

The Dubai International School – Al Quoz 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.

The Dubai International School – Al Quoz was inspected in March 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 Quoz, The International School of Dubai is a private school providing education for both boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 12, aged 3 to 18 years. The school follows an USA curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 1,786 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 reported a high degree of satisfaction with the conduct of the school. Teachers were accessible to parents and cooperative in assisting parents with concerns. The leaders of the school were widely appreciated and respected. Parents felt the school was a welcoming place and supported their children. Communications with parents took multiple forms and effectively addressed the needs of the school and their families. Parents felt they understood their children's studies. Overall, the survey was positive towards most aspects of the school and its provision.

How well does the school perform overall?

The Dubai International School was judged to be acceptable overall. 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 about Islam such as the Pillars of Islam, the prayers, attributes of the people in Paradise. Attainment and progress in Arabic in elementary school were good, while in the middle and high schools they were acceptable. In all grades, the listening skills of students were good as they understood the instructions from their teachers and followed them. Attainment in English was

acceptable in the KG, elementary and middle schools; it was good in the high school. Progress over time was good in the KG, acceptable in the elementary and middle schools, and good in the high school. Attainment and progress in mathematics were good in the KG, Elementary and high school sections and acceptable in the middle school. Attainment and progress in science were acceptable in all phases. Students' attitudes and behaviour were good in the KG and elementary grades, unsatisfactory in the middle school and acceptable in the high school. Students were generally well-behaved and approached their learning enthusiastically. Students' attitudes and behaviour were good in the KG and elementary grades, unsatisfactory in the middle grades and acceptable in the high school section. 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. Students' economic and environmental understanding was good in the KG and elementary sections and acceptable in the middle and high schools.

Teaching for effective learning was good in the KG and high school sections and acceptable in the others. Almost all teachers had good knowledge of their subjects, but there was significant variation in the level of awareness of how the subjects were best learned. Learning was acceptable overall. Some student misbehaviour along with an excessive focus on teacher-dominated lessons discouraged independent learning and development of students' thinking skills. Assessment was acceptable throughout the school. Most teachers focused on the knowledge rather than on assessing the skills and comprehension levels of the students. The quality of curriculum provision was good across all sections of the school. The arrangements for health and safety were good in the KG and acceptable in the other three sections. The quality of support was judged to be good across the school.

Overall, the quality of leadership and management of the school was good. The senior leaders provided effective direction for the school. Systems for self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. The school responded effectively to all recommendations in the previous inspection report and significant progress was evident in the areas of curriculum and health and safety. Partnerships with parents and governance were judged to be acceptable. Staffing, facilities and resources were good. The staff were friendly and supportive of students which contributed to a positive school atmosphere.

Key features of the school

- The Kids Academy provided a strong foundation for future learning;
- The good facilities supported the instructional programme effectively;
- The scope and sequence of the curriculum addressed the needs of most students;
- Most students had a good appreciation of Islam;
- The culture of school was welcoming and supportive;
- The effective links across the school between English and mathematics.

Recommendations

- Improve the attitudes and behaviour of boys in the middle school section;
- Ensure assessment information informs a wider range of learning experiences in line with international standards;
- Provide parents with a formal voice in the governance of the school.

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 about various areas in Islam such as the pillars of Islam and the prayers. They also developed good understandings of the qualities and the ranks of the believers in Paradise. Most students had good knowledge about the Prophet's life (PBUH) and understood many of the Prophet's sayings. Across the school the majority of students understood Islamic values from The Holy Qur'an and the Prophet's sayings. In the high school most students' recitation skills of The Holy Qur'an were below expectations, but students developed acceptable understanding of their Islamic responsibility and duties.

Attainment and progress in Arabic in the elementary school were good, while in the middle and high schools they were acceptable. In the elementary grades most students were able to express themselves using adequate vocabulary and extended sentences. They demonstrated good understanding of grammar rules. In all grades the listening skills of students were good as they understood various genres and responded appropriately. In the middle and high schools most students' skills in extended writing were limited to a few sentences. Across the school few students used Classical Arabic consistently.

Attainment in English was acceptable in the KG, elementary and middle schools; it was good in the high school. Progress was good in the KG, acceptable in the elementary and middle schools, and good in the high school. Children in the KG were able to pronounce and recognise

simple words; they could understand their teachers for sustained periods, and they were beginning to write simple sentences. Students in Grade 3 could read and understand short stories, and Grade 5 students were able to invent and write accurately sentences that explained key vocabulary. Speaking skills varied widely; some students in Grades 5 and 6 could speak fluently and at length about their chosen projects. A few Grade 9 students were able to write long paragraphs of creative English, and the most accomplished students in Grades 11 and 12 were able to speak and write with empathy in response to works of literature.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were good in the KG, elementary and high schools and acceptable in the middle school. Children in the KG knew number operations, wrote numbers, counted them in sequence, identified geometric shapes and completed mental mathematics activities. Elementary students solved problems using basic number operations and they calculated using whole numbers, fractions and decimals. Middle school students solved geometry problems related to congruent segments, angles, and angle bisectors. High school students solved problems related to polygons and increasingly difficult trigonometry. Discussions and question-and-answer sessions were used effectively to solve complex problems.

Attainment and progress in science were acceptable in all phases. Children in the KG understood broad concepts such as life cycles and made progress through exploration using their senses. Students in the elementary school knew key terms and described simple concepts, such as types of pollution and the importance of recycling. In the middle school, students hypothesised, made predictions and could apply formulae. In the high school, students could apply their knowledge and understanding but their analytical skills were underdeveloped; for example solutions were not justified in multiple ways.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good in the KG and elementary sections, unsatisfactory in the middle school and acceptable in the high school. Students were generally well-behaved and approached their learning enthusiastically. They had good relationships with their teachers. Yet a whole-school culture of expectation for learning was underdeveloped. In the middle school the boys were disruptive and disrespectful in lessons. This challenged teachers' capacities to manage their classrooms effectively. As a consequence, learning experiences for a majority of these students were hindered. In a minority of lessons students were late on a regular basis.

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 and performed well when given responsibilities inside or outside their classes. They demonstrated that they understood their responsibilities at school as lead students and members of the student council. In the high school almost all were able to talk about their heritage, for example pearl diving and other traditions of the UAE. Most

students' understanding of Islam was good; they demonstrated a good understanding of Islamic values and were able to talk about the role of Islam in Dubai's culture.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good in the KG and elementary school and acceptable in the middle and High schools. Most students could articulate the unique attributes of Dubai and demonstrated deep knowledge of their potential contributions in the future. Students were aware of the current economic situation and how it impacted upon the school and the community. Most students were aware of what makes Dubai unique. Students were aware of local and environmental concepts and how they could make a positive impact on the environment. However, students did not demonstrate care and concern for the school environment, as litter was evident in the classrooms and on school grounds.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching for effective learning was good in the KG and the high school and acceptable in the other sections. Almost all teachers had good knowledge of their subjects, but there was significant variation in their levels of awareness of how the subjects were best learned. Senior leaders encouraged teachers to focus on specific learning objectives, but time was poorly managed in a majority of lessons. Teachers spent too much time ensuring knowledge levels without developing higher order skills. Where teaching was good or better, teachers supported student presentations, group work and used questions skilfully to allow meaningful discussion. Where teaching was less than good, teachers dominated the discussions. They asked students to write information on the board that was already known, did not plan lessons to meet all abilities and needs and failed to develop students' critical thinking skills.

Learning was of an acceptable quality overall. Significant developmental work had been carried out in defining the type of learner the school wished to encourage. There was a good definition of the skills that should be developed at the planning level. The English, mathematics and science departments shared relevant vocabulary to ensure that students had opportunities to use relevant skills across these subjects. Where learning was good, students could connect their classroom experiences to the world outside. They displayed good research and enquiry skills and were able to use information and communication technology (ICT) effectively for presentations of their work. This feature encouraged students of all abilities and learning styles to become more engaged with the topics and improved their understanding effectively. However, most students were inconsistent in their attitudes towards learning. Significant numbers of students were too passive in their lessons. They depended excessively on their teachers to provide direction. In some sections of the school student behaviour was so poor that it hindered the quality of the learning taking place. This, coupled with an excessively teacher-dominated lessons discouraged independent learning and thinking skills development.

Assessment of learning was acceptable throughout the school. Large amounts of data were regularly collected in all sections. Tracking of individual students' progress was closely monitored for reporting to parents. A highly organised system of quizzes and mini-tests, combined with mid and end-of-term examinations effectively gathered information on students' attainment and progress. This formal assessment structure was supplemented by

informal appraisal of students' performance, participation, homework and project work completion. The use of assessment to improve learning was clearly understood by the assessment team. However, its implementation throughout the school was less than consistent. Marking was of poor quality. Teachers did not provide students with clear and useful feedback relating to their homework.

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

The quality of curriculum provision was good across all sections of the school. The curriculum team had listened to the views of stakeholders, including former students and were firmly addressing the students' needs. The programme was under constant review and had a strong rationale, which allowed for smooth transitions between the four sections of the school and beyond. Revisions were made to assist students progressing to university by adapting the mathematics curriculum to include units on statistics, probability and vectors. Major changes had been made following the previous year's inspection report. There was a systematic approach to teaching students with particular weaknesses. The curriculum in the KG was more rounded, integrated the six areas of learning and included provision of Arabic for all children. The amount of testing had been reduced to increase teaching time, and there was evidence of increased communication between heads of department to provide cross-curricular links that embedded students' acquisitions. Even though there was high dependence on textbooks for curriculum delivery, group-work was becoming the norm. Students were usually interactive in their lessons, and there were opportunities for scientific experimentation. Generally, however, the emphasis was on the acquisition of knowledge rather than skills. There was provision of extra-curricular activities and clubs which was more extensive in the younger age range than in senior classes. The activities were often presentations, rather than activities involving student participation. Curricular links with the community at large were underdeveloped.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements for health and safety were good in the KG and acceptable elsewhere in the school. General medical examinations were conducted regularly for newly admitted students. Medical checks, including measurements of height, weight, and body mass index were conducted and recorded in individual medical files. Medications were properly stored, secured and administered with parental consent. The school had posted fire evacuation diagrams showing specific routes to assembly points. The pick-up area in front of the school was being supervised on a timed basis by three security guards and a trainee. Closed-circuit television cameras significantly augmented security. The school featured numerous postings related to personal hygiene, nutrition and awareness of healthy lifestyles. Toilets were clean, maintained, and, for the most part, resourced with soap dispensers, toilet paper and electric hand driers. Arrival and dismissal times were well supervised and students moved through the school in an organised manner under supervision of staff.

The quality of support was good throughout the school. Student and staff relationships were generally good, although with some noted exceptions at the middle school. There was extensive evidence of an integrated support program being provided for students with academic, behavioural, or personal needs. A child protection policy and procedures involving teachers, supervisors, and heads of department had been developed and were in place. Supervisors monitored student attendance and punctuality, keeping detailed records. There were no consistent measures to calm traffic speed outside the school.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was good. A distributive model of leadership was evident which shared responsibilities for assessing learning and supporting staff amongst all the subject coordinators. The senior leaders provided effective direction for the school. The Director and senior leaders were open to new practices to improve all aspects of the school. For example, a new assessment system was scheduled to begin. But the senior leadership had yet to fully investigate a range of international comparative assessments to serve as benchmarks for students' development in relation to those following similar curricula.

Systems for self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. The school had responded effectively to all the recommendations in the previous report and significant progress had been made on curriculum and health and safety. Self-evaluation for the improvement of instruction was a priority and was a topic of discussion at all leadership meetings. However, no review had taken place relating to school-wide discipline issues.

Parents reported a strong sense of belonging and acceptance for all children and families within the school. The school had worked with parents to develop a mothers' committee to advise the school on extra-curricular programs. Parents also reported that they were happy with communications with teachers via the website, phone calls, and written correspondence. The parents were very supportive of the school's senior leaders.

The governing board responded to requests from parents for school improvements and it provided funds for effective school maintenance and improvement as requested by senior leadership. However, no formal channels existed for parent input to the governing board.

There were sufficient teachers who were appropriately qualified and experienced. All staffing positions were filled with certified individuals. Teachers were evaluated annually based upon three classroom observations. New teachers were also evaluated at mid-year. The school facilities were relatively new and were well maintained and clean. Resources were available for the instructional programme and teachers made good use of the materials at hand. The development of the Kids Academy, a pre-school programme for very young children was a prominent aspect of the school. Class sizes were acceptable. ICT laboratories were satisfactory. Classrooms were acceptable in size; however the science laboratories were somewhat restricted in size for the senior high school 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	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

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

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

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

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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