

# INSPECTION REPORT

## Universal American School

Report published in April 2013

## GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Universal American School

Location	Festival City
Type of school	Private
Website	www.uasdubai.ae
Telephone	04-2325222
Address	PO Box 79133, Dubai
Principal	Dr. Gunther Brandt
Curriculum	US/IB
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-18 / Kindergarten 1 to Grade 12
Attendance	Outstanding
Number of students on roll	1,308
Largest nationality group of Students	US
Number of Emirati students	121 (9%)
Date of the inspection	18th February to 21st February 2013

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## The context of the school

The Universal American School is located in Festival City. It is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten to Grade 12, aged three to 18 years. At the time of the inspection, the school had a total roll of 1,308 students. Approximately eight per cent of students were Emirati. Seventy nationalities were represented among the student population.

The school followed a US and International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. The International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program (PYP) was provided in Kindergarten to Grade 6, a school-developed, conceptually-based curriculum in Grades 7 to 10, and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IBDP) in Grades 11 and 12. Students took a variety of external examinations.

There were 130 teachers, all of whom had teacher qualifications. The staff included a director, two principals, two assistant principals and subject leaders.

## Overall school performance 2012-2013

Good

### Key strengths

- The outstanding progress of students in English in the Kindergarten and the high school;
- The excellent relationships and behaviour of students and their outstanding personal development;
- The outstanding health and safety provision;
- The high quality of support for students;
- The director's highly effective leadership of the school's core values and improvements.

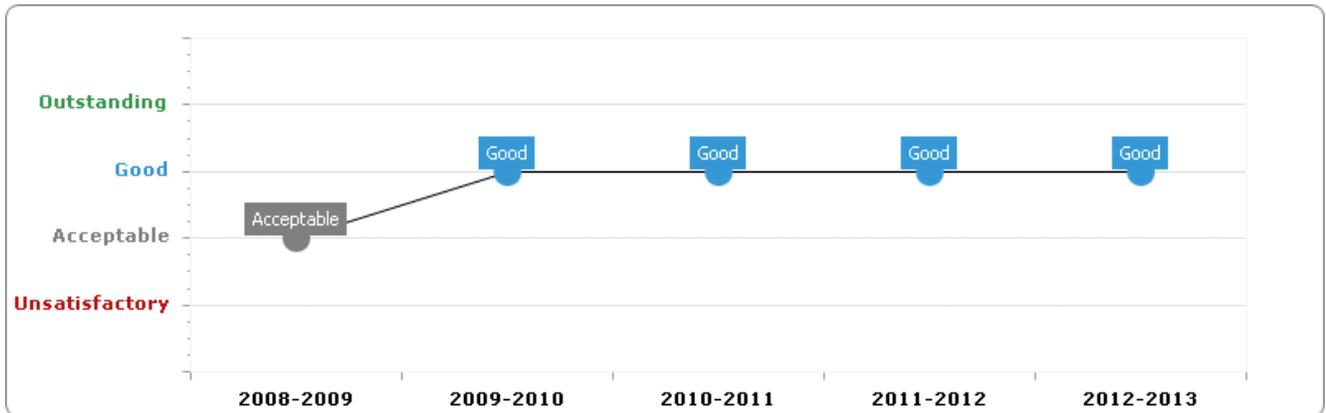
### Recommendations

- Improve students' progress in Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Improve the tracking of students' progress within and across grades, and use progress information to inform curriculum planning and student outcomes;
- Ensure the time allocated for Arabic as a first language meets Ministry of Education requirements;
- Use students' attainment and progress to develop self-evaluation and improvement planning.

## Progress since the last inspection

- Students' progress in English in the Kindergarten and the high school had improved;
- High levels of behaviour had been sustained, and students' cultural awareness and community responsibility had deepened;
- The curriculum in the Kindergarten had improved significantly.

## Trend of overall performance



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

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
<b>Islamic Education</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Progress</b>	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Arabic as a first language</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Progress</b>	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Arabic as an additional language</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Progress</b>	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>English</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good
<b>Progress</b>	Outstanding	Good	Good	Outstanding
<b>Mathematics</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Good	Good	Good	Good
<b>Progress</b>	Good	Good	Good	Good
<b>Science</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Good	Good	Good	Good
<b>Progress</b>	Good	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Attitudes and behaviour	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Understanding of Islamic values and local, cultural and global awareness	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Community and environmental responsibility	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

## How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	Kindergarten	Elementary	Middle	High
Health and Safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of Support	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	Whole school
Quality of leadership	Outstanding
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Outstanding
Governance	Good
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

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

In Islamic Education, most students had acceptable knowledge of key principles and concepts. Most students had strong listening and speaking skills in Arabic as a first language. Reading and comprehension were acceptable but included mistakes in pronunciation. Writing was the weakest area. Students studying Arabic as an additional language listened and responded to familiar greetings and engaged in simple conversations. Reading was challenging but writing was weak. Across the school, students' skills in speaking, listening, reading, and writing in English, were at least good. Students in upper grades demonstrated strong communication skills in response to challenging tasks. In mathematics, students showed a sound ability to use their mathematical knowledge. A few could extend their knowledge and develop new insights. Students used scientific language well and collected, interpreted and communicated scientific findings clearly. Observation and prediction were also developed. Asking scientific questions and planning and investigating were not as strong, especially for older students.

In Islamic Education, most students made acceptable progress understanding the verses of The Holy Qur'an, but recitation skills were less well developed. They made significantly less progress in developing a deeper understanding of Islamic rulings and values, and how these related to their lives. Most students in Arabic as a first language and Arabic as an additional language, made strong progress in speaking. They developed a satisfactory range of vocabulary. Limited progress was evident in using modern standard Arabic, and a significant minority lacked accuracy when speaking and writing. Students in English progressed well connecting their learning to the real world and to other subjects. Progress was also good in mathematics and science. However, the progress of the most able students was limited by a lack of opportunities to develop enquiry and higher level thinking skills, particularly older students.

[View judgements](#)

## How well does the school provide for Emirati students?

Emirati students made similar progress to other students. Most Emirati students who had been in school for two years or more were reaching the expectations for their age. A significant factor in their achievement was that staff ensured Emirati students felt welcome and teaching provided individual support and guidance. Each teacher kept records of student progress, assessment data, background notes, key priorities, extra support provided and samples of work. Parents were encouraged to support their children's learning. They benefited from the school's excellent liaison and translation arrangements.

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

Attitudes and behaviour were outstanding across all phases of the school. Almost all students demonstrated self-reliance, positive attitudes and excellent behaviour; they showed respect to other students, teachers, staff and visitors. Almost all students chose to eat healthy foods and to participate in physical activities regularly. Attendance was outstanding in middle and high, good in elementary, and acceptable in Kindergarten. The students' understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture was outstanding in all phases. They highly respected and understood very well Emirati traditions and heritage. They had a very strong appreciation of their own culture and the multi-cultural nature of Dubai and other cultures around the world. They demonstrated strong understanding of the impact of Islamic values on modern society in Dubai. Community and environmental responsibility was outstanding across the school. Students demonstrated an excellent level of loyalty and commitment to their school. Students knew the value of taking personal responsibility. They embraced the frequent opportunities to take leadership roles, especially in recycling projects, energy conservation and the eco-club. This had a positive impact on students' daily life. Their work ethic also had a positive effect on their role in the school.

[View judgements](#)

## How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

Teaching was good across all phases of the school. Most teachers at all levels had strong subject knowledge. Interactions between students and teachers were respectful. Teaching was enhanced through the use of modern technology in most classrooms. Across the school, teachers were very effective in guiding learning through questioning and discussion, and lessons were generally engaging. Lessons were well planned for the needs of all students. Teachers usually ensured that all students were included in classroom discussions and activities. Teaching assistants were very effective in Kindergarten and the elementary classes in supporting learning.

Learning was good across the school. Students were engaged, participated enthusiastically and took some responsibility for their learning. Students contributed on a regular basis in many classes. They showed particular strength in making connections to prior knowledge and were able to extend their thinking to real world situations. Students across all levels asked effective questions and contributed thoughtfully to discussions.

Assessment was good in all phases. Many teachers were effective in using students' progress to plan new work. Individual teachers understood the strengths and weaknesses of their students well. However, the use of assessment information to track students' progress within grades and from grade to grade was inconsistent. The analysis of data was not standardised between the elementary and secondary phases. The school was very effective in assessing incoming students but not in the use of information in the transition from elementary to secondary. The school was developing an assessment database, with reports and analysis available on-line for all staff to access.

[View judgements](#)

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

The quality of the curriculum was outstanding in Kindergarten and good in elementary, middle and high school. It had a clear rationale, based on the school's mission statement. It was generally broad and balanced. The IB PYP framework guided the curriculum from Kindergarten to Grade 6 and was aligned with the Common Core Standards. In Grade 7 to Grade 10, the curriculum was aligned with New York state standards, which incorporated Common Core State Standards. The IB-DP guided the curriculum in Grades 11 and 12. Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum was aligned with the Ministry of Education standards for Islamic Education and Arabic. However, the time allocated for delivery of Arabic as a first language in Grades 1, 2, and 3 did not meet Ministry of Education requirements. Continuity and progression were supported by detailed curriculum maps, unit plans and lesson plans, especially in Kindergarten. Transition arrangements between Kindergarten and elementary were outstanding and good between other phases of the school. The curriculum was reviewed regularly. The curriculum provided limited opportunities for independent learning, research and critical thinking. Cross-curricular links and the variety of extra-curricular activities enhanced student learning.

[View judgements](#)

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

The protection and support of students were outstanding. The school had highly effective procedures and comprehensive, detailed records to ensure students' safety when using laboratories, playgrounds, the canteen and classrooms. The campus was accessible to individuals with physical disabilities. Fire drills were held regularly and the school had an effective relationship with Civil Defence. Students were put at risk when a few car drivers ignored the directions of security staff which were given to assure student safety.

The quality of support was outstanding across the school. Relationships between staff and students demonstrated mutual respect and high regard. Behaviour management was excellent. Students behaved in a mature and sensible manner. The school's thorough systems and procedures successfully promoted high attendance and punctuality. Staff monitored students' personal, academic and social needs very closely and provided extremely effective support and guidance. A collaborative approach, openness, sensitivity and flexibility ensured high quality guidance and care for students.

[View judgements](#)

## How well does the school provide for students with special educational needs?

There were effective systems to identify and respond to students' special educational needs from Kindergarten to Grade 12. Individual education plans identified individual needs precisely and provided good quality guidance on how they were to be met. Parents were fully involved. Teachers modified lesson plans and the curriculum, and provided a good level of support and challenge enabling students to make good progress. Support in withdrawal lessons was particularly effective. Provision was not as consistent for the gifted and talented. It was also more inconsistent in Islamic Education and Arabic than in other subjects.

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

Leadership and management were outstanding. The Director provided a clear vision and played a pivotal role in guiding improvement. He was very well supported by senior leaders. There was close teamwork and excellent communication within and across phases. There was a clear and interconnected leadership across the school, with commitment to promote continuity and consistency for all students. The mission statement had been revised, drawing on the views of staff, governors and parents. It placed more emphasis on enquiry and global citizenship, Staff felt empowered to try out new ideas. They knew their views and contributions were highly valued.

Self-evaluation was good and informed by wide-ranging consultation. The process was undertaken at all levels and provided for strategic planning and development. Staff engaged in reviewing students' progress and striving for improvement. Senior and middle leaders regularly observed lessons, looked at curriculum plans and sampled students' work. This helped them to identify what was working well and areas for improvement. Effective methods were shared and a wide range of in-house and external training was

available. Although the school gathered attainment data for analysis, there was less rigour in the analysis of students' progress. What constituted expected progress was not explicit. This hindered self-evaluation and achieving school development targets.

Partnerships with parents and the community were outstanding. Communication between home and school was regular and effective. In addition to excellent formal communication through newsletters, the school's website and written reports, there were ample opportunities for informal contact. Parents appreciated the internet portal, which allowed rapid communication between home and school, including curriculum topics. Parents were confident they could raise concerns that would be swiftly addressed. The school drew on the skills and expertise of local business personnel, and parents with specific expertise, to talk to students about their activities.

Governance was good. Working relationships between board members and the school were strong with a shared vision. There was co-operation on enrolment strategies, budgets, and facilities planning. A beneficial working relationship between senior leaders, board members and the parent teacher organisation enabled a mutual response to parental suggestions or concerns. However, board members were not always rigorous in seeking assurance that statutory regulations were being met, for example, in the time allocation for Arabic.

The management of staffing, facilities and resources was outstanding. Effective systems and procedures ensured the efficient management of the school. Increases to the school roll had been carefully planned. The spacious campus was safe, clean and well maintained. Staff were well qualified and experienced, and were deployed highly effectively. The campus facilities were extensive and provided a wide range of good quality resources to support learning including the extensive extra-curricular activities. A multi-purpose hall was under construction to provide for the performing arts, further teaching spaces and a cafeteria. However, there was a lack of books and other educational material to support students studying Islamic Education and Arabic.

[View judgements](#)

## What are the views of parents, teachers and students?

Before the inspection, the views of parents, teachers and senior secondary students were surveyed. Key messages from each group were considered during the inspection and these helped to form judgements. A summary of the survey statistics and comments from those who responded to the survey follows:

Responses to the surveys			
Responses received	Number		Percentage
Parents	This year	229	27%
	Last year	190	26%
Teachers	99		76%
Students	224		81%

\*The percentage of responses from parents is based on the number of families.

Most parents were satisfied with all aspects of the school. They praised the school's welcoming family atmosphere and its approach to education. They felt well informed about their children's progress and were pleased with the internet portal system for communication between home and school. Staff were extremely positive in their views and of the leadership of the school in ensuring all staff were aware of the school's core values. They felt well supported and valued with the opportunities for professional development. Students were satisfied with the quality of education and enjoyed all aspects of school life. They felt they were making good progress and that the school provided many opportunities for them to take responsibility. They praised the school's multi-cultural nature and enjoyed learning with students from a variety of backgrounds. Both Muslims and non-Muslims felt they were developing a good understanding of Islamic values.

## What happens next?

The school has been asked to prepare and submit an updated action plan to DSIB within two months of receiving the most recent report. This plan should address:

- Recommendations from DSIB;
- Areas identified by the school as requiring improvement;
- Other external reports or sources of information that comment on the work of the school;
- Priorities arising from the school's unique characteristics.

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)

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