

Star International School – Al Twar Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Year 9

Report published May 2010

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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.

Star International School - Al Twar was inspected in November 2009 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 Twar, Star International School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from the Foundation Stage to Year 9, aged from three to 14 years. The school follows the English National Curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 246 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Overall, parents were very pleased with almost all aspects of the school. They agreed that their children liked the school. Parents thought that teaching was good and that students were encouraged to work hard and do their best. They felt that students made very good progress in English, mathematics and science but were less confident about progress in Islamic Education and Arabic. Parents believed that the behaviour at the school was good, that their children were treated fairly and that staff showed concern for their children's care and welfare. Parents felt comfortable about approaching the school with a question or complaint. They thought that the school enjoyed good links with parents but felt they were not sufficiently informed about their child's progress or what they might do to help them with their school work. They considered that the school was well led and most of them believed that the school had responded positively to the recommendations of the last inspection report.

How well does the school perform overall?

Star International School - Al Twar, provided an acceptable quality of education, with good features. Attainment and progress was, overall, good in English and mathematics, acceptable in Islamic Education and science, and unsatisfactory in Arabic. Improvements, especially in English and mathematics, were the result of the school's greater focus on teaching and learning, and ensuring that work was better matched to students' ability. Students' attitudes to work and their behaviour in school were good and relationships were positive and harmonious. Students had an awareness of their responsibilities as citizens and showed an understanding of and a respect for Islam. They were proud of their heritage and the richness of the many cultures in Dubai. Younger students' and children's understanding was less developed, especially about environmental issues. Attendance was acceptable.

The quality of teaching was acceptable throughout the school. Good lessons started promptly and continued at a brisk pace which kept students focussed. Homework was used well to consolidate and extend learning. In unsatisfactory lessons there was insufficient challenge, especially for higher attaining students and tasks did not motivate or engage students. In too many lessons, teacher talk dominated the lesson. The deployment of teaching assistants to support students with special educational needs was good. Students had good learning skills and were engaged in lessons and involved in their learning. They worked well independently and in groups, where they supported one another well. In the Foundation Stage they were keen to answer questions or make comments. By the end of secondary phase, students asked questions for clarification or information and were keen to express their opinions and make suggestions. They also could apply their learning to the real world and to unfamiliar situations. The quality of assessment was acceptable. Assessment was variable in lessons, within subjects and from subject to subject. The school was beginning to collate data in an increasingly sophisticated way in order to identify progress, support teaching and inform the curriculum. The curriculum, based on the English National Curriculum, was acceptable. The variety of subjects and the extra-curricular activities ensured breadth but the balance of subjects required attention because the time allocated in the primary school to Islamic Education and Arabic did not meet Ministry of Education requirements. The arrangements for ensuring the health and safety of children and students were outstanding. Supervision of the arrival and departure of students was orderly and closely controlled. The premises were clean and tidy and the school was meticulous in its record keeping. Members of staff were aware of their responsibilities regarding child protection, although there was not yet a formal written policy.

The quality of leadership and management was good throughout the school. The Principal provided strong and forceful leadership which was clearly focussed on raising standards. She recognised and nurtured potential within her staff through ongoing support and coaching. Self-evaluation was acceptable and the school consulted widely with students, teachers and parents. Significant progress had been made in addressing the recommendations of the previous inspection report, although significant weaknesses still existed in Arabic.

Key features of the school

- Leadership and vision of the Principal in helping the school improve and empowering staff;
- Students' positive attitudes and behaviour which support their learning in the classroom;
- Outstanding arrangements to ensure health, safety, security and welfare of students in the school;
- Development of students' attainment and progress in English, which enabled them to participate successfully in an English curriculum.

Recommendations

- Ensure that the number of lessons in Islamic Education and Arabic meet Ministry of Education requirements in the primary stages;
- Improve the teaching of Arabic and ensure that students have opportunities to develop their speaking and listening skills;
- Use self-evaluation as a tool for improving teaching and learning and raising students' attainment;
- Implement a school-wide student tracking system to monitor students' progress and attainment.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable overall. Students in the primary phase recited short Surahs of Qur'an and Hadith with a few errors. They showed a readiness to apply what they learnt about obeying parents and animal welfare. In the secondary phase, the majority of students memorised the first verses of the required Surahs and also memorised the required Hadiths. They could mention the advantages of the prayer in daily life. The majority listened well and provided acceptable responses to closed questions. Throughout the school, students knew Islam Pillars and most of them could discuss what the Muslims do in Eid Al Adha.

Attainment and progress in Arabic were unsatisfactory in the primary phase and acceptable in the secondary phase. In the primary phase, Arab students had under-developed reading and writing skills due to limited opportunities. Their oral and written work was below the expected level. Non-Arab students made unsatisfactory progress and their listening and speaking skills were under-developed. In the secondary phase, the majority of Arab students could read accurately short and medium length paragraphs and poems. Their oral and written responses to textbook questions were acceptable. The majority of non-Arab students could read and write the new words, and provided a few examples to demonstrate their understanding of simple grammar.

Attainment and progress in English were good throughout the school. By the end of the Foundation Stage most children understood instructions and answered questions about their work and pictures. They also took part in role play and linked their learning to real-life situations. Higher attaining students expressed their opinions clearly. Most primary students had good listening skills and expressed themselves well. All primary students read stories and many were skilled writing poems and compositions with correct paragraph structure, spelling and grammar. Students with special educational needs also produced good quality writing when supported. By the end of secondary phase, most students had well developed listening and reading skills. They discussed topics and reached logical conclusions. They wrote different types of texts, including descriptions and formal and informal letters. They had rich general vocabularies but had gaps in some subject-specific vocabulary.

Children's attainment at the end of the Foundation Stage in mathematics was acceptable and data confirmed that most children made good progress in relation to their starting points. Children's counting skills were well-developed throughout this stage. Attainment at the end of the primary phase was good and students continued to make good progress. They showed increasing confidence in their mental arithmetic skills but had some difficulty when questions were set in real-life contexts, requiring the use of literacy skills. Their knowledge and use of subject-specific vocabulary was limited. Attainment at the end of the secondary phase was good and progress was acceptable but better in number, algebra and shape than statistics and problem-solving. Students had a good understanding of number, algebra and geometry but their measuring skills were less confident and lacked precision. Using and applying mathematics was under-developed.

Attainment and progress in science were acceptable throughout the school although there was some variation in levels of attainment and progress in the primary years. Most students were able to demonstrate levels of knowledge and skill in line with the English National Curriculum standards. In the Foundation Stage children developed their knowledge and understanding of the world through discovery and exploration. In the primary phase, students knew a range of scientific facts and most understood scientific processes and principles. For example, almost all students understood the concept of a fair test and could plan and carry out practical investigations. In the secondary phase, students had developed acceptable levels of investigative and analytical skills.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes to work and their behaviour in school were good throughout the school. Relationships between staff and students and among students were also very positive. Rules were respected and the school had a positive and friendly ethos. Students made good progress in the development of their personal skills and they were able to work well independently or with others. Students with behavioural difficulties were well supported. Attendance was acceptable although there were some instances of lateness, especially among younger children being brought to school by car.

Students in the Foundation Stage and the primary phase had an acceptable understanding of their responsibilities in the school and wider community. Students in the secondary phase had a good understanding of their civic responsibilities and those chosen to be class representatives took their duties seriously and were good role models. Year 9 students helped children in the Foundation Stage with their reading. Students were proud of their heritage and the richness of the many cultures in Dubai. They felt that Islam bound them together and that the beliefs influenced their way of life and behaviour. Although they always responded to appeals for helping those in need, for example, through the shoe box appeal, they had not yet initiated any projects themselves.

Secondary students had a good understanding of Dubai's economy and how they could contribute through their chosen future careers. They had a good awareness of the impact of the global financial situation on the growth of Dubai and the importance of tourism to the economy. They had become more aware, from attending an environmental workshop, that it was important to conserve energy and water by turning off lights and taking showers instead of having baths. They felt that the opening of the Metro would help reduce pollution by lessening the traffic on the roads. They were less sure about the importance of recycling and had not thought about how this might be done. Children and younger students' understanding was less developed, especially about environmental issues.

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was acceptable throughout the school. The unsatisfactory lessons were mainly observed in non-key subjects and Arabic. Teachers generally had good subject knowledge and teaching skills but occasionally failed to develop students' subject specific vocabulary. Subject knowledge in science in the primary phase was under-developed and teachers of French and Arabic failed to effectively develop students' speaking and listening skills. The quality of some teachers' spelling was variable. There was some good collective planning, teamwork and joint production and sharing of resources but this was not yet embedded and, consequently, had not impacted fully on teaching and learning. Good lessons started promptly and continued at a brisk pace with tight deadlines, which kept students focussed on their group or paired work tasks. Homework was used well to consolidate and extend learning. In the unsatisfactory lessons seen there was insufficient challenge, especially for the higher attaining students, and tasks did not motivate or engage students. Teachers also spoke for too long and asked mainly closed questions, which only required short answers. The deployment of teaching assistants to support students with special educational needs was effective.

The quality of students' learning was good overall. Most students were engaged in lessons, involved in their learning and they focussed well and tried hard. They worked independently and in groups, where they supported one another well. Occasionally, students took the role of the teachers and presented part of a lesson. In the Foundation Stage they listened carefully to stories or descriptions and were keen to answer questions or make comments. Primary students effectively used dictionaries and reference works and were beginning to develop problem solving skills. By the end of secondary phase, students asked questions for clarification or information and were keen to express their opinions and make suggestions. They were able to apply their learning to the real world and to unfamiliar situations.

The quality of assessment was acceptable, overall. Generally, work was marked regularly and teachers' record keeping was appropriate. Assessment was variable in lessons within subjects and from subject to subject. Many teachers gave constructive feedback in lessons, wrote comments of acceptable quality in exercise books and organised effective reviews of learning at the end of lessons, which helped students to know the level they were working at and helped them to make progress. The quality of feedback and assessment by a minority of teachers was, however, unsatisfactory and did not sufficiently detail what the students needed to do in order to improve their work. In Arabic, the assessment was poor because lessons focused mainly on low-level copying and reading out loud. In these lessons, there were insufficient opportunities to measure students' progress in reading, writing, speaking and listening.

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

The curriculum, based on the English National Curriculum, was acceptable. The variety of subjects and the extra-curricular activities provided breadth across and within each phase. The balance of English, mathematics, science, Islamic Education and Arabic required attention because the number of lessons allocated in the primary school to Islamic Education and Arabic were less than the statutory requirement. Continuity and progression across the key stages was acceptable but there was no direct communication with senior secondary schools to support continuity after the secondary phase. Cross-curriculum links were evident and there was a strong focus on literacy across the curriculum, particularly in the Foundation Stage and in the primary school. Opportunities for students to learn about the local and wider community were developed through field trips and excursions. Extra-curricular provision enhanced learning and included a variety of activities including basketball, cookery and creative arts.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The arrangements for ensuring the health and safety of children and students were outstanding. Supervision of the arrival and departure of students was orderly and closely controlled. Whenever students made educational visits, medical staff provided an emergency medical kit. Teaching assistants were trained in first-aid. The premises were clean and tidy, checked regularly and maintenance was carried out promptly. The school was meticulous in its record keeping and all essential medical checks were carried out. The school had been particularly vigilant during the current flu epidemic and there was a heightened and effective awareness of necessary hygiene procedures. Parents were encouraged to pack healthy food options for their children and the medical staff worked closely with the parents of students identified as having weight problems. Members of staff were aware of their responsibilities regarding child protection, although there was not yet a formal written policy.

Staff and students enjoyed very good relationships with each other and the positive school ethos was valued by everyone. Staff knew their students and their families very well; parents had great confidence in the school to take the best care of their children. Students identified as having special educational needs were well supported. There were very clear procedures for managing students' behaviour and these were clearly understood by all. Records were kept of any incidents of unacceptable behaviour and parents willingly cooperated with school staff to ensure good behaviour was restored. In September 2009 the school introduced an approach to assessment which enabled teachers to make judgements about attainment and progress against national benchmarks. This approach was still in its infancy with the first full set of assessments planned for January 2010. Although teachers had an acceptable level of knowledge about their individual students, the school did not yet have an overview of the attainment and progress of students and they did not routinely compare attainment with other schools. Attendance and punctuality were checked each morning and parents contacted when no explanation was given in advance of a student's absence.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership and management was good throughout the school. The Principal provided strong and dedicated leadership which was clearly focussed on raising standards within an environment of respect, vision and commitment. She recognised and nurtured potential within her staff ensuring that they realised their potential through ongoing support and coaching. Her strengths in communicating ambition and driving improvement were shared by the distributed leadership who collectively demonstrated a commitment to the ethos and values of the school. The roles of the leaders were well defined and clearly understood. Performance management was in place and was beginning to inform professional development needs.

Self-evaluation was acceptable and senior staff had a good idea of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school consulted widely with students, teachers and parents and had used this feedback well in its action plan which was focussed on improvements beyond those identified during the last inspection. Monitoring of teaching and learning had been undertaken but assessment was in its early stages so that its use as an evaluation tool was limited. Significant progress had been made in addressing the recommendations of the previous inspection report, although weaknesses still existed in Arabic. The objectives of the action plan arising from the initial inspection were mostly being met.

The school had good links with parents. The parents were kept informed about developments in the curriculum and this enabled them to support their children's learning at home. Parents were responsive when the school contacted them about any concerns and this resulted in students benefitting from all round care and support at school and at home. The school was developing links with an overseas university that was supporting its recruitment of staff and their ongoing professional development.

Governance was acceptable and the owners held the leadership of the school to account for its performance. They played a significant role in the work of the school and had a clear sense of

the school's strengths and weaknesses following the last inspection report and the subsequent Follow-Through Inspection. The owners were seeking to further strengthen this role by accessing increased participation from parents and other stakeholders.

The school premises were spacious and well maintained, contributing positively to the atmosphere for good learning. There were specialist rooms that enabled teachers to set out their subject-specific materials to support students in their work. Wall displays celebrated students' achievements and the wide range of cultures in the school, as well as the noteworthy events in the development of Dubai. Resources for teaching and learning, such as information and communication technology and tactile objects for the younger children, added to the learning experience for all. The current staffing levels were adequate for the needs of the students although there had been a substantial turnover of staff at the start of the academic year. New staff benefitted from being up to date with the latest developments in the English National Curriculum but their experience of teaching was, in some cases, rather limited. Teaching assistants working with students requiring support were well-matched to their roles and responsibilities. However, general assistants were not always well employed in supporting learning.

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	Primary	Secondary
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?			
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary
Attainment	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How well does the school perform overall?
Acceptable

Next Steps

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

**Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau
Knowledge and Human Development Authority**

How to contact us

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

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

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