

INSPECTION REPORT

The Westminster School

Report published in April, 2014

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT The Westminster School

Location	Al Qusais
Type of school	Private
Website	www.gemsws-ghusais.com
Telephone	04-2988333
Address	Al Qusais, PO 27016 Dubai, U A E
Principal	Kingston Gilbert Xavier
Curriculum	UK
Gender of students	Boys and Girls
Age / Grades or Year Groups	3-18 / Foundation Stage-Year 13
Attendance	Good
Number of students on roll	4626
Largest nationality group of Students	Arab
Number of Emirati students	134 (3%)
Date of the inspection	2nd March to 6th March 2014

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The context of the school

The Westminster School, located in Al Qusais, provides education for girls and boys from Foundation Stage to Year 13, aged three to 18 years. At the time of the inspection there were 4626 students on roll compared with 4966 at the previous inspection. Students in the school were mainly Arabs and Pakistanis with smaller numbers of Indian, Asian and Philippino students. About two fifth of the students studied Arabic as a first language and three per cent were Emiratis. The school had identified one tenth of the students as having some form of special educational need.

English was the language of instruction. The school had a Foundation Stage with English as the language of instruction, a primary phase (Years 1 to 6), a secondary phase (Years 7 to 11) and a post 16 phase (Years 12 to 13). The school followed the English National Curriculum with students taking International General Certificate (IGCSE) examinations in Years 10 and 11, and Advanced Level examinations in Years 12 and 13. At the time of the inspection, there were 301 teachers including the Principal and 25 teaching assistants. Teachers had a range of academic and teaching qualifications.

Overall school performance 2013-2014

Acceptable

Key strengths

- The purposeful leadership of the recently appointed Principal and his contribution to moving the school forward;
- The outstanding attainment and progress of post 16 students in English, mathematics and science;
- The exceptional attitudes and behaviour of the majority of students and their understanding of culture, community and Islamic values especially in the sixth form;
- Good teaching, learning and assessment in the secondary and post-16 phases;
- The good quality of the curriculum and the school's support for art and technology as well as the core values programme.

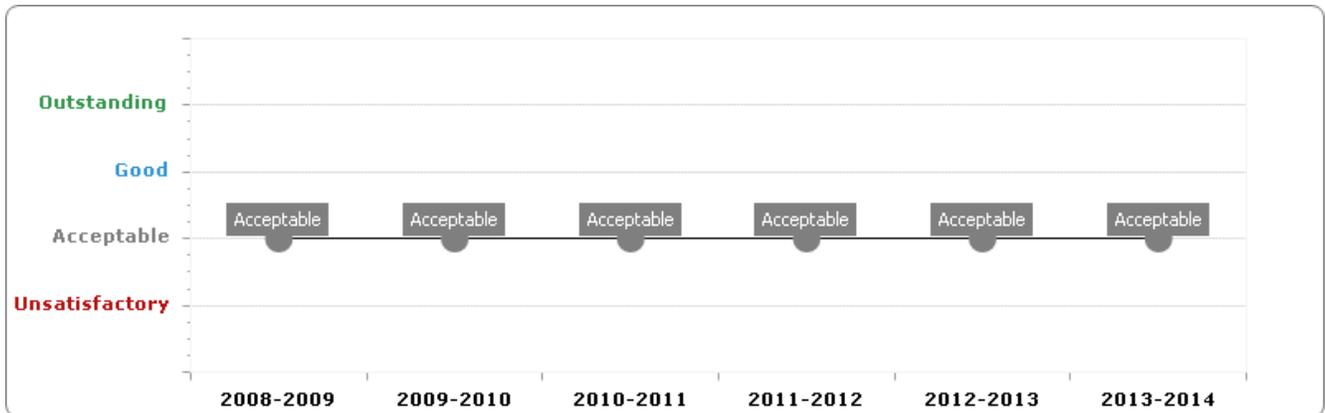
Recommendations

- Raise the attainment and progress of children in the Foundation Stage in English, mathematics and science and older students' in Arabic and Islamic Education by:
 - matching work more closely to students' abilities;
 - making sure that tasks excite and challenge students to do their best;
 - ensuring students understand what they are learning and what they need to do to improve;
 - identifying and sharing good practice;
- Further improve teaching, learning and assessment in the Foundation Stage and the primary phase;
- Review entrance requirements in the sixth form so that more students can continue their education in the school;
- Improve the behaviour of boys by ensuring that all teachers apply consistent approaches to the management of behaviour in their classes.

Progress since the last inspection

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved through more focused lesson observations as well as ongoing professional development;
- Teachers' professional development has measurable outcomes and teachers are now more aware of English National Curriculum standards;
- Students' awareness of the environment and their involvement in the community is now outstanding in the sixth form;
- The quality of the curriculum in the primary phase is good as shortcomings identified in the previous report have now been addressed.

Trend of overall performance



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

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

[Read paragraph](#)

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Quality of students' learning skills	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Personal responsibility	Outstanding	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding
Students' understanding of Islamic values and their local, cultural and global awareness	Good	Good	Good	Outstanding
Community and environmental responsibility	Good	Good	Good	Outstanding

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

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

	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Good	Good
Curriculum design to meet the individual needs of students	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

[Read paragraph](#)

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	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good

[Read paragraph](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

	Whole school
Quality of leadership	Good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
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 Islamic Education, attainment was acceptable across all phases. Most students had an appropriate understanding of key Islamic values and concepts. They could recite and memorise the short Surahs they learnt from Holy Quran. In Arabic as a first language attainment was acceptable in primary and good in secondary and post 16. Students' speaking and listening skills were good. They had secure reading comprehension skills but their writing skills were less well developed. In Arabic as an additional language attainment was acceptable and most students could read letters and words but their pronunciation lacked accuracy and their speaking skills were limited. Their basic writing skills were adequate. Attainment in English was acceptable in the Foundation stage, good in primary and outstanding in the rest of school. Children's development of literacy skills was slower in the primary phase than in the later part of school. Girls outperformed boys in all phases. Post 16 students performed exceptionally well in English. In mathematics and science, attainment was acceptable in the Foundation Stage, good in Primary and secondary and outstanding at Post 16. In mathematics, children in the Foundation Stage could identify shapes and worked confidently with numbers up to 20. By Grade 9, they skillfully worked out the areas of composite shapes but their mental arithmetic skills were not well developed. In science, children were encouraged to be curious and to explore their own world. Most students in the primary phase were developing an early knowledge of inquiry which continued into the secondary phase.

In Islamic Education, most students made acceptable progress in explaining Islamic values. Their understanding of key concepts and of Islamic practice was developing steadily. In Arabic as a first language, progress was good in Primary and Secondary and acceptable at post-16. Students made steady progress in speaking and reading skills but their progress in writing was limited. In Arabic as an additional language, students in the primary phase progressed well in their listening skills but this was much less evident in the secondary phase where progress slowed to unsatisfactory. Students' progress in developing the ability to read independently and to use what they had learnt to communicate was slow, particularly for older students.

Overall progress in English, mathematics and science was acceptable in the Foundation Stage, good in Primary and Secondary and outstanding at Post 16. In speaking and listening skills in English, progress was good across the school except in the Foundation Stage where it was acceptable. In the primary and secondary phases, students' progress in writing was slow. Post 16 students, especially girls, made better than expected progress in reading, writing, listening and speaking. In mathematics progress in the development of students' critical thinking skills was slow and mental arithmetic skills were not sufficiently supported until the latter part of the school. In the Foundation Stage, the development of science skills was inconsistent.

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In the primary, secondary and post 16 phases, challenging lesson objectives and well planned lessons reinforced the development of scientific understanding and stimulated good and better progress in science.

[View judgements](#)

Quality of students' learning skills

Students' learning skills were acceptable in the Foundation Stage and the primary phase. They were good in the upper secondary and post 16 phases. Poor behaviour by boys in the upper primary and lower secondary phases meant that many were not fully engaged in their learning and did not make the expected progress. Most students, especially girls, were keen, enthusiastic and excited to learn. Students in the upper secondary and post 16 phases were mature and showed high levels of responsibility for their learning as well as supporting the learning of others. Students were keen to work in groups and most teachers provided opportunities for paired and group work. Senior students frequently undertook independent research and used technology and the internet to support this. In science and business, students were challenged to develop their critical and higher order thinking skills. Most teachers shared the objectives of lessons with students and this supported their learning. However opportunities to revisit these objectives at the end of the lesson in order to check student understanding were sometimes missed.

[View judgements](#)

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Personal responsibility was good in primary and outstanding in other phases. Most students demonstrated positive and responsible attitudes to their studies. In a minority of lessons, especially in the upper primary boys' section, poor behaviour disrupted learning. Regardless of this, relationships between students and teachers were often excellent. Students felt safe, valued and supported. School based initiatives on healthy living had encouraged students to make healthier choices. Attendance had improved and was now good.

Cultural awareness was outstanding at Post 16 and good in the remainder of the school. Students had a clear understanding of how Islamic values influenced society, for example relating Shakespeare plays to Islamic values on suicide and the role of women in society. Students appreciated the heritage and culture of the UAE and life in Dubai. They gave good examples of their own cultures and traditions as well as demonstrating accomplishment in music, art, drama and technology.

Community and environmental responsibility was outstanding at Post 16 and good across all other phases. Students were responsible and committed members of the school community. There was a strong student voice in the school through class and student councils. Older students provided excellent role models for

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younger students and demonstrated high levels of commitment to the life of the school. Community involvement was a strength and included many charitable concerns. Students were actively involved in activities to improve the environment although litter remained a problem.

[View judgements](#)

How good are teaching and assessment?

The quality of teaching was acceptable in the Foundation Stage and the primary phase, and good in the other phases. Most teachers had good subject knowledge but some, in the Foundation Stage and the primary phase, did not fully understand exactly how students learned. In the Foundation Stage, most teachers were using active learning with appropriate practical tasks and activities to develop understanding and skills. In the primary, secondary and post 16 phases, a majority of teachers used a range of learning activities such as group and paired work effectively to enhance learning and enjoyment, especially in English, mathematics and science lessons. In a number of classes in the Foundation Stage, as well as the primary and lower secondary phases, the pace of lessons was sometimes too slow and the tasks set lacked challenge. Whilst most teachers planned thoroughly, a minority did not adhere to their plans or share the learning objectives with their students. In Arabic as an additional language there was too much teacher talk in lessons. Throughout the school there was insufficient differentiation observed in lessons. High quality teaching was observed in art, business and physical education.

The school's assessment of learning was acceptable in the Foundation Stage and the primary phase. It was good in the secondary and post 16 phases. The school had thoroughly reviewed and improved its arrangements for collecting and recording assessment data. In the Foundation Stage, assessment information was not always used appropriately for planning lessons to meet the wide range of needs. Some primary and early secondary phase teachers did not fully understand differentiation and as a result they provided activities which were not appropriate to meet the needs of the full range of students' abilities. In the upper secondary and post 16 phases, most teachers had a very good knowledge of students' strengths and weaknesses. Whilst feedback on written work had improved, not all teachers especially those in Islamic Education and Arabic, used assessment data effectively or provided sufficient feedback on next steps in learning.

[View judgements](#)

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

The quality of the curriculum was good across all phases. Provision closely followed the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum, the English National Curriculum and the Ministry of Education curriculum for Islamic Education and Arabic. The curriculum was balanced with a very broad range of subjects including a special focus on art, music and technology. It was reviewed annually and changes were implemented to ensure a dynamic and relevant curriculum. Curriculum planning ensured progression in all subjects but the Foundation Stage curriculum for free flow and outdoor learning activities lacked rigour and challenge. Opportunities for independent learning, research and critical thinking were built into the curriculum but were not always translated into lesson planning. Carefully considered transition arrangements ensured that students moved smoothly across phases. There was a broad and developing extracurricular after-school programme. This was in addition to the highly successful core values programme which provided stimulating enrichment activities within the school day.

Curriculum design was acceptable across all phases. The school had made significant steps to modify its curriculum to cater for the needs of all student groups. However, the quality of in-class provision for students with special educational needs, including gifted and talented students, was still at a very early stage of development. Teachers were improving their skills to more effectively manage student support by differentiating the curriculum. The school had reviewed and broadened its subject offer to ensure that the range of available subjects matched student talents, interests and aspirations. Concerns were raised by parents and students about the entrance requirements in the sixth form which were unduly high because of the limited number of places available.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school protect and support students?

Overall, health and safety were good in all phases but arrangements to ensure the safe delivery and collection of students by private car remained a concern in spite of the diligent efforts of the school to improve this area. Despite the school's efforts, parents coming to school by car were not always alert to the danger to students from car traffic. Appropriate policies and procedures supported all aspects of health and safety including the inspection of equipment and regular fire drills. There was a sharp focus on guiding students to follow a healthy life style and this was supported by the provision of healthy food options in the canteen. Some health and safety concerns were reported to the school during the inspection and most were corrected.

The quality of care was good in Post 16 and acceptable in the other phases. The school was a harmonious community in which each student was valued. Relationships between staff and students were generally of

a high quality. The core values programme provided valuable opportunities to extend students' awareness of the value of good behaviour, respect for others and other social values. However, measures taken to improve the behaviour and social awareness of a few boys in upper primary and lower secondary classes were not effective and the learning and enjoyment of school for other students was adversely affected. Students with a wide variety of special educational needs were admitted to the school but arrangements for their care were inconsistent and their needs were not always accurately assessed.

[View judgements](#)

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership and management was good. The recently appointed Principal had the respect and support of parents, teachers and students. He had provided a clear direction for the school based on a well-considered understanding of what was needed to be done. The leadership of other senior staff, supervisors and subject leaders was similarly focused and well intentioned. Relationships between leaders and staff was professional and supportive. There was a clear focus on consultation and collegiate working which secured high levels of commitment from staff. Leaders had been successful in developing the quality of teaching as well as communicating with and meeting its promise to parents. The school had been receptive to external evaluation and managed the inspection with openness and integrity.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. Leaders at all levels had a good awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Self-evaluation was realistic and accurate and the action plans included appropriate success criteria. Subject self-evaluation was similarly purposeful but the analysis of data lacked precision. Lesson observations were regular but targets were not specific nor directly linked to professional development. Joint lesson observations were successful in identifying strengths and weaknesses but grading was sometimes generous. Recommendations raised in the last inspection were being addressed in terms of consistency in teaching, learning and assessment as well as teachers understanding of the English National Curriculum.

Links with parents and the community were good and parents were pleased with the improved communications between school and home. Parents were well informed about their children's progress and developments in school. Productive links had been forged with local public services and schools within the same organisation. Parents were mostly pleased with the quality of education provided by the school.

Governance was acceptable. School owners played a significant role in supporting the school and ensuring that the school met its commitments to parents although evidence of the school being held to account for its actions was not corroborated. Issues of non-compliance for Emirati students had not been pursued, health

and safety concerns had not all been addressed and concerns regarding the provision for students wishing to continue their education in the sixth form had still to be resolved.

Management of staffing, facilities and resources was acceptable. The day to day management of the school was efficient and managers responded quickly to identified priorities. Teachers were deployed effectively but there were insufficient teaching assistants to support them. Many of the teaching rooms and laboratories were too small for the number of students who used them. The school made prudent use of the limited range of resources available for learning.

[View judgements](#)

How well does the school provide for Emirati students?

Most Emirati students made acceptable progress in their studies with the exception of Arabic as a first language where progress was good. Attitudes and behaviour were good throughout the school and students showed high levels of respect to other students. Attendance and punctuality were good. Emirati students engaged enthusiastically in cultural events and enjoyed talking about the achievements of Dubai. Nine Emirati students were studying Arabic as an additional language instead of Arabic as a first language. Emirati parents were actively involved in the life of the school.

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

The quality of care and support for students with special educational needs was acceptable and enabled students to take a full part in the life of the school. The identification of students with special educational needs was generally reliable and accurate. Teachers knew their students well and were aware of their specific needs. There had been improvements in the assessment and monitoring of progress. Specialist support through withdrawal groups helped students make good progress in English and mathematics. Provision for supporting students with behavioural, social and emotional needs was good. The progress of students with special educational needs in lessons was too variable. Some teachers lacked the skills and expertise to adapt tasks and worksheets to help students' understanding. They did not always provide the necessary support in lessons to enable students to make good progress. The school provided good opportunities for gifted and talented students to excel in mathematics, art and physical education, but many students were not sufficiently challenged in lessons.

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

Most teachers of Arabic as a first language had good subject knowledge. They planned for their lessons and included clear learning objectives. They regularly used dialogue and oral questions to students to raise levels of engagement; this worked particularly well in classes with a small student population. They gave sufficient attention to establishing links between what the students were learning and real life. They used an appropriate range of resources including ICT in most of their lessons. Only a few teachers matched work well to students' individual learning needs or used the subject to develop students' thinking skills.

The school curriculum for Arabic as a first language was based on the Ministry of Education standards although assessment of students' achievement did not reflect appropriate understanding of what students were expected to achieve at each phase. In addition, a few Arab students in the upper grades were studying Arabic as an additional language and therefore were making less progress than was expected of students at their age.

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 judgments. 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	261	12%
	Last year	207	10%
Teachers	201		66%
Students	272		38%

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

Approximately 12 per cent of the parents responded to the survey which was higher than the previous year. Almost all parents were positive about the school but not overwhelmingly so. Most were satisfied with the quality of education but one in eight parents were not. Parents felt their child was making good progress in English, mathematics and science but were concerned about progress in Islamic Education and Arabic. Most parents agreed that their child enjoyed school. They were happy that their child was looked after and kept safe but concerned over whether bullying was dealt with effectively. Most felt that the school was well led but a few were concerned that school leaders did not listen to their opinions. The survey was also undertaken by 201 teachers and 272 of the older students in the school. Almost all teachers were satisfied with the quality of education and thought that the school was well led. Most thought that students were well behaved but a minority disagreed. Most students felt they made good progress in their subjects and almost all said that they felt safe. One fifth did not feel that students in the school were well behaved. Feedback from student meetings commented on recent improvements in the school and the need for more field trips and sporting activities.

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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