

INSPECTION REPORT

International Academic School

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Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT International Academic School

Location	Al Warqaa
Type of school	Private
Website	www.ias-dubai.ae
Telephone	04-2800993
Address	PO Box 262, Al Warqaa, Dubai
Principal	Ms Marah Qadoura
Curriculum	US/MOE
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-18 / Kindergarten to Grade 12
Attendance	Acceptable
Number of students on roll	1,054
Number of Emirati students	560 (53%)
Date of the inspection	5th December to 8th December 2011

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The context of the school

The International Academic School is a private school situated in Al Warqaa, providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to Grade 12, aged three to 18 years. At the time of the inspection there were 1054 students on roll, an increase of 27 per cent in comparison with the previous year. The school follows two curricula – the Ministry of Education curriculum for Grades 1 to 9 and a US-style curriculum from Kindergarten to Grade 12. No external examinations are taken by the students.

There were 90 full-time teachers deployed across the school, five of whom were not qualified. There were two members of specialist staff who provided learning support and counselling but no students had been identified as receiving additional support. The teacher to student ratio was 1:11. Just over half the students were Emirati nationals and the rest were from a mix of nationalities.

Overall school performance 2011-2012

Acceptable

How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

The International Academic School provided an acceptable level of education for its students. Children in Kindergarten made good progress from their starting points as a result of good leadership, provision and parental involvement. Attainment and progress in other parts of the school were mainly acceptable and there had been improvements in Islamic Education, Arabic as a first language and economic and environmental understanding. Although the majority of students felt valued and the Student Council had a positive impact on school life, a minority of students reported that their opinions were unimportant. Students' attitudes, especially in assembly, were acceptable in the elementary, middle and high school, but good in the Kindergarten.

Whilst teaching and learning remained acceptable overall, there were examples of good, and sometimes better practice in all phases. Assessment, however, was unsatisfactory in all phases except the Kindergarten, where it was good. The curriculum lacked enrichment and was only just acceptable because links across the US and MOE classes did not provide parity in the quality of provision for both sets of students. Although self-evaluation, school-improvement planning and governance were unsatisfactory, the school had at least an acceptable capacity to improve because the Principal, in post for less than a term, has a clear vision for improvement. She also had the support of teachers and most parents and was slowly but surely making a difference.

Key strengths

- The improvements in Islamic Education and Arabic;
- The improvements in students' economic and environmental understanding in middle and higher grades;
- The vision of the new Principal and her determination to improve provision;
- Effective leadership, management and provision in the Kindergarten;
- The good partnerships with parents.

Recommendations

- Ensure that leaders at all levels monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching so that learning improves;
- Implement international tests to benchmark students' attainment and use the information to plan lessons which meet the learning needs of students;
- Review the curriculum, especially in the MoE section, to ensure it provides choice, diversity and the development of skills and understanding;
- Identify and effectively support students with special educational needs; and,
- Improve self-evaluation using rigorous analysis of data to produce a strategic plan which clearly and specifically identifies improvements in outcomes for students.

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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Islamic Education				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Acceptable
Arabic as a first language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Acceptable
Arabic as an additional language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
English				
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Mathematics				
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Science				
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

Attainment in Islamic Education was acceptable in the elementary and high school and good in the middle school. In the middle school, the majority of students, especially Arab students, developed a good understanding of what it meant to be a Muslim and demonstrated respect for others. Attainment in Arabic for first and second language learners was acceptable across each phase. Most first-language speakers understood what they heard. The majority spoke and read fluently in the middle -school, and made good progress in writing but this was less well-developed in the higher grades. Second-language learners listened well in the elementary and middle grades but skills in speaking were less well-developed in the middle grades. Elementary students wrote short sentences and the majority showed satisfactory skills in reading and understanding picture books. Higher grade students had acceptable skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Attainment in English, mathematics and science was mostly acceptable across all phases; it was good in English and science in the Kindergarten. They had age-appropriate knowledge and understanding of numbers and shapes. They also understood life processes and living things and the basic skills of scientific enquiry.

In Islamic Education most students made good progress in reciting chapters of The Holy Qur'an, following the rules of recitation. In the higher grades progress was slower. Most students made acceptable progress in English, mathematics and science, although this was significantly better in the US than the Arabic sections of the school. Elementary students in the US classes made better progress and had a more varied vocabulary, answered questions competently and read with good expression. Middle school students had a sound knowledge of English grammar and by Grade 12, most students spoke fluently and confidently. Most Grade 6 students could calculate using fractions and decimals. Middle school students made steady progress in algebra and by Grade 12 most could use calculus to differentiate a range of functions. However, their ability to apply mathematics in real world contexts was limited as was their ability to independently investigate and solve problems. Scientific skills and their application were less well-developed among elementary students because of the repetition of concepts by the teachers. Middle school students extended their knowledge of life and living processes and by high school most students demonstrated an appropriate understanding of scientific knowledge, concepts and processes. However, as in mathematics, their ability to apply independently their knowledge to everyday contexts, and their skills in scientific methodology, were less well-developed.

Students with special educational needs made good progress in Kindergarten and in Islamic Education. In Arabic as an additional language and in English and science, progress was acceptable whereas in mathematics, progress for these students was unsatisfactory.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture	Good	Good	Good	Good
Civic, economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good

The students' attitudes and behaviour were good at the Kindergarten level and acceptable in other phases of the school. Students were usually courteous. However, a minority of students arrived late to morning assembly and first period classes. Students' self-initiative and a positive work ethic were not reflected in all aspects of their work in school. Children in Kindergarten could understand and explain many aspects of Islam and had a strong sense of Islamic identity. In all stages, non-Muslim students understood and respected Islamic values and showed interest in talking about some of them, such as charity, and knew the impact of Islam in the contemporary society in Dubai. Most students exhibited strong pride in their national identity and respected other cultures. They were happy to be a part of the Dubai society. They had an acceptable level of understanding of the concept of responsibility towards their families and the community. Economic and environmental understanding was at an acceptable level in the KG and elementary, and good in the middle and high schools. In the Kindergarten, the majority of the children could indicate what would happen if they did not keep their environment clean; they also understood the concept of money. Younger students readily took on a few roles of responsibilities in the school. Most students had sufficient awareness of the range of economic activities present in Dubai.

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Good	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

The quality of teaching for effective learning was good in the Kindergarten and acceptable in all other phases. Teachers knew their subjects well and were mostly confident in how to teach them, this was especially so across Kindergarten in Islamic Education and in the teaching of Arabic. Lessons were usually well planned, although expectations in too many lessons in middle and high school were not sufficiently high. Teachers provided tasks which were mostly suitable for each phase. The level of challenge, however, for more able learners and support for slower learners were not consistently appropriate, especially in the elementary, middle and high school. The majority of teachers supplemented textbooks with some practical activities and worksheets but too often tasks were not related well to real life contexts.

Learning was good in the Kindergarten and acceptable elsewhere. In most phases of the school students were usually keen to learn but in the middle and high school grades their enthusiasm was less evident. They were confident in sharing their learning with others but were not given frequent enough opportunities to do so. Students undertook very little independent research or enquiry and limited access to information and communications technology in lessons did not help to support the development of investigative skills. In lessons, most students were not challenged to develop their critical and higher order thinking skills. Although teachers often shared the objectives of lessons with students, the rubrics for assessment were not used regularly by teachers to involve students more fully in reviewing their own learning. As a consequence, most students did not have a clear idea about their next steps for learning.

Assessment was good at the Kindergarten and unsatisfactory at all other stages. At Kindergarten there was a comprehensive system of assessment and review which was rigorously implemented, resulting in good progress for all students. Children in the Kindergarten were also involved in self and peer-evaluation. Data was analysed effectively and used to modify the curriculum and individual lesson plans. There was a

detailed school assessment policy and clear correction procedures for assessing written work but they were not consistently implemented. The marking of students' written work did not generally support them with their learning and help them to improve. Oral feedback was not a feature of most lessons and consequently there was insufficient feedback on student performance in class. Additionally there were no external benchmarks to assess attainment against international standards. Arrangements to track and record progress were also inconsistent with a tracking system which was not sufficiently standardised. Assessment information was not used sufficiently in planning to meet the learning needs of all groups of students.

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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

The quality of the curriculum was good in the Kindergarten and acceptable in the other three phases. The Kindergarten curriculum was well planned and balanced. It was enhanced by a range of departmental resources, a close working partnership with parents and by a range of extra-curricular activities. The remaining three phases operated a dual curriculum with most students following an US curriculum, and the others a Ministry of Education (MoE) model. This structure enabled continuity and progression as students moved up through the school. However, essential links across the US and MoE strands of the curriculum were not always maintained in order to ensure parity in the quality of provision for both sets of students. The curriculum was reviewed annually, but not sufficiently rigorously to ensure consistency in meeting the educational needs of all students. The Arabic curriculum was an area of strength in the school and included educational visits and cross curricular links with other subjects. Curriculum plans generally did not include sufficient enrichment to motivate and excite students and develop their critical thinking and investigative skills.

How well does the school protect and support students?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and Safety	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of Support	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

The quality of health and safety was good in the KG and acceptable elsewhere in the school. The policies relating to transportation arrangements were well implemented. There was sufficient medical staff to carry out checks regularly and rigorously. Medical records were comprehensive and up to date. Fire drills took place on a regular basis and were properly evaluated. All parts of the school buildings, equipment and resources, including play areas, were safe and hygienic. The condition of the outdoor football pitch was poor and some unsafe practices were observed in a science laboratory. There was an appropriate level of supervision. The school promoted a healthy lifestyle and the food options in the canteen were healthy. Child protection arrangements were recently reviewed and the policy had been distributed to key staff members. The new policy was, however, a statement of intentions and did not unambiguously outline the actions required. The Kindergarten had an appropriate induction process relating to child protection.

Support for students was good in the Kindergarten and acceptable at the other levels. Rapport between teachers and students was strong. Relations between staff members and students were mostly respectful and, as a result, behavioural issues were well managed. Policies effectively communicated behaviour expectations to students and their parents. Students received only minimal guidance and support for college preparation. There were limited opportunities for students to gain specialist knowledge and experience from the local community, with only a few links between the school curriculum and the community. Identification and support for students with special educational needs was well-established in the Kindergarten but at an early stage of development in the rest of the school. Differential instruction was in a minority of the lesson plans but was not observed in most classrooms; therefore the needs of many students, especially those with special educational needs, were not always met. Procedures to promote good attendance were systematic but punctuality to lessons, particularly at the beginning of the day, required significant improvement.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

	Whole school
Quality of leadership	Acceptable
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Unsatisfactory
Partnerships with parents and the community	Good
Governance	Unsatisfactory
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Acceptable

The quality of leadership was acceptable. The new Principal had a clear vision and direction for the school; however, she had not had sufficient time to ensure that all members of the school community, including newcomers, understood their roles in achieving it. Consequently, improvements were still at an inconsistent level. A few leaders were effective in bringing about improvements and although workshops were provided to improve teaching and learning, the impact across the school was variable.

Self-evaluation and school improvement planning were unsatisfactory. There had been some improvements, for example in the Kindergarten and in Islamic Education and Arabic. However, information about how well students' attainment compared with international standards was lacking, and systems for tracking their progress over time were not well-developed. Consequently, the school had no way of knowing if it was meeting the needs of all students. Surveys were carried out and whilst some suggestions for improvement from parents and the Students' Council had been addressed, not all members of the community felt their opinions were valued. Recommendations from the previous inspection report had not been adequately addressed.

Links with parents and the community were good. Parents were supportive of the school and valued the open access to the Principal, the owner and the teachers. The school effectively communicated with parents and provided information and resources to support learning at home. Reports on students' progress were adequate. Parents of KG children enjoyed family learning sessions and occasionally taught classes alongside the teachers. Most classes had trips to places of interest to enhance and enrich learning, but links with other schools were limited.

Governance was unsatisfactory. Although school leaders were held accountable by the owner, the board had only recently been established and was not fully representative of the school community. It had not met regularly and so was not in a position to evaluate, challenge and support the school in its work.

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The management of staffing, facilities and resources was acceptable. Systems and procedures were in place to ensure the school ran efficiently most of the time, although there were some time-tabling problems between the US and MoE classes which led to loss of teaching time. Almost all members of staff were suitably qualified and appropriately deployed to support learning. A programme of professional development was in place to further develop teachers' skills. The facilities and resources, including the library, computer and science rooms, were adequate to support the curriculum, but technology was not always available or used in classrooms. Access for those students with additional needs was limited. Sports facilities were adequate, although the playground surface needed replacing and the swimming pool was underused.

What are the views of parents, teachers and students?

Before the inspection, the views of parents, teachers and senior secondary students were surveyed. Key messages from each group were considered during the inspection and these helped to form judgements. A summary of the survey statistics and comments from those who responded to the survey follows:

Responses to the surveys			
Responses received	Number		Percentage
Parents	This year	71	10%
	Last year	155	27%
Teachers	11		13%
Students	49		55%

*The percentage of responses from parents is based on the number of families.

Only about a tenth of the parents responded to the survey, much fewer than last year's response. A few teachers and about half of the senior students responded to their surveys. Most parents were satisfied with the overall quality of education available at the school, but about a third of the students did not indicate overall satisfaction. Most parents and students indicated that progress was good in the key subjects, but a few of each group indicated that progress was not good in Arabic as a first language. Parents and students held mixed views about provision and participation at the school; on balance their views were more positive than negative. The majority of parents and teachers believed that inspection had led to improvements at the school. Teachers held positive views across the different aspects of provision, but a few indicated that they did not have sufficient resources to support their teaching. About half the senior students reported that they enjoyed life at the school, but the other half indicated otherwise. Similarly, about half thought that the range of subjects, clubs and activities was not good. Less than a third of the students reported that school leaders listened to their opinions about the school. About a third reported that the school had good links with the wider community, but a third reported that it did not.

What happens next?

The school has been asked to prepare and submit an updated action plan to DSIB within two months of receiving the most recent report. This plan should address:

- Recommendations from DSIB;
- Areas identified by the school as requiring improvement;
- Other external reports or sources of information that comment on the work of the school;
- Priorities arising from the school's unique characteristics.

The next inspection will report on the progress made by the school.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau

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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

Our work with schools

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) inspects schools to inform parents, students and the wider community of the quality of education provided. Inspectors also give guidance to staff about how to improve the standard of education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask the principal and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan our time in school. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities in which students are involved. We also gather the views of students, parents and staff. We find their views very helpful and use them, together with the other information we have collected, to arrive at our view regarding the quality of education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of education in the school. We describe how well students are doing, how good the school is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and children work together and how they go about improving the school. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its aims.

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