

GEMS Wellington International School Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Year 13

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 Wellington International School was inspected in February 2010 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 Jumeirah, GEMS Wellington International School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Foundation Stage to Year 13, aged three to 18 years. The school follows the UK National curriculum. At the time of the inspection, there were 1772 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Almost all parents said their children liked school. Most parents said they were unsure of how well their children were doing in Islamic Education while a majority of parents were happy with the progress of the students in Arabic. Almost all parents thought that progress in English, mathematics and science was good or better. Almost all respondents to the questionnaire felt that the school supported the children well, encouraged independence and had high expectations of the students. They felt that the students were treated fairly and a large majority thought the teaching was good. Almost all parents felt that the school provided a wide range of extra-curricular activities and shared good quality information about the progress of their children. It was felt that the staff showed good concern for the students, promoted healthy lifestyles and protected the students appropriately. Most parents said the school responded effectively to issues of concern and stated that there was good leadership. Almost all said there were good school and parent links. A few parents were unaware of the quality of the school's response to the last inspection.

How well does the school perform overall?

The overall performance of GEMS Wellington International School was outstanding. Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable. In Arabic, attainment was acceptable and progress was good. In the Foundation Stage attainment and progress in English, mathematics and science were outstanding while in the primary, secondary and post-16 sections of the school these were good. All aspects of the students' personal and social development were outstanding throughout the school. Since the previous inspection, the school had worked effectively to help students of all ages understand how to learn and what personal characteristics each student had that would contribute to the identification and implementation of the next steps in learning. Students' behaviour in the school was exemplary. They displayed outstanding awareness of their civic responsibilities and there was a strong appreciation of and value given to local traditions and cultures and Islam.

Teaching in the Foundation Stage was outstanding and it was good in the rest of the school. Almost all teachers had outstanding knowledge of their subjects and the partnerships between staff, students and parents to promote effective teaching strategies were strong features of the work of the school. Learning was outstanding at all levels in the school. The entire school community had collaborated to create a learner profile document that was shared and understood. There was a strong and effective emphasis placed on ensuring the learner had responsibility for their learning, identified the next steps easily and accurately and could use a range of strategies with teachers and peers to achieve relevant targets. Celebration of learning was a very well developed strategy across the school. Students used a very mature vocabulary in describing their learning and could support teachers effectively in setting out a clear learning agenda. Assessment was outstanding. In all parts of the school, assessment systems were in place to ensure that the students understood and took responsibility for what they learnt. Despite a wide range of learning styles and abilities at all stages, the school had used the learner profile as a means of knowing whole school and individual attainment and trends in progress. This knowledge was effectively transmitted into identifying the best teaching and learning strategies for each student. Arrangements for the health and safety of the students were outstanding. The school provided a safe and secure environment for all. Mature and respectful partnerships were evident between students, staff and parents. Appropriate advice for students at all levels was readily available. The school tracked each student's progress consistently and there was an extremely positive approach to handling any behaviour issues that arose. This was based on the assessment information at hand being used to promote positive re-enforcement and celebration of successes.

Leadership and management were outstanding. The new Principal of the school had successfully embedded a culture of rigour allied to the empowerment of students, teachers and senior leaders. There was a confidence in the senior leadership and a belief that the school had identified a genuine shared vision based on learning. This had been effectively used to help the school know itself very well. Self-evaluation and improvement planning were outstanding. Due to the focus on learning, the staff and students worked tirelessly together to learn how best to improve. Partnerships with parents and the local community were

outstanding. Seeking to use the widest range of communication means available, parents' views were constantly sought to inform the school's actions on how best improve the work of the school. Governance was good. There was a sound understanding of the need to involve all stakeholders in the management of the school. However, formal structures to ensure the appropriate impact of this collaboration at governance level were underdeveloped. Staffing, facilities and resources were outstanding. The school infrastructure was of a very high order and the school community used the resources at its disposal very effectively.

Key features of the school

- The inclusive nature of the school and its highly effective work with a wide range of student needs;
- The outstanding learning skills of students who took responsibility for their own learning;
- The outstanding leadership that promoted rigorous self-evaluation and improvement planning throughout the entire school community;
- The outstanding teaching and learning in Foundation Stage and good teaching throughout the rest of the school;
- The highly effective curriculum design and management complemented by thorough analysis and use of assessment data;
- The highly effective assessment procedures that involved students fully in knowing the next steps in their learning;
- The outstanding arrangements for the protection and support of students;
- The highly supportive, committed and involved parent body.

Recommendations

- Raise standards of attainment in Islamic Education and Arabic and improve progress in Islamic Education;
- Extend best practice in teaching to ensure that students experience high quality learning across all subjects and at all stages of the school;
- Involve parents more fully in accountability and management structures within the governance of the school.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable across the primary and secondary stages. Most Year 1 students knew the Pillars of Islam and memorised a few short chapters from The Holy Qur'an. In Year 2, they worked well in groups to write about the blessings of Allah. However, in Year 4, only a few students had sufficient understanding of the significance of fasting in Ramadan. Year 6 students developed basic knowledge about Judgement Day and learnt a few examples of the impact of this knowledge on their daily lives. In Year 7 students developed a basic understanding of honesty as an Islamic value. Year 9 and Year 11 students discussed women's rights in Islam; however their Islamic knowledge about the topic was basic.

Attainment in Arabic was acceptable and progress was good in both primary and secondary. In listening, most students of Arabic as an additional language could follow teachers' instruction in Arabic, listened effectively to their peers' reading and answering. In grammar, most students used pronouns appropriately. They knew the types of words needed to answer simple questions at lower primary level and increasingly more complex questions in more senior years. In Years 1 to 6, most students could identify letters and read words from texts well. Older students read and re-ordered parts of complex sentences when challenged to do so. They also read many passages from a range of sources. Their writing of letters and familiar words was at an age-appropriate level. Arab students had good spelling skills and the majority of students in Years 10 and 11 could write long passages of a good standard.

Attainment and progress in English were outstanding in the Foundation Stage. Language acquisition and listening skills were highly developed. This prepared students well for the introduction to literacy and writing in primary school. Attainment and progress throughout the rest of the school were good with many outstanding features, most notably the connections students made between the four key skills. Students' writing skills were above international standards at all stages. Students wrote in a variety of genres using what they had read and experienced to inspire high quality imaginative work. Students applied their knowledge and understanding in English effectively across the curriculum to provide relevance and individuality to reading and writing tasks. This was shown most clearly in the wide variety of publications that students regularly produced, reflecting their various interests.

In mathematics, attainment and progress in the Foundation Stage were outstanding. Children could count accurately, recognising numbers of objects. They could sort effectively and they had outstanding capacity to apply their knowledge of mathematics in various contexts when asked to measure, predict, analyse and calculate. Attainment and progress in Key Stages 1 to 4 and at post-16 were good. Students in Year 1 recognised and named shapes that they saw around the school. In Year 6, almost all students were achieving standards that were above levels expected for their age. Their good progress was seen in their ability to use a range of data to solve problems. In Key Stage 3, almost all students were performing above the appropriate international benchmark while a minority had made outstanding progress and

were working on post-16 qualifications. Students in Year 11 showed exceptional performance when working out the lengths of circular arcs and areas of sectors.

In the Foundation Stage, attainment and progress in science were outstanding. Children's increasing awareness of their senses developed well alongside their language acquisition. Across the rest of the school attainment and progress were good. Students made outstanding progress in their scientific thinking, their investigation skills and their abilities to apply what they learned to new situations. When students carried out investigations they drew conclusions from the data they collected. In the secondary school, students developed their critical thinking and reasoning skills. They planned and carried out investigations; some were able to discuss the accuracy, reliability and validity of their results. In the post-16 years, students were developing their questioning and evaluation of scientific data.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Attitudes and behaviour were outstanding across the school. Students were very positive about their school and their learning. They worked well in groups, collaborated, respected and supported one another. Individually, their approach to learning was mature and focused well on applying learning to new situations. They had very strong relationships with the staff based on a shared vision for improving learning as defined in the school's learner profile. Attendance was good and almost all students were punctual and arrived to school and classes in good time.

Membership of the school council provided students with an excellent opportunity to develop outstanding civic and leadership skills. Students also participated in various other committees around the school to improve the quality of the school life. They participated in charitable events around Dubai and in other countries. They had developed a mature respect for Islam, believing that safety in Dubai was achieved mainly because of the Islamic nature of the country. Students developed strong understanding about the UAE through various units in the curriculum and through the events the school organised and excursions to places of significant cultural importance. The school had developed effective links with local schools to promote mutual understanding. Students valued and respected the multi-cultural nature of Dubai.

Students' economic and environmental understating was outstanding. Students were aware of the economic challenges facing Dubai. They knew significant people in the history of the UAE and Dubai and the contributions they had made to the progress of Dubai. Students understood they were contributing to the UAE by being positive community members and looking after the environment; keeping it clean and contributing in the social and environmental initiatives. Students participated in events to raise awareness about water conservation. They were aware of various ways to save water. They participated in various environmental initiatives and had good understanding of global environmental issues.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching, learning and assessment were outstanding in the Foundation Stage. Teachers were skilful practitioners with a very good understanding of early years education. Well-focused whole class teaching sessions, together with opportunities for choice of activities across each year group, developed the children's language, their understanding of number and of the world around them. Children developed socially, learned new skills and knowledge, and were growing in independence in a secure and supportive environment. Assessment was well organised, regular and non-intrusive. It enabled teachers to identify children's personal preferences and learning styles. Very good use was made of assessment data to plan for the next stages in the children's learning. Teaching across the primary and secondary schools and post-16 was good. Teachers had very good subject knowledge. Lesson planning was outstanding and catered for the full range of learners' needs. Learning objectives were clear and shared with students. Most lessons were briskly paced and engaged students quickly in their learning. Teaching was characterised by the use of good, probing questions that enabled assessment of understanding as well as development and application of students' thinking. Teachers used information and communication technology (ICT) well, including, for example interactive whiteboards and data projectors, to promote interest and learning. A very successful thematic week in Year 6 combined elements of science, mathematics, drama, ICT and languages. There was a variety of independent, paired and group-work across subjects and an emphasis on enabling students to become self-sufficient, co-operative and collaborative learners. On a few occasions, however, over-direction, by providing too much guidance and too tight a control on the pace of lessons, restricted learning and did not allow students to take the responsibility of which they were capable.

The quality of learning was outstanding across the school. A key factor in this success was the creation of the school's learner profile which had collective input from and ownership by all members of the school community. From an early age, students took responsibility for their own learning. They were keen to learn and enjoyed lessons. They applied their learning in a variety of ways, both indoors and out. For example, Year 1 students developed their knowledge of 3-dimensional shapes through a learning walk around the school. Younger science students examined a teacher's car to see how processes in the design stages came to practical reality. They participated well in activities with others, working co-operatively and collaboratively. Students regularly engaged in peer tutoring and peer assessment; there was a culture that established everyone as learners within the school. Research and investigation were embedded within the learning process throughout the school. Students were active learners and used resources well to make progress. Higher order thinking and discussion were common in many lessons because of the very good questioning skills of teachers and the skills-based curriculum that was taught.

The quality and use of assessment were outstanding. From the Foundation Stage onwards, students were involved increasingly in self and peer assessment. Students in the secondary school knew how they were being assessed, how well they were doing against assessment criteria and what they needed to do to improve. Assessment was used proactively to help students identify how they could move between courses in order to maximise their potential. The quality of marking and feedback to students was impressive. In lessons, very good dialogue with teachers contributed much towards students' and teachers' awareness of how well students were progressing in each subject.

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

Curriculum provision was outstanding in all key stages. There was a clear rationale for the curriculum which placed students' learning firmly at the centre. The curriculum was extremely well planned and subject to regular, systematic review by teachers and students. Learning groups comprising of teachers, parents and students contributed effectively to the curriculum debate. Parents were given the opportunity to sample the curriculum through being students for a day. Staff made excellent links across the key stages. There was impressive cross-curricular links. For example, Year 8 students improved their literacy skills whilst studying history and Year 9 geography students effectively developed data handling skills when researching a topic on India. Students requiring particular support to achieve their full potential receive comprehensive, targeted help through the school's Achievement Centre. A few students were working at levels of between two and four years above that expected of their age. Extra-curricular provision was outstanding. The school provided an exceptionally comprehensive range of activities that met both student and parent aspirations. Across all phases of the school, students had access to a wide range of activities from origami to scuba diving and had the opportunity to travel to many parts of the world including, for example England, USA and Vietnam. A range of courses for parents, including Arabic, was in place and attendance at and satisfaction with these courses was consistently high. The school had links with other schools in the UAE and other countries. There were good opportunities for students to take responsibility through activities such as the prefect system, model United Nations and the sports teams. Extensive community involvement was in place, such as in Year 4 and Year 6, where the students linked their class work to established environmental groups.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The school provided outstanding student protection and support. Medical care was effectively organised and information relative to a child's welfare was sent to parents on a daily basis. A full-time physician and two nurses were in the building when students were present. The school premises were clean and well maintained. Records of safety and health related activities, such as fire drills, were accurate and up to date. School security and maintenance were outstanding. The facilities and equipment provided a safe and attractive learning environment. Students were respectful of the school and worked to keep it tidy. The achievement centre was a key aspect of the school offering intake assessment for all students, as well as remedial support. The school was inclusive in its enrolment policies and the range of students from the Foundation Stage to Year 13 included students with a range of special educational needs.

Relationships between staff and students were very positive. The student mentoring programme ensured that each child was supported by a staff member at least three times during the school year. This practice helped with the development of the high degree of mutual respect evident in the school. Attendance was good and student information was tracked effectively for social and educational purposes. Career, educational and personal counselling was available to students at the appropriate stages. A high level of student-teacher engagement outside of the classroom added to the overall positive environment of the school.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership and management of the school were outstanding. The school had a highly effective distributed leadership structure in place. The newly appointed Principal had used her considerable experience at senior leadership level to instil an increased level of enthusiasm, commitment and rigour to the work of the senior management team. She had developed a directed and collegiate climate of improvement in the school. Roles and responsibilities had been efficiently re-constructed to reflect personal attributes, the developing skill-sets of staff and the major priorities of the school. Professional development for senior leaders had focused on the need to ensure that the promotion of a relevant, achievable and successful learning experience was the key priority of all leadership actions. Close, open and purposeful relationships were seen between all leadership levels and the entire learning community in the school. Teachers were encouraged to take initiative with the creation of innovative learning experiences and to respond positively to the management of the change agenda set out by the senior leaders.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were outstanding. The school knew itself very well. Action planning reflected appropriate priorities with realistic success criteria. All initiatives focused on learner improvement. Teacher appraisal was focused on the effectiveness of teaching in its support of learning. The views of all elements of the school community were regularly sought to ensure a collective vision and direction. The objectives of the action plan arising from the previous inspection report were being met.

Partnerships with parents and the community were outstanding. Parents were welcomed into the school as members of the learning community. They acted as support for teachers in classes and as learners themselves when, for example, they participated in the Arabic classes organised for the parent body. Several parents also served as advisors to senior leadership on a range of issues. The school had developed very effective means of communicating with, listening to and learning from parents. This was done through surveys, interviews and meaningful interaction with the parents' association. During the inspection, parents were observed attending a range of events designed to provide information on curriculum, to inform learning styles, to engage with celebrations of success and to assist in developing solutions to difficulties being experienced by their children. All parents interviewed during the inspection were extremely supportive of the school's work and were enthusiastic at the progress being made to include them in relevant matters. They expressed a strong desire to maintain this positive momentum, particularly in relation to the development of meaningful roles in the governance of the school. The school had many and varied links with the local community and the wider world. Local schools, businesses and areas of interest were all used effectively as learning opportunities. Students were supported in their efforts to act charitably towards those less fortunate than themselves.

Governance in the school was good. A new accountability structure had been put in place. Staff members were now being held to account to the governors through formal appraisal ratings. Through this, teachers and senior leaders had the opportunities to inform, through a wide range of mechanisms, those in a governance role about the work and future direction of the school. Parents did not yet have a direct role in the management of the school.

Staffing, facilities and resources were outstanding. All teachers were appropriately qualified and the staff in the school's achievement centre had suitable qualifications to support those in need. The school has developed all staff professionally on a range of issues identified by senior management and following self-evaluation activities undertaken by students, teachers and parents. Almost all teachers were knowledgeable about their subject and how students learn. The learning environment of the school was of a very high quality. Extensive facilities were available to support the variety of learning styles and needs across the entire range of subjects on offer. The school had reviewed its display policy and the process for the selection of work on display was highlighted as part of the school's overall contribution to ensuring that all students' work was shown. All aspects of the school's work were well resourced. Extensive use was made of the range of ICT facilities available by students and staff. Libraries throughout the school were well stocked and regularly used. Across the curriculum, almost all teachers used the range of learning resources available to enhance the practical learning experience of the students.

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 Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Not Applicable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attitudes and behaviour	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Economic and environmental understanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Teaching for effective learning	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Assessment	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Curriculum quality	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of support	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

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

How well does the school perform overall?
Outstanding

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.

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