

INSPECTION REPORT

GEMS Wellington Academy (Branch)

Report published in April 2014

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT GEMS Wellington Academy (Branch)

Location	Dubai Silicon Oasis
Type of school	Private
Website	www.gemswellingtonacademy-dso.com
Telephone	04-3424040
Address	P O Box 49746, Dubai
Principal	Michael Gernon
Curriculum	UK
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Year Groups	3-16 / Foundation Stage 1 to Year 12
Attendance	Good
Number of students on roll	2930
Largest nationality group of students	UK
Number of Emirati students	70 (2%)
Date of the inspection	18th to 21st November 2013

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The context of the school

Located in Silicon Oasis, GEMS Wellington Academy is a private school providing education for boys and girls, aged three to 17 years. The school served a multinational community and students came from 96 different countries. The largest group of students were UK nationals and the next biggest group was from other European countries.

The school offered the English National Curriculum. There were 196 full-time qualified teachers, including 78 who had been appointed from the beginning of the school year. Around 14 per cent of students had been identified as having some form of special educational need.

The school opened in September 2011 and had more than doubled in size in 2012. It added Year 10 in September 2012 and Years 11 and 12 in September 2013. At the time of the inspection, there were 2930 on roll. New buildings to house secondary classrooms and specialist areas for the performing arts, science and technology were scheduled to open in January 2014.

Overall school performance 2013-2014

Good

Key strengths

- Highly effective teaching in English and mathematics in the Foundation Stage and secondary phase led to outstanding progress.
- Students had extremely positive attitudes and behaviour; they had a strong work ethic and were developing increasingly independent learning skills.
- Targeted, varied and effective provision for students with special educational needs helped them to make good or better progress.
- The great care taken to ensure students' health and safety was underpinned by highly effective policies and procedures.
- Inspirational leadership by the principal, working closely with the highly effective senior leadership team, had led to very successful innovations, including an enrichment programme that was an integral part of the school timetable.

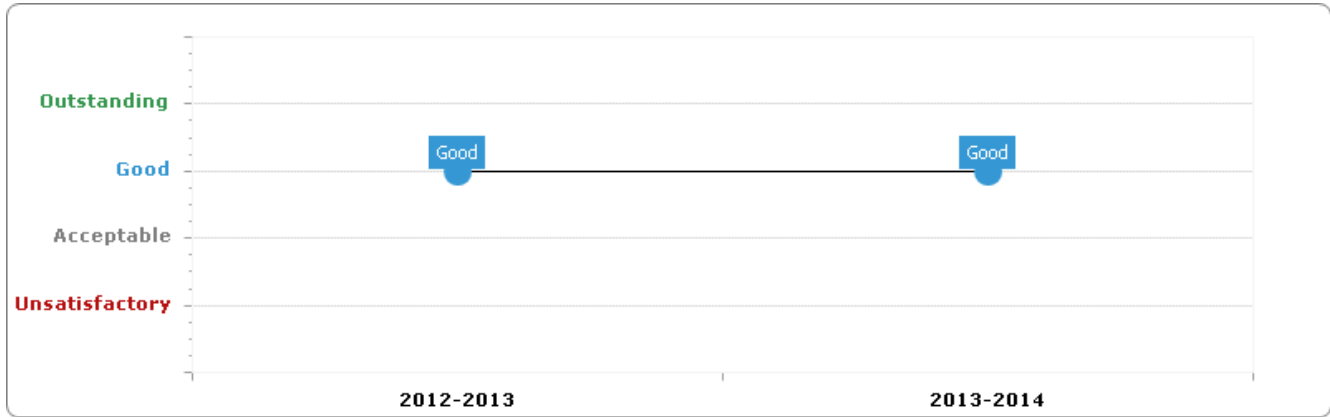
Recommendations

- Improve teachers' skills in engaging and motivating students in Islamic Education and Arabic, in order to accelerate progress and raise attainment in these subjects.
- Address inconsistencies in the quality of teaching by continuing to promote approaches which ensure that all students are challenged and receive constructive feedback on how to improve.

Progress since the last inspection

- Good progress had been made in improving teaching by sharing effective strategies.
- Insightful monitoring of teaching by senior leaders had led to more accurate evaluations that pinpointed areas for development that were addressed through subsequent training.
- Much emphasis had been placed on increasing the rate of progress to raise standards in Islamic Education and Arabic.
- The school had succeeded in strengthening leadership and management, the curriculum and the provision for students with special educational needs.

Trend of overall performance



How good are the students' attainment progress and learning skills?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Islamic Education			
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory	Acceptable
Arabic as a first language			
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory
Arabic as an additional language			
Attainment	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory
English			
Attainment	good	Good	Outstanding
Progress	Outstanding	Good	Outstanding
Mathematics			
Attainment	Good	Good	Outstanding
Progress	Outstanding	Good	Outstanding
Science			
Attainment	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Outstanding	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Quality of students' learning skills	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Personal responsibility	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Students' understanding of Islamic values and their local, cultural and global awareness	Good	Good	Good
Community and environmental responsibility	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Outstanding	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Curriculum quality	Outstanding	Good	Good
Curriculum design to meet the individual needs of students	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Health and Safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of Support	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
Parents and the community	Good
Governance	Good
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the students' attainment and progress?

Across the school, attainment in Islamic Education was acceptable. Most students had basic knowledge about the key principles of faith and worship in Islam. For example, primary students knew the difference between the ablution and the Al taymum; Hajj and Umrah. The majority of secondary students understood the values of Islam from the Holy Qur'an and Prophets' lives such as patience, tolerance and co-operation. However, only a minority of students could explain how to apply Islamic values in their daily lives. Attainment in Arabic as a first language was acceptable in the primary phase and unsatisfactory in the secondary phase. Secondary students found it difficult to use correct standard Arabic to express their ideas and a significant proportion of students, speaking, reading and writing skills were below the expected levels. In Arabic as an additional language, most students could pronounce letters and words when prompted with familiar pictures. Only a minority knew, understood and could write an appropriate range of words and expressions. In secondary, particularly for those who had been studying the subject for years, the ability to use the words they had learnt to express simple ideas was very limited.

Attainment was mostly good in English, mathematics and science, but outstanding in secondary mathematics and English. In English, Foundation Stage children and primary students had good speaking, listening and reading skills for their age but their writing skills were less well developed. In the secondary phase, students' outstanding attainment was evident as they discussed and debated knowledgeably and with confidence. By Year 11, students wrote clear, well organised and accurate prose on a variety of topics. In mathematics, in Foundation Stage, most children had a good understanding of the concept of number and could count, recognise and order numbers to at least 20. They had a basic understanding of the concept of simple addition and subtraction. Secondary students attained very well in number, algebra, geometry and probability. For example, a Year 11 group confidently used and applied circle theorems. In all phases, students could relate their learning to their own lives and the real world. In science, younger students were inquisitive about the world around them and they used their early skills in observation, predicting and recording during science activities. The acquisition of science investigation skills was strong throughout the school.

Primary students made unsatisfactory progress in Islamic Education. Most did not acquire a sufficient depth of knowledge of faith and worship. Secondary students progressed at an acceptable level. Students' progress in Arabic was acceptable in primary but unsatisfactory in secondary. In Arabic as a first language, low expectations and limited opportunities to practise the language in meaningful and engaging contexts inhibited progress. In Arabic as an additional language, tasks which did not match students' individual needs restricted their progress, particularly in the secondary phase.

Children in the Foundation Stage made outstanding progress in English, mathematics and science. Primary students made good progress in these subjects. Secondary students made good progress in science and

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outstanding progress in English and mathematics. In English, progress at primary level was somewhat uneven across classes. This was linked to the quality of teaching. Progress was much stronger for older students. In mathematics, progress was also variable but accelerated towards the end of each key stage. In the secondary phase, most students made outstanding progress towards their IGCSE examinations. Although only a few took the examination, they all achieved A* or A grades and met or exceeded their projected scores. In science, students in the primary and secondary phases developed good skills in planning, carrying out and evaluating investigations.

[View judgements](#)

Quality of students' learning skills

The quality of students' learning skills was good in all phases. Students enjoyed school, were enthusiastic and wanted to do well. In most lessons they demonstrated the variety of the skills necessary for learning, living and working in the 21st century. They especially enjoyed working in groups, sharing ideas, supporting each other and solving problems. Most students demonstrated mature attitudes beyond their age. They were increasingly confident in their explanations and in justifying their responses. They were comfortable asking for clarity and in taking a risk when answering. They understood that making mistakes was part of the learning process. They were aware that learning builds on what they have already learnt in other areas of the curriculum. Students' understanding was deepened when they saw a real purpose to their learning and could make connections with the real world. They were increasingly able to find things out for themselves in school and at home, and were skilled in using technology to support their learning. In some lessons, students were not given sufficient opportunity to develop the skills of listening and speaking, thinking and collaborating, As a result they became disengaged and, on occasion, there was some minor disruption.

[View judgements](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' personal responsibility was outstanding. They had very positive attitudes to school and were courteous and helpful. They understood the school's expectations of behaviour, displaying self-discipline and maturity. Consequently, behaviour in and out of lessons was excellent. Relationships were cordial and respectful, and students knew how to resolve difficulties without conflict. This resulted in a very calm, orderly atmosphere. Students understood the importance of healthy foods and habits. They enjoyed the school's healthy living initiatives. High attendance and punctuality demonstrated students' positive attitudes to school, although punctuality at the start of the school day was an issue for a small minority of students.

Students' understanding of Islamic values and cultural awareness were good. They understood the importance of Islam and gave examples of Islamic values that were relevant to them. Non-Muslim students knew the importance of Ramadan, Eid and the Haj. Students readily recalled lessons that related to the culture and heritage of the UAE. This was reinforced by displays around the school. All students celebrated events such as UAE National Day. However, students' awareness of important global issues and other world cultures was weaker than their knowledge of the UAE.

Students' conduct of their community and environmental responsibilities was outstanding. They willingly seized opportunities to take on responsibility and to show initiative, for example by serving as school council members. They took part in many charitable activities, and good links with local businesses had enhanced learning through events such as Silicon Oasis Maker day. A work experience programme had helped Year 10 students to plan future careers. Lessons such as science and geography had included environmental issues and students had participated in events such as litter clean-ups and 'plastic oceans'. However, the school did not have a well-established recycling scheme to encourage all students to care for the environment.

[View judgements](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

The quality of teaching was good across the school. A significant number of lessons were outstanding. Most teachers had excellent subject knowledge and, in most subjects, they used a range of strategies and high quality facilities and resources, including technology, to engage, motivate and excite students. Throughout the school, there was a consistency of approach in planning lessons which took account of students' earlier achievements and needs. Most teachers provided ample opportunities for speaking and listening, especially, but not only, in the Foundation Stage, to enable students to develop the basic skills needed to express themselves and share their ideas. Most Foundation Stage teachers understood that students and young children learn best through play and practical activity, and through opportunities to collaborate on a common task with their classmates. They established positive relationships with their students. In most lessons, teachers made clear what each group of students needed to achieve to be successful. They used effective questioning skills to engage students, to assess their understanding and to challenge their thinking. They enabled students to see a real purpose to their learning and provided opportunities for them to use and apply their learning to other curricular areas. Within this positive picture, the effectiveness of teaching in Islamic Education and Arabic, and in a few other lessons, was inconsistent and in some instances it was unsatisfactory.

Assessment was outstanding in the Foundation Stage and good in other phases. Throughout the Foundation Stage, detailed records were used very effectively to plan for individual needs. Teachers in most subjects

across the school knew their students' needs well and used assessment information to plan accordingly. They involved students in setting targets and supported them in assessing progress. In the best lessons, teachers followed their plan but were able to change direction when necessary to adjust the challenge for individuals. In weaker lessons, teachers did not respond as quickly to individual needs and so some students, and in particular the more able students, were not stretched to their full capability. In some lessons, most noticeably Islamic Education and Arabic, expectations for what students could do were low. Teachers' assessments of students' progress over time were accurate and were used well in planning. Most marking was of a high quality and provided students with a clear understanding of how to improve. Occasionally, and more often in secondary than primary, there were inconsistencies in marking and some work was unmarked.

[View judgements](#)

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

The quality of the curriculum was outstanding in the Foundation Stage and good in the primary and secondary phases. The new Foundation Stage curriculum had been securely in place for over a year. It was enhanced by specialist teacher provision for physical development, music and outdoor activities. The curriculum in the primary phase had been improved by the introduction of 'learning enquiry' for all primary students, and this allowed a thematic approach adapted to students' needs and interests to be made more easily. Good arrangements for transition between key stages had been enhanced by the appointment of cross-phase vice-principals for the Foundation Stage and Year 1, Years 2 to 4 and Years 5 to 8. Other important improvements to the curriculum included the introduction of a programme of enrichment activities which were timetabled during the normal school day. This enabled cross-curricular approaches to be more easily exploited. Many of the extensive new curriculum initiatives had only been introduced at the beginning of this academic year and had yet to make a sustained impact on standards.

The curriculum design to meet the individual needs of different groups of students was outstanding in all phases. Raising achievement plans were put into place for students falling behind, and senior leaders supervised and monitored interventions. Students had a free choice in one of two sets of enrichment activities and these provided ample opportunities for further challenge and the pursuit of students' individual interests. Furthermore, students' interests had an influence on the direction of learning enquiry lessons in the primary phase. There was an outstanding choice of subjects for GCSE and IGCSE courses, including vocational BTEC programmes.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

The school made outstanding provision for the health, safety and security of students. The new buildings were very well maintained and the school's security systems were robust. Procedures for evacuation were regularly practised and lock-down procedures were comprehensive. The student transport was very effectively managed, including regular checks of the buses. Excursions and visits were subject to rigorous safety requirements. Medical facilities were of high quality. The medical team of the doctor and the three nurses worked closely with staff to ensure that they were fully aware of students' individual medical conditions. Procedures for handling medication and the keeping of medical records were extremely thorough. Healthy living and healthy eating were strongly promoted, although the school's building programme meant that the school canteen offered a limited range of choices. The detailed policy for child protection was well known. Staff had been trained in its procedures and knew how to respond appropriately to any concerns. Students were well informed about internet safety and the dangers of cyber-bullying.

The quality of support was outstanding. Staff-student relations were highly developed and behaviour was generally well managed. Recent initiatives such as vertical tutoring and head of house roles had a positive effect on this. Robust procedures were well established to manage attendance effectively, with first day parental contact standard practice for un-notified absences. Admission into the school was open and inclusive with a wide ability range alongside over 90 different nationalities. There were well-developed methods for identifying individual needs on a phase-appropriate basis. There was very high level of intervention and support for all students with special educational needs, especially those, who faced great challenges in a mainstream setting. As a result, students with special educational needs, including gifted and talented students, were very well supported in maximising their potential. High-level personal support was available to students through a wide variety of support. The school was planning to employ its own career advisor, having already availed itself of some support from another school.

[View judgements](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership and management were outstanding. The principal played a crucial role in establishing a shared vision across the school. There was a common commitment to ensure all students achieved as well as they could, reflected in the school's maxim '*Learn. Aspire. Be.*' Leaders at all levels had high expectations and a mutual determination to drive improvement. Within a collegial working environment, colleagues were supportive of one another and staff at all levels felt valued and empowered to try out new ideas and offer their suggestions for improvement. The impact of effective leadership in English, mathematics and science was evident in the students' improving performance. Strong leadership of the Foundation Stage and

provision for students with special educational needs had led to significant improvements. Some positive and innovative strategies had been introduced in Islamic Education and Arabic, such as paired teaching, but they were not reflected in students' progress in these subjects.

Self-evaluation was good and involved students, staff, parents and governors. All aspects of the school's provision were systematically and rigorously reviewed. This provided a comprehensive and accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. All reviews were centred on how the school's provision had an impact on students' academic achievement or personal development. Students' progress and the quality of teaching and learning were closely monitored. Analytical appraisal of all aspects of the school's performance had led to several improvements, but the recommendations of the last report regarding Islamic Education and Arabic had not been met fully.

The partnership and communication with parents was good. Parents valued the weekly communication about how they could support their children's academic progress and personal development at home. The newly-elected parent council had made a good start in working actively with the school on areas for support and development. In questionnaires and discussions, most parents confirmed that they were pleased with their children's education, but a few had concerns about progress in Arabic and the speed of growth of the school. Students benefited from the school's growing links with local businesses and the community.

Governance of the school was good. The board of governors supported the new principal in his vision for the school and provided appropriate challenge for the school's improvement. Through discussion with the senior team and regular monitoring and, through engaging with the views of parents, governors were very aware of the particular challenges faced by the school as it rapidly expanded its student numbers. The governors worked closely with the school in meeting these challenges.

The management of staffing, facilities and resources was outstanding. All teachers were suitably qualified and the induction process ensured that new teachers were fully prepared for their work in the school. This quality of this support was significant as 79 teachers were new at the start of the school year. A strong feature of the school was the development of leadership skills at all levels so that the increase in the school's size could be supported by a home-grown team of leaders. Teaching assistants were used effectively in lessons. Resources were not only of high quality, but were used well by teachers and students to enhance their learning. A feature of students' good learning was the ease with which they used information technology.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school provide for Emirati students?

Provision for Emirati students is just as good as that for all students. A strength of the school's assessment procedures was the way that the progress of Emirati students could be tracked and analysed. Senior staff kept a close eye on their progress. Assessment data and lesson observations indicated Emirati students were reaching similar levels of attainment and making progress comparable with their peers. Emirati students were welcomed by staff and other students. They felt equally at home as other students. Their particular interests and needs were taken seriously by all staff. Curriculum topics engaged them and provided opportunities for them to share their knowledge and understanding of local culture and traditions, for example, during social studies and humanities lessons. Those with special educational needs benefited from the same effective support provided for all students. Emirati students were present in the highest ability sets, for example when studying mathematics in the upper secondary phase.

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

Provision for students with special educational needs was outstanding. There had been significant development in planning and provision for students with special educational needs since the previous inspection. This included the establishment of very effective and cohesive leadership structures. There had been significant development of policies. Alongside the open and inclusive admissions policy there were guidelines for special educational needs, children needing extra support with language development and those who had particular gifts or talents. The implementation of policies into practice was very effective and outcomes were seen to be outstanding overall, especially for students with a wide range of needs. There was very effective communication with parents from point of entry into the school and almost all parents were actively involved in supporting the implementation of individual education plans (IEPs) and reinforcing their children's learning. A combination of external assessments, previous school records and internal testing as students enrolled, led to quick identification of students' individual needs. Transition from phase to phase was very effective for most students, especially where there was an overlap of leadership or support roles between phases. The monitoring of progress was well developed. There was good evidence of self-assessment by students with IEPs. The curriculum was modified suitably to support special educational needs. The enrichment programme and vertical tutoring were particularly effective. Resources were excellent across the phases.

How well does the school teach Arabic as a first language?

The quality of teaching varied widely across the school. In too many lessons in secondary, students sat passively listening, waiting for teachers to direct their learning. Where teachers set suitably challenging tasks for their students, learning was better. Teacher's questioning skills and their effective use of independent group work were very limited. Assessment information was rarely used to plan appropriate activities to meet the needs of all students particularly for those with significant gaps in their learning. There were low expectations of students in most phases. Critical thinking and independent enquiry were not promoted effectively in most lessons. Although the curriculum was modified to some extent to meet some of the wide range of students' needs in the school, support for those finding it difficult to speak Arabic and listen with understanding was limited. There were too few opportunities for creative writing as most writing tasks were over directed by the teachers.

What are the views of parents, teachers and students?

Before the inspection, the views of parents, teachers and 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	514	25%
	Last year	254	16%
Teachers	85		44%
Students	0		0%

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

Parents' views were overwhelmingly positive. Most were happy about the quality of education, including the teaching and information they received about their children's progress. Almost all felt their children enjoyed school. Most were pleased with their progress in English, mathematics and science and the way their children were guided towards the next steps in their learning. Most felt that their children were kept extremely safe around school and especially when travelling on the school buses. About a quarter of parents were concerned about the progress their children were making in Arabic as an additional language and Islamic Education. About a fifth of Muslim parents felt that their children did not know enough about Islam. However, most non-Muslim parents felt that their children understood the importance of Islamic values in Dubai.

Most teachers held positive views of the school. They reflected much of what the parents said. However, there were some comments from a small minority of teachers who expressed concerns about assessment systems, SEN support and communication between the staff.

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.

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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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