

Parents' Guide to the 2008-2009 School Report Card

Understanding and using your child's school's report card

Purpose of the School Report Card (SRC)

The main aim of the School Report Card (SRC) is to help parents and the community generally become more informed about, and thus subsequently more involved with, Qatar's schools. Apart from aiming at encouraging and empowering parents, the SRC provides a basis by which they can engage with schools and discuss and influence important matters relating to their children's schooling. Ultimately, this will allow them to make better decisions about their children's schools and schooling, enabling them to exercise informed choices.

The challenge is that schools are dynamic and complex entities and the SRC does not allow for simplistic judgements to be made about whether a school is bad or good. Choosing a school is also a highly individual consideration and, simply put, what might be a good school for one child may be a bad school for another. Parents with a deep understanding of their own child's capacities, interests, aptitudes and propensities, together with sound information about the schooling options available, are ideally positioned to make sound decisions about which school or schools are best for their child. What is clear is that, the more parents are genuinely engaged with their child's schooling and the stronger the home-school links, then the better chance that good educational outcomes will ensue. The SRC is an important component which can help facilitate these connections.

Overview of the SRC

The data presented in the SRC constitutes a strategic selection of the available information. The SRC information presented is not all that is important in schooling, but all that has been presented is important. It is all worthwhile; however, it can be best characterized as providing a focussed, selective and indicative picture of the school rather an extensive, exhaustive and prescriptive one. On their own, these data are not sufficient to make definitive judgements but they serve as a useful basis for considering schools and assisting parents' in their journey to find out more about, and become more involved in, their child's school and schooling. The SRC information, together with that which parents may obtain from the schools themselves and other sources, needs to be assembled, considered and assessed. For an individual parent such activities can be challenging and arduous, but they are certainly worthwhile, as the outcome will be a better education for their child.

Some Useful Next Steps for Parents

Here are some suggested actions that you as a parent can undertake in order to better use the SRC and school's own information as well as to enhance the effectiveness with which you can interact with schools and your child's schooling.

Start conversations – use the SRC data to begin talking about your school with other parents and community members and particularly with your school's principal, administrators and teachers.

Ask questions of school administrators and teachers – use the SRC areas as starting points for discussions. If there is anything that is puzzling or unclear, then enquire. If you feel that the data may indicate weaknesses or potential problems then ask what the school is doing to address these.

Assess *the information* you have but do this carefully and do not rush to judgement and make decisions on one or two isolated measures or aspects. Try and bring to bear the wide array of information that exists when making decisions and judgements about schools and schooling.

Get involved in the school. This involvement can manifest itself at the level of your own child (eg in terms of what's going on in their classroom, their homework and working to establishing sound home-class connections and relationships) as well as at the level of the school as an entity (eg through attendance or serving on the various school councils and boards, and participating in any school planning and review processes involving parents). As a parent, you can help make the school better by holding it accountable for improvement and working with it to review progress, set targets, and monitor their achievement.

The voice of parents is critical, so have your say, and contribute to making Qatar's schools better places for your children and future generations.

Some Useful Questions to Consider

As a parent, you are encouraged to use the information within the SRCs in order to get to know, and become more involved with, your children's schools. In interacting with a school, and the principal, its teachers and other parents, the following are some worthwhile questions to consider and explore constructively:

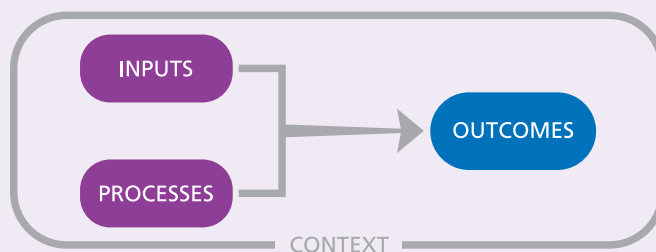
- *Is the school's students' academic performance improving?*
- *Does the school encourage and make it easy for parents to be involved?*
- *How effective is the school in catering for students with special needs or learning difficulties?*
- *Does the school use current and relevant teaching and learning materials and resources?*
- *Does the school have a strong learning ethos and high expectations for its students?*
- *Are the school's teachers well and appropriately qualified?*
- *Does the school provide a safe and constructive learning environment for my child?*
- *Do the students attend regularly?*
- *Is there sufficient time on task and focussed teaching and learning?*
- *Is there good educational leadership in the school?*
- *How many teachers leave the school from year to year?*
- *What are class sizes like within the school?*

Parents can use the SRC information as an input into decisions about their child's schooling options and the choice of school for them. However, it is important to remember that there is no one indicator of school quality. Parents should examine the various aspects of schooling and select the schools that best fit their children's need, aspirations and potentialities.

Ultimately each parent is not concerned with identifying the best school or even knowing if a school is a good school; rather the parent wants to know is this a good school **for my child** and is it the best school **for my child**. The SRC cannot answer these questions; it can only assist. Each parent is best placed to know their child and make appropriate decisions about schools and schooling for, about and with their child.

Framework of the SRC Information

The framework within which the SRC is structured can be seen broadly as one of providing information about key elements of the *Contexts, Inputs, Processes* and *Outcomes* of schooling. Whilst the ultimate aim is to achieve the various diverse *Outcomes*, it is important to be aware, and take account, of the *Contexts* when judging schools and determining which ones might be best for each child. Similarly, examining and improving the *Inputs* and *Processes* is of value, as these are some of the critical preconditions for effective schooling and will have an impact on the school's *Outcomes*. All these facets are complexly and intricately interlinked and play critical roles in shaping what makes a good school and are keys to help schools become better.



The *Context* encompasses important elements related to the educational and social milieu within which the school operates and includes the characteristics and backgrounds of the students; *Inputs* includes resources and facilities; *Processes* involves aspects such as school practices and policies, teaching approaches, and student behaviour management; and *Outcomes* relate to both students' academic achievement as well as their personal/social growth and development.

The Data Used in the SRCs

The SRC has been independently compiled by the Evaluation Institute based on a range of data sources. The data are presented essentially as provided by various respondent groups; they represent what the respondents think, feel and report and have not been filtered and/or verified. In one sense, verification occurs through triangulation: by juxtaposing the various perspectives of the same concept from different groups (eg parents, principals and teachers each independently provided their views about what was transpiring with respect to parent-school involvement and interactions). Sometimes triangulating information is either not available or has not been presented in the actual SRC. On these occasions the information is still worthwhile, but care must be taken to judge it within this context. It should also be noted that some of the information presented is purely descriptive and not evaluative. For example, the information on school facilities available is simply indicative of the facilities' existence (as reported by the school itself) and no judgement has been made about the quality or the fitness-for-purpose of the facilities.

The main sources for information selected for presentation in the SRCs are listed and briefly outlined in the table which follows.

It should be noted that the Qatar Comprehensive Educational Assessment (QCEA) tests are only administered to students within Independent schools. As such, there is no student achievement information within the SRCs for the International, Ministry of Education and Private Arabic schools. All other information sets (collected through DCM and QCSS procedures) are available, and reported in the SRCs, for Independent, International, Ministry of Education and Private Arabic schools.

Main Data Sources 2008-2009 School Report Cards

Data Source	Date Collected	Collection Method
DCM School Enumeration	October to December 2008	School records
DCM School Profile	October to December 2008	School visit
QCSS School Questionnaire	December 2008	Computer assisted questionnaire
QCSS Principal Questionnaire	December 2008	Computer assisted questionnaire
QCSS Parent Questionnaire	February 2009	Paper surveys completed at home
QCSS Student Questionnaire	February 2009	Paper surveys completed in the classroom
QCEA Student Assessment	April 2009	Standardized tests administered in the classroom
QCSS Teacher Questionnaire	April to June 2009	Computer assisted questionnaire

DCM Data Collection & Management
 QCEA Qatar Comprehensive Educational Assessment

QCSS Qatar Comprehensive School Surveys

The information covers a range of approaches and data sources ensuring that the description of the schools involved are not dependent upon a single viewpoint, and that the information is broad and robust. It is also important to note that, with few exceptions, the data are sourced from the 2008-2009 school year or earlier. They thus can be a little dated and not necessarily precisely depict the current situation in the school, as schools are dynamic entities with their resources, students, staff and operations undergoing change. Nevertheless these data are usefully indicative and over time, together with up-to-date school information, serve to inform conversations and considerations about the schools. The basic school contact information (ie address, telephone number and facsimile number) provided on the first page of the SRC are current as of the time of production, in order to assist parents should they wish to communicate with the school concerned.

Space precludes reporting within the SRC all data collected, but all these data will be used in some way in other processes involved with school monitoring and evaluation by the School Evaluation Office and others. In addition, much of the data may be accessed through the SEC website.

Time Period Covered by the Data Presented in the SRCs

The SRC mainly reports on schools' 2008-2009 information but also provides, where available, some trend data for a three year period (ie the 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years). For some of these comparisons, there were minor differences in the ways in which the specific information was collected on the three occasions. Where this has occurred, slight modifications have been made to the data presentations in the report, in order to allow for fair comparisons to be made. Data comparing the schools' 2008-2009 information with that of 2007-2008 are also presented for selected measures. This allows for some consideration of progress and charting of changes that may have occurred over time. Available space precludes the presentation of the many comparisons possible, however, a selection of measures have been presented which are sufficiently illustrative and illuminative of each school's performance. These comparative depictions utilise, as appropriate, data which were collected in the prior year(s) but through similar processes, and at similar times of the year, as those listed in the *Main Data Sources* table above. There are some minor differences between the specific questions asked on the various occasions and, where this has occurred, some slight modifications have been made to the ways the data have been presented in order to allow for making appropriate comparisons.

There are three international studies of student performance in which many of Qatar's schools participate: PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment); TIMSS (Trends in Mathematics and Science Study); and, PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study). These studies target students in a number of different grades or age-groups and cover selected areas of learning. They are conducted in different periodic cycles and data from them are usually available publically a year or so following its collection. Despite these variations and characteristics the data from the international studies are relevant and extremely useful. As such, for the information for schools which participated in the studies is included in the last page of the SRC in which the school's performance is presented and compared both with the performance of all students in Qatar who participated as well as with the performance of all students in all the countries who participated. Whilst these data can be a little dated, collectively they provide powerful comparative indicators of the school's performance context and history. At present the data that are available are from the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years. However, over time, as data become available, the school performance picture will be richer and will also allow for some tracking of performance in the areas covered by the international studies.

Explanation of Codes and Conventions Used Within the SRC

Throughout the report a number of practices have been deployed to assist with data reporting. Apart from the trend and comparison information presented in the last two pages of the SRC, all data and displays pertaining to the particular individual school which is the subject of the SRC are coloured in **dark blue** (and are always presented to the left in columnar displays and on the top in stacked displays), whereas the data and displays which represent the *All Schools*, with which the school is being compared, are coloured **lilac** (and are always presented to the right in columnar displays and on the bottom in stacked displays). *All Schools* is used to refer only to the Independent, International, Ministry of Education and Private Arabic schools which cater for the particular stage(s) of the school which is the focus of the specific SRC. Thus, in a SRC report for a school covering some or all of the secondary stage grades (ie one or more of Grades 10, 11 and 12), the *All Schools* comparative data are compiled only from schools' which have some secondary grade(s). Similarly the *All Schools* comparative data for schools with any preparatory stage grades (ie one or more of Grades 7, 8 and 9) and primary stage grades (ie one or more of Grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6) will be compiled from schools' with some preparatory and primary grade(s) respectively.

It should be noted that the symbol ■ is used within the report at any part in which no data are reported. There are a number of diverse reasons why the data may not be reported including: the data were not sought; no responses were provided; and, data have not been reported to protect the confidentiality of individuals or their responses. Whatever the particular reason, the ■ symbol has been used. In the sections of the SRC which present judgements about the school's comparative performance (either compared to other schools collectively or compared to the school's previous performance) then when no data are reported (ie as indicated by the ■ symbol) then clearly no comparative judgement can be made and this is indicated by the ● symbol.

It should be noted that, as most data have been presented in rounded form, the individual component percentages will not always sum to 100%. Also there will be occasions where the individual components sum to less than 100% with this having occurred as not all response categories for a particular area were chosen for reporting within the SRC. There will also be instances where values exist but are shown as 0% in the report as this is the correct value after rounding.

Content Differences for the Various SRCs

In broad terms, the different SRCs are similar in design. They all follow the same order of information presentation but there are a number of subtle and some not-so-subtle differences in structure and content. These differences are discussed briefly here in order that parents can better understand the SRCs of their children's schools as well as allowing them insight into other schools' SRC which they may wish to examine for informative and possible comparative purposes.

The most evident difference is that of language and associated presentation. The SRCs for International schools are in English and presented in a left-to-right orientation, whereas the SRCs for the Independent, Ministry of Education and Private Arabic schools are in Arabic and presented in a right-to-left orientation. Keeping in mind the prevailing structural similarities of the SRCs, it is possible with a little help, to be able to gain a reasonable understanding of the results in the Arabic-language SRCs. The actual data contained in the Arabic-language reports are presented using Hindi numerals, so these values can be comprehended by using the following relationship between Hindi and Arabic-Indian numerals: ० is 0; १ is 1; २ is 2; ३ is 3; ४ is 4; ५ is 5; ६ is 6; ७ is 7; ८ is 8; and ९ is 9.

Other translations that will assist relate to:

- The description of the 'Gender mix of student intake' which is reported as *Boys and Girls* (بنين وبنات), *Boys Only* (بنين فقط) or *Girls Only* (بنات فقط).
- The response to 'Any mixed boys and girls classes'? which will be *Yes* (نعم) or *No* (لا).
- The description of the 'Gender mix of teaching staff' which is reported as *Males and Females* (ذكور وإناث), *Males Only* (ذكور فقط) or *Females Only* (إناث فقط).
- For the information which is provided with respect to the proportions of the Mathematics, Science, Computer and Social Sciences classes which are taught in Arabic, the proportions that may be reported are *All Classes* (جميع الحصص), *Most Classes* (معظم الحصص), *Some Classes* (بعض الحصص) or *No Classes* (ولا حصة).

The SRCs also differ in the specific test results (from the QCEA and/or the international testing programs) which are reported. The QCEA are only undertaken by Independent schools and are thus only reported in Independent schools' SRCs. The actual QCEA results reported depend upon the Grades that each school covers.

The QCEA are a series of standardized tests of aspects of the Qatar national curriculum standards in Arabic, English, Mathematics and Science. The results are presented in the form of the average scale scores. A school's average scale score can be compared with that of its *All Schools* group, but these scores cannot be compared across curriculum areas, and within any curriculum area the scores can only be compared across a few Grade levels. The scales have been constructed so that individual student's scores are typically within the range from 250 to about 900. These scale score provide a broad indication of the students' performance, with the higher the score being indicative of stronger performance.

As each curriculum area has scores based on their distinct curriculum standards the scores are part of distinct scales and that is why they cannot (and should not) be directly compared. Similarly, within curriculum areas with a few exceptions, there are different scales for each Grade. The way the scores are presented in the SRC attempts to indicate which scores may or may not be compared. The simple rule is that if the scale score information is separated by a light-coloured horizontal line then they represent scores from different scales and should not be compared.

As the international testing programs cover only selected groups of students (Grade 4s and 8s and fifteen-year-olds) and not all schools participated in the programs, each school's SRC will be different with respect to the international test results reported, depending upon the groups of students it covers. The international testing programs are distinctive and the scores are computed and reported using different scales. As a result the only comparisons that are valid with the international test scores reported in the SRC are for each school against schools overall. It is not valid to compare the scores of a school in one testing program with that of another nor is it valid to compare a school's performance either across Grades or curriculum areas. In future SRCs, when school's scores are available for different time periods from the same international program, grade and curriculum area, it will be valid to compare the school's results over time.

In all considerations about test scores, it is important to remember that test scores, whilst being far from being perfect or comprehensive measures of student learning, are nevertheless usefully indicative of aspects of academic achievement. Of course, a school's scores simply represent the overall performance of the students enrolled and cannot be taken as a direct measure of the school's impact and contribution to student learning outcomes.

A Note about Real Differences in Measures

Care should be taken when comparing a school's data points with another school's, with *All Schools*, or even within the school itself. Often, what might appear to be a large or important difference between data points is, in reality, of little or no real substance. Thus, for example, it may well be possible to determine that someone's annual salary is five dirham a year more than that of another person, but does this measurable amount make any meaningful or substantial difference? Perhaps, over a lifetime, this difference may allow the purchase of an extra newspaper or some additional apples, but this is unlikely to have any observable differential impact. Similarly, just because we have the technique to discern that there is a statistically significant difference in an educational measure does not mean that this will result in some tangible difference in a student's life chances, or indeed even on their learning opportunities the very next day. Thus, care should be taken to ensure that observed differences are also differences in substance, and sometimes even apparently large differences in specific numbers are neither sustainable nor substantive.

Two sets of codes are used within the SRCs to assist the reader's understanding when comparing a school's results either with its own previous results or with the results of other schools. The codes take account of both the statistical and educational significance of differences in results. In essence, they provide guidance as to whether the differences, which may be observable when undertaking such comparisons, are indeed meaningful and substantive.

- The section of the SRC, presented in the penultimate two or three pages, containing the comparisons between the school's latest (2008-2009) and previous (2007-2008) measures uses the following codes to indicate whether, in real educational terms, the school's latest year's results are essentially *much lower than* (denoted by ▼▼), *somewhat lower than* (▼), *about the same as* (►◄), *somewhat higher than* (▲), or *much higher than* (▲▲) the school's previous year's results. The same codes are used on the last page of the SRC showing international testing program results but in this case the codes relate to the school's performance compared to that of the other schools in Qatar and to that of the schools in the countries participating in the testing program.
- The comparisons involving the QCEA results (as contained in Independent schools' SRCs) use a coarser, coding scale. Here the educational meaningfulness of any differences between the school's results compared to those of Independent schools as a group are indicated as being *higher* (denoted by ⊕), *no different* (⊖) or *lower* (⊖).

Some Additional Points to Note about the Data Presentations and Codes

A number of conventions have been adopted in the data presentation that should be noted when considering the SRC data. Throughout the SRC various the views of students, parents, and teachers) are described by presenting the proportions expressing satisfaction and the proportions expressing dissatisfaction with various aspects of the school. In these descriptions the proportions reported as being *generally satisfied* are indicated by the ☺ symbol, and comprise those who reported being *very satisfied* or *satisfied*, and the proportions reported as being *generally dissatisfied* are indicated by the ☹ symbol, and comprise those who reported being *very dissatisfied* or *dissatisfied*. The proportions that were *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied* are not directly reported, but can usually be inferred from the other data presented.

For some elements of the SRC, students', teachers' and parents' views or reports about various aspects of school are depicted in terms of the percentage, or proportion, indicating agreement with aspect described. In such instances, the proportions reported as agreeing comprise those who indicated they either *strongly agreed* or *agreed* with the particular aspect presented to them in the questionnaire.

The information about the school's facilities, services and extracurricular activities is presented as reported by the school itself or through direct observation. It should be noted that with these aspects, it is simply the existence of the facility, service or activity which is being reported. There has been no judgement made about their actual quality or nature. Thus, for example, two different schools may report that they have a library but the libraries may differ substantially in features such as its size, the numbers of books available, the relevance of the material contained, who has access to the holdings, the condition of the facility, etc. For each of these, the availability or non-availability of the aspect is indicated by a tick (✓) or cross (✗) respectively for the individual school concerned. The *All Schools* column presents comparable information on the overall percentage of schools in which it is reported that the aspects are available.

In the section about parental participation and interactions with the school the codes (✓) and (✗) are used to show respectively, whether the school *expects* or *does not expect* their parents to be involved in the particular aspects listed and juxtaposes these responses with the related percentages for *All Schools* which hold those expectations. A similar presentation is used in relation to the reported actual parental participation where the codes (✓) and (✗) are used to show respectively, whether the participation aspects listed *occur* or *do not occur* with their parents and juxtaposes these responses with the related percentages for *All Schools* in which such participation occurs.

Comments and Feedback

Thank you for looking at the SRC. We hope that it provided you with some useful information and ideas and we would value your reactions and feedback. Whether these be suggestions, criticisms or comments — they are all welcome. Contact details for communicating your views about SRCs in general are provided. These can be sent through any of the channels identified. We continue to work to improve the SRC and the information available. Your feedback will assist us greatly in this effort.

The school itself should be contacted if you wish to discuss the actual information in the SRC or to get more and other information about the school.

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