

# Uptown Primary School Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 5

Report published May 2010

## Contents

Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report .....	2
Basic information about the school.....	2
How well does the school perform overall? .....	2
Key features of the school .....	3
Recommendations .....	4
How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects? .....	4
How good is the students' personal and social development?.....	5
How good are the teaching and learning? .....	6
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students? .....	7
How well does the school protect and support students?.....	7
How good are the leadership and management of the school?.....	8
Summary of inspection judgements .....	9
Next Steps.....	12
How to contact us.....	12

## 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.

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

## Basic information about the school

Uptown School is a private school situated in the Mirdif area of Dubai and managed by the Taleem group. Within the framework of the Primary Years Programme (PYP) of the International Baccalaureate (IB), it provided education for students from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 5, ages three to 11 years. At the time of the inspection there were 605 students on roll. Student attendance in the last academic session was good.

As part of the inspection process, Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analyzed responses to on-line questionnaires issued to a sample of parents. The responses indicated that all parents were satisfied with most aspects of the work of the school. Almost all of these responses gave particularly high commendations to the work of the school.

## How well does the school perform overall?

The quality of education at Uptown Primary School was good with many outstanding features. The strengths included the outstanding personal and social development of students. The high quality curriculum, based on the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme, was highly effective in enabling students to gain exceptional skills in learning. Attainment and progress in most subjects were good. In Islamic Education, Muslim students achieved well and reached good levels of attainment. Students made steady progress in Arabic and reached broadly average standards. In English, students made good progress, especially in developing their speaking skills and, in mathematics, there were notable strengths in students' data handling skills. Science was integrated well into units of enquiry and students made good

progress developing their investigation skills and reached good standards. The personal and social development of students was exemplary. Excellent behaviour and attitudes permeated the school, reflecting its mission to nurture caring and communicative young people, well integrated into life in Dubai. Underpinned by an outstanding curriculum, the quality of teaching was good overall, with some examples of outstanding practice. Lesson planning was based on teachers' detailed knowledge of their students. However, in a few instances, teachers and classroom assistants were unable to fully support the range of learning activities. Assessment methods were extensive and took account of the students' own evaluations of their work. The quality of the school's protection and support of students was outstanding.

The quality of leadership and management was outstanding. The Principal and Deputy Principal, with the strong support of the board and the leadership team, had the confidence of parents. Communication between the school and students' homes was excellent. Parents fully endorsed the school's focus on personal development and the aim to promote a thirst for learning within a harmonious multicultural environment. There was a strong commitment to continuous review but self-evaluation was constrained because the wealth of assessment information was not utilised effectively to provide school leaders and governors with a secure basis for reviewing the school's performance. Good progress had been made in addressing the recommendations from the previous report and the school showed an excellent capacity for further improvement.

## Key features of the school

- Outstanding leadership inspired students and staff to develop intellectual curiosity, independent thinking and respect for cultural diversity;
- Warm relationships through the school and with parents contributed to the exemplary behaviour and attitudes of all students;
- Good quality teaching was underpinned by teachers' subject knowledge, enthusiasm and imaginative approaches;
- Students were achieving well and reaching good standards in Islamic Education, English, mathematics and science;
- The outstanding curriculum provided excellent opportunities for students to learn through practical activities, explore their own ideas and develop their individual interests and talents;
- Assessment procedures provided excellent feedback for students and parents, but information was not used effectively enough to identify trends, strengths and weakness, and to contribute to self-evaluation;
- Students benefitted from outstanding support and care.

## Recommendations

- Accelerate students' progress in Arabic by refining planning to more closely match the individual needs of students;
- Enhance the quality of teaching by sharing good practice;
- Improve strategic planning by using assessment information to inform self-evaluation.

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

Students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good. Most students had a good understanding of the basic concepts in Islam and were able to demonstrate how they would apply them to their daily lives. For example, students in Grade 1 were learning about the steps in ablution and most were able to list them correctly. Most students had good knowledge of the early life of the Prophet (PBUH) and were able to name some of his immediate family members. In the higher grades most students were able to reflect on their behaviour as Muslims and talk about how they should honour and respect their parents and others. Most students' ability to recite The Holy Qur'an was good, and a few students were able to show good application of recitation skills.

Attainment and progress in Arabic were acceptable. The skills of both first and additional language students were broadly in line with the school's expectations, with a minority of the first language learners exceeding those expectations. Students were strongest in their listening skills, as most students were able to understand and follow familiar instructions accurately. Most first language learners could, by the end of Grade 5, extract information from a text and reflect on it in order to rephrase and re-present it. However, most students learning Arabic as an additional language relied heavily on their transliteration of Arabic for reading and writing, with few understanding meanings and using them outside the context of the lesson. By the end of Grade 5, most additional language students had good Arabic pronunciation skills and a majority could introduce themselves using simple vocabulary and basic introductory phrases.

Attainment and progress in English were good. Students were motivated, engaged in learning and were making good progress. They showed initiative in expressing themselves, sharing ideas, reflecting and evaluating their learning. Students in KG1 and KG2 moved from single letters and key word recognition to combinations of words to form simple sentences. Their speaking skills were particularly well developed. Students in Grades 1 to 5 were able to elaborate their ideas, analyse and discuss, showing good progressive understanding of their work. Speaking skills were outstanding. Their written work showed development through to complex analytical writing. Reading skills were also good. Drawing on their good comprehension skills, students were able to analyse a wide variety of texts, including fiction and non-fiction.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were good, overall. There were strengths in the use of precise mathematical language and the application of mathematics to real life situations. For example, students often carried out investigations; they devised tally charts to collect information and processed data to produce graphs, from which they drew conclusions. Most students made good progress in their knowledge of shapes and in their skills of measurement. Throughout the school, students developed their understanding of number well. In Grade 1, the majority of students could add and subtract single digit numbers confidently and, by Grade 2, they had a good understanding of place value. By Grade 5 the higher attaining students were competent in multiplication of two and three-digit numbers. However, a significant number of boys in Grade 5, who had joined the school recently, were unsure of the concepts of division and factors.

Standards in science were good. Through practical activities, students were acquiring a good range of scientific skills, including hypothesising, close observation, methodical recording of observations and drawing conclusions. Students demonstrated a very secure knowledge and understanding of the human body and the functions of the main organs. They knew, for example, that the heart pumps oxygenated blood around the body. Through practical investigations, they gained a good understanding of the effect of exercise on pulse rates. They had good insights into the value of different types of food and the importance of a balanced diet in sustaining bodily functions.

## How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' personal and social development was outstanding. Their attitudes and behaviour both inside the classroom and during break times were excellent. Students from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures worked effectively in harmony together and were eager to support each other, especially in group activities. They respected each other, their teachers and were welcoming toward visitors in the school. Almost all students reported that they were happy at school and felt safe and cared for by the school's staff. The students were mature, confident and articulate for their ages and were almost always prepared for lessons. Attendance was good, with almost all lessons starting and ending on time.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of the local traditions and culture were outstanding. Almost all students contributed to the life of the school and the community. They took pride in the achievements of the students' council and felt that their council was an effective way to deal with issues they raised. For example, the council explored ways in which they could raise money to help the Haitian earthquake survivors. They had an excellent appreciation of Islam and how it shaped the daily lives of people in Dubai. Students were able to talk about some of the local traditions and compare them with traditions in their own countries.

Students had an excellent economic and environmental understanding. Almost all had an awareness of the current economic situation and how this impacted on their lives. They had an excellent understanding of environmental issues locally and globally and could talk about their responsibilities in conserving energy and recycling.

## How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was good. Subject expertise was generally strong and most lessons included imaginative, practical approaches which stimulated students. Warm relationships meant students did not hesitate to offer suggestions. The most effective lessons moved at a brisk pace. Teachers worked closely with teaching assistants to ensure all students sustained their attentiveness. Teachers planned well for the different ability groups, setting appropriate tasks for more able students and providing timely support for those who found the work more difficult. However, this good practice was not a consistent feature of all lessons and this meant, at times, that students became distracted in their learning. Occasionally, the more able students were not sufficiently challenged in English and mathematics. In contrast, a few teachers presented work that was too difficult for most students in their classes.

The quality of students' learning was outstanding. The students were almost always enthusiastic and eager to participate in lessons. They worked extremely well when engaged in group work; sharing ideas, taking turns and respecting one another's points of view. Students talked confidently about their work, the tasks they had been given and the way they planned to go about tackling them. They were particularly adept at finding information for themselves, using the library and searching for relevant material on the internet. A successful drive to improve students' presentation skills meant that most took care to write neatly and show pride in their work. Sometimes teachers did not take advantage of students' ability to work independently; their lessons consisted mostly of them talking and the students listening. This characterised some lessons in Arabic, which students said they found boring, in contrast to their usual experience in other subjects.

Outstanding assessment procedures resulted in a wealth of useful information about students' academic progress. Teachers kept detailed cumulative records of individual attainment, noting those who were meeting, exceeding or not reaching the expected standards for each grade. Students were extremely reflective, gaining valuable insights into their own learning preferences. Teachers generally provided high quality feedback in their marking. Many teachers skilfully used questions to establish students' levels of understanding and what they needed to do next. Older students regularly reviewed one another's work against specific criteria; this too contributed to their exceptionally mature attitudes, independence and responsibility. Students' work was regularly reviewed by class teachers and grade teams to modify subsequent plans. Within this positive picture, work in Arabic did not take sufficient account of individual students' prior attainment.



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

The quality of the curriculum was outstanding. Since the previous inspection, the curriculum had been extended to incorporate new units of enquiry across the school and to ensure breadth and balance across the subjects. The curriculum fully reflected the IB Primary Years Programme [PYP]. It emphasised attitudes and trans-disciplinary skills, and provided high quality integrated programmes of study. The process of review and development was outstanding. The standards expected of each year group were based on the IB-PYP expectations, modified for local needs and enhanced by reference to best practice in other IB-PYP schools. There was a specific focus on developing key skills; mathematics and language had been extended to relate more to students' contextual understandings. A programme had been established to challenge the talented and gifted students, and there was also very good curricular support for those with exceptional needs. In addition, provision for the maintenance of mother tongues of a majority of students contributed well to the ethos of internationalism that was evident throughout the school. For example, students with Arabic as a first language participated in an Arabic spelling competition and this had a positive effect on their progress in spelling. The school used opportunities to adapt and enhance the Arabic curriculum and link it to the PYP units of enquiry. The units benefited from the inclusion of field trips and visitors. There was a full programme of extra-curricular activities.

## How well does the school protect and support students?

The school consistently and in all respects provided a safe, hygienic and secure environment for students. Students were supervised at all times; before school, during school hours, after school and at bus loading points. The school had excellent report-keeping procedures and kept documentation on all aspects of protection and support of students. The medical clinic had detailed health files on students who had particular health issues and required medication. This included medical pre-history and known medical conditions. Staff members were informed of students' medical conditions and medication was given as necessary. Records were kept of all incidents and accidents with follow-up action. The school curriculum incorporated a 'Healthy Lifestyles' programme. The nurse provided age-appropriate health and safety discussions and activities from KG to Grade 5. Buildings, rooms and equipment were regularly inspected and problems acted on. There were regular, documented fire drills. Staff were informed of health and safety, emergency procedures, medical issues with students and the child protection policy at the beginning of the school year.

The exceptional needs co-ordinator had developed a record regarding all supported students detailing testing, follow-up and classroom teacher support. Class teachers maintained academic records on their students. Staff-student relationships were excellent. Teachers knew their students extremely well and provided them with guidance and support. The behaviour management policy emphasised student responsibility and accountability. Student absences



were recorded and parents were contacted promptly when the school was not notified in advance. Students felt cared for and protected in all aspects of their school life.

## How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Outstanding leadership successfully inspired students and staff to fulfil the school's central aims. There was a shared understanding and commitment to the school's core values as expressed in its mission statement. The promise to parents was met extremely well. They particularly valued the school's inclusive ethos and its multicultural nature. Senior managers provided clear direction for staff, through well-established performance management procedures, informal advice and additional training.

Self-evaluation of the school's work was good. The views of parents, staff and students were taken into account through questionnaires and meetings. Classroom practice was monitored closely to identify strengths and areas for improvement. The school's provision was regularly subject to review and the results were widely circulated and used to inform development plans. However, the wide range of assessment information was not used as effectively. Leaders, board members, parents and outside bodies could not gain an overview about student outcomes relating to international standards and the extent of students' progress through the school.

Partnerships with parents and the community were outstanding. Parents were generally delighted with the quantity and quality of information they received. Each class had a parent representative who acted as a valuable contact for information between home and school. Parents received very good guidance about how they could help their children at home. Parents of younger children valued the 'story sacks' containing books, relevant artefacts and activities for them to use at home. An informative website and frequent newsletters kept them well informed about whole school activities. Good quality written reports provided a clear account of how their children were getting on. Good links with other schools within the group enabled staff members to exchange ideas and provide mutual support. The community was used extensively to support students' learning, with local institutions and businesses very willing to participate.

Governance of the school was good. Members of the advisory board included parents, and students views were sought regularly. There was a high level of educational expertise and experience across the advisory board and a common determination to improve. Board members had a strong commitment to the school's vision and ethos. Their ability to contribute to strategic planning was constrained, however, by the lack of clear information about overall student outcomes.

Overall, staffing, facilities and resources were outstanding. The school was extremely well-resourced with an attractive learning environment; including a well-stocked library and a good range of modern technology. Staffing levels were good, with teaching assistants making a significant contribution to many lessons. Specialist teachers were very effectively deployed.

## 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:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 to 5
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?		
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 to 5
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?		
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 to 5
Attainment	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?		
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 to 5
Attainment	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?		
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 to 5
Attainment	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?		
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 to 5
Attitudes and behaviour	Outstanding	Outstanding
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Economic and environmental understanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

How good are teaching and learning?		
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 to 5
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Outstanding
Assessment	Outstanding	Outstanding

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?		
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 to 5
Curriculum quality	Outstanding	Outstanding

How well does the school protect and support students?		
Age group:	Kindergarten	Grades 1 to 5
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of support	Outstanding	Outstanding

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

How well does the school perform overall?
Good

## Next Steps

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

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau  
Knowledge and Human Development Authority

## How to contact us

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

More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at [www.khda.gov.ae](http://www.khda.gov.ae).

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