

New Academy School
Inspection Report
Kindergarten to Grade12

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.

New Academy School was inspected in November 2009 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 Raffa, New Academy is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 12, age three to 18 years. The school follows a US curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 689 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Parents were supportive of the school, believing the school promoted good habits of behaviour and the values of respect, honesty and responsibility. The positive interaction between parents and staff was highly valued and appreciated. Almost all parents felt that the school had established good links with parents. They were positive about the leadership and management and found the school approachable and responsive to their questions and concerns. While remaining supportive of the school a significant minority had concerns about how they were consulted on some important matters including the quality and timing of some of the information they received and the amount of practical activity in the curriculum.

How well does the school perform overall?

New Academy School provided an acceptable quality of education for its students. Attainment and progress were acceptable in each of the key subjects across the school. Students' attitudes and behaviour were good and relationships between students and teachers throughout the school created a good environment for learning. Students had a good understanding of their national identity and the reasons for Dubai's rapidly changing ways of life. They had a good understanding of local traditions and the values of Islam. Economic and environmental understanding was acceptable among younger students. Some older students had perceptive insights into the need to use resources carefully and wisely. However, this understanding was unsatisfactory in the most senior classes because of a lack of application of the principles of Islam to the daily lives of the students.

Teaching and learning were unsatisfactory. A common shortcoming was an over dependence on the textbook and too much talking by the teacher to the class. These strategies often constrained learning and there was rarely scope for the more able students to excel. In most lessons there were too few opportunities for students to explore ideas and investigate, and homework was rarely set in ways that captured students' imagination or interest. Overall, the teaching of boys was not as good as that of girls. Procedures for assessing students' progress were acceptable. Teachers tested the knowledge of the students regularly. They marked written work accurately but they did not routinely give sufficient help and guidance on what they must do to improve further. The curriculum was unsatisfactory. There had been too little progress since the last inspection. It still did not meet all students' needs well. While the school had made improvements in curriculum planning, the impact of this work so far was limited. Students had almost no choice of subjects. Curriculum planning groups had recently been established but it was too early to judge the impact of their work. Protection and support arrangements were acceptable. The pastoral care teams worked closely together to provide support for students. Health advice was regularly given by both the school nurse and the doctor. Parents were kept well informed through detailed written advice and home-school diaries. However, there were no risk assessments in place in key areas to optimise students' protection. Despite these significant shortcomings, the school was a safe place in which students worked and played.

Leadership and management of the school was acceptable overall. On a day-to-day basis the school was well organised, friendly and purposeful. The good progress in developing the care and welfare of its students reported in the last report had been maintained but the response to other recommendations was unsatisfactory. Actions to improve teaching and learning and the curriculum had not been effective. The school did not know its strengths and weaknesses well enough and its improvement planning and its action plans were not well targeted. Lines of responsibility were often unclear. Partnership with parents was acceptable. Parental anxieties about the lack of practical activity were well placed. Governance was unsatisfactory and did not hold the school to account for the progress it was making. There were sufficient qualified teachers and they had acceptable subject knowledge. The premises and facilities

were well maintained and the resources for learning were acceptable, though the library and the information and communication technology (ICT) suites were not always well used.

Key features of the school

- In most parts of the school the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and curriculum was unsatisfactory;
- The school provided a caring and friendly learning environment for students and showed a real concern their well-being;
- Attitudes and behaviour of most students was good;
- Older students showed a good appreciation of the way Dubai was changing and most were developing into mature and responsible citizens.

Recommendations

- Further improve attainment and progress in all key subject areas by addressing shortcomings in the teaching and learning;
- Ensure the curriculum better meets the needs and interests of all students;
- Improve the schools senior leadership capacity to address the areas of self-evaluation and improvement planning;
- Develop effective governance structures that reflect the needs and capacities of the entire school community.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable overall. In the KG a majority of children memorised Surah Al Qadr and recited it well. They also memorized the Hadith of the pillars of Islam. Grade 1 students were able to memorise and sing three songs and knew the difference between truths and lies. In Grade 3, a majority of students recognized the pillar of the ablution (Wodua) and what nullifies it. In most classes there was acceptable understanding of the rules of Islam, except among senior boys' classes, where understanding was better. They could apply what they understand about Islam to their behaviour.

In Arabic, attainment and progress were acceptable overall. In KG classes, children were able to write the letter 'Dal' and identify it in words. Children could also distinguish between long and short vowels. In Grade 1, students were able to read short sentences and identify words correctly. In Grade 4, they could distinguish between past and present verb tenses and in Grade 6 they were able to read some lines from classical Arabic poems. Grade 7 students could

distinguish between the definite and indefinite. Grade 12 students could understand the main elements of the story in poetic lines and could write essays on specific topics.

Attainment and progress in English were acceptable across the school. For almost all students English was an additional language. Internal examination results for the last three years showed acceptable levels of attainment in speaking, listening and reading and unsatisfactory in writing. Most students could read with increasing confidence though few read widely for pleasure, but their written work was invariably less well developed. In Grades 1 to 7, the students' range of vocabulary was generally acceptable and most children in the KG, by the time they moved into Grade 1, could speak in sentences. Between Grades 8 to 12, students developed their speaking and listening skills well and most were able to discuss more complex issues. Writing in Grades 1 to 7 was not well developed and many students struggled to write competently. Most of the older students could write short essays but rarely did so.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable across the school. Grade 12 internal examination results for the last three years showed acceptable levels of attainment. Children in KG were confident with number and could add and subtract single digits and recognise shapes. Elementary students had developed sound computational skills and an acceptable level of understanding of shape and measure. A few students had difficulty placing negative numbers on a scale. Grade 12 students had developed sound algebraic and analytical skills and most could derive results in calculus. Throughout the school, however, problem-solving and graphical skills were underdeveloped. The development of their higher order thinking skills was restricted by insufficient investigative and collaborative work.

Attainment and progress in science were acceptable across the school. In KG, children actively explored the world through discovery based activities. Elementary students described life cycles and classified seeds into groups using different criteria. Most understood the different stages of cell division. Middle and high school students' attainment and progress were acceptable, overall. However, in chemistry, they were unsatisfactory. In biology and physics, students achieved more and results were acceptable. However, throughout the school, the understanding of the scientific and investigative processes was not sufficiently developed through lessons or practical work.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Attitudes and behaviour were good. Students were well behaved during lessons in hallways and during assemblies, with only a few exceptions. Students were typically friendly and courteous. Relationships between teachers and students and among students were good overall. Students were punctual and attendance was acceptable.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and culture were good. They knew that they had responsibilities as members of a wider community. While some students held positions of responsibility in their classrooms, including leadership in lessons, few held school-wide responsibilities. Most were aware of and spoke confidently about the importance of Islam in contemporary society and especially the positive effects of Islamic values. They reflected on key Islamic messages and explained how they put them into practice. Most respected Islamic traditions and heritage appropriately. Nearly all appreciated the multicultural nature of Dubai and valued their UAE national identity.

Economic and environmental understanding was acceptable overall. Students made at least age related progress and by the time they left school most had an age appropriate understanding of the reasons for Dubai's rapidly changing way of life and the economic reasons that influenced many of these developments. Many of the older students in particular displayed perceptive insights into the reasons to use and conserve resources carefully and to recycle.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching and learning was unsatisfactory, except in the KG, where it was acceptable. Teaching methods in the early elementary grades contrasted markedly with those seen in KG. While KG teaching encouraged productive learning through the use of a broad range of strategies, this was not evident in the lower elementary classes. In a few classes unsatisfactory classroom management skills led to teachers shouting to gain attention. In both Arabic and Islamic Education, students copied their teacher's writing rather than forming independent answers. In mathematics lessons students too frequently learned by rote. In the later elementary, middle and high school grades, the teaching was better and examples of good teaching was seen in all of the core subjects. Overall, more unsatisfactory teaching of boys was seen than of girls, particularly in the older grades although the teaching methods used were similar. Most lessons relied too heavily on the textbook and worksheet and made too little use of either the library or ICT. In all subjects students were not given enough opportunities to use their knowledge, skills and understanding to solve practical problems or apply what they had learned more widely. Homework was usually confined to the finishing of questions not completed in class.

Students' learning was acceptable in KG and unsatisfactory throughout the rest of the school. Most students were keen and purposeful learners who applied themselves well. The fact that the students made too little progress in lessons often reflected the teaching strategies used. In lessons where students made good progress they used their prior knowledge to good effect and girls in particular took initiative by asking and answering questions effectively. Classroom relationships between teachers and students were good and, on a few occasions, outstanding. Students showed respect for their teachers, except in a few lower elementary classes. Most students worked well on their own or in small groups. A few students, including those who required additional support, lacked motivation. .

The quality of assessment was acceptable overall but was unsatisfactory in the KG, because teachers failed to monitor and record children's achievements in sufficient detail. The assessment data which the school kept regarding students was often inaccurate. Teachers did not have any criteria for the marks they gave for work and mark ranges against grades varied from subject to subject. This was noted by the parents in their responses to the questionnaire, as a significant minority of parents indicated that they could not grasp, from the reports, how well their children were doing at the school. The marking of work, while generally accurate, did not routinely offer clear written guidance on how students work could be improved and developed.

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

The curriculum was unsatisfactory overall. The rationale was unclear with the textbook having a dominating influence. The school had made improvements in curriculum planning, but their effect upon the learning experiences of students had yet to be realised. There were no subject options for students to choose from until Grade 11 and then only very limited ones. There were no clear expectations of what students should know, understand and be able to do, by given stages. A review of the curriculum was completed at the departmental level but was not systematic. No individual staff member had oversight of the whole school curriculum. In Islamic Education and Arabic, the curriculum was more than book-based but was not delivered in an imaginative way. Even with the modifications that had been made recently, the English curriculum did not meet the needs of students of all abilities. In mathematics, promising curriculum planning was taking place but there was little application of the mathematics learned to the real world. The science curriculum was mostly limited to book knowledge with few opportunities for students to develop practical investigative skills and an understanding of the scientific method. Some continuity of the curriculum was established due to the nature of the books used, but the building of students' knowledge and skills in a planned way was not yet established. Cross-curricular links were rarely made, except in the KG, so that students could connect learning between different subjects and aspects. Targeted provision for both high- and low-attaining students was uncommon, and only a very few students with special needs were effectively supported. As parents reported in the survey, co-curricular activities were few and links to the taught curriculum were missed.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements for the protection of students were acceptable. The premises were generally safe, secure, well-maintained, hygienic and regularly checked. Procedures and drills were in place. Regular fire drills were not in place and bags still obstructed the smooth exit for evacuation in some elementary classrooms. Most staff members were clear on the procedures to follow for child protection. The nurse provided good health care. Healthy lifestyles were promoted well and canteen food had improved. However, a lack of a clear policy meant that not all staff understood their responsibilities and their roles, so that, for example, the acids were not stored safely in the laboratories. Accidents were very rare at the school and students felt safe. However, there were no risk assessments in place in key areas to optimise students' protection. Transport regulations were met and arrivals and departures of students and school buses were smooth and safe.

The quality of support was acceptable. Staff members showed respect for students and concern for their well-being. Teachers and section supervisors worked together to provide interventions and guidance for personal and academic needs. Students' overall academic progress was reviewed by teachers. Parents were contacted and support plans were developed. Section supervisors met with students who had not completed assignments to determine the causes and to establish communication with parents to find a solution. A similar approach was taken to resolve behavioural issues. The school provided guidance regarding future education and career paths, and university applications. Management of student attendance and punctuality was acceptable.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership and management were acceptable overall. The last inspection reported that the support and care provided for students was the greatest strength of the school's leadership and management. This was still the case. However, the school had a far better understanding of how it was going to improve its support for students than improve their attainment and progress. While many teachers responded positively to the schools efforts to address known shortcomings, their talents and energies were not always being used productively. Senior leadership and management roles and responsibilities in the school were unclear and better lines of communication and accountability were needed at all levels. In too many instances staff members were hindered by not having the necessary information or authority to monitor the impact of the changes that they were being asked to make.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were unsatisfactory. Most planning documents were overly descriptive and progress in addressing some of the recommendations from the last report was limited. Actions that required changes in procedures had been taken but, in the areas of teaching, learning and the curriculum, only limited progress had been made. While some informal monitoring of teaching was taking place too little use had been made of the information gained.

Links with parents and the community were acceptable. Almost all parents were highly appreciative of the interest staff took in their children's progress and welfare and their ready access to the Principal, who was seen as approachable by everyone. The school informed parents regularly on matters relating to their children's progress, while most parents valued these regular points of contact, a minority wanted more information about how best they could help their children to improve and support teachers' efforts more effectively. A similar number were unhappy about the lack of practical activities offered. Links with the local community operated well on an informal basis but there were missed opportunities to use the community more extensively and systematically as a resource for learning.

Governance was unsatisfactory. The role of the owners, while benevolent and having the best interests of students at heart, did not extend to undertaking the role of a 'critical friend' or hold the school to account for its successes and failings. There was no evidence of regular meetings with the owners to articulate a vision for the school and no help and support on guidance and accountability structures for the school leadership. Parents did not have a voice in governance and there were no plans to help them support the school in this way.

Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable. Teachers were appropriately qualified and suitably deployed. A programme of continuous professional development had been introduced but this was not underpinned by a needs analysis to target support to where it was most needed. Staff turnover was low. Resources for learning were acceptable though the library and newly installed ICT suite was underused. The location of the KG constrained children's opportunities for outside play and recreation.

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 Grades 1-5	Middle Grades 6-8	High Grades 9-12
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary Grades 1-5	Middle Grades 6-8	High Grades 9-12
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary Grades 1-5	Middle Grades 6-8	High Grades 9-12
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary Grades 1-5	Middle Grades 6-8	High Grades 9-12
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary Grades 1-5	Middle Grades 6-8	High Grades 9-12
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 Grades 1-5	Middle Grades 6-8	High Grades 9-12
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary Grades 1-5	Middle Grades 6-8	High Grades 9-12
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Assessment	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary Grades 1-5	Middle Grades 6-8	High Grades 9-12
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary Grades 1-5	Middle Grades 6-8	High Grades 9-12
Health and safety	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
Quality of leadership	Acceptable
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Unsatisfactory
Partnerships with parents and the community	Acceptable
Governance	Unsatisfactory
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.

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

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