

Dar Al Marefa Private School Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 8

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.

Dar Al Marefa Private School was inspected in January 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

Located in Mirdif, Dar Al Marefa is a private school providing education for boys and girls aged 3 to 12 years from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 8 (Middle school). There have been significant changes to the school since it was opened in October 2008. These included a recent review of the curriculum and the introduction of the International Baccalaureate (IB) programmes. The present Principal was appointed in August 2009. The school facilities had been enlarged to accommodate an increase in student number; from the 54 on roll last year to 175 at the time of the inspection. The attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Most parents who responded believed that the school was well led, that their children were happy and safe. They felt welcome in the school. Very few parents had concerns over teaching and their children's attainment. A few were unclear about their children's progress.

How well does the school perform overall?

Overall, Dar Al Marefa Private School provided a good quality of education for its students despite significant recent changes. Students' attainment and progress was good in KG in all key subjects and in Arabic at both the primary and middle stages. In KG, children showed highly developed early language skills in Arabic and English. They were knowledgeable and showed good understanding in Islamic Education, mathematics and science. In the primary and

middle stages students were skilled in speaking, writing and reading in Arabic. Students of Arabic as a second language were making particularly good progress. The attitude and behaviour of students were mainly of a high quality, both in and outside of the classrooms. However, a few students were not punctual in coming to school and attendance rates had declined from last year. Students were courteous and polite. In all year groups, almost all the students had a good attitude to learning and worked very well in their classes. Students were aware of their responsibilities as citizens and they showed good understanding of and a respect for Islam. Students had a good and developing understanding of the economic and environmental issues which related particularly to Dubai. Most took good care of their school and local environment but were at an early stage in developing their understanding of how they might contribute to wider issues of conservation.

Teaching and learning was good overall but acceptable in the primary section. Teachers used discussion well to engage students in their learning and shared learning intentions well with them. Students responded positively to the increased opportunities to become active in their learning through working on practical tasks, exploring ideas or through carrying out scientific experiments. The school's focus on these more activity based approaches to learning helped to raise students' attainment. However, these approaches were not yet being used consistently across the school. Assessment was acceptable throughout the school but lacked consistency. This inconsistency of practice was being addressed through an assessment policy review which had yet to impact on student progress. The curriculum in KG was good and at other stages, it was acceptable. There was appropriate progression from year to year. Recent improvements to the curriculum in Arabic and English and the focus on cross-curricular activities were positive developments. The school was continuing to develop its curriculum to meet the varied needs of the large numbers of new students attending the school. The school had outstanding arrangements to ensure the health and safety of its students. The quality of support given to students ensured a caring and inclusive environment for learning.

The positive impact of the Principal and his management team provided good leadership to the school. This included an increased focus on developing the skills of teachers, ensuring greater consistency in learning, teaching, assessing and monitoring more effectively the attainment of students. Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. The school had made good progress in meeting the recommendations from the last inspection. However, self-evaluation required to be further developed to ensure that the school's priorities were fully achieved. Links with parents were good. Parents were very positive about the school and had made important contributions to its development. The governance of the school was acceptable and the Board of Governors was committed to increasing the involvement of key stakeholders in the decision-making process. With the support of the Board of Governors and parents, the school had significantly improved the accommodation and resources.

Key features of the school

- The good leadership of the Principal and his management team and the commitment of the school to achieve its vision;
- Good attainment and progress in Arabic and the good progress made by students in most other key subjects;
- The positive relationship between staff and students and the effective inclusion of large numbers of new students into the school;
- The quality of care and support for students including outstanding arrangements for health and safety.

Recommendations

- Track and monitor students' progress more effectively to gain a better understanding of where students are in their learning and to help them identify how to improve;
- Ensure consistently high quality teaching, learning and assessment through continued sharing of best practice within the school and through more rigorous self- evaluation to ensure that activities and resources fully meet students' needs, and challenge the more able;
- Further develop the curriculum in Islamic Education, mathematics and science to provide greater breadth and continuity of students' learning;
- Improve attendance and punctuality;
- Implement the Board of Governors' plans to increase the involvement of key stakeholders in decision-making.

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

Attainment in Islamic Education was good at the primary stages and acceptable in the middle stages. Progress was acceptable at the primary and middle stages of the school. By KG 2, children knew basic facts such as the five pillars of Islam and could memorise short chapters of The Holy Qur'an. By Grade 4, students were making good progress in their understanding of how to be good Muslims. However, few students could give examples of how to apply Islamic values to their lives. In Grade 7, most students were very knowledgeable about obligatory and voluntary prayers. Students in Grade 8 were able to recite but their memorization skills were below expectations.

Attainment and progress in Arabic were good across the school. In KG, almost all children accurately identified sounds and letters and spoke well using a range of appropriate vocabulary. Most of them wrote legibly when writing letters. At the primary stage, students wrote well-constructed sentences and paragraphs and showed highly developed reading skills.

Students spoke with confidence and most made accurate use of classical Arabic in responding to their teachers' questions. At the middle stage, most students were skilled in note-taking and produced high quality pieces of extended writing. Students of Arabic as an additional language were making excellent progress in developing their vocabulary and their reading and writing skills.

Attainment and progress in English were good in both KG and middle stages and acceptable at the primary stage. In KG, almost all children listened well, knew the sounds of the alphabet, recognised simple words and spoke confidently. By Grade 7, students were able to write in sentences with growing vocabulary and grammatical accuracy. However, students' skills and confidence in speaking and reading with comprehension were less well developed in the primary stages. At the middle stage, students read well and spoke fluently using a wide range of vocabulary. Students had highly developed writing skills and were able to write in complex sentences and paragraphs using legible handwriting, correct spelling and punctuation.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were good in KG. It was acceptable at the primary and middle stages. In KG, children could identify numbers and count, with confidence, up to 30. They accurately described positions and were skilled in sorting and classifying solid objects, including cubes, cylinders and spheres. At the primary stages, attainment and progress was best at Grades 1 to 4. Across Grades 1 to 7 and at the middle stage, most students worked confidently with fractions and decimals and their mental arithmetic skills were developing well as was their understanding of mathematical vocabulary. However, students' problem-solving skills were not well developed and they had limited appreciation of how to apply mathematics in real life situations.

Attainment in science was good in KG and was acceptable in both the primary and middle stages. Progress was good at all stages. In KG, children knew about the animals that lived in the sea, on land and in the air. In Grade 5 most students were able to discuss accurately the difference between solids, liquids and gases and provided some information on how they changed their properties. By Grade 8, students were able to record their observations on bacteria and could discuss how infections spread. However, in the Primary and Middle stages students were at an early stage of developing their skills in using practical experiments to ensure fair tests.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Overall, students' personal and social development was good. Almost all students were motivated to learn, behaved very well in class and when moving around the school. They listened attentively to their teachers and to each other, and most participated enthusiastically during class discussions. Students had very positive attitudes to learning and positive relationships with their teachers and with other school staff. However, a minority of students were not punctual in arriving at the beginning of the school day or in moving to their next class. Attendance was acceptable.

Students' Islamic, cultural and civic understanding was good. They were aware of their responsibilities at school and in the community in which they lived. Almost all students had a well-developed understanding and appreciation of the multi-cultural nature of Dubai and showed respect for different religions. Their understanding of Islam was good and they valued its importance in their lives.

Economic and environmental understanding was good. Students were aware of the factors influencing Dubai's development and of the contribution that they might make to its future success. Almost all students were proud of Dubai's progress and could identify many of its unique economic features and knew about its role in the world. Students spoke knowledgeably about their concerns on issues such as pollution and congested traffic in Dubai. However, students had only a basic understanding of how the environment might be protected through, for example, recycling plastic bottles. Students cared for their school and its local environment, and mostly kept it clean and tidy.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was good in KG and at the middle stages of the school. It was more variable at the primary stage where it was acceptable. Most teachers had sound subject knowledge and had very positive relationships with the students. There were, however, inconsistencies in teaching approaches across subjects and across the school. Teaching was most effective when stimulating activities were used and there was a strong focus on active learning. High quality questioning, even in KG, encouraged critical thinking and engaged students in their own learning. At all stages, in science, there was a strong emphasis on developing students' skills in investigating through practical experiments. However, there were a few examples where teachers had set tasks which were not well matched to the needs of all learners. An over reliance on worksheets and published schemes of work in a minority of lessons hampered creativity and resulted in a more didactic approach and less opportunities for independent learning.

Students' learning was good in KG and at the middle stages of the school. It was acceptable at the primary stage. Almost all students were motivated to learn and responded well when given the opportunity to take responsibility for their learning. Students enjoyed assessing each others' work and explaining their ideas during group or class discussions. In KG, children interacted very well in practical activity-based learning activities. In the Grade 8 English class,

students had elected a board of directors as part of an enterprise initiative and responded well in making connections in their learning through this type of cross-curricular activity. At all stages students were confident in discussing aspects of the Arabic language and in reporting the outcomes of their investigations in science.

Assessment was acceptable. Teachers regularly assessed students' work and let them know how they were progressing in their learning. However, the school was revising its assessment arrangements to address identified inconsistencies. This had yet to impact fully across the school. Teachers were making effective use of new assessment procedures introduced in Arabic and English classes. Students were also beginning to use group and self-assessment to set targets in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Teachers used assessment information to inform their planning and to plan appropriate learning activities and this was beginning to have a significant impact on the students' learning and attainment. Students who required extra support in Arabic and English benefited from clear and detailed individual education plans reflecting their identified needs.

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

The curriculum was good in KG and acceptable at the primary and middle stages of the school. It was being extensively reviewed and developed to meet the varying needs of the large number of students who had recently entered the school. The curriculum met Ministry of Education requirements including the time allocated to Islamic Education. The curriculum was being brought more into line with the requirements of the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme although the school was not yet accredited as an IB school. It offered breadth and balance and ongoing reviews had resulted in the school having a well considered philosophy for the development of subjects and global themes. The curriculum in KG had a strong emphasis on planning to meet children's varying needs and opportunities for active and enquiry-based learning. The curriculum for mathematics and science had still to be fully revised and improved. The most effective curriculum areas in the primary and middle stages were in English and Arabic where there were well-planned opportunities for active learning and cross-curricular work. The curriculum for students with special education needs had been improved but provision for able and talented students was underdeveloped. Opportunities for students to learn about the local and wider community were enriched through visiting speakers and whole school events. The school had also extended its extra-curricular provision to include classes on The Holy Qur'an, handwriting and activities such as football, basketball and self-defence.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements for ensuring the health and safety of students were outstanding. The school provided a pleasant and safe learning environment and students felt they were well protected. Students were well supervised at all times. School facilities were safe, clean and very well-maintained. Classrooms were spacious, very bright and well-ventilated. Gates were secure and play areas were free of hazards and there were appropriate procedures for safely transporting students. Evacuation arrangements in case of emergencies were well-established. The school had carried out three fire drills since last term. Fire fighting equipment had recently been checked and was in good order. The school promoted good eating habits and its small canteen sold only healthy food. The school had a well-equipped clinic, a full-time nurse and a visiting doctor. Students with medical conditions were given appropriate support. Staff ensured that regular medical checks were carried out and students' health files were up-to-date. The school had clear procedures for child protection.

The quality of support was good across the school. Form teachers regularly provided guidance to students. Students with special educational needs received good support. The school had an effective behavior management policy and procedures. There were appropriate arrangements for communicating with parents including informing them of teachers' weekly plans. Assemblies were recently introduced to promote good behaviour and celebrate students' achievement. A recently revised tracking and monitoring system was being developed which was beginning to provide very useful information on students' well being and academic progress.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership and management were good, overall. The Principal had a quiet but effective and supportive leadership style. There was a strong sense of collective leadership developing across the school. The Principal and his management team were committed to the values of the school. This included offering a holistic bi-lingual curriculum in Arabic and English. The primary co-ordinator and the recently appointed subject coordinators in Arabic and English had successfully reviewed and developed teaching and learning approaches. Teachers had benefited from recent professional development activities linked to supporting more active learning and student-centred teaching approaches.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. Processes for self-evaluation had been reviewed and improved. Senior managers had started to formally monitor learning and teaching to identify and share good practice and to ensure greater consistency across the school. The curriculum was monitored by the Principal and a primary co-ordinator. The curriculum co-ordinators had worked very effectively with senior managers resulting in considerable improvements to the Arabic and English curriculum. The school had gathered more consistent information on students' attainment through revised assessment procedures. Senior managers had improved school planning, focused more directly on ensuring consistency in learning and teaching and had identified appropriate priorities for school improvement.

Overall, the school had made good progress in addressing the recommendations identified in the last school inspection report.

Partnership with parents was good. An active mothers' committee had supported the school through helping to organise school events and through evaluating books and other resources. Almost all parents felt that the school had an effective 'open door' policy and that the new Principal was responsive to their needs. A planned improvement to the KG play area was the direct result of consultation with parents. There was a programme of parent-teacher conferences which provided parents with the opportunity to discuss their children's progress with staff. Information on the school was also provided through weekly newsletters and parents were able to contact the school through e-mails. However, parents wanted more information on how they might help their children learn. The school had identified the need to establish links with its community to create opportunities to increase students' learning in the real world. The aim was to create opportunities for students to see science at work through contacting local science based companies. The school had yet to establish these links.

Governance at the school was acceptable. The Board of Governors had a strong commitment to developing the school. The Board had invested significantly in improving the school's accommodation and resources. It was very supportive of parents but had not yet implemented its plans to widen the representation of stakeholders in making decisions about the school. The Board had an accurate picture of the school's development, effectively held the school to account and provided challenge to senior leadership through the Principal.

Staffing, facilities and resources were good. Teachers were well qualified and deployed effectively. Teachers and classroom assistants had a good range of expertise to support and develop learning. Leaders, with the support of the Board, had successfully ensured the completion of an ambitious building programme which has significantly enhanced the learning environment of the school. The school benefitted from high quality interactive whiteboards and computing resources which were increasingly being used by teachers to support and develop 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:	KG	Primary	Middle
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?			
Age group:	KG	Primary	Middle
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Good

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

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

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

How good is the students' personal and social development?			
Age group:	KG	Primary	Middle
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:	KG	Primary	Middle
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Acceptable	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Acceptable	Good
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?			
Age group:	KG	Primary	Middle
Curriculum quality	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?			
Age group:	KG	Primary	Middle
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of support	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	Good
Governance	Acceptable
Staffing, facilities and resources	Good

How well does the school perform overall?
Good

Next Steps

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

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau
Knowledge and Human Development Authority

How to contact us

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

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

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