

Star International School- Al Twar Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Secondary

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 - Al Twar was inspected in October 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

Star International School is located in Al Twar, close to Dubai airport. It provides education for boys and girls from the Foundation Stage to Year 8, ages four to 13 years and follows the English National Curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 332 students in the school. Attendance as reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

As part of the inspection process, Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires issued to parents. Parents were pleased with the progress made by their children, especially in English, the quality of teaching, students' enjoyment and enthusiasm for school and the way they were treated by staff. They approved of the initiatives to promote a healthy lifestyle, the safe school environment, the school's communication with parents, the good quality of information provided by reports and parents' meetings, the school's timely response to concerns, and the good leadership. They were slightly less positive about advice given to students about future education choices. They felt the school could focus more on improving the range of out-of-class activities and the standard of Arabic. A few made additional comments, mostly positive, but occasional inconsistency of homework tasks was mentioned.

How well does the school perform overall?

Star International School at Al Twar provided an acceptable quality of education, overall, with a number of good features. Attainment and progress were broadly acceptable in three of the five key subjects. The quality of teaching for effective learning was acceptable. The school had made progress since last year's inspection and had responded positively to the recommendations in the last report. The number of lessons in Islamic Education and Arabic had been increased and standards in Arabic in the primary phase had been improved. New procedures for effective self-evaluation had produced a number of initiatives designed to enhance the educational experience of the students, including tracking systems to monitor and analyse students' academic progress and learning. The school had a good capacity for further improvement.

Students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education and mathematics was acceptable across all phases of the school. In science, attainment was acceptable and progress was also acceptable, except for the secondary phase where progress was good. Attainment and progress in Arabic at the primary phase and in English at all phases were good. Students' personal development was good. They behaved very well, and had positive attitudes to their learning, and to the multi-cultural nature of Dubai. They recognised the importance of living and eating healthily, and showed concern for environmental issues. They had a good understanding of Islam. The quality of teaching was somewhat inconsistent, but was acceptable overall with a number of good features. This, together with the students' strong desire to do well and the encouragement they received at home had enabled them to show good standards of learning. The outstanding health and safety arrangements and the good quality of support received by students enabled them to feel safe and settle quickly in school. The curriculum provided by the school was acceptable and included opportunities for students to develop and broaden their learning experiences. The quality of leadership throughout the school was good, and strongly influenced by the clear ethos and vision promoted by the Principal. The school had produced effective systems for evaluating its life and work and produced good plans to guide its future improvement. Staffing levels were good, and teachers were deployed well. They made good use of the resources provided and produced many excellent displays, enabling the school facilities to be an inspiring place to stimulate students' learning. The governing structure was adequate, but lacked wider representation among the school community. The school had built and maintained an outstanding partnership with its parents.

Key features of the school

- Students' good attainment and progress in English and the improved standards in Arabic in the primary phase;
- The exemplary behaviour of students, their positive attitudes to learning, and their understanding of what it means to be a good citizen of the school and the wider world;

- The outstanding arrangements made to ensure that students felt safe, well cared for and supported, particularly those with learning needs and those with little or no English language;
- The commitment and vigorous response of the Principal and senior staff to the recommendations of the previous inspection and their desire to raise educational standards.

Recommendations

- Identify more clearly aspects of subject teaching that require development, so as to share best practice more consistently;
- Make more effective use of the increased amount of assessment information available, in order to meet students' learning needs more precisely and raise their attainment and progress further;
- Improve the governance of the school by creating an advisory body which includes wider representation from those outside the school who have its best interests at heart.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable throughout the school in both primary and secondary phases. The majority of students could recite chapters of The Holy Qur'an to an acceptable or good level. In Years 1 and 2, most students were able to identify the names and times of the five daily prayers. In Year 4 the majority of students knew the role of generosity in life from the Islamic perspective. In Year 8 most students read and explained the Hadith and understood the negative consequences of making sins. However, a few were unable to demonstrate their deeper understanding of the subject content and relate its principles to life.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were good in the primary phase, and acceptable in secondary. In Year 1 the majority of students identified new letters and pronouns in different positions in words. In Year 2 most students applied basic grammatical rules in their speaking confidently and accurately. In Year 4 most students made connections and relationships between their knowledge of language and their everyday lives. In Year 7 most students extracted the roots from words to use Arabic dictionaries. However, writing skills were under-developed. There were limited opportunities for students to broaden and extend their writing skills which slowed their progress.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language were good in the primary phase, especially in speaking, listening and reading, but acceptable in secondary. Most students in Years 3 to 5 were able to repeat new words with good fluency. Their listening skills were

good, and they were able to repeat words with correct pronunciation. This enhanced their understanding of spoken words. In Year 8 the majority of students identified new nouns and linked these to objects and concepts in their classroom and daily lives. However, students in general needed to expand the scope of their writing and conversation to move beyond simple words to make faster progress.

Attainment and progress in English were good across all phases. By the end of the Foundation Stage most children were good listeners, spoke with confidence about themselves and what they were doing and enjoyed listening to stories. In Year 1 the most able could write several linked sentences and read them. The pace of progress through primary was good and, by Year 6, students discussed well in groups and in front of the class, and spoke confidently to justify their point of view. Their writing included formal and informal letters and compositions. By Year 8 students demonstrated their understanding of texts through dramatisation. They spoke with fluency and their writing was generally accurate, demonstrating a good use of English.

Overall attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable and, in some primary classes, they were good, especially in mental arithmetic and calculation. Foundation Stage children counted objects successfully. By Year 4 they wrote long numbers and started to understand numerical place value. By Year 6 most students knew their multiplication tables up to nine and recognised some of the properties of triangles. Students in Years 7 and 8 achieved standards in line with expectations for their age. Year 7 students had good recall of the mode and median of a series of numbers and understood benchmarks. Students did not show a full appreciation of the practical aspects of number and algebra and their investigative and problem-solving skills were under-developed.

Attainment and progress in science across the school were acceptable, except for the secondary phase, where test results showed good progress. In the Foundation Stage, children developed their knowledge of colours and the nature of solids and liquids. In lower primary, students understood the concept of habitats and the structure of the human body. Those in Years 4 and 5 recognised acids and alkalis and explored the properties of gases. Year 6 students predicted outcomes, on the basis of known facts, and recorded changes in solubility. Students in Years 7 and 8 showed some skills of scientific investigation but lacked some independence in their planning and execution and, as a result, such skills were not fully developed.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good overall. They were polite, shared with each other, listened to each other in class, and played sensibly outside. They enjoyed good relationships with their teachers in class and in sporting activities. Those with learning or physical needs were fully accepted by others. Students' punctuality, and their attendance in the last term, was acceptable.

Students' civic and Islamic understanding was good. Class and school council representatives took their role seriously. The school provided adequate opportunities for students to enhance their civic and Islamic understanding. Students were able to collect many items for charity.

They also had age-appropriate knowledge about UAE as an Islamic and Arab country. Most students appreciated living in the multi-cultural society of Dubai. Students were able to identify the various roles of mosques in Islam.

Students appreciated the multi-cultural nature of Dubai and found the mix of cultures exciting. They were proud of their heritage. Older students were aware that Dubai desalinated its water and spoke of the need to conserve both water and electricity. Students collected paper and plastic bottles for recycling with great enthusiasm. Older students debated Dubai's economic situation and younger ones were proud that Dubai had the world's highest building.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching varied significantly among subjects and across year groups but overall was acceptable. Some good lessons were seen, as well as a few that were unsatisfactory. Lessons were generally well planned, had clear learning objectives and made effective use of resources. Teaching assistants were well used. At its best, the teaching exhibited good subject knowledge, and incorporated a variety of planned activities that were well matched to students' needs. It encouraged students to work together, sharing ideas and opinions and finding things out for themselves. Examples were seen of different tasks being well matched to the different abilities of students within classes, but practice was inconsistent. Few teachers asked good questions which demanded thoughtful responses from students and others relied too much on closed questions which resulted in lack of challenge and passive students. Less successful teaching sometimes relied on a narrow range of learning tasks that failed to excite students and engage them fully in their learning and progress. Insufficient opportunities were given in some subjects for enquiry, research, investigation and real-life practical application of the subject material.

Overall, the quality of students' learning was good. Nearly all students were not native speakers of English and were highly motivated and effectively supported by both their teachers and parents. Students were enthusiastic about their learning and very keen to succeed. When given the opportunity, students were fully engaged in their learning but occasionally they were more passive when the learning tasks did not require an active response from them. Students' speaking and listening skills, as learners of English as an additional language, were generally well developed. In a few lessons students showed a good ability to work in pairs or groups. In the Foundation Stage, almost all students listened with enjoyment to stories and worked co-operatively with each other in group activities. In primary and secondary phases, students occasionally used critical or higher order thinking skills such as reasoning or analysis, but these were not widespread. By the end of secondary, students asked spontaneous questions for clarification or information and were keen to express their opinions and make suggestions. Year 7 and 8 students took part in a lively debate where they presented their points of view clearly and persuasively.

Systems used to assess students' attainment, progress and learning were acceptable. New assessment procedures had been introduced and these were developing the school's ability to evaluate students' progress effectively. Students' attainment levels were tracked against key

objectives according to English National Curriculum standards. In the Foundation Stage, assessment was very thorough. Additionally, in key subjects, standardised tests compared students' abilities and potential against international standards. Written work was marked regularly and teachers kept up-to-date records. In a few lessons, teachers gave clear feedback, which helped students to make progress. In some subjects, they also wrote similarly helpful comments on students' written work and reviewed their learning at the end of lessons. Assessment was not seen to impact on the planning of teaching and learning.

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

Overall, the curriculum in each phase was acceptable. The curriculum was particularly effective in the Foundation Stage in its provision of English as additional language and in its planning for progression and transition. The curriculum in all phases had a clear rationale based on the English National Curriculum and, in one subject, was supplemented by material from another curriculum to broaden provision and meet students' learning needs more appropriately. The curriculum showed breadth and depth and required regular review across all phases and in all subjects to ensure effective progression and avoid overlap across year groups. Increased provision of Islamic Education and Arabic had added better balance and provided students with additional learning opportunities. The curriculum generally relied heavily on textbook content rather than a more flexible approach to adapt the subject content where necessary to ensure that all students make the progress that they should. An annual review of the curriculum and of the texts used had taken. The school understood the importance of an annual curriculum evaluation to support the learning needs of all students. Greater monitoring of the curriculum, particularly through interpreting and analysing assessment data was necessary to ensure sufficient challenge for able students as well as an appropriate curriculum for the less able was fully in place. A good extra-curricular programme including learning support was provided. Partnership links and initiatives took place with the local community but these enrichment opportunities had not been fully integrated with students' learning in the classroom.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements to ensure the health, safety and security of students in all parts of the school, on school transport and in other locations used by the school were outstanding. The premises and facilities were clean and well maintained, and were suitable for all students, including those with disabilities. The school maintained good records of fire drills. The school nurse weighed all children regularly, followed closely those who were over-weight and provided advice on diet. Packed lunches had been checked on a regular basis and good guidance and encouragement for healthy living had been provided. Medication was safely stored. Students with additional physical needs were known and well supervised. A child protection policy and appropriate fire evacuation procedures were in place.

The quality of support for students in school was good. Students were very well known by staff, and there were excellent relationships between them. Their physical, sensory and

learning needs were well supported, both by teachers and by a special educational needs co-ordinator who knew her students well. Students with special educational learning needs were carefully assessed and appropriate individual and in-class support provided. The behaviour of almost all students was exemplary. Students' and class performance has been well monitored and analysed enabling staff to compare performance across key subjects and across year groups. Good records were kept of student attendance and punctuality. Parents were informed promptly of any concerns.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership throughout the school was good. The Principal had shared a clear vision for the school and promoted this strongly with staff and parents. The new senior leadership team worked effectively together and had achieved significant success in addressing recommendations from the previous inspection report. A particular feature of the good leadership was the robust system of communication with staff and parents. Subject co-ordinators were key people responsible for educational leadership and direction within their subject areas and held regular meetings with the Principal and other senior leaders.

Systems for self-evaluation and school improvement were good. A clear and comprehensive action plan had successfully identified key priority areas for development, and this included contributions from teaching staff. As a result, systems and structures had been initiated to monitor and evaluate the work of teachers, and students' learning and progress. Effective procedures for appraising staff through lesson observations had been put in place. The school recognised the challenge of assessing the effectiveness of these new initiatives and identifying their impact on the educational life of the school.

The school had formed an outstanding partnership with its parents, who expressed a high level of satisfaction with the work of the school. They felt involved with the school and strongly supported the thriving parents' association. They were involved in reading schemes with students and organised a successful International Food Day. Parents felt that they received good feedback about their children's progress through the helpful regular reports, and valued easy access to staff. The school had been active in seeking and promoting productive links with the local and wider community in a variety of environmental, cultural and charitable enterprises.

The governance of the school was acceptable. The school had two governors who, although representing the school's owners, nevertheless provided valuable advice to the school. They held the management of the school to account through monthly meetings with principals of the other schools in the consortium. Parents stated that they had easy contact with governors as necessary. However, this was too small and unrepresentative a body to have an effective advisory role and act as a critical friend.

The quality of staffing, facilities and resources was good. Teaching staff were well deployed, with an appropriate number of subject specialists. The school recognised the need to develop

and maintain an effective system of appraisal, performance review and career development for staff and comprehensive systems were in place. Children appreciated the very attractive premises and surroundings and many colourful displays around the school, which enhanced their learning experience. The school was generally well resourced, and interactive whiteboards offered considerable additional scope for exciting teaching.

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	Secondary
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?			
38% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.			
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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:
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More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at www.khda.gov.ae.

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