

Al Mawakeb – Al Garhoud Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 12

Report published May 2010

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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.

Al Mawakeb School in Al Garhoud was inspected in November 2009, 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 Garhoud, Al Mawakeb is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 12, aged from three to 18 years. The school follows an American curriculum. There were 2,365 students enrolled at the time of the inspection. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good. At the time of the inspection there was an acting director replacing the Director, due to an extended illness.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires which were completed by parents. Most parents reported that their children liked school. Additionally, most reported that they believed student behaviour was good and a majority felt that the staff encouraged their children to do their best work. A minority of parents reported that they did not know how the school responded to the previous inspection. A majority of parents felt that the school could be more effective in communicating with the families on all issues that applied to their children.

How well does the school perform overall?

The overall judgment of the inspection team was that Al Mawakeb School, Al Garhoud provided an acceptable quality of education, although there were some areas which were judged unsatisfactory. Students' attainment in Islamic Education was at the acceptable level and the time allocation was below as determined by the Ministry of Education. The quality of attainment in Arabic was good at the elementary stage and acceptable at all other grade levels. Students' attainment in the other key subjects was acceptable with notable exceptions in KG science, which was unsatisfactory and mathematics in Grades 9 to 12, which was good. The students' personal and social development was good with positive features at all grade levels, particularly in the high school.

Teaching and learning were acceptable overall with some deficiencies in KG. Elements of teaching and the curriculum as a whole did not meet the wider learning needs of young children and students. There was too much teacher direction that did not allow for learning through practical activities. For example, there were very few opportunities for children in KG to write independently. However, additional intensive support classes for students with low proficiency in French or English ensured improved access to the curriculum, especially in lower grades. There were very few strategies within lessons to meet the needs of special needs or particularly able students. The curriculum had too narrow a focus on the textbook. This led to a lack of sufficiently challenging learning experiences for students. There was little application of learning to real life. Whilst there were a few examples of independent learning, the curriculum lacked opportunities for critical thinking and learning through discovery at all stages and collaborative learning was a feature in only very few lessons. The degree to which the school protected and supported their students was good, providing an environment in where students felt safe.

Leadership and management were acceptable. Aspects requiring improvement identified at the last inspection had been addressed to an acceptable level by school leaders and governing body.

Key features of the school

- The development of students' personal skills and self-confidence;
- There was a lack of effective support for students with special educational needs;
- A positive focus on language acquisition in the early grades;
- Lack of cross-curricular opportunities and a limited range of after-school activities;
- A safe environment in a family atmosphere for students and staff;
- A lack of teamwork in the development of a number of key management and instructional areas.

Recommendations

- Implement the use of international benchmarks across the school to help track students' progress effectively and inform school improvement;
- Develop a range of strategies for teaching to place students more firmly at the centre of learning;
- Review the curriculum to ensure:
 - Greater breadth of subjects;
 - Improved links across subjects;
 - More opportunities for collaborative, practical and problem-solving activities;
 - The learning needs of all students are addressed;
 - Clear connections between learning and the real world.
- Increase the effectiveness and impact of the school's self-evaluation, linked to a systematic focus by all teachers on improving attainment and the quality of teaching and learning;
- Focus on engaging all stakeholders in the development of a vision for the school and involving them fully in school improvement.

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

Attainment and progress were acceptable in Islamic Education across the school. Most Grade 3 students knew the importance of concentration in Salah. Students were able to give examples of how to put what they learned about helping others and about prayer into practice. They also knew some of the main events that led to the establishment of the Islamic state in Madeenah. Most Grade 9 students understood the overall meaning of the Qur'anic text they studied. However, they did not sufficiently link the Qur'anic text to daily practices. Holy Qur'an recitation skills were acceptable across the school and stronger in the girls' section in Grades 11 and 12. Most students across the school had sound knowledge about Islam. However, they made limited links to real life situations.

Attainment and progress in Arabic were good in the elementary school and acceptable in the rest of the school. Children in KG acquired a good vocabulary of words, phrases and short

sentences. Students could distinguish between short and long vowels and could read and write short sentences. By the time they reached Grade 3 students were able to read a short paragraph and deduce the main idea. However, the theoretical knowledge of grammar was not fully implemented in speaking and writing. There was a lack of extended and free writing in general, throughout the school. Standards in reading and dictation were acceptable and students were able to distinguish between different types of sentences. Students in Grade 6 understood stories and could identify their main elements clearly. Grade 9 students had limited ability to analyse passages. In higher grades, students were able to divide poetic stanzas into the right metre. Grade 12 students were able to discover the narration within a poem discussed in class.

At KG, overall attainment in English was acceptable and progress was good. From Grade 1 to Grade 12, attainment and progress were acceptable. At Grade 1 to Grade 8, levels of attainment varied across classes. In Grades 9 to Grade 12, there were examples of good student performances. Reading and listening skills were acceptable but speaking skills for a minority of students were underdeveloped. Writing was improving but students' skills in extended writing, spelling and grammar were weak. By the end of KG, most students could understand instructions and use language in a range of activities and games. By the end of Grade 8, the majority of students were confident in listening and reading. By the end of secondary, many students were able to make confident oral presentations and discuss literature.

The students' attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable from KG to Grade 8 and good in Grades 9 to 12. In KG, students made acceptable progress in developing skills in space, shape, calculation, measurement, and handling data. In Grades 6 to 8, they could understand the relationship among angles, sides, lengths, perimeters and areas as well as represent and analyse mathematical situations and structures using algebraic symbols. In Grades 9 to 12, students were able to use systems of linear equations and inequalities and interpret and apply definite integrals. Higher achieving students were achieving their potential in the advanced subjects because they were being challenged by the content of the lessons.

Attainment and progress in science in KG was unsatisfactory. Although children learned facts about science they made little progress in discovering and exploring through their senses. In the elementary, middle and high schools, attainment was acceptable. However, in the elementary phase, students were not able to classify animals accurately. In Grades 6 to 8, students made acceptable progress in understanding the function of the heart and the respiratory system. Students in Grades 9 to 12 knew a range of scientific facts and vocabulary, and understood various processes and principles within specialised science subjects. Overall, in lessons where students had opportunities to learn through investigation, their understanding of science in the real world was enriched.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good in KG, elementary and high schools. They were acceptable in the middle school, where teachers' expectations were inconsistent. In most classrooms, however, relationships were positive and students demonstrated mature behaviour. Most students were developing a range of personal skills and self-confidence, felt safe and valued by the school. Attendance was good, but, a large number of students arrived late for school.

In Grades 9 to 12, students were developing a sense of responsibility and could approach management with ideas for events and activities. Student council meetings offered them some sense of contributing to the life of the school. However, not all students had the opportunity to take some responsibility. The school encouraged a broad awareness of Islamic festivals and events and non-Muslim students demonstrated a basic knowledge of Islam and its beliefs. Students were aware of the multi-cultural character of Dubai's society and felt that everyone was equal and equally respected. They retained a clear awareness of their own national identity but understood the importance of the heritage and culture of the UAE.

Students had an acceptable level of knowledge regarding economic and environmental understanding. They could describe some of the important aspects of Dubai's economy and discuss in simple terms the place of Dubai in the global economy and the recent international financial crisis. They were less sure of their own potential role in contributing to Dubai's future. Students had an acceptable level of awareness regarding a range of environmental issues, both local and global, such as pollution and water conservation.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Overall, the quality of teaching was acceptable. Teachers directed children's learning too closely in the KG and instruction was over dominated by adults. Children rarely had the opportunity to work independently. Teachers did not take the opportunity to build on evidence of early development in writing. However, where open questions were used to promote thought, this resulted in children giving more than one word responses, though this was insufficiently widespread. In elementary, middle and high schools, teacher-student interactions were of high quality and included the use of dialogue and questions, in particular in English, where there was some evidence of high expectations of students in some secondary classes. Although teachers often had good subject knowledge, they did not always have a good understanding of how students learn and how to meet the needs of the full range of learners. Teaching was often textbook-based and there was a lack of variety of activities in many classes resulting in students lacking involvement in their learning. In the elementary phase, lessons were usually teacher-led and students sat for long periods answering questions or completing written exercises.

The quality of learning was acceptable. Most students engaged in active learning in science, mathematics and English, responding very positively. They applied their learning to the real world and made connections between areas of learning. They collaborated well in group activities and shared resources effectively. However, there was a lack of enquiry and research skills and students rarely worked independently.

Assessment was acceptable in KG. Regular testing provided marks for each student and year group. However, this was not compared with other results outside the school. Regular assessment was not an integral part of learning and teaching. Most teachers knew their students well but they did not make full use of this knowledge to support learners. Constructive oral or written feedback was inconsistent and students were not clear about how well they were doing or what they needed to do to improve. There was limited evidence of self or peer assessment by students. Test results were not generally well used to modify work because of the pressure to cover the syllabus in key subjects. Overall, the school did not empower teachers to adopt more extended teaching strategies in order to encourage active learning and the development of independence in students as learners. Teachers did not use a sufficiently wide range of teaching strategies in the classroom to meet the needs of all students, including students with special educational needs and more able learners, through different tasks and level of challenge.

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

The quality of the curriculum was unsatisfactory overall with weaknesses in key areas where it failed to meet the needs of all students. The curriculum rationale was clear and reflected the school's general values but it did not match the specific goals as communicated to the parents. The curriculum was largely driven by textbooks and lacked breadth and connections in learning. For example, the elementary curriculum had no history, geography, social studies or music and the quality of the science curriculum was unsatisfactory in KG and Grade 1. The approach in KG was effective for most students, and ensured good language acquisition in Arabic, French and English. The older students benefited from accessing textbooks on-line from home but e-Learning had not yet impacted on students' attainment. Overall, the curriculum showed continuity and progression but transition from KG to Grade 1 was weak with insufficient relevant information passed between departments. A few cross-curricular links were evident in syllabus documents but not evident in many lessons. The school did not fulfil the requirements for Islamic Education in Grades 1 to 3. The children in KG benefited from the inclusion of Islamic Education and Arabic. Teachers were involved at a superficial level in an annual review of the curriculum through the subject co-ordinators and co-directors and this had led to a few changes which impacted on students. However, there was no systematic means to link curriculum review to an analysis of reliable attainment data and so no effective means to judge the impact of the schools' curriculum. Students enjoyed access to a narrow range of extra-curricular activities but more needed to be done to expand these opportunities and include more field trips to enrich the curriculum and develop links in students' learning.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The quality of protection provided for students was good throughout the school. Staff monitored the external gates and all members of the school population felt secure. The building and outdoor facilities were clean but there was some litter on the grounds after student breaks. A full-time doctor worked at the school along with two full-time nurses who took turns staying back until after-school activities were over. The nurses kept accurate health records and were active in their encouragement of students to follow a healthy lifestyle. Records were meticulously kept and medication was kept in locked cabinets. A newly created written emergency evacuation plan was in place and evacuations had taken place with the co-operation of the local authorities. The buses were tracked by satellite and each bus had an adult monitor.

The quality of support provided for students was acceptable. Students received guidance relative to college application and placement from the college guidance counsellor. Students' concerns, needs and questions were usually dealt with in an effective manner. On the rare occasion when serious student misbehaviour occurred, the parents were immediately contacted. When support was needed, the school referred students and their families to the relevant agencies. Tracking and supporting students' overall academic progress were not consistent throughout the school. Procedures for monitoring attendance were effective in promoting good attendance and absences were followed up with telephone calls to the parents.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership and management was acceptable. Unsatisfactory areas identified in the May 2009 report were addressed under the leadership of the acting Director, who had also been in the interim position during the previous inspection. The roles within the leadership team were clearly defined. Several areas that required attention were noted, most importantly the inconsistent use of student data to develop and improve teaching and learning in some curricular areas. The systematic tracking of internal and external assessment results, graduation rates and students' post-secondary experiences were not yet part of the school's self-evaluation and improvement process.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. The evaluation and improvement process remained primarily an administrative function and did not reflect staff input as part of the process. An action plan and programme of professional development activities had been created and presented to staff at the beginning of the 2009 school year. The collection of student attainment and attendance data was not systematic as part of the evaluation process. Overall, the leadership and management team were judged to be responsive to the previous inspection report and progress had been made in several key areas. Previously identified areas deemed unsatisfactory had been addressed, most notably in relation to the role of parents on the governing body, and the school self-evaluation and improvement planning process.

The school's partnership with parents remained positive as expressed in parent interviews and survey responses. Parents were supportive of the school and the leadership team. The parents saw the school as having an open door policy. The website provided parents with access to school announcements and other items of importance to their students. During interviews, parents expressed satisfaction with the amount of communication from the school and felt engaged when appropriate. Communication with parents was achieved through various means such as SMS, face-to-face meetings, by circular or letter, and through group meetings.

Governance was acceptable. The chief academic officer reviewed the procedures currently used in programme development. The proposed creation of an advisory council, scheduled for implementation in January 2010, included several parents along with other stakeholders outside of the school. However, there were no plans to include the school Director on the governing board.

The quality of staffing, facilities and resources was acceptable. There were sufficient staff to cover the needs of the curriculum but teaching assistants were not always effectively deployed. There were ICT resources but they were not consistently well used. There were deficiencies in specialist facilities that impacted on students' learning. The library was generally well-stocked but lacked a range of dual language books.

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:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High School
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High School
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High School
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High School
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High School
Attainment	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High School
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Acceptable	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High School
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:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High School
Curriculum quality	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High School
Health and safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
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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