

Horizon School Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Primary

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.

Horizon 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 Jumeriah, Horizon School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to Year 6, aged three to 11 years. The school follows a UK curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 586 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was outstanding.

As part of the inspection, parents completed an on-line questionnaire of their views about the school. Most parents thought the quality of education was good or better. Most parents felt that their children were making good progress in key subjects. Almost all felt that teaching and learning were good or better. Similarly, satisfaction ratings for the quality and range of extra-curricular activities were very high. Most felt behaviour to be good and well managed and that resources were also good. Parents felt that the school promoted healthy eating and a healthy lifestyle very well. Almost all parents thought their children were treated fairly by the school and that provision for students with special educational needs was good. Most parents stated that the school dealt well with incidents of bullying and kept their children safe. Most parents were happy with the level, type and quality of communication with the school. They felt that reports were informative and found parent teacher meetings useful. A significant majority felt the school was well led and had responded well to the previous inspection. They thought the previous report was accurate and helped them with their selection of the right school for their child. Over half of the parents felt the greatest strength of the school was the quality of the teaching.

How well does the school perform overall?

The overall performance of Horizon School was good. The school had responded well to the previous inspection and had made significant progress in relation to the recommendations. Students' progress in Arabic had improved, parental representation at board level had been put in place and the school had continued to develop its action planning capacities. There was a positive and inclusive ethos in the school which enabled students to be active participants in their own learning. Accommodation and resources were excellent, parental support was strong and there were very effective means of communication in place. The school delivered well on its promise to parents and promoted continued improvement successfully. As it continued to develop and communicate its mission and vision, the school was deeply committed to the creation of an inclusive and positive learning environment for all students and staff. The capacity to improve further was well developed through the school's own desire to be a purposeful learning community.

Attainment and progress were unsatisfactory in Islamic Education. While attainment in Arabic was also unsatisfactory, progress was acceptable. This was due to recent appointments that supported better learning opportunities for the students who were keen to develop their Arabic skills. In English, attainment and progress were good throughout the school, but in mathematics and science attainment was outstanding and progress was good. Teaching, learning and assessment were good. There were a few examples of outstanding teaching and learning. Here teachers encouraged students to lead their own learning. Critical and higher order thinking skills were developed well. In most lessons, teachers were competent, skilled and planned their lessons well. A few teachers were, on occasion, excessively directed and limited the capacity of students to be independent. Assessment information was plentiful but not always used to good effect to meet the needs of students. The curriculum was good. It was broad and balanced and teachers planned topics well to ensure that students developed an appropriate range of skills. Protection and support of students was outstanding. All relationships in the school were good. Health and safety arrangements were prioritized by all and the premises were organised to maximize learning opportunities. The school promoted a healthy lifestyle very effectively and good child protection arrangements were in place. Staff managed attendance, behaviour and guidance issues effectively. Students' performance was monitored well and students with special educational needs participated well alongside all students. Leadership in the school was committed and professional. There was a strong commitment to ongoing improvement.

Key features of the school

- Students' behaviour and their attitudes to learning were outstanding and, as a consequence, they learned well;
- Outstanding relationships between students, teachers and students existed in a very positive, inclusive and safe environment;
- There were unsatisfactory standards of attainment in Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Primary students' attainment in mathematics and science was outstanding;
- The curriculum was enriched by a broad and diverse range of extra-curricular activities;
- Determined and professional leadership continued to support ongoing improvement.

Recommendations

- Improve standards of attainment and students' progress in Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Ensure that the best teaching is used as a model throughout the school and leads to consistently high quality learning for all students;
- Refine self-evaluation and assessment procedures so that senior leadership is more fully informed of student outcomes.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were unsatisfactory. Few students across the school were confident in reciting The Holy Qur'an with basic Tajweed applications. The majority of students had a very basic knowledge of some of the concepts and principles in Islam. Although students were learning about the tenants of Islam, few displayed an acceptable level of understanding.

Students' attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were acceptable. Students listened carefully and responded well to instructions. They spoke clearly and with good pronunciation and they could read and write simple words correctly. They also had acceptable comprehension skills and could correctly form full and coherent sentences applying grammatical rules. With help, the students could read short paragraphs and recite poetry correctly.

Attainment in Arabic as a second language was unsatisfactory, and progress was acceptable. In the lower grades, most students could correctly sound the Arabic letters and repeat simple words after listening to the teacher. The majority of the students responded well to basic classroom instructions in Arabic. They could correctly identify some of the letters in different forms, however, only a few could correctly identify short common words. A minority of the students could count correctly and name family members. Students in the upper grades were more confident in their speaking and listening skills than their reading and writing.

Attainment and progress in English were good throughout the school. Students developed formal knowledge and skills but made less progress in expressing themselves creatively. Most students listened and spoke with confidence in a wide range of contexts. Their talk was adapted to the purpose and audience: developing ideas thoughtfully, describing events and conveying their opinions clearly. They developed good phonic skills which allowed them to decode text and spell well. When reading, they located and used ideas and information effectively. Their handwriting was legible but not fluent because cursive handwriting was not taught consistently. Their formal writing skills were well developed but they did not have sufficient opportunities to write imaginatively.

Students' attainment in mathematics in the Foundation Stage was good and by the end of the primary phase it was outstanding. Progress was good throughout the school. All students had good knowledge of number and mathematical concepts and had effective problem-solving skills. Foundation Stage children were able to count reliably up to 10 and to understand addition in terms of combining two groups of objects. Primary students showed good calculation skills and were able to carry out short multiplication and division using decimal numbers. They also solved mathematical problems by extracting and interpreting data presented as tables, graphs and charts. The older students could order, add and subtract negative numbers in context.

Attainment and progress in science were good in Foundation Stage. Attainment in primary was outstanding and progress was good. Younger students knew about healthy food. They could classify different materials and understood that some solids have similar properties to liquids. They could carry out fair testing accurately. Older students understood the function of body organs, and stated, for example that the liver cleans the blood of toxins. They were also able to develop their own investigative skills into such topics as gravitational forces. Students did not have frequent enough opportunities to pursue their own lines of enquiry with independently formed hypotheses.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Attitudes and behaviour were outstanding. Students consistently exhibited the capacity to act maturely and sensitively especially when they were given the freedom to make choices. They were at their best when they were encouraged to be self-disciplined. They were very friendly, courteous and welcoming. They showed genuine concern for and tolerance of each other. Healthy eating was a well established routine in school life. A majority of students engaged in an appropriate level of physical activity. Attendance was outstanding overall and students were punctual.

Students' Islamic and civic understanding and their appreciation of local traditions and cultures were outstanding. Almost all students in the school appreciated and listened to The Holy Qu'ran in lessons. They knew and respected that Muslims pray in the mosque and understood the importance of the Pillars of Islam. They respected the national anthem of the UAE at all times. All students demonstrated a good understanding of the multi-cultural community of Dubai. Most students knew about the traditions and heritage of Emirati culture.

Economic and environmental understanding was outstanding. Foundation Stage children knew the importance of spending any money they had wisely while older students could clearly describe basic reasons for the global recession. They knew that Dubai's reputation in the world was based on developing aspects of its society to be the best. They explained the need for future leaders and citizens to be mindful of caring for the environment and were sound in their beliefs that this meant that they should care for their school and home themselves through litter management, environmental awareness and energy conservation programmes.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching and learning were good throughout the school. Excellent relationships between staff and students meant that all classrooms had a positive ethos for learning. Good subject knowledge ensured that teachers motivated the students to participate enthusiastically. Teachers planned lessons efficiently so that they were well-structured and teaching assistants were well deployed. Most teachers used resources skilfully and asked open-ended questions to guide and reinforce learning. In most lessons, teachers provided clear explanations and a good level of challenge for students. There were examples of outstanding teaching especially when teachers inspired students with a rich curriculum, had high expectations and successfully encouraged students to be independent and creative thinkers. By contrast, some teaching was satisfactory when expectations of students were too low and the learning activities failed to motivate. This was particularly true in Islamic Education and Arabic.

The quality of students' learning was good. They listened intently in lessons and maintained good levels of concentration even when, at times, the subject matter was not stimulating. Their outstanding behaviour meant that little time was lost in lessons. Students worked maturely in co-operation with one another and were respectful of others' views. Mostly, students knew how well they were doing in their work and how they could improve. They did not have sufficient opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning and find things out for themselves. In addition, students did not use computers routinely enough to support their learning.

Assessment was good overall. The school had good procedures that provided staff with a clear view of students' attainment throughout the school. In the Foundation Stage, teachers evaluated the children's development well through regular observations. In Years 1 to 6, assessments in English and mathematics enabled teachers to identify those students who were beginning to fall behind and staff provided additional support for these students. Similarly, teachers were able to ensure that more able students received work appropriate to their capabilities. Teachers monitored day-to-day progress of students well. They gave helpful advice in lessons and in their marking of books, although this was often more supportive than constructive. Not all teachers made the best use of regular assessment to plan lessons that were suitably challenging for students of all abilities. The school also lacked a sufficiently detailed overview of students' long-term progress to underpin its development planning.

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

The curriculum was good overall. It was broad and well balanced, with a good range of activities including creative opportunities. The curriculum was underpinned by resources of outstanding quality. The curriculum was reviewed annually in consultation with parents and revised in the light of their comments. Extra-curricular provision was outstanding. Curriculum time for Islamic Education and Arabic met Ministry of Education requirements. Transitions from the early years to primary were well managed and ensured that most students were well prepared for the next stage in their education. However, transition across Key Stage 2 was less well planned. There were appropriate links with the secondary schools to which most students transfer. Links with the pre-school settings from which children enter the Foundation Stage were less well established. The school was working to establish a creative curriculum which focused on the development of the key skills in the key subjects across all subject areas. However, its effectiveness in accelerating students' progress was not yet evident. The students benefitted from a good range of opportunities to learn within the community and local environment. The school provided outstanding information and communication technology (ICT) facilities but they were not used consistently to support students' progress. For example, every classroom was equipped with an interactive whiteboard but they were used mainly as projection screens.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety procedures were outstanding. During the school day students were able to learn and play safely in secure, clean and spacious buildings with excellent facilities. All staff took great care of the students in their charge. Fire drills occurred regularly. When outdoors, students had access to good sized and adequately supervised activity areas. They were able to choose sunshine or shade, grassed, sandy or paved areas and the equipment available was appropriate to students of all ages. Sun hats during playtime were mandatory. Students were able to travel safely to school by bus because the system was well supervised at embarkation, arrival and during transit. Healthy living was promoted in all aspects of school life. The school expected parents to provide their children with healthy food in their lunchbox and this was monitored by staff in order to ensure that this was happening. The school nurse maintained records of children's specific and general health needs. There were clear procedures for child protection. The records of attendance were excellent.

Support for students was outstanding. Relationships between students and between all adults were positive and highly effective both in classrooms and around school. As a result the behaviour of students was outstanding. Students' personal and academic development were carefully monitored and reported to parents on a regular basis. When concerns for students' progress were identified, the Learning Enhancement Department worked effectively with teachers and parents to identify the underlying factors and construct strategies to accelerate their progress. External specialists, including educational psychologists, an occupational therapist and a physiotherapist, were used to help diagnose more serious issues and provide more targeted support.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership and management in the school were good, overall. There was a strong focus on developing a shared vision among the school community, leading the school's responses to the recommendations of the previous report and ensuring that the professionalism of all staff was developed appropriately. Excellent relationships existed in all sections of the school with middle management structures designed to monitor attainment, contribute to the development of creative teaching and supporting professional development. Senior leaders were able to direct future improvement. However, there was insufficient emphasis on ensuring that effective learning and successful outcomes were prioritised by all teachers.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. The school knew itself well, listened to parents' views and promoted innovation in some areas such as the development of a new approach to homework. Accountability structures were in place and all staff understood their roles and responsibilities. The school had responded well to the previous report with improvements made in Arabic, parental representation at governance level and action planning. Significant amounts of data were generated as part of the self-evaluation process. However, this data was not used effectively to inform specific success criteria in lessons. This resulted in unclear learning targets in some lessons.

Partnerships with parents and the community were outstanding. Parents were effectively engaged in the life of the school with highly productive programmes in place for teacher and students' support, celebration of the school's diversity and inclusion and reporting. The school ensured that parents were central to the students' understanding of the next steps in their learning. Parents were overwhelmingly supportive of the school's initiatives and were keen to contribute at every opportunity. There was enthusiastic support for the new representation of parents at governance level. The school had established effective links with the wider community. Participation in many external programmes of academic, artistic and sporting benefit to the students was well developed. The school had clear and purposeful links with secondary schools and ensured that smooth transition was in place for Year 6 students preparing for the next stage of their education.

Governance was good. Defined roles for each board member were in place. The board held the school to account for standards in attainment and sought to support senior leaders with appropriate resources, development planning and an increasing awareness and communication of the vision and ethos of the school. The recent addition of parental representation on the board was a positive step. Arrangements were in place to ensure that this new role would lead to a greater understanding of the parental perspective and an increased capacity of the board to make decisions on the school's future that reflected the views of all stakeholders.

Staffing, facilities and resources were outstanding. Almost all teachers were suitable qualified and deployed. A comprehensive ancillary staff team were in place to support administration and maintenance issues and personnel worked closely with teachers to support provision. Roles were clearly understood and the students' learning experiences were suitably enhanced by this arrangement. Facilities were maintained to a very high standard. All space was used appropriately and equipped well to meet students' needs. Teaching and learning resources were plentiful and accessible. They were used regularly, in most cases, and contributed to good learning experiences.

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
Attainment	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?		
1% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.		
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable

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

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

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

How good is the students' personal and social development?		
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary
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:	Foundation Stage	Primary
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Good

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

How well does the school protect and support students?		
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of support	Outstanding	Outstanding

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	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:
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More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at www.khda.gov.ae.

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