

Dubai International School - Al Garhoud 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.

Dubai International School - Al Garhoud 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 Garhoud, Dubai International School - Al Garhoud is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to Grade 12, aged three to eighteen years. The school follows a US curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 2487 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

As part of the inspection process, DSIB analysed responses to on-line questionnaires issued to parents. Most parents expressed satisfaction with the quality of education provided by the school and thought that the school was well led. Almost all believed that the school kept their children safe and most felt that it responded appropriately to parental concerns. Most considered the quality of teaching to be good and the majority felt that their child's enjoyment of lessons and enthusiasm for learning were good. A majority of parents stated that their child required a lot of additional help at home with their study. The majority did not know if the school had responded positively to the recommendations of the previous inspection report. The same proportion thought that parents were effectively involved in the work of the school. A significant minority felt that the school should focus on improving the quality of teaching.

How well does the school perform overall?

The school continued to provide an acceptable quality of education although there were weaknesses in certain aspects. The school had made acceptable progress towards addressing a few of the recommendations from the previous inspection. With the support of the school Board of Directors, the school was well placed to continue to improve.

Students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic as a first language were good in elementary and acceptable in the middle and high school. Attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language was acceptable, overall. Attainment and progress in English were good in Kindergarten and high school and acceptable in elementary and middle. Attainment in mathematics was good at Kindergarten and elementary and acceptable at middle and high. Progress was good at Kindergarten, elementary and high school and acceptable at middle. Attainment and progress in science were good at Kindergarten and acceptable at all other stages. The quality of teaching for effective learning was good in Kindergarten and acceptable at the other stages. The school demonstrated acceptable capacity to improve.

Key features of the school

- The school provided a good start to students' education in the Kindergarten department;
- Staff were committed to the care and support of students;
- The school had made good progress in exploring methods of benchmarking students' attainment against international standards;
- Learning experiences were inconsistent across subjects and grades;
- The school emphasised delegated leadership but the roles and responsibilities of senior and middle leaders were unclear.
- Self-evaluation and improvement planning lacked rigour.

Recommendations

- Focus clearly on improving the quality of teaching to ensure consistency of high quality learning across all grades and subjects;
- Address consistently, the learning needs of all students in the classroom, supporting those experiencing difficulties and offering higher attaining students appropriate challenge;
- Ensure a more systematic system of whole school improvement, ensuring the active involvement of leaders at all levels;
- Build on the progress made in international benchmarking and assessment to focus more clearly on the analysis of data to ensure accurate target-setting to improve attainment;
- Ensure students' safety from buses and traffic and in evacuation procedures.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good in the elementary school, while in the middle and high schools, they were acceptable. In the elementary grades, most students had good knowledge of the key principles of Islam. They understood the five Pillars of Islam and knew the conditions of prayer. Across the school, most students had good knowledge of the Prophet's life (PBUH) and understood Islamic values in the verses they learnt from The Holy Qur'an and the Prophet's sayings. Most students developed a good understanding of the behaviour and manners expected of a good Muslim. However, the majority of high school students did not always apply the rules of Qur'an recital correctly. Critical thinking skills were under-developed.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were good in elementary and acceptable in middle and high school. Students made good progress with their listening skills, particularly in the lower grades. Speaking skills were in line with expectations. The majority of students were able to answer direct questions. However, students' ability to give extended answers to probing questions was less well developed. Students made good progress in their reading skills in elementary while progress in reading comprehension skills were acceptable in the high school. Students' ability to infer, deduce and evaluate a text was under-developed. Students' writing skills, including spelling, developed well in elementary. High school students were able to write about a range of topics.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language were acceptable. Students' language skills were in line with expectations in relation to the years of study. In elementary, students' listening skills were the most developed as they were able to interact in lessons conducted fully in standard Arabic. Speaking skills were less well-developed, as most students usually spoke in colloquial Arabic. Upper grade students had acceptable reading comprehension skills and could answer direct questions in full sentences. Students' skills in writing for a purpose were not fully developed. Overall, in the middle and high school, students were not making progress of which they were capable in their language skills.

Attainment and progress in English were good in Kindergarten and high school and acceptable in elementary and middle. In Kindergarten, almost all students listened well, developed good phonics skills and responded accurately to instructions. They made good progress from starting points of limited English. Grade 3 students made good oral presentations on their knowledge of animals and worked well in groups to design paragraphs. Elementary students used an expanding vocabulary, recited poetry and recognised character development and themes in literature. Middle school students could analyse poetry well. High school students could express complex ideas, write extended essays and investigate topics for research, using advanced strategies of writing and editing. Grade 11 and 12 girls displayed advanced English skills during a debate on the subject of animal testing in scientific research.

In mathematics, attainment and progress were good in Kindergarten and elementary school. Attainment and progress were acceptable in the middle school. In the high school, attainment

was acceptable and progress good. Children in Kindergarten could write numbers, count accurately and identify simple geometric shapes and colours. In elementary school, students could work in number with accuracy, making good use of mental strategies. Grade 9 students identified prime and composite numbers. High school students demonstrated good skills of enquiry and progressed well. Almost all students were competent in reaching accurate solutions but did not think critically about different strategies.

In science, attainment and progress in Kindergarten were good and, in elementary, middle and high school, they were acceptable. In school-based tests, most students attained levels in line with the curriculum standards. In Kindergarten, children developed knowledge of growth and change and could identify healthy foods. In Grade 1, students made accurate observations to record changes in weather. Elementary students did not always develop appropriate skills in scientific method. Similarly, in the middle school, students knew scientific facts but were lacking in the skills required for investigation. In laboratory work students observed, discussed and recorded but did not predict which meant that their ability to draw conclusions was limited.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good in all phases apart from in the middle school where they were acceptable. Girls displayed greater maturity than boys, but most students behaved well in classes and around the school. During the inspection week, most students were enthusiastic about their anti-bullying campaign. Good relationships with staff, built on mutual respect, were evident in many classes. However, there were a few instances where relationships were disrespectful and hampered students' learning. Attendance was good but punctuality was a concern. A few students arrived late to morning assembly, disrupting the programme during the national anthem and recitations.

Students' civic responsibility, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and cultures were good in all phases. Most students responded well to responsibilities at school, for example, as members of the students' council. Overall, however, insufficient opportunities existed at all stages for students to take leadership roles in school. In all phases, most students were able to talk confidently about the heritage of the UAE. Students demonstrated a good understanding of the importance of Islam in contemporary society.

Most students' economic and environmental understanding was good. Almost all students knew the history of how Dubai had developed and understood the recent changes. They expressed their desire to get a good education and make contributions to the continued success of Dubai. A few attended economic seminars and took part in Young Entrepreneurs' competitions. Most students looked after the school environment and cared about local and global environmental issues. Most participated enthusiastically in the school's recycling efforts and joined campaigns to conserve resources.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching for effective learning was good in Kindergarten and acceptable in the elementary, middle and high school phases. The quality of teaching varied considerably throughout the school. Most teachers had good subject knowledge but an inconsistent understanding of how students learn best. The quality of lesson planning was variable and frequently did not meet the different learning needs of students. Lessons were mostly text-book driven with limited use of additional resources and information and communications technology (ICT). Where teaching was effective, well-planned work, a variety of well-structured activities and good time management challenged and engaged students, for example in high school English. Kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers also created an especially supportive learning environment but elsewhere there was inconsistency in the quality of interactions between teachers and students. Questioning was often aimed at the class rather than targeted to individuals. There was an over-reliance throughout the school, on whole-class teaching and lessons were too teacher directed.

The quality of students' learning was good in Kindergarten and acceptable in the elementary, middle and high schools. Kindergarten and Grade 1 students participated enthusiastically, interacting well with each other. Most students throughout the school had positive attitudes, particularly in elementary Islamic Education and in a few Grade 11 and 12 subjects. Where teaching was less effective for instance, in Grades 7 to 12 many students lacked interest and were passive learners, rarely interacting with teachers. Throughout the school, students demonstrated good collaboration when given the opportunity to work in groups. Students overall, however, were too dependent on their teachers, with too few opportunities to work independently. A majority of students were able to make connections between their learning and applications in the real world. In English, senior high school students showed good research and presentation skills. Generally, however, students showed limited independent research skills and had too few opportunities to be independent in their learning or develop critical thinking.

Assessment was acceptable throughout the school. Teachers in all grades had a good knowledge of their students' strengths and weaknesses. They used a variety of internal and external assessments to evaluate student attainment but there was a lack of expertise in analysing the information about student performance and using it to address the needs of individuals and agree learning targets. Daily observation records enabled good tracking of progress in Kindergarten. Overall, the quality of marking and feedback to students varied and the majority of workbooks and homework tasks had few constructive comments to help students know how to improve.

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

The quality of the curriculum was good. The curriculum provided an appropriate breadth and balance, with a clear rationale based on creating confident young people. A curriculum review committee met regularly to evaluate programmes. This committee took account of the views of students and parents, gained through surveys carried out by the students' council and the Principal. The school had continued to strive to meet the needs of all students but recognised that this was an on-going process. While most students' needs were met, there were still students who did not have an appropriately full programme, for example, those who did not take Islamic Education. Continuity and progression from Kindergarten to Grade 12 was effectively managed through the phase and subject co-ordinators, who met regularly. Programmes were planned to ensure a smooth transition between phases, aided by the academic advisors who had a good knowledge of the students in their care. Good cross-curricular planning was implemented well in most subjects, particularly in English, mathematics and science. Some students had regular morning assemblies, giving them the opportunity to celebrate achievements and reflect upon important issues. However, this opportunity was not available to high school students. A good extra-curricular programme included a number of sporting activities. There was also a range of clubs that students could subscribe to, such as art and music. Students made visits to a wide variety of venues such as the zoo, museums and businesses. A recent positive development had been the introduction of internships to enable senior students to experience an extended period of working in a hospital.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety arrangements in the school were good. Premises and facilities were checked regularly by a maintenance team and there were good record keeping and monitoring procedures. The school ensured that staff and students were aware of evacuation procedures and regular fire drills were held. Effective medical arrangements were in place. Staff knew the schools' child protection arrangements and parents and students could find information on the school's web-site. Healthy living was promoted. The canteen provided several healthy food options. Bus transport was well organised but better supervision was needed to ensure the safety of students boarding and leaving buses and private cars. Classrooms in the middle and high school were crowded and school bags were a hazard to safe evacuation. Evacuation arrangements from specific areas needed to be reviewed.

The quality of support was good in Kindergarten and acceptable in the elementary, middle and high schools. Staff-student relationships were mostly positive but a few teachers needed to ensure more positive interactions with students to support their learning and progress. The careers co-ordinator provided regular information and guidance regarding future education and career paths. Supervisors cared for individual students well. An academic advisor supported students with special needs effectively. Students' progress was tracked in terms of grades in tests but this information was not analysed well or linked to improvement. There was

inconsistent behaviour management by the school, resulting, for example, in the disruptive behaviour of a few middle school boys. There was graffiti in a few toilets, on walls and on desks. Significant numbers of students arrived late in the morning. This was sometimes recorded but with unclear consequences. Consequences of persistent lateness were unclear.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership and management was acceptable. Senior staff showed commitment to improvement and there were clear roles and responsibilities in ensuring middle managers received on-going professional development. The Principal had established and maintained a positive culture of improvement within the school. However, the vision for the school's future development was still unclear. The management of whole school improvement was not sufficiently systematic and rigorous and did not involve all leaders at all levels with clear lines of responsibility in evaluating and improving.

The quality of self-evaluation was acceptable, overall. The school had put in place certain processes which enabled it to evaluate areas of its work with a focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. These included a programme of classroom observations, analysis of a range of assessment data, regular meetings at various levels and end of year discussions. Currently, self-evaluation focused effectively on the improvement of individual teachers, and the improvement of student attainment. However, a more precise whole school improvement plan was needed to underpin this process, with a major focus on ensuring consistency of teaching and learning across classrooms and a progressive and broad development of learning skills across the stages.

The quality of partnership with parents and the community was good. The school ensured good communication with parents. It kept them well informed about their child's education and sought their views annually through questionnaires. The Mother's Council formed an effective link with the parents and was well involved with the school through meetings with leaders. The school did not place sufficient emphasis on informing parents about its plans for improvement. It had developed a number of effective links with the community.

The quality of governance was good and the school's partnership with the Board of Directors was a supportive one. The Board set out policy and strategies with the school's involvement and the quality of dialogue between them underpinned the school's overall development. Through on-going meetings and direct and regular contact with the representative of the Governing Board and the General Director, the Board contributed positively to the development of the school and held it to account for standards. The Mothers' Council was beginning to make a positive contribution to the governance of the school.

The quality of staffing, facilities and resources was acceptable overall. There were sufficient teachers suitably qualified to cover all subjects and sections. The premises were generally fit for purpose and provided an appropriate learning environment. Kindergarten rooms were bright and stimulating. Sports facilities included a swimming pool, games pitches and large

games hall which were well utilised. However, the majority of rooms in middle and high school were too small and created very cramped conditions for learning. There were insufficient ICT facilities to enable students to use the technology as an integral part of the learning process and existing resources were too limited to promote independent learning effectively.

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	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
94% 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	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
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	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Progress over time	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

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

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Good	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Good	Good	Acceptable	Good

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

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Acceptable	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good

How good are teaching and learning?

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
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	Good	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	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

	Overall
Quality of leadership	Acceptable
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.

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