



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



Summary Inspection Report

GEMS American Academy

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Iqraa

GEMS American Academy

Inspection Date	01 st – 04 th October, 2012
School ID#	210
Type of School	Private
Curriculum	American
Number of Students	728
Age Range	KG – Grade 10
Gender	Mixed
Principal	Ian Deakin
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Introduction

The school was inspected by four inspectors. The inspectors observed 60 lessons, met with school leaders, the GEMS director, teachers, students and parents. They read documentation relating to assessments, evaluation, planning and they examined students' work to determine the quality of students' learning experiences.

Description of the School

Global Education Management Systems (GEMS) run the American Academy of Abu Dhabi. In 2011 it relocated to a brand new building in the Khalifa area of Abu Dhabi City. The school has expanded this year from 380 to 728, due to the expansion of Grades 9 and 10. Numbers in Grades 9 and 10 are 21 and 15 respectively and there are 368 students in Grades 1 – 8. The school's Kindergarten (KG) has doubled in size to 325 students. There are 380 boys and 348 girls. Students with special educational needs make up approximately 6% of the school's population, with the main learning problems being dyslexia and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Entry is by a KG assessment and Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment for the other grades. The school will admit students functioning at up to two years below their chronological age. The majority of parents are from professional backgrounds.

Forty-three new teachers joined the school in August 2012. Most teachers come from North America, Europe and Australasia. Teachers hold the North American Teaching Certification or the equivalent from their home country. The school offers the enriched American curriculum. This provides grade level benchmarks from the Commonwealth of Virginia standards. The Primary Years Programme curriculum operates in the elementary and KG departments.

The school's mission is 'preparing leaders and citizens for our global society.' The students represent 63 nationalities, with 20% from the Gulf Cooperative Council countries and 23% from the USA. A small proportion of students come from other nations. Muslim students make up 44% of the school. One hundred students receive English language support and there are one hundred more with other learning needs.

Teachers' salaries range from AED 110,880 to AED 183,336 per annum. Middle managers' salaries range from AED 18,000 to AED 30,000 per month and senior leaders from AED 27,500 to AED 67,500 per month. Fees are AED 31,550 in KG1, AED 47,880 in the two KG2 year groups (4 and 5 yr olds) and AED 66,780 for the rest of the grades.

The Effectiveness of the School

Band A

Grade 2

Inspectors judged the GEMS American Academy of Abu Dhabi to be in Band A; that is a high performing school.

The school's previous inspection was in May 2010. Inspectors judged it to be a good school. Since then, the school has sustained its performance in all areas and most areas have improved. In particular, protection, care, guidance and support systems now provide students with clear information and advice for the future. This was a recommendation in the previous report. During discussions, many students shared aspirations and ambitions for their future. Improvement in students' personal development is also significant as personalised teaching and pastoral care now meet individual needs. Other recommendations of the last inspection were to raise the quality of teaching and maintain the drive for excellence. Improved use of prior data to plan students' work has raised the quality of teaching and learning. The ethos of continuous improvement maintains the school's drive for excellence.

Students make good progress throughout the school. Inspectors found no significant differences in the standards and progress of boys, girls or groups of students. MAP test results demonstrate strong performance when compared with schools using the same curriculum and with other international schools. The school's effective tracking system confirms that over 95% of students met or exceeded their targets last year. Productive dialogue between the principal and all teachers means that teachers are accountable for the progress of all students in their class. The lowest achieving 25% of students must have a personal learning plan and the highest achieving 10% must have an extension programme. KG students make good progress because of good teaching, personal development and a stimulating learning environment. KG1 students can match pictures and letters and can sort objects according to size and shape. The KG library provides students with a wide range of books to read. KG2 students can write simple sentences, add, and subtract numbers to ten with effective help from the teacher or teaching assistant. Progress in Maths is good across secondary grades because learning objectives are explicit. There is effective communication between teachers and students. This helps students to understand the grading system and understand what they need to do to move to the next level. Progress in maths is good in the elementary department. Progress is also good in G6-10 maths as students are placed in sets according to ability and given appropriately challenging work. Students make better progress in maths when high quality resources support the teaching. This enables them to be actively involved.

Students' progress in English is good across the school and they reach good standards in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Carefully planned activities meet individual needs. The recent 'spiral curriculum approach' to the teaching of science involves more practical and investigative skills. Progress in Arabic is good for all students except those who are new to the school. Their limited basic skills on entry prevent them from making better progress at first. They make good progress over time because of the good use of assessment data and the effective in class support students receive. Students in every grade make good progress in Islamic Studies. This is demonstrated by students' knowledge and understanding of the impact of Islamic values on their daily lives such as behaviour, ethics and morals. Social Studies lessons provide opportunities for students to progress well. Interesting teaching methods reinforce students' understanding of the U.A.E. culture and heritage. Practical approaches enhance student learning and engagement; in one lesson, for example, students enjoyed making clay models of houses and in other class students made a flyer to advertise the attractions of the UAE. Students collaborate well and evaluate their learning about the importance of the U.A.E. in the Gulf region and in the wider world.

Overall, the quality of teaching is very good. Almost half of the teachers are new to the school this year, many of whom are new to the country. Leaders are concerned to support new teachers well. They are beginning to discuss ways that good practice can be shared within the school. Leaders will 'buddy' teachers together in pairs to observe each other teach. Feedback from these observations will be used to continuously improve quality and build consistency of practice. The most effective lessons are characterised by good subject knowledge, positive attitudes and relationships, high expectations of behaviour and effort and the use of prior data to plan activities that match individual needs. Students whose first language is not English receive effective support from teaching assistants and from the English Language Learners (ELL) department. Here, assessment of students' understanding informs future planning. The consistent use of 'WALT' (we are learning today) and WILF (what I'm looking for...) in all lessons enables students to understand what they are learning and how their work is assessed. These strategies result in students making good progress. In science, students are enthusiastic learners who enjoy immersing themselves in practical activities. Elementary English teaching enables students to discuss ideas in a collaborative way. On occasions, student engagement decreases because teachers talk for too long and do not reinforce students' understanding with appropriate use of resources. Evidence from discussions with more able students indicates that they would appreciate more challenging activities and greater independence in their learning.

Students' personal development, together with the care, guidance and support they receive, are outstanding. Students are excellent ambassadors for their school. Underpinning the school's success are harmonious relationships at all levels. Students' behaviour is exemplary. All students have excellent attitudes to learning and they relate to the many different nationalities with maturity and insight. Students say that the 'culture of kindness, tolerance and open-mindedness' results in a cohesive community where learning is the highest priority. The fusion of this climate with the culture of achievement makes the school so successful. This is the reason many parents choose this school. A successful Parents' Forum meets regularly. The overwhelming percentage of positive responses from the questionnaires praised the school's climate of openness and happiness. A typical comment from one parent was, 'My child doesn't look forward to vacation as much since he's been here. He just wants to be at school.' Students feel safe and secure. Effective systems operate for addressing parental complaints and keeping parents informed of their children's progress. The informal 'back to school' night at the beginning of each year enables teachers and families to get to know each other. Daily 'passports' and regular reports keep communication strong and inform parents of recent test results. Guidance counsellors provide appropriate advice to those students who need extra support.

The inclusive curriculum provides students with a wealth of activities, both within lessons and through the after school enrichment programme. Improvements in curricular provision cater well for students with specific needs. KG students receive a curriculum that is student-centred. Activities are organised in centres and focus on specific areas of learning. Students enjoy the role-play area and book corner where their imagination and reading skills are developed. The elementary department operates the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme and the secondary curriculum features a strong emphasis on cross - curricular teaching and learning. Teachers receive curriculum training matched to their experience. Innovative lessons such as photography, news casting, light and sound, robotics, rock band and mad science excite and motivate students. A visiting author to the auditorium evoked enormous excitement and fun as students clapped, laughed and sang in response to poems and stories. The wide choice of enrichment activities offers all students opportunities to participate in a variety of appealing after-school activities. These include debating club, fashion arts, cooking, mural art club, board games designed to enhance speaking and listening skills for ELL students and Student Council. KG students delight in taking part in computer club and cooking club. Students are encouraged to be involved with other organisations. Fund raising takes place for charities, for example, a fashion show was held to raise money for Feline Friends and Cameron's Camels.

Links with the local special care centre enable students to develop empathy and understanding for others.

The new purpose-built school has state of the art facilities that provide a safe and stimulating environment. Students say that they feel ‘inspired to learn’ in resources such as the planetarium, music technology recording studio and the black box theatre. The extensive range of sporting facilities meets the needs of all students. Accessibility to prayer rooms for boys and girls has recently improved. The KG department has its own well - resourced library and the KG recess area provides good shade, with a variety of equipment to develop students’ physical skills and imagination. Staff enhance students’ learning by playing and talking alongside the students during recess. The main library has a wealth of books, computers, mobile laptops, research magazines and DVDs. Whiteboards are in daily use in every classroom. The school is about to launch the use of tablet computers throughout the school. Parents feel welcome in school and use facilities such as the coffee lounge. Effective security at each entrance maintains high levels of safety. Bus supervisors travel with the students to ensure their safety and well - being. All teachers are well qualified, including ten Arabic teachers, and the ratio of teachers to students is high at 1 – 10. The school employs forty teaching assistants who enhance students’ learning through intensive intervention programmes.

Leadership receives clear direction from GEMS and the director meets with the principal regularly to provide support and challenge. Professional development provides the principal with frequent opportunities to meet with principals from other GEMS’ schools. He values highly the support from this network. Other schools have benefitted from a training session showing how the American Academy of Abu Dhabi tracks their students’ progress. The principal is a forward-thinking, inspirational leader. Students and parents alike value his visible leadership and honest approach. A new, experienced and highly skilled associate principal has joined the leadership team. The elementary principal demonstrates an insightful understanding of the school’s strengths and areas for development. The school has very good capacity to sustain its drive for improvement.

School fees are in the high range. The quality of education is very good with exemplary personal development, care and guidance, which enable students to make good progress. Therefore, the American Academy of Abu Dhabi provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further:

1. Embed the new leadership team so that the continued growth of the school is effectively managed by:
 - i. providing a high quality induction programme for new staff that supports them both professionally and pastorally to carry out their roles effectively.
2. Improve the quality and consistency of teaching to the level of the best by:
 - i. using high performing teachers to share best practice across the school in a strategically planned way;
 - ii. incorporating more inter-active strategies into lessons consistently, so that all students are actively engaged in their learning; and
 - iii. increasing challenge and risk taking for more able students in order to enhance skills of collaboration and independence.