

The English College - Dubai Inspection Report

Foundation Stage 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.

The English College, Dubai 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 Umm Suqueim, The English College, Dubai is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Foundations Stage to Year 13 aged three to 18 years. The school follows the English National Curriculum and students completed GCSE and Advanced level examinations as part of their studies. The principal of the primary school was recently appointed to the school. At the time of the inspection he had been in post for six weeks. At the time of the inspection there were 977 students on roll. Attendance was acceptable.

As part of the inspection process, Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires issued to a sample of parents. Parents were very positive with a majority expressing satisfaction with almost all aspects of the school. Most parents were satisfied with the quality of teaching but a few had concerns regarding the teaching of Arabic. Parents were extremely appreciative of the support their children received for special educational needs through the Enhanced Studies Team which they believed enabled their children to achieve their true potential. Many parents applauded the leadership of the school and felt comfortable raising issues or concerns with staff. They commented positively on the open nature of the school and the fact that they could see staff without lengthy appointment systems. Parents were happy with the behaviour of the students although a small minority commented on cases of bullying. The inspection team believed that whilst there may have been isolated incidents, bullying was not a problem at this school. Throughout the questionnaire responses a key theme was concern over facilities. Parents and students interviewed agreed that sports facilities and those for information and communications technology (ICT) were in need of

upgrading. Overall, parents were very supportive of the school but felt that they would be able to contribute more effectively to the life of the school and their children's learning, if they had access to a formal mechanism such as a parents' committee.

How well does the school perform overall?

The English College provided a good quality of education with a number of significant strengths. The school had responded well to the recommendations from the last inspection report. It was now compliant with requirements regarding the time allocated to Arabic within the curriculum. The school leaders now provided regular and more detailed information to the school advisory board. The school demonstrated a strong capacity for further improvement.

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education was acceptable in primary and unsatisfactory in secondary and post-16. In Arabic as a first language, attainment and progress was unsatisfactory at primary level and acceptable at the secondary stage. Attainment in Arabic as an additional language was unsatisfactory in primary and secondary. While progress was acceptable in primary it was unsatisfactory in secondary. In English, attainment and progress was outstanding in Foundation Stage, secondary and post-16 and good in primary. In mathematics and science attainment and progress was outstanding in Foundation Stage and good in primary. In secondary, attainment and progress in mathematics was outstanding and good at post-16 level. Students' attainment and progress was good in science at secondary level and acceptable at post-16. Students demonstrated excellent attitudes and behaviour and economic and environmental understanding while their Islamic, civic and cultural understanding was good. Teaching and learning was outstanding in Foundation Stage and good throughout the other stages. The curriculum was outstanding in Foundation Stage, good at primary and secondary and outstanding at post-16. Health and safety were good overall and support for students was outstanding. The leadership and management, self-evaluation and improvement planning and the partnerships with parents and the community were all good. Governance, staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable.

Key features of the school

- The outstanding attitudes and behaviour of students across all phases of the school;
- The high quality of support for students provided by the Enhanced Studies Department;
- High quality provision in the Foundation Stage;
- The students' success in examinations at GCSE in English and mathematics;
- The significant weaknesses in students' attainment in Islamic Education and in Arabic;
- The productive partnership between the two school principals.

Recommendations

- Develop a single mission statement for the college which will facilitate continued partnership between primary and secondary schools;
- Raise attainment in Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Improve the ICT facilities in the college so that students of all ages have more regular opportunities to enhance their learning through the use of ICT across the curriculum;
- Extend parental involvement into formal structures which enable regular, informed feedback from parents into decision-making in the college;
- Continue to improve the governance of the college and ensure that school leaders are held accountable for the quality of education provided at the college;
- Improve the facilities and resources especially in relation to the science laboratories, the toilet facilities, sports and PE equipment.

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

In the primary school, attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable, whilst in the secondary and post-16 phases, attainment and progress were unsatisfactory. Younger primary students could identify the chapter in the Qur'an which refers to the oneness of Allah. They also could list the attributes of Allah as the Creator. Students in lower primary classes made better progress than those in the upper primary phase. Although students' general understanding of Islam was acceptable, the main required skills of this subject were well below expectations. Students in Year 9, 11 and 12 demonstrated very poor recitation skills and their understanding of the Qur'an was very limited. Student knowledge and understanding of Islam were characterised by significant weaknesses.

In Arabic as a first language in the primary phase, attainment and progress were unsatisfactory while at secondary, they were acceptable. Primary students' speaking and listening skills were below expectations and their reading and writing skills were significantly below expectations. In Year 2, students could write single letters and connect the letters with long vowels. They could read few simple illustrated words. Secondary students displayed speaking and reading skills which were broadly in line with expectations and made acceptable progress in these aspects. However, their writing skills were weak and were often limited to short basic sentences.

In Arabic as an additional language at the primary stage, attainment was unsatisfactory but progress was acceptable. In secondary, attainment and progress were unsatisfactory. By Year 3, most students listened carefully and could repeat simple familiar words, and a few could say basic words independently. They also could copy words correctly. In Year 7, most students could read very simple words. A small minority could connect letters to form words. By Year 8,

most could answer simple familiar questions from memory and could write a two-word simple sentence.

Attainment and progress in English were outstanding in Foundation Stage, secondary and post-16 and good in primary. Students in Foundation Stage made an excellent start to speaking, listening, reading and early writing skills. They could articulate their needs, listen to instructions and use marks to communicate. Phonic skills were well-developed throughout Key Stage 1 which enabled students to develop effective spelling strategies. Students in Year 6 exceeded international reading standards and attained in line with international standards for writing. In secondary, progress in all aspects of English was rapid and led to high attainment at GCSE, AS and A-level. Older students were extremely mature and sophisticated in their oracy and writing. They formulated arguments well, annotated and critiqued texts effectively and understood a range of complex literary devices, such as fore-shadowing.

In mathematics, at Foundation Stage and secondary, attainment and progress were outstanding, while in primary and post-16, they were good. Children in Foundation Stage counted, made patterns, identified shapes and carried out mathematical enquiry at levels above international standards. Primary, students used numbers confidently, calculated accurately and understood key mathematical concepts such as multiples. Older primary students solved problems well but this was less well-developed in lower primary classes. Secondary students competently calculated, drew and interpreted graphs, and handled data and achieved high standards at GCSE. Students in Year 13 knew algebraic fraction functions and accurately sketched graphs using combinations of transformation.

In Foundation Stage, attainment and progress in science were outstanding, good in primary and secondary and acceptable in post-16. Through their play activities, Foundation Stage children were able to identify and distinguish between manmade and natural objects. Students in Year 1 carried out investigations using their senses. Older students knew the purpose of predictions and fair tests in a scientific environment. GCSE results were above the international averages. Year 10 students proved highly competent when investigating the properties of halogens. Year 11 students understood the need for consistency when applying Newton's Law. Attainment and progress at post-16 were acceptable. Results in this stage were broadly in line with international averages. Students in physics were able to apply scientific laws. Biology students worked competently on aspects of forensic science. Year 12 chemistry students could apply appropriate tests to determine acid concentrations.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Attitudes and behaviour were outstanding. Students were confident, self-disciplined, respectful and caring. They had an inclusive approach to their peers and a genuine concern for each other and for their teachers. Students showed a strong commitment to leading healthy lifestyles and were proud of the impact they were beginning to have on food choices in the canteen. Relationships throughout the school were very positive and central to the development of a safe and supportive ethos. Whilst attendance was notably lower in the post-16 phase, students rarely turned up late to school or to lessons.

In the Foundation Stage and primary and secondary phases, students' civic understanding was good and in post-16, it was outstanding. Almost all students demonstrated high levels of maturity and responsibility. They showed pride in achieving change through student initiatives such as improving food in the canteen and their uniform and upgrading ICT facilities. All students enjoyed living in a multi-cultural society of Dubai and were inclusive in their attitudes to others. They understood the importance of Islam to Dubai and its impact on the world. However, primary students currently did not benefit from a School Council and therefore did not feel they had a strong voice within the school. The school already had plans to rectify this.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was outstanding in all phases. Older students demonstrated advanced knowledge and understanding of Dubai's economic context and the effects of global recession. They had clear and feasible ideas about how Dubai might ensure the development of the tourist industry. Younger students understood the value of money and how it had changed in recent years. Students showed an excellent understanding of environmental sustainability and had worked hard to ensure recycling was embedded in school life.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching in the Foundation Stage was outstanding and in all other phases it was good. Most teaching was characterised by strong subject knowledge and an understanding of how students learn. This was particularly apparent in Foundation Stage where activities were designed skilfully to meet the needs of very young learners and promote independence. Most teachers used high level questioning that challenged students and supported inquiry, reflection and critical thinking. However, in a few lessons, especially those in Islamic Education and Arabic, teachers did not always encourage students to engage in their learning or gain independence. Lessons were well-planned to meet the needs of students including those with special educational needs. Teachers provided good pace to learning in most cases. Most teachers were creative in their use of resources, including interactive white boards but students did not use ICT enough to support their learning. Positive teacher-student relationships and effective questioning developed learning well in many lessons.

The quality of students' learning was outstanding in Foundation Stage and good in primary, secondary and post-16. Students collaborated well, challenging and supporting each other. Mostly, students made good connections to the real world, for example in a lesson related to severe weather conditions where they cited excellent examples from Dubai. Connections were less well-developed and opportunities for collaboration were lacking in a few lessons. Enquiry and research skills were a developing feature of learning throughout the school. In A-level English lessons, critical thinking was a key strength and led to high quality understanding of challenging texts. This feature was less evident in other subjects.

Assessment was good throughout the school and had improved since the last inspection. Teachers used assessment strategies well in lessons to evaluate learning and suggest ways in which students might improve. Leaders had worked hard to create a whole school approach to assessment and record-keeping with some success. Nevertheless, in the Foundation Stage,

assessment scales needed to be linked to internationally recognised standards and moderation of teacher assessment needed to be more rigorous in primary. A key strength of secondary and post-16 was the use of assessment criteria to enable students to know exactly how to achieve their targets. In primary, feedback to students lacked consistency although, on occasion, it was outstanding. Despite a thorough marking and feedback policy, written feedback to primary students was inconsistent and merely congratulatory rather than providing next-step guidance on how to improve.

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

At the Foundation Stage and the post-16 phase, the curriculum was outstanding and in the primary and secondary phases it was good. The curriculum had a clear rationale and was broad and well balanced, emphasising high academic standards and providing strong support for all students. In Foundation Stage the range of activities provided excellent choice and diversity and promoted independence well. The curriculum was modified well to meet the needs of those students who had been identified as requiring support or further challenge by the Enhanced Studies Team. For example, GCSE students were able to opt out of one options group in order to pursue Directed Studies which offered a more personalised approach designed to better meet their learning needs. Further choice had been made available through the introduction of a Leisure and Tourism option for older students. The curriculum emphasised depth of understanding and application of knowledge through inquiry and problem-solving, higher order thinking skills and authentic learning opportunities both in and out of school. However, the Arabic curriculum required urgent review and updating to ensure it met the needs of all students. Subject teams carried out regular, systematic reviews of the curriculum, taking account of assessment data to bring about change which would impact on learning. Although cross-curricular links were well-developed in some subjects these could be developed more fully across all subjects. The students were very positive about the extra-curricular activities on offer and these enabled students to participate in both academic and sports activities both locally and internationally. The wide range of local and residential visits enhanced students' learning and opportunities for older students to participate in work experience prepared them more fully for life beyond school.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The quality of health and safety of students was good across all phases. The school premises, equipment and resources were of a good standard as a result of the regular checks and maintenance. Findings from weekly inspections were logged and the appropriate actions taken. Risk assessments were a regular feature of the school, routinely undertaken for planned activities. Fire drills were carried out and recorded with the most recent one being on the day prior to the inspection. Medical staff carried out their duties effectively. They had well-developed systems for administering medicines and for alerting staff and parents to any incidents or accidents. The school nurses were active in the encouragement of healthy

lifestyles. The secondary school student council played a major role in monitoring the menus available to students to ensure healthier food options. The designated child protection officer had ensured that staff and students knew and understood the school procedures.

There was outstanding support and guidance for the students in all phases. Relationships throughout the whole school were excellent as both staff and students valued their respective roles in the school community. Students received high quality advice and guidance from staff on how they had performed and what progress had been made. There was a tutor with specific responsibility for advising on courses and career options. Effective arrangements were in place to advise students on higher education choices. Tracking of students' academic progress was highly effective and ensured early identification of vulnerable students. The early identification of, and specialist support for students with special educational needs was outstanding across the school. The highly qualified and dedicated Enhanced Studies Team provided high quality information on students to teachers to enable them to meet their learning needs, as well as providing direct support to all students experiencing learning difficulties.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was good. The school had an effective management structure with clear roles and responsibilities. A number of recently appointed staff provided strong leadership. The new principal in the primary school had only been in post for six weeks at the time of the inspection. He had accurately identified strengths in the school and appropriate priorities for the future. The secondary principal had overseen important improvements in the secondary school, providing a clear sense of direction, clearly focused on raising standards. School leaders were empowered to deliver and develop school plans through the work of their teams and were accountable to the two principals through line management procedures and regular meetings. Consequently, their leadership had an effective impact upon school life and they demonstrated the capacity to devise practical strategies to secure further improvement.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. An appropriate range of information was gathered to review performance. Lesson observation and performance management were established and the views of parents, staff and students had been sought. The resulting three-year development plan with designated responsibilities and completion dates was fit for purpose. There was a need, however, in both evaluation and planning, to break down the desired improvements into smaller and more manageable steps and identify specific success criteria to check progress.

The school had strong parental support for its work; almost all parents felt well informed and able to approach the school because of its open door policy. They were regularly updated about their child's progress through both interim and annual reports, meetings with teachers and effective communication channels. Parents expressed a keen interest in providing greater support to the school through a formal organisation. The school had established a number of

useful links with the community and these enhanced the curriculum provided across primary and secondary phases.

Governance of the school was acceptable. The advisory group met regularly and more recently had begun to review key school information including the development plan and attainment data. Members of the advisory board also visited the school to support special events and celebrations. Despite these improvements, governance was not sufficiently rigorous as no other stakeholder group was involved in school decision-making.

Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable. Almost all staff members were well qualified with a good knowledge of the curriculum they were required to deliver. The facilities required improvement and enhancement in a number of key areas. The science laboratories, the toilet facilities, sports and PE equipment in particular, needed improvement. The accommodation was in poor condition, most notably in the secondary school. The primary school accommodation was good but lacked a few amenities, such as a cover for the swimming pool.

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:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

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

2% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Health and safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
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	Good
Governance	Acceptable
Staffing, facilities and resources	Acceptable

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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