

International School of Arts and Sciences 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.

International School of Arts and Sciences 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 Warqaa, International School of Arts and Sciences is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to High, aged three to eighteen years. The school follows a US curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 531 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 parents said they were satisfied with the quality of education provided. Almost all parents agreed that the school was open and communicated effectively through the website, school mailings and face-to-face discussion. Almost all parents responded that they were satisfied with the range of extra-curricular activities on offer for the students. A minority of respondents felt that their children needed too much assistance with their homework. Almost all parents agreed that the school was safe and supportive. Interviews with parents confirmed the findings in the survey. Almost all indicated that their children enjoyed school and the learning opportunities available to them. Almost all parents reported satisfaction with the school's response to parental concerns.

How well does the school perform overall?

International School of Arts and Sciences provided an acceptable quality of education for students. The school had made a number of important improvements since the last inspection. The school leadership had responded effectively to the recommendations from the previous report. Self-evaluation and improvement planning had been addressed in response to the previous report and was now good.

Attainment in Islamic Education was acceptable across the school and the progress was good in the elementary and acceptable in the middle and high school. Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were good in elementary and acceptable in middle and high schools. Attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language were acceptable across all grade levels. Attainment and progress in English were good across all grades. Speaking, listening, reading and writing were all good across the school for most students. Students' attainment and progress in mathematics were good in Kindergarten and in Grades 6 to 12. In the elementary cycle, attainment and progress were acceptable. Kindergarten attainment and progress in science were good and in the rest of the school were acceptable. Students' attitudes and behaviour were good in the Kindergarten and acceptable in the other grades. Student staff relations were mostly positive and the majority of students respected school rules, their teachers and their peers. The quality for teaching for effective learning was good in the Kindergarten and acceptable in other grade levels. Across the school, most teachers had good subject knowledge and often used resources such the interactive white boards and supplementary worksheets to enhance their teaching. The curriculum was acceptable at the Kindergarten, elementary and middle school levels and good at the high school level. High School students were provided with a broad spectrum of electives. The quality of protection and support provided to students throughout the school was good. The school leadership was good, particularly in leading the teaching and learning process. Evaluation of student progress had been begun in a systematic manner and was good. Parent partnerships and governance were acceptable. Staffing, facilities and resources were good, although a high teacher turnover restricted the rate at which teaching could be improved.

Key features of the school

- The quality of curriculum co-ordination had improved;
- There are more unique and challenging course options at the high school level;
- Attainment in Islamic Education had improved;
- The senior leadership demonstrated a strong focus on school improvement;
- There was an embedded ethos of care and inclusive support for students;
- The quality of teaching and learning throughout the school was variable.

Recommendations

- Develop written policies and procedures in all phases of student academic and social growth;
- Use assessment data to improve teaching;
- Further develop assessments that align closely with the curriculum and more accurately reflect the attainment and progress of all students;
- Continue to improve teaching and learning by ensuring that teachers provide an appropriate range of tasks to meet the varying needs of students;
- Provide opportunities for students to receive an internationally recognised qualification at the time of their graduation from high school.

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

Attainment in Islamic Education was acceptable across the school and the progress was good in the elementary and acceptable in the middle and high schools. Most students had sufficient knowledge of Islam and were able to ask research questions. Students demonstrated understanding of the gap between Islamic manners and the reality of Muslims' behaviour. Almost all students in Grades 1 to 5 were progressing well. They performed prayer correctly. They memorised correctly one or more of the Prophet's Sayings and they knew the Pillars of Islam. In the middle and high schools most students knew their individual responsibilities in Islam. However, their recitation skills were weak.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were good in elementary and acceptable in middle and high school. In Grades 1 to 5 almost all students accomplished more than the curriculum requirements, demonstrating good skills in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and applying grammatical rules correctly. For example, in the lower grades students were able to identify letters of the Arabic alphabet, and read short sentences confidently. In the upper grades, they were able to read stories and poems with good intonation and accuracy in standard Arabic and produce a written summary of a short chapter of the story. Older students exhibited acceptable skills in reading for understanding. Most students used their acquired language skills and knowledge of grammar in meaningful contexts.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language were acceptable across the school. Students in the younger elementary grades were making good progress in developing their language skills, but this progress did not continue in the upper elementary, particularly in lack of progress in creative writing. Most middle and high school students' listening, speaking and oral reading comprehension skills were in line with expectations but writing was limited to answering direct comprehension questions.

Attainment and progress in English was good across all grades. Students were performing at or above expected levels in recent examinations. Kindergarten students could identify letters and recognise them in the context of sentences. By the beginning of Grade 4, students could

compare and contrast elements within a story. Students could write creatively by middle school. In Grade 7, students could write creative essays and Grade 12 students could recognise various genres of writing and compare authors' styles of writing. Speaking, listening, reading and writing were all good across the school for most students.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were good in Kindergarten and in Grades 6 to 12. In the elementary school, attainment and progress were acceptable. In Kindergarten, students recognised numbers and were able to write them in sequence. In Grades 1 to 5, students had developed proficiency in their knowledge of computation and most had made acceptable progress in the application of these skills and competencies to solve problems. In Grades 6 to 8, students had a good understanding of equivalent fractions. They could classify angles and solve linear equations. In Grades 9 to 12, students had developed a good knowledge of complex formulae. They used and applied higher order thinking skills to solve increasingly challenging problems.

Attainment and progress in science in Kindergarten was good and in the remainder of the school they were acceptable. Children in Kindergarten had established a strong basis for scientific understanding. Most could correctly identify parts of their bodies and were aware of their different senses. In the elementary school, younger students developed their abilities to classify different animals and knew the names and functions of parts of plants. Older students understood that living organisms were composed of cells. Middle school students were improving their practical skills using microscopes and Grade 9 students were developing their understanding of patterns of chemical bonding across the periodic table. High school students used their understanding of isotopic half-life in calculations and carry out practical work to extract DNA from strawberries.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good in the Kindergarten and acceptable in the other phases. Student staff relations were mostly positive and the majority of students respected school rules, their teachers and their peers. Kindergarten students readily lined up and followed their teachers' advice regarding safety rules. In a few lessons in the elementary and middle school phases, a minority of students disrupted learning particularly with teachers who lacked class management skills. Most students arrived to classes in good time but lateness in the morning often reduced the quality of teaching and the time available for learning in the first period.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and culture were good in Kindergarten and the high school and acceptable in the elementary and middle schools. Children in the Kindergarten were learning about the culture and traditions of the UAE while celebrating the diversity of the different nationalities. However, students in the elementary and middle schools had limited opportunities to assume roles of responsibility within the school. A minority of students did not sufficiently understand the multi-cultural nature of Dubai.

Students in the middle and high schools had a good understanding of how Dubai had developed. They knew about its growth and global significance in financial and economic issues. Students' understanding was acceptable in Kindergarten and elementary phases. Students were well informed about the context of Dubai's developing economy and saw themselves making a contribution to the future of Dubai through careers in medicine, journalism or business.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality for teaching for effective learning was good in the Kindergarten and acceptable in other grade levels. Kindergarten teachers set high expectations for their learners yet catered to individual needs and pace of growth. Across the school, most teachers had good subject knowledge and often used resources such as interactive whiteboards to enhance their teaching. Most teachers used questioning effectively to check students' understanding and, in the good lessons, on-going assessment of students' progress was an integral part of lesson planning. In the less successful lessons, teaching strategies were not closely matched to students' needs. Teachers did not plan with sufficient care to identify the key learning goals of each lesson. As a result, neither teachers nor students were sure what learning was intended in some lessons. In contrast, there was some consistently good and effective teaching, particularly in the upper high school.

Learning was good in the Kindergarten and acceptable in the rest of the school. Almost all children in the Kindergarten enjoyed their learning and collaborated well with their peers when involved together in activities. Across the rest of the school, the majority of students were keen to do well and, when given the opportunity, they worked responsibly and collaboratively. However, in a minority of lessons, learning was passive. Students were not expected to participate in learning other than answering a few questions, most of which did not encourage critical thinking. Work given to students was often repetition exercises and not suited to abilities and interests. In a few lessons in the elementary and middle schools, disengaged students caused disruptions to lessons. When teaching was effective and the pace of the lesson was brisk, students were engaged, responsible and keen to learn.

Assessment was acceptable throughout the school. There was a clear and shared school policy on assessment procedures and overall grade computation that was implemented in all departments. This ensured consistency. Assessment data was used by teachers and the administrative staff to monitor students' progress but the information from the data was not always used effectively to inform or alter teaching to improve learning. The quality of the feedback, whether comments in students' books or in report cards, did not detail strengths and weaknesses in knowledge, skills and understanding and did not always include effective suggestions for improvements and future learning targets.

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

The curriculum was acceptable at the Kindergarten, elementary and middle school levels and good at the high school level. High school students were provided with a broad spectrum of electives including courses in robotics, pre-medicine, pre-engineering, forensics and photography. Choices for students below the high school level were limited. The number of Islamic Education and Arabic lessons met Ministry of Education requirements. Students with special educational needs were enrolled at the school and modifications in the curriculum were made for these students on an individual basis. Parents of students with special educational needs were involved in the planning process, as were outside specialists. There was good integration of the curriculum between grade levels within the school. Timetables included topic and theme-based opportunities, as well as laboratory times, to enable the development of a variety of learning skills. Cross-curricular links occurred sporadically throughout the school. The entire curriculum for the school had been revised in the last year and this had resulted in a cohesive document that was standards-based and sequential. Curriculum review and modification was conducted annually on a departmental basis. Assessment data was used by some teachers to modify instruction for individual students. Some review of assessment data occurred on a departmental level and curriculum modification followed these reviews. There was a wide range of musical and sporting activities. Other co-curricular and extra-curricular activities were offered throughout the year, including a science fair, college visit and breast cancer awareness campaign.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The quality of protection provided to students was good throughout the school. The external and internal environments were monitored regularly throughout the day and the buildings were clean and well maintained. However, the surface of the soccer pitch presented serious hazard for injuries. A full-time doctor and nurse were available to support students. Accurate records were kept of student referrals and strong communication links with parents of students who visited the nurse's office were kept. An emergency evacuation plan was in place. School transportation for students was both safe and secure. There was adult monitoring of students on entry, while on a bus and on exit.

The quality of support provided to students throughout the school was good. Student relationships with teachers were generally positive. Two part-time guidance counsellors were available for senior students to obtain advice on career options. The school also invited a number of international universities to attend a careers day to provide further information to students. The school has a clear policy and good procedures for dealing with absent students. Overall, attendance was good, but the large number of persistently late students, particularly to the early morning classes, resulted in valuable learning time being lost.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The school leadership was good. Significant policies and improvements had recently been introduced but there had been insufficient time to see the full impact of the programmes. The senior leadership team demonstrated good capacity to implement change and was well respected by parents and students. Subject area coordinators and instructional leaders had good knowledge in their respective areas. Self-evaluation and improvement planning had been addressed in response to the previous inspection report and was now good. The school leadership had responded effectively to the recommendations from the previous report but written policies were not yet in place for all aspects of the schools' operations.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning was good. Evaluation of student progress had been started in a systematic manner. Use of a range of tests and examinations provided the school with data about students' performance in comparison with international standards. The international assessment instrument selected and collected on student achievement was a good beginning.

Partnerships with parents and the community were acceptable. Almost all parents reported that they were kept well informed of their student's progress through written correspondence, the website and regularly scheduled parent meetings. There were productive links with the larger school community and members were invited into the school to share skills and professions with the students. Parents reported good accessibility to school leadership and teaching staff. A minority of parents indicated they would like more extra-curricular activities for their students.

Governance was acceptable. The governance committee had a positive influence on the functioning of the school. The school developed a Board of Trustees that was scheduled to meet three times per year to review proposals from senior management and make recommendations to the governing board. Parents were represented on the new Board of Trustees scheduled to meet later in October.

Staffing, facilities and resources were good. Staff was appropriately qualified but the large number of new staff compromised the continual progress of the school. The school was attractive, clean and well cared for. The addition of a laboratory assistant in the science laboratories was effective in ensuring a safe and organised learning environment. The website software program was interactive and gave parents greater access to their children's grades and progress. Information and communications technology (ICT) resources were present in every room but the use of such resources was variable in lessons.

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	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
74% 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	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
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	Middle	High
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good	Good

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

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

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

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

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

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	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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