

GEMS Wellington Primary School Inspection Report

Foundation Stage to Year 6

Report published May 2010

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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 Wellington Primary School was inspected in October 2009 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 Satwa area, GEMS Wellington Primary School is a private school providing education for boys and girls from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 2, aged three to 11 years. The school followed a curriculum based on the English National Curriculum. GEMS Wellington School had been open for two years. In this time the building had been completely remodelled to meet the needs and ambitions of the school. The Principal had been in post throughout this time. There had been significant changes to the school during this time. The roll had grown from 50 pupils on opening, to the current roll of 463. The school also followed an admissions policy which welcomed students with additional support needs. As a result of the rapid increase in student numbers, the number of staff had also risen quickly. At the time of the inspection around one third of the staff had only been in post for a few weeks. Classes were small, with a maximum of 16 students. Students were supported by teachers, specialist staff and support assistants. The school's current management team had only recently been established. The school and its context had changed considerably over the past year. At the time of the inspection, there were 463 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. Almost all parents said that their children enjoyed school and benefited from the activities staff provided. They thought that children behaved well in school. A majority knew how the school had improved following the previous inspection. Although most believed that the staff were approachable, a minority did not feel that the school always dealt effectively with any concerns they raised. Overall, parents were pleased with almost all aspects of the school's provision and, when invited, made positive comments about the friendliness of the school and the high standards of education which they thought it provided. Notably, they believed their children were making good progress in English and mathematics, although a majority did not know how their children were progressing in Islamic Education or Arabic. They were confident that the school was safe and that their children were well looked after. Parents of children who required additional support with their learning were very positive about how the school helped their children. Most parents believed that the school communicated well with them, particularly about their children's homework.

How well does the school perform overall?

GEMS Wellington Primary School provided a good standard of education for its students. Attainment in the key subjects was acceptable to good with good progress made in Foundation Stage mathematics and English. The school addressed the high incidence of students learning English as a second language by providing targeted support which ensured that the expected progress was made. Across the stages students were making outstanding progress in developing their skills in understanding, talking, reading and writing French. Students' personal and social development were good with positive behaviour observed in lessons and around the school linked directly to a feeling of mutual respect between teachers and students. Students' Islamic, cultural and civic understanding was also good and reflected in the positive relationships and caring ethos. The school made sure that students understood the need to sustain and care for their environment and involved them in projects related to energy conservation.

The school's modified English National Curriculum was flexible enough to meet the needs of the students. Across the school there were a range of opportunities through which students took responsibility for others and themselves including the student council. The quality of teaching for effective learning was good overall. However, students were not consistently encouraged to become successful learners. As a result most were still capable of achieving higher standards. At the Foundation Stage children were learning through an appropriate range of play and practical activities. Staff planned opportunities well overall but, across the stages, tasks too often lacked challenge for the majority of students. Lessons were often teacher led and the purpose of lessons was not always clear or effective in achieving the learning objective. In too many lessons the teachers' plans did not take account of students' prior learning. Assessment practices were acceptable overall with teachers gathering and analysing data and using them, with students, to identify the steps students needed take to improve their work. Parents were informed of learning targets. However, assessment data were not being used effectively to plan tasks at the right level of difficulty for all students.

Arrangements to ensure health and safety in the school were outstanding with clear processes and procedures securely in place. The school provided a good quality of care and support to students and families based on a wide knowledge of individual needs and ensured that roles and responsibilities in caring for the children were clear.

Leadership and management of the school were good. The Principal led the school well, providing clear direction and involving parents. There was good capacity to improve. Processes for school self-evaluation were acceptable. The school was effectively governed and involved parents well in the life of the school. The school had made good progress in addressing two of the three recommendations of the previous inspection report. The management team was better informed about students' progress and the quality of teaching.

Key features of the school

- Strong leadership shown by the Principal which had led to the establishment of a clear vision for the development of good practice in teaching and learning;
- Students were cared for well within a family atmosphere;
- A range of extra-curricular activities helped students to develop skills and healthy lifestyles;
- The school welcomed and helped students who needed support with their learning and development;
- There were examples of high quality teaching but effective practice was not always shared across the school. School improvement planning was developing well but evaluation processes lacked the involvement of all staff.

Recommendations

- Continue to raise attainment and ensure that students have work which challenges them and builds on their previously acquired skills and knowledge;
- Identify and share the most effective practice in teaching to help students to become more involved in their learning activities;
- Build on the positive start to improving the school's approaches to self-evaluation and involve everyone in planning for improvement.

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

Attainment and progress in Islamic Education were acceptable across the school. Most students knew the basic facts about Islam especially the importance of prayer, Ramadan, Jomma'a, Eid, Tasbeeh, and cleanliness. Most students knew the main facts about the Prophet's life and his family, and could also name the other important Prophets. Students had sufficient knowledge of the details on how to perform prayers and recite The Holy Qur'an. Although knowledge of Islam was acceptable, students did not engage in a deep level of discussion about how the main principles have an impact on their daily lives.

Progress and attainment in Arabic were acceptable. Most students listened carefully and were able to say words and phrases accurately. The older students who spoke Arabic as their first language listened and responded well in Arabic. Most of these students answered questions confidently and explained their own thinking clearly. Almost all could argue their ideas when they took part in debates. Many students learning Arabic as a second language could identify and read common words. They knew the names of forms of transport, and older children could talk about what they might find in various shops. Overall, students understood that Arabic is written from right to left.

Attainment and progress in English were good at the Foundation Stage and acceptable in the primary phase. Around a half of the students were learning English as a second language and lacked English proficiency on entry to the Foundation Stage but achieved expected levels by the end of this stage. In Standard Attainment Tests, all students achieved expected levels, and a majority exceeded these levels. Attainment was similar to that in schools internationally. Most students made better progress in reading than in writing. By Year 6, almost all students could write effectively for a range of purposes. However, too few could select and use language to express their ideas well enough. Across the school, standards of spelling were too low. Almost all students listened well and answered questions confidently.

Progress and attainment in mathematics were good in Foundation Stage and acceptable in primary. Attainment was in line with expected standards. A majority of children at Foundation Stage 2 could explain how two-dimensional shapes differed from one another. By Year 3 students were able to use British coins to make simple amounts. They could add these coins quickly to give the right change. Older students knew multiplication facts. However, too many experienced difficulties in multiplying larger and decimal numbers. Across the stages students were not skilled using mathematics in real life situations or in applying several different skills to solve mathematical problems.

Students' progress and attainment in science at both the Foundation and primary stages were acceptable. Their attainment in Standard Attainment Tests was above the average for schools using the same measures. However, there were weaknesses in their understanding of some scientific facts and in their practical skills.

A majority were capable of achieving higher standards. Students in Year 6 were making good progress in developing scientific knowledge and skills. At the Foundation Stage children could compare the appearance of different animals. In lower primary classes, students linked learning about the body to self-care. Students did not always choose the right techniques to design and carry out investigations and often could not explain how their learning linked to real life.

How good is the students' personal and social development?

Students behaved very well in lessons and around the school. They attended regularly and treated one another with kindness and respect. They demonstrated positive attitudes to school, their class work and their achievement. Students were ambitious and determined to do well in school and in life. Many believed that they were capable of achieving higher standards in their work. Students had a range of opportunities to develop leadership skills and exercise responsibility within the school. Notably, members of the new Student Council had already started starting to think about what they would like the council to achieve and how they could take account of the views of their peers. All students had learned about democratic processes in the election of Student Council members.

Students could name the main features of Islam and knew the importance of Friday as a special day. They respected the practice of fasting in Ramadan and understood how it affected their own lives because they could not eat or drink during daylight hours. The culturally diverse student body was developing their understanding of one other, and the many different nationalities in Dubai's society. Teachers gave them appropriate opportunities to share traditional stories and talk about the customs of their home country.

Almost all students could compare and contrast Dubai with their homeland. They could name important landmarks, and older children could explain how these related to certain economic aspects, such as tourism

How good are the teaching and learning?

The quality of teaching was good overall. Across the school, staff used a wide range of teaching approaches. Some of these were more effective than others. Teachers were well prepared and lessons were well paced. In the best practice, for example in French and in some Arabic lessons, teachers used technology, music and movement well in their teaching. This helped students to remember what they had learned. At the Foundation Stage, staff planned children's learning well in all of the key areas. Most teachers had a sound knowledge of what they were teaching. A few did not always explain mathematics and science facts correctly. Teachers asked questions to check that students had understood lessons. However, most teachers did too much of the talking in lessons. They did not use questions well to make all the students think deeply and explain their answers.

The quality of students' learning was acceptable. At the Foundation Stage children were learning through an appropriate range of play activities. They needed to be allowed to make choices and follow their own interests more often. At later stages, most students understood

the purpose of lessons and how well they had achieved these. Almost all were skilled using information and communications technology (ICT) as part of their learning. When given the opportunity, they could work well with one another in pairs and groups to solve problems. However, tasks did not always appeal to students' interests, or take enough account of how students learn well. Overall, students had too few opportunities to find out about topics for themselves. As a result they could not easily extend their learning beyond what the teacher had taught the class. Students at Key Stage 1 did not have enough opportunity to learn through play.

Almost all teachers kept records of how well students performed in tests. They shared this information with parents and managers used it well to find out how well students were performing across the school. Almost all teachers had identified what steps students needed take to improve their work overall. As a result, students knew their learning targets and had begun to assess their own and one another's progress. Teachers had begun to record students' existing skills and knowledge. However, they had not yet begun to use these records effectively when planning lessons, to ensure that they provided tasks at the right level of difficulty. Teachers marked students' work regularly. A few needed to tell students more clearly what they had done well and how to improve their work.

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

The school provided a good curriculum which reflected the school's core values and supported students' learning well overall. Students learned about an appropriately wide range of subjects. As they progressed through the school, the range subjects and the time allocated to each subject was changed. This helped staff to plan learning which was right for the age of the students. The curriculum was regularly checked to make sure that it was meeting the learning needs of students. A range of specialist staff widened students' experiences further. For example, French was taught to all students from Year 1 to Year 6. This arrangement enabled students to achieve very well in this subject. Students' understanding of subjects such as geography, science and history was helped by grouping these subjects into interesting topics. Students had too few opportunities to use and improve their English and mathematics skills in other subjects. An extensive programme of extra-curricular activities contributed well to students' learning and the development of their skills. Staff supported the curriculum very well with regular visits to places of interest, and special events such as concerts and shows. They used the wider community well overall to help children to understand how their learning related to their lives.

How well does the school protect and support students?

The care and support provided to students and their families was of a high quality. Staff knew the students well and were sensitive to their needs. Everyone who worked in the school understood their role in looking after the students' welfare. The Principal had ensured that the staff she appointed were suitable and understood the school's policies on safeguarding children. Very good arrangements were made to ensure that the school building was safe and that children were protected, particularly when transferring between classes and buses. Play supervisors used games to encourage students to play well together at playtimes. There were effective arrangements in place to help new students to settle-in. The school nurse worked well with staff and parents to teach children about how to keep themselves safe and healthy.

The school welcomed students who needed extra help with their learning, including those for whom English was a second language. The inclusion co-ordinator identified how each student needed to be supported, and ensured that appropriate arrangements were made. She helped staff to meet the students' learning needs in lessons. As a result of this effective teamwork, almost all students who required additional support made appropriate progress. Teaching assistants helped teachers and children with their work. A few teaching assistants needed more guidance on how they could help students achieve their learning targets

How good are the leadership and management of the school?

The Principal provided very strong leadership and was well respected by parents and staff. She used her knowledge of good practice in education to establish a clear vision for the school. She had successfully maintained standards throughout a period of growth. A full management team had only recently appointed. The three phase leaders and two aspect leaders effectively supported the Principal in the day-to-day management of the school. They demonstrated a wide range of skills and experience and had begun to work together well to plan how they are going to improve the school. Almost all staff were keen to help to improve the school. The Principal was now in a stronger position to give both staff and managers more responsibility for leading and improving learning in the school.

The Principal monitored student progress closely. She sampled their work and visited lessons. She listened carefully to the views of parents. As a result she had a sound understanding of standards across the school. She had accurately identified what the school did well and what it needed to do better, and had made appropriate plans for how improvements should be made. However, significant change in the school's staffing and management had meant that weaknesses in teaching and learning had not yet been effectively addressed. Students, staff and parents were not yet closely enough involved in school improvement.

Parents were pleased with the friendly and welcoming atmosphere in the school, and felt part of the school family. They were pleased with the information that they had received about the school's activities and their child's learning. Those whose children required additional support with their learning were particularly positive about the school. The school was increasing further the wide range of opportunities it provided for parents to be involved. Regular coffee mornings, themed information sessions and individual learning plans helped parents to support their children's learning effectively.

Governance of the school was good. This helped the school to shape its strategic direction. The school was accountable for its performance and quality and reported on a regular basis. The school also benefited from effective support from the management organisation. For instance, a project to enliven the learning of Arabic was promoted by the management organisation and gave the school recognition beyond its own community. Parents' views were sought and there was a mechanism in place for the Principal to represent these views to the governing board.

The school had an appropriate range of facilities and resources to support learning. Staff made use of the school's information and communications technology resources in teaching and learning and had developed attractive library and reading rooms. At the lower primary stages displays were not well used to help students celebrate their best work. Learning activities in the Foundation Stage were sometimes limited by the space available. The school was well staffed. Almost all staff understood their roles and responsibilities clearly. A few required further training in key aspects of their work in order to be fully effective.

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 is the students' attainment and progress in Islamic Education?		
Age group:	Foundation	Primary
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable

How good is the students' attainment and progress in Arabic?		
Age group:	Foundation	Primary
Attainment	Not Applicable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Not Applicable	Acceptable

How good is the students' attainment and progress in English		
Age group:	Foundation	Primary
Attainment	Good	Acceptable
Progress over time	Good	Acceptable

How good is the students' attainment and progress in mathematics?		
Age group:	Foundation	Primary
Attainment	Good	Acceptable
Progress over time	Good	Acceptable

How good is the students' attainment and progress in science?		
Age group:	Foundation	Primary
Attainment	Acceptable	Acceptable
Progress over time	Acceptable	Acceptable

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

How good are teaching and learning?		
Age group:	Foundation	Primary
Teaching for effective learning	Good	Good
Quality of students' learning	Acceptable	Acceptable
Assessment	Acceptable	Acceptable

How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?		
Age group:	Foundation	Primary
Curriculum quality	Good	Good

How well does the school protect and support students?		
Age group:	Foundation	Primary
Health and safety	Outstanding	Outstanding
Quality of support	Good	Good

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

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.

More information about Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau can be found at www.khda.gov.ae.

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