

GEMS Wellington International School Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Year 13

Report published May 2011

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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 December 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 Sufouh, 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 English National Curriculum up to Year 11, when students take IGCSE examinations. In Years 12 and 13, students follow the International Baccalaureate diploma programme. At the time of the inspection, there were 1873 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

A small proportion of parents responded to the pre-inspection on-line questionnaire. Those that did expressed very positive views that were supportive of the life and work of the school. Almost all of them approved of the quality of education provided by the school, the healthy lifestyle promoted, and the enjoyment and enthusiasm exhibited by their children. They felt strongly that children were kept safe and well supported. Most felt that their children made good progress in English and mathematics, but felt that progress in Arabic and Islamic Education should be improved. Almost all felt that communication with the school was very good, and praised the quality and usefulness of reports. They thought that the quality of teaching and the facilities were the school's strongest features. However, a significant minority felt that they had received insufficient information to comment on the school's response to the previous inspection, or whether it had led to improvements.

How well does the school perform overall?

GEMS Wellington International School provided an outstanding quality of education for its students. The school had responded quickly to the two main recommendations of the previous inspection, and had made significant progress in the past nine months. Steps taken to enhance the profile of Islamic Education and Arabic within the school had been effective, and improvements in the standards achieved by students were starting to become more evident. Major initiatives to develop teaching to ensure a more diverse and independent learning experience for students had been highly successful. The school had made little progress in widening the participation of stakeholders in its governance. The school had a very good capacity to improve further.

Attainment and progress in most core subjects were good or outstanding in the different sections of the school. The majority of students performed in public examinations at levels above international standards. Students' personal development was outstanding throughout the school. They showed genuine care and support for each other and created an inclusive environment that nurtured individual strengths. The quality of teaching was good in the primary and secondary sections, and outstanding in the Foundation Stage and post-16. Skilled teaching enabled students to show very high levels of independent learning and a desire to take responsibility for their own progress. This was supported strongly by efficient assessment and a rich and diverse curriculum.

The provision to promote students' health, safety and welfare was outstanding, and students felt well cared for and supported. Outstanding leadership helped to promote a clear vision for the school, and fostered a strong culture for evaluating strengths and weaknesses, and planning for improvement. The school had formed an outstanding partnership with its parents. Governance was good. The high quality of resources and facilities, and the dedicated and hard-working staff, had ensured that the school was an inspiring place in which to learn.

Key features of the school

- Students and teachers had worked effectively to improve attainment and progress in many subjects;
- The quality of students' learning and the independence and initiative they showed in their work were outstanding;
- The personal and social development of the students, and their civic awareness and cultural appreciation, were outstanding;
- The diverse and rich curricular programme underpinned the success enjoyed by students, and was enhanced by much high quality teaching;
- Students' well-being was promoted strongly through the outstanding arrangements for pastoral support and guidance, and the highly efficient measures to ensure their welfare;

- Outstanding leadership and management, committed to ensuring continued improvement throughout the school, were supported strongly by the outstanding partnership with parents;
- The high quality of the resources and facilities created an inspiring learning environment.

Recommendations

In order to enhance the quality of education still further, the school should:

- continue to improve attainment and progress in Islamic Education and Arabic;
- achieve better consistency in teaching quality by developing greater flexibility in planning and teaching methods.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were good in the primary section, and acceptable in the secondary section. The quality of recitation of the Holy Qur'an was acceptable, and students had good knowledge of the basic principles and Pillars of Islam. Students had appropriate knowledge of the life of the Prophet and understood a range of Islamic values. Students in primary knew the steps of "ablution" and how they could perform prayer. Students in secondary could define the concept of Zakat and its application to money in Islam. However, only a minority of students in these year groups could apply their understanding and knowledge to a variety of social contexts.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were acceptable in both primary and secondary sections. The majority of students in the lower year groups developed their speaking and listening skills at acceptable levels. Colloquial language predominated most students' speaking. They read familiar sentences with clarity, but most students did not write to a good level. Students' ability to write creatively or to a range of audiences was under-developed. They were able to analyse a story about justice and extract lessons learnt from it, but were slow to develop skills of reading and understanding. In writing, students could generally apply grammatical rules accurately, appropriate to their age and experience. However their ability to apply these rules in reading and in their daily conversation was below international standards.

Attainment in Arabic as an additional language was acceptable in the primary and secondary sections, and progress in both was good. Students' listening skills were the most developed and, in Year 9, the majority of students were able to understand a lesson conducted almost entirely in Arabic. Speaking skills were broadly in line with expectations where most students could converse in rehearsed lines using familiar language. In the secondary section, students could give short prepared talks about familiar topics. Students' writing skills developed well in primary, where students were able to construct grammatically correct sentences in standard

Arabic. In the secondary classes, however, writing was below expectations, as a minority of students struggled to spell single words. Long-term gains were evident in students' language skills, but short-term progress in lessons was sometimes hampered by the wide ability range.

Attainment and progress in English at Foundation Stage, in the primary section and post-16 were outstanding. In the secondary section they were good. The youngest children used language very well, linked sounds to letters, and wrote simple words. Primary students listened attentively and spoke with fluency and expression. Their reading was outstanding, with ready comprehension, and they wrote clearly in a range of styles. At secondary and post-16, listening skills were very well developed. Speaking was good and in some cases outstanding. Older students' oral work showed measured, mature thinking. All had read a very good range of novels, plays, poetry and functional texts. They wrote well for a variety of purposes. Written work relating to literary appreciation was very well done. Presentation, particularly in the primary and early secondary years, was sometimes marred by weak spelling and grammar.

Attainment and progress in mathematics were outstanding in all but the post-16 phase where they were good. Students' attainment was above, and often well above, appropriate international standards or age-related expectations. Children in the Foundation Stage could say and use number names in order in familiar contexts and could count reliably up to ten everyday objects. Students in the primary section had secure knowledge of basic number facts, such as multiplication tables and three-dimensional shapes, which enabled them to solve problems adeptly and confidently. They were also able to apply their knowledge readily to real-life situations. Outstanding progress continued in lower secondary where students analysed statistical data and suggested hypotheses. At the post-16 stage, students worked competently using graphical digital calculators.

Attainment and progress in science were outstanding at the Foundation Stage and primary stages, and good in the secondary and post-16 stages. Younger students consistently made excellent progress in understanding and applying scientific procedure to increasingly challenging questions and real-life situations. Their level of scientific knowledge and understanding considerably exceeded international standards. By Year 6, students could identify variables affecting velocity, while in Year 13 they had a good understanding of atomic emission spectra. The strong investigative skills of older students provided a solid basis for regular progression of their knowledge and understanding to high levels. As they moved through the years, students reinforced and developed their skills of independently designing and carrying out experiments. They developed increasing maturity in the analysis and interpretation of results, utilising an appropriate body of factual knowledge and conceptual understanding.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' attitudes and personal development were outstanding throughout the school. They showed genuine care and support for each other and created an inclusive environment that nurtured individual strengths. Students valued their good relationships with staff. Behaviour was excellent throughout the school, although older students lacked self-discipline occasionally in lessons. Students demonstrated an excellent understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Attendance levels were outstanding in the Foundation Stage and good overall.

Students' civic awareness, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and culture were outstanding throughout. Almost all students were enthusiastic in supporting programmes through which they could contribute effectively in their school community and beyond. This reflected and enhanced their leadership qualities, their independence of mind and their confidence in bringing about change. Very good opportunities for students to have their voices heard ranged from the very active student council to the innovative 'young observer' initiative, where students had an important role in evaluating the quality of the learning opportunities. Students' awareness and knowledge of Islam were maturing well through presentations, assemblies, guest speakers and interacting with students from other Dubai schools. Students exhibited a mature appreciation of the diversity found at school and in Dubai.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was outstanding. Those in senior years had a mature appreciation of the factors that underpin Dubai's economic success and, in the primary and secondary phases, students were very knowledgeable about the history and development of Dubai and the UAE. Students demonstrated well-developed understanding of local and global environmental issues within lessons and discussions, and they strongly supported projects such as recycling initiatives and 'green' schemes to help sustain the environment.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching at Foundation Stage and post-16 was outstanding, and was good in the primary and secondary sections. Teachers' subject knowledge was very secure, and many had a very good understanding of strategies appropriate to the age and stage of their students. At Foundation Stage, teachers were highly skilled at planning purposeful activities which resulted in high quality learning. At the other stages, they planned lessons carefully and conscientiously, but on occasion the tight planning restricted spontaneity and hampered teachers' ability to cater for, or capitalise on, unexpected developments in the classroom. All teachers shared clear learning objectives with the students. A few lessons did not ensure adequate pace or challenge, and so students' progress slowed. Much of the teaching used skilful and probing questions to elicit detailed responses or to push students to reflect maturely on what they had said and learnt. Teachers used group and paired work extremely effectively and had good skills in conducting whole class discussions. On a few occasions, in the primary and secondary sections, lesson planning did not provide sufficient material or activities to stretch the most able or to support those experiencing difficulties.

The quality of learning was outstanding throughout the school. The very youngest children were highly motivated and engaged throughout the day, and showed increasing self-reliance. They were able to select the activities which they wanted to pursue, and persevered with their choice. Students of all ages had very successfully refined attitudes and motivation. They were very confident in taking responsibility for their learning, and almost all enjoyed the learning experience. In almost all cases, students listened attentively and respectfully to teachers and fellow students. They worked well together and with great maturity, challenging and giving balanced and helpful feedback on others' work. From the early stages they were well versed in research techniques, from both printed and electronic sources, considering such research an integral part of their learning.

Assessment across all sections of the school was outstanding. Students had a strong involvement in the assessment process and used self- and peer-evaluation confidently in most lessons. This meant that students had a clear understanding of what they needed to do in order to meet the learning objectives and improve their work further. Comprehensive assessment information was held at all levels, and teachers were able to access the data to aid planning. Students were well informed about their performance and identified their own targets from the variety of assessment information available to them. Marking of students' work was carried out regularly, although there was some inconsistency in the quantity and quality of their written comments. Through all the methods available, teachers had a very good knowledge of students' individual strengths and weaknesses.

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

Curriculum provision across the school was outstanding. The wide range of subjects provided a rich and varied educational diet for all students. It was well balanced between the different subjects and areas of learning, and catered very effectively for students' different needs. Clear and well-managed structures and procedures enabled regular curriculum review, and ensured effective continuity and progression. This achieved a smooth transition within and between the different sections of the school. The full introduction of the International Baccalaureate gave students in Years 12 and 13 an outstanding curricular experience in a wide range of available subjects as diverse as psychology, Mandarin Chinese and theory of knowledge. Very good opportunities were provided to develop effective cross-curricular approaches and links between subjects. Theme days within the arts and humanities areas gave students a more holistic experience of learning. The school offered a broad programme of purposeful extra-curricular activities, including music, drama and sport, which made good use of its impressive facilities and also provided students with an opportunity to participate in major international projects. A major objective of the curriculum review process had been the enrichment of the curriculum to make it specifically relevant to the needs of the student population and to make connections with the local environment and community. A wide range of curricular and extra-curricular projects and activities, including field trips, camps, and guest speakers, allowed students to broaden their knowledge and understanding of the local area.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The school's arrangements to ensure students' health and safety were outstanding. Its formal systems, including safeguarding procedures, were extremely thorough and rigorously carried out, recorded and monitored. For example, all staff received annual training for child protection. The maintenance of the building was impressive, and the weekly risk assessments were meticulous. The dismissal and bus collection arrangements were efficiently and thoroughly organised. The excellent school facilities were designed with every student in mind, whatever their needs. The school championed a healthy lifestyle with considerable success; the range of sports, for example, attracted considerable numbers of students. The two clinics and resident doctor provided ample medical expertise and support.

The quality of support was also outstanding, underpinned by the excellent relationships between students and all the adults in the school. Teachers were adept at promoting excellent behaviour and self-esteem so that students were automatically respectful and considerate towards others. Individual needs of students were swiftly identified and dealt with skilfully. The efficient new assessment data tracking system enabled students' academic progress to be monitored more accurately over time. Students were confident that staff would do their utmost to allay any anxieties they may have had; and specific problems were quickly referred to specialists, such as a behavioural optometrist. Personalised learning programmes were created for students with particular needs so that they were able to take a full and inclusive part in school life. The school's strategies for promoting good attendance were successful but sometimes undermined by term-time holidays. Students received very good guidance throughout the school. Careers advice was extensive and comprehensive and began well in advance to ensure an optimum range of choices.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership within the school was outstanding. A strong corporate commitment to maintaining high standards and providing high quality education had enabled the needs of individual students to lie at the heart of the school's priorities. The school had, at all levels, embraced the need for continual improvement. Central to this was a strong desire to support and develop the talents and skills of the teaching staff through a range of professionally challenging and stimulating initiatives.

An outstanding focus on student-centred learning had permeated all levels of school life, and had incorporated the views and support of students and their parents. The students themselves were involved in assessing the effectiveness of the learning opportunities in the school. The curriculum and year group teams worked well together and ensured an effective continuity and progression of education right through the school. Many staff were involved in the identification of priorities for future improvement. Highly effective processes for self-evaluation and action planning, carried out at all levels in the school, had enabled the school to assess its progress and make further improvements. The school was ambitious for change

and continual development, and had recently introduced new initiatives in the curriculum and in the use of assessment data to track students' progress. Outstanding processes to monitor the performance of subject departments and the quality of teaching were carried out weekly.

The school had created an outstanding partnership with its parents, who were fully supportive of the school's efforts to develop their children as independent learners. Parents took regular part in class activities and trips. Very good two-way channels of communication had been created, and parents felt that their views were taken seriously by the school. Parents had attended workshops in school to explore some of the new learning initiatives to enable them to support their children at home more effectively.

The school's good governance ensured strong accountability for the performance of senior leaders, and provided a wide range of specialist advice and support. However, parents and other stakeholders did not have a formal role in processes for oversight and consultation.

The outstanding premises and the provision of high quality resources to support teaching, combined with specialist facilities of a high standard, created an inspiring learning environment for students. Committed and hard-working staff fully supported the aims of the school.

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 | Good | Acceptable | Not Applicable |
| Progress over time | Not Applicable | Good | Acceptable | Not Applicable |

| How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic? | | | | |
|--|------------------|------------|------------|----------------|
| 5% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language. | | | | |
| Age group: | Foundation Stage | Primary | Secondary | Post-16 |
| Attainment in Arabic as a first language | Not Applicable | Acceptable | Acceptable | Not Applicable |
| Progress in Arabic as a first language | Not Applicable | Acceptable | Acceptable | Not Applicable |
| Attainment in Arabic as an additional language | Not Applicable | Acceptable | Acceptable | Not Applicable |
| Progress in Arabic as an additional language | 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 | Outstanding | Good | Outstanding |
| Progress over time | Outstanding | Outstanding | Good | Outstanding |

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

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

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

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