

# The Oxford School Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Grade 12

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.

The Oxford 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

Located in Muhaisnah, The Oxford School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Foundation Stage to Grade 12, aged three to 18 years. The school follows the English National Curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 1,440 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was acceptable.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Almost all parents reported that their children made good progress in Islamic Education, English, mathematics and science and most believed that students made good progress in Arabic. Almost all parents who responded reported that staff expected the best from the students and encouraged them to become independent and responsible. Most agreed that teaching in the school was good overall and that a good range of stimulating and enjoyable activities were on offer to the students. A minority of parents reported their concern that teachers did not explain to them how they could help their child at home and did not feel that concerns raised by them were always followed up by the school. Most parents felt that the school was well led and had good links with parents and the community. Almost all parents reported that the school had responded positively to the recommendations from the last inspection.

## How well does the school perform overall?

The Oxford School provided an acceptable quality of education for its students. Inspectors judged the attainment and progress of students in Islamic Education and Arabic as acceptable

from the primary phase onwards. By the end of their time at the school, students had a good understanding of Islamic traditions, including the importance of daily prayer. Students' speaking skills were stronger than their writing skills in Arabic and they spoke with correct pronunciation. By the end of Grade 10 many were able to create short stories with few errors. In the Foundation Stage, inspectors found attainment to be age-appropriate in English, mathematics and science but found progress to be unsatisfactory. The quality of teaching and learning at this phase was also unsatisfactory as teachers did not have a clear enough understanding of how young children learn. The curriculum in the Foundation Stage was unsatisfactory as staff did not provide effective support to help the children learn. In English, attainment and progress were acceptable in the primary phase and attainment was good at secondary level. In mathematics, students' attainment and progress were acceptable across the primary, secondary and post-16 stages but lacked a greater focus on problem solving and opportunities to apply their mathematical knowledge. In science, attainment and progress were judged as acceptable in the primary phase and post-16 and good in the secondary phase. This was because of the more realistic level of challenge for students in Grades 9 and 10. Relationships across the school were good and there was a great deal of mutual respect evident in classrooms and around school. Students had a good understanding of their civic duties and demonstrated good understanding and knowledge about Islam. Their economic and environmental understanding was acceptable and they were developing a deeper knowledge about how to care for their environment from the introduction of a recent 'Going Green' project.

The quality of teaching and learning was variable across the school. In primary, secondary and post-16, it was acceptable. Overall, teachers had good subject knowledge in Islamic Education, Arabic, mathematics and science but subject knowledge in English was not consistent across phases. Students had positive attitudes towards learning and were highly motivated but teachers did not always develop these qualities further. One of the major developments since the last inspection was that the school had begun to collect a range of assessment data and was developing assessment systems. However these were not yet taken into account when planning and therefore not impacting positively on students' attainment and progress. The curriculum in the primary and secondary phase was acceptable. It was broad and provided appropriate continuity and progression and focussed particularly on developing students' language skills. However, in the upper grades curriculum choices were limited, with no creative subjects being available at International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) level. Overall, the school's arrangements for protecting and supporting students were acceptable. There were effective procedures in place to ensure that students were safe and appropriate records were kept to assess any risks. Whilst teachers knew their students well, the arrangements for tracking their academic progress were underdeveloped.

The Principal, with her senior teachers, provided effective leadership and had a clear vision which promoted the well-being and self-esteem of all students. Whilst the school had introduced a number of new initiatives to ensure that teaching improved, many of these systems were inadequately focussed on meeting the students' learning needs and, as yet, were not showing sufficient impact. Similarly, the school's procedures for self-evaluation were

at early stages of development and priorities were not defined clearly enough in order to help the school improve students' learning outcomes. The school was beginning to develop closer links with parents and consult them about their aspirations for their children. The governing body also supported this aim and was beginning to develop its capacity for supporting the school more effectively. The school's resources and facilities were not sufficiently well used or organised in order to properly meet the learning needs of all students. This included the deployment of staff as well as the management of the school's timetable which did not keep in mind the need for lesson times to include self reflection and assessment.

## Key features of the school

- The school had made a number of improvements in key areas of its provision since the last inspection;
- Students demonstrated very positive attitudes and showed a strong commitment to learning;
- Students demonstrated a good understanding of Islam and their civic duties and had a healthy respect and appreciation for local traditions and customs;
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was variable across the school and unsatisfactory at the Foundation Stage;
- At the secondary stage students' attainment in English and science were good;
- Teachers were not deployed effectively to meet the needs of students.

## Recommendations

- Improve the quality of teaching and the curriculum at the Foundation Stage to ensure that children make sufficient progress in their learning;
- Use assessment data when planning in order to set appropriate and challenging targets for individual students;
- At the primary stage, further improve the quality of teaching and ensure that activities are challenging, age-appropriate and fully meet the learning needs of all students;
- Increase the range of subject choices available to students at Grade 11 and 12;
- Improve the use and extent of available resources, including staffing, in order to ensure that all students experience high quality learning;
- Ensure school self-evaluation procedures are accurate and rigorous in order to identify appropriate priorities for school improvement.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable in primary, secondary and post-16 phases. Students were able to talk confidently about roles and responsibilities in Muslim communities and were able to discuss the importance of prayer. By Grade 2 they were able to name the main daily prayers and in Grade 3 they were able to demonstrate how to perform prayers. By the end of the primary phase students were able to read verses from The Holy Qur'an and understood the importance of fasting in their lives. Students in the secondary school were able to explain and interpret verses of The Holy Qur'an. They also understood and were able to link the Hadeeth they studied to their lives.

Attainment and progress in Arabic were acceptable in primary, secondary and post-16 phases. Students' speaking and listening skills were adequately developed and they also had developed an age-appropriate vocabulary. Their reading skills developed consistently in the primary phase and, by Grade 5, students were able to read extended paragraphs and answer related comprehension questions. By the end of Grade 8 their reading skills were well developed and they were able to read fluently with correct pronunciation. Writing opportunities were sometimes dominated by grammar practice across the school but by the end of Grade 11, students were able to write well-planned short stories with a few spelling errors.

Attainment in English was acceptable in the Foundation Stage and primary phases and good in the secondary phase, where IGCSE results were above average. Progress over time was acceptable in the primary and secondary phases. In the Foundation Stage attainment in speaking, listening and reading was acceptable. Although all children knew sounds and were beginning to form letters and write words at the early stages, their progress was too slow. By the end of Grade 6, attainment in speaking and listening was good and acceptable in writing and reading. Almost all students listened carefully and spoke fluently, with confidence. Although a significant majority of students read well, reading skills lacked fluency and grammar and writing skills were less well developed. At secondary level almost all students were confident to speak in a wide range of contexts, adapting their spoken language accordingly. Most students had an extensive vocabulary and their writing accurately captured their viewpoint. Almost all students read well and enjoyed reading. However, a few students had difficulty understanding the texts they studied.

In mathematics, students' attainment was acceptable at all stages of the school. At IGCSE and Advanced level, students' performance was broadly in line with international levels of attainment. Progress was acceptable at the primary, secondary and post-16 stages but unsatisfactory at Foundation Stage. Most students demonstrated age-appropriate skills in mental mathematics and calculation. By the end of the primary stage most students were able to identify proper and improper fractions and could express simple fractions as percentages. At all stages of the school, students' practical skills were weak. They lacked confidence in using and applying their mathematical understanding to solve problems. At Grade 8, students used

formulae accurately to calculate the area of a shape, the length of an arc and the area of a sector. In their examination work, students demonstrated age-appropriate skills in data handling, geometry and probability.

Students' attainment and progress in science was acceptable overall, but progress in the Foundation Stage was unsatisfactory. In primary, most students used age-appropriate vocabulary and by Grade 5, students were able to design their own experiments. In the secondary phase, standards and progress over time in all three sciences were good but boys did slightly better than girls in biology and chemistry. At Advanced level, attainment was broadly average, with students achieving well in biology compared to chemistry and physics. Not all students had the highest grades at IGCSE when entering Grade 11 and their progress in Advanced level courses was acceptable. When given the opportunity to do so, students conducted their own scientific experiments effectively. Most students' theoretical knowledge in the secondary and post-16 phases was good.

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

Students' behaviour and attitudes toward learning were good overall. There were incidents where behaviour was better, but also times when it was only acceptable. In classrooms there was a positive ethos for learning and students were usually supportive of each other. At times, a few students, particularly older boys, displayed a lack of self-discipline. Older students with responsibility for supporting younger ones generally did so effectively and sensitively. Students spoke highly of their teachers and were grateful for their advice and support. Attendance in the primary, secondary and post-16 stages was acceptable overall but was unsatisfactory in the Foundation Stage.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and culture were good across the school. Students contributed well to the life of the school and took their roles as councillors or class monitors seriously. They demonstrated a good knowledge of Islamic faith, including an awareness of the Five Pillars of Islam and the importance of prayer and reflection. Assemblies promoted an understanding of the multi-cultural context of Dubai and this enabled students to demonstrate tremendous pride in their own cultures and identities. Students showed a good understanding of Dubai as a society which promotes freedom and equality.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was acceptable. They knew about the main sources of income in Dubai and were familiar with environmental issues such as recycling and pollution. These were at an early stage of development though and only a few students had participated in the "clean up the world" campaign. Students also understood the impact of heavy traffic on the quality of life in Dubai. They were able to describe the contribution they would make to Dubai's success by excelling in their studies.

## How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching and learning was unsatisfactory in the Foundation Stage but acceptable in the primary, secondary and post-16 phases. Across the school, teachers had good subject knowledge in Islamic Education, Arabic, mathematics and science. Subject knowledge in English was inconsistent and in a few lessons, students had difficulty understanding teachers' pronunciation. Teachers' planning was weak across the school and activities were not always planned well to meet the individual needs of students. Teaching was often didactic and there was an over-reliance on text books and work sheets. Lessons often lacked creative and cross-curricular activities to engage and inspire students. This was especially evident in the Foundation Stage, where a lack of engaging and sensory resources had a negative impact on learning. Relationships at all levels were good and teachers interacted well with students. However, in a few classes the volume of the teacher's voice did not encourage an orderly learning environment.

Students enjoyed school and almost all were highly motivated and eager to learn. They listened carefully and responded well to questioning and opportunities for group work and discussions. This was particularly the case in science where they were developing skills in enquiry and investigation. Students at all stages worked and behaved well without supervision. Many students were able to explain what they had learnt. Opportunities for critical thinking and higher order skills were less evident, but students were encouraged to make the connections between the real world and their learning. Opportunities for using information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance learning in classrooms were very limited.

The school collected a range of assessment data and each class had folders of data on students' attainment. However, the quality of marking and of on-going assessments in lessons was limited and marking often focussed more on presentation rather than what the students had learned. This meant that students did not always know what they needed to do to improve their work. Teachers had also begun to collect data about test results, homework tasks and special projects but these practices were not consistent throughout the school and had yet to impact on the quality of learning.

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

At the primary and secondary stages the curriculum met the needs of students to an acceptable level. It was unsatisfactory at the Foundation Stage and at post-16. The primary curriculum and secondary curriculum were sufficiently broad and included an appropriate range of subjects with a particular focus on developing students' language competencies. At these stages the curriculum was organised to ensure continuity and progression in learning. The quality of the curriculum at Foundation and early primary stages was weak and required improvement. Teachers placed appropriate emphasis upon the use of activities. However, the tasks provided for children at these stages were not well managed and were not well designed. At post-16, the courses available to students were not sufficiently broad. Options for



qualifications in English and vocational studies were under consideration by school leaders, but not yet provided. At all stages of the school, staff members arranged a broad range of visits and visitors to provide meaningful contexts for students' learning. Similarly, an extended programme of extra-curricular activities enhanced the range of activities available to students. The review of the curriculum had led to improvements at the secondary stage, notably in mathematics and science. The school was compliant with Ministry of Education requirements regarding the teaching of Arabic and Islamic Education.

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

The arrangements for health and safety were acceptable. Supervision was adequate but it was generally reactive in nature rather than proactive. For example, there were a large number of adults in the playground to supervise the buses but students often moved to the buses in a disorderly manner and were not always accompanied by adults. Evacuation drills were conducted once a term and fire extinguishers were in place and checked regularly. The building was maintained regularly and kept clean throughout the day. The school had made improvements to help ensure the safety of the students, especially in the play areas. The school nurse ensured that medical records were updated regularly. Learning about healthy lifestyles was under development in classes and, in the school canteen, students were not always supported in making healthy choices of food. Any incidents of bullying were promptly identified and managed to ensure a positive resolution.

The school provided acceptable support for its students. Most staff had established positive relationships with students. The school organised careers fairs for older students to support them in making wise choices for further study. The newly appointed school counsellor was working closely with the staff to ensure that students' needs were adequately met. Most teachers managed behaviour well but there were a few instances where poor behaviour management led to disruptive behaviour in classrooms. The school kept records of school test and examination results. Systems for tracking individual academic progress were at early stages of development and did not yet focus sufficiently on identifying and setting achievement targets for students. Support for students with special educational needs was weak and this led to students not meeting their expected levels of progress. There was an attendance policy in place but it was not applied consistently.

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

The quality of leadership and management was acceptable. Since the last inspection the Principal had supported the school community in developing a clear vision for the school and had introduced a number of improvement initiatives. The newly formed senior management team, alongside curriculum co-ordinators, was committed to planning and implementing improvement strategies and were beginning to lead by example. Senior teachers, led by the Principal, carried out regular lesson observations and arrangements were in place to better match professional development training to the needs identified as part of teachers' performance management procedures.

Procedures for school self-evaluation were at early stages of development, and were just acceptable. They lacked rigour and were not yet systematically implemented. The school had gathered the views of staff, students, parents and governors to inform this process but the result was a school development plan which had too many priorities. Although the school had made some progress with these, many were too general and needed to be robustly applied before they could demonstrate measurable impact. For example, the review of teaching and learning carried out by senior teachers had yet to impact on the quality of teaching and learning to improve outcomes.

The school's partnerships with parents and the community were acceptable. There were many opportunities to consult parents about their views, including the Parents' Forum, which met regularly to identify ways in which parents could support the school. Teachers met with parents regularly and provided written reports about students' progress. However, the focus of written communication was examination and test results. Insufficient guidance was provided for parents on how they could support their children's learning at home. The school had established a number of important links with the community. These included, for example, visits to the elderly people living in a local home. These links required further development to more effectively enrich the work undertaken by students in classes.

Governance was acceptable. The school's governing body consisted of a wide range of stakeholders including parents, the local community, the school's owners and senior staff. This enabled the governing body to provide feedback, advice and support to the school. The school was fully accountable to the governing body and provided regular reports about its work. Whilst the governors provided adequate guidance about premises and staffing issues, there was insufficient focus on the achievements of students.

The quality of staffing, facilities and resources was unsatisfactory. While there were sufficient qualified staff in the school, their deployment was inadequate. For example, there were too few staff members available to support the learning needs of students, particularly in the large primary classes. The school premises were clean and well maintained. The school timetable was inefficient. It provided short lesson times which afforded little opportunity for teachers to hold a plenary for each lesson; this impacted on the quality of learning in many lessons. Teachers did not always make use of ICT resources in classrooms, relying instead on the ICT laboratories which limited students' access to quality information. Educational resources were often old and uninspiring. For example, whilst the library hosted good quality seating it had a shortage of stimulating and up-to-date books to encourage the students to read and carry out research.

## 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	Post-16
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Not Applicable
Progress over time	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable

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

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

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

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Teaching for effective learning	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Curriculum quality	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Health and safety	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

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](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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