

Raffles International School West Campus Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Post -16

Report published May 2011

Contents

Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report.....	3
Basic information about the school	3
How well does the school perform overall?	4
Key features of the school	5
Recommendations.....	5
How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?.....	6
How good is the students' personal and social development?.....	7
How good are the teaching and learning?.....	8
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?.....	9
How well does the school protect and support students?.....	10
How good are the leadership and management of the school?	10
Summary of inspection judgements.....	13
Next steps	17
How to contact us.....	17

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.

Raffles International School West Campus was inspected in December 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 Umm Suqeim, Raffles International School West Campus is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to post-16, aged four to 18 years. The school follows a UK-based curriculum in the secondary phases with the Cambridge Lower Secondary Programme (CLSP) and IGCSE external examinations. From Kindergarten to Grade 5, students follow the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (PYP) and, at post-16, they follow the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme. Students in Grade 11 were the first cohort to sit IGCSE examinations and this group now constitutes the school's first cohort for IB Diploma. Whilst the school uses the terminology Kindergarten, junior and secondary to describe the phases, for the purposes of this report inspectors report on four phases which include Kindergarten, primary, secondary and post-16. The school has recently experienced a change of ownership and significant alterations to staffing. The current leadership team were mostly new in post and appointed from within the school. At the time of the inspection, there were 949 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was unsatisfactory although during the inspection this had improved to acceptable.

As part of the inspection process, Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires issued to parents. Most parents were positive about the school and felt that it had improved under the new leadership. Most parents were satisfied with their children's progress but a few were concerned about the progress in Arabic as an additional language. Similarly, most parents were satisfied with the quality of teaching. Parents were appreciative of the support their children received from individual teachers. Many parents felt that the leadership of the school was now more responsive and that there had been improvement in communication but the extent to which the school communicated effectively and involved parents in the life of the school was still a concern for many parents. Parents were positive about the recent formation of the parents committee. Parents were happy with the behaviour of the students although a very small minority commented on cases of bullying which were not resolved. The inspection team felt that whilst there may have been isolated incidents, bullying was not a problem at this school but that the policy for managing incidents should be more widely shared. Throughout the questionnaire responses a key theme was concern over arrangements at the start and the end of the day particularly with regard to the car park. Inspectors agreed that the school should do more to ensure the safety of students when arriving and leaving by private cars. Over half of the parents surveyed did not know how well the school had responded to the previous inspection or if the inspection had led to improvements.

How well does the school perform overall?

Raffles International School, West Campus, provided an acceptable quality of education. The school had responded positively to significant staffing and other changes and the new leaders had achieved some stability in a short period of time. However, the leaders lacked a strategic overview of the key areas; the curriculum, teaching, learning, attainment, and, the challenges presented by a disconnected curriculum and significant staff changes. Nevertheless, the school benefited from strong governance and the leaders had the capacity for improvement.

Attainment and progress in English were good across all phases of the school. Children in the Kindergarten achieved well across all key subjects and the small cohort of IGCSE students had achieved excellent results in English, mathematics and science in the school's first external examinations. In mathematics, attainment and progress were good at Kindergarten and post-16 but acceptable elsewhere. In Islamic Education, students in secondary showed good attainment whilst in primary this was acceptable. Progress and attainment in Arabic were both acceptable in primary and secondary and progress was good for Arabic first language learners in the secondary phase. Science attainment and progress were good in Kindergarten and primary and acceptable in secondary and Post-16. Students demonstrated good attitudes and behaviour and outstanding environmental awareness. Teaching, learning and assessment were acceptable across primary, secondary and post-16 overall. In Kindergarten these were good. Students with specific learning needs received effective additional help in their learning on a withdrawal basis but this help was less effective when they were in regular lessons. The school mostly ensured a safe environment for students but there were a few safety issues

which needed immediate attention. Overall, despite the lack of strategic overview, the school was managed at an acceptable level.

Key features of the school

- The school had experienced a time of significant change and the senior leaders had only recently been appointed to their current posts;
- The staff and leaders were committed to improvement but there was a lack of whole school cohesiveness, which impacted on progress;
- The primary years programme units of inquiry enabled high quality learning in English and science;
- The Singaporean mathematics programme was not delivered in the same manner as the rest of the primary years programme, which impeded progress;
- The small cohort of Grade 10 students achieved outstanding IGCSE results in English, mathematics and science;
- High quality environmental education was a positive feature of the curriculum especially at primary years programme;
- The lack of a clear improvement plan based on reliable data contributed to the overall lack of strategic vision for the school.

Recommendations

- Raise attainment to international standards across all subjects and phases;
- Ensure consistently good teaching and learning across all subjects and phases;
- Develop consistent assessment procedures, which show students clearly their strengths and weaknesses and how to improve, and include this information in reports to parents;
- Carry out a complete review of the curriculum from Kindergarten to Grade 12 to ensure cohesion, progression and continuity, especially at transition points;
- Implement systematic and focused monitoring of teaching and learning to ensure consistency of approach, identify professional development needs and ensure effective performance management;
- Involve all staff in the development of a strategic plan to ensure improvement against measurable criteria for success.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable in primary and good in secondary. Most students in primary could recite short Surahs from The Holy Qur'an with a few errors in pronunciation and they were able to quote the Hadeeth related to the importance of prayer. The Arabic speaking students in Grade 4 could apply Islamic values to their daily lives. In the secondary grades, most students continued to develop a more detailed knowledge of the Islamic principles and of the meaning of the verses of The Holy Qur'an and the Hadeeths. The majority of Arabic-speaking students in Grade 8 could memorise and recite The Holy Qur'an with acceptable pronunciation. However, there was limited use of recitation rules, which affected their accuracy. Students effectively developed their understanding of the manners expected of a good Muslim and their duties towards other people.

Attainment in Arabic as a first language was acceptable across the school. Progress was good in the secondary school and acceptable in the primary school. Grade 3 students developed good understanding of poetry through singing. Most Grade 4 students identified different types of sentences using their understanding of parts of speech. Students in Grade 8 understood the main ideas in a text and summarised in their own words but made frequent mistakes while reading aloud. Students developed good speaking skills through International Baccalaureate units of work relevant to their lives which led to good progress in this phase. Grade 11 students displayed advanced language skills in leading presentations to discuss marriage traditions in the Middle East. Independent reading and extended writing were under-developed in most grades.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language were acceptable in the primary and secondary phases. Students listened well and understood a few spoken words and simple sentences; they responded from memory using single word answers. In the lower grades, students learnt an acceptable range of vocabulary. In Grades 4 and 5 the majority of students were not able to use the words they had learnt in meaningful contexts, neither in writing nor in speaking. As for their reading skills, most students could read fluently and with few difficulties in pronunciation but they did not always understand the meaning fully. In Grade 8 most students could write a short text using expressions and language they had already learnt. As for writing, students made acceptable progress with writing skills.

Attainment and progress in English were good across the school. Whilst progress in all aspects of English was slow in Kindergarten due to high numbers of second language learners, this accelerated in Kindergarten 2 and by the end of this stage, most children made good gains in all aspects of language. Through effective listening, children developed good communication skills and their understanding of sounds supported early reading and writing skills. The majority of primary students often used sophisticated vocabulary. Grade 1 students, undertaking a study of sustainable fishing were able, for instance, to explain words like transparent, opaque and translucent. Students in Grade 5 wrote well in a range of styles and read fluently in most cases. In Grade 9, second language learners understood the complex imagery used in a Gulf War poem and communicated their ideas very well, verbally and in

writing. The small first cohort of Grade 10 students achieved well above international standards in IGCSE. Students in Grade 11 were able to select the appropriate style and structure for formal academic presentations and presented their material confidently.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were good in Kindergarten and post-16 phases, while they were acceptable in primary and secondary. Kindergarten children developed a wide range of mathematical skills such as number and shape recognition and working with basic operations. Primary school students were confident in explaining two and three-dimensional shapes although they worked with very limited strategies when solving problems. However, they developed acceptable knowledge and skills working with measurements and operations. Grade 6 students developed good understanding of angles and properties of triangles. Most students in Grades 10 and 11 were confident in working with algebraic equations and expressions. They were able to explain inverse functions accurately. Most students in the secondary phase found linking mathematics to real life applications, challenging.

Students' attainment and progress in science were good in the Kindergarten and primary phase and acceptable in secondary and the post-16 phase. Kindergarten children explored a range of scientific issues and were able to classify animals according to habitat and explain what plants needed to grow. They were developing good early inquiry skills through 'I Wonder' questions. Primary students developed scientific knowledge and skills such as classification, investigation and simple analysis. They were able to make sensible predictions and carry out investigations carefully, recognising the need for fair testing. They used key vocabulary accurately to describe their findings and explain real-life issues. In the secondary and post-16 phases, students had appropriate scientific knowledge and understood vocabulary but their investigation skills were less well developed. They were not always able to make connections between science and life. Students attained above expected international standards in IGCSE.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

The behaviour and attitudes of the students were good. Students behaved well in lessons and around the school and enjoyed good relationships with each other and with adults in the school. Students responded positively to teachers and exercised self-control when learning independently, showing positive attitudes to learning in most cases. They were confident and communicated well with visitors and were keen to share what they were learning. Almost all students cared for each other and showed respect to all members of the learning community. Students showed responsibility in school; the secondary student council met regularly to discuss issues and plan events. Attendance was unsatisfactory but improving. A few students regularly arrived late for school.

The students' civic understanding was good throughout school. Students took responsibility in many ways and had recently been involved in setting the vision for the school. Their respect for and understanding of Islam was mostly good, as exemplified during lessons and in their daily behaviour. A few students had a limited understanding of the impact of Islam on the daily life of Muslims. Most students had a strong understanding of the history, culture and

traditions of Dubai and the United Arab Emirates and many showed a good knowledge of the cultures of expatriates living in Dubai.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was outstanding. Students were aware of the economic challenges facing Dubai. They understood the significant changes in Dubai over time and could compare Dubai with other places. A great deal of environmental action was taken by students throughout the Emirates such as a campaign to preserve the endangered Ghaf tree by planting seedlings in safe areas to increase numbers of this species. Students linked their environmental knowledge and understanding to economics by considering how resources may be conserved and how alternative energy sources made good financial sense. The impact of this excellent understanding and action had resulted in a significant reduction in water consumption in the school and the raising of considerable funds to support sustainability projects. This outstanding awareness of environmental issues was manifested in the high levels of dialogue around the students' presentations of their environment projects to parents.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching was good in the Kindergarten and acceptable in the primary, secondary and post-16 phases. There was a wide variety in the quality of teaching across the school and across subjects. There was also variability in the extent to which teachers understood how students learn. Good teaching was seen in English and science lessons and in a number of other subjects. Most teachers demonstrated good subject knowledge. However, there was a limited range of teaching strategies and low-challenge in particular subjects, especially in mathematics. In the Kindergarten, teachers knew students well, personalised their teaching, encouraged independence and used hands-on, real-world activities to ensure children made good progress. Teaching was designed to meet the needs of learners. In the primary, secondary and post-16 phases, a few lessons closely followed curriculum content and therefore did not meet learner needs. Teaching in these lessons was textbook driven and teacher-controlled with low challenge and little evidence of planning for a range of abilities. There were a few examples of high quality, stimulating teaching in secondary English and science, and in lessons in the primary phase.

Learning in Kindergarten was good and it was acceptable in the primary, secondary and post-16 phases. Students in Kindergarten were independent, active learners who were involved in their own learning. In a few primary lessons, students had opportunities to collaborate and explore real-world issues and develop their own and group responses to these issues. In other lessons in primary, secondary and post-16, learning was often text-book driven, with low-level learning goals and minimal challenge. The International Baccalaureate Diploma in the post-16 phase provided students with greater challenge and the opportunity to develop independence and inquiry in their learning, but learning at this level was still over-directed by many teachers; some activities did not stimulate or challenge learners. A wider use of resources was needed in many lessons. Information and communications technology (ICT) was rarely used by students to support or develop their learning. Little or no differentiation was used effectively to support all learners' needs.

Assessment was good in Kindergarten and acceptable in the primary, secondary and post-16 phases. Assessment was continuous in early years, which allowed for regular information to be collected on attainment and progress, which in turn, informed planning. In the primary, secondary and post-16 phases, students were assessed through quizzes, homework, unit work, and mid and end-of-year examinations. However, the data was rarely used to improve teaching and learning and was only sometimes used to give improvement advice to students. Marking of written work mostly only gave an acknowledgement of student effort. In a few, but not all, subjects there was effective record keeping related to students' progress and changes in attainment from year to year. However, this was not consistently the case in all subject areas. Data was not interpreted and analysed effectively to inform teaching practice, to meet all learners' needs and to plan curriculum changes.

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

The quality of the curriculum was good in Kindergarten, primary and post-16 and acceptable in secondary. The curriculum was based on a clear rationale and values but was not always consistent in meeting the school's aims. Within the four phases of the curriculum there were key strengths. For example, the primary years programme provided choice through a wide range of student-centred inquiry based learning activities from Kindergarten to Grade 5. Young children developed independence in their learning through carefully planned structured play sessions in Kindergarten. Where the curriculum enabled students to work collaboratively on projects they made very good progress. However, this was not the case in all subjects or in all phases. In science, primary students combined all areas of learning across a range of subjects to explore real-life problems such as sustainability. The cross-curricular links in the primary years programme were a key strength which enabled students to make excellent connections in their learning and relate topics to real-life situations. Further links were made between art and social studies, science and PE, geography and physics, all of which enabled students to improve their learning and progress. In primary, mathematics was outside of the International Baccalaureate framework and was delivered in a narrow, textbook driven manner. This inhibited progress for students as it lacked challenge and did not allow them to apply knowledge to unfamiliar situations or link understanding to the real world. In secondary, the curriculum lacked breadth and was more content driven which meant that it also lacked challenge and did not always motivate students well. Older students enjoyed a range of subjects offered through the International Baccalaureate Diploma programme. There was an overall lack of coherence in terms of continuity, progression and methodology from one curriculum to the next. This meant that students were not always well prepared for the next stage of education. A good example of this was in mathematics, where Kindergarten students were attaining higher levels than those in Grade 1. The change in methodology from the primary years programme to secondary curriculum meant that a few students became demotivated and made less rapid progress. Subject leaders carried out regular reviews of the curriculum but these reviews did not always lead to change. The curriculum was enriched by

visits, visitors, charitable and environmental events and projects, which were often led by students. The CAS programme, although in its early stages, provided older students opportunities to learn within the local community.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements for health and safety were good. The school building was well maintained and clean. Recent upgrades had improved the quality of the facilities around the school such as the outdoor sports surface. Although the swimming pool was well maintained, there were no safety rules displayed or rescue devices within easy reach. The staff ensured effective bus monitoring; students boarded the buses safely under close supervision. The school doctor and the nurse worked with the students to promote and monitor a healthy lifestyle through regular checks and provision of healthy options in the canteen. However, the uncontrolled access of parents and visitors to the school building presented a potential safety risk to students. Laboratory and cleaning chemicals were left unsecured in the teaching areas and around the school, which presented a safety hazard. The school followed a reactive approach to child protection; there was insufficient training for teachers and a lack of awareness of how to ensure children were kept safe.

The quality of support was acceptable. Positive relationships were evident between staff and students across the school; they were enhanced by social activities such as camping and open days. The improvements in tracking systems within the departments provided a good range of data but these were not used well to improve teaching and meet the various needs of students during lessons. The school provided sufficient advice to older students on careers and future studies. Behaviour management was not consistent across the school; rules and expectations were applied inconsistently. Although withdrawal support for students with special educational needs students was effective, limited support was provided for the least and most able students within lessons. Improvements had been made in the management of attendance and punctuality and, as a result, attendance was improving. Nevertheless, this was still unsatisfactory in some sections of the school.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was acceptable. The recently appointed senior leadership team had dealt positively with the significant changes experienced by the school. Nevertheless, whilst there was a strong commitment to raising standards, the senior leaders lacked the essential overview through a detailed strategic plan and clear criteria for success. The roles and responsibilities of subject leaders were well defined and a few provided strong leadership of their subject areas but there was not enough communication between phases and across subjects. Consequently, there was often an inconsistent approach to improvement. The respective heads of the primary and secondary phases, together with the International Baccalaureate co-ordinator, had ensured a greater emphasis on enquiry based learning through the PYP and in specific subjects in secondary. This had begun to have an impact on student

progress, especially in English and science. Leaders demonstrated the capacity to make the required improvements.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable with a few priorities based on some analysis of performance. This was particularly successful in the support provided for second language learners of English following the analysis of a detailed language survey. Most subject leaders monitored teaching and learning regularly but the results of monitoring did not always lead to focused professional development across all phases and subjects. This meant that improvements were often not school wide. Whilst there were subject action plans, the school lacked a coherent improvement plan, which detailed clear objectives for improvement and measurable success criteria. Recent efforts to involve parents more in school self-evaluation through a parent survey had provided valuable data. The lack of reliable attainment data related to international benchmarks meant that leaders and teachers did not always know the school's strengths and weaknesses and therefore failed to target improvement programmes effectively. The school had made some progress towards most of the recommendations from the previous inspection.

Partnerships with parents and the community were acceptable overall with notable progress since the last inspection. The leadership had tried very hard to improve communication using a range of tools such as SMS, website development by individual teachers, e-mail system for communication and a range of curriculum workshops. These had all contributed to parents feeling more informed about the children's learning. Three-way consultations in PYP had enhanced parents' understanding of how students learn in the IB programme. Nevertheless, many parents still felt that communication needed further improvement. The school reported on student progress regularly via written reports and three-way conferences. However, annual reports lacked specific targets for improvement and parents found it difficult to evaluate their child's progress in relation to international standards. Productive links with the local community were achieved through a range of charitable events and environmental initiatives.

Governance of the school was good. The Board had defined roles and responsibilities well and provided a strategic overview whilst ensuring the autonomy of the principal in the day-to-day management of the school. The Board had provided mentorship and advice to the principal and met regularly with senior leaders to ensure accountability. They understood the school's challenges well and were very supportive and well informed about education. The newly established Advisory Council was representative of the school community and committed to school improvement. The links between the Board and this group were clear and the first meeting had resulted in the development of terms of reference although it was too early for this group to have had a central role in school improvement. Regular Board meetings provided the mechanism for Board members to give support and guidance as well as holding the school leadership to account for standards.

Staffing, facilities and resources were good overall. Following a period of significant change in staffing, recruitment and retention of high quality teachers had been a challenge. However, the school now had sufficient staff with suitable qualifications. There were a few difficulties in providing quality supply cover for absent teachers. Teachers did not always have the expertise required to teach the high numbers of second language learners effectively. A recent effort to improve facilities and resources had led to improvements in specialist teaching rooms, refurbishment of the sports playing surface and much needed laptops for student use. However, resources were sometimes under-used and students rarely had access to ICT to enhance their learning. The school building was accessible, bright, clean and well maintained and spaces were used well to support and develop learning. The hall area in the primary school and activity areas in Kindergarten were utilised very well to develop enquiry-based learning.

Summary of inspection judgements

In their evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the school, the inspection team made judgements about the following aspects of the school's performance.

Four descriptors are: Outstanding; Good; Acceptable; Unsatisfactory.

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education?

Age group:	Kindergarten	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Not Applicable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Not Applicable

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

15% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.

Age group:	Kindergarten	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Not Applicable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Progress over time	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Good	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Good	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Acceptable	Good

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Health and safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
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	Good
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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