

# GEMS World Academy Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Grade 11

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 World Academy 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 Al Barsha South, GEMS World Academy is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 11, aged three to 17 years. The school follows a curriculum based on the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (PYP) and Middle Years Programme (MYP). At the time of the inspection, the school was in its second year of operation and the Superintendent and the two heads of school had been appointed during the last year. At the time of the inspection, there were 620 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. Overall, parents were positive about the school. Almost all said their children liked school; that behaviour in school was good; their children were expected to work hard, do their best and were encouraged to become independent learners. They also believed that their children were kept safe and healthy in school and that staff had concern for the care and welfare of their children. Most parents considered that the school was well led, that teaching was good, and that their children were treated fairly at school. They said that there were good links with parents and that they felt comfortable about approaching the school with a question or complaint. They valued the range of activities provided by the school. Although most said that they received good information about the progress of their children, and were happy about their children's progress in English and mathematics, they were less sure about the progress in Islamic Education, Arabic and science. A minority felt they could know more about how to help their children at home with school work. More than a few were not clear about the school's links with the local community or how well the school had responded positively to the recommendations of the previous inspection report.

## How well does the school perform overall?

GEMS World Academy provided a good quality of education for students. Over the last year there had been major changes in the senior administrators of the school. Through the commitment of the new senior administrators the school was developing rapidly. Nevertheless, there were key aspects requiring further development. Students came from diverse backgrounds and there was a range of nationalities. As a result, their performances in the key subjects varied. In Kindergarten (KG), children's attainment and progress in English and mathematics were good and acceptable in science. In the main school attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic were acceptable. Attainment was also acceptable in English, although progress was good in the Secondary school as a result of the good support provided for those students learning through English as an additional language. In mathematics, attainment and progress was good in the Elementary school and acceptable in the Secondary phase, where many students had been admitted to the school with low attainment in mathematics. However, in science, attainment and progress were acceptable in the Elementary school and good in the Secondary and Post-16 phases. The attitudes, behaviour and civic understanding of students were good, although their understanding of economic issues was weaker.

The quality of teaching and learning was good overall, but there was variability in practices across the school. In the best lessons, students were involved in activities that promoted thinking and deepened understanding. There was good attention to developing skills in how to learn and students regularly took part in self and peer assessment. Teachers' assessment of their students was more consistent in Kindergarten than in the main school. The quality of the curriculum was good overall from KG to Grade 10 and acceptable in Grade 11. The curriculum was developing but, in some subjects, there was a lack of progression in learning. The school did not comply with the Ministry of Education requirements for the teaching of Islamic Education and Arabic. Grade 11 students were working towards a school diploma, which had a broad range of subjects, but was not validated by any accrediting body. Nevertheless, a few were following an Advanced Placement (AP) programme and there were plans to introduce the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme. Cross-curricular links were established and there was a strong, balanced programme of after-school activities. The provisions for students' health and safety were outstanding and the quality of support was good. A particular strength was the provision for students who needed support with English and with learning in general. The quality of leadership and management was good and, together with support from the school's owner, there was clear capacity for further improvement. Good self-evaluation systems were in place although there was inconsistency in the evaluations of teaching, learning, assessment and tracking. Partnerships with parents were good and improving. There was a developing parents' council. Governance was good and the owner was holding the school to account for all aspects of its performance. However, there was no formal channel by which other stakeholders had formal input into the accountability process. Staffing, facilities and resources were outstanding and the school provided a high quality environment for learning.

## Key features of the school

- The school had developed rapidly in moving towards consolidating and spreading the best teaching and assessment practice in order to realise its vision;
- There was good leadership with a clear vision for the development of the school and good capacity for improvement;
- The diverse backgrounds of the school leaders complemented each other and provided a balanced approach to international education that served the needs of a multi-national student body;
- The school provided a purposeful environment for learning through the inspiring building and excellent facilities and resources;
- Students had good attitudes, and displayed good behaviour and a sense of responsibility;
- There was good, well-organised support for students who need extra help for English;

## Recommendations

- Ensure full compliance with the Ministry of Education curriculum requirements for Islamic Education and Arabic;
- Monitor the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and tracking, in order to identify more clearly the progress that is being made in raising attainment, and sharing good practices;
- Continue to review the curriculum to improve continuity and progression;
- Ensure that all students obtain an internationally recognised qualification by the time they leave school.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable. Grade 2 students knew the Islamic manners during meal times. They memorised the supplications to be said before and after the meal. In Grade 4, students developed sound knowledge about cleanliness as a prerequisite for Salat. They knew the steps of ablution and understood the Prophetic teachings about the topic. Grade 6 students developed basic knowledge about the importance of Salat; they knew its main steps and how to perform it. Students in Grade 8 knew the main themes in the Qur'anic chapter they read. Grade 10 students knew the difference between Makki and Madani Qur'an. They understood the main features of each although they had some difficulties reading the Qur'anic texts.

Attainment and progress in Arabic were acceptable. Children in the KG were able to identify and trace a few alphabet letters. Grade 2 students read isolated words and they copied the same words to develop their basic writing skills. In Grade 4 students learned vocabulary about the forest but they rarely used the new vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Students in Grade 6 learning Arabic as first language applied the grammatical rules correctly. They made good progress in talking about themselves; they could introduce themselves confidently and could engage in short conversations. In Grade 8, students were able to name items on the dinner table. Grade 10 students were able to distinguish between plural and singular nouns and they developed an acceptable understanding of grammar.

Attainment and progress in English in the KG were good. Children spoke with confidence and many could read simple sentences and recognised most letters and sounds. They were beginning to read with increasing fluency and expression. Attainment in English was acceptable across the main school. Progress was acceptable in the Elementary grades and good in Secondary. Most Elementary students spoke clearly and could identify speech and dialogue using lively stories. However, by the end of Elementary many were not reading confidently enough and some of their written work lacked quality. In Secondary written work improved. Students wrote for a variety of purpose and used literary devices well. Students read with increasing fluency as they progressed through the Secondary grades but reading for pleasure was not, for them, a high priority. Handwriting and presentation of work was variable.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were good in the KG and Elementary school, and acceptable in the Secondary school. Children in the KG had a good sense of number and measure. Elementary school students developed a good use of mathematical vocabulary and mathematics inquiry skills. By Grade 2, most could add two-digit numbers accurately.

However, students' understanding of some concepts was limited, for example Grade 4 students were unsure of how different graphs were used for different types of data. Attainment was good in lower secondary grades and most Grade 7 students could apply Pythagoras' theorem to solve simple problems. In the upper grades, the top stream had good attainment, but many students had been admitted with low attainment and a few students in Grade 10 had difficulties in calculating the areas of compound shapes.

Attainment and progress in science were acceptable in the KG and Elementary and good in the Secondary and Post-16 stages. From Grade 6 onwards students were frequently able to demonstrate understanding of scientific knowledge and concepts beyond expectations for their ages. In the KG, children could understand the ideas of recycling, reusing and reduction when sorting rubbish into different categories. In Grade 6 students presented sophisticated research projects on healthy pregnancy using a variety of media, and communicated a deep understanding of the relevant issues. Theoretical understanding was regularly supported by experimental and investigative work which students of all ages were able to carry out confidently and safely.

## How good is the students' personal and social development?

The attitudes and behaviour of the students were good. The school provided a purposeful environment in which harmonious relationships were always evident; this was a significant strength. Students interacted well with each other and staff, showing mutual respect. They willingly participated in learning activities and moved in an orderly manner around school. No incidents of poor behaviour, bullying or fighting were noted. Students made the most of opportunities offered by the school to take responsibilities through sport or assemblies. The student council, made up of elected members across the whole school, had a significant role in representing students' views. Attendance and punctuality were good.

Civic understanding was good. Even the youngest children were aware of the many nationalities in Dubai. Others saw the multi-cultural aspect as an asset to be valued, enhancing their appreciation of other cultures and faiths. The school was making an increasing commitment to embedding aspects of Dubai's culture within the curriculum and celebrating events like UAE National Day. Students had an acceptable understanding of Islam; they could describe the purpose of fasting and many felt that Islam made an important contribution in making Dubai a safe place.

Economic and environmental understandings were acceptable. Younger children were aware of the landmarks of Dubai whilst older students could readily identify the factors contributing to the economy, and the impact of the international financial crisis. However, students in Grades 1 to 5 showed little awareness and many did not know the origin of the water supply. Most students were aware of environmental issues from initiatives in school and the community. Older students had a deeper appreciation of sustainability of energy sources.

## How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching and learning was good overall, although there were inconsistencies in teaching quality across the school. The majority of teachers had good subject knowledge. They used interactive whiteboards well to engage students and made good use of time. However, in a few lessons, the pace of learning was too slow, for example when activities did not closely meet the learning needs of the students, and when tasks lacked challenge for the students. On occasions, teachers talked for too long and students lost interest. Sometimes adherence to textbooks was too close, which limited students' learning. Nevertheless, many lessons were characterised by good explanations and probing questions that elicited students' understanding and promoted thinking. Teachers frequently involved students in peer and self-assessment. Students set their own assessment criteria, for example in a Grade 11 lesson on public speaking, and for a Grade 6 topic on human reproduction. These strategies were effective in helping students know how well they were progressing and encouraged students to take responsibility for their own learning. In addition, teachers shared examples of good practice with students; this helped students to improve their own work.

Elementary students understood classroom routines well so that teachers were able to maximise their time when working with groups. Across the school practical work was used to enhance and consolidate learning. For example, good use was made of objects and cubes in Grade 1 mathematics and a well-conducted selection of investigations in Grade 7 science enabled students to achieve the learning objectives. In general, resources were used well to enable students to develop their learning skills. In the best lessons, students were highly engaged and showed cooperation, independence, responsibility and enquiry skills. Their commitment to collaborative working, for example on a joint research topic, supported their learning. When given guidance, students made good links to prior knowledge, for example when comparing towns in their home countries before extracting relevant information from an article about the Indus Valley.

Assessment was good in the KG. There were detailed records about individual children's progress against age-related expectations. Very good portfolios were annotated and dated, and illustrated the progress that each child was making. This practice was extended into the Elementary school, although it was not as consistently thorough and informative. Throughout the main school, assessment was acceptable although teachers knew their students well. Teachers gave good oral feedback to students about their work and marking of work was mostly helpful. In the Secondary school, teachers of English encouraged students in frank and honest discussion about their work, and self-assessment took greater importance. The accuracy of assessment improved when lesson objectives were expressed as outcomes. However, in a number of lessons objectives were written as tasks, and this was less helpful when assessing progress. Occasionally, inaccurate assessment resulted in inappropriate tasks being set.

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

The quality of the curriculum was good from KG to Grade 10 and acceptable in Grade 11. The Primary Years Programme (PYP) and Middle Years Programme (MYP) of the International Baccalaureate provided a challenging and balanced education throughout the school. Grade 11 students were working towards a school diploma, which had a broad range of subjects, but was not recognised internationally. Good inquiry skills and personal and social development were integrated well throughout the school. The number of Arabic and Islamic Education lessons did not meet the Ministry of Education requirements. There was regular review and development of the curriculum with the Elementary school programme of inquiry being adjusted after each unit. The school was developing its own scope and sequence for Elementary mathematics and language arts. The MYP departments were developing the vertical progression of each subject, but had not developed horizontal links fully. Due to the emergent nature of the school curriculum, there was a lack of progression in many subjects but connections between PYP and MYP stages were being established. There were widespread cross-curricular links within the Elementary curriculum. Such links were less developed in the Secondary school, although connections were routinely made, for example, between mathematics and science. There was a strong and balanced after-school activities programme, with many arts and music activities, non-competitive sports and a competitive sport programme that contributed to school spirit. There were two major curriculum links with the local community at each grade level, and speakers from the community contributed to certain topics. Additional community connections were made through the Community in Service programme.

## How well does the school protect and support students?

Provision for students' health and safety was outstanding. The building was clean and extremely well presented with appropriate security arrangements. Fire drills and evacuation procedures were practised regularly. Health and safety in science laboratories was good. The medical centre provided an excellent facility. Medical files were maintained on all students and detailed notes kept of treatments administered. Medical staff also supported students with healthy life styles, reflected in the absence of junk foods in the school. Arrangements for the arrival and departure of students were excellent. Supervision onto buses was thorough. Most students arrived by car and security personnel closely monitored driving behaviour. The school had good guidance and training on child protection procedures for all staff members.

The quality of support for students was good, enhanced by good relationships between staff and students. Two counsellors provided help for students and, where appropriate, liaison with parents. Students were offered appropriate guidance on future career and study options. Provision for students who needed support with English was good; new arrangements were well organised and consistently applied. There was also good provision for students with particular learning needs. Identified students had well-written individual education plans which were shared with parents and teaching staff. However, the impact of both these initiatives had

not been evaluated. The school's procedures for tracking progress were a more recent development though there was a good basis for analysing students' strengths and weaknesses. There was inconsistency, however, in the way data were used by teachers in their planning. The management of attendance and punctuality was good and sensitively handled.

## How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was good. The new senior leaders provided a good balance of expertise and experience. The school's vision was ambitious but the Superintendent kept this well-grounded in the context of a developing school. The management structure gave teachers opportunities to take responsibilities. It generated commitment and a sense of ownership; a high priority was given to the professional development of staff. Teachers' needs were identified through observation and discussion and appropriate training had been provided. Performance management systems were developing and there was good capacity for improvement.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. The school had encouraged feedback on its work from a range of sources including teachers, parents and students. Heads of schools carried out lesson observations to evaluate and improve teaching. This had led to identification of training and other needs, but the quality and detail of the records varied. The impact of recent professional development upon practice had been monitored. Appraisal of teaching assistants had been introduced. The school had made significant progress in addressing the recommendations of the previous report.

Partnership with parents was good. There were several improvements in communication systems with parents, including a "parent engagement week" designed to give parents an insight into their children's experiences in school. Regular newsletter kept parents informed of units of enquiry and they were invited to contribute relevant aspects of expertise. Homework diaries were valued by parents of Elementary school students as regular means of communication. Links with the community were developing. Visits by universities staff and speakers had been arranged and inter-school competitions were being held. The parents' council was developing its role and provided a formal communication channel to the school management.

Governance has had a strong influence on the vision and direction of the school. Rigorous monitoring of progress in the early stages of the school's development had resulted in a new senior leadership team being appointed for the start of this academic year and Global Education Management Systems (GEMS) held the senior leadership to account for all aspects of the school's performance. GEMS sought feedback from parents on aspects of the school's provision but there was no formal governing board with full stakeholder representation. However, parents had a direct channel of communication with the senior managers through the Parents' Council.

Staffing, facilities and resources were outstanding. The inspirational school buildings, excellent facilities and resources provided an environment conducive to good learning. There was an

appropriate number of teachers and support staff covering all phases and areas of expertise, including specialist teachers of English as an additional language and special needs.

## 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:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Good	Acceptable	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Good	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Good	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Secondary	Post-16
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Secondary	Post-16
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Secondary	Post-16
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Kindergarten	Elementary	Secondary	Post-16
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of support	Good	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	Good
Governance	Good
Staffing, facilities and resources	Outstanding

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](mailto:inspection@khda.gov.ae).

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