

Dubai National School - Al Barsha Inspection Report

Kindergarten to High School

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.

Dubai National School - Al Barsha was inspected in February 2011 as part of the regular inspection of all schools in Dubai. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated students' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on students' progress in Islamic Education (for Muslim students), Arabic, English, mathematics and science.

Basic information about the school

Located in Al Barsha, Dubai National School - Al Barsha is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to Grade 12, aged three to 18 years. The school follows a US curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 2450 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to the on-line questionnaire completed by parents. Almost all parents were very positive about the school in general and reported that their children enjoyed school and were achieving well. High levels of satisfaction were also evident regarding progress in English and mathematics and the health and safety of students. A few parents expressed concern regarding the quality of reports from the school. A minority of the respondents felt that too much homework was assigned each day. Almost all parents commented on the good behaviour of the students across the school.

How well does the school perform overall?

Dubai National School provided a good quality of education overall. The leadership team had responded effectively to all recommendations from the previous report. A caring ethos was promoted by the senior leadership team and was evident throughout the school.

Student attainment and progress were good in all key subjects, with the exception of the high school, where progress in Arabic as an additional language was judged as acceptable. The quality of teaching and learning and the curriculum were good, overall. Health and safety were good across all levels and the quality of support was good in the elementary, middle and high school levels and outstanding in the Kindergarten and at Grade 1. Leadership was outstanding, with a clear vision and strong capacity for continual improvement. Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good.

Key features of the school

- Outstanding leadership was reflected in high expectations throughout the school;
- There was outstanding care and support for Kindergarten children;
- There was good attainment and progress across all subject areas;
- Some outstanding examples of teaching and learning were observed in all levels of the school;
- The physical education program was exemplary;
- Students clearly enjoyed their learning experiences;
- The school premises and facilities were used effectively to support learning.

Recommendations

- Continue detailed analysis of individual student achievement, as well as other available data, to ensure targeted instruction for all students;
- Improve the awareness amongst students of their present achievement levels and their future targets;
- School governance should investigate the role of parents in supporting the review of the school's performance;
- Continue to develop professional development opportunities which guides teachers to support and challenge higher achieving students more effectively. Ensure that these opportunities are implemented and the outcomes monitored.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good across the school. Most students were confident in quoting verses from The Holy Qur'an and the Prophet's (PBUH) teachings to support their discussions. They displayed sound general knowledge of Islamic values and principles, especially in the elementary section. However, students did not consistently link their learning to daily life. Most Grade 3 students developed good understanding of the positive behaviours expected of a Muslim. Grade 5 students developed good understanding of the life of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and major events in his life. Grade 7 students had good knowledge about the Hadeeth. Most Grade 9 students developed good understanding of the roles and responsibilities of Muslims in their community. In Grade 12, students demonstrated good understanding of the scientific miracles in The Holy Qur'an. However, recitation skills were still developing across the school.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were good across the school. In the elementary stage, students in Grade 2 recited short sentences. Students in Grade 5 could say long sentences fluently. They had a good grammatical understanding. They also wrote long writing samples and understood the meanings of poems. In Grade 8, students could distinguish verbs. In the secondary stages, most students in Grade 12 could read silently, summarise what they read and present orally. Grade 10 students used detailed sentences to explain the new words.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language in elementary and middle school were good. Attainment in the high school was good and progress was acceptable. Most elementary students in Grade 2 could construct short accurate sentences. In Grade 5, students presented a simple play. Students in Grade 7 recited long sentences and understood instructions. They distinguished verbs and wrote good book summaries.

Attainment and progress in English were good across the school. Most Kindergarten students had limited English language skills. By the end of Kindergarten 2, most had developed good listening skills and communicated with developed vocabularies. Elementary students wrote essays, made mini-presentations, described stories they had read, identified genres and expressed their points of view. Most older students developed a strong facility in the use of language and showed enthusiasm for literature. They analysed a variety of writing styles. Higher achieving students could describe the impact of literary devices and the quality of their extended writing was excellent.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were good throughout the school. Children in Kindergarten could recite and write numbers beyond 20. Grade 4 students were able to calculate accurately and solve problems. By Grade 11, understanding of probability was outstanding and all could apply what they had learnt to new challenges. Grade 12 students shared areas of concern and sought resolution to solving problems in calculus, applying their critical skills to incorrect solutions.

Attainment and progress in science were good across the school. From Kindergarten through to elementary, most students had a good understanding of key scientific facts. In elementary classes students could explain the states of matter, the solar system and fossils. They conducted investigations in classrooms and the laboratories well, adhered to safety rules and collaborated effectively to observe results as a group. At the secondary stages, students demonstrated good scientific knowledge and were able to use an appropriate scientific vocabulary. Many students were able to give outstanding presentations to their peers as preparation for lessons that followed.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviours were good in classrooms and around the school. They displayed positive attitudes towards learning and related well to one another. Those from different cultural backgrounds mixed well and played together in harmony. Students of all ages were very polite and courteous to visitors. Relationships between members of the community were positive and this contributed to their personal development and well-being. Consequently, students felt safe and were confident to ask for help should a concern arise. They showed good understanding of the importance of healthy eating and the impact of exercise on health. Overall, attendance was good though a number of students arrived late at the start of the day.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and culture were good. Students valued their school community and took on various roles around the school. For example, senior prefects monitored peers on arrival to school and at playtimes. They participated in fund raising activities to help a variety of causes, including the Red Crescent and cancer research. They expressed very strong and valid views about improving their school further. Students demonstrated good knowledge of their Islamic identity and were aware and appreciative of the cultural diversity around them. Traditions and local heritage were well known and respected by students.

Economic and environmental understanding was good. Students demonstrated good knowledge of the nature of Dubai's economic context, such as industry, tourism and construction projects and they were able to explain Dubai's position in the UAE and the world. Students had a clear idea about their potentially positive contribution to the country as a whole, such as helping peers who struggle in their learning. Students showed good understanding of important environmental issues. For example, the Eco-Club ensured that the school was kept clean and tidy. The school took an active part in recycling and saving energy.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The overall quality of teaching was good, with several examples of outstanding practice. Teachers' secure subject knowledge and their confident use of information and communication technology (ICT) contributed well to students' understanding and progress. Detailed planning, a brisk pace and the use of examples from real life were elements which made lessons effective and relevant including, for example, the use of shop sales tags to illustrate percentages in a

Grade 7 mathematics lesson. Lessons were well structured, but occasionally teachers' adherence to the structure prevented deeper exploration of the topic. The best teaching was characterised by teachers enabling students to improve their skills and understand the purpose of gaining knowledge. In English lessons, students were helped to understand that poetic devices had purpose in enhancing the work. Technology was effectively used to stimulate students' thinking. When teachers used materials and resources outside the standard textbook, learning was further enhanced. Teachers' questions challenged students and were most useful when targeted at students' individual abilities. The learning needs of students were well known by teachers but in the majority of lessons teachers did not include extension tasks for more able students.

Students' learning was good and characterised by their strong desire to succeed and develop their skills. When working in pairs or small groups, students were diligent in completing tasks and supporting each other's learning. Class behaviour was very good. In many lessons students took responsibility for their learning by leading class discussions or making presentations based on independent research. Students made most progress where they were given time to study a topic, make notes and think through their answers. Learning was less successful where students worked as a whole class without differentiated tasks. On occasions, students showed real insight, using their understanding of the real world to illustrate their answers.

The quality of assessment was good and had improved since the last inspection. The school had continued regular testing and logging of test results, but had added an external benchmarking programme to its assessment practice. This programme had enabled the school to begin more detailed analysis of individual students' learning needs, to refine teaching strategies and adjust the curriculum. Departments, however, had yet to monitor consistently the use of assessment data to target individual students' needs. The majority of marking was detailed, giving guidance for improvement, but this was not consistent in all areas of the curriculum. Assessment data on their children was available to parents on-line and this enabled parents to work with teachers to help improve students' attainment.

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

The quality of the curriculum was good across the school. The curriculum was based on shared values and beliefs, providing a foundation for its programmes and activities. It had breadth and balance. Strong art, home economics, learning support and ICT classes enhanced the curriculum and the physical education program was exemplary. The curriculum was reviewed annually. Almost all staff reflected on the degree of student attainment and adjusted the delivery of curriculum accordingly. Modifications were based on analysis of test data and recommendations from staff, students and parents. Progression and continuity was guaranteed by adherence to textbook standards. Teachers' planning ensured successful transitions from one level to the next for current students and new arrivals. The science curriculum included investigative and practical science experiences for students. The skill-based mathematics curriculum became more challenging in high school, with an emphasis on critical thinking and

problem-solving. Although there were pockets of good practice and a science stream for Grades 10 to 12, the school was only beginning to provide a comprehensive programme for gifted students. Cross-curricular links with English and science, mathematics, social studies and art furthered the development of writing skills for all students. However, this was not a consistent feature of the school. Numerous extra-curricular activities and links with the community gave students good opportunities to connect their learning to the real world. These events encouraged students' charitable work and their awareness of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Special school-wide celebrations allowed students to become better informed about the world. School clubs and sports teams provided additional opportunities for students, but choice was limited within classes.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety were good throughout the school. The school took effective steps to ensure that adults and students were safe on the school site. Security staff regularly monitored entrance and exit doors. Bus drivers and supervisors received regular training and support, but safety arrangements on buses needed to be monitored on a regular basis. The school carried out regular checks on fire alarms and extinguishers. Fire exit route maps were displayed in corridors and fire drills were regularly undertaken. The premises were well maintained and cleaned regularly during the day. Students were well supervised at all times. Dedicated medical staff provided good guidance on a range of health issues, including physical exercise and diet to obese students and this was very well supported by the healthy meals provided in the canteen. Health records were very well maintained for each student and parents were regularly informed. Child protection procedures were secure.

The quality of support was outstanding in Kindergarten and good in other phases. The school provided a welcoming learning environment where both students and staff worked together well and students praised the care they received from adults. Students with special educational needs made good progress because they were supported well. The student counsellors provided valuable support for students and guidance to members of staff in addressing social and emotional issues. Behaviour management was good. Reports to parents provided assessment data but did not provide information on strengths and areas for improvement. The school provided good support related to careers guidance for the boys but the girls desired more guidance in order to prepare them for the next stage of their education.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was outstanding. Senior leadership distributed leadership responsibilities effectively to enable middle managers to manage the long-term and day-to-day activities in the school. The Director established very high expectations for himself, his leadership team and students. He had a thorough knowledge of all aspects of the school and its supporting operations. An outstanding ethos of care permeated the school and this was

reflected in the quality of the relationships between leaders and their teams. There was a very strong capacity for further improvement in standards and the curriculum.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. Systematic and rigorous improvement planning had effectively addressed all recommendations from the previous report. Strategies were devised that focused on ensuring that all staff members understood their role in carrying out improvement tasks. Regular and close attention was paid to the delivery of agreed targets. This had resulted in a cohesive and structured approach to the school's priorities. Staff appraisal procedures were thorough and meaningful supports were in place where appropriate.

Partnerships with parent and the community were good. Parents reported a high degree of satisfaction with the school and the leadership and almost all cited that communication with the school was good. However, reporting of student progress was inconsistent. There was an awareness that the report form needed to provide more in-depth knowledge of the children's progress and to focus on the skills the students were developing. Parent surveys and interviews were regularly conducted to ensure the school understood the parents' perspective. Productive links between the school, parents and wider community were in place. The new website offered additional resources to parents in monitoring their children's progress.

The governance of the school was acceptable. The board of governors had a positive influence on the school and meetings with senior leadership were held regularly to review action plans and areas of concern. A formal procedure for evaluation of the work of the Director was in place. A formal process for involving parents in the governance of the school was being developed but was not yet in place.

Staffing, facilities and resources were good. Effective deployment of staff was used to meet the learning and personal needs of students. Staff members were appropriately qualified and supported through focused professional development on a regular basis. The facilities were of a high quality and were clean and well maintained. The libraries were bright and contained both Arabic and English titles. Additional titles in both languages were needed to support the students' progress as dual language learners more effectively. Classrooms were generally well-resourced and equipped for instruction, especially in the secondary phase. The absence of sufficient ICT resources in the primary classes restricted the students' learning opportunities.

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	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
85% 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	Good	Good	Good
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Acceptable

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

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

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

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	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	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Good	Good	Good

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

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	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
	Overall
Quality of leadership	Outstanding
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
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:
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More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at www.khda.gov.ae.

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