

The City School International Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Secondary

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.

The City School International 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 Nad Al Hamar, The City School International is a private school providing education for boys and girls from KG 1 to Grade 11, aged four to 16 years. The school follows a UK curriculum and students complete IGCSE examinations as part of their studies. At the time of the inspection, there were 448 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was unsatisfactory.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Almost all the parents were happy with the school. They agreed that their children liked being at school, that the teaching was good and their children were kept safe and were treated fairly. Most parents were happy to contact the school if they had any concerns and felt that these were dealt with quickly and effectively. A majority felt that the schools helped their child to choose a healthy lifestyle. They also believed that parent-teacher meetings were regular and helpful. Parents felt that the school had responded positively to the recommendations of the last report. Many were unhappy with the progress being made by their child in Islamic Education and Arabic. They also felt that there was a need for more career guidance for their children.

How well does the school perform overall?

The City School International provided an acceptable quality of education for its students. Attainment and progress in all the key subjects, except for Islamic Education at the secondary stage and Arabic as an additional language, were acceptable. Attendance and punctuality was unsatisfactory, with many children arriving late each morning which disrupted learning. Good progress had been made in addressing the recommendations from the previous report. Leadership roles and responsibilities had been improved and teachers had received effective support with regard to teaching approaches, planning and assessment. The school was well placed to improve further. The attitudes and behaviour throughout the school was good. The students were courteous, charming and polite and their desire for, and commitment to, learning and supporting their fellow students was good. Students had a strong awareness of their responsibilities as citizens and they showed an understanding of and a respect for Islam. The older students' economic and environmental understanding was good and the younger children understood how to care for their local area and showed concern for the environmental future of Dubai and the surrounding countries.

Teaching and learning was of an acceptable standard overall. However, one fifth of the lessons were found to be unsatisfactory. These were mainly in Islamic Education and Arabic. A few teachers were implementing more effective teaching methods together with greater opportunities for more active student interaction as opposed to whole class, teacher-led learning. Strategies to meet the different learning needs and abilities of some students, particularly those with additional learning needs, were not used consistently across the school. Most teachers were hard working and committed to ensuring children made progress in their learning. Assessment was of an acceptable standard. The gathering and use of various assessment data to inform teaching and increase student attainment was in the early stages of development and implementation. Ongoing assessment records were maintained and teachers were beginning to discuss this information with students. In the best lessons, teachers provided students with high quality oral feedback. Students spoke well in both the classroom and in assembly. Their achievements were publically acknowledged at assemblies. The quality of the curriculum was acceptable at all stages although career guidance was under-developed. The arrangements for the health and safety of the students were good. All staff took their duty of care very seriously and health and safety policies and procedures were implemented rigorously. The building and facilities were safe, secure and maintained to a very high standard. Healthy lifestyles were promoted although the range of foods on offer in the canteen was not conducive to healthy eating. Child protection procedures were well-established and implemented sensitively. The quality of leadership and management of the school was acceptable. The Principal and his senior management team had set out a clear vision for the school that ensured a strong commitment to the health, welfare and academic success of the students. Governance was unsatisfactory, although most parents were generally supportive of the work of the school. The school facilities were well designed, clean, safe and well maintained. The absence of a gymnasium prevented the school from offering a comprehensive physical education programme. The school had difficulty recruiting and retaining high quality teachers for Islamic Education and Arabic.

Key features of the school

- Clear vision of the Principal and his senior management team in promoting leadership and joint working between staff at all levels;
- The positive approach adopted by the school in response to the last inspection;
- The work done by the senior management team to model more effective teaching strategies in the classroom;
- The promising start made to formalise tracking and administrative procedures;
- Students' good attitudes and behaviour;
- Partnership between all members of the school community focused on students' well-being;
- Poor attainment in Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Difficulties in recruiting and retaining appropriately qualified teachers.

Recommendations

- Improve attainment in Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Continue to improve the quality of planning and teaching to ensure all students' needs are met, including those with special educational needs;
- Provide guidance to students concerning further study and future careers;
- Improve processes to recruit appropriately qualified teachers;
- Improve professional development of teachers in order to support teaching and learning;
- Further develop a system to gather and analyse assessment data to inform teaching and learning;
- Establish effective governance so that it has a direct impact on the school.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education was acceptable in the primary phase but unsatisfactory in secondary. Students in primary had a basic knowledge of Islam. The youngest students recognised the good practice of Islamic greeting. Most students could memorise required verses from The Holy Qur'an. Their understanding of Islamic values and their knowledge of the Pillars of Islam were at expected levels. However, most secondary students

did not make the progress expected. Their knowledge and understanding of Islamic concepts and principles, such as explaining the Islamic calendar or types of Zakat were limited. A majority of secondary students were not able to memorise the required verses from The Holy Qur'an.

Students' attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language was acceptable throughout the school. Most students' progress in the primary stage in speaking, listening, reading and writing were in line with expectations. Most students' reading was developing well and they could read extended Arabic text with minimal errors. In the secondary stage most students demonstrated the ability to communicate in standard Arabic to an acceptable level. Throughout the school, most students developed acceptable writing skills, although extended writing was limited at all stages.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as a second language was unsatisfactory throughout the school. Overall, attainment and progress in obtaining the key skills of listening, speaking, and reading were poor. Most students were unable to recognise simple Arabic words such as 'book' or 'pen'. At the secondary stage, students were unable to understand simple instructions in Arabic. Their speech was limited to single words and phrases. Students could read a few Arabic statements but their pronunciation and grasp of grammar was unsatisfactory. Whilst most students were able to copy simple Arabic words their writing skills were also limited.

Attainment and progress in English at all stages were acceptable. In the Foundation Stage classes, children responded well to tape recordings, songs and games. Many were beginning to speak at length and with fluency. At the primary level, children's reading, writing, talking and listening levels were developing well. In the secondary stage, the students were reading literary texts with good comprehension and were able to extract meaning and place it in a different context. Students in Grade 4 wrote and acted out a play about the water cycle and they wrote their own myths in Grade 7. In Grades 9 to 11, students applied their speaking and listening skills well to different contexts. Eleventh grade students successfully created a business plan and discussed management issues in English. Students sitting IGCSE examinations generally performed in line with international expectations.

Attainment and progress in mathematics at all stages were acceptable. Children at the Foundation Stage recognised and used numbers well. Most students in primary could identify and name the four basic geometric shapes and describe their distinctive characteristics. As the students moved through the primary grades they were able to order numbers and carry out mental and written mathematical activities and use fractions, decimals and percentages accurately. Students in the secondary grades were solving more complex number operations, finding equivalent ratios, comparing different numbers and solving simultaneous equations using the substitution or elimination method. Student attainment in IGCSE at Grade 11 was broadly in line with international standards.

Attainment and progress in science was acceptable and showed an improving trend. Most students attained knowledge, skills and understanding at the expected level. The Foundation Stage children had made a good start to learning about the world around them and were aware of the need to recycle and care for the environment. Most students understood the contribution of science to society and were able to participate in discussions about a range of science topics including food webs and eco-systems. Most were broadening their understanding of the environment and could discuss their potential role in protecting it. Secondary students had developed a sound scientific approach which encouraged creative and critical thinking, and investigative skills. IGCSE students achieved in line with international standards.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Attitudes and behaviour were good at stages in the school. Students' relationships with each other and with adults were positive, co-operative and respectful. Students showed concern for and tolerance of others. Most students were making good progress in the development of personal skills and self-confidence. Most students arrived in good time for lessons. However, recent attendance levels were unsatisfactory.

Most students had a good understanding of Islam and fulfilled their civic responsibilities well. Muslim students spoke of the ways in which Islam guided their lives and its place in the world. Members of the school council were starting to be active in bringing about change in the school. For example, they identified opportunities for recycling around the school. Prefects assisted adults with the supervision of younger students in school and, to a lesser extent, on the buses. Students were very proud to live in Dubai and spoke of its iconic buildings and cultural achievements. They enjoyed the variety and richness that living among so many different nationalities brought to their lives.

Most students' showed good economic and environmental understanding. For example, they could explain how and why Dubai was changing, economically. Younger students understood the importance of conserving water and how to use the earth's resources with care. Environmental education and understanding was well developed through social studies lessons and economic understanding further developed in economics, business studies and commerce lessons.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Overall, the quality of teaching was acceptable. Most teachers were committed and most had good knowledge of their subjects. They praised students and encouraged them to learn. A few teachers involved students actively in their learning through answering questions, experimenting and leading activities. More paired groupings, small cooperative groups, and independent learning were just beginning to be used by teachers. In a few lessons, teachers dominated learning and so did not fully develop students' skills. Strategies to meet the

different learning needs and abilities of a few students, particularly those with additional learning needs, were not used consistently across the school. With the exception of classes in the information and communications (ICT) laboratory, there was little evidence of technology being used to support teaching or student learning.

The quality of learning was acceptable throughout the school. Students showed positive attitudes to learning and were growing in independence. Foundation Stage children were frequently involved in practical activities and in listening to story tapes which promoted dialogue. In science, students carried out practical and experimental work well. In French and business studies there were opportunities to discuss in small groups which led to more interesting activities and better learning than in those lessons which were wholly dependent on the text book. Students displayed good levels of skills and responded positively when given the opportunity to undertake tasks involving the use of ICT. In lessons where students worked in groups or pairs and teacher questioning was effective, students showed well-developed critical and problem-solving skills. In a minority of lessons, students were passive learners and were not given sufficient opportunities to think for themselves or find things out.

Assessment was acceptable. The gathering and use of various assessment results to inform teaching and increase student attainment was in the early stages of development and implementation. Ongoing assessment results were being maintained and teachers were beginning to discuss these results with students, setting targets and providing more constructive, written feedback. Staff were at the early stages of developing a simple computerised tracking system to analyse results and use them to drive planning and teaching. This initiative required considerable further development.

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

The school's curriculum was acceptable. It was devised by The City Schools group and used elements of the English National Curriculum to provide a broad and balanced programme of study for all year groups. This went part of the way to fulfil the school's aim to 'develop happy, inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people'. The curriculum was planned around the prescribed text books but some additional materials had been added to enhance learning. Teachers used hand-outs, plays, audio and video materials to enrich students' learning. Whilst the school had put in place arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the curriculum, the curriculum did not include sufficient challenge to ensure all students achieved their full potential. Arrangements to ensure students were well prepared when they moved from class to class required further development to ensure progression and building successfully on prior learning. Cross-curricular links were developing well in the primary phase but were limited in the secondary phase. The development of skills was improving. Opportunities for creativity within the curriculum were provided in science investigations and in business studies, where students interpreted data relating to Dubai and world economy effectively. Visitors and visits

provided students with a few links to the local community. There was considerable scope to extend these links to include opportunities for students to receive more guidance about universities and careers. A limited range of extra-curricular activities were offered to support personal development and responsibility.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety were good. The school promoted some of the benefits to be gained from developing a healthy lifestyle. However, healthy eating options in the canteen were limited. The physical education programme was comprehensive but there was a limited number range of after school sports activities. Almost all parents felt that the children were safe at school and this view was supported by inspectors. The procedures for using school buses were safe. The full time nurse was supported by two teachers who had been trained in first aid. The nurse taught a comprehensive healthy living programme to all students. Medicines and dangerous chemicals were locked away securely. Comprehensive records were maintained of students with allergies or health issues. Fire drills were held regularly, however, evacuation arrangements were unclear as emergency exits were unmarked and doors on the upper floor required a teacher to open them with a key. This constituted a potential hazard to safety.

The quality of support throughout the school was acceptable. Relationships were positive, staff knew students well and ensured they were well cared for and safe. Students knew who to go to for help. However, although individual teachers provided basic career guidance to older students, the lack of a comprehensive career programme meant that some students were not fully aware of entry qualifications needed for higher levels of study or entry into particular careers. Tracking processes were in the early stages but improving. Most parents believed that the school treated students fairly but some did not know how those with special needs were supported. Arrangements to ensure support for all learners were not yet fully embedded into all classes. Almost half of parents surveyed felt that the homework load was heavy and that there was too little support for the students. The school recognised the need to manage and track attendance more effectively.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was acceptable. Led by the recently appointed Principal, the school had adequate leadership and management capacity. The Principal had a clear and explicit vision for the school and had succeeded in ensuring that almost all staff were united in their efforts to provide the students with a good education. The academic co-ordinator and the Head of the Kindergarten performed their duties well. They worked well with the Principal and formed an effective senior management team. This team knew the staff and students well. They created opportunities for students to take on responsibility and to develop leadership qualities.

Processes for self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. The school consulted widely on its effectiveness involving teachers, students and parents. The Principal had involved his senior management team and curriculum leaders in evaluating the quality of teaching throughout the school. They had led staff training sessions including modelling lessons and videoing teachers in action. This process had begun to result in improvements in lesson planning, teaching, assessment and student attainment. Curriculum leaders were the links between the academic co-ordinator and the subject teachers. They provided helpful and valued guidance and advice to teachers. The school development plan was based on the recommendations of the previous inspection report. The school had made progress in addressing some of these recommendations. Tracking of student progress was improving and teachers were working with students to set personal academic targets. Curriculum leaders frequently reviewed student progress and attainment within their area of responsibility and reported key findings back to the curriculum coordinator.

Partnership with parents and the community were good. The school had effective arrangements in place to communicate with parents and consider their views. Their opinions were sought, analysed and the results were posted in the main entrance area of the school. Staff sent parents helpful reports about their children's progress. Parents had not been given detailed information about the curriculum and what their children were learning. The school had begun to develop its links with the community. As yet, the wider community was not extensively used to make learning meaningful to children. The pre-inspection parent survey showed most parents were happy by the service provided by the school.

Governance was unsatisfactory. The owners of the school were based in Pakistan and made infrequent visits to the school during the year. This meant that external accountability was lacking. Plans to set up parents' committee and forum were at a very early stage of development.

Staffing, facilities and resources were unsatisfactory. Staffing for leadership had improved but there were serious inadequacies with regard to staffing for Islamic Education and Arabic. The school had difficulty attracting and retaining good quality teachers. The school buildings were well designed, clean, safe and well maintained. The absence of a gymnasium had a negative impact on the school's capacity to offer a comprehensive physical education programme. Well-trained and skilled staff performed well in the limited accommodation. There were no grassed areas for students to play, although undercover areas and the existing play equipment were safe. The school had an appropriate range of computers in the library and ICT sections but there were insufficient ICT resources available in lessons.

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:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?			
12% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.			
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?			
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?			
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?			
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good is the students' personal and social development?			
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Attitudes and behaviour	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Good

How good are teaching and learning?			
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?			
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?			
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Health and safety	Good	Good	Good
Quality of support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

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

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