



مجلس أبوظبي للتعليم
Abu Dhabi Education Council
Education First **التعليم أولاً**



Private School Inspection Report

GEMS American Academy

Academic Year 2015 – 2016

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GEMS American Academy

Inspection Date	2 – 5 November, 2015
Date of previous inspection	13 – 16 January, 2014

General Information		Students	
School ID	86	Total number of students	1941
Opening year of school	2007	Number of children in KG	458
Principal	Kathryn Miner	Number of students in other phases	Primary 817 Middle 350 High 316
School telephone	+971 (0)2 557 4880	Age range	4 to 18 years
School Address	P.O. Box 145161, Abu Dhabi	Grades or Year Groups	KG – Grade 12
Official email (ADEC)	adamericanacad.pvt@adec.ac.ae	Gender	Mixed
School Website	www.gemsaa-abudhabi.com	% of Emirati Students	22%
Fee Ranges (per annum)	AED 47,880– AED 66,780	Largest nationality groups (%)	1. USA 20% 2. Korea 5% 3. Canada 4%
Licensed Curriculum		Staff	
Main Curriculum	American	Number of teachers	178
Other Curriculum	---	Number of teaching assistants (TAs)	56
External Exams/ Standardised tests	MAP IB	Teacher-student ratio	1:14 KG/ FS 1:10 Other phases
Accreditation	New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) Council for International Schools (CIS)	Teacher turnover	15%

Introduction

Inspection activities	
Number of inspectors deployed	5
Number of inspection days	4
Number of lessons observed	90
Number of joint lesson observations	4
Number of parents' questionnaires	241; (response rate: 15%)
Details of other inspection activities	Learning walks; meetings with staff, parents and students (formal and informal); work scrutiny; data and document scrutiny.

School	
School Aims	To provide education showing that each child: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has special talents • has limitless potential • is unique – there is no other child exactly the same in the whole world
School vision and mission	The school's vision: 'We Inspire, We Educate, We Lead, We Innovate' and the mission is to 'provide a rigorous academic program to our international learning community.'
Admission Policy	Open at KG By interview at grades 1 and above
Leadership structure (ownership, governance and management)	The leadership team comprises the head of school, an Elementary and a Secondary School Principal and five Vice Principals, three in the elementary division and two in the secondary division. One of the elementary VP's is dedicated to the KG program The head of school has been in post for a year and a half. It is owned and managed by GEMS Education, a multi-national provider of educational services.

SEN and G&T Details (Refer to ADEC SEN Policy and Procedures)

SEN Category	Number of students identified through external assessments	Number of other students identified by the school
Intellectual disability	7	0
Specific Learning Disability	4	0
Emotional and Behaviour Disorders (ED/ BD)	6	0
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	2	0
Speech and Language Disorders	6	0
Physical and health related disabilities	2	0
Visually impaired	0	0
Hearing impaired	0	0
Multiple disabilities	3	0

G&T Details (Refer to ADEC SEN Policy and Procedures)

G&T Category	Number of students identified
Intellectual ability	1
Subject-specific aptitude (e.g. in science, mathematics, languages)	53
Social maturity and leadership	2
Mechanical/ technical/ technological ingenuity	0
Visual and performing arts (e.g. art, theatre, recitation)	4
Psychomotor ability (e.g. dance or sport)	4

The overall performance of the school

Inspectors considered the school in relation to 3 performance categories

Band A	High performing (Outstanding, Very Good or Good)
Band B	Satisfactory (Acceptable)
Band C	In need of significant improvement (Weak or Very Weak)

School was judged to be:	BAND (A)	Very Good
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	Band A High Performing			Band B Satisfactory	Band C In need of significant improvement	
Performance Standards	Outstanding	Very Good	Good	Acceptable	Weak	Very Weak
Performance Standard 1: Students' achievement						
Performance Standard 2: Students' personal and social development, and their innovation skills						
Performance Standard 3: Teaching and assessment						
Performance Standard 4: Curriculum						
Performance Standard 5: The protection, care, guidance and support of students						
Performance Standard 6: Leadership and management						
Summary Evaluation: The school's overall performance						

The Performance of the School

Evaluation of the school's overall performance

GEMS American Academy School provides a very good education and has some areas of outstanding provision. Senior leaders, almost all of whom have been appointed since the last inspection, and staff present a common vision and show commitment and energy in their drive for continuous improvement. Teachers and administrators come together to ensure students experience a rich and innovative curriculum. The parent community is very supportive and active in the life of the school. Parents recognize and appreciate the culture of 'kindness' modelled by the staff in their day-to-day contact with students.

A large minority of students start school having had little exposure to the English language. They make very good progress in developing their social and communication skills. Attainment is generally close to curriculum expectations in the early years and most students make very good progress as they move through the school. Students make outstanding progress in English and science and very good progress in many other areas of learning. By the time they reach secondary age, a large majority are above expected levels in most subjects.

Progress made since last inspection and capacity to improve

The school has improved in nearly all areas of its provision since the last inspection. Governance took prompt action to improve leadership and management by the appointment of a new head of school and by providing an education consultant to work with the new leadership team. The head of school and her team have provided dynamic and clear-sighted direction for the school. Roles, responsibilities and accountability for the leadership team members and middle managers have now been clearly established. Above all, the team were successful in raising the morale of staff and regaining the support of parents. The leadership team have improved the regularity of lesson observation which now focuses sharply on developing the teachers' skills.

The quality of teaching and learning has improved so that more account is now taken of students' prior knowledge and skills when planning units of inquiry and drawing up lesson plans. The effective use of learning support teachers has been successful in enabling students with additional language and learning needs to make similar progress to that of their peers. Progress in both Islamic education and social studies has improved and is now good.

The capacity for further improvement is very good.

Development and promotion of innovation skills

The school promotes technological and innovation skills through the imaginative use of its outstanding facilities, in a highly effective manner throughout the curriculum. Students in the older grades make very productive use of their own digital technologies to extend and enhance their studies. Students interact and collaborate purposefully and creatively in a range of learning situations in English, mathematics and science. In one science lesson, linked to work in social studies, Grade 6 students were able to explore the process of mummification by experimenting with tomatoes. The school's Planetarium is used to provide cross-curricular experiences for students in a range of areas. Kindergarten (KG) classes used the Planetarium's sky simulation technology to identify shapes in different constellations and use their imagination to picture what those constellations might represent. Through its work with environmental groups the school has developed useful links with the UAE Environmental Agency that has led the Agency to appoint a Grade 2 student as a special ambassador to protect endangered maritime species, specifically the Dugong.

The inspection identified the following as key areas of strength:

- commitment of the senior leadership team has contributed to significant improvements since the last inspection
- the outstanding progress made by students in their spoken and written English skills
- the levels of maturity displayed by the students in their behaviour and the excellent relationships with their peers from a wide range of different cultures and ethnicities
- the outstanding provision for the protection, care, guidance and support of students; the school is highly effective in promoting an ethos of kindness and empathy among its students that is modelled effectively by the staff
- excellent relationship with parents; they are very supportive and active in the life of the school.

The inspection identified the following as key areas for improvement:

- the attainment of students in subjects taught in Arabic, particularly Arabic language, so that they make similar progress to those students taught in English
- the consistent use of best practice in teaching and learning across the curriculum
- stretch and challenge for students who learn at a quicker pace than their peers.



Performance Standard 1: Students' Achievement

Students' achievement Indicators		KG	Primary	Middle	High
Islamic Education	Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
	Progress	Good	Good	Good	Good
Arabic (as a First Language)	Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
	Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Arabic (as a Second Language)	Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
	Progress	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Social Studies	Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
	Progress	Good	Good	Good	Good
English	Attainment	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good
	Progress	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Mathematics	Attainment	Good	Good	Good	Good
	Progress	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good
Science	Attainment	Good	Good	Very good	Very Good
	Progress	Good	Very good	Very Good	Very Good
Language of instruction (if other than English and Arabic as First Language)	Attainment	NA	NA	NA	NA
	Progress	NA	NA	NA	NA
Other subjects (Art, Music, PE)	Attainment	Very Good	Very good	Outstanding	Outstanding
	Progress	Very Good	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Learning Skills (including innovation, creativity, critical thinking, communication, problem-solving and collaboration)		Very Good	Very good	Very good	Very good

The school provides for students from 94 nationalities, of whom a large minority of the 700 students who have joined the school in the last fifteen months do not speak English as their first language. The KG provides children with a stimulating and language rich learning environment that enables them to make very good progress in these and other areas of learning. In lessons, a large majority of children make better than expected progress; this includes children with special educational needs (SEN) and those who speak English as an additional language (EAL). Accelerated progress in mathematics is achieved through the careful screening of students and their placement into skill level appropriate math classes from G7 and upwards. This ensures that the majority of students are fast tracked in classes, one grade level or higher than US expectations. By the end of the KG, the language skills of most children are at or in line with Common Core Curriculum Standards (CCCS). KG provides children with stimulating and challenging activities that allow them to make very good progress in their understanding of number and investigative skills.

Attainment levels in English, mathematics and science are consistently at or above the curriculum norms for international students and for those based or those living in the USA at all grade levels. By the time students reach Grade 9, attainment in language arts is at least a half a grade above expected levels. For example, students in Grade 8 are able to use sophisticated discussion strategies to explore attitudes relating to gender politics and equality. Attainment in mathematics and science is good. Grade 9 students understand formal mathematical coordinate proofs and working with distance formula. Students in a pre-algebra class, comprising mostly G7, demonstrate understanding of the Pythagorean theorem and the order of operations in solving equations. Many students for whom Arabic should be a first language enter the school having lived in countries where Arabic is not the first language and for them attainment throughout the school is acceptable. The rate of progress made by students in the subjects taught in Arabic is acceptable.

Progress is very good in primary and secondary phases in mathematics and science and outstanding in English. It is good in social studies and Islamic education, and acceptable in Arabic. Students possess a solid knowledge of Islamic concepts, especially in the primary grades, which are at curriculum level expectations. For example, Grade 2 students possess knowledge of the 5 pillars of Islam and what good deeds are, and Grade 5 students know the story of the Prophet Yunus and what it means. Students' ability to read Qur'anic verses and the 'hadith' and understand their general meaning is less well developed. Non-native students show an acceptable level of attainment in Arabic, students in Grade 10 can translate sentences from English to standard Arabic neatly and accurately.

Grade 3 children understand graphs. They can gather data and graphically represent

the data. Most can analyse bar graphs and apply its data to real world problems. By the time they reach grades 5 and 6, students are able to complete sustained pieces of free writing displaying a wide vocabulary, correct spelling and grammar. Handwriting styles rarely demonstrate the use of a cursive script but by Grade 5, most students write with a consistently neat hand. As they reach the end of their middle years in Grade 9, students were able to empathize with feelings of alienation and write expertly from their own experience.

Students in almost all lessons across the school are enthusiastic learners and are fully engaged in their activities. When given the opportunity, they take responsibility for their learning. They demonstrate an ability to work collaboratively and are able to listen to each other's views with respect, share group roles and resources and combine to create effective presentations. In an Arts showcase event for a large group of parents, Grade 6 students were confident when presenting their work and explaining the learning processes that went into their artistic endeavours. In all subjects, students use the varied technologies available with familiarity and confidence. In science lessons, students use a range of resources effectively, including microscopes and scientific calculators to access their research and analyse results to rationalise their findings.

Performance Standard 2: Students' personal and social development, and their innovation skills

Students' personal and social development, and their innovation skills Indicators	KG	Primary	Middle	High
Personal development	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good
Understanding of Islamic values and awareness of Emirati and world cultures	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good
Social responsibility and innovation skills	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good
<p>Students are positive, responsible and confident. They demonstrate mature behaviour throughout the school and interact positively with one another as one harmonious community. Bullying is very rare. Students are particularly sensitive to the multi-cultural nature of the school environment and help each other integrate into the community. The 'Big Brothers' programme effectively pairs Grade 11 students with Grade 5 students. Students share a positive relationship with their teachers, which they describe as supportive. As a consequence, there is a culture of</p>				

mutual respect for students and adults throughout the school.

Students are very well aware of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. They are provided with regular opportunities to participate in a variety of activities to promote healthy living. These include a breast cancer awareness week, a Health Campaign in which elementary students present sessions they have prepared to each other and a Business Cart, which high school students initiated and lead, to raise money to sell healthy foods not available in the school cafeteria. In KG, children were able to identify a wide range of healthy food items and name them correctly in both Arabic and English.

The average attendance for the term is good at 94%. Parents and students show an excellent understanding of punctuality by rarely being late for the start of school or for their classes.

Students have a good knowledge and appreciation of the UAE culture and heritage which is reflected during participation in cultural activities such as Flag Day and UAE National Day. Students demonstrate a deep understanding and respect for their own and other cultures. The celebration of International Day provides a powerful image of how the school is developing as a cohesive community. Students repeatedly emphasise that the integration of students from different backgrounds to form one community is something they really appreciate.

Student participation and contribution to the local and global community is illustrated in the variety of links such as that with the Red Crescent in which students collect donations for Syrian refugees and activities such as painting the school lockers and programmes such as the Key Club. On a global level, each year a group of students from various grades go to a foreign country to provide voluntary services and then participate in fund-raising activities after they return to the UAE and provide further assistance.

Students have a positive work ethic. High school students initiate and lead projects such as the Business Cart, to raise funds by selling healthy foods not available in the school cafeteria and the formation of the Key Club, in which high school students involve primary school children and initiate and lead activities such as the pink day for breast cancer.

Performance Standard 3: Teaching and Assessment

Teaching and Assessment Indicators	KG	Primary	Middle	High
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good	Very Good	Very Good
Assessment	Good	Good	Good	Good
<p>Teaching and assessment are judged to be good, and teaching for effective learning is judged to be very good overall. Teaching is good across the school and often very good in the older grades. Teachers across the school have very secure subject knowledge and most have very good pedagogic knowledge to ensure learning is relevant and challenging. Teacher-student interactions are outstanding so that almost all students are able to ask questions, challenge assumptions and respond appropriately to higher order questioning in classes. When constructing their medium term plans teachers ensure that they provide interesting activities that fully support the inquiry based curriculum. Teaching in most subjects is able to probe and extend student understanding through the adept use of higher order questioning. There are effective relationships with the learning support team providing very good in-class support from trained 'shadow teachers'. Educational assistants (EA) and Learning Support (LS) teachers are used effectively to provide targeted support to learners for whom English is an additional language (EAL) and students who make slower progress through the curriculum. The school does not consistently evaluate how well the needs of students who learn more quickly than their peers are being met. Teachers are aware of the need to provide for the wide range of abilities they find in their classes but students who finish their work at a quicker pace are not always challenged sufficiently.</p> <p>Internal formative assessment processes are thorough and teachers are able to build a clear picture of the progress made by each student. This is a data rich school and leaders and administrators are beginning to use the wealth of information available to them from the Measures of Academic Performance (MAP) assessments and Diagnostic Reading Assessments (DRA) to analyse the progress made by different individuals and groups of students. Teachers use data very effectively to match learning activities to students' abilities to ensure there is appropriate stretch and challenge, especially for those students who are identified as gifted and talented. This is yet to have a significant impact on how the school plans to meet the needs of groups who might perform less well than their peers. The marking of student work is good. Teachers provide encouraging comments and sometimes make useful suggestions as to how students might improve or extend their work.</p>				

This is an area of on-going assessment that is yet to be fully implemented. The on-line assessment procedures used in science are very effective in allowing students to have an accurate understanding of how well they are progressing through the curriculum. Students are becoming familiar with the challenge of assessing their own progress and that of their peers.

Almost all teachers are aware of the need to ask students probing questions so that this aspect is a regular feature in their planning. In the best classes students employ higher order questioning techniques with their peers. In a Grade 11 English class students probed levels of understanding in regard to each student's retelling of a myth from around the world so that they helped each other to make connections and discover common themes in their work.

Performance Standard 4: Curriculum

Curriculum Indicators	KG	Primary	Middle	High
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Curriculum design and implementation	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good
Curriculum adaptation	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good

The curriculum planning and delivery is very good. It has a clear rationale. The school has adopted a programme of studies aligned to the US Common Core Standards, and it is implemented through the Project AERO (American Education Reaches Out) framework that enables curriculum consistency and stability in overseas schools for grades KG-12. The curriculum provided is broad, balanced and promotes innovation and appropriate challenge for all student levels and abilities. The school fulfils the requirements of the authorized curriculum and national requirements. The Council of International Schools (CIS) and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) accredit it. The school is also authorised by the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) to offer the primary years programme (PYP) and the Diploma Programme (DP).

Students have a wide-range of subjects from which to choose. In addition to the mandated core subjects, foreign languages, arts, astronomy, music, and dance cater to a wide-range of abilities and interests. The IB Diploma affords students in grades 11 and 12 opportunities to undertake college-level courses whose credits can be transferred to a university programme. The curriculum prepare students for the next stages in their education. Through regular reviews of curriculum, the school

has implemented changes to further meet the needs of their students. The adoption of Project AERO and the accreditation by International Baccalaureate (IBO) are results of the curriculum reviews. All students who have been identified as having special educational needs have an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) that ensures their access to and success with the curriculum.

Students have access to an extensive range of age-appropriate and interesting enrichment, extra-curricular and sporting activities. Students talk excitedly about how these projects bring their classroom learning to life. Many of these activities are bringing Emirati culture to life. For example, investigations conducted on field trips, into the marine and desert ecologies of the UAE, have enthused many students to take their studies further.

Performance Standard 5: The protection, care, guidance and support of students

The protection, care, guidance and support of students Indicators	KG	Primary	Middle	High
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Health and safety, including arrangements for child protection/safeguarding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Care and support	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding

Provision for the protection, care, guidance and support of students is outstanding. The school has very well developed procedures for the safeguarding of students and the school's child protection policy has been effectively disseminated to staff and is clearly understood by all members of the staff team, whatever their role in the school. Parents are also fully aware of the policy. The school provides a very safe and secure environment for students and staff. There are several elevators that provide any staff, students or visitors with impaired mobility access to the upper floors. A dedicated committee that meets weekly oversees all aspects of health and safety. Regular maintenance is given a priority and buildings and outdoor facilities are kept in an excellent condition.

The school uses a range of effective strategies to keep the impact of maintaining a healthy lifestyle in the forefront of student thinking. In KG, children regularly use the food laboratory to explore how different kinds of food relate to staying healthy. The school promotes a wide range of extra-curricular sports so that all students have

access to fun physical activities after school whatever their skill level.

The school has developed a highly effective referral process that deals speedily and accurately with concerns raised by parents and teachers. Staff ensure that the results of in-school assessments are shared with parents and staff. Professional development within the school provides good quality training for specialist staff and for all those who meet the children on a day-to-day basis. Recent training in de-escalation strategies have proved valuable for those supporting students with behavioural issues. The use of ‘shadow teachers’ for those students with more acute needs is highly effective and gives additional benefits to the whole class. The school is successful in promoting self-advocacy for students with special educational needs (SEN). Students are fully involved in the bi-annual review of their Individual Learning Plans (ILP).

Parents report that the school responds with speed to address any concerns they may have about their children. For example, when one younger student was diagnosed with a chronic medical condition, the school immediately informed all staff, whether in school or on the school bus of how to respond appropriately to the child’s needs.

Performance Standard 6: Leadership and management

Leadership and management Indicators	
The effectiveness of leadership	Very good
Self-evaluation and improvement planning	Good
Partnerships with parents and the community	Outstanding
Governance	Very good
Management, staffing, facilities and resources	Outstanding
<p>Leadership and management have improved and are now very good with some outstanding features. The head of school, who was appointed shortly after the previous inspection, has provided strong leadership to the new senior leadership team. Together with her staff she has renewed the school’s vision and direction to ensure that parents, staff and students recognise their own involvement in the improvement process. Daily life in the school reveals a strong emphasis on seeing each child as an individual and as a valued member of the school. The GEMS Corporation has demonstrated its support for the new leadership team and has</p>	



given its weight and expertise to the school's leaders in their drive for improvement. Governance is very good. With the strong leadership and record of recent improvements there is very good capacity for further improvement following this inspection.

The head of school enjoys the active support of nearly all parents who recognise the positive changes in the school. They praise the school for its inclusive nature and the ethos of kindness that is demonstrated by staff and students. The school provides a vibrant and stimulating learning environment. Classrooms and shared areas are spacious and the facilities for sport and the arts are abundant.

Communication with parents is almost daily and parents can access comprehensive information about their child's progress through each part of the curriculum. Teachers and administrators are approachable and respond quickly to parental concerns. When parents were concerned about the complexity of the eight-day teaching programme the school responded by reverting to a weekly programme.

Procedures for assuring and improving the quality of teaching and learning have become more frequent and rigorous. Teaching staff recognise that the regular 'walkthroughs' by middle and senior leaders support their own professional expertise. Teachers commented that the school is enabling them to become better teachers.

Processes for undertaking the school self-evaluation involve contributions from the school's various improvement committees. The school does attempt to look critically at its own performance but has made some over-optimistic evaluations as to its effectiveness. The school improvement plan, which is driven by a series of monitoring committees focuses properly on teaching and learning as a key to sustained improvement.

The school has developed highly effective links with a wide range of local and international groups. Students' ecological understanding benefits from their links with environmental groups. Day-to-day the school is a busy, purposeful but calm place for students, parents and staff. It is managed unobtrusively, but in a highly effective manner.

What the school should do to improve further:

1. Continue to raise the attainment of students in subjects taught in Arabic so that they make similar progress to those students taught in English by:
 - i. providing greater opportunities for teachers of Arabic, Islamic education and social studies to observe their colleagues in English and Theory of Knowledge lessons
 - ii. identifying a greater range of cross-curricular links in these subjects to ensure regular re-enforcement of key language skills.
2. Ensuring the consistent use of best practice in teaching and learning across the curriculum so that:
 - i. teachers across the school understand and use higher order questioning strategies;
 - ii. students who learn at a quicker pace than their peers are consistently challenged to enhance their skills, knowledge and understanding.
3. The school leadership team should further strengthen the school evaluation process by introducing more rigorous checks at each stage when considering judgements about the school's performance.