

# INSPECTION REPORT

## Cambridge International School

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Knowledge and Human Development Authority

P.O. Box 500008, UAE, Tel: +971-4-3640000, Fax: +971-4-3640001, [info@khda.gov.ae](mailto:info@khda.gov.ae), [www.khda.gov.ae](http://www.khda.gov.ae)

## GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT Cambridge International School

Location	Al Garhoud
Type of school	Private
Website	www.gemscis-dubai.com
Telephone	+971-4-2824646
Address	PO Box 60835, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Principal	David John McLaughlin
Curriculum	UK
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-18 / Kindergarten 1 to Grade 13
Attendance	Outstanding
Number of students on roll	2,353
Number of Emirati students	41 (2%)
Date of the inspection	Sunday 16th to Thursday 20th October 2011

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## The context of the school

Cambridge International School is situated in Al Garhoud. The school follows the National Curriculum for England, from the Foundation Stage (FS) through to the post-16 phase. Students are entered for the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) and/or GCSE examinations at the end of the secondary phase and GCE Advanced level examinations at the end of the post-16 phase. The school had also introduced Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) level 2 and level 3 vocational qualification in a range of subjects at secondary and post-16 phases respectively. There were 134 full-time teachers, including the senior leadership team. The teachers in the school had a range of academic and teaching qualifications. They were supported by 16 teaching assistants. The Principal was in his sixth year and 38 of the teachers were newly appointed during 2011.

At the time of the inspection the school had enrolment of 2,353 students, aged three to 18 years. They were grouped into 83 classes. Forty-one students, approximately two per cent of students were Emirati. Over seventy different nationalities were represented among the student population.

## Overall school performance 2011-2012

Good

## How has the school progressed since the last inspection?

Cambridge International School provided a good quality of education for its students. It had some outstanding features that included the curriculum in the Post-16 phase, the excellent behaviour in the Foundation Stage and the quality of partnerships with parents and the broader community. Parents and teachers commented that students enjoyed coming to school. The executive school leadership team had a strong vision for the school and this was evident in school information materials and in discussion with parents and staff. Management initiatives included the development of a sophisticated system for accessing all students' progress data and targets across all phases and subjects. The leadership team had identified strengths in the school and appropriate priorities for the future across the school. The specialist provision for students with special educational needs was outstanding, as was attainment in primary, secondary and post-16 English and science. The quality of teaching for effective learning was good in the Foundation Stage, secondary and post-16 phases. Teachers demonstrated good understanding of the

needs of the school's multi-lingual population. In the primary phase teaching was acceptable. Students in the primary phase and above were given a wide range of leadership opportunities. The school had made good progress towards addressing the recommendations from the previous inspection report. An appropriate set of priorities had been set to sustain improvement. The school had good capacity to improve further.

## Key strengths

- Outstanding attainment in primary, secondary and post-16 English and post-16 science;
- The inclusive nature of the school and the high quality of SEN specialist withdrawal activities;
- Provision that enhanced students' vocational education options;
- Strong student leadership opportunities;
- Increased engagement of parents in their children's learning and the life of the school.

## Recommendations

- Create more opportunities for students to develop their reading and writing skills in Arabic and continue to raise students' attainment in Islamic Education;
- Spread best practices in teaching to raise its overall quality throughout the school;
- Improve the use of assessment data by teachers to promote the optimum level of challenge in lessons;
- Ensure that self-evaluation procedures are accurate and reflect the information and data available.

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

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
<b>Islamic Education</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Progress</b>	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Good
<b>Arabic as a first language</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Progress</b>	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
<b>Arabic as an additional language</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
<b>Progress</b>	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
<b>English</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
<b>Progress</b>	Outstanding	Outstanding	Good	Good
<b>Mathematics</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Good	Good	Good	Good
<b>Progress</b>	Good	Good	Good	Good
<b>Science</b>				
<b>Attainment</b>	Good	Good	Good	Outstanding
<b>Progress</b>	Good	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding

Attainment was acceptable in Islamic Education. In the upper grades the students demonstrated an understanding of Islamic values such as the difference between the Surats of The Holy Qur'an that are Madaniya and Makkiya and were able to provide appropriate examples of each. In Arabic as a first language and as a second language, most students were working in line with expectations with regard to subject content. Students had good listening skills and spoke clearly. In the primary phase, writing and reading were the weakest skills. The more able secondary students used good levels of Arabic and the new vocabulary well. Attainment was at least good in all phases for English, mathematics and science. English attainment in the primary, secondary and Post-16 phases was outstanding, as it was in Post-16 science. In English, secondary students exhibited effective skills in debating, analysis of poetry and verbal skills ahead of expectations but to a variety of levels. In mathematics, a majority of students displayed good levels of knowledge, skills and understanding. The majority of students in the Foundation, primary and secondary phases showed good science knowledge and, in the post-16 phase, knowledge and understanding was outstanding.

Students' progress was at least good in most subjects. It was acceptable in Arabic as a first and second language. In Foundation Stage and primary English, progress was outstanding. In Arabic as a first and additional language, progress was mainly short term in the majority of the classes. In English, Foundation Stage children made excellent progress from low starting points on entry. A majority of students made progress in mathematics beyond expectations, while a few had difficulties in understanding and application of key concepts to practical situations. External science examination results showed good to outstanding progress. In lessons, progress slowed when students were unclear of what they were expected to know and understand, and when discussions was limited.

The attainment and progress of Emirati students were broadly the same as those of other students in most subjects. However, there were some important differences. In Arabic, Emirati students made acceptable progress overall, although there were weaknesses in writing in some age groups, notably with regard to the limited breadth of vocabulary. Most students' writing lacked fluency and spelling was often inaccurate. The students were well-integrated, and individual learning needs were met through effective differentiation in the better lessons. Foundation Stage students mainly arrived with little English language proficiency, commonly having little or no previous play group or nursery experience. Progress for these children, once in school, followed a similar pattern to their peers.

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

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attitudes and behaviour	Outstanding	Good	Good	Outstanding
Understanding of Islam and appreciation of local traditions and culture	Good	Good	Good	Good
Civic, economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Good	Outstanding

Students' attitudes and behaviour were good in the primary and secondary phases and outstanding in Foundation Stage and post-16 where students had a particularly well-developed sense of personal responsibility and strong work ethic. The leadership of the older students made a valuable contribution to the school. Almost all had firm friendships and regarded adults as caring and supportive. They appreciated the need for exercise and good nutrition, yet did not regularly act on their knowledge of healthy eating. At all levels students had basic knowledge of aspects of Islam and Emirati culture. They acted with respect towards their host country however they did not have a mature understanding of the links between the visible features they observed and the religious and cultural values they represented. Students' understanding of local environmental and economic issues was good in all phases except in the post-16 phase where it was outstanding. Younger children could describe environmental features of their home countries. Older students appreciated the vision that had driven the development of Dubai and the breadth of its economy. Work experience gave them personal insights into employment opportunities. Attendance over the last term was outstanding.

## How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Acceptable	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Good	Acceptable	Good	Good
Assessment	Good	Good	Good	Good

Teaching was good in the Foundation Stage, secondary and post-16 phases, and acceptable in primary. Most teachers' subject knowledge was secure. They planned lessons to meet objectives, but sometimes these were not specific enough to help them focus on the key learning points. Most teachers introduced tasks with a range of difficulty into their lessons in an effort to meet students' differing needs, but the most able were often not challenged to their limit. Students with special educational needs often had the support of learning assistants. This helped them to progress at the same pace as others. Specialist teaching of withdrawal groups was of high quality. Most teachers used questioning well to check students' understanding but varied in their ability to adjust their teaching to what they found. In Foundation Stage, teachers planned a rich variety of experiences to match the children's learning needs. In the upper school, teaching was effectively focused on examination requirements. Teachers made good use of information and communications technology (ICT) to support students' learning, both in school and particularly for older students through homework. The quality of teaching in other subjects varied widely from highly effective to unsatisfactory in relation to the subject knowledge and confidence of the teachers allocated. The relevant ICT skills were taught well.

Learning was acceptable in primary and good in other phases. Younger children responded well to the challenges set for them, often working together well on practical tasks. Most students showed a good work ethic and were both keen to answer questions and confident to ask them. Opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning were not always fully exploited especially in English, where teachers often did much of the talking. When given the chance to work co-operatively, most students responded well and were happy to give full accounts of what they were doing. Where lessons featured varied resources such as data shows and hands-on tasks, students' interest was heightened and learning enhanced. A few lessons enabled students to make connections across subjects such as using

mathematical knowledge of capacity to support science activity. However, opportunities were sometimes missed to emphasise the relevance of topics by linking them to real life. Older students showed good enquiry and research skills and used ICT resources profitably. They were able to analyse and think critically at an appropriate level, but this was not yet a regular feature in the primary stages.

Arrangements for assessment were good. In the Foundation Stage, children's profiles were detailed enabling teachers to plan activities that met their needs. Elsewhere, the school had generated very good data on students' attainment and school leaders were able to track progress of individuals and groups. Most teachers had a good picture of their students' strengths and weaknesses and specific targets were beginning to be identified by students themselves. Teachers were not yet making full use of performance data in planning their lessons. Marking was inconsistent in the degree to which it helped students to improve.

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

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good	Outstanding

The quality of the curriculum in the Foundation Stage, primary and secondary phases was good and outstanding in post-16. The English National Curriculum provided a clear rationale with continuity and progression preparing students for the next stage. In the early years and in post-16, the curriculum was effectively planned to support learner needs. Curriculum review had resulted in developments which gave students and parents access to the published curriculum. Review at the primary level had resulted in re-structuring with specialist subject teachers for Years 3 to 6. Vocational education provided choices and career paths for students. There were effective community links particularly with businesses linked to vocational learning. Extra-curricular activities supported student development. The highly effective special educational needs provision gave greater access to curriculum for these learners. More consistent differentiation, greater challenge and enrichment were required to maximise curriculum access for students, especially in the primary and secondary phases.

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

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Health and Safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of Support	Good	Good	Good	Good

Health and safety was good for all phases of the school. The school was proactive in addressing health and safety issues. Security, supervision and health and safety arrangements on buses and in school were good. Evacuation procedures worked very well. While the fire alarm functioned effectively, in science practical areas smoke detectors had been disconnected to facilitate certain experiments. School buildings and grounds were well-maintained. A few classrooms in the primary phase were small and overcrowded. A shortage of play equipment in the Foundation Stage playground posed difficulties for effective supervision. The unsecured storage of certain furniture and equipment on the roof and in other outside areas posed a possible risk. The Medical Centre provided valuable guidance to students about healthy diet, exercise and living. Medical equipment and records were up-to-date and secure. The canteen area was well-maintained and clean; however the canteen menu included items that did not match with the schools own recommendations regarding healthy eating. Child protection guidance was effective and staff training was provided. Students were aware of who to talk to if a problem arose.

Support for students was good overall. Almost all staff-student relationships were mature and respectful. In a majority of lessons good discussion opportunities were facilitated. Teachers listened and appreciated individual student input. Almost all teachers demonstrated a strong sense of care for all students. Where behaviour required sensitive management almost all staff responded well, communicated resolutions effectively and ensured that future incidents did not occur. Efficient systems were in place to monitor students' well-being and personal development. Through the 'Need to Chat' initiative, staff members were very accessible for any student experiencing difficulties. A comprehensive response system was in place when behaviour, attendance and punctuality issues arose. Students were well-informed on future career and education choices. Specialist provision for students with special educational needs was outstanding. Clear and appropriate progress pathways were constructed, delivered and measured for future planning. Outcomes for almost all students were of high quality. Provision for these students in lessons was less secure. Students did not always receive focused interventions that linked meaningfully with lesson objectives at levels appropriate to their needs.

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

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

The quality of leadership was good. The strong ethos was evident in the high quality relationships amongst students, staff and parents. The school leaders had a strong vision for the school. The Principal promoted whole school improvement and was ably supported by the Vice-Principal. There were a number of new or recently appointed leaders who were beginning to impact on middle management leadership and managing change. The school was developing a faculty leadership model in most subjects from Year 3 upwards to improve the development of curriculum review processes and teaching methods. There had been good responses to the previous inspection by addressing all recommendations. Students were given a wide range of leadership opportunities.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. There was wide staff involvement in contributing to the self-evaluation processes. The school leaders were responsive to the review findings. For example, leaders had previously identified some issues with primary teaching and had consequently initiated teaching by subject specialists. The school had set priorities for continuing development. In addition to these, the school had good school improvement and action plans both in its response to the previous inspection report recommendations and to interim issues. Some of the school's judgements in evaluations were too optimistic. The criteria by which the school judged the effectiveness of its actions were largely provision related and did not always clearly indicate their impact either on student achievement or on the quality of teaching and learning.

Partnerships with parents and the community were outstanding. Strong links were evident between home and school at all phases. These include regular and informative newsletters, use of corporate website facility and the assessment data portal. Parents were very positive about almost all aspects of the work of the school, including the leadership. The communication between home and school, the open access parents enjoyed to teachers and the school leaders and the effective response of teachers to their concerns were praised. An active and well-supported parents association alongside the parents

engagement programme promoted effective partnerships. The school had good links with the community. Students and their parents had developed links with the business community through the school's careers programme. Focused careers events brought local businesses and educational establishments into the life of the school. The parents and students involvement helped promote student development. High quality reports to parents were issued regularly and included a series of targets for the students.

Governance was good. The school benefitted from the regular oversight of corporate governance which provided both support and challenge to the school's leadership. The accountability process to the Board was embedded in the organisation of the school. There were good professional development opportunities for staff through the corporate governance model and opportunities to attend workshops with parents. There were established procedures for parents and others to make representation to the corporate governance. There was no direct parent representation in corporate governance.

Staffing, facilities and resources were acceptable. There had been investment in new resources and the Learning Resource Centre was a good quality facility. Many of the classrooms were small in size relative to the student numbers. Whilst well-resourced, the computer suites were often used simultaneously by two teaching groups. This had some teacher development benefits, but created congested areas, restricting student movement. The science laboratories were well equipped.

## 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	320	18%
	Last year	487	29%
Teachers	15		11%
Students	30		1%

\*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. About a tenth of the teachers responded to their survey and very few senior students responded to theirs. Most parents were satisfied with the overall quality of education available at the school. Most believed that their children's progress was good in the key subjects, but only a majority believed it was good in Arabic. In Arabic as a first or additional language, more than a few parents indicated that their children's progress was not good. Senior students agreed with parents on this topic. On other aspects of school provision most parents held positive views and most believed that inspection had led to improvements. Teachers likewise held positive views of the school across the different aspects and agreed that inspection had helped the school improve. Senior students held positive views about the school.

## 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](mailto: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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