

INSPECTION REPORT

GEMS Dubai American Academy

Report published in April 2013

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT GEMS Dubai American Academy

Location	Al Barsha
Type of school	Private
Website	www.gemsaa-dubai.com
Telephone	04-3479222
Address	PO. Box 32762, Dubai, UAE
Principal	Robin Appleby
Curriculum	US/IB
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-18 / Kindergarten to Grade 12
Attendance	Good
Number of students on roll	2,245
Largest nationality group of Students	US
Number of Emirati students	28 (1%)
Date of the inspection	9th to 13th December 2012

Contents

The context of the school.....	3
Overall school performance 2012-2013	4
Key strengths	4
Recommendations	4
Progress since the last inspection	5
Trend of overall performance.....	5
How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?.....	6
How good is the students' personal and social development?	7
How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?	7
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of students?	8
How well does the school protect and support students?.....	8
How good are the leadership and management of the school?	8
How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?.....	9
How well does the school provide for Emirati students?.....	9
How good is the students' personal and social development?	9
How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?	10
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of students?	11
How well does the school protect and support students?.....	12
How well does the school provide for students with special educational needs?.....	12
How good are the leadership and management of the school?	13
What are the views of parents, teachers and students?.....	14
What happens next?	15
How to contact us	15

The context of the school

The Dubai American Academy is situated in Al Barsha. The school opened in September 1998. It had an enrollment of 2,245 students, aged three to 18 years at the time of the inspection. The students represented over 100 nationalities and although English is the language used for teaching, English is not the first language of a significant minority of students.

The school followed a US curriculum. Students were entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma (IBDP) in Grades 11 and 12. Students in Grades 3 through 9 participated in Measures of Academic Progress (MAPS) assessments. High school students took the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) in the appropriate grades.

There were 177 teachers and all had a teaching qualification. They were supported by 57 teaching assistants. Fourteen staff members were deployed for learning support and counseling. Students were grouped into four phases: Kindergarten, elementary (Grades 1 to 5), middle (Grades 6 to 8) and high (Grades 9 to 12). Students in Grades 8 to 12 were required to bring their own computers to school to integrate information and communication technology (ICT) with learning.

Overall school performance 2012-2013

Outstanding

Key strengths

- The students' outstanding attainment and progress in the majority of key subjects;
- The students' outstanding personal and social development in all phases;
- The outstanding teaching, learning, assessment and curriculum in a majority of key subjects;
- The outstanding provision for the health, safety and support of students;
- The broadly outstanding leadership and management of the school.

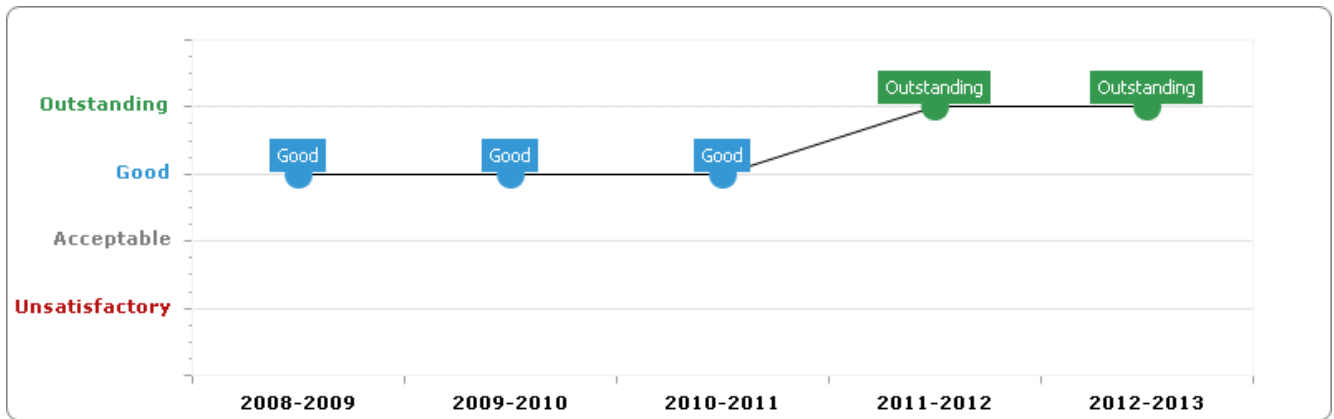
Recommendations

- Continue to improve teaching and the curriculum in Islamic Education and Arabic to raise students' attainment in these subjects;
- Ensure that all teachers create opportunities for students to think critically and thus maximize their attainment in the key subjects.

Progress since the last inspection

- Improvements had occurred in the teaching of Islamic Education and Arabic;
- The use of ICT to enhance learning had been significantly improved in most key subjects;
- Enquiry-based learning had been extended across most key subjects.

Trend of overall performance



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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Islamic Education				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable
Arabic as a first language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Arabic as an additional language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable
English				
Attainment	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Progress	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Mathematics				
Attainment	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Progress	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Science				
Attainment	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Progress	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	KG	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?

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of students' learning	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Assessment	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	KG	Elementary	Middle	High
Curriculum quality	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

	KG	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	Outstanding
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?

Attainment was outstanding in English, mathematics and science across the school. Most students performed above international expectations on the MAP, PSAT and SAT tests. Only a small number of students performed at the highest level in IB-DP examinations. Attainment in Islamic Education was acceptable in the elementary and high schools and good in the middle school. Recitation skills were in line with expectations for most students, but just the majority in the middle school. Attainment in Arabic as a first or additional language was acceptable across the school, except in the middle school where it was good for students studying Arabic as an additional language.

Progress was outstanding across the school in English, mathematics and science. Progress in Islamic Education was acceptable in the elementary and high schools, and good in the middle school. Students in the middle school made good progress improving their listening and speaking skills. The recitation skills of most students were developing. The good progress of Arab-Muslims was hampered due to language barriers and lack of a broad and balanced program of study, particularly in the middle and high schools. Progress in Arabic as a first or additional language was acceptable across most phases. Students with special educational needs made good progress in English, mathematics, and science and acceptable progress in Islamic Education and Arabic.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school provide for Emirati students?

Attainment by Emiratis in Islamic Education, Arabic, and science was acceptable, but good in English and mathematics. Progress in Islamic Education and Arabic were acceptable, but good in all other subject areas. Emirati students were listed in teachers' lesson plans and, when necessary, accommodations were added as well. Teachers were able to identify the learning strengths and weaknesses of Emirati students when asked to do so by the inspection team. There appeared to be a general consensus that all Emirati students were capable of higher levels of attainment.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students across all phases demonstrated outstanding attitudes and behaviour. From the Kindergarten to the high school, almost all students demonstrated self-reliance, positive attitudes and excellent behaviour. They showed respect for other students, teachers, and staff members. Almost all students across all

phases chose to eat healthy food during breaks and lunch and to exercise regularly. Attendance over the last full term was good. Students demonstrated high respect for Islamic culture and its values of tolerance and fairness. Students showed excellent understanding of the uniqueness of the UAE's culture and heritage; they had deep knowledge of its history that blends modernity and tradition. Students had excellent knowledge of their own and their friends' cultures. Most students across all phases were involved in various community initiatives. They contributed effectively in student-initiated clubs and student governance. Most students were well aware of their rights and responsibilities and could elaborate on their roles in developing the school. They voiced their interests, concerns and issues of significance through well-established student bodies. Students exhibited an outstanding awareness of local and global environmental matters such as energy conservation, global warming, and environmental pollution. They knew of the challenges facing Dubai in particular as being a city with enormous carbon footprint.

[View judgements](#)

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

Teaching was outstanding across the school. It was most consistent in the Kindergarten and more developed in English, mathematics and science. It was more variable in the elementary phase. Most teachers had strong subject knowledge and an excellent understanding of how students learned best. Planning was consistent and provided excellent prompts for successful lessons. Most teachers used a variety of strategies and a range of appropriate resources in order to engage students. Almost all teachers had excellent relationships with their students. There was a culture of mutual respect and most students felt confident to take risks. Consequently, most students made excellent progress. Most teachers used a range of questioning techniques in order to prompt deeper thinking. Opportunities for research and enquiry were a regular feature of learning, in part due to the 'Bring Your Own Device' project in the middle and high school phases. Teaching was observed in non-key subjects such as information technology, physical education, Theory of Knowledge, music and drama. In these subjects teaching was good or outstanding. In drama, teachers provided opportunities for student leadership and self-critique. Students' learning was good to outstanding, with most learning demonstrated through performances. The quality of learning was outstanding across the school. Students were enthusiastic and had a developing partnership in their own learning. Most could communicate what they were learning, how well they were doing and what they needed to do to improve. They could sustain their studies over a period of time without direct teacher supervision. Most collaborated well with their peers; consequently they were able to refine their own thinking as well as exchange feedback on how to improve. At the high school level, students had initiated self-help study groups. These were developments of the self-help practice that took place in the Writing Center. Most students could make connections and build on what had been learned before.

Students in the middle and high phases of the school made good use of information technology in order research new ideas and create. Critical thinking skills were a common feature of the learning of a majority of students.

The assessment of learning was outstanding throughout the school. There was a highly developed system in place for tracking students' attainment and progress. A clearly defined policy ensured that teachers regularly assessed students' work using a broad range of methods. The school used a range of external programmes, including Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) to enable appropriate external comparison of performances. The assessment process produced an extensive bank of data. It was analysed and made available to teachers to supplement their extensive knowledge of students' strengths and weaknesses. All students knew how well they were performing and parents were equally well informed. In lessons, students received high quality feedback, both verbal and written, that ensured their continued high achievement.

[View judgements](#)

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

The quality of the curriculum was outstanding across all phases of the school in the majority of key subjects. Curricula for Kindergarten to Grade 12 were aligned with Common Core State Standards in English language arts and mathematics. The UAE Ministry of Education standards were used for parts of Islamic Education and Arabic curricula. Most of the curriculum was soundly planned, broad and balanced. However, there was an overlap of Islamic Education and other classes on the timetable, which restricted Muslim students' full participation in the arts, physical education, and key subjects. Progression and continuity were supported by detailed curriculum maps, unit plans, and lesson plans in the majority of key subjects. Transition arrangements between the Kindergarten, elementary, middle, and high school phases of the school ensured that most students were ready for the next stages. The curriculum was reviewed regularly and updated, but there was lack of challenge for students who should have been in Arabic as a first language, but were in Arabic as an additional language classes. The curriculum did not provide for sufficient progression for a small minority of native Arab students in the middle and high schools. An outstanding variety of extra-curricular activities enriched students' experiences, giving them many opportunities for personal growth.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

The organisational arrangements and procedures for health and safety were outstanding. School transport was a model of good practice. The school environment and premises were maintained to an excellent standard and thus created a safe, inclusive and secure campus. Fire safety procedures were regularly reviewed and risk assessments acted upon. The school had detailed policies that ensured students' personal and medical safety. Health offices were self-contained and medicines securely stored and administered by licensed medical staff. Students were provided with healthy food. Child protection policies were in place and school leaders ensured that students, parents and staff members were informed. The visible presence of leaders throughout the school and in common areas lent an air of security and easy means of communication between staff and students. The layout of the campus and leaders' offices provided for effective monitoring of safety and students' behaviour.

The quality of support was outstanding and was demonstrated by a culture of kindness that was modelled throughout the school. Almost all students enjoyed collaborative relationships with teachers. This level of trust had fostered excellent behaviour, responsible choices being made and mutual respect exhibited by most students. Clear processes existed for the management of student attendance, punctuality and absenteeism. The quality of support for students was further enhanced by the support of a counselling team, who provided age-appropriate academic guidance and personal advice.

[View judgements](#)

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

Effective policies and procedures were developed by a committed team for students with special education needs. Identification systems had resulted in regular provision across the school. The school relied on external assessments to support the identification process. A school support team included eight counsellors and four learning support teachers. Individual education planning had commenced and learning support was provided through withdrawal or in-class provision. A good level of progress was noted among those students across all key subjects. Teaching for students learning English as an additional language was highly structured and the support of specialist writing centres was outstanding. A minority of teachers had planned and implemented a differentiated curricular approach.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The school had outstanding leadership, which was strongly committed to, and demonstrated the capacity for, school improvement. The leadership team was knowledgeable about student learning, attainment and progress and the steps needed to sustain high outcomes. Leadership responsibilities were distributed amongst middle managers and time was provided for vertical collaboration around the curriculum, a school priority this past year. Leaders planned for, participated in, and carried out professional training to continuously improve teaching and learning.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were outstanding. Recommendations from the previous inspection report were given priority and figured prominently in the school's improvement and action plans. Action plans were continuously monitored and evaluated, with clearly designated areas of responsibility and timelines. The school's self-evaluation documents were accurate.

The school's partnership with parents and the community was outstanding. Highly productive links with parents enabled them to contribute to the success of the students. A parent organization served as the main conduit of parent concerns. Parents and the school reported extensive links to the community and abroad, which provided students with outstanding opportunities to extend their learning. Communication among all stakeholders was a strength, including very frequent provision of information to parents about their children's learning.

Governance of the school was good. The governing board was highly knowledgeable about, and supportive of, the school's mission. It was strongly committed to providing the leaders with the tools necessary to attain its goals. Evidence of this commitment were the investments in information technology, additional staff to meet the needs of students with additional needs, and in its provision of access to central resources to improve Arabic instruction. The governing body did not include representation from all stakeholders.

Management, including staffing, facilities and resources was outstanding. All staff members, particularly leaders and teachers, were well qualified and experienced. They were provided with ample professional training and monitoring to ensure growth. The premises were of the highest quality, with attention given to safety, cleanliness, and enhanced student learning. Evidence of these were the inviting lunch and play areas, the displays of student work on walls in all of the buildings, and the very well-equipped classrooms.

[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	201	13%
	Last year	329	15%
Teachers	69		33%
Students	94		22%

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

Only a few parents responded to the survey this year. Almost all respondents expressed satisfaction with the overall quality of education provided at the school. Almost all thought that their children were making good progress in English and most believed that progress was good in mathematics and science. A majority of parents believed that progress was good in Islamic Education and Arabic as an additional language. Almost all parents believed that their children enjoyed school and were safe, but a significant minority did not know if they were safe when on buses. About one fifth of the senior students responded to their survey, and their opinions about progress in the key subjects were very similar to those of parents. A majority of students agreed that school leaders listened to their opinions but a quarter disagreed. About a third of teachers responded to their survey and their views were positive regarding all aspects of the school's provision.

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

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