elementary and high school. Good behaviour and friendly, courteous attitudes prevailed in Kindergarten, elementary, and high school grades and in middle school girls' classes. Average attendance was low in Kindergarten and acceptable at other levels. Behaviour in the middle school grades was acceptable due to the conduct of boys at times. Most students at all levels expressed an understanding of healthy food and exercise habits.

Students' civic understanding, their appreciation of Islam and local cultures and traditions were acceptable in Kindergarten and elementary and good in middle and high school. Most students had good awareness of the diverse nature of Dubai's population. They also had good understanding of the impact of this on their lives inside and outside school. They had a good appreciation of Islam and the UAE identity. They were keen to contribute to Dubai's development through their future occupations and were happy to carry out roles of responsibility such as membership of the student council when opportunity was provided. Their knowledge of Dubai's history and local heritage was at an acceptable level.

Economic and environmental understanding was acceptable in Kindergarten and elementary and good in the middle and high school. Almost all students could communicate age-appropriate understanding of the uniqueness of Dubai and its successes. They were positive about how they might contribute to the continuing success of Dubai. Almost all students had a good understanding of Dubai's development and of recent changes. Most students kept the school clean and tidy. Many students participated in activities to improve the environment. They expressed an awareness of the need to conserve the earth's resources.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching was acceptable in Kindergarten, elementary and middle and good in the high school. A greater focus on learning meant that examples of good practice were evident in all phases. In the best lessons, teachers' outstanding subject knowledge and their awareness of students' learning styles were used to plan purposeful and enjoyable lessons. They created an environment in which students, including those with special educational needs, learned from each other through talk partners, play and practical activities. They used resources and technology to motivate students and to develop a deeper understanding of abstract concepts. In this rich and supportive climate, most students were active learners and made good progress. Teaching was less effective and progress limited in lessons where there was an over-reliance on text books, work-sheets and teacher-talk, with limited opportunity for students to investigate and discover for themselves. Teachers did not provide sufficient opportunities for personal reading in Arabic and English and for extended writing in Arabic.

Learning was acceptable in the Kindergarten, elementary and middle grades and good in the higher grades. Almost all students displayed positive attitudes and a desire to learn. They were confident in explaining their ideas and in asking for clarification. In all grades, students enjoyed working with their classmates. Students in Grade 6 developed skills in calculation of decimals through role play. Most middle and high school students enjoyed the challenge of teaching and making presentations and in so doing developed their confidence and communication skills. In the middle and higher grades students were increasingly able to see the relevance and application of their learning to the real world. In a few lessons students were unclear about expectations and so became de-motivated and disengaged.

Assessment was acceptable across the school. In the best lessons, teachers checked students' understanding through skilful questioning and corrected misconceptions to reinforce learning before moving on. Students received verbal feedback, but their books were not consistently marked and rarely provided useful guidance on how to improve. Data from regular tests were recorded to provide evidence of attainment. This information was not used by all departments to review the curriculum or to identify areas for improvement. Similarly, data were not used consistently to monitor students' progress over time and to adapt lesson plans to ensure all students extended their learning. Whilst the school had a wealth of data about students' attainment, it did not yet have a clear view of how this compared with students' attainment internationally.

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

The quality of the curriculum was acceptable in Kindergarten and good in all other phases. The curriculum, except for Islamic Education and Arabic, had been recently reviewed and developed and was based on the common core standards adopted by U.S. states. The curriculum was challenging, had breadth and balance, and continuity led to good student preparation for higher levels. Staff reflected on students' acquisition of specific skills and

adjusted the delivery of curriculum accordingly. Practical applications such as simulated real-life mathematics activities were commonly included. Cross-curricular links supported coherence between subjects. The development of skills in mathematics was organised well to support mathematical operations in science. All students participated in physical activities. Numerous extra-curricular activities were available, including sports, clubs, charitable projects, and campaigns such as anti-smoking. Students developed creative skills in art and design. Choice within lessons was common in mathematics and English lessons. Field trips and community events, such as a visit to a home for the elderly, drew students, school, and community together. The kindergarten curriculum did not provide frequent opportunities for student choice and creativity. The Arabic curriculum did not sufficiently provide for independent writing and development of a range of writing skills and styles, nor did it strongly develop reading and comprehension skills.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The quality of health and safety was good which was an improvement since the last inspection. Buildings and equipment were safe and the school was maintained to a high standard of cleanliness and hygiene. The school had improved evacuation procedures. Students were well supervised at the beginning and end of the day and the revised procedures for student drop-off and pick-up had improved safety. Healthy living was promoted by the nutritious food available in the cafeteria. However, arrangements for elementary students to eat their food at break time were inappropriate. Posters around school and opportunities for sports activities reinforced healthy lifestyle choices. Older students worked with a local sports club to provide information on the risks of smoking to the local community. There were systematic and rigorous procedures for recording incidents and monitoring students' health. Medical staff shared information with teachers about issues which might affect students' learning. A child protection policy was in place and staff had taken part in a workshop related to this issue.

The quality of support was acceptable. Students' well being was a high priority. Behaviour management was effective and students felt safe in school. There were positive relationships between staff and students. Support systems were in place for students with special educational needs, and this was effective in ensuring their academic and social needs were met. Counselling was available to students together with advice on future careers and university admission. Teachers had begun to track students' academic progress, but insufficient use was made of this information to ensure improvement in attainment. Procedures to encourage good attendance were not always effective and attendance was low in some grades.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership and management was good. The Principal displayed a good understanding of present and future needs and gave good direction. Senior leaders worked well as a team to promote curriculum improvement and professional development for teaching staff. They also shared a common vision and showed the capacity to devise strategies for further improvement. Since the last inspection, there was an observable change in emphasis from teacher-centred to student-centred learning which was beginning to impact positively on attainment.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning was good and the school had effectively addressed almost all of the recommendations from the previous inspection report. Self-evaluation which included all staff, was beginning to impact on the curriculum, teaching and learning at most levels. Leaders took prompt and effective action in response to data findings and this had led to improvements in, for example, the curriculum. Additional assessment materials had been purchased which enabled teachers to begin to compare students' attainment against international benchmarks.

The partnerships with parents and the community were acceptable. Most parents expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the school, the school staff and its policies. The new Internet portal received positive comments, because it enabled parents to be more actively involved with their children's education. The school communicated effectively to parents through regular reports on student progress. Links with the wider community impacted positively on the curriculum and students' learning.

Governance was acceptable and adequately supported the school's mission statement and ensured statutory requirements were met. Although a wider representation on the governance committee, beyond the ownership of the school, was a positive step, there was still no formal procedure for widening representation to include parents. However, the governors were accessible to parents through regular visits to the school.

The staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable. Key staff positions in counselling and student learning support had strengthened overall student support. The facilities, premises and resources were well maintained. The addition of a second science laboratory enhanced the curriculum and enabled all students in Grades 1 to 12 to benefit from weekly practical science lessons which had enhanced their understanding of the scientific process. Most students, with the exception of Grades 11 and 12, had limited access to ICT to enhance and extend their learning. The library as a resource portal enhanced the opportunities for student investigation into lesson topics and complemented the career guidance offered to upper grade students.

Summary of inspection judgements

In their evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the school, the inspection team made judgements about the following aspects of the school's performance.

Four descriptors are: Outstanding; Good; Acceptable; Unsatisfactory.

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education?

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?

74% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
	Overall
Quality of leadership	Good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Acceptable
Governance	Acceptable
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:
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More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at www.khda.gov.ae.

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