

INSPECTION REPORT

GEMS Winchester School

Report published in April 2013

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT GEMS Winchester School

Location	Oud Metha
Type of school	Private
Website	www.gemswinchesterschool-dubai.com
Telephone	04-337-4112
Address	P.O.Box 113272
Principal	Lee Davies
Curriculum	UK
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	4-13 / Kindergarten to Grade 8
Attendance	Acceptable
Number of students on roll	2,247
Largest nationality group of Students	Indian
Number of Emirati students	43 (2%)
Date of the inspection	12th to 15th November 2012

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The context of the school

GEMS Winchester School is situated in Oud Metha, Dubai. The school had opened in October 2011 with around 500 students on roll and had grown to 747 by the end of the first year. A large number of students joined the school in September 2012. This brought the school roll to 2, 247, including students joining the newly established Years 7 and 8. At the same time, 80 new teachers joined the school. At the time of the inspection, there were 708 children in the Foundation Stage, 622 in the primary phase and 174 in the secondary phase. Over 70 different nationalities were represented in the school population.

The school followed the English National Curriculum. In addition to the senior leadership team, there were 85 class teachers and 37 teachers in specialist departments. Students were grouped into 38 classes at Foundation Stage, 22 at Key Stage 1, 19 at Key Stage 2, and 6 at Key Stage 3. Forty-three students, about two per cent, were Emirati.

Overall school performance 2012-2013

Acceptable

Key strengths

- Relationships between students and teachers from a wide range of cultures were harmonious and purposeful;
- The understanding of Islamic values and community and environmental responsibility amongst older students;
- The positive partnerships with parents.

Recommendations

- Accelerate students' progress and raise their attainment in all key subjects;
- Improve teachers' spoken and written English so they can communicate effectively with their students;
- Improve the accuracy of assessment and use the resulting information to enhance the quality of teaching and the curriculum;
- Support students with special educational needs more effectively in lessons;
- Develop the role of middle leaders in monitoring teaching, evaluating students' progress and strategic planning.

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Trend of overall performance



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

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Islamic Education			
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Arabic as a first language			
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Arabic as an additional language			
Attainment	Not Applicable	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Progress	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable
English			
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Mathematics			
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Science			
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Attitudes and behaviour	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Understanding of Islamic values and local, cultural and global awareness	Acceptable	Good	Good
Community and environmental responsibility	Acceptable	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Curriculum quality	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Health and Safety	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of Support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

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

[Read paragraph](#)

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

Attainment in all the key subjects was acceptable, except for Arabic as an additional language, where attainment was unsatisfactory. In Islamic Education, most students had acceptable recitation skills; however their application of the rules of recitation was not well developed. Most students had adequate knowledge of the teachings of Islam including, for example, regarding the travelers' prayers and the Hajj. Students in the primary phase understood the concept of Tawheed, and could list the pillars of Islam correctly. Students studying Arabic as a first language had acceptable speaking and reading skills and used their linguistic skills well when writing. Those studying Arabic as an additional language had acceptable listening skills and were able to understand basic class instructions, but they had limited speaking, reading and writing skills. In English, skills in listening, speaking and reading were higher than in writing. In the Foundation Stage classes, children's knowledge of phonics was not well developed. In later years, most students achieved the standards expected. Children in the Foundation Stage were able to count to twenty and identify simple two-dimensional shapes. In later years, students' numerical skills were age-appropriate but they lacked confidence in using their knowledge to tackle mathematical problems. Students' knowledge and understanding of key scientific concepts was generally appropriate, and well developed in Years 7 and 8. However, their independent research skills and ability to undertake fair scientific investigations were more limited.

Across the school, students were making acceptable progress in all key subjects. Most students made appropriate progress in improving their recitation skills, understanding the values of Islam and knowledge of the lives of prophets and messengers. In Arabic and in English, students were making steady progress in speaking and reading but their progress in writing was generally slower. Students were steadily developing their competence in the four main mathematical operations. Equally, in the first two years of the secondary phase, students continued to make sound progress in number, shape and data handling. However, their progress in using their numerical knowledge to solve problems was too slow. Students made steady progress in science and occasionally faster headway when tackling practical activities.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school provide for Emirati students?

Emirati students' attainment and progress were acceptable overall; they were in line with other students. In Islamic Education, Emirati students had acceptable recitation skills and age appropriate general knowledge of Islamic concepts. In Arabic, they were meeting the curriculum expectations. In English, they had developed acceptable listening and speaking skills, and students taking English as an additional language made good progress in improving their listening and speaking skills.

In mathematics, overall, they had acceptable attainment levels but their problem solving skills were slightly weaker than their peers. In science, there was insufficient opportunities for investigative work, however the students' attainment levels were broadly in line with those of other students; it was acceptable. Most Emirati students were well behaved in lessons and throughout the school. They enjoyed positive relationships with their peers and teachers. Emirati students took leading roles in preparation for the UAE National Day celebrations.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' personal and social development was acceptable in the Foundation Stage and the primary phase but good in the secondary phase. Attendance and punctuality were acceptable over the last full term. In the Foundation Stage children had acceptable attitudes and behaviour with appropriate consideration for others, whilst their self-reliance was improving. Primary students demonstrated acceptable behaviour and sensible attitudes, but required much supervision and direction. Relationships with other students and staff were respectful and students demonstrated positive attitudes towards healthy living. The secondary students showed very positive and responsible attitudes most all of the time and demonstrated strong self-reliance. Their behaviour was good and their commitment to school life was evident. Foundation Stage children had an acceptable understanding of a few, key Islamic values such as kindness and compassion. The majority demonstrated adequate awareness of a few features of Dubai and UAE. In primary, most students demonstrated a deeper level of understanding of Islamic concepts and laws and could explain what they learnt. They identified and explained local traditions and heritage. They compared different cultures and identified some of the common elements between them. Students' community and environmental responsibility was acceptable in the Foundation Stage and good in the rest of the school. In the early year's classes, the majority of children followed routines to take care of their personal items and the school. Most children participated actively in practical projects such as environmental activities. In the secondary years, students were very knowledgeable about other inhabitants of Dubai and the world. They were aware of their personal work requirements. Students showed a very good understanding of environmental sustainability and took care of their immediate environment.

[View judgements](#)

How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?

Teaching was broadly acceptable across the school. The majority of teaching was of acceptable quality. More than a few lessons were good, but a few were unsatisfactory. Teaching was generally stronger to the older years, especially in English and science. Teachers demonstrated secure subject knowledge, although their English communication skills were not consistently strong. This often inhibited the development of students' literacy skills. Some teachers were unable to clearly articulate what to do to improve. Teachers enjoyed very supportive and respectful relationships with their students. They had an acceptable range of strategies to promote active learning. They gave clear learning objectives, which made students aware of the purposes of their lessons. Group work was prevalent, but teacher talk still dominated too many lessons. The use of plenaries to conclude lessons was of variable effectiveness. Higher attaining students were not always challenged at their levels of learning. Lesson plans did not regularly take into account the needs of all students.

Learning was of acceptable quality across the school. Students had enthusiastic attitudes toward learning and most worked with commitment and determination. Learning was limited when teachers talked too much, restricting opportunities for students to enquire and do research. Students collaborated confidently, for example in English and history, where group work and presentations allowed students to develop their speaking and listening skills. Students drew links between their learning and real life. They applied mathematics to areas in their homes; in science they focused on healthy living. In the Foundation Stage, learning was restricted by teachers' limited English skills. In the primary and middle phases, students enjoyed solving problems and undertaking investigations, but opportunities to develop these skills were infrequent. Access to specialist rooms was limited in science, meaning that students had too few opportunities to develop their practical skills.

The assessment of learning was of acceptable quality. Teachers knew their students well, with much assessment that was informal rather than formal. Teachers' questioning in their classrooms was often narrowly focused on a small group of students rather than involving all students. When given opportunities, students were able to assess their own learning and that of others. Assessment in the Foundation Stage included the use of detailed tracking sheets which identified progress across all areas of learning. Assessment information was collected in the rest of the school, matched to English National Curriculum levels. This information identified students who were exceeding or falling behind the expected attainment levels, but its use to influence teaching and the curriculum was under developed. Marking in books was variable and too often cursory and rushed. Errors were not always highlighted. The school had

recently introduced a system for monitoring students' attainment and progress which was still in the early stages of implementation.

[View judgements](#)

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

The quality of the curriculum was acceptable in all phases. The curriculum was underpinned by a clear rationale. Planned continuity and progression prepared students for the next stages of their learning. The Foundation Stage curriculum provided adequately for the needs of young learners. There were limited opportunities for independent exploration and investigation, which hampered children's learning through discovery. The time allocation for Islamic Education and Arabic met statutory requirements. The curriculum provided a wide range of enrichment opportunities through purposeful educational visits, which had positive effects upon students' knowledge of their environment and the other emirates. These were more effective in science and English, and in the secondary grades. Useful community links, particularly with local businesses, enhanced students' scientific knowledge. The review and modification of the curriculum were at the early stages of development. Subsequently, activities were not always accurately matched to students' diverse needs. Links across subjects and the use of information and communication technology to support learning were limited.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety provision was acceptable across the school. The premises and facilities were well maintained both inside and out. Some entrances were adapted with ramps for those with disabilities. Procedures to ensure that the students were safe from fire were thorough, which resulted in the students evacuating the school in record time. Adequate procedures and systems were clear for maintaining the health and safety of students. When travelling on school buses, students did not always wear their seat belts where they were provided. Staff members were not always vigilant enough at the end of the day, leaving some students unsupervised. A few students were seen leaving the premises without an adult. Incidents related to poor behaviour were suitably documented, but lacked details and analysis. All staff members had recently been made aware of the child protection policy and related procedures. Students learned what was needed to eat a healthy diet through the personal, social and health education programme and their science and physical education classes.

The quality of support throughout the school was acceptable. There were appropriate relationships between staff and students. Adults usually managed behaviour effectively but their skills varied. The well-

being and personal needs of all students, including those with special educational needs (SEN), were clearly identified, but very few students received any additional support.

At times this hindered their progress, particularly when they were set tasks which were not accurately matched to their individual needs. There were good systems to ensure regular attendance and attendance had improved in Years 3 to 6 because of them.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school provide for students with special educational needs?

The leader for special educational needs had focused on developing systems and documentation which allowed teachers to identify students causing concern or who were finding learning difficult. Additional support for students with special needs was limited to a few students and was paid for by their parents. There were insufficient numbers of specialist teachers for effective support of all the students with special needs.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership was of acceptable quality overall. The principal had played a pivotal role in establishing a welcoming, inclusive ethos where students and staff from a wide range of cultural backgrounds got on well with one another. He had established a shared vision within a short space of time and was having a powerful impact on improvement. Together with the senior leadership team, he had gained an accurate picture of what the school had achieved since it opened, and had a clear idea of the next steps for improvement. There was a strong team spirit among the teaching staff, with almost all remaining at the school after its first year. Middle managers were not consistently effective. The newly appointed subject and year group leaders and cluster leaders in the Foundation Stage had not begun to play a strong role in monitoring teaching and reviewing students' progress.

Self-evaluation was acceptable. Self-review was increasingly used as a basis for improvement planning. A systematic approach to performance management had just been introduced but was not yet fully operational. A formal system of lesson observations was being introduced and all teachers had been observed during the first few weeks of the term. Many teachers had responded enthusiastically to the informal feedback they received and they had good opportunities for further training within the school or in partnership with other schools. School development planning was informed by first hand evidence. However, summaries of students' progress were not based on entirely reliable assessment data. Not all

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teachers were confident in using National Curriculum levels to assess students' performance and this restricted the accuracy of self-evaluation.

Partnership with parents and community was good. The 'open door' policy adopted by the school meant that parents were able to approach the Principal, cluster leaders and class teachers about any matters of concern. A good communication system had been set up and the school's website provided a wealth of information. Parent representatives, for each class, had recently been introduced to provide a forum for parents to share their opinions. Partnerships with the community and other schools were beneficial; for example, staff worked with an outstanding school to share practices in the Foundation Stage. Parents were supportive of the school's activities including a successful 'Parent Engagement Week'. Parental questionnaires and interviews showed that parents were positive about the work of the school and the leadership exercised by the Principal.

Governance was of acceptable quality. Strong support from the Management Board and advisory team had been crucial in setting up a new school, transforming the abandoned and somewhat derelict buildings into welcoming administrative areas and attractive places to learn and play. The Board had a sharp awareness of most of the challenges regarding the exponential rise in student numbers. They did not fully anticipate the problems associated with the lack of confidence in English of some teachers, particularly those directly recruited from overseas. However, they had supported school leaders in providing extra help for those members who required it.

The management of staffing, facilities and resources was acceptable. Effective management enabled the school to run smoothly. Teaching staff were suitably qualified, but the majority had no previous experience in teaching the English National curriculum. School leaders had worked hard to support them. Teachers had benefitted from training in how to structure lessons to ensure enough time for independent learning. Further training in this regard was a school priority. The premises were very well maintained, although some rooms were rather small for the numbers of students. There was potential for the rooms and outdoor areas available for the Foundation Stage to be used more effectively to promote all kinds of learning. Resources were sufficient to support learning.

[View judgements](#)

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	718	38%
	Last year	0	0%
Teachers	41		34%
Students	There were no senior students in the school		

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

Approximately one third of the parents and teachers responded to their surveys. Almost all parents said that their children enjoyed school and felt safe. Most parents said that their children felt safe on buses. Parents generally agreed that their children were making good progress in the key subjects, with the exception of Islamic Education and Arabic. Written comments frequently referred to teacher's poor communication skills, especially their pronunciation of English words. Most parents felt that behaviour was good and any incidents of bullying were dealt with well. Parents expressed some concern over the identification of students with special educational needs but the majority agreed that students were welcomed by the school and parents were supported. Almost all parents felt that the school was well led. A minority of parents did not feel involved in decision making. Teachers confirmed that students behaved well and agreed that students enjoyed school and felt safe. Almost all teachers agreed that the school was well led and the majority confirmed that their views were sought and their opinions considered by school leaders.

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

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