

INSPECTION REPORT

School Of Modern Skills

Report published in April 2013

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT School Of Modern Skills

Location	Al Muhaisnah
Type of school	Private
Website	www.dubaisms.net
Telephone	04-288-7765
Address	P.O. Box 57475, Dubai
Principal	Huda Al Samkari
Curriculum	US
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	Kindergarten to Grade 12
Attendance	Acceptable
Number of students on roll	1,227
Largest nationality group of Students	Emirati
Number of Emirati students	1,107 (90%)
Date of the inspection	18th to 21st February 2013

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The context of the school

The School of Modern Skills, located in Al Muhaisnah, is a private school for boys and girls aged three to 18, from Kindergarten to Grade 12. At the time of the inspection there were 1,227 students on roll. There were 1,107 Emirati students representing just over 90 per cent of the total. The school had identified 201 students with special educational needs although they had not been fully assessed.

The school was structured around four phases, which were Kindergarten, elementary, middle and high school. It provided a US curriculum and a Ministry of Education (MoE) curriculum in Islamic Education and Arabic. The curriculum consisted of the Common Core Standards in English and mathematics and a textbook curriculum in other subjects. The first year of Kindergarten used the New York Pre-Kindergarten Standards. Students were awarded an internal school certificate after completing Grade 12. International testing included IBT tests in English, science and mathematics in the elementary, middle and high school phases. Grade 12 students took the TOEFL, IELTS, SAT and CEPA examinations.

There were 84 teachers, with almost half new to the school in the current academic year. All key subjects had new heads of department. Most teachers had a post-secondary qualification and a minority had a teaching degree.

Overall school performance 2012-2013

Acceptable

Key strengths

- Students' strong understanding of Islamic values throughout the school;
- The good progress of high school students in all key subjects;
- The good arrangements to ensure the health, safety and care of students;
- Partnerships with parents and the community were good.

Recommendations

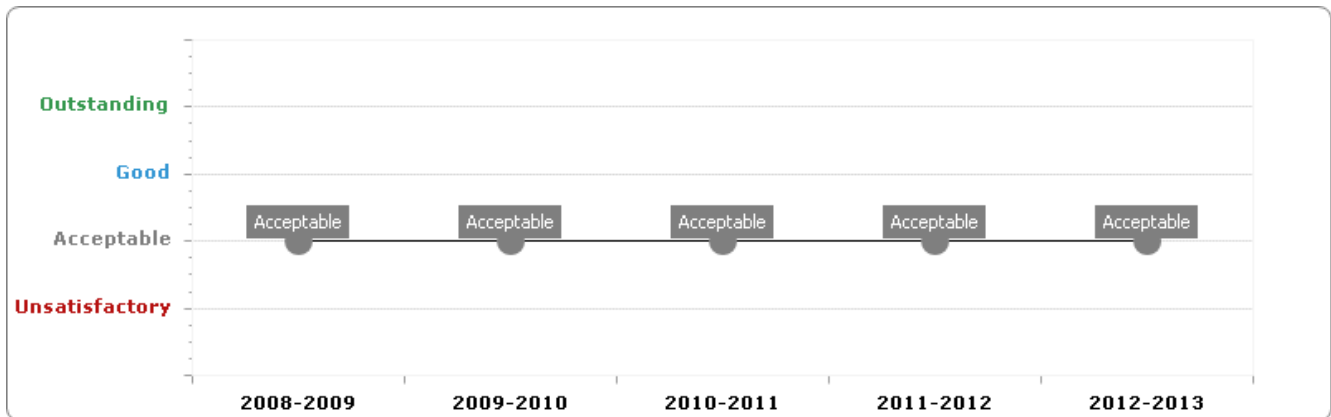
- Continue to improve students' attainment and progress, through better quality teaching, learning and use of information on students' performance, so that lessons meet the needs of all students;
- Enhance the curriculum to make it engaging for students, with good levels of challenge and choice in learning for all;
- Identify students with special educational needs more accurately and ensure that they are supported well in lessons so that they make good progress;
- Ensure strong, effective leadership that will provide the necessary improvements in the school;
- Make certain that self-evaluation is accurate and provides a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

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Progress since the last inspection

- There was improved attainment in mathematics by students in the elementary, middle and high school and in the progress by students in the elementary and middle phases;
- Students' progress in English in the high school had improved;
- There was a new building with classrooms, facilities and resources for girls in Grades 3 to 12.

Trend of overall performance



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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	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Progress	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
English				
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Mathematics				
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Science				
Attainment	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

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How good is the students' personal and social development?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Understanding of Islamic values and local, cultural and global awareness	Good	Good	Good	Outstanding
Community and environmental responsibility	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

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

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

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

[Read paragraph](#)

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

[Read paragraph](#)

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

Attainment was good in Islamic Education and Arabic. It was acceptable in the other key subjects in all phases, except science in the Kindergarten, which was unsatisfactory. In Islamic Education students demonstrated good recitation skills and made few errors. Most could apply their knowledge and understanding to real life situations. In Arabic as a first language, students' language skills were above expectations for the majority, though writing was the weakest skill. In English, students listened and understood well. Younger students' speaking skills were limited. Reading was stronger than writing but students' confidence in speaking using English varied widely. Students at all ages and phases showed age-appropriate skills in the key aspects of mathematics. Limited scientific investigation restricted attainment in science in the Kindergarten. In the elementary and middle phases, there was acceptable understanding of the scientific method. This was better in the high school. Externally moderated examinations showed weaknesses in skills and the application of understanding. In almost all key subjects, girls' attainment was better than that of boys.

Progress varied from acceptable to good, with the exception of Kindergarten science, which was unsatisfactory. In Islamic Education and Arabic, the majority of students made good progress although students' progress in writing was developing too slowly in Arabic. All skills in Arabic were weaker in the middle phase. In English, in the Kindergarten, children demonstrated good phonic skills. Reading and writing showed steady improvement in the other phases. Progress was made in mathematics, where students were engaged in group work and practical activities. In the upper grades there were good reasoning and problem-solving skills evident. In science, Kindergarten children found the language and concepts too difficult and consequently their progress was slow. In the elementary and middle phases, there was a lack of challenge in science lessons. In the high school, scientific concepts were better understood and applied. In most key subjects, the most able students were not sufficiently challenged.

[View judgements](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good in the Kindergarten and acceptable in the other phases. Most students were respectful and relationships between teachers and students were positive. The majority of students showed a sense of responsibility. However, student behaviour was not always satisfactory and this was notable when there was poor teaching and students were not engaged or motivated. Students generally understood and followed advice on keeping fit and healthy. The school reported high levels of attendance. However, during the inspection attendance was only acceptable.

Punctuality continued to be a significant issue for the school. Students' understanding of Islamic values and their local, cultural and global awareness was good across the first three phases of the school and outstanding in the high school. Students, especially in the upper grades, had a strong appreciation of Islamic values and celebrations and their impact on everyday life in the UAE. They understood and appreciated national events and the significance of traditions. They showed pride in their heritage and expressed an in-depth appreciation of the culture and achievements of Dubai. They were aware of the range of cultures in Dubai and their influence on local culture. They had much less awareness and understanding of global issues. Students' understanding of community and environmental responsibility was acceptable across the school. Most had an awareness of their responsibilities in school, enjoyed their work and worked well together. However, they were often over-reliant on others to make decisions. There was a student council but, apart from their involvement in the recent opening of the girls' building, many students felt that they had little influence on school life. They demonstrated little engagement or initiation of activities with the local community. Their work ethic and enterprise showed them to be receivers of information more than initiators of their own learning. Students kept their immediate environment clean but were not active in developing schemes for conservation and sustainability in the school. They displayed limited understanding of wider global issues.

[View judgements](#)

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

Teaching was acceptable in the Kindergarten, elementary and middle school. It was good in the high school where teachers more often supported students' interest and engagement in lessons. In the Kindergarten, teachers encouraged children's confidence and social skills. However, many teachers did not show an understanding of how young children learn best. Lessons did not often involve discovery, exploration or independent learning. In the elementary and middle schools, teaching was inconsistent, but better lessons featured varied activities, respectful relationships and teachers providing for independent learning. High school lessons offered more opportunities for students to take responsibility and learn from each other. However, a significant minority of lessons across all the phases provided activities of little interest to students. Teaching did not meet all students' needs. Teachers' expectations of students were often too low, particularly of more able students. Teaching did not focus enough on developing enquiry and critical thinking skills. Students with special educational needs were not provided with the support they needed to make sufficient progress.

Learning was good in the high school and acceptable in all other phases. Girls' positive attitudes meant they often took greater advantage of learning opportunities than boys. When learning was least effective,

boys lacked concentration and focus on their work. However, the majority of students co-operated well in lessons.

When they were given opportunities to take effective roles and responsibilities in group work, they demonstrated enthusiasm and learned well from each other. In better lessons, students were engaged in their tasks, and could explain their learning and the skills and knowledge they had acquired. When information technology was used effectively in lessons, students were more interested and enjoyed their learning. Students were passive and uninterested when activities did not challenge them, or they did not need to think for themselves or solve problems.

Assessment of learning was acceptable across the school. The school recorded students' attainment and regularly shared this information with parents and students. The majority of teachers knew their students' strengths and weaknesses. The school provided extra learning support based on regular testing. However, most teachers were not skilled at using assessment information to plan activities to meet the learning needs of all students in lessons. Teachers rarely provided immediate and effective feedback to students during lessons to support their understanding and plan the next steps in learning. A few students were involved in assessing their own learning, but most could not explain what they had learned or the progress they had made. The quality of guidance by teachers was inconsistent, both in lessons and in marking students' work. Most students had little understanding of how to improve their work.

[View judgements](#)

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

The curriculum was acceptable across all phases. The curriculum for a few of the key subjects was comprehensive and cohesive. For example, the curriculum for English and mathematics was based on the US Common Core Standards and the pre-Kindergarten programme was based on the New York State pre-Kindergarten curriculum. These areas of the curriculum were broader and effectively provided challenge for students with less focus on textbooks. The developing skills-based curriculum was having positive effects on students' behaviour and their understanding of values. The Kindergarten curriculum offered more variety. However, there was no choice of electives for students in the high school. Independent learning and challenge were not prominent features of the curriculum across all the phases. The curriculum did not provide for the learning needs of all students, including those with special educational needs and the more able. The science curriculum, in all phases, lacked consistency and challenge. There was limited provision for cross-curricular connections in learning. Enquiry, critical thinking and information technology were not integral parts of the curriculum.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety were good. The school provided a safe and secure environment for students. There were regular fire drills and equipment was well maintained. The buildings were clean and hygienic. The clinic staff provided regular health checks and a vaccination programme. There were thorough records kept of accidents and medicines for students. Parents were kept informed of health issues. School bus transport was well supervised. There was provision of healthy canteen food and the encouragement of student participation in sport and exercise. Staff members were supportive of students' personal well-being. However, the school's management of child protection policy and procedures was not well defined. The staff's roles and responsibilities were not clear. Newly appointed teachers had not been trained in this policy and practice. A few fire doors were kept locked during the school day, not allowing for the safe and efficient evacuation of students if needed.

Across the school the quality of support for students was acceptable. Relationships between teachers and students were adequate. A few teachers demonstrated poor management of students' behaviour. Systems were in place to record attendance, but they were not always accurate. Students, especially boys, were too often late for their lessons. Phase supervisors were often dominant and did not allow students to be sufficiently independent and take responsibility for their behaviour and punctuality. Older boys reported that they found this lack of personal responsibility and decision-making to be restraining. The school's social workers worked well with designated students. Advice and support for students on future study and career options was varied, with some guidance provided to older students on university choices. Links had been maintained with students who had moved on to higher education.

[View judgements](#)

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

Students with special educational needs were welcomed into the school. Although basic systems were in place to identify and support students with special education needs, weaker students were often misdiagnosed as having learning difficulties and students with stronger academic skills were often labelled as gifted and talented. The lines of communication, accountability and tracking of students were imprecise. There were a few attempts by teachers to meet the needs of these students in lessons through curriculum modification, support in learning and close tracking of their progress.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was acceptable. There was a vision for the improvement of the school. However, this vision was not consistently linked to initiatives for improvement. Roles and responsibilities of school leaders had not been clearly defined so that all understood their contributions to the school's development. Consultation and communication between school leadership teams was variable. Students and parents were surveyed, but the results were not well analysed to support review and changes in the school. A few Heads of Departments took account of the school's vision and aims to develop initiatives such as improved teaching practice. However, the initiatives were not linked to students' learning.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were unsatisfactory. Self-evaluation was largely regarded as the responsibility of a few school leaders. Evaluation methods and evidence gathered from staff, student and parent surveys was narrowly focused and did not include outcomes for students. There were too many targets for improvement, making the process unmanageable and unrealistic. Agreement on targets and the measurement of progress in meeting the targets had not been established. There had been limited impact for students from the school's improvement plan. Strengths and weaknesses of the school and key priorities for improvement had not been accurately identified.

Relationships with parents and the community were good. Parents felt welcomed by the school. Communication was effective and productive. Written reports on students were regular and kept parents informed about the attainment and progress of their children. However, a few parents expressed concern about the lack of choice of subjects for their children. A significant minority of parents stated that they were not fully involved in the decision-making of the school. There were productive links with a few other schools and with the local community.

Partnerships between the school and Board of Governors were effective. The range of representation on the board included members of the community, parents, and business representatives. The board met regularly and was informed of key issues in the school; minutes were kept of their meetings. They had responded to the school's need for more facilities such as the new girls' building, further resources and improvements to classrooms. However, the board had not held the school sufficiently accountable for improvements such as meeting the recommendations from the previous inspection report.

Management, including staffing, facilities and resources was acceptable. There had been a high turnover of teachers. Heads of Department were new in all key subjects. Staff members were effectively deployed.

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However, classroom assistants were used more efficiently for student learning in the Kindergarten than elsewhere. Section supervisors' roles did not match the needs of students or the vision of the school.

Most teachers had appropriate academic qualifications and a minority had a teaching qualification. There was a new, well-appointed building for girls' education. Facilities and resources in the Kindergarten and boys' section were acceptable. There was more than adequate classroom capacity, but restricted laboratory space and limited library resources. Good use had been made of interactive whiteboards in classrooms, but rooms with information and communication technology facilities were not fully used.

[View judgements](#)

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	72	13%
	Last year	75	13%
Teachers	27		32%
Students	51		44%

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

A few parents, nearly half the senior students and about one-third of teachers completed the on-line surveys. Most parents thought their children were making good progress in the key subjects. A minority of parents and students thought the school did not help sufficiently with development of English language skills. However, a majority of parents agreed that teachers provided good modeling of English. Around half of the students disagreed that they liked school. Almost half the teachers did not know if students had a good understanding of Islam. Most parents agreed that teaching and learning were good. One in five students disagreed that teachers made sure they knew how to improve. Almost half of parents and students disagreed that there was a wide range of subjects, topics, and activities to choose from. Most parents did not know if the school offered a wide range of electives. More than one third of teachers did not know if the school welcomed students with special educational needs. More than one third of parents and half the students did not think the school was well led. The majority of teachers thought the school was well led.

What happens next?

The school has been asked to prepare and submit an updated action plan to DSIB within two months of receiving the most recent report. This plan should address:

- Recommendations from DSIB;
- Areas identified by the school as requiring improvement;
- Other external reports or sources of information that comment on the work of the school;
- Priorities arising from the school's unique characteristics.

The next inspection will report on the progress made by the school.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

How to contact us

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

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