

INSPECTION REPORT

Our Own High School - Dubai

Report published in February 2012

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Our Own High School - Dubai

Location	Al Warqa'a
Type of school	Private
Website	gemsoo-alwarqaa.com
Telephone	04-280 0077
Address	PO Box 35519, Al Warqa'a, Dubai
Principal	Neville de Noronha
Curriculum	Indian
Gender of students	Boys
Age / Grades or Year Groups	5-18 / Grade 1 to Grade 12
Attendance	Good
Number of students on roll	4,825
Number of Emirati students	0
Date of the inspection	Sunday 2nd to Thursday 6th October 2011

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The context of the school

Our Own High School, situated in Al Warqa'a, is a private school providing education for boys from Grades 1 to 12, aged five to 18 years.

The school follows the Indian Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) curriculum and is introducing the Central Board of Secondary Education international (CBSE-i) curriculum.

There were 219 full-time teachers, including the Principal, Head of Primary and a senior leadership team of eight supervisors. All teachers in the school had appropriate teaching qualifications and had undertaken recent professional development. Students were grouped in 130 classes with an average class size of 37 students. The majority of students were from Indian families with a small numbers of other nationalities. Thirty students, or less than one per cent, had been identified by the school as having some form of special educational need. All of those students received additional support from specialist staff members.

Overall school performance 2011-2012

Good

How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

Our Own High School provided a good quality of education. It had some outstanding features, which included attainment in English, mathematics and science in the secondary phase, health and safety, and partnership with parents. Students' attitudes and behaviour were outstanding and, in the middle and secondary phases, their respect for Islam, appreciation of culture, community involvement and environmental understanding were outstanding. The quality of teaching for effective learning was good although inconsistent across the school. Students took responsibility for their own learning and made good use of their research skills. Assessment was acceptable with extensive data used to track progress but not used consistently to plan lessons for the full range of abilities or inform students of the next steps in their learning. The curriculum had strengths in extra-curricular provision but did not meet requirements for the number of lessons for Muslim students in Islamic Education in Grades 11 and 12.

Since the previous inspection, a number of initiatives had been introduced to improve Arabic and ensure greater consistency in teaching across the school, including the appointment of supervisors for Arabic,

Islamic Education and teaching and learning. The school had made good progress towards addressing the recommendations from the previous inspection report, including teacher-training and raising staff awareness about students with special educational needs.

Key strengths

- The attainment and progress of students in English, mathematics and science in the secondary phase;
- Students' attitudes and behaviour as well as their respect for Islam, appreciation of culture, community involvement and environmental understanding;
- The arrangements to secure students' health, safety, security and well being;
- The quality of links with parents and the community;
- The leadership and vision of the Principal.

Recommendations

- Raise attainment and improve students' progress in Arabic;
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that a greater proportion of lessons are good or better and unsatisfactory teaching is eliminated;
- Further develop the use of assessment information to ensure that students are clear about their next steps in learning;
- Ensure that the curriculum provision meets statutory requirements for Islamic Education;
- Significantly reduce class sizes to allow opportunities for a greater range of teaching and learning activities.

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

	Primary	Middle	Secondary
Islamic Education			
Attainment	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good
Arabic as a first language			
Attainment	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Progress	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Arabic as an additional language			
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory
English			
Attainment	Good	Good	Outstanding
Progress	Good	Good	Outstanding
Mathematics			
Attainment	Good	Good	Outstanding
Progress	Good	Good	Outstanding
Science			
Attainment	Good	Good	Outstanding
Progress	Good	Good	Outstanding

Attainment in the primary phase was good in all key subjects with the exception of Arabic, where it was acceptable. In the middle and secondary phases, attainment was good, and outstanding in English, mathematics and science in secondary grades. Attainment in Arabic was acceptable in the middle grades and unsatisfactory in the secondary phase. In Islamic Education, most students had good knowledge of the history of early Islam and an awareness of Islam in a multi-cultural, modern society. In Arabic,

students demonstrated skills in listening, speaking and reading which were in line with expectations in the primary phase but weaker in the middle phase and below expectations in the secondary phase. By Grade 8 students had good reading and comprehension skills in English, although reading for pleasure and extended writing skills were less well developed. In mathematics, students in Grades 9 to 12 had good understanding of calculus and co-ordinate geometry. In science, their investigation skills were best developed in the secondary phase. By Grade 12 they were able to determine the internal resistance of a cell and discuss the practical applications of their experiments.

Progress was good in the majority of key subjects and outstanding in English, mathematics and science in the secondary grades. In Islamic Education, most students demonstrated good progress in their recitation of The Holy Qur'an, while students progressed at an acceptable rate in Arabic in the primary phase, except for their writing skills. Students' progress in Arabic after Grade 7 deteriorated, especially in the development of speaking skills. Most secondary students made better than expected progress in their knowledge and skills as a result of remedial coaching, supportive counselling and practice sessions. Assessment information and lesson observations confirmed that progress in English, mathematics and science, in the secondary phase, was outstanding. Students with special educational needs made good progress in line with other students in their classes. Their needs were correctly identified and suitably supported in most lessons.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	Primary	Middle	Secondary
Attitudes and behaviour	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding
Civic, economic and environmental understanding	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding

Students' attitudes and behaviour were outstanding. As students moved through the school, the increased level of maturity in their personal and social development was clearly evident. By Grade 12 students had developed into responsible young adults with excellent attitudes towards learning, even when teaching was not as stimulating as it might have been. Students were extremely respectful, polite and well mannered. Attendance was good and almost all students were punctual in arriving to their classes. Students thrived on responsibility and were actively involved in leading assemblies, producing the school's 'Face to Faith' newsletter and acting as prefects to contribute to the smooth running of the school. They demonstrated well-informed attitudes towards healthy living, especially with regard to their food choices during school breaks and their participation in programmes like 'My Fit Family' and an 'Anti-Obesity Drive.' Students understood the importance of Islam and appreciated the multi-cultural nature of Dubai. Almost all students knew how Dubai had developed and most had an excellent understanding of the reasons for the developments. They were aware of the contributions they could make to Dubai's growth and economy. Students had excellent awareness of their environmental and community responsibilities, as evidenced in their charity work and involvement in environmental initiatives.

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	Primary	Middle	Secondary
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

Teaching for effective learning was good in all phases. Professional development, informed by discussion with teachers, had contributed to some improvement. Teachers created a learning environment where students were praised and felt their efforts were rewarded. Most teachers had good subject knowledge but their understanding of pedagogy was underdeveloped; consequently, students' individual learning styles were not always given sufficient consideration. Too often, teaching followed a rigid formula where teacher-talk dominated and students remained passive for too long. Group work was a good feature in a few lessons. Lesson planning was consistent and a range of teacher-made resources and technology was used well to complement textbook provision. Peer tutoring was an effective strategy, for example, when Grade 9 students had prepared and presented a geography lesson using information and communication technology (ICT) very effectively. The teaching of students with special educational needs was good. Teachers mostly understood their individual needs and were mindful of meeting them in the classroom.

The quality of learning was good in all phases. It was a stronger feature of lessons than teaching because students were enthusiastic and took responsibility for their own learning. The oldest students were mature, highly motivated learners who were prepared to support and challenge each other. Most lessons involved some collaboration in pairs or in groups, with role play and presentation to their peers providing further enrichment. Effective connections to other subjects and to everyday life were not consistent features of lessons. The broad range of extra-curricular activities offered developmental opportunities to all but especially to older students. Across the school insufficient open-ended and practical experiences were provided to engage students and to promote their creativity and independence.

Assessment of learning was acceptable. Increasing use was made of the centralised tracking data system, particularly to identify students' progress. However, this data was not used consistently to plan lessons for the full range of abilities. Lessons rarely provided students with specific assessment criteria so they were unaware of the standards and quality they should be aiming for. Teachers regularly checked students' understanding by asking questions, but this approach was relied upon too often. A positive feature was the introduction of some peer and self-assessment, but such good practice was limited. Teachers' marking was inconsistent and did not indicate what students needed to do to improve or how to reach the next steps in learning.

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

	Primary	Middle	Secondary
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

The curriculum was of acceptable quality. Within the curriculum there were some good and outstanding features, most notably in the secondary phase and in the extra-curricular provision. Courses and programmes met the requirements of the Indian CBSE and students studied a range of subjects including languages, economics, history and the arts. In the primary and middle phases of the school, there were insufficient opportunities for students to learn through investigation and experimentation, especially in mathematics and science. The courses in Islamic Education had improved since the last inspection but did not meet statutory requirements for the number of lessons in Grades 11 and 12. Arabic courses were not sufficiently developed to fully challenge and support student's learning. A strong feature was the extra-curricular provision coupled with a wide range of internal and external competitions in which students had been highly successful. An example was seen in the field of robotics, where students had the opportunity to develop advanced skills and achieve international success with their projects.

How well does the school protect and support students?

	Primary	Middle	Secondary
Health and Safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of Support	Good	Good	Outstanding

Arrangements for ensuring students' health and safety remained outstanding with exemplary practice, notably in the well organised and monitored travel arrangements as well as the extended arrangements to meet students' health and medical needs. Programmes to promote healthy lifestyles and to support students' well-being were deeply embedded. There were high levels of security and a great deal of consideration given to keeping a clean and safe environment. Meticulous attention to detail was evident in all aspects of health and safety. For example, records of evacuation drills showed timings and a full analysis of the drills with recommendations for further improvement. Staff members and students knew about child protection arrangements.

The quality of support provided by the school was good in the primary and middle phases and outstanding in the secondary phase. Most teachers were well aware of their students' social, physical and intellectual needs. They offered valuable advice and guidance on improving organisational skills and educational choices. The school was active in providing students with knowledge of possible career choices, which were particularly evident in the secondary phase where they received support for university entrance. The school's strong pastoral care and support made a significant contribution to the excellent relationships between students and teachers. The school kept accurate records of attendance and punctuality, both of which were well managed.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

	Whole school
Quality of leadership	Good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Outstanding
Governance	Good
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Good

The quality of leadership and management of the school were good. The Principal provided a clear strategic direction based on a vision which took into account the views of the staff, students and parents. His strong and supportive presence had ensured a sense of clarity and growing confidence among staff members. Distributive leadership allowed teachers to take greater responsibility for their own areas of expertise and develop teams. Professional development, focused on teaching and assessment, was appropriate but opportunities to share good and outstanding practice were rare. The school had provided a robust response to the last inspection report. The school demonstrated a good capacity for continuing improvement.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. Senior staff members, supervisors and middle managers knew the strengths and areas requiring development. They had plans to improve the quality of teaching Arabic and ensuring greater consistency in teaching and assessment overall. There were clear procedures for monitoring and evaluating all aspects of the school's work. Action planning and school improvement planning were very detailed but sometimes too generic. The school's self-evaluation was undertaken in collaboration with governors, staff members, students and parents. Judgements were mostly accurate but there was some confusion over attainment and progress, and the links between the school's provision and outcomes for students.

The school's partnership with parents and the community was outstanding. Parents confirmed that home-school communication had improved significantly over the past two years. They agreed that communication between parents and teachers resulted in positive partnership. Parents indicated that their views were listened to and their involvement led to changes in the canteen, the availability of water dispensers, the discontinuing of holiday homework and the provision of Arabic classes for parents. Extensive links with the community were in place and used effectively to support students' development.

Governance was good. The school had a well established management committee that offered advice, support, accountability and challenge to the school. The board included representation from a range of stakeholders including parents, teachers and principals from neighbouring schools, as well as the managing company. All brought expertise and influence to their roles. Parents were regularly surveyed and actively engaged with the work of the school committee through regular consultations and joint meetings. The management committee was influential in the work of the school and acted swiftly to address weaknesses, although the amount of teaching time for Islamic Education in Grades 11 and 12 had not been identified.

Staffing, facilities and resources were good. Teachers were well qualified in their subjects and well deployed. They benefitted from regular reviews. There were generally good facilities for students to engage in sports and the school had made good improvements to the library resources. However, there were shortages in teaching resources, particularly in mathematics and science in the primary and middle phases of the school. The larger class sizes and the small classroom spaces restricted opportunities for learning through practical activities.

What are the views of parents, teachers and students?

Before the inspection, the views of parents, teachers and senior secondary students were surveyed. Key messages from each group were considered during the inspection and these helped to form judgements. A summary of the survey statistics and comments from those who responded to the survey follows:

Responses to the surveys			
Responses received	Number		Percentage
Parents	This year	1632	46%
	Last year	3057	87%
Teachers	97		45%
Students	456		57%

*The percentage of responses from parents is based on the number of families.

A significant minority of parents responded to the survey, a drop from last year when most parents responded. Almost half of the teachers and a little more than half of the senior students responded to the survey. Most parents continued to express satisfaction with the overall quality of education provided, but a few indicated dissatisfaction, as did a few senior students. Almost all parents agreed that their children were making good progress in English, mathematics and science. Most parents believed that progress was good in Islamic Education and Arabic as an additional language, but a few disagreed that progress was good in these subjects. Senior students' views on progress were similar to those of parents. Parents were broadly positive about the different aspects of school provision, but more than a few indicated that they were not involved in improving the school. A majority of parents and most teachers agreed that inspection had led to improvements at the school. Teachers' views about the school generally were very positive and almost all agreed that inspection had helped them to improve their practice. While their views were mostly positive, more than a few senior students indicated that behaviour at the school was less than good. A majority of senior students believed that school leaders listened to their opinions about the school, but more than a few disagreed. Similarly, a majority thought that progress reports were useful but more than a few did not think so.

What happens next?

The school has been asked to prepare and submit an updated action plan to DSIB within two months of receiving the most recent report. This plan should address:

- Recommendations from DSIB;
- Areas identified by the school as requiring improvement;
- Other external reports or sources of information that comment on the work of the school;
- Priorities arising from the school's unique characteristics.

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

Our work with schools

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) inspects schools to inform parents, students and the wider community of the quality of education provided. Inspectors also give guidance to staff about how to improve the standard of education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask the principal and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan our time in school. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities in which students are involved. We also gather the views of students, parents and staff. We find their views very helpful and use them, together with the other information we have collected, to arrive at our view regarding the quality of education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of education in the school. We describe how well students are doing, how good the school is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and children work together and how they go about improving the school. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its aims.

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