

Al Mawakeb School - Al Barsha Inspection Report

Kindergarten to High

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.

Al Mawakeb School - Al Barsha was inspected in October 2010 as part of the regular inspection of all schools in Dubai. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated students' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on students' progress in Islamic Education (for Muslim Students), Arabic, English, mathematics and science.

Basic information about the school

Located in Al Barsha, Al Mawakeb School - Al Barsha is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to high, aged three to 18 years. The school follows a US curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 2954 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

As part of the process, inspectors analysed questionnaires from parents. Most parents were satisfied with most aspects of the school and thought that the school was well led. They thought that their children were treated fairly and that the school kept them safe. Most judged that the behaviour at the school was satisfactory or better. Most felt that the school helped their child to choose a healthy lifestyle. A minority thought there could be better extra-curricular opportunities. Most agreed that communication between school and parents was effective and timely and the majority felt that the school responded well to parental concerns. However, the majority did not feel that they were effectively involved in the work of the school. A significant number felt that they did not know the school's priorities for improvement. The majority thought that their children were enthusiastic about their learning. However, a minority of parents felt that the school should focus on improving the quality of teaching.

How well does the school perform overall?

The school had made acceptable progress in addressing the recommendations of the last report. It had continued to keep under review the performance of teachers in the classroom. Teaching and learning had improved to a certain extent in Kindergarten and the early years, with a better focus on how young children should learn, although the school needed to build on these changes. The school had adopted an international assessment framework which would enable benchmarking and allow the school to measure students' performance better. Testing would begin in January 2011. A governing board, with a broadly appropriate membership, had been set up, but had not yet met. The school's self-evaluation and improvement planning required a better focus on key priorities and how on how to implement them. With a stronger sense of vision and more systematic and rigorous management by senior leaders, the school had the capacity to continue to improve.

The overall performance of the school was acceptable, with some clear strengths. Attainment and progress in key subjects were mostly acceptable with an overall stronger performance at high school level. The attitude and behaviour of most students were good apart from in middle school where these were acceptable. Their civic understanding, understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture were good, except in elementary where Islamic and cultural understanding was acceptable. The quality of teaching and learning was acceptable from Kindergarten to middle school and good at high school. The school had undertaken a comprehensive review of the curriculum which was acceptable overall. The range of extra-curricular activities required further expansion. Health and safety arrangements and quality of support were good. The overall quality of leadership was good. All school leaders were committed to the school and to improvement and ensured its smooth running through effective team-working. The quality of self-evaluation was acceptable. The quality of the school's partnership with parents was acceptable. A number of parents, however, were not sufficiently aware of the school's priorities for improvement or involved with the school's development. The governance of the school was acceptable and the quality of staffing, facilities and resources was good. Leaders placed a commendable emphasis on professional development to encourage a consistent quality of teaching in the classrooms.

Key features of the school

- The commitment of managers and teachers to improving the school;
- The positive climate of the school, with its emphasis on caring for students and developing them as individuals;
- The good range of strategies used to support improvement in teaching;
- Effective language acquisition across the three languages in Kindergarten;
- The process of review of the curriculum undertaken by the school;
- An insufficient focus on differentiation as part of the learning process;
- The lack of specialist staff to advise on the support of lower attaining students.

Recommendations

- Continue to improve the quality of student learning, so that students are more independent and develop a wider range of learning skills;
- Address the learning needs of all students in lessons to ensure those experiencing difficulties are supported and higher attaining students are appropriately challenged;
- Analyse assessment data effectively to review the curriculum and improve teaching and learning;
- Build on the strengths of the current system of self-evaluation, to achieve more systematic and rigorous whole school improvement;
- Develop further the partnership with parents so that they understand the school's priorities and are more involved in improvement;
- Extend the overall provision of science laboratories and information and communications technology (ICT) facilities to enable students to participate further in practical activities and develop learning skills.

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

In Islamic Education, attainment and progress were good at elementary and acceptable in the middle and high school. By the end of elementary, most students could read and memorise the prescribed chapters of The Holy Qur'an. In the middle school most students had good knowledge of the life of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). However, the quality of their recitation skills needed greater development. In upper grades in high school most students had an acceptable knowledge of Islam. They linked Islamic values to their daily lives. However, most students across all phases had limited knowledge about applying the rules of Tajweed. Most students demonstrated an imbalance between knowledge development and possible application of Islamic knowledge in their daily dealings and the wider community.

In Arabic as a first language, attainment was acceptable in the elementary and the middle phase, while it was good in the high school. Progress was good in the elementary and high and acceptable in the middle phase. In Grade 1, students could recognise and pronounce the alphabet accurately. They could also write it with short vowels. Students were generally able to engage in simple conversation and could respond to instructions. Most students in elementary had difficulty in writing, which was confined to copying specific sentences from the given texts. By the end of elementary, students could describe occupations. They were able to write short paragraphs comprised of approximately three familiar lines. Students were unable to use standard language in real life situations. Reciting and memorising of poetry in Grade 6 were good. However, students' general understanding of poetry was weak, as was their use of grammar in unfamiliar situations. Most high school students demonstrated a good understanding of poetry and prose and good skills in analysing texts. They demonstrated good skills writing at length and made good oral presentations of their work.

In Arabic as an additional language, in both elementary and middle school, students' attainment was acceptable. However, their progress was good. In high school, both attainment and progress were good. The majority of students across the school, particularly in Grades 7 and 12, developed good listening and speaking skills. Students were beginning to use Arabic as a medium for communication. They could narrate short stories well and they could converse with others for a few minutes in standard Arabic without pauses. In high school, almost all students' reading and pronunciation were good. However, across all phases, writing skills were underdeveloped and writing was limited to single words or a few short sentences.

In Kindergarten and high school, attainment in English was good and progress was acceptable. Attainment and progress were acceptable at the elementary and middle grades. Kindergarten students had good listening skills and were able to create sentences using two or three words. Elementary and middle school students developed acceptable levels of reading and speaking skills. Middle school students demonstrated an increased understanding of the correct use of grammar, spelling and punctuation. High school students were mature in their use of language and were able to confidently discuss various forms of literature.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were acceptable in the Kindergarten, elementary and middle phases and good in the high school. In Grade 2, students were able to set simple number problems for their peers to solve. Students in Grade 4 could interpret a simple bar chart and draw conclusions about their friends' favourite colours. Grade 9 students understood the difference between geometric centres of a triangle and where altitudes intersect and could explain this using the correct mathematical language. Students in Grade 11 were confident in solving vector problems in trigonometry. The standards achieved in mathematics were in line with the school's curriculum objectives and with international standards.

Attainment and progress in science in Kindergarten was acceptable. In elementary and middle school, attainment was acceptable and progress good. At high school, both attainment and progress were good. Kindergarten students investigated healthy foods. Students in grades 1 to 12 were able to collect, organise and display data effectively. Elementary students could classify animals and explain how seeds disperse and grow. Middle school students discussed and sketched the stages of cell division, changes in matter and basic genetics. High school students used calculators and laptops to achieve accurate scientific calculations. They knew parts of the nervous system and understood projectile motion. Overall, however, limited laboratory opportunities effected attainment in scientific skill development.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Attitudes and behaviour were good throughout the school apart from in the middle school where examples of less positive behaviour disrupted the learning at times. Students in higher grades had good relationships with their peers and adults. Attendance across the phases ranged between good and outstanding except in Kindergarten, where attendance was lower. Overall, punctuality was acceptable. However, a large number of students who were brought by car arrived late in the morning.

Students' civic and Islamic understanding was good overall but acceptable in elementary. They respected and appreciated Islam and the local cultures present in Dubai. High school students believed that living in a multi-cultural society like Dubai was an advantage to them. The school mosque helped to enhance students' understanding of Islam. However, displays did not sufficiently promote civic and Islamic understanding at a school where the majority of students were Muslims and Arabs. Students did not feel that the Students' Senate and Student Council helped them to contribute significantly to the decision-making process of the school. For example, they expressed an ongoing concern about the lack of field trips at all stages, which they felt had not been addressed satisfactorily.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good. Students could effectively identify the unique aspects of Dubai and they were aware of how it had developed over a short period. High school students could clearly explain the reasons behind the current economic situation. Although students demonstrated a desire to protect the world's resources, they provided limited examples of how to make Dubai an environmentally better place to live in. They expressed concern about the inadequate opportunities for recycling in the school and the problem of litter in some areas of the school grounds but were not active in addressing these issues.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was acceptable in the Kindergarten, elementary and middle schools and good in the high school. Almost all teachers had a good knowledge of their subjects. The majority knew how best to teach their subject and a few understood how students learned. Teachers in high school classes maintained a good pace in their lessons and had high expectations of their students. Science teachers in all grades included a good range of practical work in their lesson planning. Where teachers recognised the different levels of ability in a class and planned accordingly, the less able students realised their potential and the more able students reached higher levels of learning, but this was not consistent. The majority of teachers in the elementary and middle schools demonstrated an over-reliance on the textbook and whole class teaching. Those teachers who had developed good classroom management skills were able to offer more opportunities for successful learning.

The quality of students' learning was acceptable in the Kindergarten, elementary and middle schools and good in the high school. Opportunities existed for Kindergarten children to take responsibility; for example, registering themselves with their name label on the wall record. In a minority of classes in the higher grades, students discussed with their teacher the methods that they could use to solve problems. The majority of students in the middle and high schools interacted well with each other in learning and were confident in engaging in group work. However, some students in the elementary school were unable to collaborate effectively in groups. Students recorded in their notebooks the objectives they were expected to achieve. However, there were still too few opportunities for students to be actively involved in their learning.

Assessment was acceptable in all four phases of the school. It was being used to measure progress of students through regular summative testing and informal feedback in student workbooks. However, assessment was not yet embedded as an integrated part of the teaching and learning process throughout the school. Kindergarten teachers provided individual evaluation of themed work and praise and reward was used well in the elementary school. Most of the students' workbooks were corrected and good work was recognised but little guidance was given on how to improve. In Islamic Education and Arabic, oral assessment of students' understanding was often good but not always consistent across the grades and in the assessment of written work.

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

The curriculum was acceptable at all levels and was based on a tri-lingual (English, French and Arabic) American-style curriculum, with contextual modifications for Dubai. It was generally broad and balanced and provided continuity and progression. In its recent comprehensive curriculum review, the school had made some modifications. For example, the Kindergarten curriculum was strengthened to improve the continuity, progression and transition to Grade 1. Secondary level English was improved by increasing extended writing opportunities. Secondary maths included greater emphasis on probability and statistics. Minor changes were made to secondary science with an additional year of chemistry now offered. Extensive curriculum documents included separate pacing guides, subject units and daily plans. Although lesson objectives were included, specific learner outcomes were not present on most teachers' unit or daily plans. Scope and sequence documents were developed primarily from textbooks or from the analysis of questions on external exams and tests. References to cross-curricular links were not included at any level and needed to be developed to provide a more balanced and relevant curriculum. Extra-curricular activities did not include much focus on the arts. Curricular links with the community and local environment were present but limited. The curriculum lacked learning contexts which developed student independence such as project work.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety arrangements and quality of support were good. The school provided a well-maintained, clean and secure environment for learning. Kindergarten students were well-supervised at all times. The administrative team ensured that all teachers knew their responsibilities concerning child protection. Evacuation and fire arrangements were appropriate, posted at children's eye level, and students knew how to respond in an emergency. Teachers and transport employees ensured student safety on school buses. Student drop-off and pick-up arrangements were well supervised. The school doctor provided high quality care and advised teachers about health-related matters. The school provided good opportunities to encourage students' understanding of a healthy lifestyle. The school should review fire safety in relation to locked doors during break times. The school should also ensure effective supervision for non-Muslim students during Islamic Education lesson times.

Students received good academic and personal support from staff. Staff-student relationships were good and the students felt confident to approach staff if they needed support. High school students received sound advice and guidance about college selection and applications from the guidance counsellor. The school did not employ any full time learning support specialists, although additional language teachers delivered appropriate support in English. Where student behaviour gave concern, parents were immediately contacted and involved in resolving these issues. There was continuity and consistency regarding monitoring of student progress. The assessment results of each student were examined and, if attainment and progress were not appropriate, a meeting with parents followed, with agreed improvement plans. Some students arrived late at the start of the day which affected learning time.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The overall quality of leadership was good. The leadership team were professional and clearly committed to the school and to improvement. Senior leaders had maintained a positive working environment and encouraged good teamwork in the various phases. They demonstrated high levels of competence in their day-to-day running of the school. Co-directors and co-ordinators worked well with their teachers, focusing on the smooth running of their areas and on improving the quality of teaching. The curriculum coordinator fulfilled her role effectively, ensuring that teachers understood curriculum developments and their implementation.

The quality of self-evaluation was acceptable, with some clear strengths. The process included a sound focus on targeting the improvement of individual teachers and the raising of individual student attainment. Senior and middle managers observed teacher performance, offered feedback and organised workshops for professional development. The school had made good progress in addressing the recommendations of the last report. A more systematic, ongoing focus on improving all aspects of the school over time was now needed to ensure consistent impact of initiatives. There was no end of year self-evaluation report to make clear what the

school had achieved and outline its next steps. The existing improvement plan did not have sufficiently clear priorities, timescales or clear responsibilities.

The quality of partnership with parents was acceptable. There was good two-way communication and an open-door policy, giving parents access to key personnel. Parents used the school website to find out information and access student programmes and reports. Parents were involved in the life of the school through events. A number, however, were not sufficiently aware of the school's priorities for improvement. Nor did the school currently seek their views on aspects of the school's development.

The governance of the school was acceptable. The management board regularly held the school accountable on a number of issues. It had also recently set up a governing board, which included two parents and two academic staff members, but this group had not yet met. A systematic annual evaluation of the school's improvement would offer a clear focus for discussions at Board level.

The quality of staffing, facilities and resources was good. There were enough suitably qualified teachers to cover all subjects, with a good mix of younger and more experienced teachers. With a significant number of new teachers this year, leaders had placed a commendable emphasis on orientation and professional development to encourage a consistent quality of teaching across the school. The school premises were used effectively to support learning. The Kindergarten facilities were bright and spacious. Some refurbishment was required in certain areas; for example, there were not enough science laboratories for the size of school and there was a need to increase the number of interactive white boards in classrooms and the overall availability of computers to support 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	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
76% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Good
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good

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

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

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

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Acceptable	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Acceptable	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of support	Good	Good	Good	Good

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

How well does the school perform overall?
Acceptable

Next steps

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

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau
Knowledge and Human Development Authority

How to contact us

If you have a concern or wish to comment on any aspect of this report you should contact:
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More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at www.khda.gov.ae.

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