



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



Inspection Report

GEMS American Academy

Academic Year 2013 – 14

Iqraa

Gems American Academy

Inspection Date	13 – 16 January 2014
School ID#	86
Licensed Curriculum	American
Number of Students	1230
Age Range	3 to 17 Years
Gender	Mixed
Principal	Dan Keller
School Address	P.O. Box 110273, Abu Dhabi
Telephone Number	+971 (0)2 557 4880
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Official Email (ADEC)	adamericanacad.pvt@adec.ac.ae
School Website	www.gemsaa-abudhabi.com
Date of last inspection	1 – 4 October 2012

The overall effectiveness of the school

Inspectors considered the school in relation to 3 performance categories

Band A High performing (overall effectiveness grade 1, 2 or 3)

Band B Satisfactory (overall effectiveness grade 4 or 5)

Band C In need of significant improvement (overall effectiveness grade 6, 7 or 8)

The School was judged to be:	BAND B;	GRADE 5
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The main strengths of the school are:

- the school has developed very good relationships, high levels of respect and a positive culture where students feel safe and are happy learners
- the high quality of the school's building and resources provide good opportunities for students to develop a wide range of skills and interests within, and beyond, the school day
- school's focus on instilling an understanding of UAE values, culture and society
- many students are effectively developing 21st Century skills

The main areas for improvement are:

- clarity and understanding of the roles and responsibilities of senior and middle leaders amongst all members of the school community
 - the more effective use of assessment to ensure that the individual needs of all students are met
 - curriculum planning and delivery to ensure progression and continuity of learning for students as they move through the grades.
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Introduction

The school was inspected by five inspectors, who observed 85 lessons. They met with school leaders, teachers, students and parents. They observed students' arrival at and departure from the school, assemblies and break times. The inspectors reviewed and analysed data and documentation provided by the school. In addition, 182 responses from parents to a questionnaire about the school were analysed.

Description of the School

GEMS American Academy opened in 2007 and moved to the current location in Khalifa City A in September 2011. The school's vision is to "Inspire, Educate, Lead, Innovate" and the mission is "provide a rigorous academic program to our international learning community." The student population is 1,200, with equal numbers of boys and girls. Student numbers increased by 50% in 2013 and are predicted to increase by a further 50% in September 2014. The school has students from kindergarten (KG) to Grade 11, with the first graduating Grade 12 class due to start in September 2014. The school offers an American curriculum, using the Virginia State Standards framework. The school plans to adopt a dual approach for grades 11 and 12 from 2014, consisting of a choice of the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma or the American credit accumulation graduation program.

Students are from 74 different nationalities. There are 24% USA, 20% Emirati, 5% Canadian, 3% Korean, 3% Australian, 3% UK and 42% from other nationalities; 44% are Muslim. The school has identified 9% of students as having Special Educational Needs (SEN), with the majority having identified learning difficulties. There are a further 15% of students identified with language needs and are spread throughout the school.

The leadership team comprises the principal, head of primary school and two vice-principals. The principal has been in post for 1 year. The school has 128 teachers. It is growing rapidly, with 65 new teachers joined in September 2013 and an anticipated 35 new teachers starting in September 2014. The school fees are AED 47,800 for KG students and AED 66,780 for all other grades, which are in the premium category. The school was last inspected by ADEC in October 2012.

The Effectiveness of the School

Students' attainment & progress

The school's assessment data demonstrates that student attainment is above similar schools offering the American State of Virginia curriculum. It is also slightly above comparable international schools generally. These levels of attainment are not consistently high in all grades and subjects. Attainment and progress are satisfactory in English, mathematics, Arabic, Islamic education and social studies. In science, attainment and progress are good. Information and communication technology (ICT) skills are developed through the integration of technology into student learning activities in many lessons and as a result attainment and progress in ICT are good. The development of students' speaking, listening, reading, writing and numeracy competencies is satisfactory. Gifted and talented students make only satisfactory progress in many lessons due to low expectations and the absence of appropriately challenging activities. SEN students and those with identified language needs make satisfactory progress and receive appropriate support. Poor assessment strategies combined with some weaknesses in the curriculum are major factors preventing students from making better progress in accelerating their attainment levels. As a consequence of the varying levels of achievement and progress made across the range of subjects and grades, overall student attainment and progress is within the satisfactory range.

Students' personal development

Students' personal development is very good. This is evident in the very good relationships and high levels of respect among students and adults throughout the school. Students demonstrate high levels of self-discipline, interest and application. This is seen at its best in lessons where students have opportunities to work collaboratively in activities that challenge and develop their 21st Century Skills. In most lessons in the KG and in the primary section, students respond positively because teachers have effective routines and behaviour expectations. Students in the secondary section demonstrate high levels of maturity, confidence and respect. Students show respect for the culture and values of the UAE. This begins with morning gatherings in different areas of the school where students respectfully stand while the national anthem is played. A student council provides opportunities for some students to take on leadership roles. Students learn about living safe and healthy lives in lessons in a variety of curriculum areas. Attendance is good at 94%.

The quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning is satisfactory but inconsistent. This is demonstrated by the wide range in lesson quality observed by inspectors, from being unsatisfactory to outstanding. A contributory factor to this inconsistency is the failure of senior and middle leaders to undertake formal lesson observations and give constructive feedback. In the most effective lessons, students are inspired and enthused by activities that challenge them to work collaboratively to undertake research, solve problems, draw conclusions, create plans and present their ideas. The least effective lessons are often teacher dominated, with students passively listening and making only limited contributions to the learning process. The school's assessment strategies and procedures are insufficiently developed. Assessment for learning is not used consistently by teachers to ensure students' prior knowledge and skills are used to refine curriculum plans or to ensure that classroom activities are designed to address the differentiated learning needs of all students. In some lessons students routinely undertake the same work, with some students having limited access to the learning. Students with high ability levels are not challenged sufficiently. In the most extreme cases, students are being asked to learn skills and facts that they already know.

A significant number of teachers are beginning to adopt a student centred approach to learning and are also integrating ICT into activities. As a result, many students are developing good 21st Century Skills. Teachers have access to professional development within the school and through the GEMS organisation. However, the programmes on offer are not designed to take account of the differentiated needs of each teacher as identified through lesson observation and other monitoring procedures.

Meeting students' needs through the curriculum

The curriculum offer is good. The quality of its planning and delivery is more mixed. Overall this represents a satisfactory picture.

The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum. The core curriculum is supplemented by a wide range of other subjects including art, music, physical education, drama, swimming, modern languages, choir and a range of elective subjects for high school students. Teachers use Virginia State standards as the basis for planning their curriculum and lesson plans. In the primary years the curriculum is based on the International Baccalaureate framework programme. Students have good opportunities to enrich their educational experiences through an extensive program of extra-curricular activities. There are very good

opportunities for students to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the values, culture and heritage of the UAE, particularly through social studies.

Curriculum and lesson planning lacks consistency and coherence within and across grade levels as students move through the school. Continuity of students' learning and progression is inhibited because medium and short-term planning allows repetition of learning already covered in the previous grade. Insufficiently robust assessment often leads to teachers making little adaptation of the curriculum to take account of the skills and knowledge students have already acquired.

The protection, care, guidance and support of students

The protection, care, guidance and support of students is very good and provides an environment where students feel safe, secure, well cared for and become happy and enthusiastic learners. In the elementary section, the school operates a pastoral programme that promotes a basic culture of kindness, the 10 attributes of the IB learner profile and the Kelso (Green Frog) programme. These programmes are delivered by the class teachers, who have responsibility for the pastoral care of the students and are well supported by 2 social workers. There is a House System in place for grades 6 to 11 and there is a home room period each day. The homeroom groups contain a mixture of students across the grades, which provide good opportunities for students to develop social skills with other age groups. There is no official programme in place for the homeroom period and this is a lost opportunity to address the students' social, emotional and organisational learning skills. Student behaviour, engagement and enthusiasm for learning are very good. The school has a child protection policy, but teachers have only received general awareness training on a range of different policies. They have not received specific training in child protection. There is a well-equipped clinic, with a full-time nurse. There are separate prayer rooms available for male and female staff and students.

The quality of the school's buildings and premises

The school's buildings are state of the art, and the wealth of high quality facilities create a very good environment for student learning. The premises are spacious, well maintained and are large enough to ensure that the projected expansion of the school to over 2000 students can be comfortably accommodated. The sports facilities include a large gym, 4 tennis courts, a large swimming pool, a smaller beginners' pool, a weights room, a cardio room and a multi-purpose sports field. There are 7 dedicated science rooms, 4 technology laboratories, 2 audiovisual rooms, a dance room, a large well-equipped library and a planetarium. Classrooms are spacious, well designed and provide good opportunities for teachers to use

the space flexibly to develop a variety of different learning experiences. There are several shaded outdoor areas, with a well-equipped play area for KG. The excellent library facility is well managed by a librarian and a full-time library teacher. Library lessons are part of the core curriculum for primary students. There is good security at the gates, with visitors signing in and receiving a visitors' badge. KG children have a separate guarded entrance. Evacuation procedures are clearly signposted and regular practices are undertaken.

The school's resources to support its aims

The school is fully staffed and the low staff-to-student ratio has a positive impact on student learning. The school is well resourced and the use of resources to support student learning is generally satisfactory and in some lessons is good. Resources are not always carefully matched to the demands of the curriculum or the specific needs of students.

In KG, the range and quality of resources are good and used well to enhance learning. The ICT laboratories and mobile equipment for use in classrooms enable teachers to integrate the use of technology into student learning activities. Classrooms in the KG and primary sector are equipped with smart boards, which are used well in many classrooms to stimulate students' interest and engagement. Some teachers make good use of resources to provide stimulating and challenging opportunities for students to develop a wide range of skills and interests within and beyond the school day. The well-equipped science laboratories enable students to have hands-on practical learning experiences. The school library has a wide range of books and equipment and provides an inspiring learning environment. The physical education facilities and equipment give students good opportunities to participate in a wide range of sports. The school does not ensure that equipment regularly undergoes safety inspections by a qualified person. School buses are safe, well maintained and have supervisors to ensure student safety. There are acceptable procedures for storage and consumption of food.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

There has been a decline in the quality of leadership in the school since the previous inspection. It is now satisfactory with some significant weaknesses. All members of the senior team are either relatively new to the school or new in their posts of responsibility. They lack experience in the management of operational systems, the lines of accountability, and the strategic monitoring of the quality of provision in a large, complex school. Together with the rapid growth of student numbers and the employment of 65 new teachers, this has led to the team being over-extended by the challenges it faces. The principal, who has been in post for

one year, has introduced a highly successful orientation and induction program for new teachers, which was a major area for improvement from the previous inspection. The new teachers speak in glowing terms of the support they have received, particularly from the principal, to help them settle into a new country and a new school.

The school currently runs well on a day-to-day basis following a difficult start to the school year during which unsettled routines and staff changes led to a significant number of parental complaints and some ongoing dissatisfaction. This is evidenced by the very high number of negative responses received in the parental questionnaires sent out before this inspection.

The GEMS organisation has full responsibility for monitoring the quality of provision and holding the leadership to account for all aspects of the work of the school. Since the parental dissatisfaction became apparent, they have taken steps to provide extra support in the school. However, the underlying causes leading to the decline in the functioning of leadership in the school had not been addressed through sufficiently robust internal monitoring and evaluation measures. The roles, responsibilities and the processes of accountability for all leadership team members and middle managers are ill-defined and cause confusion for teachers, students and parents.

The self-evaluation form (SEF) is not based on the sufficiently accurate judgements necessary to inform effective development planning. The SEF has been used to feed into the school development plan (SDP), which follows the ADEC model. The SDP is adequate in construction. It does not identify sources of funding for improvements or provide any planned evidence for the monitoring of outcomes. The school uses a standard GEMS whole school performance management system to ensure that all staff are held to account for their areas of responsibility. This system has not been used effectively to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Senior leaders have not undertaken any lesson observations during the current academic year and have no schedule of observations planned. As a result, the professional development program for individual teachers is not linked to improving their effectiveness in enhancing learning opportunities for students. The school has not demonstrated that it has the capacity to make significant improvements without external support.

Members of the school's official parents association are extremely supportive of the school and generally pleased with the quality of education. They also recognise there are many aspects of the school that need improving.

Progress since the last inspection

As a result of the last inspection the school was asked to focus on two areas: induction for new staff and improving the consistency of teaching. School leaders have developed and implemented a successful induction program for new staff. The overall quality of teaching has declined and is now more inconsistent than at the time of the last inspection. There has been a decline in the quality of strategic leadership.

Little progress has been made in providing appropriate challenge for more able students due to the lack of any consistency in the use of assessment and the differentiation of learning activities. The implementation of the curriculum has become incoherent because teachers' planning now allows repetition of learning already covered in a previous grade. Some progress has been made in the provision of student centred learning, but progress is too slow.

What the school should do to improve further:

1. Improve leadership and management by:
 - i. developing clearly defined roles, responsibilities and accountability measures for all leadership team members and middle managers
 - ii. ensuring that all staff, students and parents have a clear understanding of the lines of communication in respect of roles and responsibilities within the school
 - iii. creating a consistent support and accountability program for all staff through the development and implementation of whole school performance management policy and procedures.
2. Ensure leadership provide consistency and rigor in the lesson observation process by:
 - i. focusing observations on the effectiveness of student learning
 - ii. linking the outcomes of lesson observations to individualised professional development for teachers
 - iii. planning classroom revisits to check that the agreed improvements are embedded in practice
3. Improve the quality of teaching & learning by implementing effective assessment for learning strategies to ensure that:
 - i. students' prior knowledge and skills are used to refine curriculum plans
 - ii. classroom activities are designed to address the different learning needs of all students.
4. Improve the curriculum implementation by :

- i. reviewing provision to provide higher levels of consistency across grade levels, and to improve continuity of learning as students move through the grades
 - ii. ensuring medium and short-term planning clearly maps out progression and continuity in learning for students.
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Inspection Grades

	Band A High performing			Band B Satisfactory		Band C In need of significant improvement		
Performance Standard	Outstanding	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory & Improving	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Very unsatisfactory	Poor
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Standard 1: Students' attainment and progress								
Standard 2: Students' personal development								
Standard 3: The quality of teaching and learning								
Standard 4: The meeting of students' needs through the curriculum								
Standard 5: The protection, care, guidance and support of students								
Standard 6: The quality of the school's buildings and premises								
Standard 7: The school's resources to support its aims								
Standard 8: The effectiveness of leadership and management								
Summary Evaluation: The school's overall effectiveness								