

The City School International Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Year 11

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

Basic information about the school

Located in Nad-Al-Hamar, The City School International is a private school providing education for boys and girls from KG to Year 11, aged three to 16 years. For ninety-seven percent of students English was a second language. The school follows a City School curriculum in conjunction with UK curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 385 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Most parents agreed that the school was well led and that their children were receiving a good education. Students were happy at school and almost all parents were satisfied with the quality of teaching and students' progress in all subjects. A minority of parents would have liked a broader range of activities and more advice on how to help their children learn.

How well does the school perform overall?

The City School International provided an acceptable quality of education for its students. Students made acceptable progress in all subjects. There was some variability in teaching that resulted in a few unsatisfactory as well as a few good lessons in each section of the school. Students' attitudes and behaviour were positive. Although attendance was acceptable in the last semester, when buses were late this resulted in poor punctuality and, for some students, this led to an unsettled start to the school day. Students' knowledge and understanding of Islam was acceptable and was reflected in student behaviour. Links with the local community were limited. Students could describe the multi-cultural nature of Dubai, key characteristics of the Emirates and economic and environmental features as they related to their own lives.

Teaching and learning were acceptable overall with most teachers using a lecture-style approach and most students listening rather than being active learners in classes. In the best lessons students worked effectively in groups and developed thinking and reasoning skills. Lesson planning and approaches to assessment were not sufficiently well developed to meet the needs, prior knowledge and understanding of all students. The curriculum was acceptable and made some reference to the English National Curriculum framework but was almost wholly text-book driven. Health and safety in the school was good with healthy lifestyles promoted and buildings well maintained. In the Kindergarten, the quality of support was good and it was acceptable in the primary and secondary sections. Tracking of student progress and career advice were under-developed.

The quality of leadership and management was acceptable with the Principal and teachers demonstrating commitment to the vision of the school. The Principal was responsible for almost all areas of management and had made many initial steps to improve the school. However, the management structure of the school did not support effective delegation of leadership duties. Self-evaluation was acceptable and the recommendations from the previous inspection were being addressed. Parents were, overall, happy with the performance of the school but expressed a desire for a greater range of activities and wanted to know how they could help their children improve. The governance of the school was unsatisfactory as there were no parent organisations or formal structures which reflected the school community. Staffing, facilities and resources were unsatisfactory as there were insufficient leadership staff and teachers. Not all teachers were trained in the subjects they were teaching. The lack of a gymnasium or physical education facility restricted the value of sports activities and classrooms lacked adequate resources to provide a rich learning experience. New computers had been installed to support student learning but access to these resources outside of scheduled lessons was limited.

Key features of the school

- The economic and environmental understanding of students in primary and secondary phases was good;
- Students were cared for well, particularly in the Foundation Stage, but older students lacked career guidance and advice about further study;
- Arrangements to ensure health and safety were good in the primary and secondary phases;
- The school had a welcoming ethos where student-teacher relationships were positive;
- The school was committed to improving but there was a need to develop a more distributed approach to leadership to ensure managers other than the Principal were involved in leading the school.

Recommendations

- Improve the quality of teachers' planning to include activities which meet the needs of all students, including the least and most able;
- Ensure that appropriate data is developed from external or internal tests to provide a measure against which to assess individual student progress;
- Improve marking and feedback to ensure that all students receive specific guidance about how to improve their work;
- Provide regular guidance to older students concerning further study and future careers;
- Ensure an adequate number of appropriately qualified teachers are in place, and provide training relevant to their current teaching skills and expertise;
- Review the management structure including staffing levels, roles and responsibilities to further improve the leadership of the school.

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

In Islamic Education attainment and progress were acceptable. In most classes, students were able to read and recite The Holy Qu'ran accurately with correct pronunciation and expression. In Year 10 all students shared reading The Holy Qu'ran and explained meanings clearly. Student writing in workbooks and during activities was clear and care was taken in presentation. Workbook, test records and lessons showed acceptable progress and an appreciation of key Islamic figures. Students had good listening skills in classes. For example, in a Year 7 class students were able to explain parts of The Holy Qu'ran after listening to teacher instruction. Most students' attainment was as expected for the class level but not all students were sufficiently challenged.

Attainment and progress in Arabic were acceptable. Most students were able to speak, read, listen and write Arabic at an acceptable level. A Year 6 class showed a good understanding of grammar in the way students answered teacher questions and then wrote in workbooks. Most students showed acceptable progress in classes and in their workbooks where care, accuracy and appropriate vocabulary were seen. In a few classes, tasks were not sufficiently challenging and progress was limited. Kindergarten students sang songs and played games using appropriate Arabic on a daily basis. Older students read stories well and responded to Arabic poetry.

Attainment and progress in English were acceptable. Speaking and listening were well developed across the school, though several students had strong accents. Kindergarten children's speaking and listening skills were developed well through regular singing and games in English. These skills supported their reading and writing. Reading and writing were acceptable across the primary and secondary classes. Students read for understanding and extracted specific information from a text. Year 5 boys spoke and wrote sentences using the past tense accurately and confidently. Students' writing in Years 10 and 11 showed weaknesses in sentence structure and lacked fluency. Most students entered for IGCSE in English as an additional language gained grades A to C.

The quality of attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable. Students demonstrated confidence with key mathematical concepts. For example, Year 7 girls showed good understanding of fractions and students in Year 11 understood the reflection of geometrical shapes. Year 4 students quickly acquired mental strategies for the addition of several numbers at one time and Year 10 students had mastered composite functions. Year 1 students knew the names of flat shapes and could recognise these. The first external examination results of June 2009 were good with a majority of students achieving A*-C grades

Attainment and progress in science were acceptable. Students attained knowledge, skills and understanding that were in line with age expectations. Students could provide verbal responses that indicated their understanding of the topics being covered and used knowledge previously gained. The Year 11 pass rates in the IGCSE were below international standards. However, a few students gained high grades and all achieved pass grades. Year 5 students knew the food components of their diet. In a Year 11 physics class, students applied their learning using magnets to test out how forces attracted and repelled. They were confident in their responses providing explanations even though they had encountered the phenomena for the first time. Investigative skills, where used, were well-developed. Year 1 students classified living and non-living things accurately.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Attitudes and behaviour were acceptable and staff-student relationships were good. Almost all students arrived at class on time and were polite and respectful to teachers and each other. Older students cared for younger students in the playground and encouraged them in games and performances. Attendance for the last semester was acceptable and, during the inspection, punctuality at the beginning of the day was poor with several buses arriving late. This meant that students and a few teachers were both late to assembly and the tutor session at the beginning of the day.

Civic and Islamic understanding was acceptable. Students undertook leadership roles as prefects, class leaders, house captains and student council representatives as a means of contributing to the life of the school. The national anthem, school song and prayers were part of the morning assemblies. Students were able to describe the features of Dubai culture.

Economic and environmental understanding was acceptable in the kindergarten and good in the primary and secondary stages. Many students were aware of the different jobs that people do in Dubai and the various industries that characterise the emirate. Students were able to quote oil and tourism as a main source of the country's wealth. They were able to outline the implications of living in Dubai and the variety of cultures and nationalities that made up the workforce. Students had a good awareness of the effect that international trade was having on the economy, especially during the world banking crisis. Students referred to how they could contribute to Dubai's future success by gaining qualifications. They showed good awareness of the need for recycling and to conserve water and were able to describe the desalination process. They treated their surroundings with respect and evidence in and around the school of clean and tidy classrooms, playground and toilets endorsed their appreciation of the environment in which they worked and played.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching and learning were acceptable across the school and most teachers had good subject knowledge. The school's systems helped standardise and ensure regular planning, but there were inconsistencies in planning to meet the needs of individuals or groups. Most teachers planned the same activities for all, and not all teachers circulated the classrooms to provide stimulation to challenge the more able and support those with learning or specific needs.

In English and science there were opportunities to discuss in small groups which led to more interesting activities and better learning than in those lessons which were wholly dependent on the text book. Clear instructions, explanations and demonstrations enhanced learning in several English and science lessons. Kindergarten children's practical experiences, such as drawing letters with their fingers in sand, helped their writing, and they thoroughly enjoyed using computers. Developing learning through the use of new technologies was not widespread, however, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) was well used in science. Inadequate practice and preparation resulted in many inaccuracies in Year 10 French. In a few lessons discipline was not managed effectively by teachers and learning was inhibited by excessive noise.

Assessment was unsatisfactory. The school carried out no standardised testing when students entered the school and so had no baseline data to guide teacher's planning for subjects or lessons, to monitor students' progress, detect underachievement or to set targets for students. The lack of this information impeded accurate prediction of grades for the first entrants to the IGCSE examinations last term and resulted in poor correlation between predicted and obtained grades. Over two-thirds of the predicted subject grades were incorrect, mainly too high. More recently, the school had taken steps to set up baseline tests and the English department had begun to establish standards for students' work. Marking was unsatisfactory. Many, very basic technical and spelling errors, were not corrected, however, and comments guiding students were rare, so that students and parents had insufficient knowledge of levels reached or the improvements needed. Teachers did not provide students with criteria against which to judge the quality of their work.

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

The school's curriculum was acceptable. It was devised by The City Schools group and used elements of the UK framework to provide a broad and balanced programme of study for all year groups. This helped to fulfil the school's aim to 'develop happy, inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people'. The process for monitoring and reviewing the curriculum was not formalised or regularly conducted and the school had yet to plan for breadth and balance. The school had not yet ensured that the curriculum provided sufficient continuity and progression, specifically with regard to learning support. Good cross-curricula links were used in classes up to Year 4 by class teachers who linked subjects well. Other opportunities for extra-curricular provision were limited, however assemblies provided a whole school platform for the school song and daily class presentations. Arrangements were in place for boys to attend a local gym and the recently established 'Association Afternoon' had provided a forum for computer, art and sports clubs. Curriculum enhancement was achieved through students' engagement with national public speaking contests, technology challenges and an international environmental awareness initiative.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety were good. The school cared for its students and the students knew to whom they should turn when they had problems. This was usually their class teacher or the Principal as there was no organised scheme of pastoral care or school counsellor. Supervision in the recreation areas and on the buses was observed to be good and security guards were on duty throughout the day. The maintenance of a visitors' register, however, was noted to be inconsistently applied. Healthy eating was observed to be a major theme throughout the age-ranges. This, together with the clean state of the school, prominent posters encouraging cleanliness and the efforts being made to increase sport gave the positive impression of a school educating its students in good habits for life. Students were required to wash hands regularly to prevent the possibility of cross-infection. Provision of medical care was observed to be good, with back-up systems in place in case of the absence of the school nurse.

The quality of support was good in the Kindergarten and acceptable in the primary and secondary phases. Support for research and study through the use of the library and computer room was limited, often because access was restricted, or because the computer and library facilities were locked after the departure of the buses. The need for additional support for students in English was not fully met. The one period, weekly "Association Time" was being used for some learning support. There was no careers guidance counsellor. The Principal had developed an information booklet which provided information on further and higher education options. The school had also invited representatives of universities to talk to older students. However, students required further guidance to find a suitable Sixth Form college.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was acceptable. The Principal undertook almost all leadership roles in the school as teaching loads and bus travelling time for teachers left little time for extensive leadership in subject specific and professional development areas. There was no leader designated for coordination of Years 3 to Year 11 and so the Principal was required to undertake those duties in addition to her primary role. Most of the staff were committed to the school vision and supported the leadership and each other.

Processes for self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. Performance management procedures were well-defined and feedback to staff was constructive. The co-ordination of professional development was lacking structure and therefore failed to impact effectively on practice. Staff, student and parent surveys had been completed and results analysed. The outcome of the surveys and performance management informed professional development and school processes for self-evaluation. A strategic plan, handbooks for parents, students and teachers contributed to shared values and understanding. The strategic plan included means of addressing the recommendations of the previous inspection. The tracking of student progress was not yet sufficiently well developed and plans to support students setting personal academic targets were in the early stages of development.

Partnerships with parents and the community were acceptable. Parents completed locally developed surveys which were analysed and results posted on notice boards around the school. Communication with parents was limited as there were no forums other than parent-teacher interviews at reporting periods and occasional school events for parents to have structured and planned communication on a regular and effective basis. The Principal maintained strong links with the broader group of City Schools and many of the parents indicated that their respect for the City Schools' global reputation had influenced their joining the school community. The pre-inspection parent survey showed a high level of satisfaction by parents.

Governance was unsatisfactory. The owners of the school were based in Pakistan and made infrequent visits to the school during the year. There was no parent association or advisory group and few opportunities for parents to contribute to their child's progress and development. Parents expressed a desire to make an increased and formal contribution to the school and to offer support and feedback to the Principal and owners.

Staffing, facilities and resources were unsatisfactory. Staffing, particularly for leadership positions, was inadequate, with too great a load being placed on the Principal which affected her capacity to plan for and act on improvement strategies. The school buildings were well designed, clean, safe and well maintained. The absence of a gymnasium had a negative impact on the school's capacity to offer a comprehensive physical education programme. The necessary additional safety precautions required in lessons held outside of an appropriate sports space placed increased pressure on the well-trained and skilled staff, ultimately limiting their roles. There were no grassed areas for students to play, although undercover areas and the existing play equipment were safe and age-appropriate. Additional resources had been provided since the last inspection. These included more computers for the library and ICT sections, but access to these resources outside of scheduled lessons was severely restricted. Insufficient additional resources were available as classroom and teaching aids.

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:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?			
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?			
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?			
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?			
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good is the students' personal and social development?			
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary
Attitudes and behaviour	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Good	Good

How good are teaching and learning?			
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?			
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?			
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary
Health and safety	Good	Good	Good
Quality of support	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

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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