



British Schools Overseas School inspection report

School of Research Science Dubai

Inspection dates
Reporting inspector

31 May – 2 June 2011
Brian Oppenheim

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Cambridge Education using the Department for Education (England) standards for inspection of British schools overseas. The purpose of the inspection is to provide information to parents, teachers, senior managers and the school's owners on the overall effectiveness of the school and the standard of education it provides.

Cambridge Education is approved by the British Government for the purpose of inspecting schools overseas. Cambridge Education reports to the Department for Education (DfE) (England) on the extent to which schools meet the relevant standards for British schools overseas as follows:

- the quality of education provided by the school (curriculum, teaching and assessment).
- the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.
- the welfare, health and safety of the pupils.
- the suitability of the proprietor and staff.
- the premises and accommodation.
- the provision of information for parents, carers and others.
- the school's procedures for handling complaints.
- leadership and management of the school.

Inspectors use the following grading scale to make judgements:

- Grade 1: outstanding
- Grade 2: good
- Grade 3: satisfactory
- Grade 4: inadequate

Information about the school

The School of Research Science is a popular, private co-educational school providing education from Foundation Stage to Year 13. It was established in 1998 to meet the needs of ambitious children in the local community. It provides an English curriculum plus Arabic and Islamic studies and citizenship. There are 1220 students on roll and almost all of them speak English as a second language.

Overall evaluation of the school

The School of Research Science (SRS) provides its students with an outstanding education. The school teaches the National Curriculum for England together with Arabic language, Islamic studies and Islamic history. As a result it provides a good range of experiences that develop students' knowledge, skills and understanding effectively ensuring they are able to move to UK schools, colleges and universities if they wish. The school uses tests and examinations commonly found in schools in England effectively to assess students' achievements and check their progress. The range of data, the comparisons made with other schools and the way it is used by teachers, has a strong impact on student outcomes. The school meets the accreditation standards set out by the Department for Education for England for British schools overseas.

Children in the Foundation classes get a good start to their education. They all arrive at school speaking languages other than English but the quality of the education they receive means they make good progress in learning to speak English although their achievements are still below the UK average at the start of Year 1. Children's social and personal development is also very good: they are respectful of each other and their teachers, and enjoy their learning.

Students in the primary and secondary sections achieve very well and make excellent progress as they move up the school. This is because teaching is outstanding overall and students' are given the support to learn very well. Students start Year 1 below the average for England but as a result of the effective teaching they achieve above the average at the end of Year 6 and at the end of Year 11. In 2010, boys' achievement was higher than girls but the small numbers taking examinations means that these differences need to be treated with caution. The school predicts boys and girls will achieve similarly in the 2011 examinations.

The school's data illustrate the high standards well. Test results at the end of Year 6 show a steady upward trend over the past three years. The 2010 examination results at GCSE are well above average particularly in mathematics where nearly 90 per cent of students achieve the top grades A* - C compared with 58 per cent for all international schools. There is a similar picture with GCSE physics, chemistry and biology. English results at GCSE are less good because students' English oracy skills are not well developed enough. However, students take the examination that is designed for those who speak English as their first language so it does, nonetheless, represent good progress. Nevertheless, the need to improve students' oracy skills is an area for the school to develop. AS-level results are above the international average overall although they do not show the same high rate of progress as other phases of the school. Again, however, the numbers are small and need to be treated with caution.

The school is very successful in helping students to develop their personal skills and qualities: students are thoughtful, well behaved, treat others with respect and have excellent social skills. As a result, by the time they leave school they have the personal and social skills to move to the next stage of their lives. The excellent accommodation makes a very strong contribution to students' achievements and to their extremely positive attitudes.

Leadership and management are extremely effective. The principal's focus on detail and on raising achievement has had a very strong impact on improvement right across the school. This gives the school a very clear direction which is shared fully with everyone from the chair of the board of governors to the support staff. This creates a powerful drive to become an outstanding school. Senior and middle leaders have a very accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development because they use a range of data astutely to identify trends and to support all students. As a result, they know where there are weaknesses, which students need additional help, and tackle issues effectively. A good example is attendance where a range of strategies has reduced the number of days that students are absent. Within the local context the school meets the requirements for safeguarding.

The curriculum

The curriculum is good with outstanding features. It covers the subjects of the English National Curriculum and is planned very well to provide a broad range of experiences and opportunities that support students' learning. In the Foundation Stage the curriculum provides very good early years experiences with good opportunities for children to develop important concepts through play. In Key Stages 1 and 2 the curriculum is outstanding. The use of a commercial international primary programme has helped provide a curriculum that is child-centred, relevant, related well to students' ages and takes account of the local context. It encourages independent learning and provides good opportunities for individual, paired and group work which teachers use to good effect. As a result, students develop good collaborative and teamwork skills.

The curriculum in Key Stages 3 and 4 is good. There are some outstanding and innovative areas, for example in ICT where the opportunity for Year 7 students to develop and extend their skills by devising business cards and flyers produced exceptional work. In Key Stage 4, some subjects are tailored to meet the needs of all students. In a Year 10 boy's English lesson, for example, the work was made relevant for the students and as a result developed their interest and excitement, allowing them to write very successfully. The curriculum is planned very effectively so that students are well prepared for further learning and life after school.

“Learning without Boundaries” provides students with a wide variety of enrichment opportunities such as overseas trips and volunteer projects, for example cleaning and raising funds for a local mosque. Extra-curricular provision in the form of after school clubs and activities offers exceptional opportunities for students to develop new skills. The majority of these clubs and activities are well attended.

The quality of teaching and assessment

Teaching is outstanding because students are given consistently good or better learning experiences. This promotes students’ learning very effectively. The great majority of teaching seen was good and a significant proportion was outstanding. Detailed planning, a strong focus on learning outcomes, clear classroom routines, excellent relationships, a brisk pace and high expectations are common features in many lessons. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge most effectively to make learning interesting and allow students the space to take responsibility for their own learning. This was seen in a very effective Year 8 science lesson on heat transference where the task was both interesting and exciting and thus motivated students. They consolidated the language of science effectively, all made at least good progress and many made outstanding progress.

The use of talking partners, group work and the way students work together all have a positive impact on learning. The quality of questioning, where teachers ask targeted questions of individuals and do not always accept the first answer, followed by supplementary questions to get them to think at a higher level, were also effective in promoting learning. In an excellent Year 8 mathematics lesson, for example, questions were used particularly effectively not just to challenge students but also to test their understanding. Similarly, in an outstanding Year 4 English lesson, challenging expectations and good planning meant that all students achieved well and made outstanding progress. Plenary sessions are used well to get pupils to summarise what had been learnt in the lesson and build on their contributions. Where teachers have clear success criteria this enabled students to assess how much they had learnt and what they needed to do to improve.

In the very small number of lessons where teaching is less effective it is because the same work is set for all students or that the learning is not broken down well enough to encourage understanding. This limits learning especially of the more able.

As a result of the high quality teaching, students make outstanding progress with their learning. This is particularly so in mathematics but students also make good progress in the sciences and Islamic Studies in Key Stages 3 and 4. Progress in English in Key Stage 2 is improving well although students’ oracy requires further development.

Assessment is good overall. There are some excellent examples in English of marking that provides a clear judgement about achievement and comments to help students improve their work further. However, this is not a consistent feature in all subjects. Nonetheless, assessment is used well to set targets for students, predict grades and monitor progress in achieving these grades. As a result, intervention to support students is most effective and explains the outstanding progress.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students

This is outstanding. Students have a strong moral code and a keen sense of right and wrong. The spiritual development of all students is very strong. Students, especially the boys, participate fully in Salat. The curriculum encourages consideration of other cultures, for example in a geography project on child labour and through discussions about racism in football. The use of imagination and creativity, particularly in Key Stage 2, is effective in developing a sense of awe and wonder. As a result students show a real enjoyment of their learning and a willingness to collaborate with others and work in different settings, for example camping and charity work.

Behaviour in the school is outstanding. Students are polite, considerate and friendly. They show respect for each other, for teachers and for the ancillary staff. Students have very positive attitudes to their learning and respond well to the school's behaviour management strategies.

The school's very positive ethos also has a strong impact on students' personal development. Celebrating Human Rights Day, for example, or keeping diaries as indigenous people in the rain forest which is being cut down by developers, as they did in a Key Stage 2 class, all add to a strong sense of ethics.

The welfare, health and safety of the students

The quality of welfare, health and safety provided by the school is outstanding because of the very strong impact it has on students' academic and personal development. Health and safety procedures comply fully with the Dubai Government's requirements and the school's learning environment is safe and welcoming for all students. Staff have high expectations of behaviour, good relationships with their students and are prepared to "go the extra mile" to support learners.

Transition arrangements from the Foundation Stage into Key Stage 1 are good. One of the school's priorities has been ensuring curriculum progression from one key stage to another and teachers from secondary support Year 5 and 6 subject lessons, for example in science. This is helping to raise standards.

Support for students who are falling behind is well targeted and effective. For example, a group Year 10 boys who had had specialist support in English and mathematics all exceeded their predicted GCSE grades.

The school promotes healthy eating effectively and students generally respond well. A student counsellor, school nurses and a part time doctor all ensure that students' personal, emotional and health needs are met. Students say they are happy at school, including those who have sometimes found school difficult.

The school has clear systems for ensuring that good discipline is maintained both in class and around the school. Teachers implement these consistently and have a clear understanding of their responsibilities: this is one of the reasons why students' behaviour is so good. The Kindergarten and Reception have very good systems to identify and monitor children who are of concern. Staff have a strong concern for the children who, as a result, are cared for very well.

The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The proprietor ensures that all the checks required by the local authorities are made on staff to confirm their suitability to work with children. Details are recorded appropriately.

The premises and accommodation

The accommodation is outstanding. Classrooms are large and well organized and there are good specialist facilities including swimming pools, multi-purpose classrooms, ICT areas, and art and design and technology rooms. Displays in classrooms and corridors are good and some are outstanding. The accommodation is extremely well maintained and students show care for the building. The range of resources available for teaching is generally very good. The provision for ICT, especially in Key Stage 2, is good. All this has a very strong impact on students' learning.

The provision of information for parents, carers and others

The range of information available to parents is comprehensive. There is a well-structured programme of reports on students' progress. There are informative and helpful although the targets in secondary reports could more specific. The school's website provides good information about the work of the school. This includes the Family Handbook which provides parents with a wide range of information, including policies for complaints, safeguarding, health and safety, the curriculum and behaviour. Parents are kept well informed: for example, the school uses SMS text messaging to inform parents of special events, reminders or emergencies.

The school's procedures for handling complaints

The Family Handbook provides clear information about complaints and the procedures are in line with Ministry requirements. As a result the school meets the standards for this aspect of their work.

Leadership and management of the school

The school is extremely well led and expertly managed. The principal provides very strong strategic leadership and has moved the school forward particularly effectively in the short time she has been in post. Senior leaders are very effective and all share the principal's strategic vision and high expectations. They work together as a most effective team to drive initiatives that help improve teaching and learning, and raise students' achievements. Middle leaders also make a strong contribution to the school and take up their leadership roles effectively. For example, heads of department use peer observations to identify strengths and areas for improvement which are used to focus developments and initiatives. As a result they have a good understanding of the school's priorities and work hard to achieve them.

A particularly significant achievement has been the way the principal has promoted, and continues to promote, consistency across the school. Robust, practical steps have been taken to ensure that policies are in place and that parents, staff and students understand them. A good example is the way the school has tackled successfully students' attendance. The absence rate has fallen significantly over the past year ensuring that more students receive a consistent educational experience. The importance of this work is not to be underestimated: as well as helping to ensure consistency it also provides stability and sustainability when teachers leave and new staff are appointed.

The school uses data very effectively to understand overall trends, identify students who need additional support and to set targets for students to achieve. Students are clear about these targets and are able to talk about them intelligently. The school also has well developed systems for reviewing its work, identifying priorities for development and using these to implement improvements. This focus on self-review has a strong impact on the quality of education the school provides its students. It is one of the main reasons for students' high achievements as well as the school's status as an outstanding school.

The Board of Governors also makes a very strong contribution to the school's excellence. The chair has a very clear vision for the school and works closely with the principal to drive improvement. There is a relentless focus on improvement and in how well students achieve.

The school and the proprietor invest significantly in the recruitment and selection of staff. As a result, the school has been able to recruit some new good quality teachers with up-to-date international level teaching skills. In many cases this explains the good lessons and the strengths in teaching seen by inspectors.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all the requirements for British schools overseas.

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- improve students' oracy skills, particularly their fluency in English, throughout the school by sharing and developing consistent approaches to classroom practice such as:
 - key vocabulary lists
 - using questioning to encourage students to talk
 - the use of talk partners
 - providing opportunities for students to discuss and debate
 - getting students to present their work to the rest of the class
 - ensuring that students understand new and difficult words
 - making sure that when students read out loud, their mistakes are corrected
 - making sure when students use incorrect English, the correct version is immediately modelled by the teacher.

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education	✓			
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs	✓			
How well pupils make progress in their learning	✓			

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	✓			
The behaviour of pupils	✓			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils	✓			
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Leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management	✓			
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School details

School status	Private		
Type of school	All through 4 - 19		
Date school opened	November 22, 1995		
Age range of pupils	4 - 18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 621	Girls: 592	Total: 1213
Annual fees (day pupils)	Primary £24,502 Dirhams	Secondary £35,661.25 Dirhams	
Address of school	44 Baghdad St. Al Qusais, Dubai, UAE		
Telephone number	+971 4 6011011		
Email address	elma@srs.ae		
Principal	Nan Billingham		
Proprietor	Mr Abdulrahman Al Shamsi		