

Al Mizhar American Academy Private School for Girls Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Post-16

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 Mizhar American Academy Private School for Girls was inspected in November 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, The American Academy for Girls provides education from Kindergarten to High School for girls aged three to 18 years. The school's curriculum is based on the Michigan curriculum standards in the USA. At the time of the inspection, there were 546 girls on roll. The attendance of students for the last academic term was good.

As part of the inspection process, Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires issued to parents. Most parents were very satisfied with the quality of education. Most reported that they were happy with progress in Islamic Education and Arabic as a first language, while only about a minority were satisfied with progress in Arabic as an additional language. Most parents were pleased with their children's progress in English, mathematics and science; they thought teaching was good and that their daughters learned well. Most felt behaviour was good and well managed and that resources were good. Almost all parents thought their children were treated fairly by the school and that provision for students with special educational needs was good. They said the school promoted a healthy lifestyle, made good links with the community and provided a wide range of activities for the students. Almost all respondents said they were pleased with the leadership of the school. A significant minority of parents were not aware of the existence of the advisory board of the school. They said the inspection reports had been helpful in providing information for parents on which school suited their needs for their children.

How well does the school perform overall?

The overall performance of Al Mizhar American Academy for Girls was good with some outstanding features. The school had responded well to almost all of the recommendations of the previous report with improvements in outcomes for lower secondary students of Islamic Education, Arabic for first language learners in upper secondary and English and science learners in the upper grades. Through effectively distributed leadership, the school had a strong capacity to improve further.

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good in elementary and lower secondary and acceptable in the higher grades. Attainment and progress for students in Arabic as a first language were good in elementary and upper secondary and acceptable in the lower secondary grades. Attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language were acceptable in all phases. In English, attainment was acceptable in Kindergarten, elementary and lower secondary. Progress was good in these stages. Attainment was good in upper secondary and progress was outstanding. In mathematics, attainment was good in Kindergarten and acceptable in all other phases. Progress was good across the school. In science, attainment was acceptable in Kindergarten and lower secondary, good in elementary and upper secondary while progress was good in all stages. Students had outstanding attitudes and behaviour. Their knowledge and understanding of Islam, civic responsibility, local traditions and culture and their economic and environmental understanding were outstanding. Teaching, learning and assessment were good throughout the school. The curriculum was good in all phases. Protection and support for students were outstanding throughout the school. Leadership and management were good with outstanding features. All staff shared a common vision and there had been significant improvement since the last inspection. There were outstanding partnerships between parents and the wider community. Governance was good and staffing, facilities and resources were outstanding.

Key features of the school

- The care and welfare for the students' personal and academic progress was outstanding;
- There was a very strong commitment and capacity from senior leadership to share responsibilities, delegate and empower all teachers;
- The support for students with English as an additional language was outstanding;
- The exemplary attitudes and behaviour of the students were enhanced by the improvement in attendance and punctuality since the last inspection;
- The progress in English at upper secondary level was outstanding;
- The school fostered productive links with parents and the community.

Recommendations

- Continue to raise attainment and progress in all subjects with increased levels of challenge;
- Integrate the learning of Arabic as an additional language with other modern foreign languages;
- Develop approaches to teaching and learning to achieve specific outcomes with a more effective alignment of learning objectives and assessment strategies;
- Increase opportunities for each learner to be an independent and critical thinker through the development of cross-curricular links including information and communication technology (ICT), language and numeracy skills.

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

Overall, attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good in elementary and lower secondary schools while both were acceptable in the upper secondary. Generally the recitation of The Holy Qur'an was acceptable and students had good knowledge of the basic principles and pillars of Islam. The students had knowledge of the life of the Prophet (PBUH) and understood a range of Islamic values. They could talk about Islamic ethics. Younger students knew the steps of 'ablution' and explained its benefits. Older students demonstrated good understanding of the Prophet's sayings 'Hadith Al Sharif'. A minority of students in these grades could apply their understanding and knowledge in a variety of contexts.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were good in both elementary and upper secondary and acceptable in the lower secondary. Students in the lower grades were developing their speaking and listening skills effectively. They could read familiar sentences with clarity. Grade 3 students were able to correct their own writing and spelling well. Most lower secondary students did not write to a good level. There were few opportunities for them to write creatively or to a range of audiences. Older students had good understanding of grammatical rules and applied them well in their writing. Students' comprehension skills in the upper grades were good. They could analyse novels effectively and offer well-thought-out opinions.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language were acceptable. Students across the school were developing their speaking and listening skills in line with expectations. They could understand and respond to basic classroom instructions in Arabic confidently. Although the students' reading skills varied, most students were able to read the assigned texts correctly. However, in the lower secondary school, a few students used their English skills excessively to communicate in Arabic lessons. Consequently their comprehension skills also varied. Students' writing skills were developing well. By the beginning of lower secondary they were able to write short sentences correctly, but most students had yet to develop independent writing skills beyond the requirements of the textbook.

In English, attainment was acceptable and progress was good in Kindergarten, elementary and lower secondary. Attainment in upper secondary was good and progress was outstanding. Kindergarten students spoke confidently. Speaking improved throughout the grades to upper secondary where students could debate as well as interrogate text to a high standard. Reading skills developed as students focused on increased vocabulary, and benefited from exposure to a wide range of materials and outstanding support for students of English as an Additional Language. Grammatical understanding developed quickly in the upper grades as students' confidence in using and applying their language skills increased. Iowa Tests for Basic Skills (ITBS) indicated that students entered school at low proficiency levels. By Grade 12, most achieved standards in reading, vocabulary and writing which were above US national averages.

Attainment in mathematics was good in Kindergarten, and acceptable in elementary, lower and upper secondary. Progress was good across all grades. Students generally achieved in line with expected grade levels, but more capable students did not progress at a rate relative to their abilities and needs. Most students did not work on extended projects and solve real-life problems. Students progressed from a basic understanding of number in Kindergarten to where they were able to apply simple mathematical operations accurately in Grade 5. By Grade 8 most students used graphing calculators to plot simple quadratic equations. By Grade 12, Advanced Placement students efficiently applied basic principles of calculus. By the time students reach Grade 12 ITBS results were in line with expectations.

Attainment in science was acceptable in Kindergarten and lower secondary and good in elementary and the upper secondary grades. Progress was good across all grades. Kindergarten children knew the five senses. Most understood the links between them and could display a good capacity to using their emerging scientific skills. Most elementary students had a good understanding of fair testing and the basic laws of their physical environment. Their capacity to record findings and work as independent scientists was well developed. Lower secondary students demonstrated good practical skills when this was facilitated. However, their capacity to apply their understanding and construct hypotheses independently, as in Kindergarten, was underdeveloped. Upper secondary students attained above expectations in tests, could use their understanding in mature ways to solve complex Advanced Placement problems and demonstrated sound practical skills in the laboratory.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Attitudes and behaviour were outstanding. Students were friendly, self-assured and respectful. Relations among students and with staff were positive and constructive. Almost all students arrived punctually and were well-prepared for class. They demonstrated their excellent understanding of healthy living by eating wholesome lunches and by participating enthusiastically in school sports and activities. Students had made significant improvements to their attitudes toward attendance and punctuality.

Civic responsibility, understanding of Islam and appreciation of local culture were outstanding in all phases. Students were actively involved in Student and Cultural Councils. They were responsible for charitable deeds, visits to the Hospice and the elderly in Dubai and promoting greater knowledge and understanding of the heritage of the UAE. Students enhanced their understanding of Islamic and cultural principles at a practical level through involvement in the Model United Nations and international trips and experiences.

Economic and environmental understanding was outstanding. Students had an excellent understanding of the nature of Dubai, its progress and success as part of the UAE. Students could describe the potential contribution they could make as future citizens. They were eager participants in the ongoing environmental management of the school.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was good across the school. Teachers had good subject knowledge and most had a good understanding of how students learn. There was some inconsistency in implementing that understanding to meet the range of students' needs through appropriate levels of challenge. Lessons were planned effectively, were well-organised with established routines and positive interactions between students and teachers. In most lessons, there were examples of good dialogue and questioning techniques, but teachers did not always challenge students sufficiently or develop their critical thinking enough to promote independent learning.

Learning was good across all phases. The students were keen and eager learners who actively participated in lessons and school activities. Most students collaborated well in tasks, shared their ideas and contributed to classroom discussions. Students were starting to make connections between their learning in different parts of the curriculum. However, students did not regularly demonstrate an independent curiosity for learning through critical thinking to solve problems, meaningful extended work, the use of ICT and real-life application of knowledge and understanding.

Assessment was good. Most teachers were starting to use the outcomes from the assessments to identify what their students were learning against criteria set out in guidelines. The extensive data generated from the assessments had not yet been used consistently by all teachers to plan for the next steps in the students' learning. Students were increasingly involved in assessing their own work. In English, for example, there were opportunities to draft and redraft their work and identify areas for development. Teachers' feedback was usually good but did not always provide students with clear, relevant and appropriately challenging guidance on their next steps in learning.

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

The curriculum was good. Staff had adapted the Michigan State standards, by aligning them with the principles and structure of an "Understanding by Design" framework. The school was able to construct learning outcomes related to the local UAE context. The curriculum was broad,

balanced, and offered a wide variety of options for students at all grade levels. Elementary and lower secondary students had the opportunity to pursue topics of their choice during activity days that were held once a week. Upper secondary students could choose among a variety of subjects and Advanced Placement was an option for the more able students. A wide variety of engaging and high-quality extra-curricular activities was available, including various sporting activities and community involvement. The curriculum was further enriched through student-led aid and support programmes in other countries. Students were provided with the opportunity to participate in environmental and community awareness projects. The curriculum contained general and specific outcomes that were appropriately sequenced according to the grade levels of the students. The school was aware of the need to continue establishing cross-curricular links that included ICT, literacy, and numeracy outcomes. Alignment of assessment, curriculum, learner outcomes, and teaching strategies was inconsistently developed. Regular and effective curriculum review was in place; the above-mentioned issues were being addressed.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements for health and safety were outstanding. Drop-off and pick up of students were safe, orderly and well supervised. The school maintained a safe and secure environment; buildings were clean, well-maintained and fire drills regularly undertaken. The management and monitoring of students' medical welfare were outstanding. Teachers and support staff were visible and vigilant, ensuring students were very well supervised at all times. Students were trained in safe practices and risk assessments were conducted in all required areas. A healthy lifestyle team provided outstanding opportunities for students to adopt healthy lifestyles through a balanced diet, physical activities, as well as personal and social development. Teachers understood child protection procedures and adhered to these systematically.

The quality of support provided by the school was outstanding. Excellent relationships existed between teachers and students. The strong pastoral structure of the school ensured that all the well-being and academic needs of the students were being met. This included university guidance as well as support for their personal and emotional needs. Student progress was tracked carefully and students with special educational needs received outstanding care and guidance. Support for students learning English as an additional language was outstanding. The school's approach to supporting students' excellent behaviour was understood by all staff. The school had introduced highly successful strategies to improve attendance and punctuality.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Overall, leadership and management in the school were good with some outstanding features. The school was unified in its vision, committed to its ongoing improvement and clear in its action planning to achieve further gains in academic performance and personal development. Effective communication, highly distributed leadership responsibilities and an awareness of the

need to empower all teachers in their work were the cornerstones of this leadership model. The Principal led all colleagues with passion and focus to enable continuous improvement to take place. There was a developing awareness that independent, creative learning based on critical thinking skills was now the priority for the school. There was an outstanding capacity throughout the school's leadership structure to improve.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. Well-developed processes had been set up to ensure that the school gathered performance data on all aspects of the academy. Teaching was monitored carefully, improvements were systematically and individually implemented and all teachers endeavoured to learn from their professional development consistently. Detailed and comprehensive development plans had been drawn up. These included the views of a wide range of stakeholders, accreditation bodies and external contacts that the school had developed. The school knew itself well and had identified the next steps to ensure greater rigour in knowing the specific learning outcomes of each lesson.

Partnerships with the parents and the community were outstanding. Regular and informed communication strategies facilitated easy access for parents to know the progress of their daughters. Parents were very supportive of the school's efforts to raise standards and had considerable knowledge of the school's priorities and needs. There were good examples of parents helping teachers and students with their learning. There had been good engagement with the parents regarding the recommendations of the previous inspection, particularly regarding attendance and punctuality. The support for the school's links with the wider world had improved considerably. This had led to more opportunities for the extension of learning into the community.

Governance was good. Teachers and senior leaders were held to account by the school's owners. Significant support had been provided by the owners to ensure that focused professional development was available on an ongoing basis. An advisory board was in place which represented parents, teachers and staff and had external representation from other Taaleem schools. This board reported regularly to the Foundation Board of Taaleem. Parental awareness of this advisory board and the means to access it in order to represent concerns, ideas and future projects was underdeveloped.

Staffing, facilities and resources were outstanding. All staff were appropriately qualified and effectively deployed. The senior leadership ensured that regular review of roles and future personnel needs were identified early with successful approaches made to governors to enhance the staffing as needed. Facilities were well-maintained, met students' needs and enhanced the effective learning opportunities that were provided by good teaching. Students had easy access to these materials and when they had the opportunities to do so, they used them well. Library stock for Arabic and English reading was good.

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	Lower Secondary (Middle)	Upper Secondary (High)
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic? 68% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Lower Secondary (Middle)	Upper Secondary (High)
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Good
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Good
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Lower Secondary (Middle)	Upper Secondary (High)
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good	Outstanding

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

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Lower Secondary (Middle)	Upper Secondary (High)
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good	Good

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

Age group:	KG	Elementary	Lower Secondary (Middle)	Upper Secondary (High)
Attainment	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good	Good

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

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Lower Secondary (Middle)	Upper Secondary (High)
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Good	Good	Good

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Lower Secondary (Middle)	Upper Secondary (High)
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good	Good

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Lower Secondary (Middle)	Upper Secondary (High)
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of support	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
	Overall
Quality of leadership	Good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Outstanding
Governance	Good
Staffing, facilities and resources	Outstanding

How well does the school perform overall?
Good

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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