

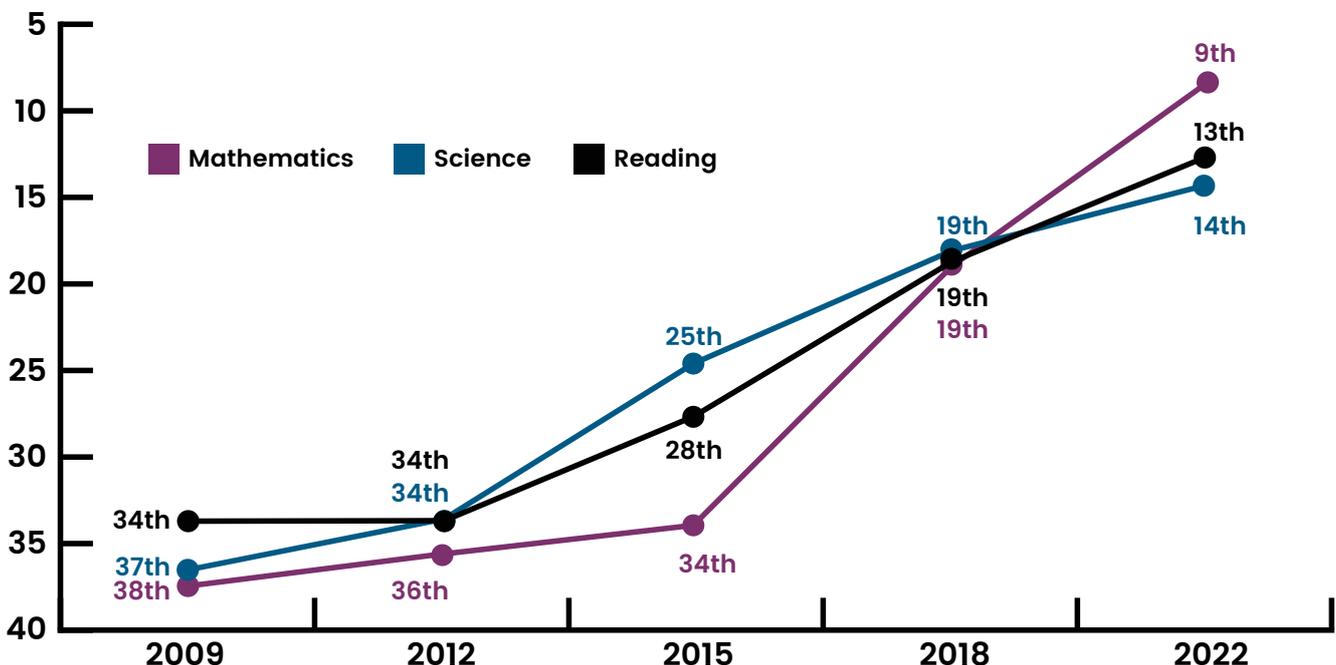
## Accountability mechanisms and the improvement of private schools in Dubai

Robust global test data indicates that the Dubai school system – which is made up predominantly of private schools – has improved dramatically over the past decade and that the private schools of Dubai are now operating at a high level compared to most other education systems. Education Development Trust (EDT) has been the strategic partner of the Dubai government’s Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) since 2006, providing support relating to the improvement of private schools through inspection. Although it is difficult to disentangle cause and effect, it seems likely that the KHDA inspection system has contributed to the measurable improvement in learning outcomes in Dubai private schools.

The Dubai system is unusual in international terms because most students attend private schools, so the performance of the private school sector is immensely important to the overall wellbeing and future of Dubai. With technical support from EDT, regular transparent inspection has been one of the main mechanisms whereby KHDA set out to drive improvement in the private school system. The story of the Dubai private schools over the last 15 years has been one of demonstrable success. Results from different international comparative assessment exercises document the trend towards better academic outcomes for the Dubai private schools that are regulated and supported by KHDA.

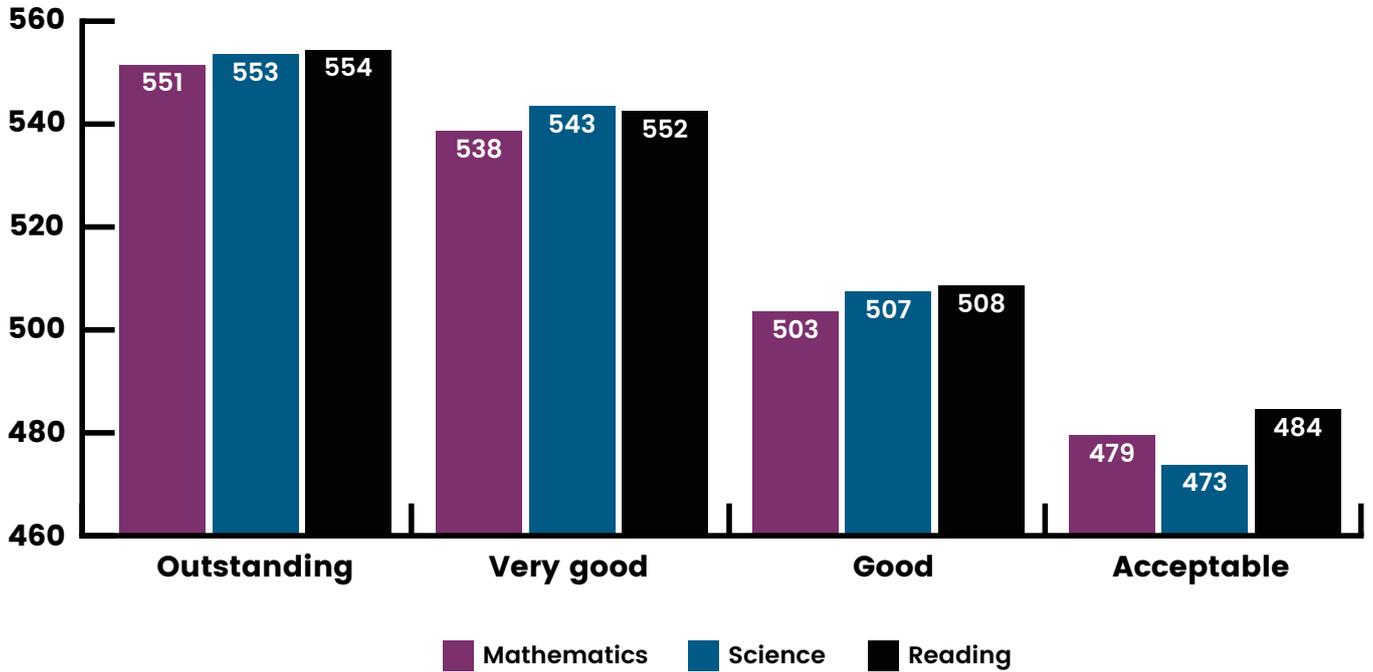
Since 2009, the Dubai private schools have regularly taken part in PISA (the Programme for International Student Assessment) and have steadily risen up the global PISA ‘league table’ in terms of performance in mathematics, science and reading literacy. While the performance of most school systems declined worldwide according to PISA 2018–2022, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic emergency, Dubai private schools sustained previous performance levels and rose significantly when compared to other education systems. This achievement built on steady progress over the previous decade.

**Figure 1: International ranking of the Dubai private schools viewed as a school system compared with other education systems as measured by performance in PISA tests 2009–2022**



It is interesting to note that the judgements of the KHDA inspections on the schools that participated in PISA 2022 are closely aligned to the differential performance of the same schools in the PISA tests. This confirms the accuracy of the inspection judgements.

**Figure 2: Achievement in PISA 2022 for Dubai schools grouped in terms of most recent inspection grade**



The pattern of steady improvement over many years apparent in the PISA results is also consistent with results from other comparative assessments of student performance organised by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), which is responsible for TIMSS (Trends in Mathematics and Science Study) and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study). Both TIMSS and PIRLS also indicate a steady improvement in test scores for Dubai private schools since the inspection regime was introduced in 2007. The TIMSS tests for science and maths were last reported for 2019. Tests were conducted in 2023 but these have not yet been reported. The trend for Dubai schools 2007-2019 was significantly upwards for both subjects.

**Figure 3: Trends in the TIMSS assessment of science achievement for Dubai private schools**

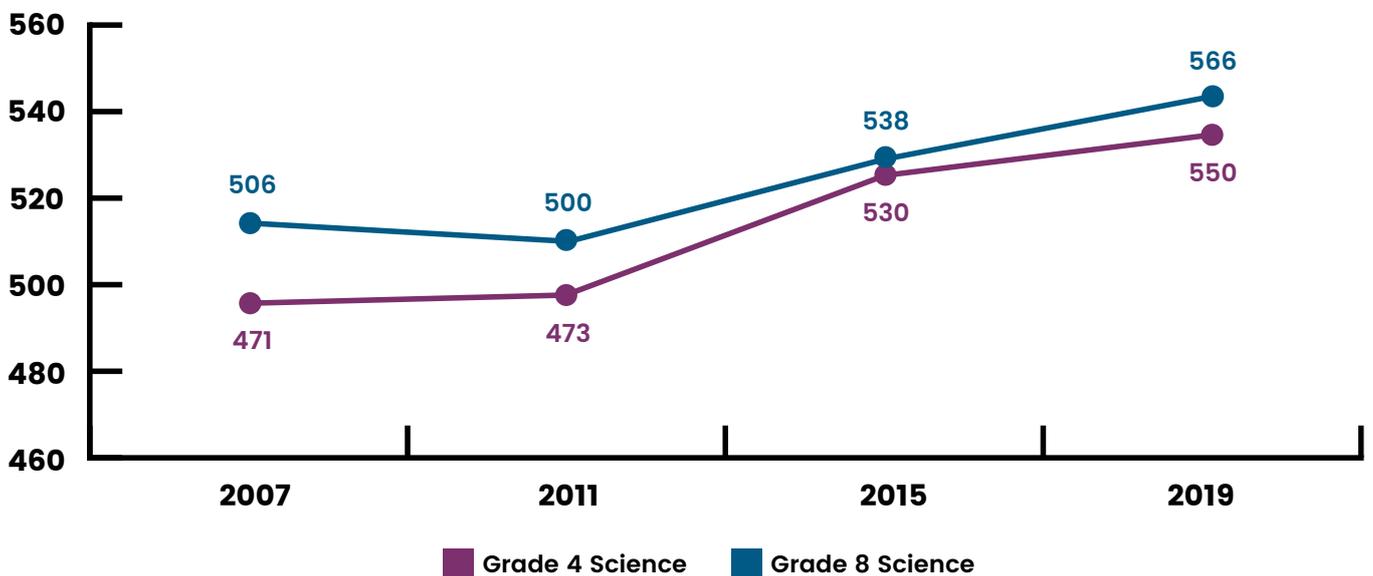
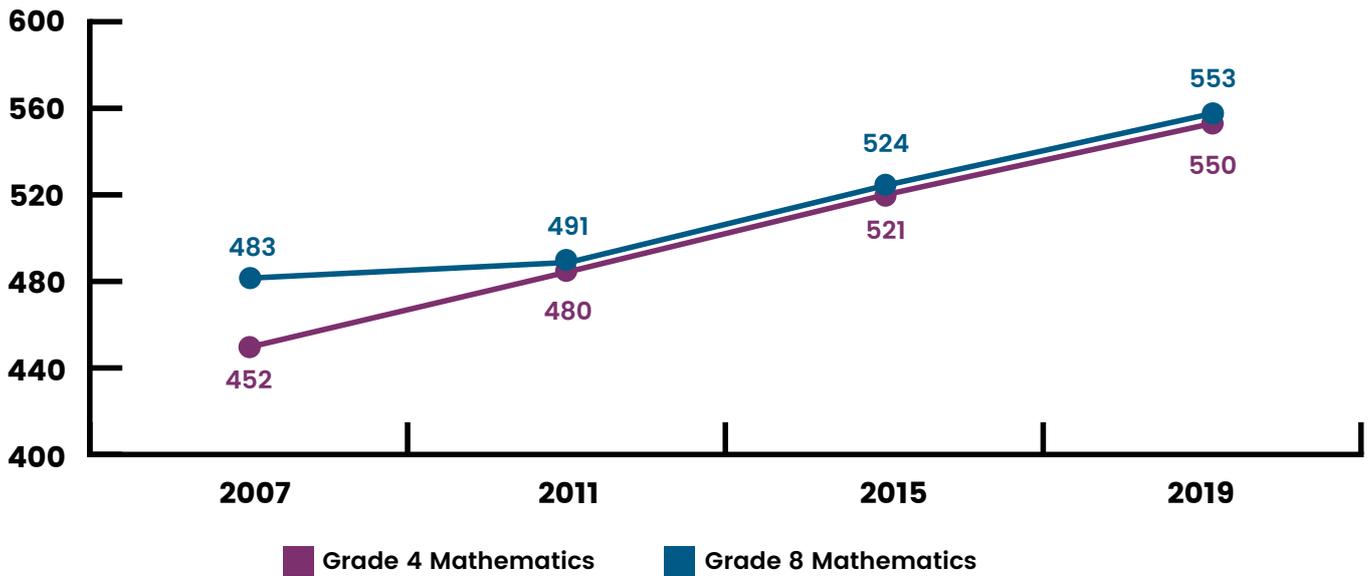


Figure 4: Trends in the TIMSS assessment of mathematics achievement for Dubai private schools



IEA also conducts the PIRLS assessment of Grade 4 reading literacy. Tests were conducted in 2011, 2016 and 2021. Dubai private schools achieved substantially improved outcomes in the 2016 and 2021 assessments. During the ten-year period 2011-2021, the Dubai schools went from performing below average (set at 500 points) to achieving results well above average. The Covid-19 pandemic disruptions of 2020-2021 did not derail this upward trend.

Figure 5: Trends in PIRLS points scored by students in the Dubai private school system 2011-2021

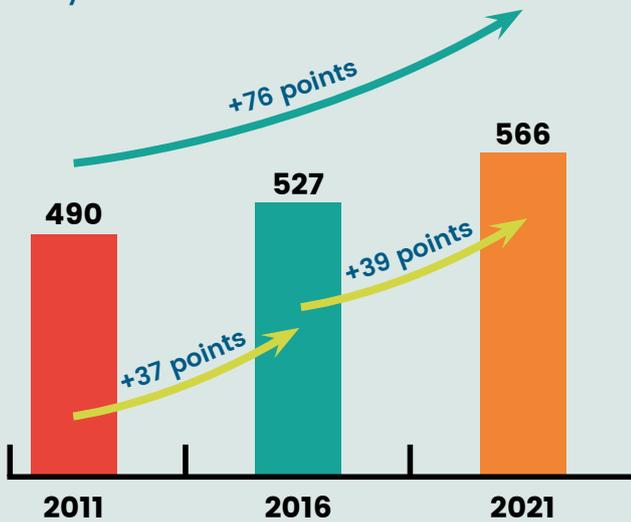
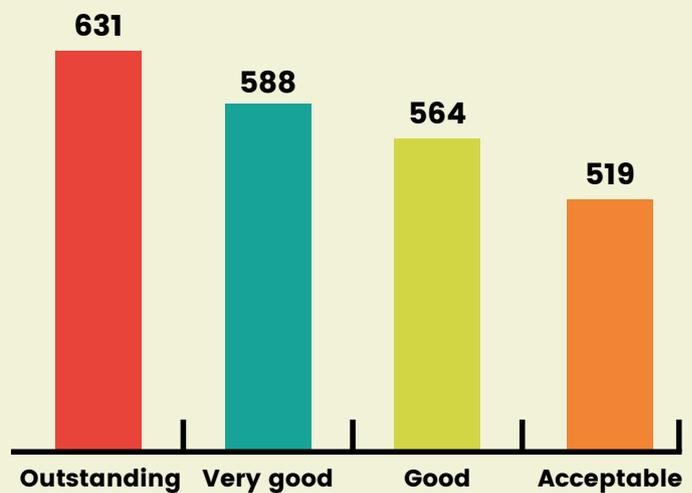


Figure 6: Average points scored in PIRLS 2021 by Dubai private schools grouped according to inspection grade



As with the PISA results, the PIRLS tests confirm the consistency and accuracy of the inspection judgements. The 2021 reading literacy results for the Dubai schools corresponded closely to the categorisation of quality provided by KHDA inspection judgements. Schools designated by KHDA as 'outstanding' performed dramatically better than schools deemed to be 'good' or 'acceptable', confirming the accuracy of the inspection judgements.

PIRLS results grouped in terms of most recent inspection judgements



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To find out more about schools in Dubai, our research, and how we are working to transform lives through education, please get in touch.

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