

INSPECTION REPORT

Dar Al Marefa School

Report published in April, 2014

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Dar Al Marefa School

Location	Mirdif
Type of school	Private
Website	www.daralmarefa.ae
Telephone	04-2885782
Address	Dubai PO Box 112602
Principal	Shirine Al Khudari
Curriculum	IB
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-16 / KG 1-Grade 10
Attendance	Acceptable
Number of students on roll	456
Largest nationality group of Students	Emirati
Number of Emirati students	349 (77%)
Date of the inspection	13th to 15th January

Contents

The context of the school	3
Overall school performance 2013-2014	4
Key strengths	4
Recommendations	4
Progress since the last inspection	5
Trend of overall performance.....	5
How good are the students' attainment progress and learning skills?	6
How good is the students' personal and social development?	7
How good are teaching and assessment?.....	7
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?	8
How well does the school protect and support students?	8
How good are the leadership and management of the school?	8
How well does the school provide for students with special educational needs?.....	14
How well does the school teach Arabic as a first language?.....	14
What are the views of parents, teachers and students?.....	15
What happens next?	16
How to contact us	16

The context of the school

Located in Mirdif, Dar El Marefa School, at the time of this inspection, had an enrolment of 456 students. Their ages ranged from 3 to 16 years.

The International Baccalaureate was the programme in operation. Students took a range of national and international examinations. These included ISA and ACER.

There were appropriately qualified teachers, led by the principal and her senior leadership team. Seven kindergarten classes were led by teachers and teaching assistants. Ten teaching assistants supported the teachers in Grade 1 to 5 classes. The Middle Years Programme had boys and girls in Grades 6 and 7, and girls only in Grades 8 to 10 where class numbers were small. Most students were Emirati. Approximately 10 per cent of the students had been identified as having a need that required specific support or curriculum modification.

The principal was in her third year as leader of the school and the other members of the senior leadership team had been appointed in 2011 and 2012. Seven new teachers had joined the school in the current academic year.

Overall school performance 2013-2014

Good

Key strengths

- Good teaching across the subjects in Kindergarten and PYP, and in English in MYP;
- A coherent and balanced curriculum in PYP;
- Students' strong knowledge and understanding of Islamic values and cultural heritage.

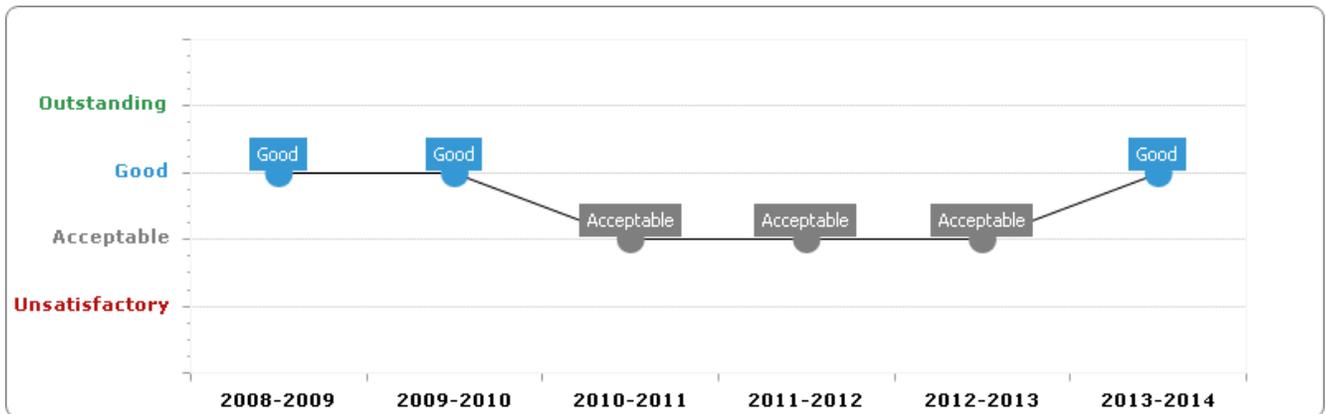
Recommendations

- Encourage more learner-led actions and experiences, to ensure that students understand their learning expectations better and make more purposeful use of technology to develop critical thinking and enquiry skills;
- Strengthen the IB rationale and principles across the school and raise the level of challenge for students especially in Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Improve curriculum modification and teaching for students with special educational needs, particularly in MYP;
- Give the students a greater voice and facilitate student leadership in environmental and community-based programmes.

Progress since the last inspection

- Strong leadership had led improvements to teaching in many grades and subject areas;
- Previous declines in mathematics and science had been reversed and students were making better progress overall;
- There was better provision for students with special educational needs;
- Assessment procedures had improved and were providing the school with accurate data, which supported better self-evaluation.

Trend of overall performance



How good are the students' attainment progress and learning skills?

	KG	PYP	MYP
Islamic Education			
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable
Arabic as a first language			
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Arabic as an additional language			
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Not Applicable
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Not Applicable
English			
Attainment	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Good
Mathematics			
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Good	Good	Acceptable
Science			
Attainment	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

	KG	PYP	MYP
Quality of students' learning skills	Good	Good	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	KG	PYP	MYP
Personal responsibility	Good	Good	Good
Students' understanding of Islamic values and their local, cultural and global awareness	Outstanding	Outstanding	Good
Community and environmental responsibility	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

	KG	PYP	MYP
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Acceptable
Assessment	Good	Good	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	KG	PYP	MYP
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Acceptable
Curriculum design to meet the individual needs of students	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

	KG	PYP	MYP
Health and Safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of Support	Good	Good	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

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

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the students' attainment and progress?

Most students developed their understanding of Islamic concepts such as worship and the manners expected of a good Muslim but did not consistently link these with daily life. In Arabic as a first language, students had secure listening skills. In speaking, they communicated their ideas with fluency and were better at comprehension than reading aloud. Their writing included mistakes in spelling, grammar and word choice. In Arabic as an additional language, a majority of students had good listening skills. In speaking, students could talk about simple familiar topics, although reading comprehension was less well developed. Students' abilities to express their ideas through writing creatively was still developing. In English, kindergarten children were skilful in speaking and listening, early reading and writing. Older students applied those skills to a high standard in extended writing in English lessons and to solving problems in other subjects. Attainment in mathematics was good in Kindergarten. It was broadly acceptable in PYP although there were some aspects of good attainment following the implementation of a range of new and effective teaching and support strategies, and raised expectations. In science, kindergarten children could identify living and non-living things. PYP students researched topics such as life cycles, water pollution and space. Students in MYP conducted investigations in topics such as separation of substances and chemical reactions.

The progress was acceptable in majority of MYP lessons because teaching strategies that did not help students to go beyond the text-books. There was a lack of differentiated tasks and limited opportunities of relating learning to daily lives. In Islamic Education, progress was slower in MYP than in the primary years across most aspects of the subject. In Arabic as a first language, most students made better progress in listening and responding skills than in other aspects of the language. They made steady progress in reading and writing. In Arabic as an additional language, students made better progress in listening and basic reading skills than in other aspects of the language. Greater challenge was improving their extended speaking and writing skills. In English, students, especially those in PYP, were making good progress in extended writing, debate, analysis and presentation. In mathematics and science, students in KG and PYP made better than expected progress from the starting points. This was due in part to the practical inquiry based programme and teaching strategies that generated interest. Kindergarten children were establishing strong reasoning skills. Progress in mathematics of PYP students was good because they had developed more concrete ways of looking at problems and many could solve challenges individually. However, on occasions, there was insufficient challenge in lessons for stronger students.

[View judgements](#)

Quality of students' learning skills

Learning skills were good in Kindergarten and PYP, and acceptable in MYP. Most students displayed enthusiasm for their lessons, were keen to answer questions and consistently engaged with their peers when tasked with group activities. In the lower grades there were more opportunities for students to apply their understanding to real-life situations and they made more connections between various aspects of their learning. Across Kindergarten and Primary, a majority of students described how their learning could be used outside school. Where learning skills were less strong, for example in MYP, students did not take sufficient individual ownership of their learning. Many were reluctant to think for themselves and carry out research in the units of enquiry. Older students were often passive and waited for direction from teachers. Their use of technology as a tool for accessing information and expressing their own thoughts was limited. Students were still developing as enquirers of their world.

[View judgements](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Personal and social responsibility was good. Students displayed positive attitudes and responsible behaviour in classrooms and around the school. They were courteous and helpful to each other and adults. A new behaviour and discipline policy, underpinned by the learner profile, provided comprehensive guidelines for student management, but had rarely needed implementation. There were strong relationships between teachers and students. Across the school, students demonstrated a comprehensive knowledge of and positive attitudes towards a healthy lifestyle. Attendance was acceptable and punctuality was an issue for some students. Students demonstrated an outstanding understanding of Islamic values and how they influence the life in Dubai. Students had good understanding of local traditions and the heritage of the UAE. PYP students and Kindergarten children had excellent age-appropriate awareness and appreciation of their own culture and other cultures from around the world. Older students were not as aware of their own cultural context within the wider cultural setting of Dubai and the world. Kindergarten children helped one another; taking pride in their classroom. They gained some environmental awareness by making compost. Students had a positive work ethic. Only a few students, especially in MYP, understood the environmental challenges facing UAE, such as producing and sustaining a supply of fresh water. PYP students had some insight into challenges facing others. They interacted with an orphans' school but this was still a developing venture and not sufficient to prepare them for a strong understanding of the world community.

[View judgements](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

Teaching was good in KG and PYP and acceptable in MYP. Teachers had sound subject knowledge and significant understanding of how children learn. The teachers designed creative and imaginative lesson plans and used interesting and appropriate teaching strategies. Teacher-student relationships were good enabling constructive dialogue within lessons. The school had a broad range of excellent resources and facilities, although the resources were not always used well enough in lessons. The slow pace of some lessons often resulted in students being bored. Some teachers over-directed learning, resulting in passive student participation. The promotion of critical thinking skills and enquiry-based learning was rare in MYP. Low expectations and a lack of challenging lesson objectives sometimes limited progress. Nevertheless, teaching strategies mostly met the needs of students with special educational needs. Strategies to meet the needs of the more able did not result in greater challenge, independence and opportunities for students to learn for themselves in a topic.

Assessment was good in KG and PYP and acceptable in MYP. A reflective approach by teachers and students contributed well to assessment of progress and for learning. A range of international data provided greater accuracy for curriculum planning and target setting. During the best lessons, students monitored their own progress. In Kindergarten and Primary, the Learner Profile provided an analysis of work, formative and summative data and ensured students' understanding of how well they were doing and what their next steps were. In MYP, assessment in some subjects focused too much on recall and understanding of content, rather than on evaluating skills. In contrast, the humanities and English departments used clear evaluation rubrics which were shared with students at the start of lessons and allowed time for peer evaluation and reflection. These enabled teachers and students to identify strengths and weaknesses. Points for improvement were written and discussed with the students, who then illustrated their understanding in writing.

[View judgements](#)

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

The quality of the curriculum was good in KG and PYP and acceptable in MYP. The Kindergarten and PYP units of inquiry and the eight subject areas of the MYP provided a broad, comprehensive programme offering that could meet the needs of most students if implemented effectively. Smooth transition between phases was facilitated in the PYP and MYP sections through regular meetings that established cross-curricular opportunities and the development of more complex skillsets. Review was on-going through collaborative planning in the PYP and in subject areas in the MYP. Aspects of MYP such as the assessment criteria, concepts and approaches to learning were being integrated into planning documents. The trans-disciplinary nature of

the PYP resulted in strong cross-curricular links and there had been some encouraging work on developing interdisciplinary units in the MYP. A range of extra-curricular activities was offered across the school but links with the community needed further development.

The design of the curriculum was acceptable. Modifications to the curriculum were made to meet the needs of students, and Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) were used in PYP. The daily planning included differentiated learning activities but these were not sufficient to meet the needs of all groups of students. The school did not systemically categorise the students according to their interests, talents and aspirations. Limited extra-curricular options for students to explore these individual options meant that students did not always develop talents in school matched to their capabilities.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

The provision for the health and safety of students was outstanding. The school buildings and grounds were safe and well maintained. Sunshades ensured all year round availability of sports and relaxation areas. Students were well supervised in the buildings, grounds and buses. Robust systems and processes ensured that health and safety, healthy living and child protection procedures were understood and implemented consistently. All staff had an understanding of their responsibilities and the counsellor and heads of phase were proactive in making the school as safe as possible. The school acknowledged that the canteen required improvement to ensure its impact on healthy life styles. Health education was well supported by the counsellor and external organisations

The quality of support was good in KG and PYP and acceptable in MYP. The school was inclusive and demonstrated strong support for students with special educational needs (SEN). However, there was a need to review the classifications of SEN and to strengthen identification and curriculum modification. Individual learning plans with specific targets were in place for all students with SEN, and parents were involved and kept well informed. Curriculum modification with SEN support staff had enabled most students to make good progress. In a number of instances the progress is outstanding, although more rigorous overview of classroom provision to support teachers was required. Provision for gifted and talented students was not good enough across the school. The identification of MYP students with SEN was improving. Staff-student relationships and behaviour management were good. Management of attendance and punctuality management was inconsistent. Focused and specific guidance and support for future education were provided.

[View judgements](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of the leadership was good. The vision and mission of the leaders were well-established and teaching had been improved. A majority of teachers implemented the strategies required to enable independent and purposeful learning. The team's collective and individual responsibilities had been well set out. Achievable and appropriate improvement plans were in place for each phase. Leaders understood what aspects to prioritise. These were communicated effectively to middle leaders. There was a strong capacity for further improvement.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. The school knew itself accurately. Systems for reviewing the quality of teaching, attainment, progress and curriculum had improved. Staff had prioritised aspects for improvement and identified success criteria. All staff were involved in self-evaluation, although some evidence was not accurate enough.

Partnerships with parents and the community were good. Productive, relevant partnerships with parents contributed to students' progress. School staff were accessible, efficient and focused in helping parents understand each student's next steps. Reporting highlighted topics to be covered, skills to be developed and how learning can be applied at home and in the community. Parents were very supportive of the school's work. Connections with the local community were less well established. The school made some links but did not routinely engage the students in community activities as a learning experience.

Governance was good. Governors were closely involved in and informed about the school. They listened to the parents and aligned their expectations to the vision of the school. They worked consistently to support the school's work through resource procurement, professional development and effective responses to ongoing issues. Governors were well informed of school improvements, especially the quality of teaching and student achievement. Governors understood the need for greater accountability among senior leaders as the school continued to improve. They were committed to implementing more easily understood measurements for this accountability.

Management, staffing, facilities and resources were good. The school was managed well on a daily basis. Qualified, committed staff were deployed effectively. The premises, which included three well-stocked libraries were well maintained and used well. There was a wide range of high-quality learning resources in the libraries and around the school but the extent and use of ICT needed further development.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school provide for students with special educational needs?

Significant work had taken place in the provision for students with special educational needs. Identification systems were more accurate with the exception of those who were gifted and talented. The school provided a modified curriculum with specific focus for improvement in lessons for those with the greatest need. It also ensured that a tracking system was in place to cater to those students with less challenging learning requirements. Teachers planned carefully to set good activities at appropriate levels to ensure success for students with SEN. They implemented these strategies effectively. Parents were closely involved and informed of the actions and supported their children effectively. Data collection systems had been set up to measure the students' progress and to plan the next steps. Students with particular needs were not identified in MYP as well as they were in other phases.

How well does the school teach Arabic as a first language?

Almost all teachers had secure subject knowledge but insufficient understanding of how students learn. This led to a substantial control of students' learning and lack of focus on language development in too many instances. The quality of lesson plans varied. Teachers used a range of resources, including ICT, but these were not used well enough to promote students' learning. Most lessons were characterised by an appropriate level of teacher-student interaction but often relied on too much teacher talk which did not allow all students to participate actively. Teachers' questions varied but did not promote enough students' higher-order and critical thinking skills, and often they did not allow students enough thinking time. Although teaching strategies in most lessons ensured student engagement, time and learning activities were not managed well enough to enable students to reach their potentials in the different skills of language.

The Arabic department had recently reviewed the curriculum to meet the MoE curriculum standards in teaching and assessment. It was broad and balanced. However, activities in lessons did not always support the language development well enough of students according to their individual needs. There was an over-reliance on textbooks. Some enrichment was provided, particularly in implementing process-writing and increasing reading for pleasure opportunities.

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	89	34%
	Last year	98	38%
Teachers	53		98%
Students	3		100%

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

Only a third of the parents responded to their survey. All teachers and students responded. There was a high level of satisfaction with the quality of education offered in the school. Most parents were pleased with the quality of leadership, teacher accessibility, bilingual provision and teaching in English and mathematics. Small minorities of parents expressed concern over teacher feedback on student progress, the use of technology by students, the range of extra-curricular activities available and the degree of parental involvement. They were positive about the safety arrangement across the school. A significant number indicated that they seek private tutoring outside of school for their children. Students were largely positive about the modification of the curriculum to suit their needs and the quality of teaching. They were optimistic about their future career choices and clearly enjoyed coming to the school. Most teachers were concerned about meeting the needs of students with special educational needs in MYP but, overall, were pleased to work in the school.

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

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