

The Westminster School Inspection Report

Foundation Stage 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	4
Recommendations.....	5
How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?.....	5
How good is the students' personal and social development?.....	6
How good are the teaching and learning?.....	7
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?.....	8
How well does the school protect and support students?.....	8
How good are the leadership and management of the school?	9
Summary of inspection judgements.....	11
Next steps	15
How to contact us.....	15

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 Westminster School 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 Qusais, The Westminster School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Foundation Stage to post-16, aged three to 18 years. The school follows a UK curriculum and students completed IGCSE and Advanced level examinations as part of their studies. At the time of the inspection, there were 5115 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed parents' responses to an on-line questionnaire. Almost all said they were happy with the school and most felt that progress in Islamic Education and Arabic was satisfactory or better. They said that their children enjoyed their lessons and made good progress particularly in English, mathematics and science. Almost all parents said that teaching was good and most were happy with the range of activities and the resources on offer. Almost all felt that their children were safe and fairly treated at school and most agreed that students were well behaved and that the school dealt well with any incidents of bullying. The majority of parents were pleased with the way the school guided students' educational choices and helped them choose a healthy lifestyle. Most parents agreed that the school's partnership with them was effective and were satisfied with the information they received from the school. However, a minority felt the school could involve them more. Almost all felt that the school was well led.

How well does the school perform overall?

The Westminster School provided an acceptable quality of education. The school responded well to the recommendations of the previous report. Work on these recommendations was on-going. Work on developing the middle tier of leadership was underway, but this remained a continuing priority. Leadership qualities and strategies were not yet sufficiently embedded below the senior management level. However, given the high quality of leadership overall, the school had a good capacity to improve further.

Attainment and progress varied across the four phases of the school. In Islamic Education and Arabic both as a first and an additional language, students' attainment and progress were acceptable. In English, attainment was acceptable in Foundation Stage, good in primary and outstanding in secondary and post-16. Attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable in Foundation Stage and primary, good in secondary and outstanding in post-16. Science attainment and progress was acceptable in Foundation Stage and primary and good in secondary and post-16. Students' personal development was the strongest aspect of the school's work across all four phases. Attitudes were outstanding across the school. Islamic, civic and cultural understanding was acceptable in Foundation Stage, good in primary and secondary and outstanding in post-16. Teaching for effective learning was acceptable in Foundation Stage, primary and secondary and good in post-16. Assessment was acceptable across the school except in post-16 where it was good. The curriculum was acceptable and still developing with new elements such as travel and tourism. Protection and support for students were acceptable in all phases. The school had improved the health and safety of students with attention to previous shortcomings and a strong focus on healthy living. Leadership and management, self-evaluation and improvement planning and partnerships with parents and the community were good. Governance was unsatisfactory and staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable.

Key features of the school

- The outstanding maturity and confidence of older students, particularly those in the sixth form and the excellent attitude to school life shown by most students;
- The commitment by the Principal and senior staff, to driving the school forward through creative and determined leadership;
- The culture of celebrating students' achievement in building strong leadership qualities around the school;
- The variable quality of the teaching particularly in the early stages of the school;
- The increasing range and quality of the extra-curricular activity available;
- Success in international examinations for secondary and post-16 students.

Recommendations

- Build the capacity of the extended management team to improve the quality of the teaching in their areas of responsibility;
- Continue to develop and support the drive towards a wider range of learning opportunities;
- Continue to improve the way the school identifies and supports those students with specific learning needs;
- Explore ways in which the school might more easily access, and utilise parents' views and ideas.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable throughout the school. Most students in primary recited, memorised and applied the rules of Qur'an recitation at a level appropriate to their age. The majority of the students could explain the meaning and the contexts for the hadeeths. In secondary, most students understood and applied Islamic manners but only a minority understood the difference between the sources of Islamic legislation. By the end of secondary, most students understood and supported the argument for the oneness of God. They could explain how submitting to Allah brings peace to the Muslim's life, however they had limited knowledge about Mohammad's (PBUH) life which limited their views of a Muslim's identity and duties towards the world.

Attainment and progress in Arabic for first language speakers was acceptable for primary and good for secondary and post-16 students. Most students in primary demonstrated acceptable levels of knowledge, skills and understanding in their work in line with expectations for their age. The majority of students in secondary and post-16 performed above these expectations and showed good attainment over time in their test results. Almost all students in primary made expected progress in their listening, speaking, reading and writing. Almost all secondary and post-16 students could use the grammatical rules in their work. They read texts confidently and accurately, analysed stories and poems and explored their own ideas through drama.

Attainment and progress for students with Arabic as a second language was acceptable in primary and good in secondary. Externally assessed grades for secondary students showed good attainment overall with the majority above expectations. Younger students developed their skills in listening and writing less quickly than the older students. Almost all students in secondary demonstrated good levels of knowledge, skills and understanding, in line with the curriculum. Their usage, pronunciation and accuracy in listening, speaking, reading were good. Their work books showed correct use of syntax and grammatical rules in their answers. Students used a wide range of examples from The Holy Qur'an and other writing in their work.

Attainment in English was acceptable in the Foundation Stage, good in primary, and outstanding in secondary and in post-16. Most Foundation Stage students developed their listening and speaking skills using phonics and they were able to understand and follow directions. In Years 1 to 3, most students were able to communicate effectively in English. Year 4 students had developed confidence and displayed a good understanding of grammar. Year 6 students displayed extensive vocabulary and correct punctuation. They read a wide range of literature, and could explain themes, genre, characters and development of plots. Secondary and post-16 students acquired good investigative, organisational, and presentation skills. Comparable data with IGCSE, AS and A-levels showed outstanding exam results in English, surpassing international standards

In mathematics, students' attainment and progress were acceptable in the Foundation Stage and primary, good in secondary and outstanding in post-16. Foundation Stage children were increasingly able to understand number concepts. Most primary students could conduct number operations and knew how to solve problems related to space, shape, measure and whole and fractions. In Years 7 and 8, they could find averages and showed clear understanding of geometrical shapes. By Year 11, difficulties with basic calculation had been resolved and students were confidently exploring the concept of inequality. Post-16 students solved algebraic equations at levels well above international expectations.

Attainment and progress in science were acceptable in primary and good in secondary, and post-16. Students developed high levels of factual knowledge and were successful in IGCSE, AS and A-level examinations. However, their development of investigative skills and critical thinking was below expectations. They did not make effective connections between the three sciences, such as applying in chemistry lessons what they had learned about energy in physics. Year 2 students knew that they needed a balanced diet and Year 4 students knew about CO₂. In Year 6, students developed a acceptable understanding of how cell structures function, whilst Year 11 students could interpret circuit diagrams and apply knowledge of patterns in chemical reactions to suggest how a salt could be prepared. Year 13 students could explain the meaning of electronegativity and reactivity.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Attitudes and behaviour were outstanding. Students' commitment to their work and respect for others resulted in excellent standards of behaviour. They felt safe, valued and well supported by school staff. Consequently, they grew in confidence and self-esteem and in the ability to take initiatives and accept responsibility. They co-operated well with others and took an active part in forging school initiatives such as promoting healthy living. Relationships between students were outstanding as a result of their increasing maturity. Attendance was acceptable and lessons started on time.

Students' Islamic and civic understanding and their appreciation of local traditions and culture was acceptable in the Foundation Stage, good in primary and secondary and outstanding in post-16. The youngest children expressed their understanding through their drawings and in the morning assembly songs. Most students knew the basic elements of Islamic faith such as the pillars of Islam and they were aware of local traditions and culture, such as Emirati dress, local landscapes, architecture and dance. Students demonstrated a good understanding of the importance of Islam in their lives as young people in Dubai, enhancing the school environment with thoughtful displays. Almost all students were active in a civic role, such as participating in classroom councils. Post-16 students were particularly adept at organising peers, helping teachers, and representing the views of others.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was outstanding in all phases except in Foundation Stage where it was acceptable. Younger students did as instructed but did not play an active role in their understanding of the importance of environment care. Older students showed an understanding and appreciation of the multi-cultural nature of Dubai, local traditions and culture, and special features such as famous landmarks, exports, the metro rail system and the fame of Dubai around the world. They understood, valued and could explain their part in Dubai's on-going future development. They showed concern for the environment at the local level and for the school environment as well as a concern for environmental issues in the wider world.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching in the Foundation Stage, primary and secondary was acceptable and at post-16, it was good. Examples of outstanding teaching were seen particularly in senior English and mathematics classes. In Foundation, primary and lower secondary, there was some good teaching but there were also a few lessons that were unsatisfactory. Many teachers demonstrated sound subject knowledge, even when lessons were not conducted effectively. Teachers were beginning to share learning objectives with their students and good questioning techniques were seen in a few lessons. However, overall, the range of teaching strategies was limited. Teaching methodologies often relied heavily on teacher talk and closed questions with insufficient focus on student learning. Lesson content was mostly aligned to the text book content and seldom tried to develop individual opinion or active learning. Most teaching featured respectful relationships and an orderly working atmosphere but there was insufficient planning for the full range of student's abilities and needs.

Learning was acceptable in all stages with the exception of secondary and post-16 where it was good. Students were generally enthusiastic, eager and engaged. However, when it was not made clear enough what was expected of them, learning and progress was too slow. Learning was best for older students because they were given the opportunity to discuss ideas, collaborate and undertake their own research under teachers' supervision. Whenever interaction between students was encouraged, even for younger students, their learning improved. Most students were good at recalling factual information, which helped them perform well in tests. However, their development of skills and techniques was not as well

catered developed. Overall, low achievers and the most able students were not as effectively supported in their learning as the majority of students.

Assessment arrangements were acceptable in Foundation Stage, primary and secondary stages and good at post-16. Teachers organised very regular tests which gave a breadth of information regarding students' achievements. This information was not used effectively at all stages to inform the next steps in learning. Across all stages of the school, teachers questioned students well to check their understanding during lessons.

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

The curriculum was acceptable across the school showing an improvement in Foundation Stage from the previous inspection. It also had some good features. A clear rationale with suitable breadth and balance was evident. The Foundation Stage focus was on early childhood development across six areas of learning. The main primary focus was on numeracy, literacy, and Arabic. In addition to the key subjects taught in the lower and upper schools, other offerings included history, geography, art, music, information and communications technology (ICT), travel and tourism, business studies and physical education. Healthy living concepts were taught at all levels, as well as during presentations at school assemblies. The curriculum included some additional course offerings this year. Also, some progress was being made in emphasising independent and project-based learning, and peer teaching was also introduced in many subject areas. The curriculum was reviewed regularly but it was not effectively and adapted to meet all students' learning needs, including those with special educational needs. There were beneficial links between some subjects and extra-curricular activities which enriched students' learning. Students participated in a wide range of events and activities, including charity work for Dubai Cares, sports, clubs and the arts. Curriculum links with the community and local environment remained strong, with students involved in UAE National Day, Dragon Day, recycling projects and competitions against other schools. During the year the calendar was planned so that certain concepts could be studied in depth, including an "Environmental Week" and an "Art and Design Week".

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements to ensure the health and safety of students were acceptable. Effective procedures were in place for child protection, health and safety and fire safety, to ensure that all students were safe in school and on their arrival and departure. Staff were fully trained and understood their roles. A few members of staff were inconsistent in their implementation of these good procedures. Site security was good, as was the student supervision. Fire safety checks and drills were carried out in line with regulations. Students stated that they felt safe in school. Premises and facilities were clean, well-maintained, safe and secure. Medical staff were vigilant in their care of students and kept detailed records and risk assessments were carried out for school trips. Healthy lifestyles, healthy eating and exercise were successfully promoted.

The quality of support for all students was acceptable. Students felt that many, but not all, of their teachers knew them well. They generally had good relationships with them. Mutual respect, trust and confidence characterised the interactions between students and a majority of the staff. Year 8 students and their parents were invited to an annual orientation day with Heads of Department, older students, ex-students and external experts where they had access to careers counsellors and examinations officers. The school sought to meet the varying needs of individual students as far as possible for example, allowing some to prepare for IGCSE in more subjects, and allowing others to sit AS examinations one year early, in Year 11. It similarly provided career counselling for sixth form students with the active support of several universities. Support for students with special educational needs was underdeveloped.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Overall the quality of the leadership and management of the school was good. The senior leadership team displayed outstanding vision and set a strong direction for its work, as exemplified by the drive to develop more varied learning styles in the classrooms and leadership qualities amongst the students. Responsibility was widely distributed. The whole senior team demonstrated competence and commitment, but whilst middle managers organised well, many were still developing the confidence to initiate and lead school improvements. This limited the overall effectiveness of key initiatives such as the efforts to raise the standard of teaching skills for some staff.

School self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. The school had undertaken a thorough analysis of all aspects of its performance, drawing upon a broad range of examination and other data. This information included input from students and staff including the results of an extensive performance review. The result was an accurate and honest appraisal of strengths and weaknesses, which provided the foundation for a realistic school improvement plan. This was closely aligned to shortcomings identified in the previous inspection report. The school had begun to have a steady but significant impact key developments including, for example, the need to offer students a broader range of learning opportunities than text books alone can provide. There was still more scope to access the views of the parents in making fully informed decisions about the school's work.

The school's overall partnership with its parents and community was good. Most parents felt that their children were happy and safe and that the school was responsive to their needs. Parents were particularly pleased with the enrichment of the curriculum and mentioned sports and arts as key aspects. They felt that leadership had a clear vision for the school and the majority appreciated the information that the school provided and felt that there had been improvements in resources since the last inspection. A few parents felt that the school did not always give enough support to less able students and said that they would like more opportunity to contribute their views and ideas. Through its local business links and charity work the school made a good contribution to the local community.

Because the school had no organised means of involving its parents and community in decision-making, its quality of governance was unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, the efficient working relationship with its management board had proved to be productive with a number of improvements stemming from the support of the board. Notable amongst these was the increased focus on professional development as a result of priorities raised by the leadership of the school. The school's governance had fulfilled its duty of ensuring that commitments to parents and students are met.

Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable overall. Whilst the school had to cope with a significant regular turnover of staff by improving its induction procedures, there were sufficient numbers of qualified staff. These were deployed as well as possible within the constraints of a building that was struggling to house such large numbers of students. Through a rolling programme including the reorganising and replacing of furniture, installing better ICT facilities, upgrading libraries and laboratories, the school was managing to improve the effectiveness of its use of resources.

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	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

37% 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	Acceptable	Good	Good
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Not Applicable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Not Applicable

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

Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding
Progress over time	Acceptable	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding

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

Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Outstanding
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Outstanding

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

Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good

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	Acceptable	Good	Good	Outstanding
Economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

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

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

How well does the school protect and support students?

Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Health and safety	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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	Unsatisfactory
Staffing, facilities and resources	Acceptable

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: inspection@khda.gov.ae.

More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at www.khda.gov.ae.

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