

# GEMS World Academy Inspection Report

Kindergarten to Diploma Programme

Report Published May 2011

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## Explanation of the inspection levels used in the report

**Outstanding** - exceptionally high quality of performance or practice.

**Good** - the expected level of quality for every school in Dubai.

**Acceptable** - the minimum level of acceptability required for Dubai. All key aspects of performance and practice in every school should meet or exceed this level.

**Unsatisfactory** - quality not yet at the level acceptable for schools in Dubai. Schools will be expected to take urgent measures to improve the quality of any aspect of their performance or practice that is judged at this level.

GEMS World Academy was inspected in April 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 Al Barsha, GEMS World Academy is a private school providing education for boys and girls aged from three to 18 years. The school follows the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. The Kindergarten is for children aged 3 to 6 years. The Primary Years Programme (PYP) is for Grades 1 to 5, the Middle Years Programme (MYP) is for Grades 6 to 10 and the Diploma Programme (IB DP) is for Grades 11 and 12. At the time of the inspection, there were 840 students on the roll. The student attendance reported by the school for the last academic session was good.

As part of the inspection process, Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau analysed responses to on-line questionnaires issued to parents. The overwhelming majority of parents were satisfied with all aspects of the school. There was a high level of satisfaction with the teaching and students' positive attitudes and behaviour.

### How well does the school perform overall?

The school continued to provide a good quality of education and performed effectively in most aspects of its work. The quality of leadership was outstanding, and was reflected in the very good progress that had been made in addressing the areas for improvement identified by the previous inspection.

Children's progress in English and science in the Kindergarten was outstanding. In PYP and MYP, students were making good progress in most subjects and levels of attainment were at least acceptable. Their progress and attainment in science was consistently good across the

school. Students' behaviour was exemplary and they had an outstanding awareness of environmental issues. Teaching, learning and assessment were outstanding in the Kindergarten and good in the rest of the school. The quality of the Kindergarten curriculum and the school's systems for the protection and support of students were also outstanding. The school demonstrated an excellent capacity for continued improvement.

### Key features of the school

- Highly competent leadership with an outstanding capacity to sustain improvement, as reflected in the progress made since the last inspection;
- Students' exemplary behaviour within a harmonious and diverse cultural community;
- Highly effective promotion of environmental understanding;
- Outstanding Kindergarten provision, particularly in English;
- Outstanding provision for the protection and support of students;
- Outstanding support for students with special educational needs;
- Positive relationships between students, staff and parents;
- Excellent facilities and resources;
- Insufficient challenge for some students at Diploma level in Islamic Education, Arabic and mathematics;
- Information from monitoring and assessment was not used consistently to inform strategic planning;
- Insufficient support for students with English as an additional language to improve communication skills.

### Recommendations

- Accelerate progress and raise attainment in the Diploma Programme in Islamic Education, Arabic, English and mathematics by ensuring all students are appropriately challenged;
- Use the information from monitoring and assessment to set specific measurable targets and ensure that improvement plans show how and when these are to be achieved;
- Support teachers in generating specific goals for all students, particularly those with English as an additional language, in developing their communication skills and the vocabulary relevant to each subject.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable in all phases. Most students acquired acceptable general knowledge about Islam. The extension classes offered to a few PYP students reinforced Qur'an reading and memorisation skills. A few Grade 1 students memorised ten short chapters from the Qur'an but had limited understanding of their meaning. Most Grade 4 students knew the names of the five daily prayers but they had limited understanding of the significance of prayer in Islam. Most Grade 5s developed basic knowledge about key Islamic concepts and facts, such as the pillars of Islam and the Islamic calendar. Most Grade 6 students developed good knowledge about the concept of paradise in Islam. Few Grade 8 students understood the importance of the Prophet's teachings in Islam and, in Grades 9 to 12, students' knowledge about Islam was at a basic level.

Attainment in Arabic as a first language was acceptable overall. Progress was good in PYP and MYP and acceptable in Diploma Programme. Most students developed a good understanding of the rules of grammar, and applied them correctly to single sentences and recognised parts of speech. However, there was insufficient use of grammar skills in a meaningful context, to develop communicative skills. Overall, students listened well and were able to identify key ideas in a section of writing. They read aloud age-appropriate texts but a few made frequent pronunciation mistakes. Independent reading skills were limited. In Grade 11, most students were able to read aloud age-appropriate texts about different topics and understood the main ideas.

Attainment in Arabic as an additional language was acceptable. Progress was good in PYP and MYP and acceptable in the Diploma Programme. In Grade 2, most students knew words to name family members. They were able to read simple sentences about items in the kitchen. In Grade 3, most students used their limited vocabulary to rehearse simple sentences to make self-introductions. In Grade 4, most students were able to do read vocabulary and sentences about the environment. Few students were able to write about their families with confidence. In Grade 6, most students were able to talk about their school, age and residence. They developed an acceptable range of vocabulary. They were able to recognise adverbs. Most Grade 7 students read simple sentences and used a limited range of vocabulary. In Grade 8, most students engaged in basic conversations about their hobbies and in Grade 9, they were able to use adverbs of place and time in simple sentences. The majority of students developed good listening skills and understood most instructions in Arabic.

Attainment in English in Kindergarten was good and progress outstanding. In the PYP attainment and progress were good. In the MYP and Diploma Programme, attainment was acceptable and progress was good. By Kindergarten 2, students could speak confidently, explain ideas and write short sentences. In the PYP, the majority listened and responded but, in discussions, their oral responses were limited. Students learning English as an additional language showed good progress from their starting points. The most progress in reading, writing and speaking skills was in Kindergarten and PYP.

Attainment and progress in mathematics in Kindergarten and PYP were good. Attainment in MYP was acceptable and progress was good. Attainment and progress in Diploma Programme were acceptable. Almost all children in Kindergarten had strong mathematical skills and a few demonstrated excellent conceptual knowledge. In a science investigation, for example, the children were sorting materials using Venn diagrams. In the PYP, there were significant opportunities for all students to investigate, solve problems and to explore mathematical patterns. Good progress was maintained in the MYP. However, in the Diploma Programme, where mathematics was a core subject for all students, a significant number of students found the programmes difficult.

Attainment and progress in science were outstanding in Kindergarten and good in the rest of the school. The Kindergarten students developed the skills of reasoning, making predictions and recording findings in different ways when investigating mini-beasts and exploring pollution levels caused by vehicles. Grade 1 students used microscopes to investigate human cells. In Grade 8, students applied their knowledge of forces when designing efficient cardboard boats. The Grade 10 case study on acids and neutralisation enabled students to interpret quantitative data about chemical reactions. Grade 11 students understood important aspects of molecular theory.

## How good is the students' personal and social development?

Attitudes were outstanding in Kindergarten and good elsewhere. Behaviour was excellent in all phases. Young children displayed mature approaches to learning, questioned intuitively and used resources independently. Most students moved around the school with consideration for others. They communicated purposefully and engaged with activities enthusiastically. They had positive relationships with staff and asked good questions. They responded thoughtfully when the opportunity was given but a significant minority of students depended on teachers to prompt the next steps in learning rather than taking the initiative. Attendance and punctuality were good.

Students' civic understanding, their understanding of Islam and their appreciation of local traditions and culture were good. Students took a variety of leadership roles around the school through the students' council. They participated enthusiastically in charity and fundraising activities to help locally and globally. They developed acceptable understanding about Islam through a number of visits to local areas and by learning about Islamic and national celebrations. However, they were less confident explaining and discussing current topics about Islam and the world. They developed good understanding about the culture of the UAE through a number of units of inquiry and local visits to various areas in Dubai.

Economic and environmental understanding was outstanding in Kindergarten and good in the other sections of the school. Kindergarten children linked learning to environmental responsibility. They knew that their actions impacted on the environment and they had an excellent awareness of Dubai's economic progress. Older students had age-appropriate, and occasionally higher, levels of understanding of global economics. Work on sustaining their immediate environment was outstanding. High participation rates in recycling programmes and proactive, committed approaches to a wide range of sustainability issues were evident in all year groups.

## How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching for effective learning was outstanding in Kindergarten and good in the rest of the school. The teachers' strong subject knowledge was reflected in the detailed planning of learning outcomes and the sequential presentation of knowledge, concepts and skills within lessons. A very comprehensive professional development programme over the past year had led to improved staff awareness regarding the promotion of students' critical thinking skills, specifically within the context of the IB Learning Profile. It had also contributed to general improvements in teaching through addressing some of the recommendations highlighted in last year's inspection report. However, in a minority of classes the pace of learning was still too slow. Students were too dependent on the teacher and activities were not well matched to the wide range of individual needs. In the best lessons, open-ended, challenging questions gave students opportunities to reflect upon and express their ideas. Interactive technology and a range of other imaginative resources were deployed widely to engage the students and to promote purposeful learning.

The quality of students' learning was outstanding in Kindergarten and good in the rest of the school. Enquiry and research skills were particularly well developed in science in the Kindergarten and PYP. The units of inquiry encouraged students to make predictions, formulate hypotheses and draw conclusions using the correct technical vocabulary. Many opportunities were provided for group collaborations during which students took responsibility for their learning and adopted different roles. Students were usually engaged in their learning and keen to participate in the many interesting and motivating assignments. Links to the real world were evident, for example, in mathematics where students calculated fractional reductions in the recent shop sales. The majority of students were able to explain what they had learned and could make connections to previous learning.

Assessment in the Kindergarten was outstanding. In the PYP, MYP and Diploma Programme phases it was good. Across the school, there were rigorous and comprehensive systems of data collection that were used to determine student groupings, support planning of activities and predict expected outcomes. Appropriate policies and timetables enabled the consistent use of assessment throughout the school. Effective teacher questioning was a feature of many classrooms. Assessment was most effective in Kindergarten where results impacted on teaching and learning on a daily basis. Teachers knew their students very well across most subjects. Opportunities were given to all students to assess their own learning. Oral feedback was strong throughout the school. Assessment of students who needed additional support was

excellent. There were effective systems for gathering and recording performance data, evaluating difficulties, monitoring progress and determining intervention.

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

The curriculum was outstanding in Kindergarten, good in the PYP and MYP and acceptable in the Diploma Programme. The curriculum had a clear rationale based on the International Baccalaureate (IB). It generally offered breadth and balance appropriate to the needs of the learners. There was a formal annual review of the curriculum by heads of departments and teachers which considered range and progression. The extensive extra-curricular provision included an outstanding music and sports programme. As well as a review of progression, staff checked to make sure that the curriculum provided regular opportunities for students to learn through well planned cross-curricular activities. The curriculum was well-adapted to support students working within the special education needs and English as an additional language programmes. Transitions from the PYP to MYP were developing, but were not yet well established between MYP and the Diploma Programme. There were a number of community links in the PYP but insufficient student initiated links in MYP and Diploma Programme. There was a community service component as part of the IB Certificate and Diploma programmes for senior students. The post-16 curriculum did not fully meet the needs of students in Islamic Education, Arabic and mathematics. It was not sufficiently challenging in Islamic Education and did not provide sufficient relevance in Arabic. Given the wide range of abilities in Diploma Programme, the needs of a significant number of students were not met in mathematics.

## How well does the school protect and support students?

Arrangements for health and safety were outstanding. Significant effort was spent ensuring that all possible dangers were minimised. Students felt safe and secure at all times. Medical support was exemplary; detailed records were maintained and the resource was successfully integrated into the school curriculum. Canteen and sporting facilities were managed carefully to support appropriate lifestyle choices and priorities. Regular fire drills, lock-downs and meticulous incident recording, ensured consistent high standards. All staff and students understood their responsibilities for child protection and consistently adhered to agreed protocols.

The quality of support was outstanding. Staff-student relationships were based on mature communication, a strong pastoral commitment to students' welfare and a sharing of the challenges and opportunities that each learning experience presented. Students accessed well-informed, specific guidance reflecting their ambitions and abilities. Behaviour was managed positively, rewarding effort and commitment. Effective counselling support was available when needed. There were well developed systems to track students' academic progress. Key skills across every subject were measured, analysed and included in planning procedures quarterly at least four times per year. Support for students with special educational needs was exemplary. Attendance and punctuality were monitored effectively.

## How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The quality of leadership was outstanding. A strong team of competent and committed leaders shared an agreed vision. This led to an excellent programme of staff development that enabled teaching and support staff to expand their range of skills. Senior leaders communicated their vision well and worked cohesively to sustain a shared sense of purpose. Significant progress was evident in almost all aspects of the school's work and there was an outstanding capacity for further improvement.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning were good. Rigorous and accurate self-review meant the school knew itself well. Under the strong leadership of the principal, the school had addressed the issues raised by the previous inspection and made improvements in several areas. Information about students' progress was used to set suitably challenging targets for attainment, with all staff eager to maintain the pace of improvement. A comprehensive teacher appraisal system was in place. Improvement plans did not always identify the intended impact on students' academic progress or personal development.

Partnerships with parents and the local community were outstanding. Liaison with parents was exemplary and the school worked very effectively to help them support their children's learning. Parents were made welcome and were supportive. They appreciated the information provided by teachers about what their children were studying and how they were progressing. Parents communicated regularly with school staff using the school's intranet facilities. A strong partnership with other schools in the GEMS group enabled joint training, curriculum development and the sharing of successful strategies.

Governance was good but there was no formal governing board with full stakeholder and parental representation. Information was obtained from regular visits to the school by representatives of the owners and by frequently canvassing the opinions of parents. The owners held the school to account and played a strong role in ensuring the school kept its promise to parents. It vigorously promoted the school's vision. The school had limited arrangements to accurately gain the views of all stakeholders.

The outstanding facilities and resources provided an extremely positive learning environment. There was a wide range of expertise among the staff, including subject and language specialists, early years practitioners, counsellors, and those with expertise in supporting students with special educational needs. Resources, including the extremely well equipped library-research centre and planetarium, were used to good effect.

## 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:	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in Arabic? 7% of students in the school studied Arabic as a first language.				
Age group:	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Attainment in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as a first language	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Acceptable
Attainment in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress in Arabic as an additional language	Not Applicable	Good	Good	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in English?				
Age group:	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Attainment	Good	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good

How good are the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?				
Age group:	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Attainment	Good	Good	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Good	Good	Good	Acceptable

How good are the students' attainment and progress in science?				
Age group:	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Attainment	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good
Progress over time	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good

How good is the students' personal and social development?				
Age group:	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Attitudes and behaviour	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good
Islamic, cultural and civic understanding	Good	Good	Good	Good
Economic and environmental understanding	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good

How good are teaching and learning?				
Age group:	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Teaching for effective learning	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good
Assessment	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?				
Age group:	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Curriculum quality	Outstanding	Good	Good	Acceptable

How well does the school protect and support students?				
Age group:	KG	PYP	MYP	DP
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of support	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

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

How well does the school perform overall?
Good

## 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](mailto:inspection@khda.gov.ae).

More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at [www.khda.gov.ae](http://www.khda.gov.ae).

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