

INSPECTION REPORT

International Academic School

Report published in April 2014

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT International Academic School

Location	Al Warqaa 1
Type of school	Private
Website	www.ias-dubai.ae
Telephone	04 2800993
Address	Al wargaa 1 P.O. BOX 262
Principal	Miss Marah Qadourah
Curriculum	US
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-18 / Kindergarten 1- 12
Attendance	Good
Number of students on roll	1012
Largest nationality group of Students	Emirati
Number of Emirati students	342 (33.79%)
Date of the inspection	21st to 24th October

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The context of the school

The International Academic School is located in Al Warqaa. Most students spoke Arabic as a first language; just over one third of the students were Emiratis. Most students were in the Kindergarten (KG) and elementary phases.

The school follows a US curriculum, including the Common Core curriculum for English and mathematics. For other subjects, the school used the California State curriculum.

Children were able to start in pre-Kindergarten before the age of three, and there were two kindergarten year groups with a total of 343 children. The class average size was increasing in the elementary school and number of students per class was relatively lower in the high school. The school had identified a small minority of students with special educational needs (SEN), including some who were gifted and/or talented. The principal had been in her post for a second year and was now well established. There had been a relatively high number of staff changes.

Overall school performance 2013-2014

Acceptable

Key strengths

- The positive attitudes to learning and good behaviour of all students;
- The focused and dedicated leaders in school;
- The growing and purposeful partnership with parents;
- The caring learning environment which welcomed all students.

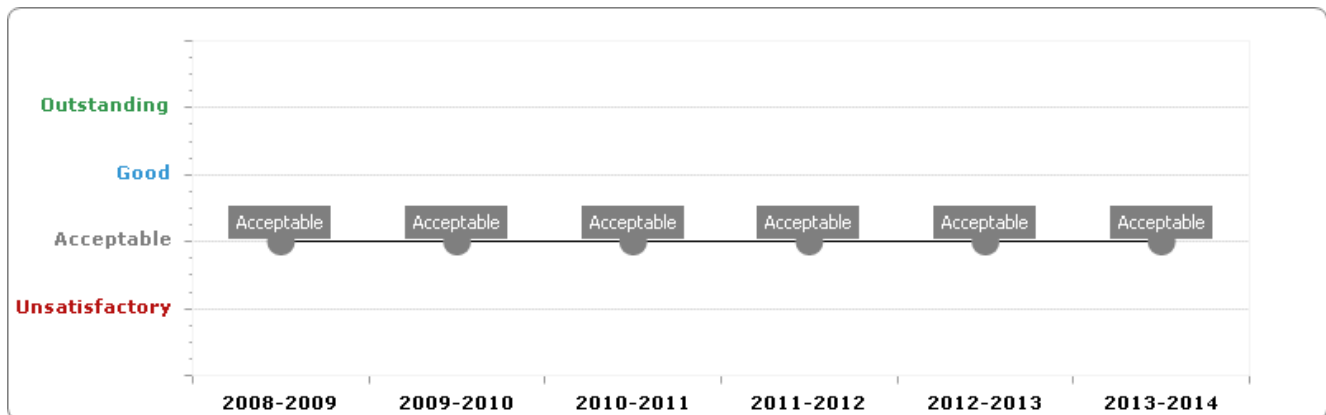
Recommendations

- Raise attainment in key subjects, particularly in the middle school and narrow the attainment gap between different groups of students.
- Ensure all lessons include a variety of approaches to meet the needs of different abilities.
- Raise expectations in lessons by providing more opportunities for collaborative and independent learning.
- Further enrich the curriculum in the high school by providing more opportunities for preparing older students for the world of work and the next stage in education.
- Capitalise on the good practice available in school through a more focused professional development programme linked to school priorities.
- Increase the amount of time for teaching Arabic as a first language to students in Grades 1 to 3 to meet MoE requirements.
- Use externally validated assessments to moderate the school's own assessments and to give staff, the students and their parents, a realistic view of students' attainment in an international context.

Progress since the last inspection

- Improved attainment in mathematics in high school
- More accurate self-evaluation to inform future improvement
- A more focused curriculum securing continuity between phases
- The appointment of new leaders to develop strategic roles

Trend of overall performance



How good are the students' attainment progress and learning skills?

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

[Read paragraph](#)

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	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Quality of students' learning skills	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Personal responsibility	Good	Good	Good	Good
Students' understanding of Islamic values and their local, cultural and global awareness	Good	Good	Good	Good
Community and environmental responsibility	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Curriculum design to meet the individual needs of students	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

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

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

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

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the students' attainment and progress?

In Islamic Education, in the primary phase, students demonstrated adequate levels of knowledge of key Islamic concepts and the Prophet's Seerah. However, students' Quran recitation skills were underdeveloped across most phases. In Arabic as a first language, most students across all phases had appropriate listening and speaking skills, particularly in higher grades. Reading was in line with expectations for most students. However in the secondary phase, students' understanding of the writing process and their ability to write at length for different purposes was underdeveloped. In Arabic as an additional language, students' listening and responding were acceptable while the quality of their reading was inconsistent across the school. Students' oral communication was limited to the use of a range of familiar words and expressions.

Students' attainment in English was good in Kindergarten and acceptable in Elementary, Middle and High school. Kindergarten children made a good start with early reading and writing skills. They made phonic wheels, read rhyming words and created words with given letters. Throughout the school students had a sound knowledge of grammar. However they did not use their knowledge and skills to write and read independently. They listened attentively and spoke with increasing confidence. In grade 10, boys took part in debates, for example on the topic of "E books versus real books" and "school uniform versus no uniform". However their skills in reading and writing were under developed and this affected students' performance in developing extended writing.

Students at all levels of the school were able to calculate reasonably well, but their progress was hampered due to weak reasoning and numeracy skills. Problem solving in mathematics proved particularly challenging and students did not demonstrate the necessary skills to tackle two and three step operations.

In Science, attainment was good in Kindergarten and acceptable in the other phases. In Kindergarten, students were able to talk about changes that they had observed in nature and were eagerly asking questions about their learning. However, this aspect of scientific enquiry was not developed further in the school and resulted in being a weaker aspect of attainment in this subject.

In Islamic Education, in all phases, students made steady progress in the knowledge and understanding of Islamic concepts and values but their progress in Quran recitation was limited. Students' progress in Arabic as a first language was good in listening and in line with expectations in speaking. The progress of deeper reading comprehension skills was slow as was the development of extended writing skills. There was acceptable progress for most students taking Arabic as an additional language, their listening and basic reading skills were secure, however their skills in writing were developing at a very slow rate.

In English, students' progress was good in kindergarten and acceptable in elementary, middle and high school. In Kindergarten students made good progress in letter recognition and had started to write their

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names. Through elementary, students acquired a range of more difficult vocabulary which they were able to read and understand in sentences. This enabled students in higher elementary classes to analyse characters, establishing a time and place in historical fiction. Middle school students through secure acquisition of reading skills were able to discuss different viewpoints presented in a story. Students in High School were beginning to improve their reading and writing through the school's new reading programme. By the time they reached the end of High school they showed a deeper understanding of a range of texts. However, their independent writing skills were not developed well enough.

Although students in Kindergarten, Elementary and Middle phases were making acceptable progress in mathematics, students in the High School were showing more rapid improvements.

In Science, progress was good in Kindergarten but acceptable in all other phases. The Kindergarten students made good progress in developing their observation skills and were able to record their findings in clearly labelled simple diagrams. This was not always the case further up the school where there was a lack of opportunities for experiential learning and appropriate recording was not always evident.

[View judgements](#)

Quality of students' learning skills

Students' learning skills were good in kindergarten and acceptable in the rest of the school. Almost all students had positive attitudes towards learning. They listened and responded well to questioning by their teachers. Students in the Elementary phase quickly followed instructions and were keen to take part in lessons when teachers involved them in active learning.

Younger students displayed curiosity and were active learners in science. In the older grades they were enthusiastic about new learning; this was evident when observing students dissecting a heart in biology. Almost all students, when given a task, worked well without close supervision. They worked cooperatively in groups, took turns and were willing to learn from each other. However, collaboration skills were less well developed. Often in group work a more able child completed the task while others watched and had limited involvement. Teachers gave few opportunities for students to work independently and so as a result they did not demonstrate age appropriate research skills.

[View judgements](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were a hallmark of the school. Both in and out of class, students were respectful, helpful and interacted positively with their teachers and peers. Students could explain the importance of healthy eating and a healthy lifestyle, and generally made good food choices. They had a strong understanding of the influence of Islamic values on everyday life in Dubai, and could name several examples of positive Muslim behaviour in their society. Most of the older students understood the local heritage and traditions of the UAE. Although students were not well-informed about other cultures, they expressed inclusive attitudes for all peoples. Their awareness of the multicultural society in Dubai and its impact was adequate, while their understanding of the wider world was limited. Students had a clear understanding of the value of hard work and had a clear plan for using self-reliance and goals to approach difficult tasks. All students were appreciative of community activities and expressed a desire to undertake further such events. Individual initiative was developing and students indicated they were ready to take on new responsibilities because they had grown in confidence through the various opportunities provided for them.

[View judgements](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

Teaching for effective learning was good in kindergarten, particularly in Kindergarten 2 and acceptable in all other phases. All teachers had a good knowledge of their subjects and were enthusiastic. However they did not all have a sound knowledge of how students of different ages learn. In the Elementary school students often found subjects difficult to understand because they were not actively involved or using resources themselves. For example in mathematics, students were completing worksheets and finding correct answers on number bonds by following a set of prescribed steps. However they lacked a deeper understanding of the application of mathematical principles and as a result were unable to apply numerical skills to solving problems. Not all teachers used resources well across the school. Often they had resources in classrooms but did not have enough for the number of students. The whole school had been involved in improving lesson planning but the majority of teachers did not use these documents consistently. This affected students' learning.

Assessment across all phases was acceptable. Teachers knew the students well and had started to monitor their achievements. However the tracking of students and using assessment knowledge to help them improve was at an early stage. A few teachers had useful informal assessment notebooks for recording young students' achievements and difficulties in lesson time. These were used successfully to inform planning of additional support for those students with special educational needs. Teachers had created

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rubrics to assess the work of older students and involve them in recognising their own strengths and areas for improvement. However, these were sometimes not subject specific enough and could not be used to provide effective support and feedback. The senior management team (SMT) had reviewed the formal assessments used in school and the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), also known as the Iowa Tests, were being replaced by assessments aligned to the new Common Core state standards. This was a new project and assessment information was not yet used effectively to enable staff to plan to meet the learning needs of all students.

[View judgements](#)

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

The curriculum was acceptable in all phases. The conversion to a complete US curriculum has taken place and is now fully aligned and articulated from Kindergarten to high school. However, the school was still in transition and the impact on teaching and learning was just beginning to become evident. Through the adoption of the Common Core and the California Curriculum, scope and sequencing has been embedded in the system. The heads of departments had met to create cross-curricular links and have reviewed and developed lesson planning to ensure consistency. Some enrichment activities have taken place, such as an annual school trip, as well as other types of infrequent enrichment offerings including a few opportunities to connect with the community. While some provision has been made for the needs of different students, little impact was seen in the classrooms. The newly developed lesson plan document was designed to allow adjustments to be made to each lesson to cater for the needs of different groups of students including those with special educational needs. However, in many cases, teachers did not use this feature. Few extra-curricular choices were offered to students. However, some options were in place, such as French, techno club and music. Additionally, the school was not compliant with MOE regulations regarding the amount of time given to Arabic as a first language for students in grade1 to grade 3.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

There was a strong sense of caring on the part of all staff members, impacting positively on the health and safety of all students. The clinic was well run, with good systems to provide for the medical needs of students. Facilities were well-maintained, including laboratories. Fire drills were carried out regularly. A range of strategies were being adopted to support students in making healthy lifestyle choices. Attendance was good. Students were supervised well, and a child protection policy was in place and understood by

teachers. School buses were tracked but insufficient regard was given to student safety in and around moving vehicles.

Teachers and students enjoyed positive relationships, and it was apparent that students appreciated the care they received from staff. All areas of the school were well supervised and secure. The school had systems in place that promoted attendance and punctuality. Students with special educational needs were admitted and welcomed into the school. Plans to improve advice and guidance, particularly for older students, were in place. They included stronger links with local universities. However, identification procedures for SEN students were underdeveloped and not sharply focused. Gifted and talented students were identified, but were not usually challenged in order to advance their knowledge sufficiently.

[View judgements](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The leadership of the school was good. The principal provided good leadership for the school and had clear understanding of the improvements needed. She acted swiftly to address any deficiencies and had strategically appointed new leaders. She was very well supported by middle managers, who shared a clear direction and commitment to the values of the school. Leaders were clearly focused on the previous recommendations in order to achieve the best outcomes for students. However, there had not been sufficient time for the impact of those strategies to be evidenced in students' outcomes.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. The principal and the governors had an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Self-evaluation documents had been compiled and action plans completed. However, there was variation in the ability of middle leaders to self-evaluate, which hindered the improvement process. Appraisal systems were improving, with the professional training and development needs of teachers being acted upon. However, the objective to provide consistently good teaching remained a challenge whilst the turnover of teachers remained high, particularly in the middle school.

Partnerships with parents and the community were good. A good communication system was in place and the interactive school website provided a wealth of information. For example, parents could access a secure area to check the progress of their children. Partnerships with the community and partner schools were still too few.

Parents thought that the school was particularly good at building students' confidence and self-esteem in a safe and secure environment. They celebrated the pivotal role some parents played at school for careers and cultural awareness and hoped to see such initiatives grow further.

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Governance was acceptable. They held the school accountable and received regular updates from the Principal. They had a realistic and accurate view of the school, including strengths and areas requiring further improvement. As the school was growing fast, long term improvement plans for facilities and building were being reviewed to meet the demands of a bigger school population. However, the issue of curriculum compliance in Arabic as a first language still needed to be addressed.

The management of staffing, facilities and resources was acceptable. Teachers were well qualified and appropriately deployed. New leadership roles across this growing school had been created. Daily routines were efficient and the premises were effectively managed, despite the growing population of students. The school's learning resources, however, were not always fully used by teachers. Modern technologies used by students were limited. Specialist areas such as the science laboratory and Art studio were of good quality. The library was well stocked but had a limited stock of Arabic books. As the number of students per class was increasing, the space in classrooms such as the IT room in Elementary was becoming overcrowded. Outdoor sporting facilities were limited and inadequately shaded, limiting their usage.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school provide for Emirati students?

The analysis of students' external examinations showed a gap in achievement between Emirati and non-Emirati students, with Emirati students underperforming compared to their peers. The gap narrowed after grade 9 as the population of the school became smaller. These classes also included new students from other local schools. Emirati students' attainment and progress in lessons largely matched their peers in key subject areas. Although attainment and progress scores were slightly lower against curriculum expectations, the gap varied by year group. The school, however, had not started to track the progress and attainment of Emirati students sufficiently. This was particularly the case for Emirati boys' reading skills in Kindergarten and lower KG.

How well does the school provide for students with special educational needs?

The school had strengthened its identification of students with different learning needs. As a result, teachers were more able to track students' progress systematically in their lessons. The identification and tracking included Emirati students. Emirati students, in particular, displayed weaker language skills. The support that all groups of students received during lessons was still a key area for improvement. Teachers' methodology did not adequately focus on the learning outcomes of different groups of learners within lessons. Less able

and gifted students therefore only made acceptable progress and were not able to reach their full potential. Progress in reading was particularly slow in the early stages for Emirati boys.

How well does the school teach Arabic as a first language?

Across all phases, most teachers had secure subject knowledge. Teachers' presentation in classes was mostly clear easy to follow. They used oral questioning frequently to check understanding. However, in Elementary, teachers gave very few opportunities for students to work independently or with peers. Levels of challenge and expectation in speaking and writing, across most grades, were frequently low. In Middle and High, teaching was driven by the textbook content and students were expected to listen and complete routine activities, usually following patterns provided by the teacher. In too many instances, valuable time was consumed in copying given answers and low-level work. Across most grades, teachers did not always focus on helping students develop independent skills, for example in writing. The curriculum broadly followed the content prescribed by the MoE. It ensured appropriate opportunities were provided for progression with grammar and reading. While curriculum plans included planning for writing, this was not always followed through into the classrooms. In Middle and High, the curriculum was heavily focused on the teaching of abstract grammar rules. While the curriculum was broadly adequate, little modification was made to cater for the needs of those who had significant gaps in their learning.

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	94	9%
	Last year	73	10%
Teachers	45		46%
Students	75		91%

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

A very small proportion of parents responded to the survey. The number of students and teachers taking part was similar to the previous year. Overall, the three populations are satisfied with the education provided by the school. Parents and students feel the school is growing fast and resources need to be enhanced urgently. Some parents commented on the increase in fees and the need to see an impact on expanding the existing facilities, such as toilets, class size and shaded playing fields. This was echoed by students during the inspection. Students and parents believe that the progress made in different subjects is good overall. Homework was set regularly but students felt overwhelmed at times. Most of them also felt that they did not use new technologies regularly in school. Curriculum choices, career guidance and support were also raised by a majority of students as an area which needed improving. As the turnover of teachers in school is high, all parties emphasised the importance of professional development and support for newcomers in order to achieve stability and consistency from one year to the next. A few teachers in their response shared the need for more professional support in relation to meeting the needs of students with different abilities.

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

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

How to contact us

If you have a concern or wish to comment on any aspect of this report you should contact:

inspection@khda.gov.ae

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