

GEMS Royal Dubai School Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Year 10

Report published May 2010

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Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report

Outstanding – exceptionally high quality of performance or practice.

Good – the expected level of quality for every school in Dubai.

Acceptable – the minimum level of acceptability required for Dubai. All key aspects of performance and practice in every school should meet or exceed this level.

Unsatisfactory – quality not yet at the level acceptable for schools in Dubai. Schools will be expected to take urgent measures to improve the quality of any aspect of their performance or practice that is judged at this level.

GEMS Royal Dubai School was inspected in October 2009 as part of the regular inspection of all schools in Dubai. The inspection covered key aspects of the work of the school at all stages. It evaluated students' achievements, the effectiveness of the school, the environment for learning, the school's processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. There was a particular focus on students' progress in Islamic Education (for Muslim students), Arabic, English, mathematics and science.

Basic information about the school

Located in Mirdif, GEMS Royal Dubai School is a private school providing education for boys and girls aged three to 15 years, from Foundation Stage to Year 10. The school follows the English National Curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 750 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Most parents made complimentary statements about the school and particularly mentioned the supportive school ethos. Most believed the school had made good progress since the last inspection. However, a minority expressed concern about their child's progress in Islamic and Arabic Education.

How well does the school perform overall?

GEMS Royal Dubai was a good school with some outstanding features. Since the previous report there have been significant improvements in planning, self-evaluation, leadership and management. This played a major part in the improved attainment and progress in all key subjects. There were some positive developments in Islamic Education and Arabic and across all other areas, the improvement was consistently good. In English, mathematics and science, teaching was generally of a high standard and teaching strategies met the needs of almost all students. In these areas, challenging questioning was used to extend students' learning and to develop complex thinking. Across the school, three quarters of all lessons were judged as good or outstanding. However, few of these were located in Islamic Education or Arabic.

In many areas, teachers made good use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance teaching and learning. For example, in science and in many sessions held in the library, laptop computers and hand held i-pods were used to supplement other teaching resources. Teachers had a clear commitment to the students' success and the mutual respect between teachers and learners contributed to a purposeful working atmosphere throughout the school. From initially variable levels on entry, most students made good progress, with their attainment in the English National Curriculum tests being at least equal to the expected level. Overall, students progressively developed independent learning, skills of research and analysis, and most used a rich vocabulary in their oral and written work. Procedures for assessing the students' work were mostly good, but teachers' marking was more variable in quality. Students were knowledgeable about the economic situation of the UAE and were aware of the main environmental issues affecting the larger world. They showed an understanding of and a respect for Islam.

The school was continuing to improve the use of assessment data to identify challenging targets for students. The good quality of the curriculum in most areas allowed students to develop their potential. This was mainly apparent in English, mathematics and science, yet even in these areas, some higher achieving students were not given sufficient challenge. A wide range of extra-curricular activities complemented opportunities for formal learning. The arrangements for the health and safety of students were good. Policies and procedures were clear to all. In and around the buildings safety issues had been addressed. Healthy lifestyles were promoted and procedures for child protection were clear and effective.

The leadership and management of the school had improved considerably since the last inspection, and the restructured system of senior and middle managers showed the significant progress made in distributing responsibilities. The many new appointments at middle management level had led to an increase in the number and quality of observations of classroom practice, the encouragement of peer observation and an increased awareness of the main strategic objectives of the school. These processes contributed to an extension of the exchange of good practice in teaching, learning and assessment. A further key factor in the resultant improvement in standards was the continuing strong support from parents. Informed by regular briefing sessions from the school, they knew how they could further add to their child's learning. However, despite some significant changes, the attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic required further improvement and issues of compliance with official regulations remained unresolved.

Key features of the school

- Effective leadership at senior and middle levels leading to increased attainment and progress in all areas;
- Weaknesses in the curriculum, attainment and progress and compliance with Ministry of Education regulations for Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Positive student behaviour and attitudes to learning, contributing strongly to the atmosphere of a learning community;
- The good level of care, ensuring that students' well-being and personal development were a priority at all times;
- Outstanding parental involvement supporting the school's ethos and helping it improve;
- Innovative use of ICT enhancing learning for many students, including the gifted and talented and those with special educational needs.

Recommendations

- Improve the arrangements for Islamic Education and Arabic so that:
 - they meet Ministry of Education curriculum requirements for time allocation
 - standards of attainment and progress are raised;
- Further develop the analysis and tracking of students' progress so that all teachers plan and use appropriate activities to match the learning needs of all students, especially those who are already achieving high standards.

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

Students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education was acceptable throughout the school. Most students knew the basic facts of the five pillars of Islam. They understood the significance of the ritual of prayer and could perform this. Most students knew key information about the Prophets, their works and their activities. Most students could recite parts of The Holy Qur'an. Although students' knowledge of Islam was good, few could discuss in depth how the main principles had an impact on their daily lives.

Attainment in Arabic was acceptable across the school. Progress from Years 1 to 4 was acceptable but unsatisfactory in all other year levels. Few secondary students made acceptable progress. In secondary classes, progress was often limited by students' inability to work independently of their teachers. Most primary students listened carefully to their teachers, and they accurately copied words and phrases from their textbooks. A few senior students speaking Arabic as their first language debated fluently, and responded carefully and accurately to their teachers' questions. Younger students expressed themselves with clarity and imagination.

Attainment and progress in English were good. Students' speaking and listening skills were at expected international levels. Compared with recent English National Curriculum results, in Key Stages 2 and 3 reading was above average and writing was well above average. Most students made good progress and made links between English and other subjects and applied their knowledge well to unfamiliar situations. In the Foundation Stage children followed a sequence of stories and identified alliteration. Classroom and corridor displays of Year 3 work on Tudor Monarchs included examples from art and writing for different audiences. Year 4 students used i-Pods to develop their vocabulary and research information. In the secondary school, students explored meaning and emotions through drama, through Dickensian character descriptions and poetry.

In mathematics, attainment and progress were good. Most students possessed knowledge and skills that were above the expected levels for their age. Individual children in Foundation Stage 1 could count up to 10 and, collectively, the group counted the total children present. Year 1 students were confident handling two numbers that added up to 10 and, by Year 2, they were adding three numbers, organising their work and using correct terminology. In Key Stage 2, students understood alternative approaches to problem solving. Older students knew the properties of some polygons and at Year 6 collected and interpreted data. At Key Stage 3, confident conversion between decimals and fractions was observed and geometrical operations such as drawing equilateral triangles presented no difficulty. Year 10 students, working on Pythagoras' Theorem used calculators effectively to find square roots.

Attainment and progress in science were good at all stages of the school, as confirmed by both internal and external benchmarks. Using scientific principles, Year 10 students were able to debate the merits of different forms of power generation for Dubai with reference to the impact upon the environment. Understanding of scientific concepts was consolidated by regular experimental work, which almost all students were able to carry out accurately, confidently and safely. At Year 3 students understood the notion of 'fair tests' through investigative work such as which paper is the best absorber. By the secondary stage they could plan to test a hypothesis experimentally.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

The level of students' attitudes and behaviour was good. The attitudes of almost all students were indicative of a keenness to learn. In moving around the school, or in class, they exhibited good behaviour. In an atmosphere of mutual respect, there existed relaxed student-staff relationships. Generally, the students arrived punctually to school and class: attendance was good overall.

Students' civic and Islamic understanding was good. Students were mature and responsible and several positive changes, such as the menu in the cafeteria, were the result of their mature input. They appreciated the benefits of living in a multi-cultural country and had a strong sense of responsibility towards those less fortunate than themselves, as seen in the student-driven fund-raising for charity. Students became more aware of the importance of Islam and its impact on their society as they moved up through the age groups. Most students spoke knowledgeably about the impact of Islam on life in Dubai.

The secondary students could confidently talk about Dubai's importance within the UAE and the wider world and most students were aware of the major industries of the country and its place within the UAE. The students could explain the need for care of the environment and conservation measures to which they could contribute.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching across the school was good and most teachers' knowledge of their subjects, combined with the use of varied teaching methods, promoted interest and challenge for students. Teachers' lesson planning was mostly good and focused attention on individual student's needs, goals and targets as well as teacher self-reflection and self-improvement, which were incorporated into future lesson planning. Teachers' use of available resources ranged from unsatisfactory to outstanding. A few teachers used basic resources such as textbooks and worksheets while, at the highest level, the use of sophisticated technology to enhance teaching and learning, for instance, electronic notebooks and hand held i-pods, was most effective. Teaching strategies were mostly varied to meet the needs of all students and included challenging questioning, multiple ways for students to show understanding, good pace and opportunities for enquiry, research and critical and complex thinking. Teacher-student interactions were almost always good and reflected the correct and appropriate use of

technical language and actual applications of learned material. There was mostly shared respect, interest and challenge. Classes were supported by well-trained, skilled and well deployed teacher assistants.

The quality of students' learning was good. Most students were able to demonstrate responsibility for aspects of their learning. The best examples of this were evident when students were confident of teacher and lesson expectations. Students, particularly those in Key Stages 2 to 4, were mostly aware of what they were required to do, what their individual targets were and how to demonstrate understanding. When questioned, students could explain how their learning related to other subjects and non-school environments. Almost all students were able to effectively work independently and in collaboration with classmates. Students were challenged to use enquiry and research skills in most subjects and the majority of students demonstrated good critical and higher order thinking skills when using the library, ICT and problem-solving.

Assessment throughout the school was good and was used in most classes to improve teaching methods. However, marking did not always identify to students how they could improve their work. Examples were seen of teacher and student assessment, self-assessment and peer-assessment practices. Teacher assessment evidence included photographs at Foundation Stage, folios of work in some primary and secondary classes, video and electronic recorded activities and class/unit tests which were all used to meet assessment requirements of the English National Curriculum. As a result of the analysis of specific class and key stage assessment data the focus of most lessons, activities and resources was modified to reflect student strengths and weaknesses. Students with special educational needs were identified through assessment and were given good additional support both in the classroom and a specialist centre.

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

The quality of the curriculum was good at all stages and reflected the English system. This, together with appropriate distributions of subject time, ensured breadth and balance for all students with a strong emphasis on personal development and the school's core values. The first cohort of Year 10 students was offered a broad range of options. The delivery of the curriculum through a focus on child-centred learning was often outstanding but variable. This inconsistency was particularly apparent in Islamic Education and Arabic and compounded by non-compliance with Ministry of Education time requirements. The leadership team ensured a coherent and regular review of curriculum planning which was evident in subject planning frameworks. These showed clear progression and a commitment to meeting the needs of all children. This aim was well met by creative use of "The ACE Centre", teaching assistants and differentiated approaches, but overall practice was variable. There were good arrangements for transition from Year 6 to Year 7. Students received appropriate guidance for subject choices in Year 10 through an options evening and careers education delivered within personal, health and social education. The curriculum was enhanced by an extensive range of extra-curricular

opportunities which provided for all ages and interests and were accessed by almost all students. In the primary stage, curriculum design assured good integration of cross-curricular links and skills and this was evolving in the secondary school. The use of school blogs, laptops and podcasts were good examples of ICT being used well to support learning. The school made good and effective use of the environment and the local community to bring relevance and meaning to learning. During the inspection a Year 2 visit to a local park supported the study of plants and animals in the local environment.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Attention to the health and safety of the students was good throughout the school. Young students waited inside the building until they were collected at the end of school and traffic was controlled outside the school gates. The two new, well-qualified, nurses had continued to implement the procedures to cater for students' needs. Fire prevention regulations were strict and drills carried out on a regular basis, with quick and orderly evacuations. Safety procedures were also a high priority in the science department. The café and canteen served foods selected for healthy eating by the student council.

The quality of support for students was good. The relationship between staff and students was good and students were confident in knowing they were supported with good quality counselling and pastoral care. New students were helped to integrate well into the life of the school. The reward system provided a good incentive for students always to do their best. There had been improvements to the tracking system for students' well-being and academic progress. These included well-considered targets which led to improved support being directed to students requiring assistance. Good attendance was encouraged through the school's diligent recording and follow-up of absence.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The Principal provided effective leadership to the school and the senior leadership team had clear roles and responsibilities, including that for sections of the school improvement plan. The newly-implemented structure included a middle management tier of year group leaders. The use of a well-specified team leader handbook helped ensure consistency in roles and responsibilities across most curriculum areas, although this had yet to extend to Islamic Education and Arabic. Performance management systems were thorough and the deepening of this process since the last inspection enhanced the atmosphere of collective responsibility. Overall, senior and middle managers showed the capacity to carry through further improvements.

There were effective whole school self-evaluation procedures, including the regular use of questionnaires and other methods with students, parents and teachers. There was regular observation of teachers by managers and team leaders, all of whom had received training in lesson observation and feedback. There had been significant progress in addressing the main recommendations of the previous inspection report, especially in relation to the reinforcement of planning, monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the school. Whilst measures taken to raise the attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic had begun to have effect, further improvement in these areas was still required in relation to meeting Ministry of Education requirements. Teachers of Islamic Education and Arabic worked closely with teachers of modern languages to improve the planning and teaching of Islamic Education and Arabic.

There were outstanding links with parents, who were regularly involved in the daily life of the school, for example, by acting as classroom helpers and assisting on visits to outside events. Parents were highly supportive of the school and its leadership. There were many opportunities for them to meet with senior staff or teachers, including a weekly series of coffee morning for parental year groups, hosted by senior staff. Parents were regularly consulted about school developments. They were well informed of their child's progress through personal contact with teachers and through exchange of information contained in home-school communications. An electronic bulletin board on the school's website was regularly updated, including the provision of live video coverage of school activities or outside visits. Parents' understanding of their children's learning was enhanced by briefing sessions organised by the school to introduce new areas or phases of learning. There was extensive use of the local business community to enhance the curriculum.

School managers had a clear interest in the educational success of the school and systematically held the school to account for progress in key areas. Parents were also represented in some of these mechanisms. School managers had a clear role in the strategic planning of the school and aimed to extend the representation of stakeholders in this process.

The school had a high quality environment, including specialist areas such as a gymnasium, library, swimming pool, music and art facilities. The use of the library as a resource centre was particularly well-planned and there was extensive and inventive use of a wide variety of ICT. There were a sufficient number of well qualified teachers, although in Islamic Education and Arabic further development of teachers' capacity was required. New and revised staffing arrangements, including teacher exchanges between the Foundation Stage and primary phases, the appointment of a library manager and the enhancement of staffing in ICT, had a significantly positive effect on students' learning experiences.

Summary of inspection judgements

In their evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the school, the inspection team made judgements about the following aspects of the school's performance.

Four descriptors are: Outstanding; Good; Acceptable; Unsatisfactory.

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education?			
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?			
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?			
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary
Attainment	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?			
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary
Attainment	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?			
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary
Attainment	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?			
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Good

How good are teaching and learning?			
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Good	Good

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?			
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good

How well does the school protect and support students?			
Age group:	Foundation	Primary	Secondary
Health and safety	Good	Good	Good
Quality of support	Good	Good	Good

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
Quality of leadership	Good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Outstanding
Governance	Good
Staffing, facilities and resources	Good

How well does the school perform overall?
Good

Next Steps

The school has been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how it will address the main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents. 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.

More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at www.khda.gov.ae.

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