

Arab Unity School 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.

Arab Unity School was inspected in March 2011 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 Rashidia, Arab Unity School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Foundation Stage to post-16, aged three to 17 years. The school follows a UK curriculum. There was a high number of recently appointed and recently qualified staff this academic year. At the time of the inspection, there were 3051 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Most were satisfied with the quality of education. Most felt that their children were achieving well, especially in English, and were happy with their children's progress in other subjects, apart from Arabic. Just over half felt that teaching was good or better. The majority considered that students behaved well, that the school kept their children safe and healthy, and that incidents of bullying were effectively handled. A significant minority felt that the school did not cater adequately for children with special educational needs. The majority was content with communication and the frequency and quality of reports, although a minority did not feel sufficiently involved in the work of the school. Most considered the school to be well led and the majority thought that the school had addressed the recommendations of the previous report well. A few wrote that they had concerns over the lack of shade in playgrounds and about the quality of teaching and learning in physical education.

How well does the school perform overall?

The school provided an acceptable quality of education overall. It performed at an acceptable level in almost all aspects of its work, with a few good features. The previous inspection report had identified several areas requiring improvement. The school had made good progress in addressing most of them.

Students' attainment in most key subjects was acceptable. There were strengths throughout in English and at the secondary phase in mathematics. Progress was good at all stages in Islamic Education and in secondary and at post-16 in science. Progress overall in Foundation Stage was better than had been the case at the time of the previous inspection. The quality of teaching for effective learning was acceptable, as was leadership. The school's capacity to improve was hindered by its inward-looking policy for staff development.

Key features of the school

- The harmonious, well-ordered community in which students were very polite and showed respect to one another;
- Improvement in Foundation Stage, leading to better early reading and writing skills;
- The high percentage of acceptable teaching and learning throughout the school;
- Over-reliance on a rigid curriculum, with insufficient regard for the needs of students with different abilities;
- The improvement in standards particularly in the provision of English.

Recommendations

- Design lessons to promote the use of Arabic as a living language at all grades;
- Ensure that lesson content is stimulating, enriching and inspiring, with much less reliance on textbooks and repetitious worksheets;
- Use the information derived from assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum and teaching and act upon that evaluation;
- Develop the quality and extent of support for students at all phases;
- Provide high quality professional development in teaching, the curriculum and leadership at all levels, by looking more widely beyond the school.

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

In Islamic Education, attainment was acceptable, while progress was good across the school. In primary, most students had a good knowledge about Islam, such as prayer, the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and the angels. They could recite from memory an adequate number of the prescribed verses of The Holy Qur'an with confidence. In secondary, most students had a good knowledge of the Hadeeth of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). They could link it with

faith and with their own lives. They understood most of the main concepts and values clearly and accurately. However, only a few students could correctly pronounce unfamiliar Qur'anic texts or apply the rules of Tajweed.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were acceptable in all phases. The majority of students made acceptable progress in most key aspects. In Grades 3 and 4, most students were able to apply grammatical rules, answer questions using standard Arabic and used good handwriting. By the end of Grade 6, their confidence when speaking was strong. However, at this stage they did not use standard Arabic. For a minority of students, listening skills were underdeveloped. By the end of Grade 12, the majority of students could analyse age-appropriate literary texts accurately. Their writing was mainly limited to copying texts and to writing short answers in their workbooks.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language were acceptable. Across the school, reading was better developed than listening and speaking. The best progress was made in Grades 4 and 6, where students' reading and pronunciation were in line with expectations. Speaking was limited to memorising dialogues from textbooks. This practice inhibited students from using Arabic as a living language and limited the range of vocabulary they were using. In general, progress in primary was better than in secondary, though this was not always consistent. Progress was also better in the girls' section. Writing was less well developed and was often limited to exercises from textbooks.

Attainment and progress in English were good in all phases with the exception of the primary phase, where progress was acceptable. In the Foundation Stage, children could write simple sentences. Most could read from their favourite stories. However, listening skills were not well developed. In primary, students had good speaking and listening skills, although sometimes their pronunciation was not clear. They read and understood texts which had varied topics and vocabulary. They wrote in good, clear sentences, with mostly accurate spelling and neat handwriting. At the primary phase, progress was acceptable. In secondary, students' attainment in examinations exceeded international averages. Listening and speaking skills were very well developed, with most of the older students speaking fluently and confidently. They could read and understand factual texts, but their appreciation of imaginative texts was limited and mechanistic. Writing was well presented. Progress was good.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable in Foundation Stage, primary and post-16 phases. In secondary they were good. Attainment in Foundation Stage matched international standards in most aspects of mathematics. They could recognise, count and order numbers up to 12 by Kindergarten 2. Primary students were beginning to use efficient strategies accurately when using the four rules of number. Secondary students progressed well in the later years and could carry out calculations and understood the significance of the results obtained. However, post-16 students did not build effectively on earlier success. Across the grades, most had not developed a level of independence to enable them to think critically about mathematics. Investigative skills were not well developed.

Attainment in science was acceptable at each phase in the school. In Foundation Stage and primary, progress was acceptable. In the secondary and post-16 phases it was good. High

ability students in Grade 11 did well in external examinations at A-level. Students performed better in physics than other science subjects. Their factual knowledge developed well as they progressed through the school, as did their examination techniques. However, investigative and research skills remained underdeveloped. For example, students developed a sound knowledge of magnets and their properties in the primary section, but in secondary they were not confident about finding a method to determine the shape of a magnetic field.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Attitudes and behaviour were acceptable throughout the school and good in the primary phase. Behaviour was mostly good, except for a few incidents when there was poor classroom management. Most students had good relationships with others. They had positive attitudes towards learning. Children in Foundation Stage were calm, disciplined and relaxed. They could recite the morning prayer independently. Attendance was acceptable. Most students were punctual but a significant minority arrived at school late. They did not participate fully in physical education, with many sitting in the shade inactive.

Students' civic responsibility, understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture were good in all phases except Foundation Stage, where they were acceptable. Most were happy to take responsibilities, which they performed well. Their Islamic understanding was appropriate to their age. They could relate the peaceful nature of Dubai to its following the principles of Islam. Most could identify the seven Emirates and the year of union of the UAE. They were proud to be living in Dubai.

Economic and environmental understanding was good in Foundation Stage, primary and secondary, and acceptable in post-16. The school provided informative displays and arranged assemblies which promoted awareness of water and electricity conservation. Most students could identify the environmental problems in Dubai and their roles in trying to improve that situation. However, their economic understanding in the upper grades was underdeveloped. They could not identify the reasons behind the global economic crisis nor its impact on Dubai and the world.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching throughout the school was acceptable. There had been an improvement in teaching in the Foundation Stage. The school had adopted a more student-centred approach, which had enabled the very youngest children to learn through their own investigations and experiences. The approach had been only partly successful. Common strengths in lessons included clear learning objectives which helped students to be aware of what they should learn. Teachers made better use of resources to reinforce new learning. Often, they asked good questions to assess and strengthen students' understanding, but this practice was not consistent. They used a range of strategies to motivate students, but did not measure their actions accurately in terms of students' learning. In the best lessons, there were imaginative and flexible planning, a lively pace and high expectations of all students. Too often though, teachers followed text books too rigidly, offering insufficient challenge for the different ability groups. Not all teachers

had a clear understanding of how students learn. Teachers did not build on prior learning accurately enough and often relied too much on repetitive and mundane tasks in worksheets.

The quality of learning was acceptable throughout the school. Students had positive attitudes towards their work. They concentrated well during lessons, even when topics were not interesting. They worked well on their own and with others. They were capable of applying their learning to the real world, but did not have enough opportunities to develop the skill fully. In Foundation Stage, children had more scope for independent learning than previously. Generally, teachers did not provide enough initial guidance to maximise such opportunities, for example in creative writing. As work was often not challenging enough, students' higher order thinking skills were underdeveloped.

Assessment was acceptable in all sections of the school, including Foundation Stage, where it had previously been unsatisfactory. The systems of gathering information about students' progress were well organised and provided useful information. In most cases, teachers used this information to group students according to their abilities and to pinpoint underachieving students. However, they did not routinely use it to adapt planning or to maximise the challenge for students. Marking was inconsistent. A few teachers provided helpful comments on how to improve, but this was not done consistently. Students were becoming accustomed to assessing their own work. The ongoing assessment by teachers of students' work in lessons was inconsistent.

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

The curriculum throughout the school was acceptable. There had been an improvement at Foundation Stage and post-16. The focus on independent learning in Foundation Stage was beginning to improve the children's learning skills. The school had remedied the weakness in the provision for English in the post-16 phase. The curriculum had good continuity and progression because it was based firmly on published courses. Teachers worked well together to ensure equality across year groups, but did not adapt the curriculum adequately to cater for all students' needs. The school reviewed the curriculum annually to seek ways of improvement. It had responded seriously to the recommendations of the previous report, but had not measured its success through accurate and reliable monitoring. The curriculum was broad and balanced in Foundation Stage and primary, but narrowed in secondary, where options were very limited. Enrichment of the curriculum was acceptable. Course books contained some good instances of making links between subjects, but teachers did not often plan for them themselves. The school offered a limited range of clubs and activities. Visits and links beyond the school were few. Students took part in competitions, such as Qur'an reading and sports matches, but not frequently. Links with the community included visits to the Dubai Fire and Police Departments.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements for the health, safety and security of students were acceptable. The premises were secure during the school day. The site was clean and generally free from litter. The arrival and departure of students by bus were adequately supervised. However, parents did not follow school advice when collecting their children by car and this compromised the safety of all students. The buildings were ageing, but there were adequate systems for maintenance. Hand driers and wash basins in some toilets were inadequate. Emergency evacuation practices were carried out regularly. Medical services were professionally administered, with appropriate records of treatment noted in good detail. Laboratory safety had a high priority, and students observed suitable guidelines. The school promoted healthy lifestyles through lessons, information to parents and school activities. It had organised an effective fitness programme. However, food available to students did not promote a healthy lifestyle. Staff had received child protection training, but their understanding of procedures was insecure.

The quality of support for students was acceptable. Staff and students were respectful of each other. Students had guidance on course choices at Grades 9 and 11 and on university options at Grade 12. There were no formal arrangements to provide careers advice other than through the counsellor. Academic performance and general well-being were monitored effectively through co-ordinators and supervisors, who tracked students' progress and held the relevant data. Identification of and provision for students with special educational needs were extremely limited and were the responsibility of the part-time counsellor. Monitoring of attendance was acceptable. The school managed punctuality appropriately.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was acceptable. The recently appointed Principal was committed to improvement, particularly in academic aspects. However, she had not yet succeeded in transmitting her vision to all teachers, some of whom lacked a sense of urgency or desire for improvement. The senior management team had clearly defined responsibilities, which they performed well. Some heads of departments had an overly optimistic view of performance in their subjects, relying on an inadequate interpretation of examination results and international comparisons. Efficient organisational structures ensured the smooth running of the school.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. Effective delivery of the school's action plan was limited because of over-reliance on in-house staff development. The school did not have a large enough body of highly able practitioners to lead development. Supervisors and heads of department monitored teaching and learning on a regular basis, using appropriate checklists. The Principal received feedback and from her analysis of this she had identified that cross-curricular links and differentiation needed further development. The school conducted regular surveys of students, teachers and parents, all of which impacted positively on planning.

Partnerships with the parents and community were acceptable. Regular newsletters kept parents well informed. Parents valued the school diaries as an efficient means of

communication. They felt welcome in the school and were treated as partners. They received regular informative reports, which included helpful advice on how they could support their children's learning. A few parents had acted as classroom helpers and had assisted on school trips. Links with other schools and local businesses were not well developed.

Governance was acceptable. The Advisory Board met every few months. It had given significant guidance to the Principal on issues of management, facilities and relationships with parents. Members received regular oral and written reports and the school had briefed them on students' attainment. However, members were not sufficiently aware of international standards and comparisons. Membership of the Board did not yet include representation from an adequate range of stakeholders.

Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable. Almost all teachers were well qualified academically. Nevertheless, a number had a weak grasp of how children learn, or, in the Arabic department, of how to teach effectively. A significant number of teachers had had little previous teaching experience. Classrooms were cramped, offering little space and thereby limiting the range of teaching approaches used by many teaching staff. There were some good attractive displays of work done by students in the corridors, although there were few displays of students' best work in the classrooms. Outside, there were no canopies over play areas to protect students from the sun. Although provision of information and communication technology (ICT) had improved, resources had to be shared between rooms. Often the room layout did not facilitate its use. As a result, ICT had a limited effect on 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:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	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:	Foundation Stage	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	Acceptable	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:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Acceptable	Good	Good

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

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
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	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Good	Acceptable

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

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	Acceptable
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Acceptable
Partnerships with parents and the community	Acceptable
Governance	Acceptable
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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