

# Dar Al Marefa Private School Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Middle Years Programme

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.

Dar Al Marefa Private School 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 Mirdif, Dar Al Marefa Private School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to Middle Years Programme (MYP), aged three to 14 years. The school follows an International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. Significant change was a feature of many aspects of the school; since the last inspection the number of students had increased from 175 to 314. Staff numbers had increased both at the beginning and during the academic year. A new section had been opened for students in Grades 7 to 9 including classes for girls and boys. The school was a candidate school for the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (IBPYP) and an interested school for the MYP. A new primary head and co-ordinators of the PYP and MYP had joined the Principal to form a new leadership team. At the time of the inspection, there were 314 students on roll. The attendance reported for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Almost all parents were satisfied with the quality of education. They were satisfied with academic progress across the key subjects. They thought that their children were safe and treated fairly. They were positive about the school's leadership and about the school's emphasis on promoting Arabic language, and Emirati culture and values. They stated that school staff was approachable and welcoming and that the workshops and meetings they

provided helped them to understand the curriculum. A few believed that the behaviour of older students needed to be improved and approximately half did not know how the school had responded to the last DSIB report.

## How well does the school perform overall?

Dar Al Marefa Private School provided an acceptable quality of education. The school performed effectively in most aspects of its work although there were weaknesses. The school had made insufficient progress in addressing the recommendations in the previous report. There was a developing awareness of how to address the future direction of the school. While the school was endeavouring to fulfil most of its promise to parents, the changes taking place in the school still presented significant challenges across all phases.

Attainment was acceptable across most subjects with the exception of MYP mathematics, which was unsatisfactory. Progress was acceptable overall and good in Arabic and science in the PYP. Teaching and learning were acceptable but assessment was unsatisfactory. The curriculum was acceptable overall, but did not fully meet the needs of children Kindergarten. Measures for health and safety were outstanding and the quality of support for students was acceptable. The work of the school was not monitored comprehensively. The need to create organisational structures, policies and procedures had resulted in a disproportionate focus on management rather than leadership.

## Key features of the school

- The significant growth and change in leadership, staffing, student population and awareness of curriculum expectations;
- Good attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language in the primary section;
- Outstanding health and safety arrangements;
- Limited information and communications technology (ICT) and insufficient learning materials required for an inquiry-based programme.

## Recommendations

- Raise attainment and progress across the key subjects, particularly in English, mathematics and science;
- Improve attendance and punctuality across the school, particularly in Kindergarten;
- Improve teaching and learning by training teachers in the school's IB philosophy;
- Improve the curriculum in Kindergarten;
- Link the learner profile to more consistent and effective assessment strategies;
- Ensure an effective tracking system is in place to measure progress;
- Ensure governance holds the leadership to account for the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment.

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

Attainment in Islamic Education was good in the primary school and progress was acceptable while both attainment and progress were acceptable in the middle school. Most students in the primary school had good knowledge of Islamic key values and principles. They read The Holy Qur'an well and understood the key messages in the Prophet's (PBUH) teachings. Most Grade 1 students understood the importance of showing mercy to animals. Students in Grade 3 quoted relevant Hadeeth and verses from The Holy Qur'an during discussions of duty towards their parents. By Grade 7, students had an acceptable understanding of dealing with negative social behaviour, while Grade 9 students were able to explain the Prophet's (PBUH) approach to making positive social change. However, middle school students did not make sufficient links between Islam and their lives.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were good in the primary school and acceptable in the middle school. Most Grade 2 students distinguished correctly between parts of speech and were able to agree subjects to verbs. In Grade 3, students read aloud well and demonstrated good understanding of sentence structure. Most Grade 6 students understood the main points in their reading of set texts. By Grade 8, students recognised key ideas in poetry but did not have sufficient discussions about the relevance and appreciation of poetry. Most students in Grade 9 made frequent mistakes reading aloud and their writing was limited to answering textbook questions. Although primary students were developing skills in writing, extended writing was limited across the school.

In the primary school, attainment was acceptable and progress was good in Arabic as an additional language. There were no learners of Arabic as an additional language in the middle school. Students in the Middle years set were confident in conducting conversations about their interests and hobbies. They read confidently and with an acceptable understanding of overall meaning. Students of the Middle years set developed an acceptable range of vocabulary while beginners knew most of the alphabet and were able to read a range of basic vocabulary.

In English, students' attainment and progress in English was acceptable. By Kindergarten 2, students knew the letters of the alphabet, words beginning with those letters and many simple words. By Grade 6, students listened and responded well. Their oral presentations were acceptable. They read accurately, wrote simple and compound sentences and brief paragraphs. By Grade 9, most students' use of grammar was good. The majority listened attentively and a minority could speak confidently. They could read the textbook and their teacher's notes. They could write short connected paragraphs. Middle years students lacked extended writing skills.

Attainment and progress in mathematics in Kindergarten and the primary section were acceptable. In the MYP section, attainment was unsatisfactory and progress was acceptable. Kindergarten children counted confidently to 30. They recognised individual numbers and identified specific amounts accurately. They did not have a well-developed understanding of how to sort large numbers into smaller groups. Most primary students read the time

accurately, identified lines of symmetry, and added and subtracted competently. They did not use the four operations of number effectively to solve problems independently. Most lower-MYP students knew the names of parts of a circle but needed assistance to calculate dimensions. Older students had a limited understanding of equivalent fractions and struggled to find a quotient or product without support.

Attainment was acceptable in science throughout the school. Progress was acceptable in Kindergarten and good in the rest of the school. Kindergarten children used a globe and a torch to demonstrate the rotation of the Earth and its orbit around the sun. A significant minority had difficulty explaining night and day. Lower primary students investigated forces using simple practical methods. The majority of Grade 6 students explained how geothermal energy could be used as a source of power. Most Grade 9 girls had a good understanding of cloning and could discuss social implications of scientific issues. Students had a limited understanding of the methods used by scientists such as fair testing.

## How good is the students' personal and social development?

Attitudes and behaviour were acceptable in Kindergarten and good in the primary and middle sections. Generally, most students were interested in their learning. When not occupied purposefully, younger students displayed casual attitudes to their work. Primary and middle school students were mostly engaged in lessons and participated fully when activities were relevant and challenging. They supported each other effectively and followed teachers' instructions well. Most students respected their teachers and moved around the school in an orderly manner. Although attendance, overall, was acceptable, in Kindergarten they were significantly lower than in the other phases of the school.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and culture were good. Most students developed good understanding and appreciation of Islam; this was enhanced through extra-curricular programs of Qur'an memorisation. They developed sound awareness of their responsibilities within the school and to the wider community by participation in activities such as the students' council, fundraising and charity events. They had a good understanding of the development and culture to the UAE and regarded the diverse and multi-cultural nature of Dubai as a positive development.

Economic and environmental understanding was good across the school. Students participated in a range of projects that promoted a proactive and responsible approach to litter control, energy conservation and sustainability issues. They had age-appropriate awareness of the global recession and the key landmarks in Dubai. They were keen to support the development of Dubai, but were less sure of how they themselves could contribute to this process. Students did not have regular opportunities to initiate their own ideas on environmental understanding within the school.

## How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching for effective learning was acceptable across the school but there was significant variability in the quality of teaching. Most teachers had sound subject knowledge, although their understanding of how children and students learned was less developed. When teachers knew their students, there were effective interactions. In the best lessons, prior knowledge was used to encourage thinking, discussion and reflection. For example, in Arabic lessons and in units of inquiry, teaching provided opportunities for purposeful, active learning and real-life activities. However, most teaching strategies did not meet the needs of all students. There was ineffective planning, poor timing and a slow pace. Lesson objectives and expectations were not always clear to students. Teachers did not provide activities that were well matched to the wide range of students' needs. Collaboration and independent learning were seen in a minority of lessons. The level of challenge in most key subjects was often low for the range of student abilities. ICT was mostly used for display purposes. Resources were not effectively used to support learning. There was little provision for enquiry and critical thinking in lessons; a key element of IB principles.

The quality of learning was acceptable. When given opportunities, which was rare, students were active and responsible learners, working successfully in pairs and groups and focused on tasks. They could work independently for short periods, respond well, ask questions and reflect on their learning. A few students had organisational and collaborative skills, and were productive in their activities. However, there were often high levels of teacher-controlled, directed learning. Students did not always have a clear understanding of teaching objectives and their learning outcomes. They were inconsistently engaged in tasks. They rarely worked without support and did not regularly express their understanding. Independent research and enquiry skills were seldom used. Students did not have high expectations of themselves. They did not use appropriate resources including ICT, effectively. Critical and higher order thinking skills were not well developed.

Assessment across the school was unsatisfactory. In a few lessons, teachers listened to students and gave constructive feedback. They used questioning to check for understanding and progress. There was peer and self-assessment in a few lessons. Inconsistent assessment of students' knowledge, understanding and skills did not inform lesson planning or identify appropriate outcomes. Teachers' understanding of prior learning was incomplete. Teachers rarely used the learner profile to give meaningful written and oral guidance on how students could improve. Students did not know what they had to do to improve or understand how to improve their learning.

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

The curriculum was acceptable overall. In Kindergarten the scheme of work identified appropriate topics and themes but these were not linked to provide a coherent learning experience. This resulted in children's needs not being fully met because key skills were not



reinforced across the curriculum. There was a lack of a clear rationale on how to best meet the needs of young learners. In both the primary and Middle years significant work had been completed to develop documents that reflected broad thematic learning experiences. Within this ongoing work, skills were identified to be applied across all learning. Work incorporating IB learner principles and practice had commenced this year. Plans were in place to ensure that the curriculum met all aspects of students' needs. Cross-curricular opportunities were being developed but teachers did not have a clear understanding of the skills-based outcomes to be expected from them. Consequently, it was not always apparent whether the needs of all students were being met. An increasing number of students engaged with a range of extra-curricular activities that reflected a positive approach to developing specific academic, sporting and pastoral skills. Teachers' use of the community as a relevant and useful learning resource was less developed. There was a high level of awareness that the PYP and MYP curriculum review required ongoing cohesion, progression and appropriate challenge to prepare students effectively for the requirements of the IB Diploma in future years.

### **How well does the school protect and support students?**

Arrangements for health and safety were outstanding. Arrival and departures procedures were very well managed. Excellent facilities and procedures for first aid and medical support were provided. Health checks were arranged and detailed medical records were kept securely. School personnel ensured that students made healthy lifestyle choices. The premises were maintained to a high standard and safety equipment was checked regularly. Practice evacuations were held at least twice a year. Staff members were aware of child protection procedures.

The quality of support for students was acceptable. Staff-student relationships were respectful but there was an inconsistent approach in teachers' response to poor behaviour. The school had introduced bi-lingual, detailed reports. Home room teachers addressed the welfare needs of their students. Academic tracking was not systematic or effective. Students with special educational needs were included in regular programming. The management of student attendance and punctuality required greater prioritisation. There were high absence rates, particularly in Kindergarten.

### **How good are the leadership and management of the school?**

The quality of leadership was acceptable. The leadership team was committed to the improvement of the school and benefited from an expansion of specific expertise in IB understanding. This had resulted in an improving understanding of the curriculum and a realistic view of the school. The need to create organisational structures, policies and procedures had resulted in a disproportionate focus on management rather than leadership. There was insufficient clarity about leaders' responsibilities for setting direction for the school and ensuring the impact of initiatives on teaching, learning and assessment. Co-ordinators were not in place for Kindergarten and learning support. There was inconsistent leadership of subjects. Revised performance management arrangements had been put in place but had yet



to have a significant impact on teaching and learning quality. Most leaders were aware of the need for further improvements and appropriate strategies to address them.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were unsatisfactory. The leadership team had undertaken a review of the needs of the school in the light of the many changes taking place. A strategic plan had been developed. These plans did not specify the impact on student learning. The school had made little progress in addressing the recommendations in the previous report. Student progress had not been tracked and best practice was not shared through meaningful peer appraisal.

Partnerships with parents and the community were good. A Mothers' Council was active in supporting the school through four standing committees. Volunteers assisted with activities such as reading to students and accompanying trips. The school had improved the quality and frequency of its communications to parents and revised the report cards to provide more detailed information. A series of workshops in English and Arabic, available in the afternoon or evening, enabled as many parents as possible to become informed about the IB programme. Links with the local community were being developed, enhancing the units of study in each class. There were visits to locations such as factories as well as museums, and opportunities to experience natural environments.

Governance was acceptable. Governors ensured that statutory requirements were met. The Board of Governors was strongly committed to the vision of a bi-lingual IB school. They had begun to build closer links with the leadership team by joining their monthly meetings. Accountability was not formalised. Governors maintained informal links with a number of parents and these contacts informed their picture of the school's development. They had not implemented plans to broaden the composition of the board by the inclusion of a position for a person with educational expertise.

Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable. Teachers were qualified but few had sufficient understanding and skills needed for the IB programme. Most teaching assistants did not effectively support independent learning. There were pleasant, safe play areas, a spacious gym, two developing library collections and an infrequently-used primary science laboratory. Primary students used the library independently. Resources to support learning were developing. There was a need for more practical learning materials across the school. Facilities did not sufficiently allow students to use ICT as a learning tool.

## Summary of inspection judgements

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

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

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education?			
Age group:	KG	PYP	MYP
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic? 41% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.			
Age group:	KG	PYP	MYP
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	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Good	Not Applicable

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

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?			
Age group:	KG	PYP	MYP
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

How good is the students' personal and social development?			
Age group:	KG	PYP	MYP
Attitudes and behaviour	Acceptable	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:	KG	PYP	MYP
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?			
Age group:	KG	PYP	MYP
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?			
Age group:	KG	PYP	MYP
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

How well does the school perform overall?
Acceptable

## Next steps

The school has been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how it will address the main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents. The next inspection will report on the progress made by the school.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau  
Knowledge and Human Development Authority

## How to contact us

If you have a concern or wish to comment on any aspect of this report you should contact: [inspection@khda.gov.ae](mailto:inspection@khda.gov.ae).

More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at [www.khda.gov.ae](http://www.khda.gov.ae).

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