GOVERNMENT OF DUBAI
حكومة دبي
KNOWLEDGE & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
هيئة المعرفة و التنمية البشرية
Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau
جهاز الرقابة المدرسية في دبي

INSPECTION REPORT

Al Maaref Private School

Report published in April 2013

Knowledge and Human Development Authority
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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Al Maaref Private School

Location	Al Qusais
Type of school	Private
Website	www.almaaref.ae
Telephone	04-298-8881
Address	P.O. Box 87823, Al Qusais, Dubai
Principal	Mohamed Fliti
Curriculum	US
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-18 / Kindergarten to Grade 12
Attendance	Acceptable
Number of students on roll	1,544
Largest nationality group of Students	Emirati
Number of Emirati students	632 (41%)
Date of the inspection	14th to 17th January 2013

Contents

The context of the school

Al Maaref Private School is located in Al Qusais. It offers places for students from Kindergarten to Grade 12, age three to 18 years. The English, mathematics and science programmes were broadly based on a US curriculum and taught in English. Islamic Education and Arabic followed Ministry of Education guidelines and, in common with other subjects such as history, geography, music, physical education and art, were taught in Arabic. The school used a few externally generated tests to assess the attainment of some students.

At the time of the inspection there were 1,544 students. The largest nationality group was Emirati, around two fifths of the student population. The school had identified 63 students with special educational needs.

The school had 90 teachers, most of whom were qualified. It also had 25 teacher assistants, two social advisors, a doctor and two nurses to attend to students' medical needs. The new Principal had been in post for a few months. He was supported by a Vice-Principal and an Assistant Vice-Principal.

Overall school performance 2012-2013

Acceptable

Key strengths

- Improved students' progress in Islamic Education and English in the middle school;
- Students' understanding of Islamic values;
- The school's attention to promoting and ensuring the health and safety of students.

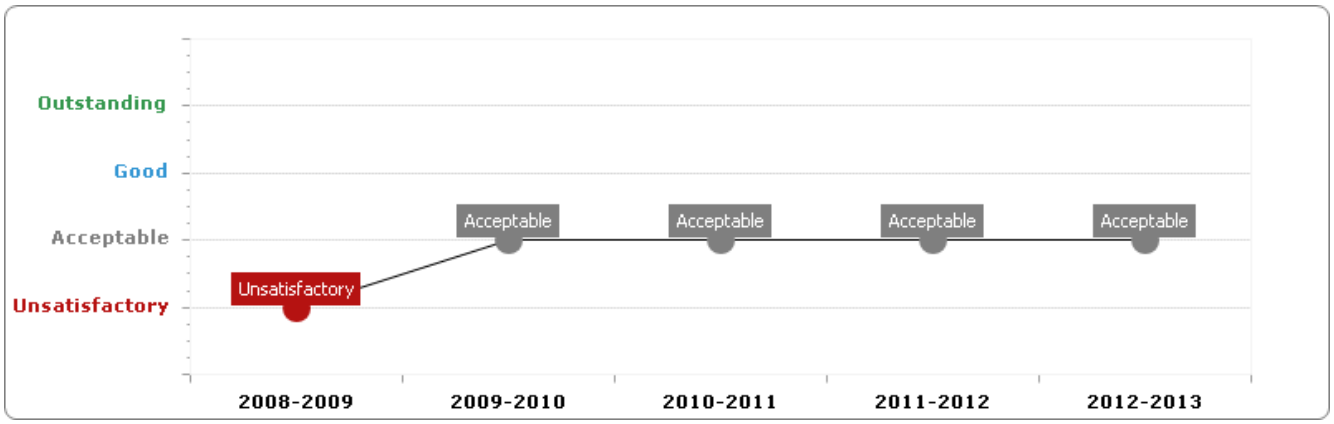
Recommendations

- Establish among all teachers a shared understanding of good teaching and learning, and ensure that good quality teaching is consistently in place across all phases of the school;
- Use US and international assessment benchmarks at key points, and ensure that all students receive better advice about how to improve their work;
- Address weaknesses in the curriculum, particularly by aligning the work done at each grade to appropriate US and international standards;
- Use information about the quality of the school's work, including benchmarked assessment data, to evaluate outcomes and raise attainment;
- Improve students' punctuality.

Progress since the last inspection

- Teachers had improved some aspects of teaching and learning in Islamic Education and English and as a result, students' progress in middle school had improved;
- Progress in improving the curriculum to meet the needs and interests of all students was slow;
- Senior leaders had improved some aspects of the school's self-evaluation and improvement procedures, but further work needed to be done;
- Senior leaders had developed the use of international benchmarks, but these were still not used consistently to assess the progress of all students at key points;
- The Principal had established a parent advisory body and this group was contributing views to the governing body. Representation on the governing body had not been widened.

Trend of overall performance



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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Islamic Education				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable
Arabic as a first language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable
Arabic as an additional language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
English				
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Mathematics				
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Science				
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

Read paragraph

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	Good
Understanding of Islamic values and local, cultural and global awareness	Good	Good	Good	Good
Community and environmental responsibility	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

Read paragraph

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	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

Read paragraph

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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

Read paragraph

How well does the school protect and support students?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and Safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of Support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

Read paragraph

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

	Whole school
Quality of leadership	Acceptable
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Acceptable
Partnerships with parents and the community	Acceptable
Governance	Acceptable
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Acceptable

Read paragraph

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

Overall, attainment was acceptable, with the exception of Arabic as a first language in the middle, and English in the high school, where it was good. In Islamic Education, students were able to memorise suras of The Holy Qu'ran with few errors. They could explain Hadeeth and knew Fiqh laws. Students' language skills in Arabic were acceptable. They used dictionaries and read poems with expression. Students' writing skills were in line with expectations, although their understanding and application of grammar rules were poor. In English, Kindergarten children understood instructions and read key words and phrases. Overall, writing skills were less well developed. Written calculation skills in mathematics were acceptable, but mental calculation skills were weak. Problem-solving was not a well-established skill across the whole school. Most elementary and middle school students understood basic scientific facts but few achieved good levels of understanding. High school science students were not challenged sufficiently to achieve in line with international expectations.

Progress was acceptable, with the exception of Islamic Education and Arabic as a first language at middle, and English at middle and high school, where it was good. In Islamic Education, students made evident progress in recitation skills. In Arabic, gains in reading were less rapid than gains in other aspects. Progress in writing at length was hampered because students had too few opportunities to practise key skills. In mathematics, most students made progress to their lesson objectives, but few extended beyond expectations for their grade. Progress in science was variable across phases. Better progress was made in lessons when students were involved practically and were given high academic challenges. Unsatisfactory progress in lessons was seen in most science subjects in Grades 11 and 12.

View judgements

How well does the school provide for Emirati students?

The attainment of Emirati students was broadly in line with the attainment of other students, and was acceptable overall. At some of the upper middle and high school grades, boys tended to perform less well than girls in classwork. Emirati students made progress at the same rate as their peers; acceptable overall. Strengths and weaknesses in curriculum, teaching and learning had a similar impact on Emirati students as on others. Leaders did not analyse attainment information to identify any particular factors affecting Emirati students' achievements.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good. Almost all students demonstrated appropriate attitudes towards learning. Behaviour was generally good, but there were a few exceptions among older boys. When unsupervised, the younger students' behaviour was at times only acceptable. Students chose to eat healthy food and almost all students took part in physical education activities. Attendance was acceptable but punctuality was a significant problem. Almost all students understood and identified with Islamic values, such as modesty and honesty. High school students helped to organise a model 'Haj' in collaboration with the Islamic Education teachers. Students had a good knowledge of Emirati culture but their understanding of other cultures was limited. Community and environmental responsibility was acceptable. Serving on the student council gave opportunities to some students to show leadership skills. Students participated in a wide range of activities in school and in the community for trips, visits, overnight camps, sports and competitions. Contributions to the local community were less regular or widespread, although students had some opportunities to make charitable donations. Students' work ethic was well developed on the whole, but the school rarely gave students opportunities to show initiative, leadership or creativity. Students took care of their immediate surroundings but environmental awareness was not well developed.

View judgements

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

The quality of teaching was acceptable in all phases. Most teachers had sufficient subject knowledge, but their understanding of how students learn was limited. Lesson plans included objectives, but details of how tasks would be matched to the needs of different groups of students were too vague. Textbooks were the main resources used in classes. Teachers often spoke too much and failed to develop meaningful dialogue with students. The development of enquiry and critical thinking skills was inconsistent across the school. While there was a significant amount of good teaching practice, too many lessons were also unsatisfactory. This was mainly because teachers spent too much time reviewing what had been learned earlier and talking to the whole class about the concept to be learned, leaving insufficient time for the students to become engaged in the learning. Teaching in other subjects such as art, music, history, geography and business showed the same variation as the key subjects and was acceptable overall.

The quality of learning was acceptable at all phases. Most students had positive attitudes, but they were often passive in their learning. They could explain their learning to their peers while working co-operatively in small groups. Students worked well without close supervision. Teachers emphasised

connections between previous and new learning, but did not give students sufficient opportunities to relate their learning to the outside world.

Students acquired knowledge and skills, but understanding of the concepts was often less well developed. In Arabic and Islamic Education, students were given opportunities to be independent. Opportunities for students to develop critical thinking skills, or to use technology to support their learning, were limited.

The assessment of learning was acceptable across the school. A range of approaches was used to monitor the progress and attainment of students. These approaches were rarely linked to US or international benchmarks for all students, although some steps had been taken to develop benchmarking. By observation, written tests and projects and questioning students, teachers had generally good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of individual students in their classes. They also assessed and recorded aspects of students' personal and social development. Oral and written feedback was not systematic or detailed enough to help students to understand what they needed to do to improve. Analysis of data was not sufficient to allow good matching of tasks to groups of students with different needs, or to inform improvements in teaching, learning and the curriculum.

View judgements

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

The curriculum was acceptable. The breadth of subjects offered included key subjects plus art in Grades 1 to 8 and music in Grades 1 to 3. All students had physical education opportunities twice weekly. Students in Grades 10 to 12 did not have arts or social studies opportunities. English, mathematics and science were taught in English, while a majority of subjects were taught in Arabic. The overall scheme of the curriculum had general continuity and progression, but the levels of challenge were not well matched to what the students already knew. There were some gaps in curriculum content and some repetition of content. The curriculum was reviewed regularly and some modifications had been made to accommodate students' language skills. The school had recently adopted the US Common Core Standards for English and mathematics, which teachers were adopting into their lesson plans. Provision was rarely made for different groups of students. Enrichment of the curriculum was done by means of activities after school on Tuesdays, special events, field trips and sports competitions with other schools. Enrichment during lessons was not observed.

View judgements

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements for ensuring students' health and safety were good. The school environment was clean, well maintained and checked regularly. Vigilant staff members made sure students were well supervised. Buses were well organised, with seat belts fitted. The routing of students walking from cars to the front gate was not safe. Regular fire drills resulted in speedy evacuation. Caring medical staff kept accurate, detailed records of all students and shared information with relevant adults. Medicines were stored securely and science materials were locked away. Students wore protective items for body, eyes and mouth in science lessons. The school was proactive in promoting a healthy lifestyle. Policies for behaviour management were clear and followed. Child protection procedures were in place and understood.

Teachers and students had a good rapport in most instances. Teachers knew their students well, and monitored behaviour closely. The school kept records of attendance but had an on-going problem with punctuality. Monitoring systems were not stemming the flow of late arrivals each morning. The school provided additional staff members to whom students might turn for guidance.

View judgements

How well does the school provide for students with special educational needs?

Staff members had accurately identified students with special educational needs, including those facing learning challenges and the gifted and talented. A team with specific responsibilities for meeting the needs of those students was in place. The team was working to help teachers to understand how best to support students with special educational needs. They had not created individualised educational programmes for each of these students, with learning goals and parent and teacher roles set out clearly. Teaching staff were generally supportive of students with special educational needs, but needed to use more targeted and customised strategies for some.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was acceptable. The new Principal had made a promising start by setting up a parent advisory body, re-aligning the management structure, and involving stakeholders in establishing the vision and direction for the school. He had plans to train and support his Vice-Principal, Assistant Vice-Principal and leaders at middle level to achieve more consistency in leadership.

Success in raising educational outcomes since the previous inspection had been limited, although there had been some improvements. Leaders, particularly the Principal, were not complacent. They knew that the school was broadly acceptable and were keen to improve it. The school's capacity to achieve better outcomes remained broadly the same as previously, with some signs of recent improvement.

The quality of self-evaluation and improvement planning was acceptable. The system for performance management of teachers was a positive feature. Staff members employed a good range of approaches, including lesson observations, data gathering and surveys. Analysis of the data and information gathered was not systematic enough for school improvement. Assessment data was not analysed fully to inform evaluation of the curriculum, teaching or learning.

Partnership with parents and the community was acceptable. The recently established parent advisory board was a positive development. The members were contributing views and were appreciative of the new Principal's approach. A few parent volunteers helped in classes. The school's website had been improved, and other forms of communication with parents had been developed, for example, the new parent partnership office. Report cards were sent to parents twice-yearly but they were not fully helpful, for example, in setting out their children's next steps in learning. Links with local businesses and other organisations in the community were weak.

Governance was acceptable. The parent advisory body was able to contribute views and suggestions for improvement, but the governing body did not have representation from the parent body or the local community. The governors ensured compliance overall, although in a few early grades, the time for Arabic was less than recommended. Communication between the governors and the Principal was good, but advice and guidance to the school on educational matters was limited. Governors exercised accountability, for example by appointing the new Principal and requiring him to prepare a policy on teacher professional development. Support for new technology resources, improved security and general freshening up of certain areas had been good.

The quality of management was acceptable. The school operated at an adequate level day-to-day, but several aspects needed to be carried out more systematically. The school did not have efficient systems for ensuring that parents brought their children to school punctually. The school was well staffed overall. The school needed a teacher who could teach Islamic Education to non-Arabic speakers. Premises and resources were sufficient overall. There were no prayer rooms.

View judgements

What are the views of parents, teachers and students?

Before the inspection, the views of parents, teachers and senior secondary students were surveyed. Key messages from each group were considered during the inspection and these helped to form judgements. A summary of the survey statistics and comments from those who responded to the survey follows:

Responses to the surveys			
Responses received	Number		Percentage
Parents	This year	49	4%
	Last year	116	9%
Teachers	37		42%
Students	15		9%

*The percentage of responses from parents is based on the number of families.

Around two-fifths of the teachers responded to the survey. Only a very few parents and students did so, a drop on the previous year's return rates. Most parents who responded were satisfied with the school. They felt that their children were treated fairly, enjoyed school and were well looked-after and safe. Almost all teachers who responded, and most parents, thought that the school was well led. A minority in both groups wanted to be more involved in decision-making.

What happens next?

The school has been asked to prepare and submit an updated action plan to DSIB within two months of receiving the most recent report. This plan should address:

- Recommendations from DSIB;
- Areas identified by the school as requiring improvement;
- Other external reports or sources of information that comment on the work of the school;
- Priorities arising from the school's unique characteristics.

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