

Cambridge International School Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Post-16

Report published May 2011

Contents

Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report.....	3
Basic information about the school	3
How well does the school perform overall?	4
Key features of the school	4
Recommendations.....	5
How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?.....	5
How good is the students' personal and social development?.....	7
How good are the teaching and learning?.....	7
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?.....	8
How well does the school protect and support students?.....	9
How good are the leadership and management of the school?	9
Summary of inspection judgements.....	11
Next steps	15
How to contact us.....	15

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.

Cambridge International 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 Garhoud, Cambridge International School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Foundation Stage to post-16, aged three to 18 years. The school follows a UK curriculum. At the time of the inspection there were 2358 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 on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Almost all parents agreed that their children liked being at school, that the teaching was good and their children were kept safe and were treated fairly. They agreed that the school provided good support to children with special educational needs. Most parents were happy with the school and felt that if they had any concerns these were dealt with quickly and effectively. They also felt that the school helped their child to choose a healthy lifestyle and that parent-teacher meetings were regular and helpful. They reported that the school has responded positively to the recommendations of the last report and that the report had helped them to select the school for their child. Most were happy with the progress being made by their children in English language, mathematics and science. A significant number of parents were unhappy with the progress being made by their child in Islamic Education and Arabic as a first language. They also felt that there was a need for better career guidance for their children.

How well does the school perform overall?

Cambridge International School provided a good quality of education for its students. The school had responded well to most of the recommendations from the last inspection report. Students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic had improved. Teachers were now more aware of the requirements of the English National Curriculum and most were now employing appropriate approaches to teaching and student learning. The school was well placed to improve further.

Teaching was acceptable at the primary stage and good at the other stages. In the Foundation Stage, teaching for learning showed improvement since the last inspection. Most teachers, but not all, provided differentiated tasks which met the needs of most students in their class. Strategies to meet the different learning needs and abilities of some students, particularly those with additional learning needs, were much improved with students receiving a good quality of support. The quality of students' learning was good across the school. Arrangements for assessment had improved significantly since the last inspection and were now good. The school had developed more rigorous procedures for assessing and tracking students' progress in secondary and post-16. The quality of leadership and management of the school was good. The Principal and his senior management team had set out a clear vision for the school that ensured a strong commitment to the health, welfare and academic success of the students.

Key features of the school

- Outstanding attainment and progress in English, mathematics and science in the senior school in comparison to international standards;
- The ability of the student population to express themselves both orally and in writing;
- The students' sound understanding of Islamic principles and traditions;
- The broadening of the curriculum through the introduction of vocational courses which had increased the range of choices for senior school students;
- Small classrooms and poor facilities to support students and staff;
- Strong, innovative and inclusive leadership throughout the school including student involvement;
- Recently introduced innovative administrative and curricular systems that enable improved student attainment;
- Well behaved, courteous and engaged students who were a credit to the school and their parents.

Recommendations

- Continue to improve student attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Continue to develop consistency in the good features evident within the school in teaching, learning and assessment;
- Further develop governance arrangements to include representation from a wider range of stakeholders;
- Continue to develop teaching for improved learning in the primary school;
- Continue to broaden the curriculum to include additional vocational subjects.

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

Attainment in Islamic Education was acceptable and students made good progress. In the primary stage, most students memorised and recited short chapters of The Holy Qur'an and the Prophet's (PBUH) sayings with a few errors. The majority of students showed acceptable knowledge of the principles of Islam and forms of worship such as the ethics of Friday prayer. They could perform ablution and the call for prayer with a few errors. In secondary stage, most students discussed and shared their views on misconceptions about Islam. The majority of students discussed and explained the purpose of Hijab. They also recognised the different characteristics of the chapters of The Holy Qur'an revealed in Mecca and compared them with those revealed in Medina.

In Arabic as a first language, students' attainment and progress was acceptable, overall. Students were able to read age-appropriate texts aloud but with too many errors. Most students identified and understood the main ideas in the texts they studied. Whilst they understood teachers' instructions, they struggled to learn new words. Overall, most students developed acceptable levels of writing. For example, Year 1 students could write single letters while Year 9 students were able to produce short, simple messages to friends to invite them to Dubai. However, overall, in the secondary stage, students' ability to write at length was limited.

Overall, students' attainment and progress in Arabic as an additional language was acceptable. Most of the students studied Arabic as a foreign language. Students in the upper primary and the secondary phase used rehearsed conversations to introduce themselves using simple sentences. Most students were able to understand basic instructions by teachers in Arabic. Few students were able to understand unfamiliar questions about themselves or to answer them. Writing was limited at most stages to copying from the board or the textbook. In the lower primary grades, students wrote single words and sometimes used them to form simple sentences. In the upper grades students were able to write rehearsed questions about self-introduction and answer them. They did not write independently about their own ideas. In the secondary phase, few students were able to write simple familiar sentences without copying.

Attainment in English was good at the Foundation Stage and primary stage and outstanding at the secondary and post-16 stages. By the end of the Foundation Stage many children communicated well. They accurately wrote letters of the alphabet and a few words. At the end of primary, students progressed in listening, speaking, reading and writing. They made mini-presentations and described books they had read, identifying genres and justifying their point of view. Secondary students were highly articulate and expressed complex ideas with clarity and conviction. They wrote summaries and extended compositions and had a very good knowledge of grammar. Post-16 students were very articulate, skilled at text analysis and writing in functional, creative and analytical genres.

Attainment and progress in mathematics in the Foundation Stage and primary phase was good and outstanding in the secondary and post-16 phases. Most students in the Foundation Stage and primary phase demonstrated levels of knowledge, skills and understanding that were above international standards. The majority of the students in Year 1 knew the difference between triangles, squares, rectangles and circles. In Year 4, most students could make tally marks and construct frequency charts and, in Year 5, they could construct and interpret simple line graphs and make connections with real life situations. Year 6 students collected complex information, created diagrams and pie charts and drew appropriate conclusions. In the secondary and post-16 phase, most students' demonstrated knowledge, skills, understanding and attainment which was consistently above international standards.

Attainment and progress in science in the Foundation Stage and primary phase was good and outstanding in the secondary and post-16 phases. In the Foundation Stage classes children made good progress in their knowledge and understanding of the world. Almost all students in the primary classes built well on their previous learning, particularly in how to carry out investigations about living things. Attainment figures by the end of Year 6 showed that students were attaining well above the international average. Attainment and progress in biology, chemistry and physics by the end of Year 13 were outstanding. Results were well above the international average. In the three subjects, students regularly used scientific models to come to conclusions and apply their skills in mathematics to predict patterns and outcomes.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good across the school and in class. They were fully engaged in most lessons and collaborated well in tasks. Student-staff relationships were positive and were based on mutual respect and understanding. There were clear shared goals to improve learning around the school. Most students understood healthy living and took part in various activities around the school to promote healthy living. Overall, attendance was good though a few students arrived late in the mornings.

Students' Islamic and civic understanding was outstanding. The students showed care and consideration for others. Almost all students in the school understood the relevance and impact of Islam on contemporary society in Dubai. Most students recognised Islam Pillars and Faith Pillars. Many students showed adherence by their co-operative manner. They could mention the names of rulers of the different Emirates and the local currency. Almost all students showed respect to the multi-cultural community of Dubai.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good. Students participated in a range of activities including "business week" where they developed understanding of basic financial concepts. They had sound understanding about the sources of income in Dubai and the UAE. They knew some of the main industries in Dubai and the UAE. Most students developed a good knowledge about the Gulf countries through social studies lessons. Students contributed to a number of charity programs to raise funds for good causes. Most students gave ideas about caring for Dubai and the UAE through treating others considerately and keeping their environment clean. They believed Dubai could be improved by adding more parks. They believed it was important for Dubai to maintain its own Arabic and Islamic identity. Students were aware of major environmental issues and took part in a number of recycling and cleaning up programs in the school and around Dubai.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching for learning was good in the Foundation, secondary and post-16 stages. It was acceptable in the primary phase. Almost all teachers demonstrated strong subject knowledge and prepared their lessons well. In the Foundation Stage, teaching for learning showed improvement since the last inspection. Across the school, teaching strategies were varied and well designed to meet the needs of most students. Teaching generally varied from challenging, imaginative, well planned and innovative lessons to lessons where students were not fully challenged. Most teachers, but not all, provided tasks which met the learning needs of most students in their class. Lesson objectives and outcomes were not always shared with students. In the upper stages of the school, teachers made strong connections between what they were teaching and the demands of the IGCSE and A-level syllabus. Best practices of effective teaching strategies were shared amongst most teachers and peer mentoring and coaching was ongoing.

The quality of student learning was good across the school. Students interacted well with each other, were enthusiastic about learning and most could explain what they were doing and how much they had learned. They built successfully in lessons on their previous skills and knowledge to make further gains in their learning. Students in the primary classes did not have sufficient opportunities to work independently. The majority of the students responded positively to the teaching and interacted well with each other. Students behaved well, respected the teachers and each other. They made connections with real world applications and across subjects. The students were confident, and eager to share their learning. There was a positive climate for learning across the school.

Arrangements for assessment had improved significantly since the last inspection and were now good. The school had developed more rigorous procedures for assessing and tracking students' progress in secondary and post-16. Management used data with increasing effectiveness to identify underachievement and provide strategies for improvement. Profiling has become well established in the Foundation Stage. The increased use of objective testing for analysing and predicting students' performance in key subjects throughout the school had helped teachers focus more on what students needed to do to improve. Students were aware of their targets and most knew what was needed to achieve them. Marking was variable and, on occasion, did not provide students with sufficient advice on how to improve further. Teachers were aware of the academic progress of students but did not always take sufficient account of assessment information in their planning and teaching to help to extend the more able students or support those who needed further help.

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

The curriculum throughout the school was good and met the educational needs of almost all students. The curriculum provided a broad and balanced curriculum with increased opportunities for individual choice at IGCSE and post-16. The school had successfully implemented an Early Years Framework Strategy into the Foundation Stage. Individual choices in Years 9 to 11 and in post-16 included a wide variety of vocational and technology courses. The blend between the English National Curriculum with Islamic Education and Arabic was developing well. A few Arab speakers received fewer English classes because they attended Arabic lessons. In the upper secondary and post-16 classes, students were able to specialise in a curriculum which reflected a mix of strong science or business subjects or a combination of the two. Media studies, art, French and drama classes provide useful and productive elements to a good curriculum. The curriculum was reviewed on a regular basis. Transition arrangements between Years 6 and 7 and between Foundation Stage and primary were effective and ensured consistency in curricular continuity and progression. Cross-curricular links between subject areas were most common in the Foundation Stage classes. They were not as evident at the other stages. Extra-curricular activities enhanced the learning experiences of a minority of children. Opportunities for students to learn within the community were strong in the

secondary and post-16 classes. The school had developed links with the community to offer vocational courses for parents and also to ensure they were aware of developments within the school curriculum.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements to ensure health and safety were good at all stages. Site security was good, as was supervision of students on school transport and during the school day. Fire safety drills were carried out in line with regulations. The premises were clean, well maintained with scientific equipment and materials kept safe. Medical information was updated and kept securely. Risk assessments were carried out appropriately. All staff were aware of the school's child protection policy. Over-crowding in the Foundation Stage and early primary classes posed health and safety risks with students' bags on floors impeding safe access. Foundation Stage classes did not include child-proof fittings to classroom doors. Easy access for those with physical disabilities was limited to the ground floor. Healthy lifestyles and exercise were promoted effectively and regularly throughout the school and in assemblies.

The quality of support for students, especially those with special educational needs was good at all stages. Arrangements for tracking and supporting students were good and staff provided well focused support for students' academic progress and their personal development. Arrangements were in place to ensure parents were fully involved in these processes. There were very good staff-student relationships in all year groups. Teachers and managers dealt with behavioural and academic issues effectively. Systems for offering subject choices, careers and higher education advice to students were good. New and effective arrangements were in place to strengthen understanding of the world of work and to provide students with information to help them make informed career choices. Attendance and punctuality were monitored effectively and parents were contacted promptly when absences occurred.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership and management were good. Senior staff knew their school and their teachers well and were active, involved and committed to school improvement. They provide a clear vision, a sense of direction and purpose to staff and stakeholders. They had high aspirations for improved student achievement. Strengthened by developing systems of self-review, aligned improvement plans, an enhanced and broadened curriculum, improved student academic tracking and comprehensive teacher training, the school was well placed to continue to focus on improved student learning outcomes in the coming years. Innovation was evident in a number of useful initiatives including the teacher training programme, the new teachers' induction programme, the Islamic Education and Arabic teachers' improvement programme and the staff mentoring and coaching programme. The school staff had ample opportunity for

consultation and collegiate working. Distributive leadership and effective teams were evident in the school. The school had successfully encouraged the development of student leadership.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning was good. The school had continued to evolve its processes of school self-evaluation. Staff were involved in this rigorous process, which generated valid, reliable evidence. The school had systematically analysed pertinent data and this had begun to be used to provide the framework for realistic and achievable annual school improvement goals. The teacher tracking system, involving the quality assurance team, had led to informed teacher development. The school had addressed all of the issues raised in the previous inspection report.

Partnerships with parents and the community were good. Most parents were supportive of the school. Regular reports on students' learning provided parents with clear information about the progress of their children. Parents said that the school dealt with concerns and complaints promptly. Coffee mornings and afternoon tea sessions encouraged parents to come into the school where they could meet with other parents and discuss with staff relevant curriculum matters and learning and teaching issues.

The quality of governance was good. Positive influences on leadership, management and the role of the teachers in raising standards were evident. Members of the management board had effectively supported the senior leadership through its improvement agenda arising from the last report. Accountability structures had been improved and refined and were in place for all members of the school community.

Staffing facilities and resources were acceptable, overall. Almost all teaching staff were suitably qualified and well deployed. Senior managers had taken effective steps to make sure that new staff were well informed about the requirements of the English curriculum. Extensive in school training for teachers had resulted in improved approaches to teaching. The size of some classrooms and the numbers of students in some classes resulted in crowded conditions that compromised safe evacuation procedures. There was insufficient shade for students at break time. Adequate resources were available to support the curriculum.

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	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
12% 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	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

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

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

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

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

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

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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