

Dubai International Private School Al Garhoud Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 12

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.

Dubai International School was inspected in February 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 Al Garhoud, Dubai International School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 12, aged four to 18 years. The school follows an American curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 2,463 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. Parents were very supportive of the school and reported that communications with the school were good. Parents felt staff had high expectations for their children to work hard and do their best and liked the school because it was a caring and welcoming place. Some parents reported they have no way of knowing how their children compared academically to students in similar schools and countries. Some parents questioned the large class sizes at some levels.

How well does the school perform overall?

The Dubai International School was acceptable overall. Attainment in Islamic Education and Arabic were good in the elementary grades and acceptable in the middle and high schools. In the elementary school most students had a good knowledge of Islam and a functional understanding of Arabic. Attainment in English was acceptable in the KG, elementary and the middle grades and good in high school. Much of the most proficient English was produced in response to literary stimuli. Attainment and progress in mathematics were good in KG and elementary and, together with science throughout, acceptable in middle and high schools. The attitudes and behaviour of students from KG to high school were good, extremely positive and welcoming. The students' civic and Islamic understanding was good throughout the school and students at all levels had a good understanding of the environmental and economic characteristics of Dubai.

Teaching for effective learning was good in the KG and high school, with outstanding qualities, and acceptable in the elementary and middle schools. Teachers' subject knowledge was good, but there was a lack of understanding among many teachers of how students learn best. Effective questioning at higher levels of understanding was evident in the higher achieving classes. Learning was good in KG and acceptable in all other grades. The KG staff assessed students regularly and lessons reflected the developmental levels of the students. Where learning was effective the lessons reflected a high degree of student engagement and good teacher facilitation, with minimal teacher talk. Assessment was acceptable across all levels. The school's use of good systems of data collection monitored student progress. However, there were no external measures used to compare students' progress against others in similar curricula and countries. The curriculum was good overall. Although there was some over-reliance on text books which contained material that was not relevant to students' experience, the majority of teachers carefully chose extra texts and attempted to adapt the material appropriately. This was especially apparent in Grades 11 and 12 English classes where teachers selected the most relevant and stimulating extracts, from internationally recognised writers, to raise successfully the quality of students' learning. There was a good range of extra-curricular activities and visits across the phases; the visits were often environmentally oriented or involved visits to the school by specialist professionals. Arrangements for ensuring students' health and safety were good across the school. Significant progress had been made in the action plans developed by the school in response to the previous inspection, by compiling a school safety action plan. Three key indicators had been identified for fire hazard preparedness, bus safety and hygiene. The quality of support was good in KG and acceptable across the other grades. The supervisors, social advisor and academic advisors collaborated with the classroom teachers to support students with academic, behavioural, or personal counselling needs. Supervisors monitored student attendance and matters of punctuality and detailed records were kept.

The quality of leadership was acceptable in the school. Individuals were capable and dedicated to their role as school leaders. Senior leadership worked diligently addressing recommendations in previous report and evaluations by an external certifying organization had been used to help develop the vision of the school.

Key features of the school

- Students' good social and personal development throughout the school;
- Good and sometimes outstanding teaching and learning in KG and in other specific areas;
- Good follow-through with the school action plan based on the previous report with particular reference to curriculum and health and safety.

Recommendations

- Raise attainment and improve progress in all subjects;
- Improve teaching and learning in the middle school;
- Investigate student management software to organise and effectively use available student data for instructional improvement;
- Explore internationally accepted assessments to ensure all student information is benchmarked;
- Expand counselling services to ensure all students have access to information regarding breadth of post graduation opportunities.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education in elementary school were good, while in middle and high school they were acceptable. In the elementary school most of students had good knowledge about Islam such as the prayer, prophets and the angels; they could recite a good number of verses of The Holy Qur'an with confidence, clarity and accuracy and they recited confidently and understood the meaning of Hadeeth. In middle and high school the boys did better than the girls, the majority of whom could memorise and recite the verses of The Holy Qur'an and understood the general meaning. Across the school few students understood their Muslim responsibility and duties.

In elementary school, progress and attainment in Arabic were good while acceptable in middle and high school. In Grade 1, students were able to write letters and familiar words and they could recognise them in simple sentences. In Grade 3 most students could read fluently and could use words in new contexts. In Grade 6 students had a solid knowledge of grammar. In Grade 7 the majority of students were capable of understanding the passages and analyzing the main ideas. In Grade 9 students could read poetry confidently. In higher grades students could identify the figures of speech but writing throughout school was underdeveloped. However, reading was good in general.

English was acceptable in the KG, in elementary and in the middle school and good in the high school. The children in KG understood and liked to speak in English. In the elementary phase students were enthusiastic about reading aloud, both in groups and individually. The majority read well, though others in a stilted way. In Grade 5, students displayed mastery of fairly extensive vocabulary; they were able to understand and explain quite difficult words. The boys in Grade 6 acted out a version of "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" with conviction and obvious enjoyment and in Grades 7 to 9 students were able to explain and describe concepts in front of the class with confidence. Standards varied in Grades 11 and 12. A few Grade 11 boys did not enunciate carefully, while a few in Grade 12 could write extensively for a specific purpose and could debate the differences between the protagonists in Moby Dick.

Children in KG knew number operations, could write numbers and count in sequence. They could also recognise geometric shapes. Elementary students calculated with whole numbers, fractions and decimals, using mathematical terms correctly and completing mental mathematic activities. Grades 7 to 12 students computed number facts quickly and accurately, knew formulae for finding midpoints of line segments, proofs for parallelograms, integration using substitution and how to calculate and represent a reference angle. A few high school students worked independently using information and communication technology (ICT) and achieved a good level of understanding. Discussion and higher order questioning and answer sessions was used effectively to explore complex elements.

Attainment and progress in science was acceptable in all phases, except KG where progress was good. In KG children understood the broad concepts such as life cycles and made progress through exploration using senses and guided discovery. Elementary students knew key terms and described simple concepts, but a majority could not demonstrate a deep understanding of some complex concepts such as the earth's rotation. In middle school students were knowledgeable about concepts and formulae. However a majority were unable to revise conclusions or explanations based on logic and evidence. Secondary students could apply their knowledge and understanding especially through practical application; however, analytical skills were underdeveloped, for example when justifying solutions in multiple ways.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good across the school. Upper school students in particular showed a highly commendable level of maturity and self-discipline, which contributed to a consistently constructive ethos in the classroom. Relationships between students and teachers were very positive and clearly based on mutual respect. Students were considerate and encouraging towards each other in all situations, and this fostered a sense of wellbeing and harmony throughout the school community. Students welcomed visitors with a spontaneous warmth and confidence and showed pride in the school. Attendance was good but students were not always punctual especially to the first lesson of the day.

Students' civic responsibility, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and culture were good in all phases except the high school where they were outstanding. Most students were happy to take on positions of responsibility, which they performed well inside and outside the classes. They showed that they understood their responsibilities at school as lead students and as members of the student council. In high school almost all were able to talk about their heritage, for example, of pearl diving and some of the traditions of the UAE, such as the local sport 'Al Youla', horse and camel racing. Students' understanding of Islam was good. They demonstrated a good understanding of Islam's values and were able to talk about the role of Islam in Dubai's culture.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good. Students could articulate that Dubai was a fast developing city with implications resulting from the rapid growth. They understood the importance of education and planned to contribute in the future to the education, technology, engineering, medical, and law, architecture and events management industries. Students were aware of local and global environmental issues and they knew that Dubai passed laws against littering, promoted recycling and had recently opened the metro to ease traffic and reduce pollution.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching for effective learning was good in KG and high school and acceptable in the elementary and middle schools. There was a wide variety of teaching quality. Teachers' subject knowledge was good, but there was a lack of understanding among the majority of teachers of how students learned best. Where teaching quality was high, such as in English and mathematics, teachers questioned deeply, facilitated purposeful discussion and ensured students had sufficient resources available. They paced their communication well and had appropriate levels of challenge for all students and could show a sound analysis of the learning outcomes of each lesson. In general however, teachers relied too much on the textbook and did not share appropriate learning objectives with the students. Here also, they questioned in a manner where it was easier for the higher achieving students to answer. In a significant number of lessons, teachers wasted time and opportunities by adhering to what the textbook directed rather than using student led activities to develop understanding and application skills to a high level.

Learning was good in KG and acceptable in all other parts of the school. Students were enthusiastic in their attitudes, effectively engaged with their teachers and communicated in a mature manner with all concerned. Where learning was good, students used PowerPoint presentations, performed dramas and understood the connections between subjects and topics. In English, high school students showed independence, confidence and fluency in their appreciation of literature and grammar. In Arabic, mathematics and science, they could apply their understanding in practical situations and worked well in groups. Where learning was only acceptable, students were passive participants, did not use the resources available well and did not develop or explore hypotheses and opinions independently of the teacher.

Assessment was acceptable throughout all phases and the school had developed a good system of data collection. Teachers in KG recorded detailed outcomes of student performance daily and over longer periods of time. In elementary classes teachers used evaluation reports that reflected student understanding and application. In the middle and high schools assessment documentation recorded success rates across all subjects in school quizzes and tests, and staff compiled analyzed the results to show the trends in student performance. Reporting to parents was good with weekly reports on the topics being covered. In KG parents knew how they could best support their children's learning when they were at home or in the market. This work was highly effective in keeping parents informed. However, the quality of assessment for learning in most classes was underdeveloped. Teachers did not use the data available in a systematic manner to plan the next stage of learning, design appropriate assessment criteria at the end of lessons or provide good feedback to students in their notebooks. Feedback on homework was particularly poor. Teachers did not regularly correct the work and did not give students clear indicators of what they had done well and what they needed to do next.

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

The quality of the curriculum was good overall. It was based on a US model and offered opportunities for interpretation in line with student needs and Ministry of Education requirements. Although there was some over-reliance on text books, which contained material not relevant to students' experience, the majority of teachers chose texts carefully and attempted to adapt the material appropriately. The limitations of the current curriculum had been acknowledged during an extensive review process involving consultation with teachers and students and the establishment of a strategic curriculum committee. As a result of the review the Californian state curriculum had been adopted, which was more suitable to the culturally diverse student population in Dubai. The review also highlighted concerns about the effectiveness of the current separate commerce and science bands operating from Grade 10 onward. These were to be phased out, beginning with Grade 10, in the next academic year. The school would then pursue a more integrated approach to take account of the needs of students and their entitlement to a broader and more balanced curriculum. The planning for the changes had been well researched and very thorough. An evaluation process for the new

program had been built into the planning. There was a good range of extra-curricular activities and visits across the phases; the visits were often environmentally oriented or involved visits to the school by specialist professionals. There were opportunities to follow arts subjects as after-school activities, since these were not available on the curriculum beyond Grade 5. Enrichment activities such as drama, debating, and sport gave students valuable experiences which enhanced their learning. The elementary school ran an advisory programme three times each week, designed to increase self-awareness and build self-esteem. There was a limited vision and subsequent lack of opportunities for the most and least able students of all ages. Through curriculum flexibility in some subjects and the range of enrichment activities, students were well prepared for each stage of their education, including transition to higher education.

How well does the school protect and support students?

There were good measures in place to ensure student safety and protection. Security guards were stationed at the main entrances to the school. Fire safety equipment was regularly checked and drills were conducted two to four times a year. Toilets were clean, well maintained, and well resourced. Most students were driven to school and after dismissal, pick-up procedures were supervised and student safety was assured by the presence of school staff and security guards. The health clinic staff provided services in accordance with Department of Health guidelines. Extensive medical records were maintained. Dental, vision, and medical examination were conducted regularly. Medical checks related to body mass index, weight, height, and nutrition were conducted and recorded in student files. Medications were administered with parent consent. A child protection policy and procedures were developed and understood by staff members. Students knew that they could approach any school staff members, most notably their teachers. Supervisors and the social adviser were the next level of staff concerned with developing supportive interventions.

The quality of support for students was good in KG and acceptable in the remainder of the school. Student-staff relationships were good and students were polite, respectful and benefited from the school's caring policies. The supervisors, social adviser and academic advisers collaborated with the classroom teacher to monitor and support students with academic, behavioural, or personal counselling needs. An academic advisor, one for boys and one for girls, provided support to students for academic and career pathway guidance. Supervisors monitored student attendance and matters of punctuality and detailed records were kept.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Overall leadership was acceptable. Individuals were capable and dedicated to their role as school leaders. The Principal had a good understanding of the school and its operation. Senior leadership worked diligently addressing recommendations in previous report. A shared leadership model was in place engaging senior leaders, in conjunction with the governance board in the development of the vision and annual goals for the school.

Self-evaluation was good. The action plan, developed after the previous inspection addressed areas in need of improvement. Curriculum improvement was particularly evident in addition to the quality and support. Improvements in the areas of student safety and support were evident.

Partnership with parents and the community was good. Parents were very supportive of the school. Principal and senior leadership. Parents felt staff had high expectations for their children to work hard and do their best. Parents liked the school's caring and welcoming environment. The parent organisation reported opportunities for two-way communications with the governing board. Parents also reported they had no way of knowing how their children compared academically to students in similar schools and countries. Some parents questioned the large class sizes at some levels and questioned the traditional way some teachers instruct their children.

Governance was acceptable. The governing board responded to requests from parents for school improvements. The governing body provided funds for effective school maintenance and conduct as requested by senior leadership. All statutory requirements were met. However, no formal channels existed for input to the governing board by parents

All staffing positions were filled with suitable qualified staff. The school premises were well maintained and clean. Adequate resources were available for the instructional programme. Class sizes were reduced in line with the observations made in the previous report. The ICT laboratories were satisfactory though ICT facilities were not present in most classrooms for the students to expand their learning. Classrooms tended to be small and this was especially noticeable in grades with larger class sizes.

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	Elementary	Middle	High School
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High School
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

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

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

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	Senior High
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	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:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	Senior High
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
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:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High School
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good	Good

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	Senior 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?	
Quality of leadership	Acceptable
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Good
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: inspection@khda.gov.ae.

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