

Al Maaref Private School Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 12

Report published May 2011

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Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report

Outstanding – exceptionally high quality of performance or practice.

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

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

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

Al Maaref Private School was inspected in January 2011 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 Qusais, Al Maaref is a private school providing education for students from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 12, aged three to 18 years. The school follows a US curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 1,436 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to an on-line questionnaire completed by parents. Most were satisfied with the quality of education available in the school. They were particularly pleased about their child's progress in Islamic Education and Arabic. They agreed that the school treated their child fairly, supported them in choosing healthy lifestyles and kept them safe. The majority of parents did not know whether the school provided good support or whether the school responded well to the recommendations from the last inspection. They felt that their child enjoyed lessons and most of the parents believed that the school dealt effectively with incidents of bullying. Parents identified teaching and learning as strengths of the school.

How well does the school perform overall?

The overall performance of Al Maaref Private School was acceptable. The school responded well to the recommendations in the last inspection report. In particular, there were noticeable improvements in the quality of the curriculum and it now met the needs of most students. The quality of teaching had improved in some lessons across the school, especially in the middle cycle. In most classes, behaviour strategies were understood and consistently applied. The school leaders were competent and committed to improving the school. Heads of department had defined roles and responsibilities and most of the staff showed a strong commitment to the ethos of the school, its values and success. The school improvement plan had an acceptable capacity for further improvement.

Attainment and progress in all the key subjects were acceptable across the school with the exception of Arabic in the middle grades where attainment and progress were good. Students' attitudes and behaviour were good in the Kindergarten, middle and upper grades. They were acceptable in elementary because of occasional disruptive behaviour. Students had a good awareness of their civic responsibility and cultural heritage as well as a good appreciation and understanding of Islam. Their economic and environmental understanding was acceptable in all grades. The quality of teaching and learning was acceptable overall but inconsistent across the school. The curriculum was acceptable. The arrangements for ensuring the health and safety of children and students were good across the school except in the upper grades. The quality of support was acceptable throughout the school. Teachers knew their students well but the school's processes for checking academic progress were not always rigorously applied. The quality of leadership and management was acceptable. The work of the school was monitored and appropriate actions taken but school development focused on too many initiatives at the same time. The school was adequately supported by governors, parents and the local community. Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable.

Key features of the school

- Improving standards in English;
- A determination to move the school forward by addressing the previous recommendations;
- Strong relationships between staff and students;
- Inconsistent teaching and learning across all subjects and levels;
- Improved health and safety arrangements;
- A high percentage of new staff who had recently joined the school.

Recommendations

- Raise attainment in all subjects;
- Improve teaching to ensure that students use and apply what they have learned in different contexts;
- Plan lessons that meet the needs of all learners, especially in Grades 1 to 3;
- Make effective use of data in order to track students' progress over time and improve attainment;
- Create a school development plan that focuses clearly on priorities within a defined timeline;
- Ensure that all staff are appropriately skilled and deployed to meet the learning needs of students.

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

The attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable across the school. In elementary, most students memorised and could recite the prescribed chapters of The Holy Qur'an to an acceptable level. By Grade 10, students made better progress. Most students linked the Qura'nic texts they studied to possible applications in their lives. They also could support their arguments with verses from The Holy Qur'an and the teachings of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). Moreover, they could identify the different types of "Jihad" and their contexts. Grade 12 girls acquired detailed knowledge about the Islamic code of dress and could provide various examples from their daily lives.

Attainment and progress in Arabic for the elementary and upper grades were acceptable and good in the middle grades. Most students made better progress in extended reading. As a result, Grade 5 students were able to read independently but most reading was below age-appropriate levels. The lack of use of dictionaries across the school inhibited students' acquisition of an extended vocabulary. Most students across school gained an acceptable knowledge of grammar but did not apply their knowledge to various contexts. By Grade 8, students made good progress, particularly in the girls' section. They were articulate in expressing their opinions and succeeded in composing a few lines of poetry. Students' writing skills were under developed. Upper school students did not have sufficient opportunities to practice free and extended writing on unfamiliar topics.

Attainment and progress in English were acceptable in all phases. Almost all students listened well. Most Kindergarten children responded to simple instructions. Grade 5 students read a paragraph, listened to peers and talked about adjectives to describe characters. The majority of students in Grade 10 listened attentively, understood complex sentences spoken at normal speed and responded with confidence, correct pronunciation, accurate intonation and fluency. Reading skills were inconsistent across the school. Grade 4 students read fluently while Grade 7 students discussed the conflict of feelings within the characters from their books. However,

students in lower grades did not read a sufficient range of fiction and non-fiction books independently. The skill of writing for different purposes was developing but not all students could write independently at length.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable throughout the school. Most students in Kindergarten were able to recognise and write numbers, count them in sequence and identify geometric shapes. Elementary students solved fraction problems using the four operations accurately. They knew measurement concepts and used a range of strategies in finding solutions. Middle school students solved geometric problems related to angles and understood the prime factorisation of numbers. Most older students were proficient in algebraic skills and concepts. Grade 12 students knew trigonometric functions and understood many components of calculus, such as knowledge of limits, convergence and divergence.

Attainment and progress in science were acceptable in all phases of the school. While Kindergarten children learned about the properties of materials such as wool to provide warmth in winter, there was limited opportunity for discovery and independent learning. In Grade 12, students understood Coulomb's Law and could calculate the forces of attraction and repulsion. Most older students had some opportunities to carry out investigations planned by the teacher. For example, Grade 10 students' understanding of chemical formulae was deepened when they saw various salts burning different colours. Most students, especially younger ones, had under developed investigative and independent scientific skills.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good in Kindergarten, middle and upper grades and acceptable in elementary. Most students were proud of their school and enjoyed lessons and the opportunities available to them. They showed respect and care for each other and for their teachers. However, a small number of younger students in the elementary grades had difficulty in following the rules and behaviour expected by the school. Students moved around the school in an orderly way and were punctual to lessons. They followed the school advice on healthy living and taking exercise and made appropriate choices of snacks at break time. Attendance overall was good.

Civic and Islamic understanding was good. In Kindergarten, children knew about different roles that people had in the community. Older students assumed individual responsibilities, such as monitoring behaviour during break times. They had a strong knowledge of Islam and recognised its influence on their daily lives. Younger students participated in role play for Hajj and all were respectful of the prayer call. All students celebrated local events and knew about relevant customs. They explained Dubai as a tolerant, multi-cultural society which welcomed people of all nationalities.

Economic and environmental understanding was acceptable. Middle and high school students were aware of Dubai's history and recent developments. They could talk about the infrastructure of Dubai and how immigrants were contributing to making Dubai a modern world city. They gave examples of careers and how they needed qualifications to get good jobs. Younger students knew the names of Dubai's rulers and important buildings. However,

their historical knowledge was under developed. High school students talked confidently about pollution and what could be done to eliminate it. They knew about improvements in health and education. All students looked after the school and kept all areas litter free. They were involved in activities such as cleaning up the beach but did not initiate projects for themselves.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching for effective learning was acceptable, overall. The majority of teachers knew their subjects well. However, their understanding of how students of different ages learned best was variable. This was most evident in the elementary grades where teachers did not always make learning accessible to younger students and behaviour was not well managed. A majority of teachers used resources and activities which involved students more actively in their learning. For example, board games in mathematics, role play in Arabic and experiments in science helped make learning exciting. While the majority of teachers used questions to check students' understanding, only a few used more searching questions to challenge students to think critically. Group work was used well by the majority of teachers to promote discussion and team working skills. Although the majority of teachers knew their students well, most did not use this knowledge to plan lessons to meet different needs. In a minority of lessons, teachers talked for too long and did not encourage students' independent learning.

The quality of students' learning was acceptable. Almost all students had positive attitudes to their subjects and took their learning seriously. However, the behaviour of a few students in the elementary grades hampered their own progress and that of others. Almost all students collaborated well during group work and, when offered opportunities for discussion and exploration, they participated enthusiastically. Students enjoyed it when they could apply their learning and experiences to the real world including, for example, using the school environment to apply their mathematical skills. Due to limited opportunities to apply their understanding, investigative and enquiry skills were under developed in some subjects. Most students were confident in their responses to their teachers due to the good relationships they had with them.

Assessment was acceptable in all grades. The school had a wide range of data on students' performance. Initial assessments were carried out in all grades and the sharing of assessment information between Kindergarten and Grade 1 was good. However, most teachers made limited use of the range of data available to plan their lessons in order to meet the different needs of their students. Verbal feedback to students in lessons was good and enabled students to improve their work. In a few lessons students were beginning to assess their own work and that of their peers but this was not yet a regular feature. Teachers marked students' work regularly and accurately though they did not provide any specific written guidance to inform students of how to improve further.

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

The quality of the curriculum was acceptable across the school. Based on a US model, it had breadth and balance within its various elements and was in line with the Ministry of Education requirements. Although it was textbook driven, many teachers had adapted the content and started to plan in order to meet the needs of students, especially in the areas of local community and national identity. Children in Kindergarten had opportunities to be more active in their learning. There were planned transitions between the four phases of the school, but delivery of the curriculum was not always appropriate for children moving from Kindergarten into Grade 1. In most subjects there was little evidence of teachers planning to meet the individual needs of students who were gifted and talented or those with additional learning needs. The curriculum included art, music, physical education and computer science and many extra-curricular activities. There were opportunities for educational trips and a wide range of clubs. Cross-curricular links were planned in English, mathematics, science and computer science. The school library was a good resource and enriched the curriculum, particularly in its large collection of Arabic materials. The curriculum was reviewed by the Vice-Principal and subject co-ordinators but the impact of this was not evident in most of the lessons.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements for the protection and support of students were good in Kindergarten, elementary and the middle grades and acceptable in the upper grades. Students were safe and secure in most respects. Evacuation procedures were well-known and understood. Risk assessments ensured accidents were rare and of a minor nature. The premises were clean and well maintained and students with physical needs were accommodated on the ground floor, when necessary. In the science laboratories, older students did not wear protective clothing and goggles when carrying out investigations. Although the Kindergarten play area and a few classes were overcrowded, students were well-supervised at all times including on school transport. Despite the school's efforts and the presence of staff, the car park was not well organised especially at the end of the day. The school doctor and nurse monitored students' medical needs and were proactive in promoting healthy lifestyles. Most staff and students were aware of child protection arrangements.

The quality of support for students was acceptable across the school. Relationships were positive. Staff members knew the students well and provided well-focused support for their personal development and well-being. Most students with learning needs made acceptable progress because teachers modified their teaching to try to meet their needs. While students' scores in tests were recorded, the school did not have an efficient system for tracking individual progress. A clear behaviour policy was in place but its implementation was inconsistent across the school. In most classes, behaviour was well managed with appropriate rewards and sanctions. Attendance and punctuality statistics were recorded accurately.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership and management was acceptable. School leaders shared a common purpose and vision. They worked well together to ensure that development priorities resulted in improved learning outcomes for students. This was evident in the improved attainment and progress in Arabic and English. The roles of senior staff were defined and linked well to school priorities. However, the impact of the shared vision in the school was not evident in all areas of the school. The school leadership had not yet ensured that teachers in all subject areas were focused appropriately on the raising of standards.

The self-evaluation and improvement planning process was acceptable. Senior staff had systems in place to gather information for school development. Performance management arrangements were in place and were beginning to inform professional development. Management personnel monitored lessons and held weekly meetings as well as providing appropriate support for staff in their departments. Test results were analysed and specific areas of weakness were identified and acted upon. The consultants working in the school had provided training for the high number of staff who started at the school this year.

Partnerships with parents and the community were acceptable. Parents were regularly informed on matters relating to their children and they attended school consultation events. A small committee of parents made contributions to the health and safety improvements throughout school. There was clear communication with parents if students were unexpectedly absent. Parents said they felt welcome in the school and were able to discuss any concerns. Links with local schools and businesses were established. Local colleges and universities visited the school to inform older students of possible options for further education.

Governance was acceptable. The governing body provided strategic guidance to the school. It met each semester to discuss the school's development. Members of the group represented a limited number of stakeholders including parents, school leaders and owners. The governors did not yet play a full role in leading or monitoring all aspects of school improvement. Information was shared with regard to the progress of the school. Educational expertise was readily available from one of the owners and when used appropriately this made a positive impact on the quality of leadership and management of the school.

The staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable. There were sufficient numbers of qualified teachers to provide an appropriate curriculum for all students as well as support staff for young children and students with additional needs. Most teachers were deployed appropriately but there were a few new staff members who did not have the expertise to teach some of the younger students. The library was an attractive learning environment with a range of books and computers suitable for all ages. Specialist rooms were used well although the science laboratories were not fully resourced. The premises were clean and safe and furniture and fittings were in good order. A number of classrooms were too small for the large number of students, especially in Grades 1 to 3.

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?				
100% 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	Good	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Acceptable	Good	Good
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	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and safety	Good	Good	Good	Acceptable
Quality of support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

	Overall
Quality of leadership	Acceptable
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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