

INSPECTION REPORT

Uptown Primary School

Report published in May 2012

Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Uptown Primary School

Location	Mirdif
Type of school	Private
Website	www.uptownprimary.ae
Telephone	04 2886270
Address	PO Box 78181, Algeria Road 15, Mirdif, Dubai
Principal	Timothy Simon Waley
Curriculum	IB
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Ages / Grades	3 – 11 / Foundation Stage to Grade 5
Attendance	Outstanding
Number of students on roll	545
Number of Emirati students	92 (17%)
Date of the inspection	Monday 23 rd to Wednesday 25 th January 2012

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The context of the school

Uptown School opened in 2003 and is situated in Mirdif. At the time of the inspection there were 539 students on roll, aged between three and 11 years. The school follows the International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Programme (PYP.) The nationalities of the students were mixed. Around 10% of students received effective support for English as an additional language to enable them to access the curriculum and make good progress.

There were 42 teachers, including the Principal, who had been in post only since August 2011. The Deputy Principal, who had overall responsibility for the PYP programme, was absent at the time of inspection. There was also a newly appointed Coordinator for the PYP. All staff members were well-qualified and deployed effectively to support learning. The teaching team included a very experienced team of assistants who supported learning alongside teachers. The support team included six specialists in teaching additional languages plus those skilled in supporting students with 'exceptional needs.' The school was proud of its inclusive approach. A dedicated administrative team supported the smooth running of the school on a day-to-day basis.

Overall school performance 2011-2012

Good

How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

Uptown Primary School continued to provide a good quality of education with several outstanding features and a few improvements since the last inspection. Key features of this multicultural school included outstanding relationships between all members of the learning community and high levels of collaboration amongst students during learning. The students displayed all elements of the IB learner profile, demonstrated well-developed learning, thinking and social skills and excellent behaviour. There was an inclusive ethos which pervaded the whole school and enabled students from a wide range of backgrounds, nationalities and abilities to thrive harmoniously.

The school demonstrated a very inclusive approach and provided strong support for students with additional language needs and those experiencing learning difficulties. The curriculum had been very well

developed. It enabled students to develop the skills of inquiry, but further work was needed to increase challenge in lessons and lead to higher attainment and improved progress across all subjects.

The school was responsive to the recommendations from the previous inspection report and had made improvements, especially in extending teaching and learning strategies in Arabic. This had resulted in improved progress for first language learners with a significant improvement in writing skills. However, these improvements had not affected students' attainment. Similar improvements in science had led to improved progress in the primary but again, greater development of students' conceptual understanding and investigative skills was needed. There was also greater consistency in the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Whilst there was a strong commitment by the staff to the IB philosophy, together with a comprehensive professional development programme, teachers and leaders still needed to ensure a sharper focus on attainment and progress.

Self-evaluation processes included all members of the learning community but did not ensure that teachers and leaders had an accurate view of attainment. Furthermore, whilst initiatives were well-resourced they were not rigorously monitored and so did not reliably lead to improvement in student outcomes. Nevertheless, improvements in progress in Arabic A and science were evident.

Key strengths

- Excellent application of learning to real life in Islamic Education;
- Outstanding student behaviour and positive attitudes to learning within a truly international community;
- An outstanding curriculum which met the needs of a very diverse range of learners;
- High levels of safety and support, including provision for students with additional language needs and special educational needs;
- A very responsive leadership team focused on improvement and open to new ideas.

Recommendations

- Improve attainment and progress across all subjects, particularly in Arabic and science;
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning and ensure that assessment information is used effectively to provide appropriately challenging learning activities for all groups of students;
- Ensure that self-evaluation processes are rigorous and accurate and that improvement planning is linked directly to student outcomes.

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

	KG	PYP
Islamic Education		
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good
Progress	Not Applicable	Good
Arabic as a first language		
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Good
Arabic as an additional language		
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable
English		
Attainment	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good
Mathematics		
Attainment	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good
Science		
Attainment	Good	Acceptable
Progress	Good	Good

Students' attainment was good in most key subjects. It was acceptable in Arabic for first and additional language learners and in science in primary. In Islamic Education students applied their learning well to real life contexts and most exceeded appropriate curriculum expectations. In Islamic Education, most students were able to recite and memorise a good range of Holy Qur'an verses and Surahs. They demonstrated good understanding in Seerah and Islamic rulings, high levels of respect for the values of

Islam and Islamic etiquettes. A key strength was students' skills in applying what they had learnt to real life contexts, independently. In Arabic as a first language, most students demonstrated good listening skills and reached expected levels in speaking, reading, and writing. Few students were able to read long paragraphs with good levels of fluency and accuracy. Most students developed expected levels of proficiency in Arabic as an additional language. They responded correctly to everyday instructions and read familiar words and short statements accurately and with understanding.

In English, children in the Kindergarten understood and used language assuredly and communicated well. Attainment in Grades 1 to 3 showed developing confidence in speech and reading. Upper primary students were highly interactive listeners and speakers and attained particularly well in reading. In mathematics, assessment information showed that most students were meeting expectations, with a few exceeding or working toward expectations. However, in lessons attainment levels were consistently good across all aspects of mathematics. In science, Kindergarten students had a good understanding of living things and tools, made useful observations and explained their findings. Primary students had good knowledge of areas like habitats, but their understanding of significant scientific concepts and investigation skills were weak.

Students' progress was good in all key subjects apart from Arabic B where it was acceptable. Most students made better than expected progress from their entry points in skills, knowledge and understanding. Progress in Arabic as a first language had improved, especially in listening and extended independent writing. Students were able to write short and extended paragraphs. However, the majority of students made limited progress in the use of standard Arabic. In Arabic as an additional language, most students demonstrated inconsistent levels of attainment across the four language skills. Kindergarten children, including those who were not first language learners of English, made rapid progress across all four skills of language. In English and mathematics, international benchmark data for Grade 5 students showed a significant increase in language and mathematical literacy over the last three years. Kindergarten students progressed well in exploring and testing scientific aspects of their environment. In primary classes the students' progress in science had improved with most effective progress observed in the lower grades. Students in Grades 3 to 5, who previously had low levels of practical skills, were developing their abilities to conduct scientific investigations. They acquired scientific knowledge more frequently than investigative and analytic skills.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	KG	PYP
Attitudes and behaviour	Outstanding	Outstanding
Understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture	Outstanding	Outstanding
Civic, economic and environmental understanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

Students' attitudes and behavior were outstanding across the school. Almost all students enjoyed excellent relationships with their teachers and demonstrated high levels of self-discipline. They were caring towards their peers, particularly those with exceptional educational needs. Almost all students chose healthy life styles and made wise food choices. Students showed a deep understanding and appreciation of Islamic values and its impact on daily life, and Dubai society. Their respect of local traditions and culture was consistently outstanding. Almost all students valued the multi-cultural nature of their school and Dubai while celebrating their own cultures. Students understood the importance of diversity and its positive impact on enriching people's lives. Most students, especially School Council members, understood their community roles and responsibilities. They had good understanding of how Dubai had developed and the economic successes of the region. Students were proud of their school environment and demonstrated this through a range of recycling initiatives. They expressed their concerns about local and global environment issues well. They could explain the importance of recycling, clean energy, sustainability and conservation to improve the environment.

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	KG	PYP
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Good

The quality of teaching was good. A majority of teachers demonstrated good understanding of their subjects, although this was not the case across all subjects. Most teachers showed an understanding of how children learn. The use of resources in most lessons was successful in supporting learning. Interactions between teachers and learners were highly effective, particularly through dialogue and open questioning. In most lessons there were high expectations of students to enquire, solve problems, reflect, discuss and learn independently. However, the depth of inquiry and critical thinking was under-developed. There was a range of teaching strategies designed to meet learners' needs in most, but not all subjects. A few teachers did not effectively link learning objectives, student activities and student outcomes to ensure good progress. In a minority of lessons teachers talked at length, demonstrating poor pace and time management, at the expense of student's active learning. Teaching needed to provide greater challenge for learners.

Learning was of good quality. Students across both phases had positive attitudes to learning and demonstrated high levels of independence, responsibility, and curiosity from an early age. Students cooperated well and often explored and tested ideas and opinions collaboratively. They used information and communication technology (ICT) appropriately to support their understanding. Most students could make logical connections to real life and other areas of learning. They applied their understanding to different contexts. Critical, in-depth thinking and inquiry was evident in many, but not all lessons. A few learners were passive rather than active learners.

The assessment of learning was good. Throughout the school effective assessment strategies, including self and peer assessment, formed an integral part of the learning process. Teachers' records were detailed and systematically maintained so that they had an ongoing check on students' progress. This was most clearly seen in the Kindergarten, where the thorough assessment and recording of the development of

basic skills underpinned children's good progress. Teachers had good knowledge of individual pupils' strengths and weaknesses so they were able to implement effective support strategies. There were a few examples of highly effective marking of students' work, with clear guidance on improvement given through oral and written comments. However, this was not consistently done. Students needed a clearer idea of what they needed to do in order to take the next steps in their learning.

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

	KG	PYP
Curriculum quality	Outstanding	Outstanding

The International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme was broad and balanced, with a clear rationale. The curriculum met the needs of the diverse range of learners in the school, including those with exceptional needs. The overall curriculum created excellent opportunities for students to make cross curricular links and connections to the real world. There were opportunities for enquiry across subject areas, allowing students to demonstrate research, independent learning and critical thinking in the majority of lessons. The units of inquiry of the curriculum were regularly and systematically reviewed with effective transitions planned between subjects and classes. The school provided extensive curricular enrichment through celebration of cultural events and a broad range of extra-curricular activities after school. These included sports activities, clubs, music tuition, orchestras and further enrichment opportunities for gifted students.

How well does the school protect and support students?

	KG	PYP
Health and Safety	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of Support	Outstanding	Outstanding

The arrangements for students' health and safety were outstanding. All facilities were well maintained and provided a safe and healthy learning environment. The leadership team conducted regular and effective reviews. Transport arrangements were well organized and safe. Student supervision and child protection was given a high priority by all staff members. A large proportion of teachers had completed first aid training and the clinic was meticulously managed and provided excellent care. The medical staff monitored students' weight and provided effective support when there was a concern. The cafeteria provided only

healthy and appetising food, and teachers encouraged healthy snacks. Several units of inquiry developed students' understanding of diet, exercise and health issues extremely well. Students in the school felt comfortable going to adults in case of any problems.

The care for and support of students were central to the school's ethos and were of outstanding quality. Relationships throughout the school were consistently respectful and supportive. Teachers and students developed a strong culture of mutual respect. Teachers involved individuals and groups of students in agreeing strategies to resolve disagreements. All teachers took their duty of care very seriously and worked pro-actively to ensure their students' welfare. Homeroom teachers monitored students' well-being thoroughly, provided advice, and referred any concerns to support staff or leaders as necessary. The school had an inclusive approach to meeting the needs of a few exceptional students that benefited the whole community. It provided a level of support that made all students feel valued, and enabled those with individual needs to make good progress in most subjects. Students learning English as an additional language received a high level of support and made rapid progress. The school promoted attendance and punctuality effectively.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

	Whole school
Quality of leadership	Outstanding
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Outstanding
Governance	Good
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Outstanding

The quality of leadership was outstanding. The new Principal had quickly built positive relations with teachers, students and parents and was developing an inclusive leadership ethos. Leadership responsibilities were distributed effectively throughout the school and were underpinned by a commitment to the philosophy and requirements of the PYP programme. The senior leadership team demonstrated effective communication and it led to productive relationships amongst the staff team. A high priority was given to the professional development of teachers. Recent improvements demonstrated that the school had capacity for further improvement with an even greater focus on student outcomes.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. Processes had included all members of the staff and had resulted in a detailed document which was shared at all levels. However, this evaluation needed further refinement to ensure a more accurate understanding of students' attainment and progress. Appraisal systems were well-established and linked directly to professional development. Nevertheless, the monitoring of teaching needed to be more rigorous to ensure that it led to improvements in student outcomes. Annual surveys ensured that parents and students contributed to the self-evaluation process. Improvement planning had led to improvements in key areas, but success criteria were not always measurable and directly related to expected outcomes.

Partnership with parents and the community was outstanding. Parents were highly supportive of the school and very satisfied with the quality of education the school provided. Relations between school and home were extremely productive and impacted on learning in a positive way. The genuine partnership between the home and school was supported by student-led conferences and portfolios. However, reports to parents did not provide enough information to ensure that parents understood their child's attainment levels, progress and next steps. Parents' views were valued by the school. Strong community links and the use of the local environment were linked to the units of inquiry and enriched students' learning experiences.

Governance of the school was good. The executive board included wide representation and sought the views of stakeholders regularly. The board provided excellent support to the school and ensured high quality professional development opportunities to support the appraisal system. This had led to significant improvements in teaching and learning in Arabic, especially, which were beginning to impact on attainment and progress. Governors were supportive of the school's aims and had excellent understanding of the programme requirements. Accountability measures were in place but needed to be more rigorous with governors asking more challenging questions of the school leaders to ensure an accurate view of attainment and further improvements in student outcomes.

Staffing, facilities and resources were outstanding. Sufficient, well qualified teachers were effectively deployed to provide an outstanding curriculum. Excellent use of teaching assistants and specialists ensured highly effective support for students. Consistently good arrangements were made for classes to be covered when teachers were absent. All learning areas were accessible for those with additional needs. The premises and outside areas were of high quality, attractive and used well to enrich learning. Other spaces that enhanced learning included an excellent library, an ICT suite, creative spaces and excellent physical education and sports facilities. The library was exceptionally well used for both purpose and pleasure, and had a supply of books to support learning in Arabic and English. Electronic whiteboards boards were available in all classrooms and were used effectively by teachers to support learning.

What are the views of parents, teachers and students?

Before the inspection, the views of parents, teachers and senior secondary students were surveyed. Key messages from each group were considered during the inspection and these helped to form judgements. A summary of the survey statistics and comments from those who responded to the survey follows:

Responses to the surveys			
Responses received	Number		Percentage
Parents	This year	122	31%
	Last year	101	13%
Teachers	24		37%
Students	There are no upper secondary-aged students in the school		

*The percentage of responses from parents is based on the number of families.

Minorities of parents and teachers responded to their surveys. There was little difference between the opinions of these groups. Almost all of the parents thought that the quality of education was good or better and were happy with students' progress in English and mathematics. There was slightly less satisfaction with the progress students were making in Islamic Education and Arabic. A high proportion of parents expressed confidence in the quality of teaching and learning and with students' behaviour; teachers agreed. Parents were pleased with support for students with special educational needs and teachers were proud of this aspect of the school. Virtually all respondents indicated that students were kept safe and were well cared for. Although most parents were very happy with communication, a minority believed that reports did not contain enough information on students' attainment and progress. Teachers and parents reported that the school was well-led and that effective partnership existed between school and home.

What happens next?

The school has been asked to prepare and submit an updated action plan to DSIB within two months of receiving the most recent report. This plan should address:

- Recommendations from DSIB;
- Areas identified by the school as requiring improvement;
- Other external reports or sources of information that comment on the work of the school;
- Priorities arising from the school's unique characteristics.

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

Our work with schools

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) inspects schools to inform parents, students and the wider community of the quality of education provided. Inspectors also give guidance to staff about how to improve the standard of education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask the principal and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan our time in school. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities in which students are involved. We also gather the views of students, parents and staff. We find their views very helpful and use them, together with the other information we have collected, to arrive at our view regarding the quality of education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of education in the school. We describe how well students are doing, how good the school is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and children work together and how they go about improving the school. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its aims.

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