

# INSPECTION REPORT

## Dar Al Marefa Private School

Report published in May 2012

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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## GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Dar Al Marefa Private School

Location	Mirdif
Type of school	Private
Website	www.daralmarefa.ae
Telephone	04 2885782
Address	PO Box 112602, Mirdif, Dubai
Principal	Shirine Bahhage Al Khudari
Curriculum	IB
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-15 / Kindergarten to Grade 9
Attendance	Good
Number of students on roll	355
Number of Emirati students	303 (85%)
Date of the inspection	Monday 27th to Wednesday 29th February 2012

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## The context of the school

Dar al Marefa Private School is situated in Mirdif. The school opened in 2008. At the time of inspection there were 355 students on roll, aged between three and 15 years. The school follows the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (PYP) and a modified Middle Years Programme (MYP). The PYP programme had candidate status while the MYP programme had interested status. The curriculum was delivered through English and Arabic with a bi-lingual approach in Kindergarten.

There were 48 teachers, including the principal, who had only been in post for five months. Most teachers were well qualified and deployed effectively to support learning. A dedicated administrative team supported the smooth running of the school on a day-to-day basis. The teaching staff included a special needs support team who had identified and provided support to students with special educational needs. Almost all students were first language learners of Arabic and additional language learners of English. The nationalities of the students were mostly Arab, with Emiratis forming the majority. There were low numbers of students in the middle phase accounting for only 14 per cent of the overall student population.

## Overall school performance 2011-2012

Acceptable

## How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

Dar al Marefa Private School continued to provide an acceptable quality of education with notable improvements in key areas since the last inspection. Key features of this bi-lingual school included improved leadership and positive relationships between all members of the learning community as well as a committed teaching team. The school demonstrated an inclusive approach and had begun to provide effective support for students with special educational needs and those requiring additional support in learning. The curriculum in the PYP had been improved to enable students to develop the skills of enquiry. Further work in this area across all subjects was still needed to increase challenge in lessons and lead to higher attainment and improved progress. In Kindergarten and the middle phase, the curriculum had been reviewed to better meet the needs of learners but the changes had not been successful in ensuring the needs of all students were met. Kindergarten children did not have enough opportunities to enjoy play-based enquiry learning activities.

The school had been highly responsive to the recommendations from the previous inspection and had made good progress towards addressing most of these. Students' learning had improved in the primary phase. Improved teaching in Arabic had also led to better student progress in Arabic as an additional language in primary and Arabic for first language learners in the middle phase. However, these improvements had not yet impacted on student attainment. The attendance of Kindergarten children had improved significantly and these children now showed good behaviour and greater independence. Assessment tools and strategies had also been developed, although a more consistent approach to assessment in lessons was still needed. The introduction of a team of support staff and the identification of students with special educational needs had contributed to more effective support for students. Self-evaluation processes had also improved, but the school leaders understood the need to adopt a more targeted approach to monitoring the quality of teaching and learning to ensure good student outcomes across all subjects and phases.

## Key strengths

- Good attainment in Islamic Education and strong Islamic values and understanding;
- Well-behaved students who engage positively in their learning, especially in the primary and Kindergarten phases;
- Outstanding health, safety and security arrangements which ensures that all students feel safe and are safe;
- A very united senior leadership team, committed teaching team and supportive governors who hold the school to account;
- An improving school which is well led and well thought of by parents.

## Recommendations

- Continue to improve attainment and progress across key subjects in all phases;
- Ensure lessons enable students of all ages to be active in their learning, discuss, collaborate, think critically and find things out for themselves;
- Ensure that assessment tools and strategies develop students' skills, attitudes and values effectively and show them how to improve;
- Ensure leaders carry out better targeted and systematic monitoring to ensure initiatives impact more effectively on student outcomes.

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

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

Students' attainment in the key subjects was mostly acceptable. There had been improvement to attainment in Islamic Education in the middle years. Attainment in Arabic for first language learners was uneven and had deteriorated in PYP due to the high numbers of new students with low levels of standard Arabic. The weakest skills in Arabic were reading and writing. In English across all phases, students demonstrated expected attainment in the four language skills for students learning English as an

additional language. Attainment in writing was lowest in all phases. Speaking was the most developed skill in Kindergarten. Speaking and reading were strongest in the primary. Student's attainment in mathematics at the middle school had improved and was now acceptable, although the range of mathematical skills demonstrated by students was limited. Students' attainment in science remained acceptable in all phases mainly due to the limit placed on their conceptual understanding and investigation skills through the lack of practical science opportunities.

There had been a few key improvements in students' progress since the last inspection. Most notably, these were in Islamic Education, Arabic as an additional language in PYP and as a first language in middle years and mathematics at PYP. In English, students' progress was acceptable from low starting points with most gains in speaking and listening. Students' progress in writing in both Arabic and English was slower than in other aspects of language. Students' progress in science remained good in PYP and the middle years but progress in the development of scientific skills was slow due to the lack of practical science experiences, especially in Kindergarten and PYP.

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

	KG	PYP	MYP
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good
Understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture	Outstanding	Good	Good
Civic, economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Good

Students' behaviour had improved since the last inspection, particularly in Kindergarten. They were polite, respectful and showed enthusiasm for learning. A few middle school students supported positive student conduct through the prefect system. Attendance across the school was good and had improved significantly, especially in Kindergarten. Almost all students adopted a healthy life style and made wise food choices. Students showed a deep understanding and appreciation of Islamic values and its impact on daily life, and Dubai society. Their respect for local traditions and culture was strong but their awareness of the benefits of the multi-cultural nature of Dubai was less well developed. Most students had an acceptable understanding of how Dubai had developed and the economic successes of the region. Students were proud of their school environment and demonstrated this through a range of recycling initiatives. They could explain the importance of recycling, clean energy, sustainability and conservation to improve the environment but needed further opportunities to take positive action themselves.

## How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	KG	PYP	MYP
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

Teachers demonstrated good understanding of their subjects. Teachers in the PYP showed good understanding of how children learn and their interactions with learners were effective. They also had high expectations of students to enquire, reflect, learn independently and discuss their next steps in learning. However, enquiry and critical thinking were underdeveloped in all phases and markedly so in Kindergarten and the Middle Years. Resources supported learning in the most effective lessons; however information and communications technology (ICT) was not always used strategically by teachers to support or develop learning. Teachers used a limited range of teaching strategies in Kindergarten and middle years which meant that lessons did not always provide enough challenge or meet the needs of these students. A few teachers, predominantly in Kindergarten and the middle years, talked at length, at the expense of students' active learning.

The majority of students had positive attitudes to learning. Students in the PYP demonstrated high levels of independence and responsibility. They cooperated and collaborated productively and shared ideas and opinions. They made connections to the real world and their own personal experiences and could apply their understanding to different contexts. However, critical thinking and enquiry by learners was not evident in all lessons, especially in Kindergarten and the middle years. Students did not always develop their skills and their understanding fully. Learning was too often more passive than active, notably in the middle years and teachers did not have sufficiently high expectations. Students did not use ICT effectively or regularly enough to support their learning.

There had been improvements in assessment practices. There were a range of tools and strategies in place to enable students and teachers to be aware of success criteria. Nevertheless, these were not yet embedded in every lesson and so did not always impact positively on learning. Not all students understood how to improve. There were examples of good assessment practices throughout the school, such as the use of rubrics and student self-assessment and reflection. However, these needed to be more effectively shared to ensure greater consistency.

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

	KG	PYP	MYP
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

The IB PYP and MYP documents provided a solid rationale for planning a curriculum that catered for the needs of all groups of students, although choice was limited in Kindergarten and Middle Years. Curriculum maps enabled progression throughout the school. Reviews of the curriculum had led to a few developments, notably in Kindergarten and PYP which meant that students were more actively involved in learning. In a minority of lessons, the curriculum was delivered in the same manner to all students, and the lesson expectations did not challenge them adequately. Despite planning to meet the needs of the range of learners, this was not always achieved in practice. While it was also the clear intention that the curriculum should develop independent learning, research and critical thinking, this was yet to be common practice across the school; although it was a key strength in PYP. The school had expanded its programmes for taking students out into the community to enhance their learning and social attitudes. This needed ongoing development and expansion. Cross-curricular links were not a feature of many classrooms, particularly in the middle school. The range of extra-curricular activities had been reviewed and developed and participation of students was improving.

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

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

Staff shared a high level of commitment to ensure the safety and well-being of all members of the learning committee. School systems and staff roles and responsibilities, which had been adjusted to respond to increased student numbers, supported open and frequent communication. This enabled early intervention to prevent or resolve issues. Health and safety records were accurate and up-to-date. Buildings had been effectively upgraded to improve the size and number of specialist rooms such those as for science, art and music. A continued focus on healthy living had resulted in lower rates of obesity. Students were beginning to take this learning home to support the health of their families. A greater understanding by parents and students of child protection issues was necessary to help ensure safety beyond the school.

Teachers knew their students well. A more consistent application of school policies and a growing student involvement in shaping these policies was strengthening staff-student relationships. Students knew they could go to a range of key staff for advice. The school counsellor, in her developing role, was valued by students as a source of emotional guidance. Advice about future careers needed to be better used to raise aspirations and help promote the development of work-related skills in older students. Support for students with special education needs had been established in the primary school. Whilst in its early stages, this intervention was having a positive effect on students' learning. However, support for similar students in the middle years was weak. Clear strategies to improve attendance had been successful due to staff commitment and an increased dialogue with parents about the school's expectations.

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

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

The new principal had quickly built positive relationships with staff, students and parents and was developing an inclusive leadership ethos. She was ably supported by a very united senior leadership team. Leadership responsibilities were distributed effectively throughout the school and were underpinned by a commitment to the aims and mission of the school. The senior leadership team demonstrated cohesive and productive relationships and this led to effective communication amongst the staff team. A high priority was given to the professional development of staff, although a more targeted approach to training was now needed. Recent improvements demonstrated that the school had a strong capacity for further improvement. However, a clearer idea of attainment levels together with more consistently good teaching was now needed to ensure improved outcomes for students.

Self-evaluation processes had improved and included all members of the staff team. Their combined efforts had resulted in a detailed document which was shared at all levels. The accuracy of the most effective departmental evaluation meant that the subject team's action plan was realistic and effective. However, overall evaluation needed further refinement to ensure that all subject areas had an accurate picture of students' attainment and progress. Appraisal systems were established and linked directly to professional development. Nevertheless, monitoring of teaching and learning by leaders needed to be more rigorous and more strategic to ensure initiatives led to further improvements in student outcomes. A minority of teachers did not have a clear idea of what good IB learning looked like. Improvement planning had led to improvements in key areas, for example attendance, behaviour and learning in Primary, but success criteria were not always measurable, directly related to expected outcomes or supported by realistic timescales.

Partnership with parents and the community were good. Parents were highly supportive of the school, very satisfied with the quality of education the school provided and very trusting of the leadership.

Nevertheless, despite the school's efforts, further work was needed to help parents fully understand the IB approach. Relationships between school and home were productive and impacted on learning in a positive way. Good examples of this included the parents' involvement in tackling truancy and the engagement of parents in the new reading scheme. The genuine partnership between the home and school was supported well by the reports to parents which were informative and helpful. Parents' views were valued by the school. The use of the local environment was linked well to the units of enquiry and impacted positively on students' learning experiences. Nevertheless, links with the local community needed to be strengthened further. Older students needed to gain experience of work-related issues.

Governors were highly supportive of the school's aims and had a much better understanding of IB requirements than last year. Consequently, governance was good. The governing body had increased its membership to include two educationalists. The board provided excellent support for the new principal and the owner demonstrated his commitment by being in the school for two days a week to support improvements. The board sought the views of stakeholders regularly but needed to engage more with students through the leadership of the school. The board provided strong support to the school and had secured high quality training in IB philosophies from external providers. It had also developed productive links with other schools providing the IB curriculum. These strategies had supported improvements in learning which were beginning to impact on attainment and progress. The board had taken action to ensure the principal received further support at the senior level. Accountability measures had become more rigorous and governors now had a more accurate view of standards of attainment. However, their view needed to be more closely aligned with international standards.

Staffing, facilities and resources had improved with some strategic appointments and the development of facilities, including the new science laboratories. Sufficient qualified teachers were effectively deployed to support changes to the curriculum and learning but a minority had little understanding of IB philosophy. The specialist support staff ensured good support for students. Effective arrangements were made for classes to be covered when teachers were absent so that students did not fall behind in their education. All learning areas were accessible for those with additional needs. The shared areas had been transformed with displays of students' work and were attractive and welcoming. Other spaces that enhanced learning included a well-stocked library, an ICT suite, useful sports and play areas. The library was used regularly and plans were in place to make it comfortable for reading for pleasure. Electronic whiteboards were available in all classrooms but not used effectively by enough teachers to support learning.

## 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	83	37%
	Last year	66	24%
Teachers	27		54%
Students	There are no upper secondary-aged students in the school		

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

A significant minority of parents responded to the questionnaire which was an improvement from last year. A majority of teachers responded. The overall satisfaction of both parents and teachers with almost all aspects of the school was very positive. In particular, almost all parents were impressed with the school's supervision of their children and almost all teachers felt very satisfied that they were an important part of a professional culture. Parents were extremely pleased with their children's attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic. Most parents agreed with teachers that the teaching, resources and overall education were good and that the school was well-led. A minority of parents made negative comments that indicated they were either unhappy with or did not understand the change in direction of the school. Parents were very satisfied with communications between home and school and the majority felt that there had been noticeable improvements since the new principal had been appointed.

## 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](mailto:inspection@khda.gov.ae)

## Our work with schools

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

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

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

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