

American International School Inspection Report

Kindergarten to High

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.

American International School was inspected in November 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 Al Qusais, American International School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to high school aged three to 18 years. The school follows a US curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 1850 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Most parents were satisfied with the quality of education available in the school. A majority of parents said that their child enjoyed lessons and approximately half of the parents believed that the behaviour of students at the school was good or better. They agreed that the school treated their child fairly at school, kept their child safe and supported them in choosing a healthy lifestyle. Parents were concerned about their child's progress in Islamic Education and Arabic. Less than half of the parents felt that the school was helping their child to make good choices about their future education and career. The majority of parents felt that communication between the school and parents was effective and timely but a minority disagreed and felt that the school did not respond appropriately to parental concerns. Significant numbers expressed concern over their involvement in the work of the school. Parents felt that the school was well led. Parental comments expressed concerns over staff turnover, teaching in Arabic, overcrowded classrooms, behaviour and aspects of health and safety, especially with regard to the buses.

How well does the school perform overall?

The American International School provided an acceptable quality of education. The school had responded appropriately to the recommendations from the last inspection report with improvements in teaching and learning across all subjects, except Islamic Education and Arabic. Improvements in the Kindergarten and early elementary years were particularly evident with teaching better matched to the learning and personal development needs of the youngest students. Students with special educational needs were well supported and governance included representation from parents. Recently appointed senior managers and co-ordinators ensured that the school had the capacity for further improvement.

Attainment and progress in all subjects were acceptable or better across all phases of the school. Students demonstrated good attitudes and behaviour in the Kindergarten and elementary school, but acceptable attitudes and behaviour in the middle and high school, where a significant number of students were disruptive, disrespectful and late to lessons. These students were not positive role models for younger students. Arrangements to ensure health and safety of students were acceptable but procedures for arriving and departing students lacked organisation. Staff knew students well and cared for their social, emotional and physical needs although older students had limited opportunities for career exploration and counselling. Arrangements for child protection were not widely known. The quality of teaching and learning was acceptable but with a significant number of unsatisfactory lessons. The Principal was supported well by senior staff and co-ordinators who had a realistic view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and a determination to ensure improvement.

Key features of the school

- Improvement in the Kindergarten since the last inspection;
- Variance in the quality of teaching and learning across the school;
- The underdeveloped literacy skills of students in all areas of the school;
- The schools' prompt response to health and safety issues raised during the inspection;
- Students' sincere respect for people of all backgrounds as well as their cultural, environmental and economic understanding;
- Active response of senior staff and co-ordinators in improving teaching and learning.

Recommendations

- Improve attainment and progress in all subjects, especially that of boys throughout the school and students for whom Arabic is a second language;
- Improve literacy skills of students by ensuring that literacy is addressed in all subjects across the curriculum;
- Improve teaching and learning specifically by focusing on planning and continuity in lessons, catering for the spread of ability in classes and using lesson summaries to conclude and check understanding;
- Improve health and safety across all areas of the school and ensure that teachers, parents and students are fully aware of child protection procedures;
- Provide support for co-ordinators to model good practice, develop their areas of responsibility and support the school's future development.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable in all grades, although in non-Arab speaking high school classes students performed below expected standards. In Arabic and non-Arabic speaking classes, students had good knowledge of Islam. For example, students knew the conditions of marriage for women in Islam and the procedures of performing Al Omrah. Across the school the majority of students could memorise short chapters of The Holy Qur'an, making few errors while reading. Only a few students could explain their duties and responsibilities as Muslims. Students' understanding of how to apply Islamic values to their own lives was limited.

Overall, attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were good in elementary and acceptable in the middle and high school. In elementary school most students had acceptable listening skills. They understood instructions and followed them well. Students had a rich vocabulary in standard Arabic and they expressed themselves well. In the middle school most students were able to read with confidence and a majority of students used standard Arabic phrases during discussions. Most high school students recognised points of view and could draw inferences. However, across the school original and extended writing skills were underdeveloped. Most students could not apply grammar rules in new situations and writing samples were often limited to a few words or sentences.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language were good in elementary and acceptable in middle and high school. In elementary school the majority of students had good listening skills, could understand most spoken words and were able to follow instructions well. In the middle and high school the majority of students had acceptable speaking skills, could explain the meaning of sentences and could read familiar and unfamiliar words. Across the

school only a few students had a basic knowledge of grammar and students' skills in extended writing were underdeveloped and limited to a few words or sentences.

The attainment in English was good in Kindergarten and acceptable in elementary, middle and high school. Progress was good in Kindergarten and elementary school, and acceptable in middle and high school. In Kindergarten most students followed oral directions and communicated using simple sentences. They used phonic reading skills well and most wrote letters with appropriate pencil grip. In elementary most students answered questions eagerly, but oral language skills varied across the grades. In middle school, most students read textbook stories and discussed and answered comprehension questions accurately. However, writing and reading fluency were not well developed. In high school, most students listened and responded appropriately with original thoughts. They read in a variety of genres and identified literary devices such as metaphor and paradox. Writing skills were less developed and some writing samples had a number of errors in syntax, grammar and spelling.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable across all phases of the school. In school-based and external examinations, students consistently attained below-average to average levels. Kindergarten children understood basic concepts of number and could count objects and write numerals. They developed an understanding of addition and subtraction. Elementary students understood properties of addition, subtraction and multiplication as well as fractions, decimals and equivalencies. Middle school students developed increasing levels of algebraic understanding and, by Grade 9, they could graph and transform quadratic equations. By Grade 12 most students understood and applied processes of calculus. The attainment of girls was significantly higher than that of boys.

Attainment and progress in science were acceptable across all phases of the school. In Kindergarten, children understood the terms sliding, rolling and flying. In elementary school, the better lessons enabled students to see and manipulate living plants, as well as to develop their skills of predicting and observing. In middle school lessons, students used tuning forks to demonstrate and explain sound vibrations. In high school, students explained the life cycle of ferns and used scientific vocabulary to share their understanding with classmates. The attainment of boys was not as strong as that of girls.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Attitudes and behaviour were good in Kindergarten and elementary and acceptable in middle and high school. Kindergarten and elementary students enjoyed good relationships with each other and their teachers. They practiced healthy living habits as a part of their daily school routine. Their attendance was good, although a few students arrived late for lessons. Middle and high school students had acceptable behaviour. Most ate healthy foods and exercised regularly. A few were consistently late to lessons and did not always follow the school rules. These students were not positive role models for younger students.

Students across the school demonstrated a good level of understanding of Islam. Most students kept silent when they heard the Salah-call across the school and appreciated the multi-cultural nature of society in Dubai. They had a good understanding of the relevance and impact of Islam on Dubai. They knew about their culture and identity. Traditions and local heritage were understood and appreciated by students. They knew their responsibilities towards their school and wider community. They showed respect and consideration for the needs of students with disabilities but had limited opportunities to contribute actively to the wider community.

The quality of students' economic and environmental understanding was good at all levels. Students knew of Dubai's special place in the world and key important facts about Dubai. Elementary students could name famous buildings in Dubai and some other emirates. They demonstrated responsibility towards their surroundings. Secondary students showed good understanding of Dubai's economic foundations and of the effects of the current economic changes on Dubai and its inhabitants. They knew the major sources of Dubai's water and electricity and how to conserve resources.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Throughout the school teaching was acceptable. There had been an improvement in Kindergarten where teachers had developed learning centres and lessons allowed children to play, explore and learn independently. Across all areas of the school, where good teaching practice was observed, lessons had good pace. There was effective lesson planning, multiple resources, differentiated instruction and an evaluative summary. In those lessons, strong progress and total engagement in learning occurred. However, in too many lessons, teachers did not appreciate how students learn or how to meet the needs of all learners. In these lessons teacher talk dominated the class. Often, recall of information was required, at the expense of enquiry and higher order learning. There was little or no activity time for concept development or assessment that supported student learning. Teachers did not use open-ended questioning well to check students skills, understanding or knowledge.

Learning was acceptable across all phases of the school. In better lessons, students were motivated, engaged, confident and demonstrated positive attitudes towards their learning. Learning was evident when students were solving mathematical problems, expressing their views in writing, engaging in enquiry processes and developing new strategies. Independent learning tasks of short duration were observed. In Kindergarten, children enjoyed their learning. In the less successful lessons, learning was variable and often restricted to the memorisation and recall of facts. There was little evidence of reading for understanding or relating their learning to everyday experiences and to other subjects.

Assessment was acceptable across all phases of the school. In Kindergarten, examples of childrens' work were used well to develop individual portfolios. In elementary, middle and high school, regular summative testing provided data on individuals, classes and year groups. Data was recorded and available for parents on the school's web site. International testing of Grades 2, 4, 6, 9 and 10 had occurred and had provided valuable information about student achievement. This information was beginning to impact on the school by helping teachers to

plan the learning of students. Good practice was seen in English, where examples of written assessment criteria were used to judge the quality of work. Written feedback across the school was regularly provided to students, but the quality of marking was variable and did not help students plan their future learning steps. Assessment through constructive teacher feedback, open-ended questioning, end of lesson evaluations and student self-assessment were underdeveloped.

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

The quality of the curriculum was good at Kindergarten and acceptable in elementary, middle and high school. The curriculum was soundly planned, broad and balanced. It was reviewed and improved on a regular basis. The Kindergarten to Grade 1 curriculum had received substantial revision two months previously and was now better focussed on essential skills with more activity based and student-centred content. The curriculum for Arabic did not have sufficient opportunities to develop writing skills. The programme of study for Arabic as an additional language was not well developed. The mathematics curriculum did not provide sufficient practice and review of skills. The school had yet to align the Grade 1 and Grade 2 curriculum, but preparation for advancement across other grades was adequately addressed. Cross-curricular links were evident in Kindergarten to Grade 1 but were not formalised in elementary school and not evident elsewhere. Literacy skills were not well developed in the mathematics and science curriculum. Extra-curricular activities offered after school included art, music, drama, singing and sports, although there were insufficient sports activities for girls. Weekend options included swimming, ice skating, paint ball and shooting. The school had links with a few community organisations and provided two educational trips to the community for each class.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements to ensure the health and safety of students were acceptable. Students said they felt safe at school. Additional supervision and more effective procedures were needed for arriving and departing students, especially on the buses. Buildings and equipment were clean and safe but teachers did not always ensure that students observed safety requirements in science. The school clinic operated efficiently. Medications were properly secured and procedures were followed appropriately. Student health records were maintained with parental follow-up. Fire extinguishers were serviced and a yearly fire drill was held. The PE teacher and dietician worked together to encourage healthy lifestyles. Overweight students were monitored and received helpful advice from the doctor and nurse. The canteen served nutritious foods and provided a healthy breakfast program. Clinic staff taught classes and arranged for presentations on grade appropriate health and safety topics. Arrangements for child protection existed but were not widely known by staff.

The quality of support provided was acceptable. Staff knew most students well and cared for their social, emotional and physical needs. The school had an effective system to manage the majority of behavioural problems, but enforcement of school rules was inconsistent, particularly in the upper grades. External test preparation classes were provided and students visited higher education establishments and attended college and university fairs. Guidance was given in the preparation of college applications, but older students had limited opportunities for career exploration and counselling. Students with physical disabilities were included in all aspects of the school. The needs of students with learning difficulties were not fully addressed. The school had begun to track progress and analyse assessment results to provide better advice to students, but this was at the early stages of development. The school monitored attendance effectively and informed parents quickly when students were absent or late.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Overall leadership was acceptable. The Principal had a strong vision for the school. He was very well supported by other senior staff, who had a realistic view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. A distributive model of leadership was beginning to emerge with co-ordinators and supervisors who had been identified as strong classroom practitioners, including those responsible for English, mathematics, science and the Kindergarten. This group were committed and determined in their role. They worked diligently in addressing the recommendations from the previous report. All staff were committed to improvement but they were unclear about strategies to effect this.

Self-evaluation was acceptable. Improvements in the areas of teaching and learning across all subjects, except Islamic Education and Arabic, were beginning to take place. The school had ensured that best practice was shared across the school, although they had not yet measured the success of this. Improvements in the Kindergarten and early elementary years were evident, with teaching better matched to the learning and personal development needs of the youngest students. A school development plan suitably identified long term goals but failed to prioritise the work or provide any appropriate indication of the time scale.

Partnerships with parents and the community were acceptable. The school was working hard to respond to parental concerns, including staff turnover, behaviour management, overcrowded classrooms and health and safety. Parents found the teachers and senior leaders accessible. Communication about students' attainment and progress was regular and appropriate with good support from the school's website which parents could access to check the achievement of their child. The school sought the views of parents on a range of topics and had addressed a number of their concerns. There were a variety of links with the local community including environmental and charitable activities.

Governance was acceptable. Since the last inspection the school had expanded the board to include representation from parents. The owners of the school acted as the main source of communication on behalf of the governing body, but others were beginning to find their voice. The governing board responded to requests from parents for school improvements. However, governance did not yet include holding the school accountable for its performance and ensuring that the school met its commitments to parents.

Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable. Sufficient numbers of teachers with academic degrees were deployed, although few held formal teaching qualifications. Approximately one third of teachers were newly appointed. The school had implemented professional development activities to raise standards of teaching. The premises and facilities were acceptably clean and provided a safe environment for learning and teaching. Classrooms were small and frequently crowded. The outdoor play areas were adequate. Exercise equipment had been added to the gym. The library had sufficient materials and was frequently used. Students and teachers had limited but adequate access to information and communication technology.

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?				
49% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

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

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

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

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

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Good	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	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	Acceptable
Governance	Acceptable
Staffing, facilities and resources	Acceptable

How well does the school perform overall?
Acceptable

Next steps

The school has been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how it will address the main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents. The next inspection will report on the progress made by the school.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau
Knowledge and Human Development Authority

How to contact us

If you have a concern or wish to comment on any aspect of this report you should contact: inspection@khda.gov.ae.

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

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