

Al Salam Private School Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Post-16

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 Salam Private School 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 Nahda, Al Salam Private School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Foundation Stage to post-16, aged three to 17 years. The school follows the English National Curriculum, Cambridge International Primary Curriculum and students completed IGCSE examinations as part of their studies. At the time of the inspection, there were 1016 students on roll. The student 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. Almost all of the parents were happy with the school and acknowledged that their children enjoyed lessons and were enthusiastic about learning. Parents believed that the behaviour at the school was good and one third of parents responded that behaviour was excellent. They agreed that the school kept their children safe and supported them in choosing a healthy lifestyle. Parents felt that communication between the school and parents was effective and that school reports were informative and parent-teacher meetings helpful. Almost all of the parents felt that the school was well led and identified the leadership of the school as a particular strength. Feedback suggested that the school should focus more on teaching and the provision of extra- curricular activities.

How well does the school perform overall?

Al Salam Private School provided an acceptable quality of education for students. The school had responded well to the recommendations in the last inspection report. Improvements in teaching were well supported through a series of regular training activities. The Kindergarten curriculum had been fully reviewed with additional practical resources and the provision of 'learning centres' within each Kindergarten classroom. Practical experiments were being conducted in science and an appropriate range of experiments observed in the well-equipped science laboratories. The school had established a governing body but their support for the school was at an early stage although initial involvement had been supportive and helpful. Self-evaluation was firmly embedded but was too informal and not sufficiently prioritised and evaluated. The school demonstrated a good capacity for further improvement.

Attainment and progress was good in Islamic Education, Arabic as an additional language, mathematics in the secondary stage and science in the primary, secondary and post-16 stages. Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language, mathematics in Kindergarten and primary stage and science in the Kindergarten was acceptable. In English, attainment was acceptable in all years and progress was acceptable in Kindergarten and primary stages but good in the secondary stage. Students' attitudes to work and their behaviour in school were outstanding. However, in Kindergarten, poor rates of attendance were noted by inspectors. Students had a secure awareness of their responsibilities as citizens and a strong appreciation of local and national cultural, economic and environmental issues. The quality of teaching and learning was acceptable in Kindergarten and primary but better in secondary and post-16 where staff were mostly specialists with a secure understanding of course requirements. The curriculum, based on the English National Curriculum, was good. Arrangements for ensuring the health and safety of children and students were outstanding and staff were aware of their responsibilities regarding child protection. The quality of leadership and management was good with strong leadership from the Headmistress which was commented upon favourably in the parent questionnaires. Leadership and management in the school were not complacent about the need for further improvement.

Key features of the school

- The vision, passion and commitment of the Headmistress, senior managers and staff;
- The school's positive response to the recommendations of the last inspection report and the progress made in improving provision in Kindergarten and raising the quality of teaching and learning;
- The positive attitudes and excellent behaviour of students as well as the supportive relationships existing between students and staff;
- The outstanding arrangements for protecting and supporting students;
- Students' civic understanding and their appreciation of local and national cultural, economic and environmental issues;
- The attainment and progress of students in Islamic Education, Arabic as an additional language, mathematics in the secondary stage and science in the primary and secondary phases.

Recommendations

- Consolidate the work on raising the quality of teaching and learning to ensure that best practice is shared across the whole school and inconsistencies across phases and subjects are removed;
- Further improve attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language and English across all phases, mathematics in Kindergarten and primary phase and science in Kindergarten;
- Make better use of data, especially in Kindergarten and the primary stage, to identify trends, inform teaching and benchmark performance against international standards;
- Ensure that self-evaluation is firmly embedded and informs action plans which are formally documented, prioritised and evaluated.

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

Students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good in both primary and secondary stages. Most students were aware of the basics of Islam and the pillars of faith. A significant proportion of the students showed a good level in recitation of The Holy Qur'an according to the rules of Tajweed. Students from Grade 1 to Grade 3 knew the names of Allah and counted Allah's gifts with confidence. In Grade 7, most students knew the meaning of the set verses of The Holy Qur'an. In Grade 11, most students understood the first pillar of the pillars of Islam and were able to develop this well through in-depth discussion. Most students' recitation skills were good.

Attainment and progress for students with Arabic as a first language were acceptable in Grades 1 to 11 and good in Grade 12. The majority of students demonstrated acceptable listening skills and were able to explain the rules of grammar correctly. They responded appropriately to questions and could apply their previous knowledge in unfamiliar situations. In Grade 8, the majority of students were able to express their thoughts well however a few were not confident in discussing their points of view. In Grade 10, most students used correct standard Arabic in their answers to questions but found difficulty in expressing themselves in extended written assignments, especially where the contexts were unfamiliar. In Grade 12 students were able to read advanced texts and identify different formats and styles of writing at a good level.

Attainment and progress for students with Arabic as an additional language were good in both primary and secondary stages. Most students in the primary section demonstrated a good understanding of stories read to them in class. Their speaking skills improved as they responded to questions using accurate Arabic sentence structures. At Grade 8, students demonstrated high levels of skills in speaking and reading and enjoyed role play as a means of consolidating and practicing their skills. In Grade 9, students were able to identify the main features from a passage of text well and answered questions confidently. In general, most of the student's writing was accurate but their ability to write confidently in unfamiliar contexts was limited.

Attainment and progress in English in Kindergarten and primary stages were acceptable. Attainment in secondary was acceptable and progress was good. Students entering school in the Kindergarten, mostly as new English language learners, had quickly become competent English language learners by the primary stage in the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Students in the secondary school were confident in speaking and, reading and could use complex language in both speech and writing. Students in Kindergarten demonstrated poor listening skills whilst students in primary and secondary had good listening skills. By the end of Grade 11, attainment in English was in line with age-level expectations for English and with international standards. Progress was good in upper secondary as confirmed by the international examination results but lessons did not provide sufficient opportunities for students to express themselves or to be challenged with more demanding work.

Students' attainment and progress in mathematics was acceptable in Kindergarten and primary and good in secondary and post-16 phases. Most Kindergarten children and lower primary students reached expected levels and their knowledge, skills and understanding of number, patterns, sequences and shapes were acceptable. A few lessons included more challenge and practical approaches, giving greater opportunity for students to progress. Students learned mathematical techniques and memorised facts but many 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 in many lessons. Secondary students' international examination results exceeded international standards. Post-16 students had made a good start to their course covering quadratic equations and arithmetic sequences.

In science, students' attainment and progress was acceptable in Kindergarten and good in primary, secondary and post-16. Across all phases, students exhibited knowledge and understanding of key concepts, ideas and theories in science. They enjoyed science and showed great enthusiasm in responding to questions, conducting experiments and working collaboratively with peers. There was, however, little grounding in the use and application of the scientific method. In Kindergarten students knew about science as part of overall themes and topics. At the primary stage they covered a wide range of topics including magnets, electricity, sound, light and keeping healthy. At secondary and post-16, students' performance in the most recent IGCSE in the three areas of science exceeded international standards.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

The attitudes and behaviour of students were good in Kindergarten and outstanding in primary, secondary and post-16. Relationships between staff and students, inside and outside the classroom, were warm and positive. Students behaved in respectful ways to each other and to all members of staff. Primary and secondary students showed maturity and a strong awareness of the needs of others. Students demonstrated an excellent understanding of healthy living. Attendance was consistently high in the primary, secondary and post-16 stages but poor in Kindergarten where learning opportunities were seriously limited by frequent absences.

The quality of students' civic and Islamic understanding was good in Kindergarten and primary, and outstanding in secondary and post-16. Most students were happy to take on positions of responsibility, which they performed with enthusiasm and commitment inside and outside of the classroom. They understood their responsibilities as a member of the school community including high participation rates in the student council. In the secondary and post-16 stages they were able to talk about their UAE heritage including the pearling industry and UAE traditions such as horse racing, camel racing and other local sports. Students' understanding of Islam was good and they demonstrated a secure understanding of Islam's values and the role of Islam in Dubai's culture.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good in Kindergarten and primary, and outstanding in secondary and post-16. Students had a secure knowledge and understanding of Dubai as a fast developing city with implications resulting from rapid growth and economic recession. They understood the importance of education and fully intended to commit to the future success of Dubai through jobs in education, technology, engineering, architecture, medicine, law and events management. Students were aware of local and global environmental issues and they knew that Dubai had recently passed laws against littering, promoted recycling and opened the metro in order to ease traffic and reduce pollution.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was acceptable in Kindergarten and primary, and good in both secondary and post-16. Teaching seen in the lessons observed ranged from unsatisfactory to outstanding but with too much inconsistency across the phases and across the subjects. Relationships were very strong and teachers made good use of praise to encourage and motivate students. Teachers generally had good subject knowledge and teaching skills which were used well to present the subject using a variety of well considered resources. Lessons started promptly and continued at a brisk pace with tight deadlines which kept students focussed. Homework was used well to consolidate and extend learning. However, in too many lessons, the spread of ability was not sufficiently catered for and there was insufficient challenge especially for able students who were rarely provided with additional work when they completed a task early. Questions to students were often closed and did not always allow them to offer extended answers. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) or other technologies was rather limited. The deployment and use of teaching assistants to support students learning was good.

The quality of students' learning was acceptable in Kindergarten and primary and good in both secondary and post-16 phases. Students demonstrated positive attitudes to their lessons and most students were suitably engaged and involved in their learning. Students worked independently and in groups, where they supported one another well. When given the opportunity, they were able to make connections between subjects and relate their learning to real life. Opportunities for higher order thinking and the development of critical thinking skills were rarely offered. By the end of secondary phase, students asked questions for clarification or information and were keen to make suggestions and express their opinions on matters such as global warming. They managed tasks well in a laboratory setting, knew the safety rules and could handle different experiments and activities by themselves and in a group.

The quality of assessment in the school was acceptable in Kindergarten and primary, and good in secondary and post-16 phases. All teachers kept records of how well students performed in tests. Most teachers had identified the steps which students needed to take to improve their work while older students knew their learning targets. The school was developing its tracking system to ensure teachers could plan more effectively to meet the learning needs of all students. A few teachers gave good oral feedback to students during lessons so that they knew how well they were learning and what they needed to do to improve their work. Students' work was marked regularly but there was a lack of consistency regarding teachers'

feedback. The rigorous use of data, especially in the Kindergarten and the primary sector, to identify trends, inform teaching and benchmark performance against international standards was still at an early stage of development.

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

The quality of the curriculum was good. The curriculum had a clear rationale and suitably reflected the school's values and purposes. It supported most, although not yet all, students' needs well. The curriculum was broad and balanced. It was regularly monitored and evaluated to make sure that it was meeting the needs of students and the school was well aware of its shortcomings in relation to those students who had additional learning needs and requirements. This has yet to be addressed effectively. Planning across the phases of education was well considered and transition arrangements suitably involved students and parents. Cross-curricular themes were embedded in the school's curriculum planning and delivery. The curriculum offered acceptable challenge and engaged students' interests appropriately. A programme of extra-curricular activities contributed well to students' learning. Visits to places of interest, visitors to the school and special events all served to enhance and enrich the curriculum. The school had good links with the wider community. The curriculum had been designed and modified to take into account international standards.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The arrangements for health and safety are outstanding and the quality of support was good across all stages. One of the significant strengths of the school was the good relationships between staff and students. Students were well cared for and protected at all times. The school was clean, well-maintained and free of hazards. All medicines and chemicals in the well appointed clinic and laboratories were securely kept under lock and key. There were very good arrangements for record-keeping and tracking of student progress, attendance and discipline although this was done manually which somewhat inhibited the opportunities to share and interrogate information. There were two appointed teachers to support students with special educational needs, a counsellor and a co-ordinator for discipline and pastoral care to meet the needs of all students. Older students received good advice and guidance on career and higher education choices. There had been a concerted effort to promote healthy lifestyles for students and staff. To this end, lessons had been focused on this topic, seminars were conducted for parents and posters around the building reinforced the message of healthy living. The provision of food in the school canteen included a variety of affordable healthy options. Student transport and security arrangements were outstanding. Buses were well maintained and equipped with seat belts. They were staffed by RTA trained drivers and helpers. Child protection arrangements were clearly defined and understood by staff and students.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership and management was good overall. The Headmistress provided strong leadership which was clearly focused on raising standards within an environment of support, commitment and ambition. Senior staff and middle managers were competent and committed but lines of responsibility within subjects were not as clear as those across phases. Distributive leadership was beginning to empower staff who had a clear sense of direction and a commitment to the ethos, values and vision of the school. The focus on improvement was clearly evidenced in the school's rigorous response to the recommendations of the last inspection report and the progress made in improving provision in Kindergarten and raising the quality of teaching and learning.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. Senior staff and middle managers knew the strengths of the school well and had identified the main areas of development. The monitoring of teaching and learning had contributed to improvements in many classrooms but inconsistencies remained and the good and outstanding practice which existed needed to be shared more widely. The school had made considerable progress in improving the areas identified in the last inspection report. However, planning for future improvement was too informal so that it was difficult to identify priorities and confirm successes.

The school's relationship with the parents was good. The school had a positive and successful working relationship with parents. There was effective two-way communication between the school and parents including regular school reports regarding their child's progress as well as a series of informative newsletters which were also available on the website. Links with the wider community included activities such as field trips, careers fayres and university visits. Parents were supportive of the school and its aims and practices.

Governance was acceptable. Since the last inspection, the school had established a governing body whose members offered a breadth of knowledge and experiences which have begun to be utilised by the school. In the short time since their establishment, the governors had visited the school, observed lessons and spoken with students. They had met with the senior leaders on a number of occasions but their support for the school was at an early stage and did not yet include holding the school accountable for its performance and ensuring the school met its promises to parents.

Staffing, facilities and resources were good. Teaching staff were qualified and appropriately deployed across grades, subject areas and support areas. The premises and facilities had been up-graded to provide specialist teaching, learning and support spaces. All facilities for learning, including areas for special needs, were accessible to students and efficiently supported learning. Resources had also been improved including appropriate learning materials across Kindergarten and primary classes as well as ICT across all stages of learning. The library resource centre was adequate but needed further improvement to effectively support research in all curriculum areas and offer access to ICT.

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:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
48% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Not Applicable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Not Applicable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Not Applicable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Acceptable	Good	Good	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding
Economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good	Good

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
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	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Good
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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