

American International School Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 12

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.

The American International 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 Qusais, the American International School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 12, aged three to 18 years. The school followed a US curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 1,840 students on roll. For the purpose of the inspection, school phases of KG, elementary (Grades 1 to 5), middle (Grades 6 to 8) and high (Grades 9 to 12) are used for reporting. Middle and high school phases are referred to as secondary within this report. The school was unable to provide reliable evidence on student attendance in the course of the inspection.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. The majority of parents who responded agreed that the school showed concern for their children's health and welfare and kept their children safe and healthy. Most parents agreed that their children liked school, that the teaching was good, and that their children's progress in Islamic Education, Arabic, English and mathematics was good. A majority of parents thought that their children were treated fairly in school, that behaviour was good and that staff expected children to work hard and do their best. Almost half of parents who responded felt that the school did not give good information about their children's progress and a majority did not agree that the school was good at consulting them about decisions affecting their child. However, a majority reported that they felt comfortable about approaching the school with a question or complaint. More than half of parents did not agree that the school provided a range of enjoyable and stimulating activities for their children. The majority of parents were unsure about the school's response to the last inspection report.

How well does the school perform overall?

The school provided an acceptable quality of education, although there were areas of provision which were unsatisfactory. Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable in all grades except for boys in higher grades. At this stage boys made unsatisfactory progress. In Arabic, progress and attainment were acceptable overall. In the elementary phase, levels of attainment for most students were acceptable and they made good progress particularly with their reading skills. Students' attainment in English was acceptable in KG and elementary phase and good in the middle and high school. Progress in mathematics was acceptable in the elementary grades and good in the middle and high phases. Students' attainment was acceptable in all phases apart from the KG. Attainment and progress in science in KG were unsatisfactory. In the elementary phase, attainment was acceptable and in middle and high school it was good, in comparison with age-related expectations. Behaviour and attitudes throughout the school were acceptable. Most students were well behaved in classrooms and around the school, and treated staff, visitors and one another with respect. Attendance during the inspection was acceptable although many students were not punctual. Students gained an acceptable civic understanding and they understood the Islamic values of Dubai and the diversity of its population. They had a sound general understanding of the history and economy of Dubai in relation to the region and the wider world.

Overall, except in KG, teaching was acceptable. There was good practice in all subjects and in a few science lessons it was outstanding. In the best lessons, teachers had excellent subject knowledge and made learning meaningful for all students who were inspired, motivated and could work independently and with others. They could relate their learning to the real world and so it was enjoyable and memorable. In KG, however, children's learning was unsatisfactory. Assessment arrangements were acceptable. Regular testing provided summative data for each student and year group. However, this was not yet checked against external, international standards. The curriculum was acceptable in all phases other than KG. In KG teachers did not provide sufficient opportunities for children to develop their social skills. This was primarily due to the over directed and regimented classroom environment. The quality of health and safety in the school was acceptable. Students reported that they felt safe and well protected at school. School gates were monitored by an adequate number of security guards. In the KG and elementary phases, students received acceptable support from their class teachers but the quality of support to students in the middle and high phases was unsatisfactory.

The quality of leadership and management was acceptable. The vision of the school was published on the school website and most teachers responded positively to the declared vision and mission. The senior management team had acted on the recommendations of the last inspection and showed commitment to school improvement. The school had demonstrated commitment to improving the quality of parental involvement by the setting up of a parent council and partnership arrangements with parents and community were acceptable. The school had a Board of Directors, which demonstrated a clear commitment to improvement through business planning. However, arrangements for school governance were, overall,

unsatisfactory as the Board of Directors did not include representatives from a range of stakeholders within the school community, such as parents. There was a suitable number of qualified staff, though turnover was high. Several classrooms were too small and overcrowded.

Key features of the school

- The positive actions taken by the school in response to the recommendations of the previous inspection report, including the appointment of key staff and developments in improvement planning;
- The good command of English as an additional language by almost all students;
- The good quality of teaching and learning in Arabic and science;
- The positive attitudes to learning on the part of girls in the middle and high school phases.

Recommendations

- Ensure that the impact of post-inspection action planning is secured and developed over time;
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning across all subjects and ensure that best practice in certain departments is shared across the school;
- Review the quality of curriculum, teaching and learning in the KG and the early elementary years, so that teaching is better matched to the learning and personal development needs of the youngest students;
- Improve the provision for the inclusion of all students in all aspects of the life of the school by providing better support for students with special educational needs or disability;
- Further develop governance arrangements in the school to ensure that the school is fully accountable to the school owners and other stakeholders, including parents.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable in all grades except for the boys in higher grades. They made unsatisfactory progress. In lower grades the majority of the students could memorise short Surahs of The Holy Qur'an and also short Hadiths. They could perform ablution and they knew some details about the daily prayers. In middle years, the majority of the students could perform the Tayammum and they showed adherence to the Prophet's (PBUH) commandments. In higher grades, especially in girls' classes, the majority of the students knew recitation rules and they could recite The Holy Qur'an with few errors.

In Arabic, progress and attainment were acceptable overall. In the elementary phase, levels of attainment for most students were acceptable and they made good progress particularly with their reading skills. In the middle phase, most students studying Arabic as a first language made acceptable progress in all aspects of the language. However, in Arabic as an additional language, the majority made unsatisfactory progress. In the high school phase, the majority of girls studying Arabic as a first language had good levels of attainment and progress; they could read, understand and analyse a wide range of long texts. They also demonstrated good note-taking skills. However, their ability to write extensively was only acceptable. Attainment and progress for boys in the secondary phase was acceptable overall. Students of Arabic as an additional language made unsatisfactory progress.

Attainment in English was acceptable in KG and elementary phases and good in the middle and high school. Attainment was consistently at or above school benchmarks. In the high school phase students had a strong grasp of formal grammar, though they continued to make errors in the formation of words. Students in the middle and high phases made good progress in speaking and understanding English for a variety of purposes. Progress in KG and early elementary years was acceptable but students were still dependent on their teachers and textbooks. The introduction of personal daily journals throughout the school had produced a significant improvement in the quality and range of students' writing.

Progress in mathematics was, overall, acceptable in the elementary and middle stages and good in the high school phase. Students' attainment was acceptable in all phases apart from KG. In the KG, children were not offered a sufficient variety of practical experiences to improve their understanding of number, measurement or shape. By the end of the elementary phase, students could manipulate fractions and classify shapes in various ways. However, in this and the middle phase there were too few opportunities for students to investigate mathematical ideas. In the high school, students were able to solve problems using coordinate geometry and basic calculus and could explain the importance of mathematics in the real world.

Attainment and progress in science in KG were unsatisfactory. Although children learned facts about science, such as what constitutes a healthy diet, they made little progress in discovering and exploring through their senses. In the elementary phase, attainment was acceptable and in middle and secondary phases it was good, in comparison with age-related expectations. Students in the elementary phase made acceptable progress in, for example, understanding how machines made work easier. In the middle phase, students made good progress in understanding the human body and the properties of sound. Students in the secondary phase knew a range of scientific facts and vocabulary, and understood various processes and principles. Where students had opportunities to learn through investigation, their understanding of science in the real world was enriched.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Behaviour and attitudes throughout the school were acceptable. Most students were well behaved in classrooms and around the school. They treated staff, visitors and one another with respect. A few students lacked self-control around the school and a minority of lessons were spoilt by their poor behaviour. Teachers did not give the youngest students enough opportunities to learn self-restraint and awareness of the needs of others. Students did not take sufficient pride in their environment and frequently dropped litter. Written procedures for monitoring attendance were not evident and inconsistencies existed in the keeping of registers in different parts of the school. Though most lessons started on time, too many students arrived late in a few classes and this disrupted the learning of other students.

Students gained an acceptable civic understanding. In KG and the elementary phase, many students took responsibilities for a variety of tasks in the classroom, and class representatives on the school council took seriously their responsibility to represent their classmates' views and interests. Students showed that they understood the Islamic values of Dubai and the diversity of its population. They were proud of their Arab roots and relished the diversity within their school and city.

Students had an acceptable level of understanding regarding the history and economy of Dubai in relation to the region and the wider world, through their study of geography and history. From Grade 11, students were familiar with the UAE economy in relation to the global economy, through their business studies.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Overall, except in Kindergarten, teaching was acceptable. There was good practice in all subjects and, in a few science lessons, it was outstanding. In the best lessons, teachers had excellent subject knowledge and made learning meaningful for all students. Planning was imaginative and teachers made excellent use of the available time and resources. They used questioning to challenge thinking and assess understanding.

Students were inspired and motivated and could work independently and with others. They could relate their learning to the real world and so it was enjoyable and memorable. In the unsatisfactory lessons, teachers often had good subject knowledge but did not have a good understanding of how students learn and how to meet the needs of the full range of learners. Consequently, students became disengaged and, on occasion, disruptive. In KG, teaching was unsatisfactory. Lessons were usually teacher-led and children sat for long periods answering questions or completing written exercises with insufficient opportunity for play, exploration and independent learning.

The quality of assessment procedures was acceptable. Regular testing provided summative data for each student and year group. However, this was not yet checked against external standards. Most teachers knew their students well and provided additional support in class when possible. However, test data was not generally well used to modify work because of the pressure to teach the next topic and prepare for the next test. A few teachers supported students in evaluating their progress at the end of a lesson but students were not used to assessing their own learning because constructive feedback was inconsistent and so they were not clear about how well they were doing or how to improve.

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

The curriculum was acceptable in all phases other than in KG. In KG, there were very few opportunities for promoting the basic building blocks of knowledge, understanding and skills and for children to develop their personal and social skills. In the other phases, the curriculum was systematically designed. Plans existed to promote better continuity and progression, although these were only partially implemented at the time of the inspection. In the main, the curriculum in the elementary and middle phases of the school was textbook and test-driven and students were not well prepared for independent learning in the high school phase or when they moved on to higher education. Few opportunities existed for the talents of individual students to be celebrated through the curriculum. There were limited opportunities for students to experience out-of-school or cross-curricular activities to augment and expand their learning experiences. Girls had strong criticisms about the lack of sufficient extra-curricular activities such as music and swimming. The school had entered teams for sporting leagues. The science curriculum had been reviewed to match the range of needs within the school. This review ensured that greater emphasis was placed on the three distinct disciplines of biology, chemistry and physics, in preparation for science studies in the high school phase. The curriculum for Islamic Education and Arabic had limited writing opportunities for students at all stages. The programme of study for Arabic as an additional language was under-developed.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The quality of health and safety in the school was acceptable. Students reported that they felt safe and well protected at school. School gates were monitored by an adequate number of security guards. Closed circuit cameras were used to monitor classes in KG. Floor supervisors were available for help when required. Arrangements for the supervision of buses and dismissal time had improved since the previous inspection. There were adequate emergency exits around the school although a few doors between some sections of the school were kept locked and closed for parts of the school day. Appropriate fire-fighting equipment was available in the school and floor corridor supervisors were aware of evacuation procedures. However, a significant proportion of the staff were newly recruited, and staff were not all fully aware of what they should do in cases of emergency. In most cases, classes were bright and

stimulating with suitable furniture. The school had play areas for boys and girls and shaded waiting areas for students were provided outside the pick-up and drop-off area.

The quality of support was unsatisfactory overall. In KG and elementary phases, students received acceptable support from their class teachers but the quality of support to students in the middle and high phases was unsatisfactory. Procedures for tracking students' progress were underdeveloped and the students were not receiving adequate academic guidance and advice. The school had recently appointed a student counsellor who provided support to those students who had emotional and behavioural needs, but, overall, provision for supporting students with special educational needs was unsatisfactory. Coordination between supervisors and subject leaders to support students' progress was unsatisfactory. Guidance on the choice of subjects in the secondary phase was not well developed due to the narrow offering of subjects in this phase and limited guidance provided to students on careers. There was also insufficient support to students with physical disabilities, especially for those whose classes were not on the ground floor.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership and management was acceptable. The vision of the school was stated on the school website and most teachers responded positively to the declared vision and mission. The senior management team had acted on the recommendations of the last inspection and showed commitment to school improvement. There was evidence of distributed leadership, especially with new staff appointments to the management team. The role of the advisory council and its relationship with the senior management team was unclear. Across the school the quality of the written documentation for all aspects of school procedures was unsatisfactory.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning was acceptable. The school was at an early stage of development in creating a culture of self-evaluation across all staff - an essential step in providing a more explicit baseline to inform school improvement. The school leadership did not clearly analyse the current performance in order to develop a structured process for the management of change. Consultation on school improvement was somewhat informal. The leadership team's commitment to performance management was evident but it was not used to inform the improvement planning process. New staff in management posts had a clear vision for what needed to be done to improve teaching and learning and had introduced monitoring and peer observations, but this practice was not widespread across the school.

Partnership arrangements with parents and community were acceptable. The school had demonstrated commitment to improving the quality of parental involvement by the setting up of a parent council.

The school had a Board of Directors, which had shown a clear commitment to improvement through business planning. However, arrangements for school governance were, overall, unsatisfactory, since the Board of Directors did not include representatives of the school community, such as parents and other stakeholders.

The school had demonstrated its commitment to school improvement by the appointments of new key staff to lead school improvement as well as staff to enhance teaching and student support. Staff turnover was high. Almost half of teachers have been in school for one year or less. Aspects of resources for teaching and learning were unsatisfactory. Classrooms were small and some were crowded, making approaches to active teaching and learning more difficult. Access to outdoor play for KG and Grade 1 was very limited. The school did not make effective use of the library and other resources to develop and support independent study. Students had insufficient access in school to information and communication technology as a tool to promote independent learning.

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	Middle	High
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	Middle	High
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Progress over time	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Good	Good
Progress over time	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Good	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and safety	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
Quality of leadership	Acceptable
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Acceptable
Partnerships with parents and the community	Acceptable
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: inspection@khda.gov.ae.

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

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