

INSPECTION REPORT

The Kindergarten Starters

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Knowledge and Human Development Authority

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT The Kindergarten Starters

Location	Al Garhoud
Type of school	Private
Website	www.gemskgs.com
Telephone	04 282 4090
Address	PO Box 4973, Dubai
Principal	Lawrence William Hartnett
Curriculum	CBSE
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-11 / Kindergarten to Grade 5
Attendance	Outstanding
Number of students on roll	4,841
Number of Emirati students	0 (0%)
Date of the inspection	Sunday 30th October to Thursday 3rd November 2011

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The context of the school

The Kindergarten Starters is a private school situated in Al Garhoud. At the time of the inspection, there were 4,841 students on roll from the ages of three to 11 years. The school follows a Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) curriculum. There are no formal external exams although the children were able to choose the ASSET skills analysis in Grades 3 and 5, and participate in the GEMS CASE assessments, which provide profiles of knowledge and skills attained by students.

There were 186 teachers, in addition to the Principal and the Headmistress, of whom most had an appropriate teaching qualification. They were supported by 30 administrative staff and approximately 175 support staff including drivers, conductors and ancillary staff. Students were grouped into 140 classes. There were no Emirati students attending the school. Around 53 students, representing one per cent of the school population, had special educational needs and were being supported by the school's counsellor.

At the time of the inspection, the Principal had been in post for nine years. Ten per cent of teachers were new to the school.

Overall school performance 2011-2012

Acceptable

How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

The Kindergarten Starters School provided an acceptable quality of education for its students. The school had some important strengths including students' attitudes and behaviour, the primary students' understanding of economic and environmental issues and the school's partnerships with parents. Attainment and progress in both Islamic Education and English were good as was the progress made in science, by the end of the primary phase. Teaching, learning and assessment were acceptable at all levels. The curriculum was good in terms of breadth and balance. The school provided good support and care for all its students. The leadership provided by the Principal and his team was good and the school was at early stages of developing accurate and robust systems for self-evaluation and school improvement.

The school had made many improvements since the last inspection and some progress towards meeting the recommendations. A number of new initiatives had been introduced to support their key priorities. For example, almost all of the teachers' planning took account of the wide range of students' abilities and teachers had many more opportunities to share and observe good practice. However, many of these

initiatives had not been fully implemented and were not, as yet, showing enough impact on students' learning. There was also insufficient rigour in monitoring the impact of the new initiatives on students' attainment and progress. Nevertheless, the school demonstrated acceptable capacity to improve further.

Key strengths

- The outstanding behaviour, attitude and commitment of all students, which resulted in their active engagement in lessons;
- Students' deep understanding of and active participation in local environmental issues;
- The assemblies that enabled students to develop their speaking, listening and leadership skills;
- The outstanding partnerships with parents which impacted positively on students' attainment and progress;
- The leadership provided by the Principal and the senior management team which promoted a clear vision and a caring environment.

Recommendations

- Improve students' attainment and progress in key subjects across the school by making accurate use of assessment data to identify gaps in learning;
- Improve the quality of teaching for effective learning across the school so that all lessons provide appropriate levels for challenge and all students' learning needs are met;
- Develop accurate and rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures for school improvement priorities and ensure that they impact positively on students' learning.

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

	Pre-Primary (KG)	Primary
Islamic Education		
Attainment	Not Applicable	Good
Progress	Not Applicable	Good
Arabic as a first language		
Attainment	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Progress	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Arabic as an additional language		
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable
English		
Attainment	Good	Good
Progress	Good	Good
Mathematics		
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable
Science		
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Acceptable	Good

Attainment in Kindergarten was good in English and acceptable in mathematics and science. In the primary phase, attainment was good in Islamic Education and English and acceptable in other key subjects. In Islamic Education, by the end of the primary phase, students had good knowledge of the life of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). All students spoke Arabic as a second language and, whilst they were able to express their opinions using spoken language and able to read well, their writing skills were limited. In English,

students could confidently convey their opinions and communicate their ideas verbally and in writing. In mathematics, Kindergarten children could count and recognise numbers and primary students could use and display data and fractions at an age-appropriate level. In science, by the end of the Kindergarten, children were able to recall key facts about animals and their habitats. By the end of primary, the majority of students were able to demonstrate scientific skills needed for experimentation and exploration.

Students' progress in Islamic Education in the primary phase and in English, at both phases, was good. It was also good in science in the primary phase where students who had been making acceptable progress from Kindergarten to Grade 3, then made rapid progress in Grades 4 and 5. In all other key subjects, progress was acceptable. Students with special educational needs made acceptable progress across the curriculum at all phases. This was due to the close monitoring of individual progress by the school's counsellor who then advised staff on intervention and additional work strategies to support students.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	Pre-Primary (KG)	Primary
Attitudes and behaviour	Outstanding	Outstanding
Understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture	Good	Good
Civic, economic and environmental understanding	Good	Outstanding

Almost all students were self-disciplined, courteous and well-behaved, and shared warm relationships with peers and teachers. They willingly took on responsibility when given the opportunity to do so and actively participated in the school's initiatives to promote healthy living. Students generally arrived to school and lessons on time. Students demonstrated a good knowledge about UAE culture and heritage: they could identify landmarks and describe distinctive features of Emirati life. They took pride in their life in multi-cultural Dubai and showed acceptance of other cultures. The majority of students showed adequate understanding of Islamic culture and appreciated the practice of sharing meals and of simple living. Almost all students were aware of, and actively involved in, keeping their environment clean and green. They could suggest ways of reducing pollution and saving power and water. They participated regularly in environmental initiatives by the UAE government. They could relate the excellent job opportunities and comfortable lifestyle to an economy driven by the construction and oil industry.

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	Pre-Primary (KG)	Primary
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable

Teaching for effective learning was acceptable overall. The teaching in Islamic Education was good throughout and there were a few examples of outstanding teaching in science at the end of the primary phase. There were also examples of good practice in a variety of other subjects. The subject knowledge of the majority of teachers was good, most lessons were well-planned and there was good review of previous learning in many lessons. Further strengths of the teaching were the good relationships with students, the imaginative links to the real world and good cross-curricular links in the majority of lessons. In a minority of lessons, teachers used effective questioning techniques. However, the quality of teaching was not consistent throughout the school and, in the majority of lessons, there were few opportunities for collaborative learning and independent work. Also, in most lessons, there was very little differentiation even though it was planned. Furthermore, students had too little opportunity to talk other than by answering questions. There was insufficient challenge in a minority of lessons and attainment was affected negatively in the few lessons where the management of behaviour was weak.

Students' learning was acceptable. Students were well-focused and enthusiastic in nearly all lessons and responded positively to the teaching; they interacted and collaborated with each other well when given the opportunity. They were eager to respond to teachers' questions and, when supported, made connections with previous and other learning. However, in a few classes, students shouted out answers all at once. There was little development of research skills using information and communication technology (ICT) in lessons, although students were encouraged to undertake research at home in English, science and mathematics. Students did not often have the opportunity to take responsibility for their learning as lessons were generally very teacher-directed and there was little development of critical thinking.

Assessment was acceptable. The use of ICT to store and analyse data and to inform parents was well-developed. However, despite the assessment data being gathered across the school, teachers did not use it well enough to match their teaching to the learning needs of individuals. The majority of the teachers assessed the students' prior knowledge at the start of the lesson but the use of assessment by teachers to check understanding of students during lessons was less consistent across the school. There were too few opportunities for students to evaluate themselves and set targets for improving their attainment.

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

	Pre-Primary (KG)	Primary
Curriculum quality	Good	Good

The quality of the curriculum was good. It was suitably broad and balanced across all key subjects. The curriculum was reviewed regularly and any necessary amendments made. For example, since the last review, time in class for the students had been increased by forty minutes each week and students' views had been taken into account by the introduction of two daily breaks. The Kindergarten curriculum now included a greater emphasis on activity and life skills. In the primary curriculum, teachers had improved the way in which they helped students to make links between learning in different subjects. Teachers benefited from helpful documents that advised them on the topics to be taught as students progressed from one grade to the next grade. The curriculum was well planned to meet the needs of different groups of students, although teachers' implementation of the plans was not always fully effective. Teachers had broadened the range of opportunities for students to learn from experiences and visits outside the school and from visitors to the school.

How well does the school protect and support students?

	Pre-Primary (KG)	Primary
Health and Safety	Good	Good
Quality of Support	Good	Good

Arrangements for ensuring students' health and safety were good. Well-established routines throughout the day ensured the safety of student and staff. Systems for movement on to the buses had been strengthened and were well supervised by support staff. The classrooms were clean and tidy, as were the corridors and washrooms. Fire drills were carried out at appropriate intervals. Medicines and students' personal records were kept securely. Healthy living was promoted in the curriculum and changes were planned to ensure that the new school canteen matched the healthy requirements of the curriculum. Whilst there was a recent child protection policy in place, not all staff were aware of the details within this policy.

The quality of support for students was good. The relationships between the staff and students were positive and mutually respectful. Behaviour in lessons was mostly well-managed. Students' well-being was closely monitored and the information used to provide very effective individual guidance and support. Students with special educational needs made acceptable progress through good modifications to teaching and support. The school was proactive and successful in promoting high levels of attendance and punctuality.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

	Whole school
Quality of leadership	Good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Acceptable
Partnerships with parents and the community	Outstanding
Governance	Good
Management, including staffing, facilities and resources	Acceptable

The leadership of the school was good. The Principal and his senior team communicated a clear vision to students, staff and parents. He was supported by a number of senior and middle managers whose roles were clearly defined in terms of supervision and support for staff and students. The school regularly consulted parents and students about the full range of school activities and priorities, and took account of these when developing new initiatives. Almost all senior leaders contributed to decision-making and led whole-school improvement initiatives. However, the majority were not able to identify robust practical strategies to secure further improvements.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were acceptable. The school had developed systems for gathering evidence from a range of sources and the school development plan identified clear areas for improvement, which outlined key activities and personnel to lead them. However, there was limited focus on how the improvement activities would be monitored and evaluated in order to improve students' learning. The senior staff observed teachers in order to provide professional feedback but this was focused mainly on teaching strategies rather than the quality of learning. The school had made some progress in addressing the recommendations from the previous inspection but there was insufficient rigour in monitoring the impact of the action plan on students' attainment.

The school's partnerships with parents were outstanding. Parents were actively encouraged to be involved in their children's learning through homework assignments, shared events and by being invited into school to share their knowledge and skills. Parents received regular reports on their children's progress and valued the opportunities provided by consultation meetings to understand what their child had achieved. The Parents' Engagement Programme was particularly successful in supporting the school's aims and provided strong links with all parents. There were strong community links in place including links with the schools that the students would attend in the future.

The school's governance was good. The governors provided guidance and support from within the organisation, which included high-quality and targeted professional development for school staff. The school was fully accountable to the governing body and provided regular reports about its work. Governors had well-established systems for seeking parental views on a regular basis and this was well received and valued by parents.

The management of staffing, facilities and resources was acceptable. There were clear routines in place to ensure effective operation of the school. Most staff were appropriately qualified although there had been a significant staff turnover which had hindered some continuity of practice. The school employed a number of support and ancillary staff who ensured that the premises were clean and effectively supported safety measures for students throughout the day. There were sufficient learning resources and the library was well-stocked. Class sizes varied and there were up to 41 children in two classes. This, along with the small size of rooms, severely restricted the types of activities that students were able to participate in.

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	1166	28%
	Last year	1445	50%
Teachers	55		30%
Students	There are no upper secondary-aged students in the school		

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

A significant minority of parents responded to the survey, but fewer than last year. Most parents held positive views of the school and its leaders. Most indicated overall satisfaction with the quality of education provided at the school, but about a tenth were not satisfied. Parents were happy with their children's progress in the key subjects, but a few indicated progress was not good in Arabic. More than a few parents disagreed that the school provided a good range of clubs and activities, an opinion shared by a few teachers. A majority of parents agreed that the school's leaders listened to their opinions, but few did not agree that this was the case. Most parents agreed that teacher meetings were helpful and held regularly, but again a few parents disagreed. A minority of teachers responded to the survey. Almost all agreed that students' good behaviour and care for the environment were strengths of the school. Most teachers agreed that school inspection had helped both the school and their teaching to improve.

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

Our work with schools

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) inspects schools to inform parents, students and the wider community of the quality of education provided. Inspectors also give guidance to staff about how to improve the standard of education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask the principal and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan our time in school. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities in which students are involved. We also gather the views of students, parents and staff. We find their views very helpful and use them, together with the other information we have collected, to arrive at our view regarding the quality of education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of education in the school. We describe how well students are doing, how good the school is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and children work together and how they go about improving the school. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its aims.

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