

International Academic School Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 12

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	5
Recommendations.....	5
How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?.....	6
How good is the students' personal and social development?.....	7
How good are the teaching and learning?.....	8
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?.....	8
How well does the school protect and support students?.....	9
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.

International Academic School was inspected in November 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 Warqaa, International Academic School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to Grade 12, aged three to 18 years. The school follows two curricula - the Ministry of Education curriculum for students from Grade 1 to Grade 9, and a US curriculum from Kindergarten to Grade 12. At the time of the inspection, there were 832 students on roll. The attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

As part of the inspection process, Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires issued to parents. Most parents were satisfied with the quality of education at the school. They thought that teaching and their children's progress were at least good in all the key subjects. Most parents thought that homework was appropriate, but half of them considered that their children required a lot of extra help at home. Most parents believed that the school took good care of their children, including its focus on a healthy lifestyle. Home-school communication was considered to be good; the regular parent-teachers meetings were seen as helpful. The leadership of the school was described as good. The quality of teaching was highlighted both as the main strength and the most important area to improve. A few parents had concerns, particularly about the school's management of students' behaviour, the teaching of Arabic, the quality of the curriculum, the uniform and heavy school bags.

How well does the school perform overall?

The school provided an acceptable quality of education for its students. It had a positive ethos in which students felt valued and at ease with one another and with adults. The school had responded to most of the issues raised at the last inspection with some success, but acknowledged that there was still work to do. School leaders had been well aware that a major barrier to its development was the high turnover of teaching staff and had taken steps to deal with this. As a result, attainment and progress had improved since last year, especially in the middle and high schools and were now at least acceptable in all subjects. Students and parents were pleased with the improved teaching in these areas. Assessments systems had improved, but teachers did not use the data from them consistently well to plan their lessons. Senior and subject leaders were more vigilant in their monitoring of lessons, although not yet rigorous enough in their appraisals. The school had yet to use international standards as a means of validating students' progress and ensuring a recognised qualification by Grade 12. Nevertheless, parents were happy with the school and more involved in supporting their children's learning at home. A new parents' association had been set up.

Children made good progress in the Kindergarten where teaching was lively and interactive. Teachers used assessment skilfully in their planning to make sure that all children were challenged. Elsewhere in the school, acceptable teaching produced acceptable learning and progress. Teachers understood how to provide high expectations for all students and involve them more in their own learning, but only a small minority of teachers were confident in doing this. Although the curriculum was acceptable, lessons were too closely linked to textbooks and often not creative enough to motivate students fully. Links with the community were underdeveloped. The school cared for its students, and they felt safe and happy in school. Relationships with adults were relaxed but respectful and students' behaviour was mostly good. Students' understanding of Islam was good, although their environmental awareness was no better than acceptable. The school supported the students adequately but not with enough consistency. For example, procedures for identifying and supporting students with special educational needs were not formalised and there was little training for staff to safeguard the well-being of students. The school's leadership shared a positive vision for the school. New appointments had boosted the senior management team's scope and skills. The school's action plans highlighted key aspects of teaching, assessment and the curriculum and there had been relevant training for staff. However, the plans were too complex to drive development efficiently and there was not enough determination and momentum to carry them through.

Key features of the school

- The school had a positive and welcoming ethos. Students were well behaved and related easily to adults though not all the formal systems of personal support were fully in place;
- Children benefited from a good start to school in Kindergarten, but teaching elsewhere in the school was not consistently challenging enough for all groups of students;
- Staff professional development had improved assessment systems, but teachers did not yet use the information from assessment skilfully enough in their planning of lessons;
- The curriculum was acceptable from elementary to high school but did not have sufficient scope for students to learn for themselves. The curriculum in the Kindergarten was good;
- There was a shared vision and commitment among senior staff to improve the school but the action plans lacked clarity and monitoring of the school's progress was not rigorous enough.

Recommendations

- Implement international benchmarks and tests to provide more accurate validation of students' attainment and progress through the school and ensure that students are able to gain internationally recognised qualifications at the end of Grade 12;
- Ensure that all teachers consistently use assessment data about students' progress to provide appropriate levels of challenging work that meet the needs of all students, including those with special educational needs;
- Provide more opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning and become more independent learners;
- Establish a more creative and practical curriculum that both motivates students and enables them to apply their learning in real-life situations.
- Enhance the curriculum with more diverse links with the local and wider communities;
- Ensure that the evaluations and monitoring of the school by senior leaders are more rigorous and the outcomes are used to create clearer and more streamlined plans for improvement.

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

In Islamic Education, students' attainment was acceptable. Their progress was good in elementary and middle schools, and acceptable in high school. Across the school, most students made good progress in learning about the basic principles of Islam. They understood and could explain the Pillars of Islam and Pillars of Faith. Most Arab and non-Arab Muslim students across the school had improved their Qur'an recitation skills. Most of the Arab students in the elementary and middle schools also had good understanding of the meaning of the verses they learned. Most of the older students had an acceptable knowledge of the Islamic rulings. However, too many students were unable to explore how to apply their learning to new contexts beyond the examples they discussed in their lessons.

In Arabic as a first language, attainment was acceptable throughout the school; progress was good in middle school and acceptable in the elementary and high schools. Most students could follow and respond appropriately to instructions in standard Arabic. They could read age-appropriate texts and could provide short oral and written responses to direct questions. Elementary students steadily improved their vocabulary, their spelling and their handwriting. Most of the middle school students made good progress in understanding and applying Arabic grammar, while high school students were able to analyse pre-Islamic poems. However, only a minority of students, mostly in high school, had good ability to write extensively and independently for different purposes and audiences.

In Arabic as an additional language, both attainment and progress were acceptable across the school. Most elementary students reached acceptable levels in letter and sound recognition. They understood an appropriate range of common words and phrases and were learning to read and form Arabic cursive script. The majority of students who had learnt Arabic for three years or more could read and pronounce Arabic script to an appropriate level. They copied and wrote short sentences using the narrow range of words they had learnt, following simple sentence patterns. However, throughout the school listening and speaking skills were underdeveloped, particularly in high school.

Attainment was acceptable in English throughout the school. Progress was good in Kindergarten and acceptable in all other grades. Children in the Kindergarten knew the letters of the alphabet and could write them. They responded well to a phonics approach, which developed their basic language skills well. In the rest of the school, reading, writing speaking and listening were broadly in line with age-related expectations, although reading in Grade 4 was below the expected level. By Grade 8, students could create different types of sentences, but writing tended to be functional and analytical, and not creative enough. In Grade 12, students were good at writing poetry and enjoyed literature.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable throughout the school. Children in Kindergarten developed basic counting skills for numbers from 1 to 10. Elementary students developed an age-appropriate understanding of basic arithmetic concepts including addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, as well as early algebraic concepts. Students in the

middle school were competent in their understanding and use of algebra, but were less secure in geometry. Those in the high school were proficient in algebra, including quadratic equations, trigonometry and early calculus concepts. They had good skills in explaining mathematical concepts and had acceptable reasoning and problem-solving skills.

Attainment and progress in science were acceptable in all phases, except in Kindergarten, where progress was good. Younger students developed their scientific vocabulary and understanding through a range of practical activities. For example in Kindergarten, children could classify foods into healthy and unhealthy groups, as well as recognise, name and describe the function of each part of a plant. In the elementary school, classification skills were further developed and students in the middle school could solve basic genetic problems using punnet squares. They developed an acceptable scientific base, which allowed them to progress successfully to the high school. Grade 10 students were able to apply their learning when testing for precipitation reactions and Grade 12 physics students solved complex current flow problems using Coulomb's law.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good throughout the school. Students were considerate to one another in lessons and at play, and were respectful towards adults. Younger students misbehaved occasionally, but usually when lessons were not interesting enough to hold their attention. Attendance had improved and was now good. A minority of students arrived late for the start of school and missed all or part of assembly. Nevertheless, most students started lessons on time.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture were good. Students were responsible for carrying out duties, such as raising the national flag at the start of the school day. Older students resolved any disagreements that arose at break-times. The student council responded well to concerns of students, although its influence on school development was limited. Students had a good understanding of how Islam influences everyday life in Dubai. They were aware of tolerance and mutual respect as an important Islamic value. They felt that Dubai has an open society in which people of all nationalities and religions can live in harmony.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was acceptable. Students understood how Dubai has risen to become a modern city of importance. They knew, in part, how the city had done this and the vital influence of oil and tourism, but were not wholly clear how Dubai is diversifying its further development. A new 'Go Green' Club, led by girls from Grades 7 and 8, was involved in highlighting environmental measures, such as conserving water and electricity in the home. However, students were generally not yet committed to making the conservation of resources a part of their lives.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was acceptable in all phases, except Kindergarten where it was good. There was considerable variation across all phases of the school. Teaching was often good in Kindergarten, as well as in a number of English and Arabic lessons in the middle and high schools. However, several lessons were unsatisfactory and these included examples in English and science. In good lessons planning and pace were effective, objectives were clear and students were engaged and challenged. Teachers had adequate subject knowledge and made learning meaningful for students. Learning was supported by imaginative use of the available resources. Teachers used stimulating questions to check knowledge and encourage a response from students. Where teaching was less effective, teachers used a single mode of lesson delivery; they taught classes as a single group and did not cater well for students' different learning needs. Students were simply required to copy what was written on the white board; as a result, they tended to learn without really understanding new concepts properly. Often, teachers talked too much.

The quality of learning mirrored the quality of teaching. In too many lessons, students' learning was limited to the acquisition of factual information at the expense of broader and deeper understanding and application. In high quality lessons, students were actively engaged in learning and were able to apply what they had learned to new situations. The quality of learning, especially in English in the high school, had improved over the past year and was now sufficient for students to be appropriately prepared for progression to higher education.

The quality of assessment was good in Kindergarten and acceptable in the rest of the school. In Kindergarten, teachers were guided by a clear policy and procedures. Entrance testing, as well as regular testing of skills, knowledge and understanding, were used to provide clear pictures of both individual and class achievement. In other areas of the school, regular testing provided data for each student and each year group. However, these were not checked against external standards and so did not inform future learning. Most teachers knew their students well and provided additional support in class when necessary. Only a few teachers supported students well in evaluating their progress both during and at the end of lessons. Consequently, only a few students were familiar with assessing their own learning and were clear about how they were doing and how to improve.

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

The curriculum was good in Kindergarten and acceptable in all other phases. An American programme and the Ministry of Education curriculum had been adopted to provide a core that met the basic requirements of students in the two sections of the school. Students' work was, therefore, planned progressively to build steadily on their prior learning. The school regularly reviewed the curriculum, but its action plans were not incisive enough to ensure significant development. Nevertheless, some recent improvements had provided greater breadth and balance, as in social studies, civic understanding, economics and health education. In

Kindergarten, the curriculum was planned well and centred on learning through play and investigation. The leadership was keen to extend this approach further by including more free choices by children and developing the outside activities. The curriculum from Grade 10 to 12 was quite narrow, as students were only able to study a science programme. There were insufficient planned examples of cross-curricular activities, although in a social studies lesson in Grade 9, students combined geography, history, English and information technology to present their research into the UAE in class. The few extra-curricular activities included after-school music, art, environmental studies and health clubs. Links with the local and wider communities involved students attending a book fair and visiting an electronics company in the Oasis Mall. However, such activities to help students learn in real-life situations were underdeveloped.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The quality of the provision for the health and safety of students was acceptable. The facilities were safe and well-maintained. The nurse maintained efficient records of student health issues and medication needs. She secured and dispensed student prescriptions safely. A healthy lifestyle programme was in the early stages of implementation; it included good instructions on healthy lifestyles and a revised cafeteria menu to improve upon its nutritional content. A child protection policy was in place, but teachers did not receive training. Satisfactory behavioural guidelines were mostly applied well in all classrooms; students were clear about the outcomes of any misbehaviour. Appropriate policies and record-keeping were in place for monitoring and encouraging high levels of attendance and punctuality. Nevertheless, many students still arrived late. With the exception of Kindergarten, the dismissal of students at the end of the school day was not well organised in the bus and parent pickup areas.

Support for students was good in Kindergarten and acceptable in the rest of the school. Teachers maintained good relationships with students and responded promptly to their academic and personal needs in the classroom. A counselling system provided helpful information to students regarding standardised assessments and all students who left Grade 12 last year continued into a college or vocational programme. Good systems for tracking students' progress included databases of all assessments common to each grade. The resultant data was provided to staff. However, staff did not use this information consistently well to adapt the curriculum to the students' needs. The school had no formal procedures to identify and address the needs of students with special educational needs.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership and management was acceptable. Senior leaders shared a positive vision for the school and were committed to school improvement. They worked well together and mostly had clearly defined roles. New appointments had broadened their scope and skills. Senior leaders had acted decisively to deal with a barrier to developing the school; they had analysed the causes for the high turnover of staff and had carefully selected new staff and

improved morale and incentives for good teaching. As a consequence, teaching and learning had begun to improve. However, many other aspects of school development lacked the same sense of urgency. The leadership of the Kindergarten was good.

The school's self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. Senior leaders were aware of key aspects that needed improving and what they wanted to achieve. For example, a current priority was to make teaching more child-centred, more creative and more tailored to students' different needs. However, their action plans created to achieve such improvements were too complex. As a result, teachers were not totally clear about what they needed to do and how to do it. Monitoring of classroom practice was consistent and regular and adhered to good practice, but it lacked rigour; evaluations tended to be rather generous. Most, but not all, issues from the last inspection had been addressed.

Partnerships with parents and the local community were acceptable. Parents appreciated what the school did for their children and said they were now more involved in their children's learning at home. Some parents shared their skills and expertise in the school, but this was not widespread. The newly formed parents' association was a valuable means of parents coming together and sharing their thoughts. The updated website provided good information. Links with the community were improving, but remained underdeveloped.

Governance was acceptable. The parent company supervised the school's activities regularly and responded positively to key issues, such as staff turnover. The company provided important management and guidance that included the expansion of the Kindergarten. The Principal and senior staff were clearly held accountable for the school's performance. The school did not yet have a board of trustees with representation from a sufficiently wide range of stakeholders and members of the community.

The staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable. The academic qualifications of most teachers were suitable, but most teachers had not benefited from specific teacher training. Even so, there was some good expertise in some subjects, such as art. The classrooms were small but adequate. The limited space was not a barrier to formal learning, but it restricted free movement by students and the options for independent learning. There were sufficient specialist rooms, including three computer rooms, but some of them lacked a good range of resources, for example in science. The school had no sports hall to maximise the opportunities for physical education.

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

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
90% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

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

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

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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