

International Academic School Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 12

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.

International Academic School was inspected in November 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 Al Warqa 1, the International Academic School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from KG to Grade 12, aged three to 18 years. The school provided two separate programmes and there were two separate curricula. Approximately one third of the students followed the Ministry of Education curriculum in Grades 1 to 9, and the remaining two-thirds followed an American curriculum in Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 12. At the time of the inspection, there were 743 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good. The information in this report applies to both sections of the school, unless otherwise noted.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Almost all parents were happy with the school and agreed that their children liked school. They agreed their children were making progress and that the behaviour of the students was good. Most agreed that the teaching was good, that their children were treated fairly at school, and that there was a range of stimulating and enjoyable activities. A minority of parents desired more information about the progress of their children but the majority felt comfortable about approaching the school with a question or complaint. They felt their children were well cared for. Most agreed that the teachers explained how they could help their children at home. The majority of parents did not know about, or disagreed that the school had good links with the community, nor were they aware of how the school had responded to the recommendations from the previous inspection report.

How well does the school perform overall?

International Academic School provided an acceptable quality of education. Inspectors judged attainment and progress in Islamic Education to be acceptable. Similarly, attainment in Arabic was acceptable in all grades; progress was good in middle school and acceptable at all other grades. Attainment in English and mathematics were acceptable in KG to Grade 4, but unsatisfactory in Grades 5 to 12. Progress in English and mathematics was acceptable throughout, with the exception of mathematics in Grades 10 to 12 which was unsatisfactory. Attainment and progress in science were acceptable, overall. Attitudes and behaviour were good in KG to Grade 4, and acceptable in Grade 5 to 12 where a few students displayed poor attitudes towards their learning. Student understanding of Islam and their civic responsibilities as well as their knowledge about Dubai were good. Students had acceptable knowledge about the economy of Dubai, environmental issues and awareness of careers which could contribute to Dubai's progress.

Teaching was good in KG, acceptable at Grades 1 to 9 and unsatisfactory at Grades 10 to 12. The quality of student learning was good in KG, acceptable in Grades 1 to 9 and unsatisfactory in Grades 10 to 12. Assessment practices were acceptable, though not yet used consistently by teachers to match strategies and tasks to learners' needs. Co-ordinators assisted teachers in analysing patterns and trends in their classrooms. The curriculum was acceptable throughout the school. The arrangements for health and safety for the students were good, with careful record-keeping. The school promoted a healthy lifestyle and had removed unhealthy foods from the canteen. Academic support was good for students in KG to Grade 4, and acceptable in Grade 5 and above. The schedule in the American section provided for two academic support classes per week, whereas the Arabic section did not.

The quality of leadership and management of the school was acceptable. The Principal and Director of Academics shared a strong vision for the school and were committed to its improvement. Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. Reorganization of the leadership structure helped to unify the two school sections but more work was needed in this area. Students desired more opportunities to be together and access to academic support was not equitable. Partnerships with parents and the community were acceptable though parents desired more communication. A website with access to grades, homework and class notes was utilized by students and teachers. Governance overall was acceptable. Outreach to include parents on the board was in process and a parent group had just been formed. Progress had been made in addressing the recommendations from the previous inspection report but further work was necessary to improve student progress, use external benchmarks for attainment, and develop an effective governing body involving a wide group of stakeholders. Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable. Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and library resources had improved though both could be used more effectively for learning. The school experienced high teacher and student turnover which had an impact on teaching and learning. The school worked toward unifying the two sections of students. All were supervised by the same heads of department and, where possible, students from both sections participated in the same school activities.

Key features of the school

- There were two distinct sections within the school where approximately one third of the students followed the Ministry of Education curriculum and the other students followed an American programme;
- There was a caring and positive learning environment in the KG and elementary grades;
- There was good appreciation of Islam along all students;
- There was harmony among multi-ethnic students throughout the school;
- The school provided well for the safety and healthy well-being of students.

Recommendations

- Address unsatisfactory attainment and progress by ensuring that learning activities are matched to students' needs, particularly in the middle and high schools;
- Enable coordinators to identify good teaching practice and support teachers as they develop their skills;
- Ensure that teachers use assessment results to guide their daily work;
- Implement the use of external benchmarks and tests to prepare students to succeed in an international school setting;
- Involve parents more in their students' learning and in the work of the school.

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

All judgements apply across Arabic and American sections unless otherwise indicated.

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable. Students in lower grades knew and used Islamic greetings, recited a few short, simple prayers, and were learning about Pilgrimage and the Pillars of Islam. Most made good progress with basic knowledge of Islam and learning short chapters of The Holy Qur'an. A few of them knew some short examples of hadith. In the middle and high schools, a majority of students had detailed knowledge of the forms of worship in Islam such as compulsory and voluntary prayers and practices. They were also improving their recitation of The Holy Qur'an. Non-Arab Muslim students made good progress in this area during their weekly Qur'an lesson. A few students made links between their learning and real life. Students in Grade 7 made good progress with independent reading skills, exploring new ideas, finding information for them and working collaboratively.

Attainment and progress in Arabic was acceptable overall. Most students in lower grades made acceptable progress with sound and letter identification and learning new words. Particularly in Grade 2, they consistently improved their spelling, handwriting, and reading skills. Their speaking skills in standard Arabic were good. In middle school, most students made good progress with their reading skills and knowledge of Arabic grammar. High school students had detailed knowledge of grammar. They analysed and identified the figures of speech in poems, and provided good, brief, oral and written responses to direct questions. The majority of students made limited progress with extended writing and skills were under-developed.

Attainment in English was acceptable in KG to Grade 4 and unsatisfactory in Grades 5 to 12. Progress was acceptable at all grades. Students listened well and responded accurately to teachers' questions. However, they did not converse confidently in or outside of the classroom. Students rarely engaged in discussions during classwork. Students did have access to English reading books in the younger grades and were learning their phonics well. Older elementary students understood conflict resolution in stories and used concept maps well. Middle and high school students read challenging reading selections from an anthology but struggled with vocabulary and making inferences from context clues. Writing skills were underdeveloped particularly in the middle and high school grades.

Attainment in mathematics was acceptable for KG and elementary students but unsatisfactory for students in middle and high school. Progress over time was acceptable except in the high school, where it was unsatisfactory. In KG, children developed a secure knowledge of numbers up to ten, while the majority of elementary grade students knew their multiplication tables and some common geometrical shapes. They were less familiar with different methods of representing data or using measuring apparatus. The majority of middle grade students could solve simple algebraic equations and manipulate directed numbers but were insecure in manipulating fractions and in co-ordinate geometry. There were significant gaps in the knowledge and skills of high school students. All students sometimes applied ideas to practical applications, but their skills in problem-solving and investigations, including proof, were limited.

Overall, attainment and progress in science were acceptable and in line with international standards. From KG to Grade 4, students deepened their understanding of themselves and the natural world. By the end of Grade 4, most students understood the concept of controlled tests. However, students repeated work that they had done previously and this restricted progress. By the end of Grade 9, most students were able to analyse and draw conclusions from data. A few students were able to form hypotheses and draw conclusions. In Grades 10 to 12, students achieved higher standards in biology than in physics where attainment and progress were low. Students' independent investigative skills were underdeveloped due to a limited exposure to practical work despite being taught in laboratories. In chemistry and physics sessions, students did not apply their knowledge to solve problems.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good except for the middle and high grades where it was acceptable. In KG and elementary grades, students settled in quickly and had positive attitudes. In the middle and high grades, there were instances of inappropriate behaviour, usually linked to weak teaching. Relationships across the school were good; there was an appropriate set of school rules, setting out expectations and sanctions, so that the school was an orderly and safe environment. Students' personal development and attendance were good.

Students' civic understanding and their awareness of Islamic culture and traditions were good. Older students were aware of recent important events in Dubai such as the opening of the metro line on a palindromic date. They were aware of the five pillars of Islam and related rituals.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was acceptable, with good features in KG and the elementary grades where children exploited opportunities to learn independently. This skill was not well fostered amongst older students. Students were aware of impending environmental issues, such as relatively high use of electricity. They were aware that the economy needed to plan for a time when oil revenues became lower. However, careers education was limited to advice about university education in Grade 12; students noted an earlier and more comprehensive input would help them with future study and employment.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was good in KG and acceptable in elementary and middle school. It was unsatisfactory in the high school. As students progressed through the school, teaching became more didactic and less focused on the development and application of skills. In KG, teachers' planning ensured that students both enjoyed and were actively involved in their learning. Throughout the school, teachers' subject knowledge was acceptable and, at times, good. In the best lessons, teachers were able to use their understanding of learning to involve students in interesting activities to develop their thinking skills. A few teachers had started to use interesting resources to add variety to their lessons. In too many lessons, teacher talk dominated and students were not involved sufficiently in their learning. Most teachers did not take account of students' different needs and some teaching was insufficiently challenging.

The quality of students' learning was good in KG and acceptable in elementary and middle school. It was unsatisfactory in the high school. In KG, students were excited about learning and enjoyed discovering new things. In other grades, most students worked well in groups when given the opportunity to do so. They had positive relationships with their teachers and fellow students. Most students showed respect to each other and listened well during presentations and discussions. However, where teachers talked for a large part of the lesson, students were passive and did not develop their independent learning skills. In Grades 10 to 12, students listened well to their teachers. However, limited opportunities to practise key processes meant that these high school students' did not consolidate their learning.

Assessment procedures were acceptable overall. In KG, teachers knew their students well through regular assessment. Teachers in all grades had assessment data for their students from tests and a few teachers were starting to use projects and other ongoing assessments to monitor students' progress. However, this practice was not yet applied consistently across the school. A few teachers used questioning well to assess the understanding of their students. Teachers did not use assessment data to plan their lessons and to support and challenge learners. However, in a few science lessons, peer and self assessment skills were being developed. Marking in books was regular but there was no specific guidance to help students improve their work. There were no external examinations in a number of subjects in Grade 12 however, the school was planning to enter students for international examinations this year.

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

The curriculum was acceptable across all the grades, though it was not entirely suited to the range of varied needs of newly-admitted high school students. KG teachers planned lessons together while ensuring that skills in languages and mathematics were also developed. In the American section the elementary and middle school curriculum included a suitable range of subjects, including art, music and computer studies; French was offered as an additional language from Grade 1. In the high school, the three separate sciences were taught. In the Arabic section where there were Grades 1 to 9, the standard curriculum was being followed. Extra lessons were allocated to English in the lower grades, with a lower allocation for science. Art but not music was taught in all grades. Planning across and within grades was at an early stage of development. There were newly appointed heads of department in some subjects who undertook responsibility for both sections of the school. The previous learning of students was always not taken fully into account in certain subjects. Preparation for the next stage of education was not carefully planned, such as for students in the Arabic section who would leave after Grade 9. Workshops had been held to promote cross-curricular links and enquiry skills. There were a few clubs to broaden students' experience, such as in drama, but this was not a strong feature in the school. Occasional visits and other activities were planned but were rarely integrated to classroom learning. Links between the Ministry of Education and American sections of the school were limited.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Overall, the quality of protection and support for students was good throughout the school. Improvements in student supervision, particularly in the bus area, created an orderly arrival and dismissal. The premises were clean and well-maintained, though students mentioned a lack of adequate supplies in toilet areas. Health records were well-kept and medicines were safely secured by the nurse. The nurse provided guidance to students on maintaining a healthy lifestyle. The cafeteria selection was changed to eliminate unhealthy food choices. Procedures were in place for child protection if needed. Staff and student relations were good. Behavioural expectations were consistently enforced by school leaders, with incident records maintained. Students stated that teachers were stricter, and leaders felt that student behaviour had greatly improved. Parents reported that their children felt safe and well-supported and that they were happy to come to school. A process for tracking and following up of student attendance was in place. Punctuality in the morning was acceptable.

Support for students was good in KG and elementary and acceptable in the middle and high sections. Staff-student relationships were good overall. Systems for tracking student academic progress were more developed at the KG and elementary stages than for older students. Analysis of student performance was conducted at the co-ordinator and senior leadership levels. Information was not yet skilfully or uniformly used by teachers in planning daily lessons. Academic support was available for some students during a double period at the end of one day each week. Students in the Ministry of Education section did not have access to this. Acceptable attention was paid to student's overall well-being and provisions were made to support students by linking them with teacher-advisors. Some career guidance was available from teachers and visiting university representatives.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership and management overall was acceptable. The new Principal and the academic coordinator were professionally competent and shared a common vision for the improvement of teaching and learning. They jointly provided direction and guidance to the Ministry of Education and American sections of the school and were assisted by grade coordinators and heads of departments. After a reorganisation of leadership and beginning the unification of the Ministry of Education and American sections, leaders were beginning to focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Performance management arrangements were in place. Coordinators and heads of departments varied in their skills in improving teacher performance but recognised the need to provide more guidance. A new assessment coordinator collected and prepared data on student performance for analysis. The impact of this work was not yet evident at the classroom teacher level and on student learning, though leaders were beginning to make use of the information in assessing staff and programmes.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. Good progress was evident in response to the previous recommendations reflecting good self-evaluation and improvement planning. Action plans were in place and had begun to bring about positive change. The Principal and academic coordinator analysed the performance and behaviour of groups of students in some grades and sought creative solutions for improvement. Links with the school's governing body were strong, with good communication and accountability. The response to the previous inspection report was positive, resulting in the creation of a strategic long-range plan based on the recommendations made.

Partnerships with parents and the community were acceptable. Parents were largely supportive of the school but would value a formal avenue for communicating their comments and concerns to the school. They were keen to be involved and would value an Open Day to celebrate the work of the school and their children. There were some community links with other schools for sporting activities and students had e-links with schools in different countries. A school website provided access to students' exam grades and some teachers' class notes.

The governing body, called the School Leadership Committee, met periodically and included among its members the school principal and academic director. However, no parents yet served on this board, although the CEO had begun to seek parents whose skills matched the board's needs. The school was fully accountable to the governing body for its actions, its successes and the areas for development. A School Management Committee included subject coordinators and the academic director.

The facilities and resources for learning were acceptable. Following recommendations in the last inspection report, many new books in Arabic and English were purchased for the library. In KG and elementary grades, resources were plentiful and effectively used to enhance the learning environment. Improvements in ICT resources were also evident. Staff retention and turnover were frequently mentioned as challenges in maintaining effective programme delivery.

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	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

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

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	Good	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
Quality of leadership	Acceptable
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Acceptable
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.