

Al Ittihad Private School - Al Mamzar Inspection Report

Kindergarten to High

Report published May 2011

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Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report

Outstanding – exceptionally high quality of performance or practice.

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

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

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

Al Ittihad Private School - Al Mamzar was inspected in November 2010 as part of the regular inspection of all schools in Dubai. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated students' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on students' progress in Islamic Education (for Muslim students), Arabic, English, mathematics and science.

Basic information about the school

Located in Al Mamzar, Al Ittihad Private School provides education from Kindergarten to High school for boys and girls aged three to 18 years. The school follows a US curriculum. At the time of the inspection there were 1715 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

As part of the inspection process, Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires issued to parents. About ten per cent of parents responded to the questionnaire. Most parents were satisfied with the quality of education at the school. They were particularly pleased with the quality of attainment and progress by their children. They thought that teaching was the main strength of the school, but also that it was the most important aspect to improve. Most parents thought homework was appropriate, but about half of them expressed concern that their children needed extra help at home. Parents thought that their children were safe, that behaviour was good and that communication between themselves and the school was good. They considered the leadership of the school to be effective. However, a few parents did have concerns about many issues, including students' behaviour and especially that the school was not responsive to their opinions.

How well does the school perform overall?

The Al Itihad Private School - Mamzar provided an acceptable education for its students. The leadership had improved and had responded positively to the previous report in developing aspects of the curriculum, as well as teaching and learning. Teachers had developed new strategies in their teaching, although not all were flexible enough in their approach. Attainment in science had improved to be acceptable, but there had been little change in other subjects. Assessment remained acceptable, but there had not been enough analysis of data to ensure distinct improvements in students' attainment and progress and to measure them against international benchmarks. Other aspects of the school remained much the same; behavioural issues among older boys were less significant although a weakness persisted in punctuality.

Most aspects of the school were acceptable, but there were several strengths. For example, attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic were good and better than in English, mathematics and science. Students were responsible and enjoyed contributing to school life. They had a good understanding of how Islamic principles and values influence their lives. They appreciated the diverse nature of Dubai and the reasons behind its recent rapid growth. Most students had positive attitudes to work but were not given enough scope to think for themselves and improve their research and problem-solving skills. Teachers knew their subjects well and planned lessons carefully. However, they mostly used the set texts too rigidly and without sufficient creativity to challenge students fully, especially the more able students. Similarly, the curriculum catered adequately for the progression of students' learning, but lacked the richness and diversity to motivate students and to put learning in context. The school cared for the students and relationships were positive, but some of the formal systems of health and safety were not robust enough. The senior leaders were working hard to lead change at the school and enjoyed some success. There was still work to do in enabling staff to be competent at interpreting and using data to help improve students' attainment. School improvement was steady though, to some extent, hampered by the need to appoint many new staff. Partnerships with parents were good.

Key features of the school

- Strong promotion of students' Islamic identity and cultural understanding;
- The commitment of the Director General and her leadership team to improving all aspects of the school;
- A professional development programme which is beginning to broaden the scope of teaching strategies;
- Strong partnership with parents and community;
- More effective learning environment in the girls' section which contributed to higher attainment and better progress.

Recommendations

- Raise students' attainment in English, mathematics and science;
- Continue to improve teaching and learning across all departments through targeted professional development, focused monitoring of agreed strategies and sharing of existing good practice ;
- Develop a grading and feedback policy which shows teachers how to provide written feedback to students on shared criteria and includes next step guidance on how to improve their learning;
- Develop a curriculum that meets the needs of second language learners, provides challenge for the most able students and supports students experiencing difficulty;
- Ensure students are safe when walking to private cars;
- Expand the use of international benchmarks in order to verify that students' achievements are in line with those of students across the world.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good across the school. Most students understood basic Islamic concepts, duties and responsibilities. They were able to recite Qur'anic verses with the proper Tajweed. Almost all students were able to understand the meaning of prescribed hadeeth and the majority could explain them well. Most students had a good knowledge about their Islamic identity and they were proud of it. In lower grades most students had good, detailed knowledge about the five pillars of Islam. Older students had detailed knowledge about marriage and divorce and they understood the role of the family in Islam. There were good examples of linking this knowledge to their real life and giving the rationale behind the Islamic rulings, but such practice was not consistent across the school.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were good across the school. Most students at all grade levels had good speaking and listening skills. They were able to ask and answer questions and express their opinion using grammatically correct standard Arabic. Most students had a good functional knowledge of grammar rules, although the application of this knowledge was often restricted to workbook exercises which were not challenging or stimulating to the learners. Students' reading and writing skills were good overall, but older students were not provided with sufficient opportunities to write in different genres and for different purposes. There were evident long-term gains in students' language skills, but progress was compromised due to a lack of provision in addressing the varying abilities of learners.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language were good across the school. Most students had good listening skills and were able to follow and participate in classes where Arabic was the only language used. They had good reading comprehension skills, which was evident in their written work and classroom participation. They also had strong knowledge of grammar and were able to apply these learned rules when constructing sentences in writing. Students' speaking skills were the least developed, particularly in high school. Although most students were able to answer direct questions related to familiar learning contexts, they were less confident when talking about unfamiliar topics.

In English, attainment and progress were acceptable but there were weaknesses in the progress made by elementary students. Students started school with little or no English, but developed their understanding of the language satisfactorily through the school. Their spoken English developed gradually in Kindergarten and elementary. Many elementary students had difficulty communicating in grammatically accurate sentences, whether speaking or writing. In the middle and high schools, progress in reading and writing improved and girls tended to outperform boys. In Grade 12, for example, girls spoke clearly and confidently when making presentations. They showed a good grasp of the meaning of a complex story, using quotes from the text to explain and support their analysis.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable in all phases of the school and girls generally achieved better than boys. In Kindergarten, children could count to ten, recognise shapes and sequence colours in patterns. They wrote numerals correctly, and knew that there were 12 months in a year. A few children could count beyond ten. Elementary students knew the properties of the four mathematical operations, fractions, decimals and percentages. In the middle school, students solved linear equations and produced graphs of them using point and slope. In the high school, students showed good skills solving quadratic equations and finding derivatives of trigonometric functions. Application of mathematics to real-life situations was very limited. Across the school, the progress of highly able students was limited by a lack of challenge.

Attainment and progress in science were acceptable across the school. Most students attained knowledge expected for their age and were beginning to develop their investigative skills. Almost all students could relate lessons to previous learning but only a minority could apply their learning to real-life situations. Kindergarten children were aware of the differences between living and non-living things. Elementary students could classify various animals and environments such as deserts, forests, and oceans. Middle school students knew about matter and its measurement, velocity and time and could balance chemical equations. Most high school students understood aspects of motion, relationships of atmospheric gases, genetics, the discovery of sub-atomic particles and physics of electrical energy and currents.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were acceptable in all phases of the school. Students were mostly well behaved in lessons. The instances of poor behaviour, especially with the Kindergarten children and the middle school boys, were mainly because work in lessons was not interesting enough. Relationships were positive on the whole and in the upper grades students supported each other's learning well. Despite the school campaigns for healthy eating habits, some students were seen eating less wholesome food, such as chips and candy. A significant minority of students at all grade levels were not punctual when arriving to school in the morning. Attendance levels for the last academic term were good.

Students' civic responsibility, understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and culture were good overall. In high school, students participated in the life of the school through different initiatives, and through the student council. In the elementary and middle schools, students were not presented with sufficient opportunities through which they could assume roles of responsibility within the school. Most students had a good understanding of the impact of Islam on their lives, culture and value system. Students saw Islam as a way of life which defined their relationships with others. Throughout the school students were proud of their traditions and heritage, and most appreciated the multicultural nature of Dubai.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good in all phases. Most students had good knowledge of how the UAE had developed and the main reasons behind the economic prosperity of Dubai. Students were able to discuss global and local environmental issues, but opportunities for a more hands-on application of this understanding were limited.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching was acceptable overall with a few good and outstanding lessons and a few which were unsatisfactory. Recent workshops had led to a wider range of teaching strategies being used. Most teaching was characterised by strong subject knowledge and a developing understanding of how students learn. Where teachers had a good understanding of learning, activities were designed to meet the range of second language learner needs and promote thinking and communication. Lessons were mostly well planned, but the pace varied and was often dependent on the least able learners. Positive teacher-student relationships characterised most lessons and effective questioning enhanced learning in the best lessons. However, overall, teachers were too dependent on a narrow use of the text book and challenge was lacking. This teacher-directed approach often prevented students from making the progress of which they were capable.

The quality of learning was acceptable. Recent professional development had begun to impact on learning. In the best lessons students worked together well to discuss and formulate ideas, but these opportunities were too rare. Students found things out for themselves in a few learning situations, specifically in the library, where they researched their own presentations.

Nevertheless, in most lessons enquiry skills were not well-developed. In a few lessons teachers enabled students to link learning to their own experience and the real world and this

developed their understanding well. Critical and higher order thinking were emerging skills in a minority of lessons.

Assessment was acceptable throughout the school. A range of assessment tools were used to evaluate knowledge and understanding at the end of a curriculum unit and this had provided valuable test information relating to individual students. The recently introduced international tests had provided a valuable benchmark against which leaders were beginning to judge attainment in key aspects. A few teachers used assessment strategies within the lesson to monitor the achievements of students and so were able to modify their teaching and help students understand how to improve. However, teachers' skills in this area were in need of development. Occasionally, students were involved in evaluating their own and each others' work. Oral feedback to students varied and written feedback often failed to identify strengths and weaknesses or provide guidance on how to improve. Teachers knew individual students' strengths and weaknesses against internal tests but many were unclear how these aligned with the results from international assessments.

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

The curriculum was acceptable. It had clear breadth and sequence, mapped across all grades and key subjects that supported continuity of study and progression of challenge for most students. However, continuity between the Kindergarten and Grade 1 curricula was uneven. Provision for Islamic Education and Arabic was based upon Ministry of Education resources and featured limited enrichment. Students studying Arabic as an additional language were provided with the first-language curriculum; this meant that not all students' needs were being fully met. Students' skills in English were not fully taken into account in curriculum planning, especially in the elementary school; this affected overall progress in English, mathematics and science. The most able students in mathematics were not provided with enough challenge in their lessons. The science curriculum included regular practical activities to allow all students to develop their investigative skills. Direct linkage from assessment information to curriculum planning to meet students' needs was beginning to occur. There was broad provision that included arts and physical education for most students and a wide range of weekly activities for students in Grades 5 to 12. The curriculum was reviewed by school leaders and an outside consultant, following analysis of academic results of the previous school year; consequently some content was modified. Planned cross-curricular links were made by a few teachers, but were not part of the overall curriculum maps. Good opportunities for students to learn outside school included environmental activities and field trips to Europe for the older ones.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The arrangements for health and safety were acceptable, with some good features. The school's motto, 'respect, responsibility and safety', reflected its commitment. The children in the Kindergarten were looked after well. Maintenance of the premises was good, with thorough arrangements for fire drills and swimming pool maintenance. Bus transport arrangements were good. Regular risk assessments were carried out and acted upon, but a few potential hazards remained. For example, students' movement through the car parks posed a danger and locked doors in the elementary and boys' sections were potentially hazardous in an emergency. Risk assessments on trips were undertaken but not recorded. Medical support for students was good. The promotion of healthy lifestyles, involving the medical team, had good aspects, but the impact had yet to be seen on healthy eating and in increased access to physical education classes. There were arrangements for child protection, but the health and safety policy did not specify these procedures.

The quality of support for all students was acceptable. Staff-student relationships were generally positive and mutually respectful, but with some exceptions. Discipline issues were minor and were handled satisfactorily by teachers and administrators. Teacher assistants, especially at the lower levels, had not been sufficiently trained to provide skilled support for teachers. Each phase had a full-time counsellor available to provide personal advice and support programmes. The career counsellor provided useful advice, including career assessments and information about specific exams. Counsellors also shared responsibility for tracking students' progress. Learning support in Arabic, English and mathematics on a flexible system enabled students to re-enter regular class based on their needs and achievement.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

School leadership was good. The Director General and her leadership team demonstrated a clear sense of direction and were committed to improving all aspects of the school, including attainment. Most of the leadership team was knowledgeable about the change process and willingly assisted in responding to the previous report.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. Senior leaders had responded positively to the recommendations of the previous report, but had not yet succeeded in improving students' achievement significantly. The school had used a variety of data, including external benchmarks, but were not fully aware of how well students' achievement compared to their counterparts internationally. Staff were not sufficiently skilled in conducting analysis and interpretation of large amounts of data.

The school's relationship with parents was good. Parents expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their access to the school leaders and their willingness to respond in a timely manner. The parent organisation, re-activated during the current semester, provided parents with additional access to the school. Positive relationships were reported by most parents with the teaching staff.

School governance was acceptable. Governors had a working knowledge of the functioning of the school and ensured compliance with all Ministry regulations and guidelines. There was no formal involvement of other stakeholders, such as parents, thereby limiting access by the larger school community to the decision-making process.

Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable. The school required many new teachers for the 2010-2011 academic year. This presented issues for staff development, especially as some teachers were unable to take up their posts until just a few weeks prior to the inspection. Library facilities were appropriate but some were under-utilised and not all were equipped enough as research facilities. Older students did not have ready access to the internet to help them develop appropriate skills of research. The school facilities were generally clean and well maintained.

Summary of inspection judgements

In their evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the school, the inspection team made judgements about the following aspects of the school's performance.

Four descriptors are: Outstanding; Good; Acceptable; Unsatisfactory.

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

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
95% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
	Overall
Quality of leadership	Good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Acceptable
Partnerships with parents and the community	Good
Governance	Acceptable
Staffing, facilities and resources	Acceptable

How well does the school perform overall?
Acceptable

Next steps

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

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau
Knowledge and Human Development Authority

How to contact us

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

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

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