

Nibras International School Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 12

Report published May 2010

Contents

Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report	2
Basic information about the school.....	2
How well does the school perform overall?.....	3
Key features of the school	4
Recommendations.....	4
How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?.....	4
How good is the students' personal and social development?.....	6
How good are the teaching and learning?	6
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?.....	7
How well does the school protect and support students?	8
How good are the leadership and management of the school?.....	8
Summary of inspection judgements	10
Next Steps.....	14
How to contact us.....	14

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.

Nibras International School was inspected in October, 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, Arabic, English, mathematics and science.

Basic information about the school

Located in Dubai Investment Park, Nibras International School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 12, aged four to 18 years. The school was organised into sections including KG, elementary and secondary. For reporting purposes the secondary phase was divided into two sections; middle (Grades 6 to 8) and high (Grades 9 to 12). The school followed a USA curriculum. The school had experienced a high rate of teacher turnover over the last year, as almost half of the teachers were new to the school. At the time of the inspection, there were 360 students on roll. Student attendance as reported by the school for the last academic session was outstanding.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. All parents agreed that their children liked school. A majority of parents agreed that their children were making good progress in key subjects, with the exception of Islamic Education. Almost all parents agreed that students' behaviour at the school was good and that their children were safe and treated fairly. Almost all agreed that teachers expected their children to work hard, and encouraged them to become independent and responsible people. Most parents agreed that the teaching at the school was good, that teachers showed concern for their children, and that there was a good range of activities which their children found enjoyable and stimulating. Similarly, most parents agreed that the school gave them good information about the progress of their children, and that they felt comfortable about approaching the school with a question or complaint. While most parents agreed that the

school was well led and had good links with them, almost half disagreed that the school had good links with the local community. A majority of parents agreed that the school had responded positively to the recommendations of the previous inspection, but more than one-third disagreed that this was the case.

How well does the school perform overall?

Nibras International School provided on acceptable quality of education for the students. Students' attainment in Islamic Education was good across the school and progress was acceptable. In Arabic, students made good progress from Grades 1 to 12. Attainment was good in Elementary and acceptable in Middle and High schools. In KG, attainment and progress were acceptable. In English, attainment and progress were good in KG and Elementary. Students made acceptable progress in Middle and High Schools and reached good levels of attainment. In Mathematics, attainment and progress were good in KG and acceptable in Elementary. However, although students in the Middle and High Schools made acceptable progress, their attainment was unsatisfactory against international standards. Attainment and progress in science were acceptable across the school. The attitudes and behaviour of students throughout the school were good. Most of the students had a basic knowledge of the values of Islam and their economic and environmental understanding was acceptable.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was acceptable overall. Teachers were knowledgeable in their fields. Only a minority of teachers had moved away from a didactic lecture style and this method of instruction was prevalent in Islamic Education, Arabic and science lessons. A majority of the good teaching took place in the elementary grades. Consequently, student learning was good in a majority of those classrooms. In the secondary school, there was still too much reliance on teacher talk, and thus fewer lessons were judged to be of good quality. At all grades, staff-student relations were good. Teachers provided a caring environment and students in turn were respectful and co-operative with teachers and one another. Assessment of learning was acceptable throughout the school. All teachers were assessing student progress on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, but the school had yet to compare these results with external benchmarks. The curriculum in KG was good, but in the elementary and secondary schools the curricula were acceptable. There were gaps in provision, both in terms of breadth of subjects available, and in meeting the needs of students for whom English was not the first language. Also, the Islamic Education and Arabic curricula specifically were unsatisfactory, lacking breadth and balance. The provision for these subjects in the timetable was slightly less than regulations require. Health and safety provision for students from KG to Grade 12 were good. The quality of support for all students from KG to Grade 12 was acceptable. Students expressed positive feelings about their teachers, the school and its programs. Systems were in place for monitoring discipline, attendance and grades, but the school lacked an adequate system for comprehensive academic assessment.

The quality of leadership overall was acceptable. In his second year, the Principal showed competence and commitment to lead the school. Self-evaluation and improvement planning at the school was good. The school's priorities for improvement were based upon the recommendations in the previous inspection report. Partnership with parents and the community was acceptable. Most parents viewed the school's links with them as good and felt welcome to visit the school. Governance of the school was unsatisfactory. The school's owners had taken no steps towards the establishment of a board of governors. Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable overall. The school has experienced unusually high turnover in teachers recently, with almost half of the teachers new in the current academic session.

Key features of the school

- Positive attitudes and behaviour of students across the school;
- Teaching and learning in the KG and elementary school;
- Health and safety provision, especially the successful promotion of healthy living;
- Effective self-evaluation arrangements.

Recommendations

- Further students' civic, Islamic, economic and environmental understanding;
- Continue to develop teachers professionally, especially teachers of Islamic Education and Arabic, and improve staff retention as a priority;
- Implement external assessments of learning, and link these to curriculum and teaching;
- Continue to develop an appropriate curriculum to meet the needs of all students;
- Establish a board of directors to hold the school accountable for its performance.

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

Students' attainment in Islamic Education was good across all grades while progress was acceptable. In elementary and secondary years, students' recitation and reading of The Holy Qur'an was clear and correct. Students showed basic knowledge of the principles and values of Islam and The Holy Qur'an. Only a few students demonstrated sufficient understanding of the meaning and value of the Qur'an's verses.

Students' attainment in Arabic was good in the elementary grades and acceptable in the secondary school. Likewise, progress was good in elementary and acceptable in the secondary school. Almost all students studied Arabic as an additional language. The listening skills of students were good overall. They could understand instructions and follow them. Most students were able to speak fluently and read long texts, particularly those in Grades 9 and 12. Most students had good knowledge of functional grammar. They applied the rules of Arabic correctly in their speech, particularly in Grades 6 and 9. In Grade 3 students' pronunciation in general was accurate. Extended writing samples showed that only a few students achieved good results.

Students' attainment in English in KG, elementary, and secondary grades was good. Progress over time in English was good in KG and elementary grades but only acceptable in the secondary grades. Most KG students were able to express themselves clearly, write simple words, listen to stories, understand and follow directions, and recognise grade-appropriate words. Most elementary students were proficient in reading, writing, speaking and listening. Lesson observations in Grade 4 noted high quality student work in creative writing and journal entries. Discussions with students from Grades 4 through to 9 verified their mastery of vocabulary at appropriate levels, and review of their written work showed good progress in creative writing and grammar. Secondary students were articulate and showed acceptable progress in writing and grammar.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were good in KG and acceptable at the elementary level. There was a steady decline in both attainment and progress in the secondary grades, where attainment was unsatisfactory. Younger students had a good understanding of number value, basic computational skills and the four mathematical processes. Secondary level students did not thoroughly understand increasingly difficult concepts such as prime factorisation, exponential depictions and algebraic formulae. Students were developing skills applying their learning in mathematics to the wider world.

Both attainment and progress in science were acceptable across the school. In KG successful active learning was observed with full participation by the children. For elementary students, an investigative approach to build skills through simple experiments using visual material was commendable. Worksheets were used as reinforcement and demonstrated the level of understanding. The lessons in the secondary school continued to be driven by adherence to textbook chapters, and consequently the students at this level were not provided with enough opportunities for an investigative approach to learning. The development of practical laboratory skills was conspicuously absent among students. Although they did gather facts through teacher-led questioning and note-taking, they were not becoming young scientists in the lessons observed.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

The attitudes and behaviour of the children in KG and the students in the remainder of the school were good. The majority of students were well motivated, often enthusiastic, friendly and willing to communicate with visitors to the school. Daily attendance figures were high and all students were punctual. Students exhibited self-control and the relationships between teachers and students were positive. Incidents of poor behaviour were rare and the students commented that this was a noticeable improvement from last year. The older students were articulate and showed maturity commensurate with their ages.

Most of the students had a basic knowledge of the values of Islam, and the older students appreciated the contribution of local traditions to the overall ethos of the school. There was a good awareness of the multi-cultural nature of the school. However, the younger students needed to learn more about their own and other's cultural heritage. There was an awareness of certain responsibilities that they had regarding their place in the community. Students had re-established a Student Life Council at the time of the inspection.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was acceptable throughout the school. There was evidence of a caring attitude around the school and in the cafeteria in particular. A few students were involved in recycling and a 'Green Tree' planting programme. Older students displayed a keen awareness of the current global economic situation and its impact upon Dubai. A few students showed enthusiasm about participating in community events in Dubai, including fund-raising for the less fortunate in Dubai and abroad.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was good in KG and Elementary and acceptable in Middle and High Schools. Teachers were knowledgeable in their fields. However, only a minority of teachers had moved away from a didactic lecture mode to increase student involvement and interaction. Classroom visits showed that the whiteboard was frequently used to present lessons. Teachers used effective questioning techniques, individual assistance, integration of various content areas, use of manipulatives and other learning aides, regrouping, and effective use of "wait time," to increase peer interaction. They circulated among the students, often providing frequent positive reinforcement but only about half checked for understanding. Several teachers made the effort to show students the application of what they were learning in mathematics classes to the real world.

Student learning was good in LG and elementary classrooms. In the secondary school, learning was acceptable. There was still too much reliance on direct instruction and published materials. A few teachers had developed additional instructional materials to engage and motivate students. There were a few instances where critical thinking and higher order thinking skills were being addressed. Students were taking responsibility for their own learning, helping one another and exercising good self-control. Learning had been enhanced by good student behaviour. Students were respectful of their teachers, each other, and other school staff members. Students were aware that teachers were tracking homework completion rates,

performance on examinations and quizzes, and rewarding appropriate actions and results. A few teachers adjusted the flow of their lessons to meet individual student needs, even re-teaching if necessary. Positive reinforcement practices had already been implemented to encourage students to achieve and to maintain self-discipline.

Assessment of learning was acceptable throughout the school. All teachers were assessing student progress on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. The information collected was used to identify high and low-attaining students as measured against internal benchmarks. A few teachers assessed student progress and yet they moved ahead to new content before students had understood their lessons. Assessment of learning was yet to be fully exploited for learning. The collection of results did not inform curriculum planning to a significant degree. Systems were in place and operating to improve assessment and reporting practices by November's report card date. The use of external benchmarks to track students' academic progress had yet to be implemented by the school.

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

The curriculum in KG was good as there was evidence of balance and breadth, and it contained challenges for these children, resulting in them becoming well-prepared for the next stage of their education. In the elementary and secondary school, overall, the curricula were judged as acceptable. It was apparent that much work in these two sections has been started by the new senior co-ordinators and their teams. The changes already implemented have eliminated significant gaps and yet, there was evidence of some repetition of content in the elementary school. There was insufficient choice of subjects for students, especially in Grades 7 to 12, where there was no art, little physical education and provision for humanities was limited. Teachers have been encouraged to integrate other subject content and to establish cross-curricular links but this was not well developed. Although there was provision to help students experiencing difficulties in their learning, during the activity periods, the school needed to provide further support during lessons and offer more remedial help. The Islamic Education and Arabic curricula were unsatisfactory, lacking balance and accommodation of the needs of individual students. The provision for Islamic Education and Arabic in the timetable was slightly less than required by Ministry of Education regulations. The school had improved the extra-curricular programme by bringing a variety of activities into the timetabled day. There were insufficient links to the community for all students to learn about the local environment. Special activities for low-attaining students in the areas of English and mathematics were in the process of being implemented.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety provision for students were good. Parents agreed that their children were well cared for and were receiving a good education. Children were transported in school-owned buses which were well maintained, driven by qualified drivers, and met acceptable standards for safety and comfort. Bus monitors also rode on the bus for additional security. The health programme had been enhanced through the efforts of the school nurse who initiated a "healthy living" program which included nutrition, weight management and wellness checks. The school was maintained in a condition appropriate for learning and was generally clean, but had some unfinished areas that were accessible to students. The school had procedures in place for emergencies, had practiced exit drills, and the evacuation plan was known to all. The school was in compliance with local regulations and guidelines regarding health and safety.

The quality of support for all students was acceptable. Students expressed positive opinions about their teachers, the school and its programmes. They stated they had very good relationships with their teachers and other staff members. Student satisfaction was obvious to visitors, and was reflected in an outstanding attendance rate and confidence in effective behaviour management. Although a full-time counsellor was not appointed, the school had taken initiatives to help students explore post-secondary education options. Systems were in place for monitoring discipline, attendance and grades but the school lacked an adequate system for truly comprehensive academic assessment. Support staff included maintenance and cleaning personnel, a security guard and administrative assistants.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership overall was acceptable. In his second year, the Principal showed competence and commitment to the school, and had appointed two new co-ordinators to lead the elementary and secondary schools. There was a teacher performance appraisal system in place to monitor the work of teachers and help them become more effective. This system was not evidently linked to a formal programme of continuing professional development. Teams and committees with clear areas of responsibility had not yet been established but the three leaders demonstrated the capacity to continue to improve the school.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning at the school was good. The school's priorities for improvement were based upon the recommendations in the previous inspection report, and they were well-known by teachers and parents. There was evident progress on those recommendations, with an emphasis on in-service sessions for teachers at the beginning of the school year. The monitoring of teaching and learning outcomes was established, but this had not developed to inform improvement planning to an optimal degree. School leaders had made classroom observation visits a part of their regular practice in order to help teachers develop their skills. The school also surveyed parents as a source of information for improvement planning.

Partnership with parents and the community was acceptable. Most parents viewed the school's links with them as good, and felt welcome to visit the school due to the Principal's open-door policy. A recent open house was well supported by parents. There were plans for future parent-school events over the current year. The school produced a newsletter for parents, but their internet website contained both incorrect and outdated information.

Governance of the school was unsatisfactory. The school's owners had taken no steps towards the establishment of a board of governors that would monitor the work of the school and hold the owners and the leaders accountable for realising the school's mission. As a result, the voices of all stakeholders were not regularly heard by the school's leaders, limiting the efficacy of their work.

Staffing, facilities, and resources were acceptable overall. The school has experienced an unusually high turnover in teachers. The school premises were modern and extensive. However, parts of the campus were incomplete. Both the playing field and the swimming pool were unavailable for student use. Other existing resources were not fully exploited to maximum effect in provision for students. Both the library and computer labs were under-utilised; they were not integrated with subject areas to help students apply ICT skills to a range of learning experiences. Similarly, the laboratories for learning about science were under-used.

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:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good

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

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

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	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:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	Good
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:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

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

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

Copyright 2010

This report is for internal use only and for the self-evaluation purposes of the school. It should not be used for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement.