

INSPECTION REPORT

GEMS World Academy

Report published in April 2014

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT GEMS World Academy

Location	Al Barsha
Type of school	Private
Website	www.gemsworldacademy-dubai.com
Telephone	04-3736373
Address	Al Barsha South, Dubai P.O. Box 126260
Principal	Jason McBride (pending MoE approval)
Curriculum	IB
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-18 / KG 1 to Grade 12
Attendance	Acceptable
Number of students on roll	1853
Largest nationality group of Students	UK
Number of Emirati students	27 (less than 2%)
Date of the inspection	17th March to 20th March 2014

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The context of the school

GEMS World Academy, located in Al Barsha south, is a private school providing education for boys and girls of three to 18 years of age. There were 1853 students which was an increase of 27 per cent since the previous academic year. There were new students across all phases of the school.

The school followed the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum framework. There were external examinations in the IB Diploma programme (IBDP) in Grade 12. The Primary Years' Programme (PYP) was offered for students from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 5, the Middle Years' Programme (MYP), for students from Grades 6 to 10 and the Diploma Programme (DP) for those in Grades 11 and 12. The school was authorised by the International Baccalaureate organisation (IBO) for these programmes.

There were more than 80 nationalities represented at the school. The largest group of students were Arab nationals. The largest single group of students were from the UK making up nearly 9 per cent of the student body, while about 8 per cent of students were from the United States. Most students were at varying stages of learning English as an additional language. Less than two per cent of students were Emiratis. There were 172 teaching staff. This included a turnover of 12 teachers and 18 additional teachers for this academic year. All teachers had academic degrees; about 84 per cent of them had a teaching qualification.

Overall school performance 2013-2014

Good

Key strengths

- The outstanding provision and outcomes in Kindergarten;
- The outstanding personal responsibility of students across all phases;
- The outstanding curriculum quality;
- The outstanding protection and quality of support across all phases;
- The outstanding partnerships with parents and the community;
- The Outstanding management, including staffing, facilities and resources.

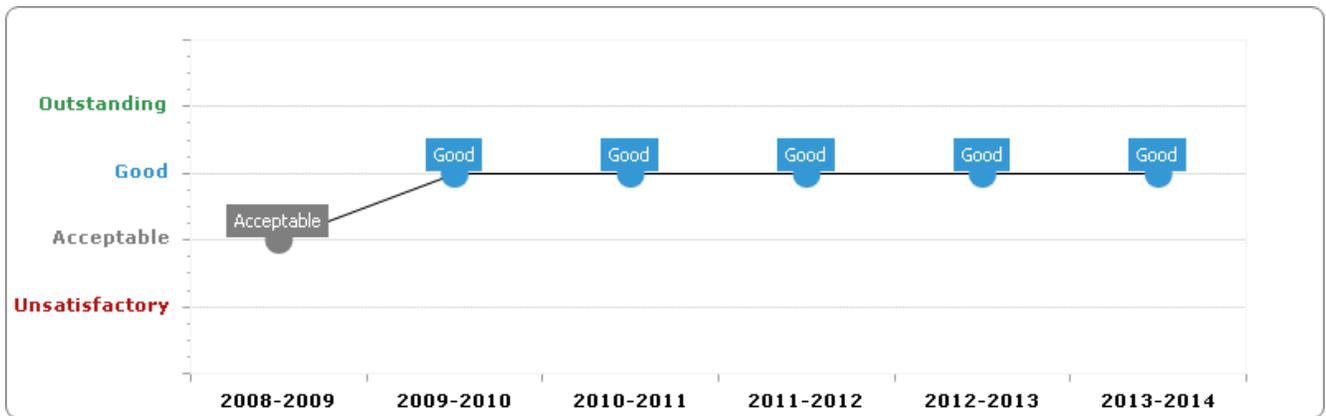
Recommendations

- School leaders at all levels should prioritise the improvement of learning and teaching;
- Ensure that improved analysis of student assessment data and self-evaluation lead to improvements in attainment and progress in all subjects particularly in Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Share best practice in teaching to ensure consistency and improvement;
- Improve learning by enabling students to explore their own questions and ideas, to think critically and to inquire.

Progress since the last inspection

- Improved attainment in Islamic Education in PYP and progress in DP.
- Improved attainment in Arabic as a first language in DP and progress in PYP and DP.
- Improved progress in Arabic as a second language in MYP.

Trend of overall performance



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

	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Islamic Education				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Arabic as a first language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Arabic as an additional language				
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Not Applicable
English				
Attainment	Outstanding	Outstanding	Good	Good
Progress	Outstanding	Outstanding	Good	Good
Mathematics				
Attainment	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good
Progress	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good
Science				
Attainment	Outstanding	Outstanding	Good	Good
Progress	Outstanding	Outstanding	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Quality of students' learning skills	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Personal responsibility	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Students' understanding of Islamic values and their local, cultural and global awareness	Good	Good	Good	Good
Community and environmental responsibility	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Teaching for effective learning	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Curriculum quality	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Curriculum design to meet the individual needs of students	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
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	Good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Parents and the community	Outstanding
Governance	Good
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the students' attainment and progress?

Attainment ranged from unsatisfactory to outstanding, with the most being good or outstanding. In Islamic Education, PYP was good but it was unsatisfactory in the other phases. Most students in PYP understood key Islamic values and knew the forms of worship. A few students demonstrated outstanding understanding of zakat. In the other phases, students demonstrated very limited understanding of Islamic concepts and practice. Attainment in Arabic as a first language was acceptable across the school. Most students' listening skills were secure. Speaking skills were less well-developed with mixed use of standard and colloquial Arabic. Reading skills of younger students, for their age, were more developed than that of older students. Most students showed appropriate comprehension skills. PYP students could write effectively. In MYP and DP, students' writing showed frequent spelling and structural errors. In English, attainment was outstanding in Kindergarten and PYP and good across the other phases. Kindergarten children spoke fluently in English, read in various contexts and could write informally about their experiences. PYP students had extensive English language skills through a variety of stimulating learning contexts. MYP students showed good language skills through critical thinking. Older students showed extended ideas in speech. Writing was less well developed as students moved through the school. Attainment in mathematics in Kindergarten was outstanding and good in the other phases. Children in Kindergarten modeled numbers to 20 or beyond. In the PYP, students were able to model fractions using manipulatives. MYP students could use substitution to evaluate equations. Senior students showed proficiency in calculus. Attainment in science in Kindergarten and PYP was outstanding and good in the other phases. Kindergarten and PYP students demonstrated high levels of understanding in real-world contexts, studying plants, animals and habitats. Scientific method was strong across the school and practical skills were well-developed. MYP and DP students showed capacity to design their own sophisticated experiments.

In Islamic Education and Arabic as a first language, progress was good in PYP and acceptable across other phases. Most PYP students made good progress in memorization and recitation skills of the holy Qur'an, Hadith and in learning about life of the Prophet (PBUH). They also made steady progress in developing their understanding of the forms of worship in Islam. MYP and DP students were developing basic understanding of key Islamic principles, values and concepts. Progress was slow in Quran recitation and developing deeper knowledge of Fiqh laws and Islamic practice. In Arabic as a first language, younger students had made good progress in all four aspects of the language. However, older students had fewer opportunities to improve speaking, reading and writing which limited their development. In Arabic as an additional language, students' listening and responding skills were improving as teachers more consistently used standard Arabic. Progress was slower in developing the ability to read or write independently. Progress in English was outstanding in Kindergarten and PYP and good in MYP and DP. There were extensive opportunities in lower grades to develop all skills. Progress in MYP and DP was impeded when the pace of learning slowed and

there was insufficient challenge. Children in Kindergarten made outstanding progress in mathematics and progress was good in other phases. In the PYP, progress in mathematics varied between the grades. Science was outstanding in Kindergarten and PYP and good in other phases. Well-planned lessons and a challenging science curriculum facilitated the development of knowledge, concepts, investigation and practical skills across the school particularly in Kindergarten and PYP.

[View judgements](#)

Quality of students' learning skills

Learning was outstanding in Kindergarten and good in other phases. Students took responsibility for their learning and learned extensively in collaboration with each other. Students were aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Most took steps to improve when given opportunities in lessons. They communicated their learning well and cooperate with others to achieve learning goals. They made connections to other areas of learning and to the real world. When given sufficient opportunities in class, they explored and learned independently, critically analysed and reflected on their learning. Students' use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in learning was strong.

[View judgements](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Personal responsibility was outstanding across the school. Behaviour in classrooms was excellent and students treated others with respect. They were self-reliant and welcomed constructive feedback. Students responded well to others. Relationships with teachers and with other students were respectful and considerate. They resolved difficulties in mature ways. Kindergarten and PYP students had excellent understanding of the need to make healthy lifestyle choices. Students took part in activities for healthy living. School data showed attendance across the school was just acceptable, being about 92%.

Student understanding of Islamic Values and their cultural and global awareness was good across all phases. Students had a good understanding of Muslim life and culture in Dubai. They appreciated and had a strong awareness and understanding of other cultures in their school and in Dubai. They had good knowledge and appreciation of many Islamic values, and discussed the impact of these on their own life. They had a good understanding of UAE culture, heritage and tradition.

Community and environmental responsibility in the Kindergarten were outstanding and good in other phases. Students were active community members through the student council and the Eco-Schools committee. The curriculum on community action and service provided opportunities for students to develop

understanding and actions. Students' work ethic and environmental awareness were well-developed. Students supported international causes through activities such as 'Sounds for Syria' and 'Schools for Asia'.

[View judgements](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

Teaching was outstanding in Kindergarten and good in other phases. Teachers in Kindergarten consistently demonstrated a very clear understanding of how children learn through exploration and play. Learning was enhanced by skillful teacher questioning. Expectations of students were realistic and achievable. Teaching elsewhere varied from outstanding to acceptable. In most lessons, teachers had good subject knowledge, planned well and had an understanding of how to match teaching to students' age and stage of development. Resources were used effectively for learning. The majority of teachers catered for the individual needs of students. In outstanding lessons teachers were creative and set high expectations. They provided opportunities for students to research independently, inquire and develop their own understanding. In these lessons critical thinking and higher order thinking skills developed more rapidly. Less successful lessons were driven by teachers, with prescriptive tasks that limited the learning of most students.

Assessment was outstanding in Kindergarten and good in other phases. In Kindergarten, assessment was used to plan the curriculum and support children's interests and their holistic development. Assessment was comprehensive and used to monitor children's progress and provide for next steps in learning. Appropriate feedback supported children's rapid improvement. In other phases, systems to monitor students' progress operated effectively. Overall, teachers knew their students' strengths and areas for development. However, a few staff did not interpret assessment information accurately to support a secure understanding of student's learning needs. The quality of feedback was helpful overall but some students did not understand how to use their individual targets to improve their work. Assessment was used well to plan the curriculum. It was less consistently used to plan teaching.

[View judgements](#)

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

Curriculum quality was outstanding in all phases. It was well-documented and provided an overview for effective monitoring and review. A broad and on-going review of subjects had given breadth and balance including cross-curricular links. Scope and sequence promoted challenge at all levels, although less so in Islamic Education and Arabic. Transition from Kindergarten to PYP was effective. Students were advised and comprehensively supported in course selection from MYP to DP and when graduating from DP. Curriculum review had targeted improvement in opportunities for critical thinking. Review and development were

ongoing to further develop cross curricular links in MYP. The breadth of extra-curricular activities was extensive and provided enrichment. These were supplemented by an extensive array of paid activities from private providers.

Curriculum design to meet the individual needs of students was outstanding in Kindergarten and good in other phases. The adaptation of curriculum for students with English as an additional language (EAL) and for those with special educational needs (SEN) was a strength. Lesson planning indicated modifications for Emiratis, but outcomes in Arabic and Islamic Education indicated inadequate curriculum design modifications. There was insufficient provision for the gifted and talented. Curriculum design did not sufficiently reflect the different needs of boys and girls, nor a consideration of different learning styles of students.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements for the health and safety of students were outstanding. Transport was well organized and well managed during school arrivals and departures. The Kindergarten provided safe areas, inside and outside the building for the children. Students felt safe and secure in the school. Buildings were in excellent order and regular checks were made to ensure very high standards were maintained. Records of building maintenance and students' health and welfare were exemplary. Evacuation procedures were regularly rehearsed to ensure there was a safe and speedy exit for all. The school's management and health professionals ensured that healthy choices were promoted. There was careful monitoring of canteen food. There was strong encouragement of physical activity. All staff were fully conversant with the child protection policy.

The quality of support was outstanding across the school. Relationships between staff and students were mutually respectful and based on high levels of trust. The school promoted a sense of personal responsibility. Students' behaviour was excellent. Management of attendance and punctuality was efficient. The school was inclusive and admitted students with a wide range of special educational needs. Learning needs were identified rapidly and accurately by specialists. When supported by specialist staff, students made excellent progress. When students reached a level with their peers they were integrated into regular classes. Advice and support from teachers and specialists such as careers advisors was highly valued by students.

[View judgements](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was good. Senior leaders had a clear vision and mission for the school and were dedicated to high standards. A few aspects of the work of the school had improved. Effective teams were evident. However, not all school leaders provided a clear direction for school improvement. Not all staff and students knew exactly what was required of them. Lines of communication were well-defined, professional and effective but key messages were not always communicated precisely to key stakeholders. Pedagogical leadership was not sufficiently demonstrated by all leaders. There was good capacity to secure further improvement.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. Most key priorities had been identified. Self-evaluation was systematic and an essential part of development planning. It had led to improvement in attainment and progress in a few subjects. Improvement plans were precise and detailed and based on analysis of data and recommendations from the previous inspection report. However, the action plan was not always clear about how improvement would be accurately measured. It contained insufficient detail about areas for development. Professional development had been accurately identified for the majority of staff through an effective performance management system. Progress had been made in addressing the previous inspection recommendations.

Partnerships with parents and the community were outstanding. There were highly productive links between the school and parents including the GEMS World Academy Parents' Association. There was an extensive range of parental committees that met regularly with the school principal. The views of parents were valued. There was frequent, effective communication between home and school providing for genuine partnerships. Parents were extensively involved in all aspects of the school which contributed to student learning. School reports were regular, informative and helpful in all areas of students' development, including next steps in learning. Links with other schools and the local community were extensive and productive in enhancing learning experiences for students.

Governance of the school was good. The Board of Governors supported the school well and had a positive influence. It actively sought the views of stakeholders and listened to their opinions such as from the GEMS World Academy Parent Association, and parents' suggestions, to gain better knowledge of the school. The Board actively supported the school in its improvement plans. However, they had not held the school sufficiently accountable for making only small improvements in teaching, learning and assessment, and limited improvement in student learning outcomes.

The management of the school including staffing, facilities and resources was outstanding. Management of the school was effective and efficient. Most teachers had a teaching qualification. Teaching and support staff

were deployed appropriately. Premises and facilities, including extensive specialist learning areas created a stimulating environment. The school was well-equipped and resourced and included significant Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Resources were well-matched to student needs and interests. Areas were accessible including for those with special educational needs. Timetabling allowed for well-organised lessons and activities.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school provide for Emirati students?

Emirati students represented less than 2 percent of students at the school. Attainment and progress in lessons was mostly aligned with their peers in most grades and subjects. School data showed that they were performing slightly below other students in a few areas. Emirati students made better progress than their peers in Islamic Education and Arabic as a first language. They were polite, well-behaved, and displayed a respectful attitude to peers and adults. They demonstrated good learning skills, and enjoyed working with others. They were highly engaged and participated well in lessons. They did not always complete their homework satisfactorily. The school curriculum included a few connections to Emirati traditions and culture.

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

The school was inclusive and accepted students for whom it could provide an effective education. On entry, needs were quickly and accurately identified by well qualified staff who had considerable expertise and experience. An extensive range of assessments appropriate to the student's learning need was used. Parents were closely involved in this process and were provided with a very detailed picture of their child's strengths and areas for development. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) were created after assessing students' academic abilities and personal needs. Targets were realistic but challenging. They were regularly reviewed with the student and parents. The curriculum was modified. There was in-class support and withdrawal, depending on students' particular needs. A few students were supported by a 'shadow' teacher, enlisted by parents and trained by the school. There were special arrangements for assessments such as extra time to complete work and examinations. Progress was more rapid when supported by specialist teachers. Provision by subject and class teachers was more variable, particularly in Arabic and Islamic Education. The identification of students who are gifted and talented was not well developed.

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

Teachers of Arabic as a first language had secure subject knowledge. PYP teachers demonstrated more developed understanding of how students learn. Overall, lessons were well planned; however the quality of delivery differed widely from teacher to teacher. PYP teachers used learner-centered strategies and provided effective learning opportunities. Teaching in MYP and DP was often didactic with learning controlled by the teachers who talked excessively and limited students' active participation. Younger students responded well to stimulating questions which promoted the development of thinking. However, interaction between teachers and students in the upper phases was limited by closed questioning and lack of motivation of students to engage in purposeful activities and productive discussions. The pace of learning was good in the PYP classes, but in MYP and DP, it was often slow and activities did not support students to achieve the intended learning objectives.

The school's curriculum was based on the Ministry of Education standards curriculum across all phases. Although the curriculum was reviewed on an annual basis, it was strictly based on the content of the prescribed textbooks. Curriculum resources in the MYP and DP years did not successfully enhance learning as the material used was often dull or provided limited opportunity for progression for students with specific linguistic needs. In PYP, curriculum was more vibrant and took into account the students' various learning styles and their different abilities and skills. ICT was integrated well into the curriculum and teaching in PYP, but not elsewhere.

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	197	17%
	Last year	218	23%
Teachers	65		38%
Students	32		12%

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

A minority of parents responded to their survey. Respondents were very positive with the quality of the education their child received. Almost all acknowledged that their child enjoyed school and was well supported; especially parents of SEN students. Almost all valued the teaching, agreed that work was interesting, challenging and students used a wide range of technology. They felt progress was good in English, but were concerned about progress in mathematics, Islamic Education and Arabic. A few students responded to the survey. They felt well looked after and safe. Almost all believed they made good progress in English and were able to use a good range of technology. They agreed that they were helped to become productive members of society. They felt teachers communicated well. A majority of Arabic speakers felt they made good progress in Arabic as a first language. However, they expressed concerns about progress in Islamic Studies, and a lack of curriculum modifications to meet the individual needs of all students. Teachers felt a significant strength was the good behaviour of the students. A few were concerned about communication from the leadership team.

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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