

Star International School - Umm Al Sheif Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Primary

Report Published May 2011

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Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report

Outstanding - exceptionally high quality of performance or practice.

Good - the expected level of quality for every school in Dubai.

Acceptable - the minimum level of acceptability required for Dubai. All key aspects of performance and practice in every school should meet or exceed this level.

Unsatisfactory - quality not yet at the level acceptable for schools in Dubai. Schools will be expected to take urgent measures to improve the quality of any aspect of their performance or practice that is judged at this level.

Star International School - Umm Al Sheif was inspected in March 2011 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 Umm Al Sheif, Star International School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Foundation Stage to primary, aged three to 11 years. The school follows a UK curriculum. At the time of the inspection there were 362 students on roll. Attendance reported by the school for the last term was good.

As part of the inspection process, Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires issued to parents. There was a very high level of satisfaction from the majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire. Almost all were satisfied with the quality of education provided and indicated that their children were making good progress in English, mathematics and science. Parents were pleased with the quality of teaching and agreed that their children were safe at school, enjoyed lessons and were treated fairly. A minority of parents felt that they needed additional help at home with school work, although the majority considered that the quality and amount of homework was appropriate. Almost all parents agreed that communication with the school was effective. They were particularly positive about the informative nature of the two types of reports issued by the school each year, especially the 'child-friendly' reports. Parents spoke positively about the supportive nature of the parent-teacher meetings. Similarly, almost all parents agreed that the school was well led, that they were welcome and able to be involved in the work and life of the school. Finally, a majority stated that the school had responded positively to the last inspection and that the inspection process had led to improvements in the school.

How well does the school perform overall?

The school continued to provide a good quality of education, overall. The school performed well in many aspects of its work. The previous inspection had identified a number of areas for improvement and there had been good progress in addressing the recommendations. However, there was still further developmental work to be undertaken before all recommendations were fully met.

Attainment and progress in English, mathematics and science were good, although progress in science in the primary school was still only of an acceptable standard. Attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic were now of an acceptable standard, which was an improvement since the last inspection. The quality of teaching for effective learning and school leadership were good. The school demonstrated a strong capacity for continued improvement.

Key features of the school

- The improved progress in mathematics and science in the Foundation Stage and improved progress in mathematics in the primary phase;
- Students' outstanding attitudes and behaviour throughout the school;
- The school's outstanding arrangements for health and safety;
- The improved curriculum, particularly the increased range of extra-curricular learning opportunities;
- The positive ethos of the school with a focus upon school improvement;
- Good teaching for effective learning;
- Assessment data that was not used consistently to help students know their next steps in learning.

Recommendations

- Improve progress in science in the primary school;
- Raise students' attainment and improve progress in Islamic Education and Arabic and ensure that sufficient time is allocated to each subject, across all year groups;
- Continue to develop school-wide assessment policies and procedures;
- Develop an effective performance management system to support school self-evaluation and improvement.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable. Most students demonstrated sufficient knowledge of the key principles of Islam and were able to link what they learned to real life. In Years 1 to 3, most students knew and understood basic facts about the five Pillars of Islam and the Pillars of Faith. They understood the duty of younger Muslims towards the elderly. Older students understood the purpose and the rituals of the Haj. They knew the origin of the Islamic Calendar and identified the Hijri months, fasting in Ramadan and celebrating Eid. Most students made good progress in learning how to perform daily prayers. Throughout the primary phase, most students memorised and could recite a few short chapters of The Holy Qur'an.

In Arabic as a first language, attainment and progress were both acceptable. Almost all students could follow instructions in standard Arabic and provided brief but accurate responses to direct questions. Most students made acceptable progress in learning to read and pronounce Arabic script. They could read and understand the main ideas and key words in age-appropriate texts. Almost all students made steady progress in learning to form letters, to spell, shape words in Arabic script and develop acceptable handwriting skills. However, only a minority had the ability to construct good paragraphs. Almost all made noticeable progress in learning to understand and apply Arabic grammar.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language were acceptable. Most students listened carefully and the majority of students could answer direct questions orally in short sentences and with appropriate accuracy and tone. They were less fluent and confident when expressing themselves in unfamiliar contexts. Most students could read and pronounce words within familiar texts with some expression, pronouncing vowel marks correctly. The majority of students had acceptable reading comprehension skills and wrote familiar words with acceptable accuracy, but only a minority could write some simple sentences to a good level. The handwriting of most students was legible, but not neatly formed. In Years 5 and 6, most students made steady progress in developing deeper understanding of language and Arabic grammar.

Attainment and progress in English were good across the school. In Foundation Stage children used new and familiar language in discussions. By Year 6 most students attained listening and speaking skills that were above international expectations. Most children in Foundation Stage had developed good word recognition skills and used new words in short sentences, with some extended writing. Students in primary made good progress in their reading and in developing their comprehension skills. A majority of students wrote to acceptable levels for structured exercises. By Year 6 higher attaining students were able to write with creativity and analyse texts. However, whilst progress against previous learning was good overall, extended and imaginative writing skills were underdeveloped throughout the school.

In mathematics, attainment and progress were good across the school. In Foundation Stage 1, children were able to identify numbers to 20 and by Foundation Stage 2 most could count to

20 with a few knowing their numbers to 100. Most students could identify the main properties of three-dimensional shapes and name cubes, cuboids, pyramids and spheres. By Year 2 most students knew that multiplication was repeated addition and a minority were problem-solving at levels above expectations. Year 3 students' skills of measuring volumes were well developed and by Year 5 the majority of students could order a set of positive and negative numbers. However, some lack of challenge in the primary phase prevented the majority of high-achieving students to make expected progress and attain their full potential.

In science, attainment and progress in the Foundation Stage were good. In primary attainment was good and progress acceptable. All children in Foundation Stage 1 demonstrated good levels of understanding regarding materials, space, forces and plants. By Foundation Stage 2 they could explain the factors that might limit the growth of bean plants. In Year 1, students demonstrated good understanding of materials and light. Year 2 students were able to investigate chemical reactions and describe why a chemical reaction had occurred. Year 5 students could interpret and record data accurately and by Year 6 all students could describe a fair test.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were outstanding throughout the school. In all classes students demonstrated excellent attitudes towards learning and towards each other. Students were extremely well behaved, polite and courteous. They demonstrated a keenness to learn, to share their views and to co-operate with each other. Student-teacher relationships were excellent. Most students displayed a firm commitment to following healthy lifestyles and making healthy eating choices. Most students attended school regularly and were punctual. Attendance over the last full term was good.

Students' civic and Islamic understanding was acceptable. When roles of responsibility were provided for them, students understood and carried out such tasks with enthusiasm. Most students also participated in planned activities which supported the immediate and wider communities. Students' knowledge and understanding of Islam and its impact on life in Dubai and of local cultures were at a basic level. Most students demonstrated genuine tolerance and an understanding of different cultures being able to live in harmony with one another.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good. Most students had good awareness and understanding of Dubai and how the UAE had developed and was perceived globally. Students showed considerable care for the school environment and had completed various environmental projects, which contributed well to their environmental understanding. Whilst most students had excellent understanding of global environmental issues and the contributions they could make to improve it, their understanding of environmental challenges in the local community was less well developed.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching for effective learning was good in both the Foundation Stage and primary phases. All teachers used a common approach to planning that was effective in both the long and short term and ensured that learning was supported in all lessons. Almost all teachers demonstrated good understanding of the most appropriate methods for teaching their subjects. They shared lesson objectives in age-appropriate ways with their classes. The good range of stimulating activities and resources, such as use of interactive whiteboards, supported and motivated students. Throughout the school, teachers' subject knowledge was strong and a majority of teachers displayed questioning techniques that invited students to think critically. Specialist teachers of information and communication technology (ICT) and personal, social and health education (PSHE) adapted activities to support learning by all students in their specific areas. However, the use of ICT did not enhance the everyday classroom experiences as a research tool or as a means of recording information.

As a consequence of good teaching, the quality of learning was good across the school. Students enjoyed their lessons, were motivated and keen to learn. Regular opportunities were provided for students to work collaboratively on group tasks and in pairs. Arrangements were made for some students to have more responsibility for their learning. For example, a class 'day chart' showed students which activities needed to be done and prescribed their order of completion. In a few lessons students worked independently and could determine the best methods for developing solutions. They applied their skills and understanding to real-life problems.

The quality of assessment was good in the Foundation Stage and acceptable in primary. Systems for assessment were comprehensive and thorough, but still evolving in the school. Work in exercise books was marked regularly, but the degree of informative and supportive comments was variable. Teachers planned regular assessments which checked students' progress against National Curriculum standards. Most teachers had sufficient knowledge of their students' strengths and weaknesses in the main areas of skills, knowledge and understanding of their subjects. However, assessment data was not always used effectively, to ensure that teaching met the needs of all students, particularly those in the primary school.

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

The quality of the curriculum was good across the school. At all stages it had a clear rationale and was broad, balanced and challenging. It was reviewed regularly and modified to ensure that students' needs were met. There was good progression between each stage. Extensive extra-curricular learning opportunities, including creative, academic and sporting activities, had recently been introduced to enrich the curriculum. Teachers planned the curriculum by referring to the English National Curriculum. In the Foundation Stage, children learned through play and activities, with some opportunities for personal choice in learning. In the primary phase a good range of subjects, including art, music, sport, ICT, social studies and PSHE, was offered.

Opportunities for students' physical development were excellent and a notable strength of the school. Appropriate arrangements, including individual education plans, were made to address the varying needs of students and those with special educational needs. The needs of those students for whom English was an additional language were identified and learning targets were set for them. There were many good opportunities for the promotion of ICT across a few subjects, but cross-curricular links were not consistently planned to ensure good progression. Field trips, visits and activities enriched the curriculum. Whilst curriculum provision for Islamic Education and Arabic had improved since last year, the time allocated to each subject was still not yet fully compliant with the requirements of the Ministry of Education.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety arrangements in the school were outstanding. Students stated they felt safe and staff members fully understood their duty of care to ensure that safety procedures were in place. Exits were secure, the school buildings were well maintained and drills and procedures for emergency evacuation were in place. School transport arrangements were excellent and enhanced by vigilant teachers. Medical arrangements were effective. The promotion of healthy living permeated the life of the school, with students' health rigorously monitored. Healthy eating habits and healthy lifestyles were promoted across the school. Students' welfare and health was a priority for all staff members, who also understood their roles and responsibilities regarding child protection.

The quality of support was good. Effective staff-student relationships were a positive feature of the school. Students stated that all staff were approachable and caring. Good care and support was provided for new students and for those with special educational needs. Systems for checking and recording students' academic achievement and progress were in place. This information was shared with most students and parents. However, individual educational plans, learning targets and programmes were not created for all those who needed them. Meticulous records were kept of students' attendance and punctuality. Attendance was monitored regularly, with parents receiving communication if the school had any concerns.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership in the school was good and the newly developed senior leadership team, led by a committed Principal, demonstrated capacity to secure further improvements. Roles and responsibilities were well defined and there were several effective teams which had started to contribute to on-going school review and improvement. The school was well managed, developing effective policies and procedures. Members of the senior leadership team had started a number of effective initiatives and these had helped raise students' attainment. However, the team did not always have a sufficiently detailed or accurate view of students' levels of achievement, especially in comparison with international standards.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. The school sought the views of parents, a governing body, teachers and the student council in order to identify priorities. Senior staff members carried out lesson observations to share teaching experiences. Appropriate development priorities had been identified and strategies introduced to improve the school. Teacher appraisal was in its early stages of development and lacked rigour. The school had made progress in addressing the recommendations of the previous inspection report, although the time allocated to Islamic Education and Arabic required further review.

Partnerships with parents and the community were good. Effective communication ensured parents' involvement in their children's learning and provided insight into their progress. Regular newsletters, homework diaries, the school's website and formal and child-friendly reports were used to promote communication between home and school. Parent consultation meetings were regular and informative. The parents' committee strengthened communication channels between school, home and the community. Parent-volunteers and the involvement of the governing body assisted learning within the school. Links with the community were well-established and effectively supported the curriculum.

Governance of the school was acceptable. A number of improvements had taken place since the last inspection and, consequently, governors were able to more systematically hold the school to account. School governors met regularly and were involved with the appointment of staff, self-review processes and action planning. They ensured that most of the statutory requirements were met and provided advice and guidance. This group included representation from senior leaders of the consortium, but did not have sufficient representation from the wider school and local community.

Staffing, facilities, and resources were of good quality. Teachers were well qualified and most were effectively deployed to promote learning. The efficient administrative and support teams helped the smooth running and organisation of the school. Various resource and specialist rooms were available, including an art studio, music room, ICT suite and assembly hall. The library was being developed to provide enhanced resources for reading, as well as more opportunities to develop students' independent study and research skills. The use of ICT across the curriculum was restricted due to the lack of classroom computers with internet access. Whilst students had access to a splash pool, the building of the swimming pool was eagerly awaited by all members of the school community. There were limited sports facilities for the size of the school.

Summary of inspection judgements

In their evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the school, the inspection team made judgements about the following aspects of the school's performance.

Four descriptors are: Outstanding; Good; Acceptable; Unsatisfactory.

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education?		
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic? 6% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.		
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
	Overall
Quality of leadership	Good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Acceptable
Partnerships with parents and the community	Good
Governance	Acceptable
Staffing, facilities and resources	Good

How well does the school perform overall?
Good

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.

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