

Al Ittihad Private School, Jumeirah Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 12

Report published May 2010

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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.

Al Ittihad Private School, Jumeirah was inspected in November 2009 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 Jumeirah, Al Ittihad is a private school providing education for boys and girls, Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 12, aged three to 18 years. At the time of the inspection, there were 1,234 students on roll. Students' attendance in the last academic session was good.

As part of the inspection process, Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires issued to parents. Almost all stated that their children enjoyed school and were happy about all areas of the school's work. A minority expressed concerns about the progress the school had made since the previous inspection.

How well does the school perform overall?

Al Ittihad Private School was providing an acceptable quality of education. It had some good features but also some significant areas for development. Attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic were good throughout the higher grades. Attainment and progress in English, mathematics and science were acceptable. Within this overall picture, students were progressing well and reaching good standards in English from the KG to Grade 4. However, students were not building well enough on this promising start and, despite reaching broadly average levels of attainment; overall progress in English through Grades 5 to 12 was unsatisfactory. Students' attitudes and behaviour were good, although there was room for them to become more independent and self-reliant. Students appreciated and valued their role

in an Islamic society and showed respect for other faiths. They had an acceptable level of understanding of the economic importance of Dubai.

The teaching was acceptable overall. In the most effective lessons, teachers interpreted the grade textbooks imaginatively. They used their subject knowledge well, provoking debate through skilful questioning. In these lessons, there was a strong focus on promoting students' critical thinking. In too many lessons, however, the pace was slow and there was little challenge in the work. This meant that students lost interest and did not progress as well as they might. The quality of assessment was acceptable overall. Records were kept of students' test results, but assessment information was not used effectively to modify the level of work set according to students' individual needs or to set them specific targets for improvement. The curriculum was acceptable. Some effective links were being made across subjects and students benefitted from a variety of extra activities. The almost exclusive use of standard textbooks, although ensuring subject content was taught progressively each year, meant that students' understanding often lacked depth. The arrangements for the health and safety of the students were outstanding. Students' attainment each year was recorded but the extent to which they were building well enough on previous learning was not systematically assessed, and thus academic support was not fully effective.

The quality of leadership was good. The Director General's vision and aspirations for the school were a potent force for inspiring senior staff. All were committed to moving the school forward and the school had made good headway in addressing the recommendations of the previous report. Self-evaluation was acceptable, with strengths in monitoring teaching but there were weaknesses in the use of assessment data to inform whole school planning. This in turn limited the board's ability to review the overall performance of the school. The school communicated well with parents about day-to-day matters but the quality of written reports was inconsistent. The school was fully staffed and the spacious accommodation was well maintained. Resources were generally adequate, but there were too few computers to enable students to use them routinely during lessons.

Key features of the school

- The leadership team's strong commitment to improvement and their positive response to the recommendations of the previous report;
- The high quality of teaching and learning of Arabic in KG;
- The subject knowledge of the English teachers in the middle and high schools was not consistently good enough to be able to challenge all learners to reach higher levels of attainment and make at least acceptable progress;
- Students had few opportunities to solve problems;
- Students' progress was not tracked systematically enough to assess their progress through the school or to inform development planning;
- Few teachers had the questioning skills to encourage the development of students' critical thinking and analytical response;
- An over reliance on textbooks resulted in students having limited opportunities to apply their skills in unfamiliar contexts;
- The outstanding quality of the provision for the health and safety of the students.

Recommendations

- Improve the teaching of English in the middle school and the high school so that it is consistently good enough to maintain students' progress and enable them to reach higher standards;
- Give students more opportunities to solve problems by finding things out for themselves;
- Improve teachers questioning skills in order to encourage the development of students' critical thinking and analytical responses;
- Reduce teachers' over-reliance on textbooks so that students have more opportunities to apply their skills in unfamiliar contexts;
- Assess students' progress through each grade and phase in order to more closely meet their individual needs and to inform self-evaluation and development planning.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good in the primary, middle and high schools. Children in the KG read The Holy Qur'an and knew something of the life and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). In the higher grades students' knowledge of Islam was improving, although few could discuss in depth how the main principles and values of Islam had an impact on their daily lives. All students knew the most important behaviours in Islam and the requirements of a good Muslim. Students in all grades were learning how to recite The Holy Qur'an accurately and knew the meaning of the words. Most students discussed basic concepts such as the oneness of Allah and the Hajj pillar of Islam.

Attainment and progress in Arabic were good in the primary, middle and high schools. Students in the KG used the computer well to enhance their learning. In the older grades, students accurately wrote words and phrases. For example, in Grade 4 students were able to write a story and read it. Most students in the middle and high grades could converse well in Arabic. Almost all students responded correctly to their teachers' questions and used their increasing knowledge of grammar to construct sentences. Students in Grades 9 to 12 researched Arabic culture and confidently discussed their findings.

All children entered the school speaking English as an additional language. By the end of KG, most had made good progress, and were reaching standards which were above age related expectations in reading, writing, speaking and listening. Students continued to make good progress throughout the elementary grades, so that by the time they left Grade 5, they were still reaching standards which were above those expected for their age. Of particular note was the good attainment of students in the lower grades who used their skills to very good effect in a wide range of creative writing tasks. Progress was unsatisfactory in the middle and high schools. Although students were attaining standards in line with Grade 12 expectations they were not building well enough on their previous levels of attainment.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable across the school. Progress was limited by insufficient challenge or practical approaches. Students learned mathematical techniques and memorised facts but lacked a deeper understanding. Students' skills in manipulating numbers and calculating were good at all levels but their ability to apply these skills in solving problems was less well developed. While the school's test data showed students were meeting or exceeding their expected grade levels, their attainment did not compare as favourably with international standards.

Attainment and progress in science across the school were acceptable overall. By the end of the primary school, students' scientific knowledge was in line with the school's expectations, although progress over the primary section was variable. As they moved through the school there was some repetition, and students did not build practical skills or an understanding of scientific investigation. Nevertheless, in Grades 5 and 6 students made good progress in understanding processes such as the human digestive system and the rock cycle. In the secondary school, progress was restricted by a heavy dependence on the textbook and the

limited reading skills of some students. Practical work was largely confined to supporting what students learned in other lessons. In the secondary school, attainment was broadly in line with school expectations but below international levels in terms of understanding and practical investigative skills.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' personal and social development was good. They had positive attitudes and were eager to please their teachers. There was a good level of mutual respect and positive relationships among students, and between students and staff. Behaviour around the school was good, although there was a need for students to become more independent, resourceful and self-reliant learners. Attendance was good.

Students' civic and Islamic understanding was good. At lunch times, many students attended prayers, during which they often took the Imam's role. Students understood and valued the multicultural nature of Dubai and enjoyed its diversity. They appreciated their roles in society but needed more opportunities to develop them within the school in order to be better prepared for life in the broader community. Students valued the importance of Islam and could relate well to how this impacted positively upon personal attitudes and behaviours, including respect of other people's faiths.

Students had an acceptable understanding of the economic importance of Dubai and were proud of its standing within the world community. They were uncertain about the recession and its impact but appreciated they were in a privileged position personally. Students had a limited awareness of their personal contributions towards Dubai's future, but aspirations were high with many intending to enter university. Environmental awareness was limited to litter collection and an environmental club in the girls' high school.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Overall, the quality of teaching was acceptable. The teaching of Arabic was outstanding in KG and, along with that in Islamic Education, was consistently good across the school. Teaching in other subject areas varied in quality. Teachers generally planned their lessons well and most showed a good knowledge of their subject. They explained tasks carefully and checked students' understanding. However, their questioning was often insufficiently open or prolonged to encourage students to respond or to support their abilities to think critically. In the most effective lessons, teachers involved students in stimulating activities which provided opportunities to use a range of learning strategies. In these lessons students made choices in their learning or demonstrated what they had learned to the rest of the class. In the less successful lessons, activities were often over-directed by teachers and they used limited approaches to meet the needs of all learners, particularly the more able.

The quality of students' learning in lessons was acceptable. Children in the KG worked well in their lessons but were not sufficiently confident in working independently or in developing creativity through play. Across the school, most students were motivated to learn, responded

well to their teachers and engaged productively with each other in class discussions. They worked purposefully when using the library for research. Students showed the ability to make independent choices and to reflect on their learning when encouraged to do so. They demonstrated these abilities when discussing current topics, which stimulated debate and the sharing of different viewpoints. However, there were too few opportunities for students to engage in this type of activity or to develop their investigation skills. Students' practical learning and creative skills were not sufficiently developed and they had insufficient opportunities to link areas of their learning across subjects.

Teachers assessed students' progress to an acceptable degree, through a range of methods including end-of-unit and course tests. They were careful to assess students' progress against criteria tightly linked to the core programmes of study. This provided them with an acceptable level of information about students' progress. They used this information to confirm their judgements of students' progress. Some teachers successfully adjusted the pace of lessons as a result of this information but many did not take into account the wide range of abilities in their classes. The quality of feedback varied and mainly provided just a broad indication of students' progress. Students did not benefit from regular discussions at the end of lessons aimed at reinforcing the learning that had taken place. Teachers rarely marked students' work in such a way as to identify what learners needed to do to improve and students had insufficient opportunities to assess their own progress and set targets for improvement.

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

The curriculum was based on an American curriculum and it provided an acceptable range of learning experiences for the children in the KG and for older students. Senior managers regularly reviewed their courses and programmes and had introduced additional teaching materials to broaden students' learning experiences. The quality of learning in Arabic and Islamic Education had improved as a result of the commitment of senior managers to ensure a progressive and balanced education. The school had recently taken a number of effective steps to link its curriculum more directly with teaching and assessment approaches. It had still to fully develop the curriculum across the school to achieve its long-term vision of providing creative and stimulating learning experiences for its students. Teaching was too often reliant on textbooks and, as a result, students had too few opportunities to apply their skills in unfamiliar contexts or to make appropriate choices in learning. The curriculum did not provide enough opportunities for the development of investigative skills or to make connections between learning in subjects and in the wider world. There were some opportunities for students to experience the world of work and to engage in considering their impact on the environment. There was considerable scope to develop these areas of study as well as ensuring more effective cross-curricular links. A well attended extra-curricular programme provided a reasonable range of sporting and cultural activities.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The quality of provision for the health and safety of students was outstanding. All staff gave high priority towards the well-being of students. The premises were secure at all times and the arrival and dismissal of students was well managed. The premises were well maintained and attractive. Fire drills were held regularly and without warning throughout the year and had resulted in a highly efficient evacuation procedure. The high quality clinic was attended by a full-time nurse and part-time medical doctor. Regular medical checks took place as students moved through the school and both medicines and routine records were kept securely. Healthy lifestyles were promoted through lessons in science and physical education, and by a healthy eating project. Staff members were knowledgeable of child protection procedures, which were supported by an effective pastoral system.

The quality of support was good. Staff were good role models and there were good staff-student relationships. The supervisors provided good support for students and involved parents, as necessary, in the personal development of their children. Older students received career and higher education guidance at the appropriate times. Both teachers and students had high expectations of behaviour and this was well supported by the detailed behaviour management policy. There were good systems for checking students' attainment through regular quizzes and tests, the results of which were analysed regularly to identify students who needed extra support in their subjects. Some analysis of results had been done to track progress of individual students in different years and in key subjects. This was not yet linked to international standards or used to ensure a range of provision in lessons to meet the varying needs of learners.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was good. The leadership team was highly committed to the school's central values. There was a clear sense of purpose across the school and some recent initiatives for improving teaching and learning were proving successful. There was a clear desire to follow up the recommendations and other points for development from the previous inspection report. Much staff training had been carried out and further opportunities were planned. However, the courses and workshops covered a lot of topics in a short time. This meant that staff members were rather overloaded when attempting to introduce new teaching methods.

Self-evaluation was acceptable. A system for monitoring the work of teachers meant that senior staff gained an overview of strengths and where improvement was needed. The leadership team, therefore, gained a clear picture of the overall effectiveness of teaching and identified further training needs. However, the focus of most monitoring was largely on teachers' performance rather than the impact on students' learning and progress. The school lacked a robust system for tracking students' progress within classes and through the school. This meant that there was little information available by which to compare students' attainment with international standards, or to judge whether they were building well enough on their previous learning. Development planning had a clear focus on the issues identified by

the previous report, but planning documents did not always include specific criteria with which to evaluate the success of each initiative.

The school's partnership with parents and the community was acceptable overall. Parents felt welcome, and appreciated the opportunities to pop in when they wanted further information or wished to raise concerns. Useful links with other local schools were mutually beneficial as staff shared ideas. The quality of written reports to parents was inconsistent. Most presented the results of grade assessments in the form of percentages in each subject, but there were very few references to how well students were progressing or to specific individual targets for improvement.

Governance was of acceptable quality. The school board ensured that statutory requirements were met and supported the senior staff in promoting the school's aims. A small executive committee provided a useful communication channel between the management team and the board. Their ability to hold the school to account for its performance was constrained, however, due to the lack of a readily available overview of students' progress. The membership profile of the board and the executive committee was not fully representative of parents and other stakeholders.

Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable overall. The school was appropriately staffed with qualified teachers and they were suitably deployed. The spacious buildings and outdoor areas were well maintained. Resources were adequate, but the development of students' practical skills in science was constrained by having to share limited lab equipment. The computer suite was adequately equipped but students had very limited opportunities to use modern technology as a routine tool for learning.

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:	Kindergarten	Elementary Grades 1 to 5	Middle Grades 6 to 8	High Grades 9 to 12
Attainment	Not applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not applicable	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary Grades 1 to 5	Middle Grades 6 to 8	High Grades 9 to 12
Attainment	Not applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not applicable	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary Grades 1 to 5	Middle Grades 6 to 8	High Grades 9 to 12
Attainment	Good	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Good	Good	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary Grades 1 to 5	Middle Grades 6 to 8	High Grades 9 to 12
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary Grades 1 to 5	Middle Grades 6 to 8	High Grades 9 to 12
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary Grades 1 to 5	Middle Grades 6 to 8	High Grades 9 to 12
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary Grades 1 to 5	Middle Grades 6 to 8	High Grades 9 to 12
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary Grades 1 to 5	Middle Grades 6 to 8	High Grades 9 to 12
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary Grades 1 to 5	Middle Grades 6 to 8	High Grades 9 to 12
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of support	Good	Good	Good	Good

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
Quality of leadership	Good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Acceptable
Partnerships with parents and the community	Acceptable
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.

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