

New Arab Unity School 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.

New Arab Unity School was inspected in October 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 Mizhar, New Arab Unity School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to high school, aged three to 18 years. The school follows a US curriculum. 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 good.

As part of the inspection process, Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires issued to parents. Most who responded stated that they were satisfied with the quality of education available in the school. Parents felt that their children made good progress in English, mathematics and science. However, most stated that progress was not as good in Islamic Education and Arabic. Most parents commented that teaching and learning were acceptable and that their children enjoyed lessons and were enthusiastic about learning. However, fewer felt that the school provided sufficient extra-curricular opportunities. Parents felt that their children were treated fairly and that behaviour was good. While a few respondents did not know if there was sufficient support in the school for children with special educational needs over half responded positively. Most parents did not know how the school had responded to the previous inspection report but most stated that the report was accurate, helped them select the right school for their child and led to improvements in the school.

How well does the school perform overall?

New Arab Unity School provided an acceptable quality of education. It had responded positively to the recommendations of the previous inspection. The teaching of Arabic was more interactive and activity based. Teachers used clear learning objectives in almost all lessons and information and communications technology (ICT) was evident as an aid to enriching instruction. However, across all phases of the school, there were insufficient examples where teachers matched the class work well to the full range of students' learning needs. Additionally, there were too few examples of teachers monitoring student's progress throughout their lessons and adjusting their teaching accordingly. Data gathering regarding student attainment and their progress had improved but was yet to be aligned to international standards in English, mathematics and science. The library had additional personnel and resources. It was a valuable additional learning resource for students at all levels.

Across most key subjects students' attainment was acceptable and progress was good. Students were achieving broadly in line with equivalent international standards. Students' progress was improving as a result of better teaching and revised assessment arrangements. The curriculum was acceptable. Based on a US text book system, it was not fully aligned to enable higher levels of attainment. The arrangements for the protection of students were outstanding, while the level of support of students was acceptable. Facilities and safety systems reached very high standards. However, students with behavioural difficulties and those with specific additional needs were not yet effectively identified, supported and monitored. The Principal and leadership team were committed, focused and dedicated. The Principal and senior management team were aware of the current shortcomings of the school. They had the capacity to continue to improve the school.

Key features of the school

- The school's improvement in Islamic Education since the last report;
- The very strong commitment to school improvement by all staff;
- A strong focus on student-centred learning in the school;
- The very high quality of the school facilities;
- The outstanding health and safety aspects of the school;

Recommendations

- Introduce appropriate internationally recognised academic qualifications for all senior students;
- Build on improved teaching approaches across all phases of the school and ensure that teachers effectively support students with differing learning needs and abilities;
- Improve the attainment of students so that more achieve in line with and above international standards;

- Strengthen support services for students identified with special education needs including learning disabilities, emotional and behavioural needs;
- Continue to develop the use of descriptive guidelines to improve the assessment of students across all levels and curricula.

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

Attainment in Islamic Education across all phases of the school was acceptable and progress was good. Most students could memorise and recite short chapters from The Holy Qur'an with few errors in their pronunciation. They could also explain the meaning of the verses they learnt. Most students developed their knowledge about Allah. They recognised some of the many attributes of Allah. Students expressed their respect and appreciation for Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). They could read Hadeeth and understood the importance of it to develop their behaviour and attitudes towards others. In Grade 12, all students were aware of the importance of patience in their lives as Muslims and were able to explain this through their presentations.

Attainment across the school in Arabic as a first language was acceptable. Progress was good in elementary and middle school, and acceptable in high school. Most students across all phases listened well. They were able to follow familiar instructions correctly. Students' speaking skills were good overall with most students responding to questions using full sentences. In elementary school, most students were able to read and understood letters and poems. They could copy accurately and write short sentences using correct grammar but made a few spelling mistakes. Middle school students were developing their writing skills by writing short paragraphs and summarising stories, using legible handwriting. In high school, students writing skills were less well-developed and they wrote only single word answers or very short phrases and frequently made spelling and grammatical errors.

Attainment across the school in Arabic as an additional language was acceptable. Progress was good in all phases of the school, apart from middle school, where it was also acceptable. Most students listened well to and understood their teachers' instructions. They understood spoken words and sentences. Most students could say basic words and repeat simple phrases in response to pictures and what they heard. They answered simple questions. Most students could read cursive Arabic script with a few errors in pronunciation but did not always understand the meaning fully. Most students made acceptable progress in the development of writing skills. They copied accurately and summarised texts well. Their handwriting was clear and legible, but there were a few spelling and grammatical errors in their independent writing.

Attainment in English was acceptable across all levels of the school. Progress was good in middle and high school, but acceptable in Kindergarten and elementary. For most children in Kindergarten, English was not their first language. Most had developed good listening skills and were able to follow their teacher's directions. In middle and high school, students' attainment in English was acceptable and progress over time was good. Samples of work of

from Grade 7 showed an emphasis on the proper use of grammar, spelling and punctuation in writing. Assessment tools with descriptors were used to guide student performance. The speaking and listening skills of both middle and high school students were well developed. Students at the high school level were confident in their ability to read well, think critically and speak with conviction.

The attainment in mathematics was good at high school. Attainment was acceptable at all other stages. Progress was acceptable across all phases. In the lower grades students could perform appropriate arithmetical calculations with acceptable accuracy and had a similar understanding of place value. Many opportunities to practice problem-solving, often collaboratively with classmates, were observed. At Grades 5 to 8, students studied basic algebraic and geometric concepts, identifying linear functions and converting decimals and fractions into percentages. At the high school level, algebra, trigonometry, pre-calculus and calculus were learned. The emphasis was on problem-solving complex mathematical concepts and having students employ critical thinking skills. The progress and attainment levels in these skills were good. Topics included solving quadratic equations by graphing and factoring, finding real roots of polynomial equations and geometric sequences and series.

Progress and attainment in science were good at the high school level and acceptable at all other stages. At Kindergarten, elementary and middle school phases, the students demonstrated acceptable scientific knowledge and understanding. In the high school, students were skilled using laboratory methods and responded accurately to teachers' questioning. In science experiments they used critical thinking skills to solve problems. At high school, the students demonstrated good scientific knowledge base within biology, chemistry and physics courses. Through further scientific activities, including field trips within the local environment, students linked their scientific understanding to other curriculum subjects, including geography.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were acceptable in Kindergarten and good throughout the rest of the school. Students were respectful towards their teachers and peers, often initiating greetings with adults. Their attitudes to school work were generally good and they demonstrated a keen sense of wanting to learn. Almost all the students were attentive in classes. Attendance in the observed classes was good. Punctuality had improved. More students arrived at school on time compared with last year.

Students' civic, Islamic and cultural understanding was acceptable at Kindergarten, good at elementary and middle schools and outstanding at high school. Students were mature and had helped to initiate a number of positive changes in their school, such as the menu in the cafeteria. Students showed that they understood the Islamic values of Dubai and the diversity of its population. They relished the diversity within their school and their country.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was acceptable at Kindergarten, good at elementary and middle and outstanding at high school. A feature of the school was the clean, bright condition of all facilities. All students showed pride in their school and identified the school as being environmentally friendly. They could explain the need to care for the

environment and could describe conservation measures to which they could contribute. Senior students expressed strong professional aspirations and had an outstanding understanding of possible roles as productive citizens in the UAE. Senior students had an awareness of the importance of volunteering for projects. They also had clear aspirations for their post-schooling education, including plans to enter a range of international universities.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was good overall. It was good in Kindergarten, middle and high school but acceptable at elementary level. Teaching was good in English, mathematics, science and Islamic Education, with a few examples of outstanding teaching. The school had developed a planning template which teachers used to good effect throughout the school. Lessons had measurable learning objectives. Features of most lessons were the range of hands-on practical activities provided and the consistent application of examples using ICT. In outstanding lessons pace and challenge were evident, encouraging students to think analytically and extend their level of understanding. However, in too many lessons, tasks were not well matched to the range of students' learning needs. Overall, there were insufficient examples of teachers monitoring students' progress throughout the lesson and adjusting their teaching accordingly.

The quality of learning mirrored quality of teaching. It was good in Kindergarten, middle and high school, but acceptable in the elementary school. A broad range of resources such as textbooks, worksheets, games, music, practical activities, group tasks and model building engaged students and encouraged co-operation and was a feature of the better lessons. In these lessons where good learning was observed, the teachers were supportive and active, asked open-ended questions and challenged students. Full engagement and solid concept development were common. Students were able to articulate their newly developed understanding with confidence. In a few lessons, learning was restricted to the acquisition and recall of facts thus limiting the range of learning.

Assessment across the school was acceptable. The school used a range of assessments with appropriate tracking strategies to provide data. This helped inform teaching and learning. A few teachers used assessment matrices with descriptors effectively. These allowed teachers to assess students' work and provide feedback on the next steps in learning. Skilled questioning of students supported students in their understanding. In high quality lessons this allowed students to explore a range of imaginative responses that required higher order thinking, or application of ideas to new situations. In less successful lessons, questioning was restricted to the recall of factual information. This did not allow teachers to effectively monitor lesson progress or prepare students for the next learning steps. Teachers did not use international assessments well to help align their students' achievements to international standards.

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

Overall, the curriculum was acceptable at all stages. Comprehensive and detailed documentation for all subject areas existed. The leadership team ensured that there was a coherent and regular annual curriculum review and revision which were evident in subject planning frameworks. These, together with appropriate distributions of subject time, ensured breadth and balance for all students, with a strong emphasis on personal development. Clear progression and a commitment to meeting the needs of all children were evident. The delivery of the curriculum through child-centred learning was often good but variable. Transitions from one grade to the next were smooth, seamless and easily implemented. This was helped by good teacher collaboration across the school. Cross-curricular activities and links were present throughout the school. It was common practice for teachers at the elementary level who taught different subjects to link their teaching units together to give their students a commonality in what they were learning. Opportunities for students to learn within the wider school community were strong. An annually planned range of field trips was a feature of all grade levels. Understanding important environmental issues that influence Dubai were developed as a consequence. The school needed to evaluate and align the curriculum so that higher levels of student attainment are achieved. The curriculum for Arabic as a second language had been successfully developed and implemented.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety arrangements were outstanding across all stages of the school. This included the clean and well maintained buildings, site security and supervision of transport. Students stated that they felt safe in the school. Mandatory fire drills and appliance inspections occurred and all health and safety policies were in place. Nutritionally sound meals that were of a high quality and variety were prepared in the schools kitchen. A full-time registered nurse and a part-time doctor were employed and the administration and storage of medications had well developed systems. There was good awareness and monitoring of students who had medical issues. Healthy lifestyles and exercise were promoted effectively and regularly with displays throughout the school, units of instruction in the curriculum and activity at daily assembly.

The quality of support was acceptable at all stages. A process for the identification and monitoring of students with behavioural and or learning difficulties was in place, but more work was needed to ensure that students' needs were met. Arrangements for tracking and supporting students had improved and provided focused support for students' academic progress and their personal development. Staff-student relationships were positive in all years and students were able to identify staff who they would consult on an informal basis. A strong program for college and career development was in place. Attendance and punctuality were monitored effectively, though lateness to class, particularly in the early morning was still a problem. A new child protection policy was in place and awareness of implications for staff was developing.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of the schools' leadership and management was good. The newly appointed Principal had a clear vision for the school and the capacity to drive an ambitious program of school improvement. Positive steps already evident included improved teaching in the middle school, a high standard of school documentation and planning and recently developed policies. These provided a solid base for future change. The Principal was aware of the need for accurate data regarding student attainment to ensure that students achieved well against international standards. Although approaches regarding teaching for effective learning had been developed, school leaders did not yet ensure that tasks were always well matched to the wide range of students' needs across all phases of the school. Clear roles and responsibilities existed, with senior management sharing responsibility with the middle managers and teaching staff when appropriate. A strong and effective student council was in place.

The school's self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. A comprehensive improvement plan had been formulated and was being implemented. The school self-review document, with appended student achievement data, was detailed. The school surveyed and analysed the views of parents, students and staff and incorporated the findings in its planning. School managers had successfully responded to recommendations from the previous inspection report with improved attainment in Kindergarten, in English and in high school science.

Links with parents and the wider community were acceptable. There was strong parental support for the school. An advisory group, consisting of parents, staff, students and management had been formed, as had a parent's forum group. Both were beginning to impact on the progress of the school. Parental communication was strong, with circulars, the website, telephone and SMS messages, progress reports and report cards all being utilised. Planned out-of-school educational visits for students and regular weekly themes all had a positive impact on learning.

Governance was acceptable. The governing body was positive in its approaches and readily supported the Principal in school improvement. Recent improvements to the library resources and personnel, as well as support for international diagnostic testing of all students, demonstrated their commitment. Accountability to the governing body was evident. The Board was supported by the school advisory body but had yet to include a sufficiently broad representation from all stakeholders within the school community.

The staffing, facilities and resources were good overall. The outstanding facilities were a feature of the school. An extremely high level of cleanliness, safety, and maintenance existed. There was a growing pool of well qualified experienced staff and high levels of support staff. Science laboratories were well equipped and laboratory assistance effective. ICT had helped improve teachers' work delivery and was well integrated in the majority of lessons. The library had been developed with additional resources and personnel and was a valuable asset to support learning.

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	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
26% 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	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Acceptable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	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	Good	Good

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

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

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Acceptable	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Acceptable	Good	Good
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	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
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	Acceptable
Governance	Acceptable
Staffing, facilities and resources	Good

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

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