

New Arab Unity 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.

New Arab Unity School 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 Mizhar, New Arab Unity School is a private school providing education for students from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 12, ages three to 18 years. The school followed a US curriculum. The school was two years old. At the time of the inspection, there were 171 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Parents were generally positive about the school, in particular with the leadership, care of the children and the curriculum. They had some concerns. A significant number of parents expressed concern regarding safety on the buses. Other areas of concern included the teaching of Arabic, the range of activities to make work interesting for the children and advice as to how they could help their children at home with school work.

How well does the school perform overall?

The school provided an acceptable standard of education for its students. Students' attainment and progress in most of the key subjects was acceptable. Progress in middle and high school English was good. Students had good attitudes to their learning and behaviour was good. In KG, children's understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and culture was acceptable while this was good in the rest of the school. This was also the case regarding the students' economic and environmental understanding.

Teaching and learning overall were good. The quality of teaching was varied but there were some good and outstanding examples of teaching across the school in the key subjects. Students were committed to their learning and responded well when the teaching supported active participation and investigative opportunities. Assessment was acceptable. The school had made some progress in this regard. However, tracking of students' progress was not sufficiently well developed. It did not inform the students, parents or teachers of progress over time as measured against reliable international benchmarks. The curriculum was acceptable. It provided a broad and balanced set of learning opportunities for the students. Extra-curricular activities were limited. The arrangements for the health and safety for the students were good. Premises were suitable, well-maintained and safe. The quality of support was acceptable. Teachers knew their students and gave appropriate advice when needed. However, the tracking of students' academic and personal progress was underdeveloped.

The quality of leadership was good. There was a good focus on improving standards of attainment and progress and the senior management team worked effectively together. Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. There was evidence of how the recommendations from the previous report had been dealt with and the school was making good progress in this regard. However, the outcomes from this work had not yet led to significant improvements in the classrooms. The partnerships with the parents and the community were acceptable. The school used a variety of effective means to communicate with its parent body. However, there was limited opportunity for the parents to work strategically with the school on relevant issues. Governance was acceptable. The owners were supportive of the leadership but had not put in place effective strategies to involve other stakeholders. Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable.

Key features of the school

- Good progress since the last inspection, with a clear vision well expressed in the development and self-review documentation;
- Students' mature attitudes and their positive relationships with each other and with staff.

Recommendations

- Enhance the Arabic curriculum by introducing more interactive and activity based learning;
- Improve students' learning by providing in-service training for teachers on how to:
 - devise measurable learning objectives;
 - manage differentiated group teaching, so that teachers are able to support different groups for substantial amounts of time;
 - monitor students' progress throughout the lesson and adjust their teaching accordingly;
 - use information and communication technology (ICT) in lessons more effectively;
- Further develop assessment arrangements which give teachers and senior managers comprehensive end-of-phase data regarding students' attainment and progress against international standards in English, mathematics and science;
- Improve library and learning resources with a much greater range of fiction and non-fiction books.

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

Students' overall attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable. Most students in Grades 3 to 6 could read short chapters from The Holy Qur'an at an acceptable level but they did not apply the rules of Tajweed. They could understand some vocabulary from these chapters. In Grades 7 to 9, students could read and apply the rules of Tajweed in their reading at an acceptable level. They also knew the manners of a good Muslim and related them to their daily behaviour at school. In Grades 10 to 12, students' knowledge progressed and they knew the rights and the duties of Muslims towards the local community and mankind. In general, the knowledge of the non-Arabic speaking students was less than their peers in the Arabic-speaking section.

Students' overall attainment and progress of Arabic was acceptable. In the lower grades the majority of students read individual letters. They could form words from these letters. By Grade 6, most students could read paragraphs from text books and they could speak clearly

and write neatly. Standards of dictation and grammatical knowledge, however, were below those expected for this age group. In Grades 10 to 12, students' reading of poetry was acceptable but their reading of a wider range of texts was unsatisfactory. Their writing was often limited to copying answers.

Attainment in English was acceptable from Grades 1 to 12 but was unsatisfactory in KG. Progress from KG to Grade 5 was acceptable and good in Grades 6 to 12. KG children matched words with rhyming sounds. In Grade 1, they learned language through song. They could match and explain action verbs and select the correct words to complete a sentence. Grade 4 students made sentences of their own using new vocabulary. Standards in reading were unsatisfactory in Grades 4 to 7. Students made inferences from texts and conveyed information to others. However, responses were short and too many students read with difficulty. Grade 8 students' written English was below expected levels with most writing confined to short sentences. A few Grade 9 students made good progress, expressing themselves articulately. They analysed poems critically. Grade 12 students understood the concept of a rhymed couplet, but standards in reading and writing were, overall, below expectations.

Students' attainment in mathematics was acceptable in KG and good in the elementary, middle and high schools. There had been an improvement in students' problem-solving skills. Students' progress was acceptable across the school. In KG children were able to use numbers one to ten and say them sequentially. Elementary students could record notes in a tally table and use the data to make predictions. Grade 6 students were able to write numerical or algebraic expressions for a word expression, evaluate each expression and solve equations. At Grade 12 students understood the application of lines and angles in solving problems.

Students' attainment and progress in science were acceptable at all levels. They demonstrated an acceptable level of investigative skills in laboratory processes, which successfully built on their understanding of theory. Grade 6 students planned an investigation and demonstrated age appropriate skills in enquiry. They knew which factors must remain constant, what they would have to measure and what questions they would ask. Grade 8 students understood that more reactive metals can displace a less reactive metal and were able to use a table to show patterns clearly. Work in students' notebooks reflected accurate recording of basic information and concepts as well as problem solving. However, students did not often write to open-ended questions or apply their knowledge of science to the wider world.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good overall, and outstanding in elementary. They were acceptable in the KG and high school. Students were respectful towards their teachers and peers, often initiating greetings with adults. They assumed responsibilities and showed appropriate care for their environment. Their attitudes to work were generally good; they were keen to learn. They were very attentive in classrooms. Overall attendance during the previous semester was acceptable and there had been an improvement in students' punctuality.

Students' civic and Islamic understanding, their appreciation of local traditions and culture, and their economic and environmental understanding were acceptable in the KG and good in all other phases of the school. During assemblies, students actively participated in prayer, Holy Qur'an recitations and presentations regarding Islamic values. Students appreciated Dubai's diversity of cultures and population, and demonstrated respect for cultural and religious identity. Students showed an awareness of its historical developments and the reasons for changes.

Students had strong professional aspirations and expressed a good understanding of how they could be of benefit to the people in the UAE and contribute to its continuing prosperity. Most students cared very much for their school and local environment. They took part in activities to improve the environment and the greater community and world. Older students participated in extensive volunteer projects in Dubai, and they expressed their understanding of the need to protect local, national and world resources.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was good overall. It was good in KG, elementary and high but acceptable in middle school. It was good in English and mathematics and acceptable in science, with some outstanding teaching in all three subjects. The overall quality of teaching in Islamic Education and Arabic was acceptable. Teachers used a comprehensive lesson plan template throughout the school and this was used effectively by most teachers. In good and outstanding lessons teachers provided for students' different abilities and learning styles and there were hands-on activities, with extra help given when needed. Teachers questioned students well, giving clues to help them think critically, building concepts. Outstanding science lessons were enquiry-based, well-timed, well organised with varied activities, and there was enthusiastic teaching with examples applied to real life situations. Calculators were used effectively in mathematics. Teachers were beginning to use ICT across the school but their ICT skills were limited.

The quality of learning in KG and elementary was good and acceptable in the middle and high schools. Good use was made of resources. A wide range of activities kept the students' interest. The pace was good and teachers were firm and supportive. The teaching assistants made a strong contribution to the lower-achieving students' learning. In Grades 1 to 12, learning was particularly good when lesson objectives were shared with students at the start of lessons and reviewed at the end. Students learned from one another through Powerpoint presentations, debates and partner reviews. Learning was limited when students had difficulty in understanding the teacher or there were too few resources, such as dictionaries.

The school used whole-school assessment and tracking strategies and these provided acceptable quality of information for staff to inform teaching. Standards were assessed against the US benchmark for each subject and this had helped to improve standards. Effective questioning of students supported concept development and, where this was evident, the teachers were able to assess the students' progress at the end of the lessons. In too many lessons, however, teachers did not monitor progress throughout the lesson to adapt their teaching, and, in Grade 12, assessment was not used sufficiently to challenge the more able students.

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

The school's curriculum was acceptable. Based on an American model, the curriculum had been reviewed by staff and adapted to the needs of students in Dubai and to be consistent with the culture of the UAE. It was broad and balanced and year-to-year progression was carefully planned. Grade levels had been agreed and were challenging. Adjustments to the curriculum were made annually to improve teaching and learning. For example, recent modifications to the curriculum and its implementation in science resulted in substantial opportunity for students to reflect and analyse laboratory data following investigations. Cross-curricular links were encouraged, such as the use of mathematical skills in chemistry lessons. A comprehensive lesson planning form had been developed which clearly linked objectives of lessons to standards, and promoted the planning and teaching of differentiated activities. Planned changes in the Arabic curriculum for students studying Arabic as a second language had not yet been developed. The choice of literature in the English curriculum was judged to be at the correct level, although a number of students needed additional instructional support to access the literature. Improvement was not evident regarding the teaching of library research skills. Students were seldom observed to be using the internet research room.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The quality of arrangements for health and safety throughout the whole school were good. The school had a part-time doctor and a full-time nurse who kept the clinic well equipped and well maintained. All documentation work was kept and a record of incidents was updated. The school had a good management policy for H1N1. It also had regular medical checking for students. All school buses were new and were monitored by adults. However, seatbelts were not used consistently. The school maintained records on inspections and on safety requirements. Except for a few cases of locked classroom doors, the whole school was a safe environment for learning with a monthly evacuation drill and a hygienic kitchen that provided healthy meals to the students on a daily basis. Fire practices were carried out effectively.

The quality of support for students was acceptable. The school was characterised by a friendly and caring atmosphere that demonstrated positive relationships between staff and students. The counsellor's role expanded to the level of regular visits to classrooms in order to observe students' behaviour during learning, so that she could provide guidance to students who needed it. She provided academic guidance to students applying to colleges. Teachers used observation and assessments to track students' progress. However, the tracking of students' academic and personal progress was underdeveloped. Attendance records were well maintained but the school lacked a system for tracking punctuality. In some cases, teachers did not address the cases of students who came late to school. The school took good care of students and had a written policy for child protection.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of the school's leadership and management was good. The Principal had set a clear direction for the school and had the ability to anticipate and solve problems as needed. A clear focus existed in the school on collegial working which brought about high levels of commitment from the staff. The roles of senior staff were clearly defined, understood and aligned to school priorities. Change was led and managed effectively. A manageable number of initiatives were prioritised, including the raising of standards in English and science and involving stakeholders in the process. Students were also being trained to hold leadership roles in the school.

The school's systems for self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. The school had formulated a school improvement plan. Work had begun on this plan which contained success criteria related to student attainment and progress. The school continued monitoring students' attainment well and had begun monitoring students' progress. The school continued to analyse the views of parents, staff and students and had begun acting on the findings. Significant progress had been made in addressing the recommendations of the previous report with raised standards in English, mathematics and science.

Links with parents were acceptable as were the links with the community. Parents showed a great deal of support for the school. Some were looking forward to becoming members of a formal parent organisation which was soon to become established. The school utilised a number of ways to communicate with parents, for example, through circulars sent home annually by the Principal, telephone calls, the school's website, progress reports and report cards. The students visited local places of interest, entered competitions and local events and contributed to significant projects in the community.

The governing body exerted a positive influence on the work of the school and played a significant role in assisting the Principal to lead school improvement. The school was accountable to the governing body for its performance and quality. The governing body was committed to the fulfilment of all of the goals in the school improvement plan. However, the membership of the governing body did not include a sufficiently broad representation from all stakeholders within the school community.

The staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable overall. The accommodation was outstanding. It was well maintained and served the students well. Teaching staff were well qualified and their deployment was efficient and effective. There was a good range of resources, except in science and in the libraries. Library provision was poor.

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:	Kindergarten	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:	Kindergarten	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 English?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good

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

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	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:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Acceptable	Outstanding	Good	Acceptable
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good

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

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

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

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

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