

INSPECTION REPORT

GEMS Winchester School

Report published in April 2014

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT GEMS Winchester School

Location	Oud Metha
Type of school	Private
Website	www.gemseducation.com
Telephone	04-3374112
Address	P.O.BOX 113272
Principal	Lee Davies
Curriculum	UK
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-15, KG 1 to Grade 9
Attendance	Acceptable
Number of students on roll	3277
Largest nationality group of Students	Indian
Number of Emirati students	65 (2%)
Date of the inspection	2nd March to 6th March 2014

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The context of the school

Gems Winchester School is situated in Oud Metha, Dubai. At the time of the inspection, the roll was 3277, with boys and girls being roughly equal in numbers. The school had been significantly over-subscribed since its opening. Its population had increased by over four hundred percent in 24 months. Almost one third of the school population was in the Foundation Stage, where there were 37 classes. Currently there were only 96 students in Grade 9.

The school offered the English National Curriculum, with adaptations to meet the requirements of the Ministry of Education. These adaptations did not fully comply with regulations. There were 92 different nationalities of students. Eighty two per cent of the students did not have English as first language. Most students were Indian expatriates. Emirati students comprised a small proportion of the school population.

The teacher population comprised 21 different nationalities. In the school year 2013 – 2014 there had been 106 new teachers and 1500 new students. Most teachers had an appropriate qualification.

Overall school performance 2013-2014

Acceptable

Key strengths

- The improvements in a number of significant areas at Foundation Stage;
- The improvements in health and safety throughout the school;
- The inclusive nature of provision for those with a special educational need;
- The good support offered by parents.

Recommendations

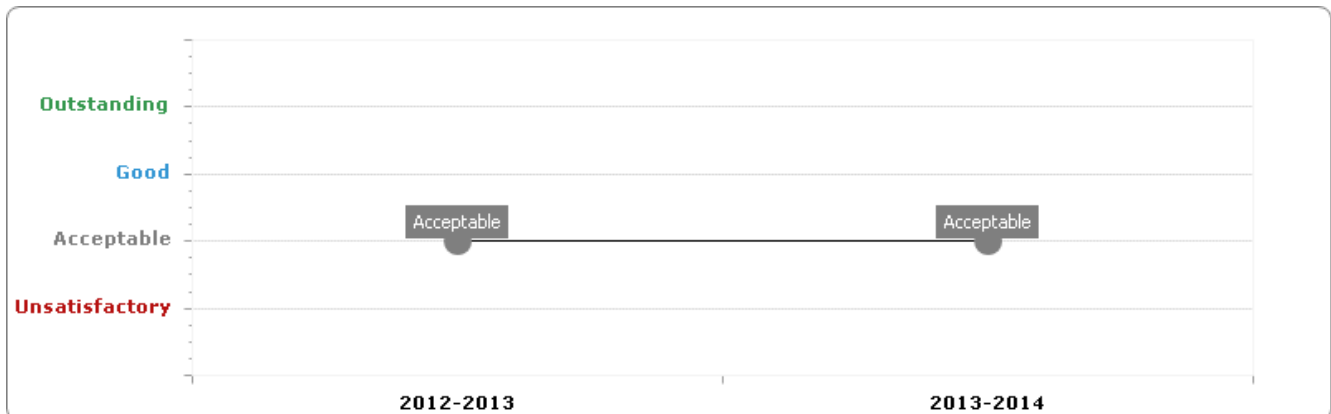
- Secure improvement in learning and teaching, and in the understanding, implementation and application of appropriate systems of assessment;
- Ensure that school leaders and governors place improvement in attainment at the heart of the vision, focus and drive of the school;
- Ensure that the school is fully compliant with the requirements of the Ministry of Education.

Progress since the last inspection

The school had addressed all of the recommendations of the previous report but had not fully met any.

- Students' attainment and progress had not improved, with a decline in Arabic, and in science at secondary phase;
- Some teachers had a poor understanding of educational concepts;
- Assessment was still not accurate and the data generated was inadequately analysed;
- The role of middle leaders had been developed, but they did not yet give enough strategic direction to their colleagues.

Trend of overall performance



How good are the students' attainment progress and learning skills?

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

[Read paragraph](#)

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Quality of students' learning skills	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Personal responsibility	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Students' understanding of Islamic values and their local, cultural and global awareness	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good
Community and environmental responsibility	Good	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Curriculum quality	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Curriculum design to meet the individual needs of students	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary
Health and Safety	Good	Good	Good
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
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 most key subjects attainment was acceptable, however it was unsatisfactory in Arabic and in secondary science. In Islamic Education, most students could explain the five pillars of Islam and the six pillars of faith clearly. Most understood Seerah and Islamic values and morals to an acceptable level. Their recitation skills and their understanding of the Qur'an verses and Hadith and their links to everyday contexts were significantly weaker. In Arabic as first language, listening was the strongest skill for most. Students of Arabic as a first language generally showed limited ability and confidence to use simple standard Arabic in their oral response. The majority could read and understand familiar texts, but they struggled to comprehend unfamiliar age-appropriate texts. The quality of writing was well below the expected levels across all phases. In Arabic as an additional language, the majority of students were able to listen and respond to familiar greetings. However, most of them struggled to hold a simple conversation about daily life using the vocabulary they were learning. Reading familiar sentences was challenging for a significant proportion of students. Students' ability to write independently was limited. In English across all phases most spoke with increasing confidence and accuracy, with strengths in secondary. Writing was stronger in secondary, with older students producing acceptable extended examples. In mathematics, many Foundation stage children could count confidently to twenty. Most in Year 6 could solve simple algebraic equations and by Year 7 they could apply algebra in problem solving. Investigation and critical thinking skills were underdeveloped. In science at Foundation Stage children could explain floating and sinking. In primary school they constructed circuits. Attainment in secondary school was influenced by students inability to understand key scientific vocabulary.

Progress across all subjects and phases was the same as attainment. In Islamic Education, progress in understanding Islamic morals and values was strong for most students, while the development of knowledge of the Seerah and Hadeeth was acceptable. Progress was slower in developing recitation skills and recognizing the links between the Islamic manners and real life applications. In Arabic as first language, progress was steady in the development of listening skills. It was slow in reading and speaking using modern standard Arabic. It was weak in writing including the application of grammar. In Arabic as additional language, the majority of students made steady progress in the pronunciation of familiar words. The development of students' skills in speaking about familiar topics in short conversations was slow. Most students across the school had acquired a limited range of vocabulary and were not developing the ability to use it effectively. Progress in writing skills was insufficient. In English, most children in Foundation Stage made steady progress in speaking and reading. Across primary and secondary most students made acceptable progress, particularly in speaking. A minority made slower progress in writing. Progress in mathematics at Foundation Stage was acceptable. They could solve simple addition sentences. A minority of year 2 students struggled with long division and did not make enough progress. In the middle stages

students made better progress in spatial rather than in quantitative tasks. In science, students observed carefully and described their understanding in Foundation Stage and primary. In secondary, too many did not connect their learning to build scientific understanding, leading to unsatisfactory progress.

[View judgements](#)

Quality of students' learning skills

Students' learning skills were acceptable across the school, with strong features in Foundation Stage. In Arabic, however, students were passive and most aspects of learning were very weak. Elsewhere, most engaged enthusiastically with learning. Foundation Stage children often exercised responsible choice, but elsewhere students were mainly over-reliant on teachers. Students' awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses was limited. Most students often worked together well and were able to discuss and communicate their learning clearly. They rarely engaged in more structured and purposeful collaborative work. Students often, but not routinely, made links with previous and new learning. Enquiry, research and critical thinking skills were variable, though they were developing in lessons and through homework. Students periodically used their own electronic devices appropriately in school, but their overall use of information and communication technology (ICT) was not an integrated feature of learning. Secondary students' understanding and application of scientific method was very limited. In Foundation Stage, children's independent learning was well developed, but elsewhere it was much more limited.

[View judgements](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students' personal responsibility was good in Foundation Stage and acceptable elsewhere. Most behaved well, particularly the youngest. Most primary and secondary students respected adults, but not always each other. Younger primary students' poor behavior, and secondary students' inattention to their peers, marred some lessons. Students knew about healthy lifestyles, but not many took part in extra-curricular sport. While attendance had improved to 92% it remained barely acceptable.

Children's and students' understanding of Islamic values, local culture and the wider world was acceptable at Foundation Stage and primary phases, and good in secondary. Older students in particular spoke knowledgeably about the influence of Islam in daily life in Dubai. They valued important features of modern Dubai, noting and commending its values of tolerance and discipline. Across the school, students celebrated important UAE national events and their own cultural heritage. Their understanding of wider world cultures was stronger in secondary classes.

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Civic, economic and environmental understanding was good across all phases. Children and students frequently donated toys for orphans and raised funds for charity. They valued hard work and enterprise. Students with specific roles took their responsibilities seriously. More widely, they responded well to infrequent opportunities for leadership, such as the secondary student-led conferences. Across the school, children and students were acutely aware of the environmental challenges in wider society. However, they sometimes failed to keep their own school litter free.

[View judgements](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

Teaching was acceptable in all phases, but it was unsatisfactory in Arabic and in science in the secondary school. It was stronger in Foundation Stage. Most teachers had secure subject knowledge and, through display work within classrooms, had provided a good environment which supported pupils' learning. They planned lessons effectively, with better teaching where generic lesson plans had been adapted to meet the individual needs of students. Teachers shared lesson objectives clearly for almost all lessons but did not always refer to them later in the lesson. Much of the teaching was aimed at the expected level and did not provide additional challenge for more able students. Relationships between teachers and students were better when classroom management was effective, thus giving students the confidence to engage in productive dialogue.

Most teachers used a range of strategies and resources to engage learners effectively, including the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) to reinforce teaching. Most had identified different ability groups within their classes.

The school system of assessment was good in Foundation Stage and acceptable elsewhere. In Foundation Stage, assessment procedures had been aligned with best practices in the curriculum for early years. Teachers had made some progress identifying and setting targets, but these measures were yet to have a significant impact on learning. Subject leaders had a good understanding of the assessment system but some teachers had insufficient understanding of robust assessment methods. A lack of moderation, resulted in inconsistencies and inaccuracies in procedures between subjects and phases. Some staff were using assessment data well to identify ability levels of students and then to plan suitable work to meet their needs. This practice was not consistent. Teachers marked students' work regularly but gave inadequate written feedback, which did not give enough detail to students about their next improvement steps.

[View judgements](#)

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

The curriculum was good in Foundation Stage and acceptable elsewhere. The Foundation Stage curriculum had been well adapted to meet the needs of young children. It offered appropriate opportunities for children to learn through play as well as through structured lessons. In primary and secondary it had not been adjusted fully to meet either the needs of the students or the particular local circumstances. Primary school students were required, for example, to learn about the Roman invasion of Britain rather than the Roman invasion of Egypt and the Middle East. Although some subjects had managed to break away from a purely text book driven curricula, in many cases the text book was still dominant. While there were some cross-curricular links, they tended to result from individual teachers rather than from corporate planning. The school offered extra-curricular activities which tended to be mostly sporting. Participation was limited. The school did not attempt to develop or extend the major home languages used by students.

Curriculum design was acceptable across the school. Curricular options were restricted by staffing expertise. Students could make some choices in science and humanities, but not yet in design and technology. The option choices at the end of Year 8 were not well constructed or balanced, with confusing and contradictory information. Teachers did not understand the necessary modifications to enable a wider range of student's access to the curriculum. Most had expected students to modify the curriculum themselves, especially those who were gifted and talented. They had not yet identified special needs children at Foundation Stage. The school had not sufficiently adjusted the curriculum in recognition of the many different cultures present and ultimately to ensure the steady progress of all.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

Health and safety provision was good across all phases. Frequent checks and prompt action ensured that the buildings were well maintained. Incident records were detailed and patterns identified. Transport arrangements were challenging for the school due to lack of private parking spaces for buses. The presence of public vehicles entering the bus area was hazardous. The effective supervision and controlled movements of students maximised their safety. Students reported that they felt safe in school. The management of medication and the detail of student health records was a particular strength. Students were committed to healthy lifestyles. The school had established a training programme on child protection for all staff in school. However, senior management needed to ensure a stronger understanding by staff and students regarding identification and reporting.

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The quality of support was acceptable. The daily interactions between students and teachers generally demonstrated care and concern. A less than effective approach to the management of behaviour meant that students were inconsistently supervised. Strategies to promote and ensure better attendance were underdeveloped. The school's policy on the admission of students with a Special Educational Need (SEN) was inclusive. Appropriate systems were in place for the identification process, but not for the gifted and talented. Individual education plans (IEP's) had been developed in consultation with parents. The necessary modifications to meet the needs of students were not consistently implemented. Progress in the key subjects was mostly acceptable. The counsellor met regularly with students and parents and provided high quality advice.

[View judgements](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

Leadership was acceptable. The Principal, ably assisted by his Deputy and the Head of the Primary School, had been very successful in establishing the school and ensuring its functionality. They had shown themselves to be very able project managers, and had established a functioning school. Their efforts to date had focused on ensuring that students were safe and had a suitable, modern learning environment. However, their efforts to improve teaching and learning through the training of teachers and middle managers had, at this stage, had limited impact on the overall quality of provision. Middle managers, year or subject leaders, had mostly been appointed from within the school. Their lack of experience and lack of confidence in interpreting the English national curriculum meant that they still required considerable support. Senior leaders had worked very successfully to develop and strengthen good relationships among staff. They had created a good supportive environment in which all felt valued. They had expended a great deal of effort to maintain this ethos, due to the increased number of new staff and the need for continuity.

Self-evaluation was acceptable. Senior management had an over-optimistic view of what constituted good practice. The result was that self-evaluation was not entirely accurate in its view of attainment or progress nor was it sufficiently objective in its overview of other aspects of the school. The rapid growth of the school had presented senior leaders with many issues to address. Techniques for effective teaching should be high on the list of priorities. The self-evaluation document was in places too descriptive and insufficiently analytical. As there was insufficient analysis, so was there a difficulty in creating a coherent development plan to address the school's needs. Most staff were committed to change and improvement, but many simply did not know how to go about it. They were adrift in a sea of concepts that were new to them. The school had attempted to address the recommendations of the previous report, but had not fully met any.

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Partnership with parents and the community was good. Parents were welcome in the school and involved in many aspects of its life and work. Parental involvement in Foundation Stage was particularly strong. The school regularly contacted parents, but some found access to the on-line communication system difficult. Reporting did not always identify next steps in learning. The school's links with the local and wider communities were underdeveloped.

Governance was acceptable. The Gems organisation offered appropriate direction to the school. The weekly presence of managers had assisted with developments. Although parents were not directly represented, governors sought their views and acted upon them. The policy of permitting the school to expand rapidly had placed considerable stress on management. Governors had not provided adequate professional development to ensure that teachers were professionally recognised by KHDA, nor had they ensured that the school was compliant with Ministry of Education requirements.

Management was acceptable. The day-to-day organisation of the school was generally efficient. However, there were some weaknesses in timetabling and some injudicious period groupings. The complicated arrangements for school transport at the end of the day had been carefully devised, but they meant that student's had unproductive time waiting. Many teachers did not have appropriate teaching qualifications or experience in the English or Ministry of Education curricula. They were unfamiliar with accepted classroom practice. Although the school had tried to remedy deficiencies through professional development, many teachers still had difficulty in putting into practice what they had learned. Many teaching areas were cramped. There were very limited facilities for outdoor sports. Resources were appropriate and were developing.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school provide for Emirati students?

Emirati students' attainment and progress was generally in line with that of their peers across the key subjects and across the relevant phases. It was acceptable in Islamic Education, English, mathematics and science. It was unsatisfactory in Arabic as a first language, in line with the attainment and progress of their fellow students.

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

Admissions and identification procedures for students with a special educational need were inclusive. Students of all abilities were enrolled in the school. The identification of gifted and talented students was now a priority in terms of future planning and provision. The SEN team had involved parents at all stages in

the identification process and in the planning of a range of key supports for their children. The head of the SEN support team was highly effective in that role and had organised the development of good practice across the school. Provision for students was improving and coordinated through the school's Achievement Centre. However, students with autism and behavioural issues had insufficient targeted and specific support. The curriculum quality had not consistently included creative and practical experiences for special needs students. Teachers' planning to modify an aspect of the curriculum did not specify the minimum learning needed for the topic, the next level of difficulty or the extended activities for more able students. Differentiated strategies to meet the needs of students were not systematically implemented, resulting in acceptable progress. The monitoring was inconsistent in both the primary and secondary phases. However, teachers at Foundation Stage tracked progress more successfully. They had good systems and processes to gather accurate information. For these SEN children progress in English and mathematics was good.

How well does the school teach Arabic as a first language?

The quality of teaching of Arabic was unsatisfactory across all phases. The majority of teachers had secure subject knowledge, but most had very limited understanding of how students develop their language skills. Lesson plans were in place but teachers did not always follow them rigorously. Teachers usually set clear learning objectives in their lessons but these were not always appropriate. Teachers used an adequate range of resources but these were not used to enhance students' learning. In almost all classes, lessons were teacher-centered with too much teacher talk and limited learner activities. Therefore, students did not develop all four language skills appropriately. Work was rarely matched to students' learning needs and did not lead to real linguistic development for students. Students had too few opportunities to learn independently or to apply their learning. Teachers' expectations of how much students could do were often too low.

The school was not compliant with Ministry of Education requirements for the teaching of Arabic. The curriculum had not been modified to address the gaps in students' language skills or to meet the needs of the more able. Opportunities for the development of students' skills in modern standard Arabic were insufficient. Similarly, the planned curriculum had too few opportunities for students to develop the quality and accuracy of their writing, reading and speaking. Enrichment activities were few. The curriculum review was not regular it did not take into account students' feedback and failed to recognized or address the gaps in students' language skills to a satisfactory level.

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	297	11%
	Last year	731	40%
Teachers	45		22%
Students	There were no senior students in the school		

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

A smaller percentage of parents completed their surveys this year compared to the previous year. Most parents, expressed satisfaction with the quality of education offered. Almost all stated that their children enjoyed being at school and were well looked after. A very few expressed concerns about safety on school buses. About a third did not know how well the school dealt with incidents of bullying. Most considered that the school offered a wide range of subjects and activities, that their children found school interesting and that they were well prepared for the next stage in their lives. Of the few who answered the question, almost all stated that the school catered well for students with special educational needs. Most thought that the school was well led. Only the majority thought that their opinions were taken into consideration. About a quarter of the written responses on children's safety indicated incidents of bullying. Some expressed a desire to see more extra-curricular activities, and some felt that their children were overburdened with projects. A number of criticisms were made of Arabic teaching and the lack of communication between Arabic staff and the home. Most teacher responses indicated that behaviour was good and that the school dealt effectively with cases of bullying. Almost all thought that SEN students were fully integrated and that they had the support which they needed to cater for such students. Most stated that the school supported their professional development needs. No students were of an eligible age to complete the survey.

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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