

GEMS Winchester School Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Post-16

Report published May 2011

Contents

Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report	3
Basic information about the school.....	3
How well does the school perform overall?.....	4
Key features of the school	4
Recommendations.....	5
How good are the students' attainment and progress in key subjects?.....	5
How good is the students' personal and social development?.....	6
How good are the teaching and learning?.....	7
How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?.....	8
How well does the school protect and support students?.....	8
How good are the leadership and management of the school?.....	9
Summary of inspection judgements.....	11
Next steps.....	15
How to contact us.....	15

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 Winchester School was inspected in March 2011 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 Jebel Ali, GEMS Winchester School is a private school offering education to boys and girls aged three to 18 years, from Foundation Stage to Year 13. The school follows a UK curriculum. At the time of the inspection there were 2851 students on roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) analysed responses to on-line questionnaires completed by parents. Most parents were satisfied with the quality of education. They felt that their children were safe at school and well supported by staff. Most considered that links and communication with the school were good; issues raised with the school were readily addressed. The majority of parents believed that their children were making good progress because of effective teaching and learning. A significant minority had concerns about progress in Islamic Education and Arabic. Parents thought that teaching was both the best feature of the school and the aspect that needed most improving. Although a few parents thought that there were behavioural issues at the school, most parents had no such concerns. Most parents were also pleased with the school's promotion of a healthy lifestyle. A minority expressed some reservations about the quantity and suitability of homework and the range of extra-curricular activities.

How well does the school perform overall?

GEMS Winchester School was an acceptable and improving school. It had done well to overcome a testing year and not only maintain its integrity and positive ethos, but also to improve in several ways. The new building to house secondary students had been a major boost to the school and its construction had been handled smoothly, with minimal disruption to school life and students' learning. The school also had to deal managerially with a large influx of students and a very high turnover of teaching and support staff. In addition to this, a new principal was in post, together with a new leadership team. It was to their credit that the school had maintained its equilibrium in the past year. Although the school recognised that there was still much work to be done, its successes in improving the safety of students, reducing overcrowding and developing links with parents, for example, provided clear evidence of the school's good capacity to improve further.

Students' personal development was good at all ages. They had positive attitudes towards work, developed good social skills and behaved well. The awareness by older students of Islamic and cultural issues was particularly impressive. Attainment and progress were mostly acceptable, although they were good in English and aspects of mathematics and science. Teaching ranged from outstanding to unsatisfactory. Induction of new staff to the school had been a priority in trying to ensure greater consistency in the approach to teaching and learning. The curriculum was better for younger students; it offered fewer options for older students, especially at the higher levels. The school took good care of its students and provided good pastoral support for all students, including those with special needs. Having come through this difficult year commendably, the school is well poised to sustain its momentum.

Key features of the school

- The strong rapport between staff and students that results in good behaviour and positive attitudes towards learning;
- The excellent awareness by older students of Islamic culture and the cosmopolitan nature of Dubai;
- The good quality of care and personal support for students, and the improved facilities to reduce over-crowding and support learning;
- The clear-sighted, determined and cohesive leadership that is firmly committed to the development of the school;
- The ready acquisition by students of English as an additional language;
- The high turnover of staff that produced inconsistencies in teaching and learning;
- The limited use of assessment to meet the learning needs of all students.

Recommendations

- Explore all possible circumstances to retain teaching staff and ensure the continuity and quality of teaching and learning;
- Ensuring that teachers make full use of assessment data to deliver lessons that are suitably challenging and meet the different needs of students;
- Diversify and strengthen students' learning through a more creative curriculum and greater emphasis on independent learning;
- Sharing good practice and monitoring its effectiveness more rigorously in order to minimise the inconsistency of teaching across the school.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable in all phases. Most Year 3 students were able to recite short verses from The Holy Qur'an from memory. Year 5 students could identify some conditions for praying, Wudu and Haj. In Year 6, students understood the importance of honesty and a few of them linked it to Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) Seera. In Year 9, students could identify other names of the Day of Judgement from The Holy Qur'an. Students in Year 11 developed their understanding of responsibility and accountability in Islam. Post-16 students demonstrated an acceptable understanding of the economic system in Islam. Across the school, students demonstrated good understanding of values and morals but only few displayed acceptable recitation skills.

Attainment and progress in Arabic as a first language were acceptable across the school. Younger students demonstrated good listening skills and could respond to different sets of instructions. Across the school, students' speaking skills were underdeveloped. In Year 5, students could read different short texts and summarise and discuss their main ideas orally. In secondary, students were developing their skills in grammar and a few of them, applied them correctly in writing. In Year 8, students could discuss a text about the islands in the Arabian Gulf and linked it to their environmental understanding. Post-16 students were developing their skills in professional writing and displayed acceptable use of accurate grammar.

Attainment in Arabic as an additional language in the primary and secondary phases was acceptable, whilst progress was good in primary and acceptable in secondary. Across the school, reading was better developed than speaking and listening. For example, in Years 5 and 6, students' reading and pronunciation were above expected levels. Speaking was limited to memorising and reciting dialogues in the textbooks. This practice inhibited students from using Arabic as a living language, particularly in the secondary phase, and their progress in learning new vocabulary was therefore limited. Writing was less well developed and was often limited to completing exercises from the textbook.

Attainment and progress in English were good. Most students listened carefully and understood challenging concepts. At all stages students spoke with fluency and developing vocabulary. In Foundation Stage, most children listened and pronounced words accurately. In primary, most students recognised the key features of a discursive text and used appropriate terminology and connectives. Primary and secondary students read with accuracy but often with limited expression. Their short report writing skills were stronger than their abilities to produce extended creative texts. By Year 12, students displayed an ability to analyse conventions of grammar and literary technique. Both IGCSE and AS-level literature results for the few students who sat this subject had consistently improved and were above international standards.

In mathematics, attainment and progress were good in Foundation Stage and primary and acceptable at secondary and post-16. At the end of Foundation Stage children could write, order and count single digit numbers and use non-standard units of measurement. Throughout primary, students developed their number skills and by Year 6 they could calculate percentages accurately and construct pie-charts. Most students in primary engaged in a range of practical activity and developed skills of measurement of lengths, weights and angles. In secondary, students displayed knowledge of the rules of algebra and could solve a range of equations and inequalities. However, their ability to work independently and investigate their own problems was weak. In post-16 courses, students gained appropriate understanding within the key areas of algebra, statistics and mechanics.

Attainment and progress in science were acceptable in Foundation Stage and primary and good in secondary. Post-16 attainment was acceptable and progress was good. In Foundation Stage, most children displayed age-appropriate factual knowledge about topics covered in class. They used observation skills confidently in exploring plants, but their investigative skills were less well developed. In primary, the majority of students had age-appropriate knowledge and practical skills. Most secondary students were able to categorise and classify materials and communicate clearly their observations and subject knowledge; improved investigative skills were a feature in this phase too. Most students in post-16 recorded and analysed data accurately and could predict outcomes, but students' critical thinking skills were underdeveloped and this limited their confidence in being able to formulate well thought-out hypotheses.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

The attitudes and behaviour of students throughout the school were good. Students were courteous to visitors and mostly considerate of each other, despite some occasional misbehaviour. They had good relationships with staff and this supported learning in the classroom. Students enjoyed their classes and most were attentive and eager to learn. Students knew about the importance of a good diet and exercise and showed a strong commitment to following a healthy lifestyle. Almost all students were punctual for school and for their lessons. Attendance was good.

Students' civic understanding was good in the Foundation Stage and primary and outstanding in secondary and post-16. Students in the primary phase understood their responsibilities and were involved in the student council and as house captains. The student council in secondary and post-16 was highly pro-active within the school and wider community. They worked on several charity projects and instigated change in the canteen food to a healthier menu. Children in the Foundation Stage could identify the seven Emirates and rulers in the UAE. Displays around the school promoted the understanding of Islam and Islamic culture. Older students were actively involved in discussions about Islam and other religions and they felt proud to be members of a multi-cultural society that adhered to its values and offered equality of opportunity.

Students' economic and environmental understanding was good. Children in Foundation Stage understood the value of money and were keen to keep their school clean. In primary, most students had a good knowledge of the economic development of Dubai and how major environmental issues had impacted on society. Secondary and post-16 students understood the impact of economic changes in Dubai and the UAE and the role of leadership in sustaining its development. Most older students understood the impact of economic decisions on the environment and some of them discussed solutions, such as consistent awareness programmes and solar energy.

How good are the teaching and learning?

Teaching was acceptable across the school. Although a significant minority of teaching was good, most was acceptable, with some that was unsatisfactory. This inconsistency meant that the outcomes for students varied. In most classrooms, the good rapport between staff and students produced a positive learning ethos. Teachers were good at ensuring that students knew exactly what they needed to learn. Good planning meant that most lessons were well organised and little time was lost. There was often good use of information and communications technology (ICT), videos and other resources to explain and reinforce new learning. A minority of teachers were skilled in questioning students to assess understanding and to consolidate learning. The best teaching was challenging and used assessment well, but this was not the norm. Too often the level of work was too similar for all groups of students, so they did not achieve all that they could. Quite often teachers would take the lead too much and not allow students to think for themselves. Teachers' subject knowledge was variable and, although they varied their strategies, many did not know how children learn best. In the least effective lessons, weak behaviour management and work that was not sufficiently demanding meant that students did not make enough progress.

Students' learning was acceptable at all levels. Students were keen to work and sustained good levels of concentration in most lessons. They had good collaborative skills and were respectful of one another's opinions and ideas. Most students used ICT skills competently, but their independent learning skills were underdeveloped. Often students were not encouraged to develop their thinking processes freely and to be creative in their approach. Older students had better opportunities and skills. In the most effective lessons, students could apply their knowledge to real-life situations, but this was not typical throughout the school.

Assessment was acceptable. The school had strengthened the systems for gathering and collating information about students' progress. Teachers had a good overview of how well students were doing and this enabled them to teach students in ability groups as well as identify underachievers. Teachers, however, did not make enough use of assessment data to influence their planning of lessons and so, too often, the work did not meet the different needs of students. Teachers were increasingly making students aware of how they could improve their work but the marking of books was inconsistent and provided too little helpful guidance.

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

The curriculum was good in Foundation Stage and primary, and acceptable in secondary and post-16. A curriculum development group supported the review and development of the curriculum across the different phases of the school. For instance, to ensure better streamlined continuity and progression, the Foundation Stage curriculum contained a good range of activities across the six areas of learning. The early years curriculum effectively supported children's language development and had a strong focus on personal, social and emotional development. Further language programmes and a greater emphasis on active learning were being introduced into the primary curriculum. Secondary heads of departments had developed thorough schemes of work in several areas of the curriculum, although a few were not consistently implemented. The addition of travel and tourism courses in Years 10 and 11 extended choice for students, but options were narrower for the older age ranges. Post-16 options provided well for business studies and science options, but opportunities for arts and humanities were lacking. Two vocational options were provided as after-school opportunities. Despite such provision, many students left the school for alternatives that better met their needs. Provision for special educational needs and additional after-school classes in Years 11 to 13 offered good support for those requiring assistance in their learning. Curricular provision to extend the more able was becoming established. ICT had been introduced in many areas of the curriculum. There was a suitable progression in all subjects, although in a few cases topics were repeated from primary to secondary without adding a greater level of challenge, for example, in perimeter work and poster design. There were some cross-curricular links at all stages, particularly between mathematics and science. Extra-curricular provision involved a minority of students and included several sports, environmental activities and international trips. Links with the local community included several environmental projects and participating in a Young Enterprise competition.

How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements to ensure students' health and safety were good. The school maintained a safe and secure environment; buildings were clean, well maintained and fire drills regularly undertaken. The medical team were dedicated to the students' needs and provided them with

an extensive health education programme. Teachers and support staff were visible and vigilant, ensuring students were very well supervised. Students were trained in safe practices and risk assessments for visits outside the school premises were rigorous and well documented. Bus transport was safe and supervision was very well managed on arrival and departure. The school canteen provided a wide choice of healthy foods and healthy living was integrated into the life and work of the school. Child protection procedures were well known to staff and students.

The quality of support for students was acceptable. Effective staff-student relationships existed within the school. Students' emotional and personal needs were well supported by a committed pastoral team and included good university and careers guidance. Tracking of academic progress was being used more effectively and students' individual needs were beginning to be addressed. Individual students' progress could be easily identified and this supported their predicted end-of-year attainment targets. Students with special educational needs were identified at an early age and their individual learning needs being addressed. However, targets for students lacked clear references to success criteria and the school had identified this area for further development. The promotion of attendance was good and punctuality was carefully monitored.

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The leadership and management of the school were good. The well-focused and purposeful leadership of the principal had been instrumental in steering the school through a transitional phase of its development. Leadership was well delegated and cohesive. Senior members of staff shared a common vision and were united in their eagerness to improve the school. Decision-making was corporate, with due regard for the views of parents and students. The leadership had rightly placed much emphasis on staff training, especially for new teachers, and had established some good practice through support and guidance. However, the school had not succeeded in addressing the issue of staff turnover. In addition, not all middle managers were equally effective in developing their areas of responsibility.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. The leadership had a clear and accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. Monitoring by senior leaders was effective, although there was a tendency to evaluate procedures more than outcomes. Since the last inspection the school had understandably focused its attentions and energies on addressing the recommendations in the report. In this, it had been mainly successful. The improvements to students' safety, curriculum compliance, governance and the new building were cogent examples. It had not succeeded in improving teaching and progress emphatically, but better systems and training were beginning to have an impact.

Links with parents and the community were good. The school had worked hard to involve parents in their children's learning. Booklets, workshops and an extended parents' engagement week had enabled parents to support work at home more effectively. Internet links, especially in the English department, gave parents valuable information. Parents also

supported reading in school, especially in Foundation Stage. Their professional contacts provided good links with local businesses and amenities. Reports on the academic progress gave information about attainment, but did not include detailed advice about how students could improve. Community links were extensive and included liaison with businesses and charities, as well as visits by current and former prime ministers from overseas.

Governance had improved and was acceptable. The management board had acted decisively to solve the issue of over-crowding. It was also responding to the student numbers in classes and had resolved to limit this in the next school year. The board provided valuable support in training, financial management and professional advice and held the school to account very well. However, the involvement of other stake-holders in decision-making was limited. A new parental body was beginning to act as a sounding board for the parental voice, but was not yet fully functioning.

Staffing, facilities and resources were good. There was a good number of teaching and support staff, whose qualifications were varied but acceptable overall. The new school building had transformed the learning environment and now provided good specialist facilities for all main subjects; for example, through the extra library and science, art and ICT rooms. The provision for sports was adequate. Resources were plentiful, but occasionally students had to share them between large groups.

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	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?				
2% 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	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Not Applicable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Good	Acceptable	Not Applicable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?

Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?

Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Good	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Good	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?

Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Attitudes and behaviour	Good	Good	Good	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Outstanding	Outstanding
Economic and environmental understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Teaching for effective learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Curriculum quality	Good	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	Foundation Stage	Primary	Secondary	Post-16
Health and safety	Good	Good	Good	Good
Quality of support	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the leadership and management of the school?	
	Overall
Quality of leadership	Good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Good
Governance	Acceptable
Staffing, facilities and resources	Good

How well does the school perform overall?
Acceptable

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.

Copyright 2011

This report is for internal use only and for the self-evaluation purposes of the school. It should not be used for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement.