

Apple International School Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Secondary

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.

Apple International School 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 Al Qusais, Apple International School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Foundation Stage to Grade 8, aged three to 14 years. The school follows a UK curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 2050 students on roll. Attendance during the last complete term was acceptable.

As part of the inspection process, Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires issued to parents. There was a very high level of satisfaction from parents who responded to the questionnaire. A high number of returns were received. Most parents were satisfied with the quality of education provided by the school. About half agreed that their children's progress was good or better in Islamic Education, but only a minority indicated good or better progress in Arabic as a first or additional language. A majority of parents agreed that progress was good or better in English, mathematics and science. Similarly, a majority agreed that the quality of teaching was good and that their children enjoyed lessons. Almost all parents expressed satisfaction with the behaviour of students and agreed that their children were safe at the school. A few parents indicated that incidents of bullying had not been effectively managed by the school, but most indicated that their children were treated fairly.

Most parents agreed that communication with the school was effective and that the school was responsive to their concerns. Similarly, most parents agreed that reports were regular and informative, and that parent-teacher meetings were helpful. The majority of parents indicated that the school had responded positively to the recommendations of the previous inspection report.

How well does the school perform overall?

The Apple International School provided an acceptable quality of education for its students. The school had made progress in addressing the recommendations from the previous inspection including, for example, the implementation of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum.

Inspectors judged students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education, Arabic, English and mathematics to be acceptable. However, the attainment of secondary students learning Arabic as an additional language was unsatisfactory, as they were not able to communicate confidently and write independently. Attainment and progress in science in Kindergarten were acceptable but they were unsatisfactory in the primary and secondary phases. Students did not have enough scope to develop their investigative skills. Overall, students had positive attitudes towards learning and their behaviour was good. The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment was acceptable in all phases. However there was a lack of consistency in the quality of teaching across the school and across subjects. Students across the school were capable of taking more responsibility for their learning but, for the majority of the time in lessons, were expected to be passive listeners. The use of assessment to monitor students' progress and inform lesson planning was in the very early stages of development. The curriculum quality was acceptable across the phases. The school had made a promising start on developing the Foundation Stage curriculum. In the primary and secondary phases, planning for curriculum continuity and progression was at an early stage of development. The school's arrangements for protecting and supporting their students were acceptable. School buses were well supervised to ensure that students were safe but the arrangements for private vehicles outside the school were not insufficiently rigorous. The quality of support provided for students was acceptable. Students with special educational needs were particularly well supported by specialist staff that focused closely on their needs. The new Principal and her senior team had begun to focus on school improvement priorities and the quality of leadership was acceptable. The school's staffing, facilities and resources were unsatisfactory and did not meet the needs of students. Staff turnover was very high and some classrooms were too small; these factors had impacted negatively on students' learning.

Key features of the school

- Students displayed good attitudes and behaviour in all sections of the school;
- The new senior leadership team and most teachers demonstrated a strong commitment to school improvement;
- There was a negative impact on the quality of learning due to the high staff turnover;
- Attainment and progress in science in the primary and secondary phases were unsatisfactory;
- Enrolment numbers had grown significantly since the last inspection;
- Overcrowded classrooms had a detrimental effect on the learning experiences of most students.

Recommendations

- Raise attainment and progress across all key subjects, especially science;
- Broaden the range of teaching strategies used in order to ensure that active, independent and student-led learning experiences are prioritised in every lesson;
- Support the promotion of learning in lessons through the effective use of assessment data;
- Ensure that safe arrival and departure procedures protect all students appropriately;
- As a matter of urgency, reduce class sizes to allow effective learning and teaching to take place;
- Develop regular professional learning opportunities for all teachers in order to ensure consistency in practice.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable in the primary and secondary phases. Students had age-appropriate knowledge of The Holy Qur'an and were able to recite parts of it accurately. They used their knowledge to enrich their understanding of their daily lives and were able to apply their knowledge effectively. Most students understood the significance of the five pillars of Islam. They were able to talk about their experience of Umrah in Makkah and of going to the local mosque. Most of them also followed the Prophet's (PBUH) direction about congregational prayer.

Attainment and progress in Arabic for native speakers were acceptable in the primary and secondary phases. In Grades 1 to 6, most students had sufficient vocabulary in standard Arabic. Their speaking and writing skills were in line with expectations. Most students knew the correct verb forms and used appropriate tenses accurately. In secondary classes, students were able to read precisely and their writing had only a few spelling errors. Most students demonstrated that they had grammatical skills by correcting their writing effectively. This was evident when they wrote poetry.

Attainment for students with Arabic as an additional language was acceptable in the primary phase and unsatisfactory in the secondary phase. Progress was acceptable across all phases. In Grade 1, students knew most of the letters of the alphabet. By Grade 3, they were familiar with key words such as the names of the animals and colours and were able to compose short sentences. By Grade 6, students were able to write more independently and could form more complex sentences. The majority of students in the secondary phase were only able to read a few simple sentences which they had accurately copied from the board.

Attainment and progress in English were acceptable across the Foundation Stage, primary and secondary phases and broadly in line with age expectations. Speaking, listening and reading skills were generally stronger than writing skills. At the Foundation Stage, children could recognise the letters of the alphabet and read and write short words. At primary level, students showed a growing appreciation of the rules of grammar and by Grade 6, the widening vocabulary of students enabled them to list the synonyms and antonyms of a range of words. At secondary level, students were beginning to develop more analytical reading skills and Grade 8 students were able to describe and discuss their personal views on the class reader, 'Wuthering Heights'. Across the school, there were insufficient opportunities for students to engage in creative and extended writing.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable throughout school and in line with curriculum levels and international standards. Most students responded to questions well and often supported each other, especially when asked to explain workings to peers. The majority of students showed a good understanding of number and calculations. For example, Grade 1 students used mental skills to add number bonds to ten and clearly explained the concept of addition. Most Grade 5 students accurately ordered a series of fractions using lowest common denominators. The majority of Grade 7 students showed good progress by working out the areas of parallelograms and clearly explaining methodology. However, insufficient opportunities were given to investigative skills to provide challenge to more able students.

Attainment and progress in science were acceptable in the Foundation Stage but unsatisfactory in both the primary and secondary phases. In the Foundation Stage, children could distinguish between domestic and wild animals and understood that animals produce food. Primary students correctly grouped living and non-living things and knew about how friction affected moving objects and how matter changes states. Secondary students made models of plant and animal cells, separated mixtures and studied the human circulatory system. Most students in primary and secondary phases were under-challenged by the curriculum. Students' investigative skills were not developed quickly enough at all levels and this led to an acute lack of skills amongst the older students.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour throughout school were good. Students were courteous, self-disciplined and well behaved. They moved around the school in an orderly manner, even when not directly supervised. Almost all students showed respect for adults and one another. Rewards were regularly presented to students for achievement and good behaviour. A six point behaviour policy was well supported by staff and bullying was highlighted in a recently organised 'anti-bullying' week. Almost all students understood the school's promotion of healthy lifestyles. Regular healthy eating themes were undertaken and work displayed throughout school. Most students arrived in good time for the start of the day. Attendance was acceptable.

Students' civic understanding was good. A very well organised student council represented all students and had a positive impact throughout school. Students felt they had a voice in developing their school. Recent successes included improved dress and behaviour codes and a 'buddy' system. Students generally illustrated good knowledge about the wide range of cultures, religions and nationalities in Dubai and they respected the principals and values of Islam. For example, the school held National Day activities which enabled all students to gain a better understanding of Emirati culture.

Economic and environmental understanding was good. Most students demonstrated a good knowledge of how Dubai and the Emirates had grown from pearl diving, sea trade and fishing. They could explain the wealth oil had provided and the development of tourism and business. They expressed a basic knowledge of future environmental issues. Students throughout school participated in several projects such as community clear-ups, visits to museums and worked with a local special school to plant trees.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching for effective learning across all phases was acceptable. There was evidence that the professional development sessions in the Foundation Stage had contributed to an improvement in teaching. However, the quality of teaching was not sufficiently consistent across the phases and within subjects. Most teachers demonstrated appropriate subject knowledge but lesson planning lacked consistency particularly in ensuring that work was suited to students' different abilities. The better lessons were more comprehensively planned with the students' needs in mind and encouraged active student engagement, learning through practical experience and collaboration with their peers. Resources, when available, were used appropriately and enhanced learning. In a minority of lessons, teachers talked too much which led to passive learning. Lesson objectives were shared with students in a majority of lessons; however, the objectives were often statements of activities rather than planned learning outcomes.

The quality of students' learning was acceptable across all phases. Positive attitudes to learning and the purposeful atmosphere in the majority of lessons enhanced students' learning. In the better lessons, students were encouraged to make links between new and previous learning, and relate learning to the real world. When learning in lessons was particularly positive, challenge was a key feature. Opportunities for students to develop higher order thinking skills were limited. Students' learning thrived in active learning situations involving effective dialogue with peers and adults. Appropriately differentiated planning and lessons resulted in good learning, but these features were inconsistent across the phases and subjects. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the laboratories enhanced learning but few opportunities existed in the classrooms to develop this aspect of learning.

The quality of assessment across all phases was acceptable. Tasks in books were marked but feedback did not always give students sufficient guidance on how to improve. External assessments were taken by a minority of eligible students and the school was finalising development of an e-gateway assessment facility. The school had yet to analyse and compare students' attainment with international standards. There were organised procedures for record keeping, including individual education plans for students with special educational needs. The Foundation Stage staff were maintaining learning profiles for the children but these were at an early stage of development. Parents received regular updates on their child's attainment and progress and the home-school daily diary helped to keep students and parents informed.

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

The curriculum was acceptable throughout the school. It had been reviewed by a staff group, recently augmented by the appointment of an academic co-ordinator. At Foundation Stage, curriculum breadth and balance has been provided through the adoption of the English Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum. One positive outcome of this had been the more effective use of outdoor areas to provide wider learning opportunities for the younger children and to develop their motor skills. At primary and secondary levels, the curriculum was broad and balanced and students were offered a choice of three modern languages. Planning for curriculum continuity and progression was at an early stage, particularly in science, but also across other subject areas. The everyday curriculum was supplemented by a daily activities period, which provided students with the opportunity to engage in a wide range of educational and recreational activities, including poetry recitation, class debates and various sports. There were inadequate midday breaks timetabled for students in order to accommodate this programme and allow students to relax between lessons. A number of cross-curricular links had been developed across subjects. For example, mathematics and science teachers had collaborated to collect and display various data sets and certain writing and comprehension exercises in English, focused on scientific topics. Some initial development had taken place in order to ensure that the curriculum met the needs of students across the ability range; for

example, mathematics worksheets had been designed for different ability levels. However, this flexible approach was not generally in evidence across all subject areas.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety procedures were acceptable across all phases. Resources, premises and facilities were well managed and designed to allow access to all members of the school community. Records of health and safety procedures were up-to-date, including medical and fire drill information. Students were well supervised most of the time, particularly at break times and on school transport. The safety arrangements for private vehicles were not effective and required further action to ensure the safety of students. The canteen was well maintained and healthy food was available. Posters showing healthy living styles were displayed throughout the school. However, healthy eating was not fully visible at break-times and parents were not encouraged sufficiently enough to provide healthy snacks.

The quality of support was acceptable across all phases. Positive and respectful relationships prevailed through the school and teachers were knowledgeable about the students' personal and social needs. Students received appropriate advice and guidance from staff members and the school counsellor. Whilst behaviour concerns were mostly dealt with efficiently, senior teachers did not always communicate the information to the Principal. Teachers monitored the rate of students' progress through a range of tests and student self-assessment was a developing feature. Procedures for the management of attendance and punctuality were in place and well managed; parents were kept informed when students failed to arrive when expected. Students with special educational needs were identified and had detailed individual education plans in place to support their learning.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was acceptable. Although the Principal had only been in post for one term, her determination and commitment to securing improvement for all students were acknowledged by students, staff, parents and governors. She had initiated a widespread consultation process about the school's vision. The new senior leadership team had begun developing a range of school procedures and policies to ensure students' safety and discipline in school. Subject co-ordinators were at early stages of identifying key priorities for their subject. Although all senior teachers were involved in developing and leading whole school initiatives, there were varying levels of experience, commitment and competence which meant that progress towards key priorities was inconsistent.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. Senior staff were beginning to monitor teachers' planning as well as their classroom practice but these systems lacked rigour and were not resulting in any discernible impact on students' learning. The school had made

some progress in addressing the recommendations from the previous inspection, for example in the implementation of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum.

Partnerships with parents and the community were acceptable. There were effective communication systems which included weekly bulletins, a daily home-school diary and the school website which parents also relied on for information about the curriculum and homework expectations. In addition, there were termly parent-teacher consultation meetings when parents had the opportunity to discuss their child's progress and attainment in internal tests. Parents of students with special educational needs also valued the support and guidance from the school's counsellor. Many parents reported that they enjoyed being involved in whole school celebrations which enabled them to become more familiar with UAE culture and traditions. A recent charity collection programme had enabled the school to build strong links with the local community.

Governance was acceptable. Governors met twice termly to discuss key issues affecting the school such as the staff turnover and the development of the building. They regularly provided professional guidance and support for the school's staff and directors. However, they did not ensure that all statutory requirements were adhered to and were not holding the school to account for such developments. Membership of the governing body included representatives from the local community as well as local businesses and from the parent community.

Staffing, facilities and resources were unsatisfactory. The school had a very high staff turnover and the majority of staff had joined the school within the past year. The absence of regular teachers had adversely affected students' progress. The school premises were clean and safe. However, the majority of teaching areas were too small for the numbers of students in them. Inadequate ventilation arrangements also affected students' concentration levels. Classroom, curriculum and ICT resources were insufficient to meet the learning needs of students.

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
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?			
17% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.			
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?			
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

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

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

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

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

How well does the school protect and support students?			
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Health and safety	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of support	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	Unsatisfactory

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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