

Dubai English Speaking College Inspection Report

Secondary to Post-16

Report published May 2011

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Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report

Outstanding – exceptionally high quality of performance or practice.

Good – the expected level of quality for every school in Dubai.

Acceptable – the minimum level of acceptability required for Dubai. All key aspects of performance and practice in every school should meet or exceed this level.

Unsatisfactory – quality not yet at the level acceptable for schools in Dubai. Schools will be expected to take urgent measures to improve the quality of any aspect of their performance or practice that is judged at this level.

Dubai English Speaking College was inspected in October 2010 as part of the regular inspection of all schools in Dubai. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated students' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on students' progress in Islamic Education (for Muslim students), Arabic, English, mathematics and science.

Basic information about the school

Located in Academic City, Dubai English Speaking College is a private school providing education for boys and girls from secondary to post-16, aged 13 to 18 years. The school follows the English National Curriculum and students complete GCSE and Advanced level examinations as part of their studies. At the time of the inspection, there were 620 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. Most parents were satisfied with most aspects of the school's work and thought that the school was well led. Almost all thought that the school kept their child safe and most agreed that it responded well to parental concerns and kept them well-informed about academic progress. Most thought that the teaching was good and that children enjoyed their lessons. Almost all appreciated the extra-curricular opportunities provided by the school. Most parents felt that the school was good at helping their child to choose a healthy lifestyle. A few parents felt that the school could be better at explaining its plans for improvement. In the meeting with the inspection team, the Parent Council also felt that they could make a more direct contribution to supporting the school's development.

How well does the school perform overall?

Dubai English Speaking School was a good school with some outstanding features. It had ensured a clear focus on the recommendations of the last report. The school had supported the Islamic Education and Arabic department in improving its practice through increasing staffing, reviewing the curriculum and the quality of teaching and learning and providing appropriate resources. The governing board and school still needed to address the issue of compliance with Ministry requirements in these areas. The school had focused on increasing the range of courses at Advanced Level. Departments had focused on improving the quality of learning in classes at this level. The school's approach to developing the quality of teaching and learning had a number of outstanding features which were leading to steady improvement in this area. The school encouraged teachers to be innovative and students to be more independent. There were a number of examples of very good practice but this needed to be more consistent across all classrooms. Overall, based on its current direction and with focused planning and strong management, the school had the clear capacity to continue to improve. Improvement would be further strengthened through an even more systematic and rigorous management of the process at senior management level.

Attainment and progress in English and mathematics were good or outstanding. In science it was good. In Arabic it was judged to be acceptable. Attainment in Islamic Education was unsatisfactory and progress acceptable. Students' attitudes and behaviour were outstanding. Many students successfully took on leadership roles. The quality of teaching was good to outstanding and learning was good, with some significant strengths. Assessment was outstanding. Effective records were kept of student progress. Teachers did not always act on that knowledge to meet fully the needs of all students. The curriculum was good overall, with appropriate attention to breadth and balance and with some good cross-curricular links. The schools' extra-curricular programme was good. Provision for health and safety was outstanding. Students were encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles. The strong pastoral structure of the school effectively supported students' well-being and academic needs. School leaders at all levels were very professional and clearly committed to achieving high standards and continuous improvement. The Headteacher led the school very well, through encouraging innovative thinking and creative classroom practice. As a result, there was a strong sense of common purpose across the school and a sense of empowerment. The school had established a number of methods to monitor and evaluate the work of the school, including a close focus on the classroom. The school had a good partnership with parents and the Parent Council offered the school a range of support. The school should work towards involving parents more in its future development. The Governing Board held the school accountable. Teachers were well qualified and supported by continuing professional development. The premises were of a very high quality, offering a well-maintained environment, with good sports facilities.

Key features of the school

- Students' high achievement in many areas of the curriculum;
- The school's corporate focus on, and commitment to, improving the quality of students' learning;
- The commitment of teachers to the school, its students and to improvement on a number of fronts;
- The very positive culture of the school, the purposeful relationships between teachers and students and the students' outstanding behaviour;
- The high quality of management and their key involvement in a number of initiatives.

Recommendations

- The governing board and school should ensure compliance with Ministry requirements for Islamic Education and Arabic;
- The school should improve attainment in Islamic Education, Arabic and attainment across the curriculum at post-16 level;
- The school should continue to ensure a focus on improving the quality of student learning to achieve consistency across the school;
- The school should build on the good partnership with parents to involve them purposefully in improving the school as it develops.

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

Across the school attainment in Islamic Education was unsatisfactory but progress was acceptable. The school did not comply with the Ministry of Education requirements regarding the number of lessons. Year 7 students developed basic knowledge of the steps of ablution, yet did not know any prophetic teachings about the topic. Year 10 students knew the difference between "Islam" and "belief" but did not link this sufficiently to daily practice or personal life. Most Arab students in Year 12 understood the importance of family in Islam yet they demonstrated limited understanding of the relevance to their personal lives. Across the school, students had limited knowledge and understanding of The Holy Qur'an and Hadeeth. They had insufficient understanding of how to use Islamic knowledge to impact positively on their lives and the community.

Students' attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language was acceptable. Year 9 students were able to read a poem and understood the overall meaning, but they had difficulty in understanding new vocabulary. In Year 12, students read a text about marriage in Islam, could understand the main ideas and were able to express their own opinion briefly and in most cases using informal Arabic. In Year 13, students were able to explain the dangers of illegal drugs, mostly using informal Arabic. Students had an acceptable understanding of techniques of the writing process. Over-use of informal Arabic restricted the further development of speaking and listening skills.

Attainment and progress were acceptable in Arabic as an additional language. In Year 7, most students could read single words but few students used the words they learned to make simple sentences. Students made frequent mistakes in sentence structure. Year 8 students used simple sentences to describe the weather, but their writing skills were limited and not developed sufficiently. In Year 9, most students read single words for means of transport. A few formed simple sentences, but with difficulty. Most students in Year 11 talked about their favourite sports, using basic sentences. They made frequent mistakes in writing. Speaking skills were limited to rehearsed sentences. Students' listening skills in most classes were under-developed because of an over-reliance on translation.

In English, students' attainment and progress were outstanding at the secondary stage. Their performance in GCSE examinations and in tests was well above the UK average. At the post-16 stage, progress was outstanding, with very good performance in classwork. Results, however, at AS level in 2010 had been below the UK average. At all stages students' listening skills were very well developed. Their spoken responses were well considered and often showed maturity of thinking. Students participated very well in discussions. All read widely for pleasure from a wide range of sources. Information literacy was being well developed through the critical reading of contemporary news articles. At all stages, students wrote well, both formally and informally. Senior students presented written literary criticism very well.

In mathematics at secondary stage, attainment and progress were outstanding and at post-16, good. Performance in GCSE examinations had been consistently well above UK averages. 2010 Year 12 AS A-C examination grades were below the UK average. However, current attainment and progress in lessons at this level were judged to be good. Targets had been agreed, indicating that the end of year AS 2011 A-C grade results would be above the UK average. Students used problem-solving strategies, shared ideas when undertaking investigations and worked at high levels of attainment. Year 13 students could use trigonometric identities and described graphs for cosine, sine and tangent.

Overall, students' attainment and progress in science were good. Students were able to apply the scientific method, and were able to collect, organize and display data. They could effectively and safely use science lab equipment to test predictions. External exam data showed that the majority of students attained above international standards, although the small cohort of AS students were below. Students could safely mix chemicals and make predictions about changes. They were able to record their observations in words and in sketches and could summarize the stages of cell growth/division. They were able to use textbooks, computers, and peer discussion as resources for answering scientific questions.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were outstanding. They displayed very positive attitudes around the school and in lessons. Students across all ages worked well together and supported one another. Constructive and purposeful student-staff relationships were evident across the school, based on mutual understanding and respect. Students developed a good understanding of healthy living. Their arrival at school and lessons was punctual, with good attendance overall.

Students' civic, Islamic and cultural understanding was good. Students took a variety of leadership roles around the school and had several opportunities to express their views. They participated in a number of charity activities. They developed acceptable understanding about Islam through a number of visits to local mosques and learning about Islamic celebrations. However, they had limited understanding of the positive impact of Islam on the life of Dubai and the UAE. They developed good understanding about the culture of the UAE through a number of events inside the school and local visits to various areas in Dubai.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good. Students knew the main industries in Dubai and the UAE. They realised the importance of looking after natural resources. They were aware of the progress of Dubai, especially in terms of economic development. They understood the importance of contributing to the success of the Emirate and the UAE. They demonstrated a good understanding of global environmental issues and participated in an acceptable range of activities to look after the environment. Students developed good understanding of local environmental issues through participation in recycling and clean-up activities.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching was consistently good. In some departments it was outstanding. Almost all teachers ensured that students were fully aware of what they were going to learn. They gave very good presentations and organised a very good range of activities to reinforce their teaching. Most teachers used group work to very good effect, but rarely seized the opportunity actually to teach to the small group. They skilfully reinforced what they had taught with judicious use of information and communications technology (ICT), including film and the internet. They generally ensured a very good pace in lessons. However, they did not always offer appropriate challenge to higher attaining students. Although the school had identified a number of students requiring support, systems were not yet fully in place to ensure that needs were fully met. Teachers used a very effective tutorial approach with senior students. They encouraged independence and fostered challenging discussions.

The overall quality of students' learning was good. In a number of the lessons inspected, it was outstanding. However, it was not yet consistent. Students showed very positive attitudes to their learning. Almost all were eager to learn and co-operated very well with their teachers and fellow students. Many were actively developing good problem-solving and higher-order thinking skills. They were developing into effective independent learners. In groups, students collaborated to choose the best ways to complete tasks and to solve problems. They clearly expressed what they had done to achieve their goals, or what they still needed to do. Assisted by their teachers, they formulated personal learning targets and worked very effectively to meet them.

Teachers had developed an outstanding programme of assessment which yielded high quality information on students' progress. It was used very effectively throughout the school. It included formal tests, very thorough review of students' work, and discussion between teachers and students. In class, teachers clearly set out the lesson objectives and gauged students' progress against them. Students also assessed aspects of their own and others' work, using these objectives. The school's system of indicating strengths and points for development on each piece of written work gave invaluable advice to students on how to improve. Teachers had a comprehensive knowledge of students' strengths and weaknesses, but in some cases this knowledge was not translated into effective extension work or remediation.

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

The quality of the curriculum was good overall. It had a clear rationale with planned progression and choice in learning for almost all students. The curricular breadth was good and had improved since 2008-09, with the addition of some subjects. However, the school did not yet comply with Ministry of Education requirements for the teaching of Islamic Education and Arabic. Managers effectively conducted whole school curriculum review, using an electronic curriculum planner and heads of department monitored their subject curricula for suitability. Whole school planning was linked to internationally recognised standards and attainment data. Continuity and progression in courses for students moving from the feeder primary school to the secondary school were sound. Cross-curricular links were clearly in evidence, especially in certain departments, such as science. There was a good quality of programme in English, mathematics, and science. Students benefitted from a good quality personal, social and health education programme, covering a wide range of expected topics, including lifeskills and preparation for the world of work. There was also a broad range of extra-curricular activities which had expanded in recent years. Some of these activities, such as the Duke of Edinburgh award, fostered curriculum links with the community and the local environment. The school needed to keep under scrutiny the suitability of course offerings for all ability levels. In addition, the school needed to offer further opportunities for high-achieving students across the years, as well as more in-class curricular differentiation on a day-to-day basis.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements to ensure the students' health and safety were outstanding. Bus transport was safe and orderly on arrival and departure. The school maintained a safe and secure environment, buildings were clean and well maintained and fire drills regularly undertaken. A school nurse was responsible for the students' medical welfare and administration. Teachers and support staff were visible and vigilant, ensuring students were very well supervised. Students were trained in safe practices and risk assessments were conducted in all required areas. Students were encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles through personal and social education, as well as through science lessons. The school canteen provided a wide choice of healthy foods including hot meals. Members of staff were clear about child protection procedures.

The quality of support provided by the school was outstanding. Excellent relationships existed between teachers and students. The strong pastoral structure of the school ensured that all the well-being and academic needs of the students were being met, including offering university guidance as well as catering for their emotional needs. Comprehensive assessment and robust tracking were available in all subjects. Rates of progress for individual students could be easily identified, enabling the setting of meaningful targets for further development. The school was undertaking a review of learning support and the findings will further add to the quality of support and care. The school provided parents with detailed school reports on a termly basis, indicating present levels of attainment, rate of progress and expected end of year levels of attainment. Effective systems were in place to monitor punctuality and attendance.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

School leaders at all levels were very professional and clearly committed to achieving the highest standards possible and to the concept of improvement. The Headteacher had a number of professional strengths. He had established and maintained a very positive culture within the school. He clearly led the school in his vision for improvement through encouraging innovative thinking and creative classroom practice. He had encouraged a climate of sound teamwork and collegiate working, based on good communication and consultation. As a result, there was a strong sense of common purpose across the school and a sense of empowerment. He was supported very effectively by the senior managers, who operated in a clearly corporate way. Committed and energetic, they effectively undertook a wide range of tasks. They fulfilled their linkage with their department heads conscientiously. The heads of department and year heads fulfilled their remits well.

The school had established a number of methods to monitor and evaluate the work of the school. The analysis of examination results was thorough, with a clear focus on areas for improvement. The school's self-evaluation was comprehensive and involved teachers in the process. Heads of Department monitored teaching and learning, discussed areas for improvement and supported their teachers. Commendably, some teachers acted as coaches to contribute to this process. Students' views made a contribution in some aspects. The action plan following the last inspection was well thought through and the school had made good progress in addressing most of the issues identified at the last inspection.

The school had a good partnership with parents. It made clear efforts to keep them informed and to engage them generally in the school, using newsletters. Parents had access to a wide range of information on the user-friendly school website and regular student reports and parents' nights kept them informed about their child's progress. They were encouraged to become involved in the life of the school; for example in offering career talks, running events and fund-raising. The Parent Council was an active group which offered the school a wide range of valued support. There were some good links with the local community. The school should continue to work towards involving parents, not just in the life of the school but also in its development.

The Governing Board worked very effectively in support of the school. Its membership included a very wide range of expertise which was well directed to respond to the school in a wide range of areas of its work. There were clear opportunities for the school to present reports to the Board and for the Board to analyse and debate progress across the work of the school. The Board also met with teachers. The Board should ensure the school fulfils all statutory requirements.

Teachers were well qualified and many were experienced. The continuing professional development of teachers was a clear focus, supported by a recently established appraisal system. A comprehensive range of administrative and other support staff offered a good level of support and service. The premises were of a very high quality, offering a spacious, well laid out and well maintained learning and social environment, with good sports facilities. Plans were in place to improve the access road and install lifts.

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:	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?		
6% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.		
Age group:	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Acceptable	Acceptable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Acceptable	Not Applicable

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

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

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

How good is the students' personal and social development?		
Age group:	Secondary	Post-16
Attitudes and behaviour	Outstanding	Outstanding
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good

How good are teaching and learning?		
Age group:	Secondary	Post-16
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Outstanding
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good
Assessment	Outstanding	Outstanding

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?		
Age group:	Secondary	Post-16
Curriculum quality	Good	Good

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

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

How well does the school perform overall?
Good

Next steps

The school has been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how it will address the main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents. The next inspection will report on the progress made by the school.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau
Knowledge and Human Development Authority

How to contact us

If you have a concern or wish to comment on any aspect of this report you should contact: inspection@khda.gov.ae.

More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at www.khda.gov.ae.

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