

# The Central School Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 12

Report issued February 2010

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## Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report

**Outstanding** – exceptionally high quality of performance or practice.

**Good** – the expected level of quality for every school in Dubai.

**Acceptable** – the minimum level of acceptability required for Dubai. All key aspects of performance and practice in every school should meet or exceed this level.

**Unsatisfactory** – quality not yet at the level acceptable for schools in Dubai. Schools will be expected to take urgent measures to improve the quality of any aspect of their performance or practice that is judged at this level.

The Central School was inspected in December 2009 as part of the regular inspection of all schools in Dubai. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated students' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on students' progress in Islamic Education (for Muslim students), Arabic, English, mathematics and science.

## Basic information about the school

Located in the Al Nahda area of Dubai, The Central School is a private school providing education for boys and girls aged three to 17 years. The school follows a curriculum based on the Indian Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). The Principal has led the school since it was acquired by the current owner, and it is now one of the five new Indian model schools in the UAE. At the time of the inspection, there were 2,044 students on roll: 1,030 girls and 520 Kindergarten (KG) - Grade 3 boys attended morning school sessions and 494 Grade 4 to 12 boys attended in the afternoon. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires, which were completed by parents. Overall, the parents were satisfied with almost all areas of the school's work. Most parents felt that the school was well led and that there were good links between the school and parents, but only a minority indicated that they felt links between the community and the school were good. Almost all stated that their children liked school and that they made good progress in English, mathematics and science. Most parents indicated that progress in Arabic and Islamic Education was good. Almost all parents indicated that staff expected their children to work hard and do their best and that behaviour was good at the school. Most believed that teaching was good, and that teachers encouraged their children to become independent and responsible. Most also stated that their children were well cared for and that the school helped keep their children healthy and safe; this was not confirmed by the inspection. They believed that the school was good at consulting them on decisions that affected their children, that they received good information about their progress and that they felt comfortable about approaching the school if they had a complaint. There was very strong satisfaction conveyed about the way in which the Principal resolved any issue that

parents raised with him. Specific concerns raised through individual comments in the survey related mostly to aspects of transport. Some progress had been made here but parents, in discussion during the inspection, indicated that more improvement was still needed. Inspectors also confirmed this with their own direct observations and findings.

## How well does the school perform overall?

The school's performance was acceptable. Attainment and progress in all of the key subjects across the school were acceptable, except for progress in Islamic Education, which was good. By the end of KG, the majority of children could communicate confidently in English and had developed a basic recognition and understanding of number and shape. Students made slower progress in the early primary grades but, by Grade 8, attainment and progress were again acceptable, including in Arabic. Students in the secondary grades built on this effectively and, by the end of Grade 10 and Grade 12, they achieved CBSE results that were in line with international expectations. Trends were generally positive, although mathematics results had fallen in 2009. Students' attainment in Islamic Education was also acceptable, although progress was good. In the KG and early primary grades, the attitudes and behaviour of most students were acceptable. Throughout the secondary grades, however, students were good role models and were polite, responsible and caring young people who were keen to learn. They respected Islamic and local traditions, promoted cultural heritage through events in the community and understood the multi-cultural nature of Dubai well. Students' economic and environmental understanding was also well developed.

Teaching was acceptable except in the early grades, where it was unsatisfactory. The best teaching ensured lessons were planned well to meet the needs of all students. In less effective lessons this was not seen, and there was also a slow pace to learning with over-directed teaching that relied on closed questioning. Students' learning followed a similar pattern and was acceptable except in the early primary grades where it was unsatisfactory; here, a few students responded to weak teaching with misbehaviour. In the majority of lessons, assessment was weak, particularly in primary grades, where there was a heavy emphasis on closed questions and answers to evaluate student learning. The curriculum was acceptable and was reviewed regularly but it remained predominantly based on textbooks leading to the CBSE examinations. Community links were good. Checks and monitoring of health and safety issues were not regular or rigorous and children and students were exposed to significant risks. Most teachers knew how to follow appropriate procedures for Child Protection. The quality of support was acceptable; the school monitored and tracked students' progress. Staff-student relationships were good and counsellors supported both boys and girls.

The quality of leadership and management were acceptable. The Principal's vision effectively guided the school's work and performance management of staff was in place. The quality of self-evaluation and improvement planning were unsatisfactory. Partnerships with parents and the community were good. Parents' views were very influential in bringing about improvement but they were not sufficiently involved in decision-making. There were good links with the local community and government agencies and services. Governance was unsatisfactory because the school was not held to account to its parents as stakeholders. Staffing, facilities and resources in the school were acceptable overall.

## Key features of the school

- Students made good progress in Islamic Education and acceptable progress in other key subjects;
- Almost all students had positive attitudes to learning. They developed good cultural, civic, economic and environmental understanding;
- The school provided a rich programme of languages which met the needs of students well;
- The Principal's clear vision of strong moral and Islamic values permeated the work of the school and guided the personal development of the students;
- Teaching in the lower primary grades was unsatisfactory;
- Aspects of health, safety and supervision were unsatisfactory;
- Self-evaluation and improvement were significantly under-developed across the school;
- Middle leaders were not sufficiently involved in monitoring, evaluation and improvement planning and there was no systematic linking of this process to the work of leaders and to identifying training needs of staff;
- Governance did not ensure the school was held accountable to stakeholders;
- The laboratory, library and information and communication technology (ICT) facilities and resources were unsatisfactory.

## Recommendations

- Conduct a rigorous health and safety audit and act urgently on its recommendations, ensuring that a monitoring and maintenance programme is established to keep standards to an acceptable or better level;
- Improve the quality of teaching, particularly in the early primary grades, by building on existing good practice by:
  - planning lessons well, using a variety of methods and resources, to meet the needs of all students
  - eliminating over-directed teaching, and developing strategies which include questioning that promotes students' active and independent learning
  - sharing and promoting good practice within the school.
- Reorganise the teaching and learning provision in the early grades to create an environment that meets the needs of all students;
- Develop the skills of middle leaders, and involve them sufficiently to enable rigorous and comprehensive self-evaluation which directs effective school improvement planning;
- Ensure that governance holds the school accountable to its stakeholders.

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

Attainment in Islamic Education was acceptable and progress was good. Much care was taken in memorizing The Holy Qur'an and reciting it according to the rules of recitation, and some students won local and international prizes for their knowledge of The Holy Qur'an. Students made good progress because extra time was devoted to supporting them in their learning of Islamic Education. Grade 9 students knew about the family structure and the rights and duties of the husband and wife. All students practised what they learnt about in the prayer room at the school every day. Students demonstrated an acceptable level of understanding of Islamic concepts and the practical applications of the Pillars of Islam in their daily lives and behaviour.

Attainment and progress in Arabic were acceptable. Grade 1 students had a good range of vocabulary and age appropriate reading skills. They could differentiate between the long and the short vowels. Grade 2 students were able to use their vocabulary in sentences. However, in Grade 6, the students had difficulty in talking about what they had learned in lessons. Secondary students had an acceptable understanding of the simple grammatical rules and could use pronouns, singular and plural, and masculine and feminine words correctly in dictations. Handwriting across the secondary grades was good. Grade 12 girls could read fluently and understood the themes of the texts.

Both attainment and progress in English were acceptable across the school. By the end of the KG the majority of children could speak confidently, read with few prompts and write letters with an acceptable degree of accuracy. There was limited progress in reading and writing in the early primary grades. However, by Grade 8, students were able to fluently summarise key points in a story and answer grammatical queries with examples from the text, and could understand well when silently reading and were able to change tenses of verbs in sentences. In secondary grades, most students listened attentively and spoke fluently; a few used a wide-ranging vocabulary accurately. In most grades, students made acceptable progress in memorising rhymes and poetry but did not necessarily develop a deep understanding of this genre.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable. Most students made progress in line with their age and ability. The school's analysis of test results indicated that mathematics was the lowest attaining key subject. Across the school, most students' mental calculations were quick and accurate, and the majority of the more able students made the connections with other topics quickly. Most children in KG had acceptable age-related competency in number and shape. By Grade 8 students were proficient in number skills with an acceptable level of competence in shape and algebra. A few students, however, had difficulty understanding the concept of ratio. Most students in Grades 9 to 12 used formulae well and interpreted data accurately. However, across the school most students' ability to solve problems and explain their work logically was under-developed.

Attainment and progress in science across the school were acceptable. In most KG and primary classes, students made appropriate progress in lessons. By Grade 1 children had a good grasp of the world around them. By Grade 8 most students understood that soils have different capacity for holding water; they could identify different seed coats and predict their contents. However, scientific

explanation was under-developed. In Grades 10 to 12, students were observed to have developed competent practical skills when conducting experiments. By Grade 12, for example, most were able to find out the acid-alkaline balance in samples of desert and garden soil and the presence of starch in two given solutions.

## How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour in KG and primary grades were acceptable and in secondary they were good. Students had positive attitudes towards learning and they behaved in a respectful, disciplined and orderly manner. Some assemblies were organised and well presented by students. An active students' council enabled them to exercise responsibility, represent students' views to the school and promote good behaviour by effectively supervising fellow students. The average attendance of the school was acceptable and punctuality in arriving for lessons was good. In the early primary grades, instances of restless behaviour by the students were observed during some lessons and some occasional lapses during periods between lessons when they were not adequately supervised.

Students' civic understanding and their appreciation of local traditions and culture were good throughout the school. Students demonstrated a good understanding of Islam and were happy to follow its traditions and values. They understood how Islam affected their lives and appreciated the school's emphasis on Islamic Education. Most of the students had a good understanding and appreciation of the multicultural nature of Dubai and the advantages they enjoyed from cultural diversity. They represented the school at cultural and heritage events locally, exercised civic responsibility by raising considerable sums of money for charity and had a clear understanding of how they could contribute to the future of Dubai.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good across the school. Most students had a good awareness of the growth and the consequences of development in Dubai and understood the effect of global recession on their lives. Older students understood the nature of Dubai's economic progress and its position in the global economy. They were concerned about conservation and recycling and understood the environmental impact that the new Dubai Metro could have. The students had organised a central environment team to create awareness about the environmental issues and the school served as an active member of Emirates Environment Group.

## How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching and learning was acceptable in the KG and secondary grades, but unsatisfactory in the primary section. Although there were some good features in teaching and learning in the primary grades, there were important shortcomings in the majority of lessons observed in the early primary years. The main weaknesses included: lessons which were not planned well enough to meet the needs of students of mixed ability; a lack of variety in the activities chosen to promote student learning; a slow pace to lessons; and an over-reliance on closed questions by teachers. In a few lessons in the lower primary grades, poor classroom management further hindered student progress. Across the rest of the school, teaching was judged as good or better in a minority of lessons. In these lessons, teachers had good subject knowledge and knew how students learned.



They set appropriate work and made their expectations clear to students. They planned lessons well with a variety of activities to meet the needs of all students and often used skilful questioning techniques effectively to deepen students' knowledge and understanding.

The quality of student learning was acceptable in the KG and in secondary grades but unsatisfactory in the primary. Across the school, a few students took responsibility for their own learning. These students interacted well with their peers to further develop their knowledge and understanding. When given the opportunity, students worked well in groups and although the majority were keen to learn and applied themselves in lessons, generally they were passive with little opportunity to discuss, explain and critically evaluate their work in detail. In the lower primary grades, a few students lacked concentration, even for short periods; they became over-excited, and, on occasion, disturbed the learning of other students in the lesson.

In the majority of lessons, assessment strategies were limited, particularly in the primary grades with the heavy emphasis on closed questions and answers to evaluate student learning. In a minority of lessons in secondary classes, good use was made of skilful questioning techniques to probe and deepen students' knowledge and understanding. Marking was regular and teachers' knowledge of their students' strengths and weaknesses was generally good but students had little opportunity to assess their own work or collaborate with others in evaluating their progress.

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

The quality of the curriculum was acceptable. The curriculum was reviewed annually within the group of schools owned by the same proprietor and on a monthly basis by the school itself. Although there were no gaps noted in students' learning between grades, the change in class organisation from KG to Grade 1 did not meet the learning and development needs of all students. In Grades 1 to 10 there was a choice of five languages in addition to English and Arabic, which significantly enriched the curriculum and effectively addressed students' needs. Arabic classes were extended to Grades 10, 11 and 12. However, there were limited opportunities for development in the creative arts, independent learning and challenges for the more able students, although tutorials in Grades 1 to 4 helped to support less able learners. Lessons rarely provided hands on experience with computers and the integration of ICT was lacking across the school. Few planned opportunities for students to make links in their learning were noted. Extra-curricular competitions supported the curriculum. Students raised money for charity and were able to develop responsibility in school. However, sporting activities, in particular, were limited in scope. There were many opportunities for students to develop links with the community through fieldtrips and participation in community activities such as the Million Book Award Challenge, Central Islamic Festival and the Global Village Festival.

## How well does the school protect and support students?

The arrangements for securing the health and safety of students across the school were unsatisfactory. No policies existed to manage, assess and reduce risks. Checks were not regular or rigorous and children and students were exposed to significant risks. These included an internally insecure area for KG; insufficient supervision of KG and younger primary students between lessons



and when waiting for buses. Students were seen playing on some equipment, which was unsafe. Further hazards included: a low ceiling on the stairs to the first floor; acids which were not stored safely and other risks observed in the laboratory. Fire drills were only practised annually and evacuation plans were not displayed adequately. Some toilets were unhygienic. Medicine was not available when the nurse was absent. The school's storage of medicine and maintenance of health records were acceptable. Most teachers knew how to follow appropriate procedures for Child Protection but the policy had not been widely shared. Students were mainly made aware of healthy lifestyles and the need to exercise through physical education lessons.

The quality of support throughout the school was acceptable. Staff-student relationships were good and were best where teaching was less formal. The school's two designated counsellors for boys and girls provided acceptable support and guidance for students on academic, emotional and personal matters but their availability was limited because of their part-time employment. Career guidance was also given to Grade 12 students and almost all who have left the school have gone on to attend universities in several countries. The school discipline committee was effective and helped resolve any related issues. Students' attendance and punctuality was efficiently monitored. Arrangements for monitoring and tracking students' progress were acceptable. Teachers used the results from the school's robust framework for testing students to select those in need of additional support lessons, as well as to inform the revision of curriculum delivery. However, the school was making insufficient use of this wealth of data on individual students to set targets and plan for improved performance in individual subjects. A new student personal profile system aimed at tracking academic, personal and social well-being had been introduced; this was an important development but had not yet had time to have an impact on students' performance or the quality of the school's provision.

## How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership and management were acceptable. The Principal's vision effectively guided the learning and personal development of the students. The performance of staff was reviewed regularly but leaders had not received sufficient training to bring rigour and consistency to the process. Teachers had defined roles and responsibilities and were committed at all levels, with teams established that met regularly. Most leaders were committed to their work but did not yet understand their roles fully. The school consulted parents frequently and also conducted surveys of its senior students. Given the Principal's immediate response to health and safety issues, and the positive impact of the school's recent membership of a larger group of schools, inspectors judged that the school had an acceptable capacity to improve.

The quality of self-evaluation and improvement planning were unsatisfactory. A school development plan was in place but the process for drafting the plan lacked sufficient rigour and a broader involvement in evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses beyond the Principal. The plan's scope was limited to only one year, objectives were not specific and there was no use of success criteria. There was no planning at other levels to link with school-wide improvement. Teachers attended training but this was mainly limited to their subject areas. There was also no professional development programme linked to the outcomes of staff performance reviews and to the needs of the school improvement plan.

Partnerships with parents and the community were good. The school conducted a termly parents' survey and acted on main concerns. Parents' views had been very influential in improving the school in the areas of hygiene, health and safety, and remedial provision. Regular reporting, communication through frequent newsletters, suggestion boxes, student diaries and directly with the Principal, encouraged parents to be active partners in learning. They were not, however, sufficiently involved in decision-making. There were good links with the local community. For example, the school regularly raised significant funds for charities and there were school seminars from the police, fire service and driving institute.

The quality of governance was unsatisfactory. The school was not held sufficiently accountable to its parents as stakeholders. The managing director, representing the owner, did not conduct a formal performance review of the principal's work. Parents were not included in an advisory board, and there were no plans to do so in the future. However, the schools recent membership of a wider group of schools had brought useful support, including funding, for extended and improved school facilities.

Staffing, facilities and resources in the school were acceptable overall. Teachers were sufficient in number, qualified and deployed appropriately with the exception of those occasions where teachers were required to teach two combined classes in physical education. There was no designated specialist to provide support for students with individual learning needs and, in KG, there were no teaching assistants. The ICT laboratory had just been refurbished but other facilities were basic and some furniture was unsuitable for the age of the students. The school was well provided with textbooks but had little ICT equipment and other resources to enhance learning. The library, for example, was poorly stocked.

## 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 is the students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 - 8	Grades 9 -12
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Good

How good is the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 - 8	Grades 9 - 12
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good is the students' attainment and progress in English?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 - 8	Grades 9 - 12
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good is the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 - 8	Grades 9 - 12
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good is the students' attainment and progress in science?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 - 8	Grades 9 - 12
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good is the students' personal and social development?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 - 8	Grades 9 - 12
Attitudes and behaviour	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Good

How good are teaching and learning?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 – 8	Grades 9 - 12
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 - 8	Grades 9 - 12
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?			
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 - 8	Grades 9 - 12
Health and safety	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Quality of support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at [www.khda.gov.ae](http://www.khda.gov.ae).

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