

INSPECTION REPORT

School Of Modern Skills

Report published in May 2012

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT School Of Modern Skills

Location	Al Muhaisnah
Type of school	Private
Website	www.dubaisms.net
Telephone	04-2887765
Address	PO Box 57475, Dubai
Principal	Mohammad Fliti
Curriculum	US
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3- 18 / Kindergarten to Grade 12
Attendance	Acceptable
Number of students on roll	1,118
Number of Emirati students	1,011 (90%)
Date of the inspection	Monday 20th to Thursday 23rd February 2012

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The context of the school

Located in Al Muhaisnah, the School of Modern Skills is a private school providing education for boys and girls aged three to 18 years, from Kindergarten to Grade 12. At the time of inspection there were 1,118 students on the roll. 1,011 students, representing 90 per cent of the total cohort, were Emiratis.

The school offered a US curriculum and will graduate its first cohort of students in June 2012.

Eighty-two teachers were employed in the school, of whom almost a half were new to the school. Additionally, most of the heads of departments were new to their roles. Almost all teachers held an appropriate first degree, however, only a few held a recognized teaching qualification.

Overall school performance 2011-2012

Acceptable

How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

School of Modern Skills continued to provide an acceptable quality of education for students. The school provided a safe and caring environment that reflected UAE traditions and values. It maintained its good provision for the health and safety of students. Students' understanding and appreciation of Islam and the traditions and culture of the UAE were good. In most key subjects, students' attainment and progress were acceptable, except in mathematics where it was mostly unsatisfactory. The quality of teaching was variable across the school, with almost a third of all lessons observed being unsatisfactory, notably in the elementary and middle schools. Despite the efforts of senior managers, there had been little significant improvement in teaching, learning and assessment in key areas of the curriculum.

The recommendations in the previous inspection report focused on improving learning, assessment and resources. The school had purchased new information and communications technology (ICT) resources and staff had set up two learning resource centers. The school had started to implement new assessment strategies that needed time to become embedded in lessons and to have an impact on raising standards. Overall, most of the recently appointed middle management leaders demonstrated capacity for improvement. However, the school lacked a clear and achievable strategic plan that was based on reliable and accurate self-evaluation evidence.

Key strengths

- Good student appreciation of their Islamic and UAE culture;
- Good attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Arrangements in the school to keep students safe and well.

Recommendations

- Improve attainment and progress in English, mathematics and science;
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning across the school, specifically in elementary and middle schools to ensure better student progress;
- Ensure that teaching methods and the curriculum are appropriately modified to meet the needs of all students, at all stages, including higher ability students and students with special education needs;
- Develop more accurate and rigorous approaches to self-evaluation and data analysis in order to better inform teaching, learning and assessment.

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

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

Students' attainment in Islamic Education was good across the school and the strongest area was in recitation of The Holy Qur'an and memorization skills. Most students made good links and relations between the different aspects of what they were learning including, for example, recitation and

understandings of prescribed Hadiths. In English, listening was the best developed skill. However, most students' speaking was characterised by hesitation, false starts, weak vocabulary and poor pronunciation. Girls' speaking was consistently better across all phases. In mathematics, elementary students had limited knowledge of place value, number bonds and multiplication facts. A majority of middle school students struggled with mental arithmetic and algebra. The majority of secondary students attained age-appropriate levels of scientific knowledge. However, there were too few opportunities for students to develop their scientific investigation skills, such as predicting, measuring and recording.

In Arabic, most students demonstrated an age-appropriate use of standard Arabic to express themselves. They used grammatical rules well. Students' progress overall was limited in English, mathematics and science due to the lack of challenge for all groups of students and low expectations across the school. Writing skills in both Arabic and English were less well developed in all phases. In mathematics, most Kindergarten children made good progress in understanding number. In the high school, students made good progress in lessons and yet still attained poorly. Girls generally made better progress than the boys in mathematics across the school.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

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

Students' attitudes and behavior were good in Kindergarten but acceptable in elementary, middle and high school. The school was orderly and safe. In a minority of lessons boys' behavior was disruptive and disrespectful of the teacher and other students, especially in the middle and high schools. Students'

behavior was generally better in classes where teachers were well prepared and students were engaged. While most students demonstrated an understanding of the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle, few made good healthy choices. Attendance was acceptable though in a minority of lessons students were not punctual. High school students demonstrated an excellent understanding of Islam and its impact on the contemporary society in Dubai and internationally. In Kindergarten, and in the elementary and middle schools, students' understanding was good. Students respected the local traditions and heritage. They had strong understanding of multi-cultural nature of Dubai and other cultures. Most students in the high school could talk about how Dubai and other emirates developed in the last decade. Students kept the school clean and tidy. They took part in activities such as a recycling program to improve their environment.

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

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

Teaching was acceptable in Kindergarten and high school, but unsatisfactory in elementary and middle schools. In Kindergarten there were consistent lesson plans, a high degree of engagement and after school support. Although there were some positive features of teaching in the elementary and middle schools, they were outweighed by significant weaknesses. Too often poor behavior limited learning. Raised voices by both teachers and students led to lack of order and structure in some lessons. Teachers' poor time management resulted in a very slow pace. A mechanistic approach to planning and delivery did not engage students. There were instances of needless repetition of the same point. Teachers in general showed an inability to adapt. Most had very little understanding of how young people learn, or of how to meet students' differing needs. In many examples able students were left with nothing to do after they had completed their basic tasks. In high school there was a more productive group dynamic. The pace of lessons was generally better. There were still weaknesses, and insufficient active participation in the lessons. The development of enquiry and critical thinking skills was inconsistent.

Learning was acceptable at all stages. There were positive attitudes in the high school from those who wished to learn. Elsewhere, students could interact and co-operate well, particularly in science. Overall, however, many lessons were teacher dominated, with too few opportunities for students to work productively in groups. In many instances students were passive and disenchanted, exhibiting little enthusiasm for learning and no joy of discovery. A considerable number were frequently not paying attention, and often totally off task. In a significant number of lessons students were learning despite the poor quality teaching.

Assessment was acceptable at all stages. Overall, assessment had little effect on teaching. Teachers did not identify next steps for students in learning, nor did they tell students what they needed to do in order to improve. A programme of continuous assessment had been established. It was well documented, but was not yet embedded and had not had time to yield results. The school participated in tests which offered valuable information on regional and international comparisons, but the school's analysis did not yet give any information which could be used to improve teaching. Although teachers had a broad knowledge of students' strengths and weaknesses, they did not use that knowledge either to support weaker students or to challenge the more able. Teachers had made some attempts to encourage students to evaluate others' work, but the practice was at a very low level. The school did not do enough to meet the learning needs of the higher achieving students.

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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

The curriculum was acceptable across the school with some strengths in the Kindergarten. The Islamic Education and Arabic curricula were compliant with Ministry of Education requirements and were enriched through competitions such as Qur'an recitation and Arabic competitions. As a consequence of high staff turnover and shared responsibility of key roles by certain staff, a significant number of teachers were unfamiliar with the curriculum. This interrupted student progress. Individual teachers made efforts to broaden the curriculum but overall, it remained text book focused. The curriculum was reviewed within the strategic plan in response to the recommendations in the last inspection report. As a result, the library and ICT areas were used more regularly. Extra-curricular activities, including physical education, art, clubs and field trips helped to broaden the curriculum. The curriculum in the Kindergarten classes and some early primary classes provided variety for the youngest students. However, the curriculum as implemented did not consistently meet the needs of the most able students and those with special educational needs.

How well does the school protect and support students?

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

Arrangements for ensuring students' health and safety were good. The systems for emergency evacuation were well known and effective. The school was hygienic and well maintained and enabled easy access for all students including those with additional needs. Students were safe on the school buses and traffic at the start and end of the day was generally well managed. The medical team monitored student health and kept detailed records for future reference. They carried out risk assessments and worked in partnership with students, staff and parents to promote healthy lifestyles. Although child protection procedures were not fully established, the welfare team provided effective and sensitive support for students. They also provided counseling for students and families who were experiencing difficulties.

The quality of support was acceptable across the school. The majority of teachers knew their students well and relationships were mostly positive and respectful. Procedures for monitoring attendance were established and, through the use of modern technology, were increasingly effective. Arrangements for improving punctuality and behaviour were less effective. Students were often late for assembly and those who missed the start of lessons were rarely required to provide a reason. A few teachers had good systems for rewarding students' work and positive attitudes though a minority used sweets as rewards. A significant number were ineffective in managing behaviour, especially in the boys' section. Guidance for future education and career options was at the early stages of development. The school did not have a clear understanding of how to identify and support students with special educational needs and those who were gifted and talented.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

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

Leadership in the school was acceptable. Even though most of the senior and middle leaders in the school were new to their posts, they had ambitious plans for the future of the school and were keen to improve it. Most were positive and invested time, resources and energy into developing performance management systems, a self-evaluation document and accompanying rubrics. However, these systems were too generic and needed time to be fully embedded in the school to have an impact on raising standards. There had been a positive response by the school management and governors to a number of comments in the previous inspection report, particularly in relation to providing more ICT and resources in the school. Despite these efforts, senior leaders had not been fully successful in improving key aspects of the work of the school. In particular, the quality of teaching and students' achievement had declined in some areas of the school since the last inspection. Awareness of best international practice was limited and the school lacked stability in the senior leadership team and support to make the required improvements to the quality of teaching for effective learning.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were unsatisfactory. The school had completed a self-evaluation that was not based on accurate and reliable sources of evidence. Data analysis was superficial and was not sufficiently interrogated to provide the leaders with an accurate picture of the school. Consequently, both the Governors and school leaders did not have an accurate understanding of strengths and weakness of the school. In particular, they lacked an accurate understanding of students' attainment and progress. The school recognised the need to place greater focus upon student outcomes and the need for a more robust self-evaluation and school improvement planning.

Partnerships with parents and the community were good. Most parents interviewed reported good systems of communication and appreciated the access they had to teachers. The school used a range of methods to communicate with parents, including parent-teacher meetings and reports. A few parents stated that they wanted more information regarding the next steps in learning for their children.

The governance of the school was good. The Board of Governors was well established and included representation from members of the community including individuals with significant experience in education. The Board met monthly to discuss a range of school issues and had invested in improving the school building and resources. However, due to the inaccurate self-evaluation of the school, the Board did not have a clear picture of the current strengths and the most important areas for development.

The day-to-day management of the school was acceptable. The school premises were clean and well cared for, with new building sections added this year to accommodate the growing number of students. The school had invested in purchasing new resources that were yet to be used effectively to improve teaching, learning and student achievement. Despite these positive developments, the school had an unusually high turnover of staff and leaders in the school over the past few years with almost half of the current staff being new to the school this academic year. This includes most of the subject leaders who recently took on their posts of responsibility. Almost all teachers had appropriate academic qualifications although only a few had appropriate teaching qualifications.

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	53	6%
	Last year	61	8%
Teachers	4		5%
Students	4		5%

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

A few parents completed the on-line survey. Of those that responded, most stated that their children were making good progress in Islamic Education, Arabic, mathematics and science. A significant number felt that their child's progress in English was slower. Parents expressed their satisfaction with the Islamic and cultural values that were promoted in the school but were concerned that certain academic aspects were

not as well developed. Most parents felt that the school was well led but expressed concern about the high turnover of staff. Both parents and teachers felt that the regular meetings were useful.

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

Our work with schools

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

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

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

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