



**British School  
Overseas**  
Inspected by Penta International

**Inspection report**

**GEMS Founders School**  
**Al Barsha**

**Dubai**  
**United Arab Emirates**

Date 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> May 2022

Inspection number

16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> May 2022

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## 1. Purpose and scope of the inspection

The Department for Education has put in place a voluntary scheme for the inspection of British schools overseas, whereby schools are inspected against a common set of standards that British schools overseas can choose to adopt.

The inspection and this report follow the Department for Education (DFE) schedule for the inspection of British Schools overseas.

The purpose of the inspection is to provide information to parents, teachers, senior managers and the school's management on the overall effectiveness of the school, the standard of education it provides and its compatibility with independent schools in the United Kingdom.

The inspection and report will cover the key areas of quality of the curriculum; quality of teaching and learning; the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils; their welfare, health and safety; the suitability of the proprietor and staff; the school's premises and accommodation (including boarding); and the school's complaints procedures. An essential part of the inspection is considering the extent to which the British character of the school is evident in its ethos, curriculum, teaching, care for pupils and pupils' achievements.

This inspection was completed by Penta International. Penta International is approved by the British Government for the purpose of inspecting schools overseas. As one of the leading inspection providers, Penta International reports to the English Department for Education (DFE) on the extent to which schools meet the standards for British Schools Overseas.

During the inspection visit, over 100 lesson observations took place, as well as a series of learning walks. School documentation and policies were analysed and data reviewed. Pupils' workbooks were scrutinised, and discussions were held with the senior staff, the management team, and a range of teachers, parents and groups of pupils. Due to a national school closure the team evaluated documentation during the first day of inspection. The inspection team were then in school for three further days.

The lead inspector was Colin Dyson. The team members were Mark Evans, Sophie Gorr, Justin Harris, Stephen Marr, Andre Nel and Simon Sharron.

## 2. Compliance with regulatory requirements

GEMS Founders School, Al Barsha (GFS) meets all the standards for British Schools Overseas.

### 3. Overall effectiveness of the school

GFS has at its heart, inclusion and equal opportunities for all students: these concepts are the school ethos. It provides outstanding education and care in all aspects. The quality of teaching is excellent and the effective implementation of *High Performance Learning* strategies (HPL) are having a highly positive effect on pupils' motivation and high-level learning behaviours. Across the school relationships are highly positive. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary, and they really enjoy being at school. Pupils feel secure and valued within the friendly, mutually trustful learning environment and the real sense of community that prevails throughout the school. Pupils are very well supported by outstanding pastoral care and robust welfare, health and safety policies and procedures. The highly supportive school environment enables pupils to make good or better progress in their learning. The pupils, parents and staff are highly committed to the school, feeling both valued and appreciated.

The school fulfils its vision to '*Grow, Flourish, Succeed*'.

#### 3.1 What the school does well

There are many strengths at the school, including the following:

- It is friendly and welcoming, whilst still expecting the best from all staff and pupils.
- The relationships between pupils and staff are outstanding. They are based on mutual respect.
- It is successful in meeting its aim to deliver a high-quality transformative learning experience to pupils, and nurturing individuals' talents.
- Strong monitoring, identification and implementation of intervention needs for pupils
- Pupils are interested and polite, demonstrating very positive behaviour towards their peers, to school staff and to visitors.
- The senior leadership team is outstanding. Led by a highly experienced and inspirational principal. He is well supported by a team of highly effective leaders and managers.
- The leaders are both held to account and supported by a knowledgeable, prudent and highly experienced local advisory board.
- The school benefits from an excellent administrative and support team.
- An inclusive curriculum that supports students in being reflective learners.
- High quality support for the development of language across the curriculum.
- Consistently excellent use of IT in lessons enhances pupils' learning.
- CPD throughout school contributes to the professional development of all staff.
- Quality and high standard of maintenance and development of the whole campus.

## 3.1 Points for improvement

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following development points:

- Continue to develop the use of kinaesthetic and inquiry learning across the school to support and enrich pupils' learning.
- Ensure policy documents are reviewed on a regular basis and reflect outstanding practice.
- Now that local Covid-19 restrictions have been lifted, fully implement the school's programme of extra-curricular activities, offering to further enhance the learning experience.

## 4. The context of the school

Full name of School	GEMS FOUNDERS School - Dubai				
Address	Al Barsha, South 3, Dubai, UAE.				
Telephone Number/s	04 519 5222				
Fax Number	-				
Website Address	www.gemsfoundersschool-dubai.com				
Key Email Address/s	principal_gfs@gemsedu.com				
Headteacher/Principal	Matthew Burfield				
Chair of Board of Governors/Proprietor	Mr Sunny Varkey (GEMS Education Founder and Chairman), Mr Brian Gambin (LAB Chairperson)				
Age Range	3 to 19 years				
Total number of pupils	5,792	Boys	2,915	Girls	2,877
Numbers by age	0-2 years	0	12-16 years	1,756	
	3-5 years	1,125	17-18 years	202	
	6-11 years	2,201	18+ years	8	
Total number of part-time children	0				

GFS is a National Curriculum of England school, aiming to provide pupils with a high standard of education. The school is part of the GEMS Education family of international schools. GEMS Education is an international body that pursues excellence in education, ensuring that it is accessible for every child, learning through innovation, pursuing excellence, growing by learning and global citizenship. Founded by the Varkey family over 50 years ago and headquartered in Dubai, GEMS Education has offices in the United Kingdom, Singapore, India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, Kenya and the United Arab Emirates.

## 4.1 British nature of the school

GFS has a strong British feel, augmenting its Emirati values and international context:

- The curriculum is based on the National Curriculum for England, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) programme and iGCSE, AS and A level public examination requirements.
- The school's interpretation of it has been carefully designed to reflect its British nature, but also take into account demographics.
- Consequently, students could enter schools in the UK without significant disruption.
- Styles of teaching and learning are informed by UK best practice, and staff professional development is used to develop consistency of approach in this area.
- The GFS leadership hierarchy is common to British schools, with clearly described roles for leaders and teachers in all sections of the school.
- The pupils are divided into year groups, key stages and school sections consistent with British definitions and age-groups: pupils wear a school uniform.
- There is very high importance placed on pastoral care, with dedicated staff positions created to foster and support pupils' welfare and well-being.
- The education of the whole child and the development of the broader skills and awareness towards becoming a valuable, contributing citizen in society are important aspects of school life.
- The school is maintained to high levels of safety and cleanliness.
- Child protection policies are derived from UK best practice.
- The school is well resourced with books and materials of the type that are in use in other British curriculum schools.
- The majority of the teachers employed by GEMS are British, with all having experience in British Schools: non-Arabic Language and Islamic Studies staff are either trained in the UK or have experience of teaching in British curriculum or international schools.
- Teachers' professional development needs are addressed through regular training to ensure that both their subject knowledge and pedagogical practice is in line with British standards.
- The school embraces tolerance, democracy, human rights and has respect for freedom of expression, within the laws of the UAE.
- Staff encourage students to be who they wish to be but to accept that others may choose different paths, have different interests and believe in different things.

## 5. Standard 1

### The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of education provided is outstanding. The school fully meets the standards for BSO.

## 5.1 Curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

Entry into the Foundation Stage (FS) 1 is based on a play-based assessment of children's social development and communication skills. Most children start school with skills that are below those typical for their age. Very few arrive in school with fluency in English. Pupils of all abilities generally make outstanding progress during their time in the Foundation Stage and leave working at levels that are in line with curriculum standards: increasing proportions of children exceed these expectations in the different areas of learning. During their time in the Foundation Stage, children develop into enthusiastic learners who appropriately enjoy taking a shared responsibility for their own learning and solving problems. They communicate their ideas effectively and collaborate very well with others. Children want to talk because adults are interested in what they have to say and help them find the right word. The teaching of early literacy is excellent and children make rapid progress in developing these skills. They enjoy working with adults in small groups, reading books and practising their phonics to help them read simple words. Expert teaching of phonics ensures children rapidly learn how to match sounds and letters to develop their reading skills. Progress in reading and writing is excellent, confirmed not only by the school's data and inspection evidence but by children's positive responses to the varied opportunities provided for them.

In the EYFS, teachers implement the curriculum with skill to secure pupils' curiosity and independence through a highly effective balance of teacher-led, play based and child-initiated learning. Teachers plan topics and activities that are relevant and well matched to the needs of individuals and groups of pupils. Children achieve well in acquiring mathematical knowledge and skills and engage in a range of exciting and rich experiences to explore and develop their mathematical problem-solving skills. The numerous outdoor learning areas are well used and provide a safe and stimulating environment. By creating games and providing opportunities for play both indoors and outdoors, adults support children to develop their core strength, stability, balance, spatial awareness, co-ordination and agility.

The school has implemented a range of innovative curriculum approaches based on an internal audit of pupils' learning needs. Curriculum delivery is further enhanced by stimulating learning environments. Across the Foundation Stage, displays are relevant, interesting and supportive of learning in classrooms, with a sound balance of learning prompts, celebration of work and working walls.

The Key Stage (KS) 1 curriculum is outstanding. It is broad, balanced and innovative, and motivates the pupils to succeed. It gives students experience in a wide range of areas of learning, with the thematic approach ensuring relevance and cross-curricular links. Students are highly engaged in lessons and consistency across year groups ensure students receive a high-quality education regardless of the class they are in.

There is a written policy on the curriculum and planning takes account of the varying student levels, including those with special educational needs. Differentiation was observed in every lesson in the forms of either targeted input, varied activities, scaffolded work or teacher assistant utilisation. There is an effective transition programme in place between KS1 and KS2, including meetings to share and discuss assessment records.

Extra-curricular activities and enrichment play a significant part in KS1. Well established theme days such as Pirate Day, Dinosaur Hunt and the Queen's Tea party enhance the curriculum. Trips and after-school activities were also evident in KS1. Student-teacher relationships are strong, behaviour was exceptional and students demonstrate high levels of independence, self-confidence and a willingness to contribute to lessons.

The school implements a broad and balanced KS2 curriculum based on the English National Curriculum in the UK and this fully meets the needs of the students, both academically and in terms of their well-being and personal development. DfE accredited English and mathematics schemes of work, such as *Power Maths* and *The Write Stuff*, underpin the planning in these core subjects. Teachers follow detailed curriculum maps that provide a long-term and medium-term planning structure for Years 3 to 6, while the school website and weekly newsletters provide a wealth of information for parents about what the children are learning. Woven into this programme of study is the Dubai MOE curriculum that strengthens knowledge and appreciation of the culture of the UAE and the country's achievements. In addition, school events, educational visits, and pastoral initiatives are integrated to develop the pupils. Extra-curricular activities are available and increasing again post pandemic. The breadth and depth of the offering could be developed to afford more opportunities to engage with a wider group of students in different contexts. Cross-curricular themed projects enhance knowledge and understanding about environmental sustainability and healthy lifestyles. There is strong provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). PHSE is taught weekly across the school and is delivered through dedicated lessons.

The secondary school's mission is to ensure learners are fully prepared and ready to take a step up with independent learning, curriculum content and application of knowledge. Lessons are often contextualised to embrace local, national and international real-life links. Individual departments across the secondary school adapt the formative marking policy to develop specific assessment rubrics in line with curriculum content.

In KS3, the curriculum follows the National Curriculum for England, with lessons pitched at an appropriate level. Throughout lessons in KS3, High Performance Learning (HPL) is integrated into lessons with learners encouraged to take risks and step out of their comfort zone. Curriculum content is contextualised for learners allowing all to engage and make good progress.

Curriculum content across all subjects in KS4 is frequently linked to International GCSE standards to prepare learners for choosing their options and beginning the courses upon moving into KS4 and 5. Lessons are all pitched at curriculum standards within the key stage, allowing learners to develop application, analytical and meta-thinking skills in all subjects. Importantly, teachers also always offer the opportunity for challenge and tailor learning where support is needed.

Teachers' professional development needs are addressed through regular training to ensure that both their subject knowledge and pedagogical practice is in line with British standards. All planning within secondary reflects the learning needs of the students in each class utilising all available data. Student outcomes, and the preparation for external assessments, ensure that every student is ready for the next stage of their learning journey. In the best examples, deep marking in core subjects takes place once every two weeks allowing learners to respond and build on the foundations of their work. Progress checks take place frequently whereby the class teacher takes into consideration progress over time to accumulate a milestone of the level the learner is working at.

Students are supported and given detailed advice and guidance when in Year 9 to prepare for KS4. This is conducted through a steady process of parent-student option and information evenings, as well as one to one advice from older student mentors and heads of department about International GCSE courses. Particularly in Year 9, the curriculum reflects the standard expected in KS4, thus encouraging students to build on their success and surpass their potential, when eventually taking their external examinations. At the start of Year 10 students, select five different options they want to pursue, alongside the core compulsory subjects. Teachers constantly encourage students to share their passions and pursue the unknowns within each subject area. Science Labs, 3D printers, Virtual Reality kits, Food Technology and Design Technology labs are just a few of the resources that teachers utilise to help develop the students.

Within KS5, students experience a range of different strategies to develop their content knowledge. Teachers design research tasks to provide students the opportunity to explore the content independently before applying it in lessons. These include presentations, debates or constructing responses to exam style questions. Students are encouraged to collaborate with their peers and evaluate the work of others to deepen their understanding of marking instructions and exam expectations. Within KS5, staff prepare students with the strategies to help them succeed in their final A-Level examinations. These include time management, revision techniques and general

organisation. In conjunction with resources provided by teachers, students have the opportunity to use their devices throughout lessons to research, access support and challenge materials in a range of formats including webpages, journal articles and videos. A-Level teachers ensure many opportunities for independent work are embedded within their courses to prepare students for their next phase of learning at university or for application into the world of work.

The school offers a range of IGCSE and GCSE accredited by Oxford AQA International Examinations, AQA and Pearson. BTEC qualifications will be introduced from academic year 2022-23. All KS4 and KS5 qualifications offered are recognised by schools, colleges and universities internationally, thus enabling all of the students to gain access to the best academic institutions in the world.

To balance the academic curriculum and promote deeper learning, the school has developed a range of cross-curricular and extra-curricular enrichment programmes. This is a good feature of the school and includes activities as diverse as the Art and Music Clubs, Model United Nations and Mindfulness, though could be expanded and promoted to include more students and activities. Additionally, older students are encouraged to participate in a wide range of academic competitions although these have been limited due to the pandemic.

## 5.2 Teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is outstanding. Teachers understand that pupils learn best when they are absorbed, interested and active.

Learning in the EYFS is of the highest quality: it involves other children, adults, objects, ideas, stimuli and events that engage and involve children for sustained periods. Much of the learning is practical and the EYFS setting has an underlying ethos of 'learning through play'. The range of play-based activities builds on children's confidence as they learn to explore, relate to others around them, develop relationships, set their own goals, and solve problems. Frequently children learn by leading their own play and by taking part in play which is guided by adults. Teachers in the FS used a range of strategies to enable all children to learn successfully; across the key stage there was frequent evidence of quality questioning that prompted the children to think and explain their understanding. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively to support children in focused teaching groups.

The development of children's spoken language underpins all seven areas of learning and development. The number and quality of the conversations they have with adults and peers throughout the day in a language-rich environment is a strength of the teaching and learning. Reading activities are engaging through a wide range of opportunities such as stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems, and adults providing them with extensive opportunities to use and embed new words in a range of contexts. Through conversation, storytelling and role play, children share their ideas with support and modelling from their teacher. Throughout the EYFS, strong, warm and supportive relationships with adults enable the children to learn how to understand their own feelings and those of others. Children are fully supported to manage emotions, develop a positive sense of self, set themselves simple goals and have confidence in their own abilities. Classrooms fully support the children in learning how to look after their bodies, including healthy eating, and manage personal needs independently. As they learn through interesting and engaging activities, they make good friendships, co-operate and resolve conflicts peaceably.

Teaching and learning across the primary years are outstanding. Assessment for learning, questioning to extend learning and the use of ICT are strengths. Classrooms are bright, vibrant educational spaces that have a buzz of learning. Pupils generally take responsibility for their own outcomes and peer learning is a common factor. Students are aware of how prior learning links to future learning and can often be heard referring to 'linking leopards'. Visual and audio stimuli is well utilised to enhance learning and incorporating more kinaesthetic activities would enhance learning further still. An outstanding lesson in Year 1 required the students to dance to a dinosaur rhyme.

Specialist lessons and the provision for EAL and SEN are excellent. Spaces around school are utilised effectively to cater for intervention groups to further enhance the differentiation and personalised learning. Pupils are fully engaged and have purpose in their lessons. A wide variety of strategies are employed by the teachers and support staff to maximise the impact of the topics undertaken. IWB technology is fully utilised in the classroom to support and enhance teaching and learning. A wide range of displays also add vibrancy and useful resources to support learning activities. The use of iPads or personal devices has a positive impact. In Year 4, 'Rhythm in Note D' in music was very successful and enjoyable, although the devices were not utilised more to further stretch pupils who needed challenge and support pupils who required it.

Teachers have strong and warm relationships with the students. In a Year 6 Art lesson one student said that her teacher has inspired her to want to be an art teacher herself. Student behaviour is exemplary and student's relationships in the classroom are warm and supportive. Excellent routines are in place to ensure there is pace in the lessons. Students are fully engaged in their learning. Targeted questioning was used effectively to move learning forward and assess for understanding. Teachers ensure their lessons are language rich to stretch students' fluency and depth of expression in English and the use of the vocabulary vault has a positive impact. HPL is having an inspiring impact on student motivation as expert learners: students are frequently adopting its language and meaning with enthusiasm. In the majority of lessons, HPL strategies are integral in teacher plans, encouraging students to collaborate, take risks, be agile thinkers and empathise in the learning process. Students are clearly learning from each other. Teachers utilise previous formative assessment data to inform their strategies for in-class activities and future learning. In a Year 5 science lesson on the four components of blood, a student explained the clotting function of platelets by sharing advice not to "pick scabs otherwise all your blood will leak out". In English, students were often invited to take risks improvising, creative figurative writing such as "My heart is like a blood amplifier". They were frequently encouraged to use their senses and empathetic skills to imagine themselves as other people in challenging situations to generate creative writing strong with metaphor and alliteration.

Teachers employ a wide range of techniques, typical of those seen in British schools, which open the door to high-level learning. Teachers ask open questions, encourage debate and challenge students' views. As a result, students display impressive learning skills. They reflect on their own learning, think critically about issues and solve problems. Practical skills are also highly developed as a result of a learning environment which is orderly and productive, ensuring that students are engaged in their learning. Students are encouraged to think for themselves, take responsibility for their learning, work independently and collaboratively, and reflect on their learning. Accurate assessments are completed that informs students how to improve. They navigate complex learning pathways and, consequently, they learn most effectively. Students collaborate and engage in very productive group work, where discussion is of the highest order.

Teaching across the secondary years is outstanding. Pupil attitudes towards learning are excellent, and behaviour of pupils is very strong. Teachers address minor issues appropriately to ensure learning is not disrupted. Generally, attendance and punctuality are good.

Assessment arrangements are robust and thorough, resulting in comprehensive analysis, which teachers use to ensure that learning experiences meet the needs of students at an individual level. Additionally, ongoing formative feedback from teachers to students, and from students to other students, ensures that learning moves on rapidly in a productive and positive environment. Assessments, data tracking and dashboards accurately capture the learning and progress that is made. Leaders and teachers throughout the secondary school routinely use the data: they discuss and describe student potential, progress and achievement in a most informed manner, showing that they have a deep and thorough understanding of each learner. The school sets challenging but achievable targets for all students, with intervention strategies employed if students are not on track to meet their target. The school's systems and structures ensure that every child will be ready to transfer into the UK educational system at the appropriate level should this be required. In the secondary school students are assessed through both their classroom work and formal assessments. Teachers develop innovative ways to assess their students. Through establishing independent self-study revision skills that evolve through key stage assessments, teachers ensure all students are prepared with the necessary tools to sit their International GCSEs and A-Level examinations at the end of KS4 and 5.

Standards in creative and performing arts subjects are exceptionally high and students are encouraged to express themselves through a range of media and genres. In music lessons students are confident to compose, perform and evaluate their own work, both vocal and instrumental. The high profile of creative arts inspires students to contribute their work to enhance the school environment either through displays or permanent murals. Students enjoy imaginative and challenging indoor and outdoor physical education and sporting activities. Specialist teachers plan activities to build skills, stamina, teamwork and integrate these with initiatives to promote staying healthy.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and are very confident. They have a good understanding of the English national curriculum as well as secondary and post-16 external examinations. They have a strong understanding of how students learn most effectively. Teachers do their utmost to help students succeed academically, creatively and personally. Lessons are planned with clear objectives and teachers share success criteria at the start of learning. Teachers mostly use a range of good-quality, age-appropriate resources such as practical equipment, video clips and digital technology to stimulate students' curiosity. Some subjects would benefit from additional practical resourcing to improve the learning experience for pupils. Teachers also use a wide range of teaching styles and strategies to motivate students and meet their needs consistently. Teachers know their students extremely well and have high expectations of them.

## 5.3 Standards achieved by pupils

The standards achieved by pupils at GFS are outstanding.

The youngest follow the EYFS curriculum and are continuously formatively assessed and monitored by their teachers. Successful ongoing assessments effectively monitor every child's progress and this is tracked thoroughly and as a result additional support can be provided to ensure each child is able to make good progress. Learning is organised by topic and teachers devise a wide range of related indoor and outdoor activities to develop pupils' communication, numeracy and social skills. There are ample art and role play opportunities that encourage creativity and equipment for physical play. This focus on developing each learner ensures children achieve well. Adults encourage children to develop their thinking and language skills through stimulating activities that challenge and excite young imaginations.

Although many children start the FS with levels of attainment below UK expectations by the start of KS1 all have made rapid progress, and most are achieving in-line with UK expectations or better. Their curiosity is aroused by what they see and, as a result, an excellent foundation for learning is established. Relationships at all levels provide a highly positive learning environment where children thrive. Adults nurture children's personal development and well-being extremely effectively. Staff are highly skilled at motivating children to join in with new activities. Clear boundaries and expectations mean that children learn to share resources sensibly and behave well. Parents are involved closely in contributing to assessments of children's learning. This enables teachers to identify what they need to do to improve their development and progress.

The standards achieved by students in KS1 are excellent. Progress and attainment are both trending upward over a three-year period. In the core subjects, *Power Maths*, *The Write Stuff* and Bug Club are used effectively to monitor progress. Other subjects are assessed through 'I can' statements.

All pupils have individual targets and work observed in their workbooks is of very high quality. Pupils clearly take pride in their work and understand how to take the next steps in their learning. Classroom resources are of an excellent quality, quantity and range, and are used effectively. Feedback is swift and targeted. Students work is assessed regularly and used to inform future planning, aiding planning for a range of needs and leading to maximised outcomes.

At the end of KS2, students' attainment and progress are above UK national averages, while standards achieved in lessons consistently meet and often exceed the expected age-related attainment levels of the National Curriculum. There is good evidence that strong progress is being made by students in Arabic language lessons and other MOE

curriculum subjects where there has been substantial, targeted leadership investment. The high standards achieved in KS2 are secured through strong distributed leadership, collegiate and standardised planning. A large majority of lessons are of an exemplary high quality. Pupils are enthusiastic about the intense exposure to HPL strategies. Effective use of assessment data has created the school's capacity to enable personalised learning to guard against pupil underachievement and focus resources on children who need support.

The summer 2021 A level results were exceptional with 84% of students achieving a grade C or above across all subjects. 100% of students who wrote English Literature and history achieved either an A\* or A grade. IGCSE results in English and mathematics exceeded the UK averages. In English, 56% of GFS students achieved A\*/A compared to 22% in the UK. In mathematics, 41% of students achieved A\*/A compared to 21% in the UK. In both music and global perspectives, 100% of the students received an A\*-C grade.

## 6. *Standard 2* Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students is excellent.

Throughout the school, students display notable self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence. This begins at an early age as they are taught these behaviours in all aspects of school life in the Foundation Stage. They use encouraging language, positive praise, and this ethos carries throughout the rest of the school. An example of self-confidence in one Foundation Stage class saw a student using sophisticated language whilst presenting what she did at the weekend.

British values are evident throughout the school in displays, behaviour, school systems and events. A Year 5 student commented, "We really respect the British values as they teach us to be responsible". The school enables students to distinguish right from wrong and encourages them to respect the law. Behaviour is excellent; behaviour points, achievement points, and house points are used effectively to help focus, reward and motivate. Students are enthusiastic learners that are respectful and adhere to the school's Mindful Behaviour policy, which promotes the values of hard work, agility, and empathy.

Pupils are well connected, and group work or paired work is a common theme in lessons. Systems such as the *I care, I listen* badges amongst staff enhance the wellbeing provision for students. A Year 13 student commented, "There is no inequality in our school". Respect for other people is encouraged and students are involved in various community and fundraising activities for worthy causes. *Pinktober* (Breast cancer awareness month) and *World Mental Health Day* are two such examples. Moral education is part of curriculum mapping and schemes of work throughout the school.

Provision for social development is highly effective. For example, in a Year 1 classroom, a group of three students combined their skills to build a road for their toy cars to run upon. In another example, a Year 2 reading lesson was focussed on the weekly core value of 'patience'. Students discussed the positive outcomes of patience in different scenarios. Healthy lifestyles are promoted in school and the canteen provides a healthy and balanced diet. A Year 13 student commented that form tutors will frequently give compliments when a student has made a healthy choice.

Student voice is evident in the school, student council and the wellbeing committee, being well established. Students are required to prepare a video followed by an interview to be elected onto the student council. Once elected, they use student surveys to ensure a democratic process to decision making. Significant improvements to school life through student voice include a toilet clean-up campaign and expectations of behaviour in school corridors. Students patrol corridors in orange vests to monitor this. The school is impeccably

clean and corridor behaviour and transitions are outstanding. This is enviable considering the size of the school.

The school provides pupils with a broad general knowledge of the responsibilities of citizenship in the host country, UK and internationally, at age appropriate level. Pupils acquire an appreciation and respect for all cultures, promoting tolerance and harmony between different traditions. The school celebrates International Day annually where all members of the school community wear their traditional clothes and bring their countries food. They also run stalls to promote their traditions and perform music or dance.

Cultural development is a strength. 'UAE and me', as well as Arabic are fixtures of the curriculum. Pupils and parents contribute to the school's community through avenues such as the annual shoe box appeal. The school has a strong provision for Art, Music, and sport through the extra-curricular programme and termly music celebration assemblies. Students have responded positively to the Duke of Edinburgh/Junior Dukes award, beach clean-up, and black history month amongst others. The older students take part in various community service schemes.

## 7. *Standard 3* The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Arrangements for welfare, health and safety are outstanding and ensure that all pupils, staff and visitors are exceptionally well cared for.

The school meets all UK and local requirements and secures an environment in which all pupils enjoy learning. It's rigorous health and safety systems and supportive supervision ensure that pupils are safe.

All relevant aspects of health and safety are addressed through comprehensive policies developed by the school with the support of GEMS Education. All policies related welfare, health and safety are available on the school's website and comply fully with local government legislation which are rigorously and consistently implemented. Attendance and punctuality of pupils are recorded following local guidelines and the school works closely with parents to overcome absence and lateness. Levels of attendance are consistently high at 96%.

The school's safeguarding and child protection processes are held up as models of best practice across all GEMS schools. The vice principal currently acts as the school's designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and she is supported by 2 deputy DSLs, one from primary and one from secondary. All staff, regardless of their position, receive full Level 1 Safeguarding training on joining the school and every year thereafter. This training is offered with translation into several languages available for staff for whom English is not their native language. Clear records are kept of participation and the required pass rate. Through the school's "I care, I listen" initiative, pupils know who to approach if they have a concern about themselves or one of their peers. The head of student welfare works with staff and pupil welfare teams to ensure that wellbeing, physical and mental health are constantly monitored. The school was awarded the wellbeing award for schools by Optimus Education in recognition of the school's long-term commitment to supporting and improving wellbeing and mental health provision within the school. Leaders ensure that staff well-being is equally as important as that of students, adding to the harmonious atmosphere. A health and safety audit done by QMS Global, an international organisation specialising in management system assessment, further concluded that the whole school was effective in all areas related to health and safety.

All leaders involved in the recruitment of staff undertake safer recruitment training to ensure they are aware of and support their stringent expectations when hiring staff who will potentially work with children. The school's processes for the reporting and recording safeguarding or child protection concerns are comprehensive and secure. Data can easily be analysed to identify possible patterns or recurrences that may require further investigation. The monitoring and notifications of this tracking system is linked to an online system that also ensures that follow-up is done in a timely manner and all parties are kept informed.

Healthy lifestyles and healthy choices are promoted throughout the school. These are promoted through events like the whole school's involvement in Dubai 30 x 30, house sports competitions and healthier options offered by the catering company in the canteens. Pupils are very well supervised and cared for in both an age and need appropriate manner. Pupils were supported to develop self-awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision making, self-management and social awareness. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe, including online safety. The school actively encourages staff to be positive role models. The management is mindful of the wellbeing of both pupils and staff, and have representatives from both groups on active committees reporting to the head of student welfare.

Thorough risk assessments are carried out regularly in line with the school's policy and appropriate action is taken to address issues and minimise risks. Pupils are supervised when moving within the school, at breaks and on arrival and departure by security and senior staff deployed at appropriate locations. Pupils and adults are kept safe at the start and end of the day, with agreed traffic routes for vehicles and pedestrians and high levels of supervision on school buses. The school complies with fire regulations, holds emergency drills at least termly and fire equipment is routinely checked. These are as stringent as those in the UK and meet UAE regulations and legislation. The school has several staff who are trained first aiders and fire marshals and detailed plans for evacuations, including for those who are vulnerable at such times, are available.

All accommodation is checked thoroughly and an ongoing assessment is undertaken to ensure premises are clean, safe, secure, well maintained and regularly monitored to minimize risk to pupils and staff. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the school has introduced enhanced cleaning procedures and protocols to ensure the safety and welfare of all the pupils in their care across the whole school. The school continues to work closely with the UAE authorities and approved cleaning partners on an ongoing basis, to ensure that the operational practices create an environment that is safe and secure for all the pupils. To further support efforts to ensure that the highest health and safety measures are followed in the community the school developed an eLearning course specific to COVID-19, accessible to everyone through the school's website which is an excellent initiative.

## 8. *Standard 4* The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The suitability of the proprietor of the school and of the staff appointed to work there is excellent.

A strong governing board ensures robust debate, which in turn leads to better educational outcomes for children. Governors hold a firm belief that their role is to function at a strategic level in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of and to make decisions in the long-term best interests of current and future students.

The board collectively lead the pursuit of excellence in learning through nurturing, inspiring and enriching the lives and characters of young people. The governor role is effectively strategic rather than operational. Governors avoid getting involved with the day to day running of the school, instead supporting, and challenging the school's leadership team to drive school improvement. Regular briefings by the school's leadership team aim to ensure all governors have a clear insight into the working of the school throughout all key stages. By creating responsibility areas, members are encouraged to focus on key aspects of the school's work: this has enabled an outstanding level of expertise from board members to support the continued development of a school of excellence. The effective, collective contribution of the board adds significantly to the continual process of improvement at the school.

Governors take a monitoring and development responsibility for the school's safeguarding, child protection and health and safety arrangements: they ensure the school complies fully with international best practice. Responsibilities with regard to the safeguarding and welfare of students are clearly understood and discharged effectively. Clear procedures have been implemented to ensure appointed staff meet best practices regarding safe recruitment procedures. Governors have a clear understanding of their individual and collective responsibilities. Prior to the confirmation of staff appointments, appropriate checks are carried out to confirm staff identity, medical fitness, right to work in Dubai and previous employment history. At least two professional references are taken up, as well as qualifications and personal references. Staff within the administration team are highly effective in maintaining a list of all staff and volunteers who currently work in the school and complete records on all staff members.

Staffing levels are more than adequate for the successful delivery of the curriculum. All teaching staff have qualifications appropriate to their role: some staff have further academic or teaching qualifications that enhance school development. Staff are supported professionally by a positive, affirming professional review and development cycle. Many staff underline that this process is developmental supporting the culture of the school, which is very much centred on the premise that nurturing teachers' creativity and innovation is best done through affirmation.

## 9. *Standard 5* The premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation at the school are outstanding.

The school premises and facilities provide an inspiring physical environment which safely meets the needs of students including those with particular requirements. The three areas of the school integrate very well, each having appropriate age-related resourcing but maintaining a whole school one campus feel. Access on and off the site is impressive and very well managed, the challenge of manoeuvring 3,000+ students via buses, is conducted in a highly effective manner. Entry and exits of the site are well lit with clear walkways and guidance. Access to buildings is secure with security card access control. Cameras are widely utilised and monitored continuously. Temperature in the buildings and classrooms is well controlled with air conditioning and comfortable acoustics. Displays around the school are fresh and vibrant. Graphic displays and wall art focus on the school values, HPL concepts and school priorities, helping to create a feeling of unity and sense of belonging across school.

There are age appropriate and hygienic pupil toilet washing facilities and separate, clearly marked adult, visitor and disabled facilities. Showers and changing facilities are available for physical education lessons and co-curricular activities.

The two comprehensive medical centres are very well-equipped. There are four nurses and two doctors with clear protocols in place. This facility is very well resourced. Extra resources are available for students with particular needs and the inclusive Small Steps program to help support and integrate students with specific needs into mainstream curriculum whilst offering praiseworthy support. This is an inspirational inclusive development.

The health, safety and welfare of the students and personnel on site is very well catered for and ensured by the staff through duties and the security team. The site is very clean, safe and well maintained and meets local requirements. The Operations departments have clear policies and protocols to follow up any ongoing maintenance issues and clear plans for future campus improvements and routine maintenance. Logs are kept regarding maintenance and monitored carefully. Policies for hot weather, parking/drop off are readily available. The provision for trips planning, whilst good, would benefit from streamlining and automating alongside the school operational software.

Lighting in the classrooms and teaching spaces complement the activities taking place. Natural light is encompassed in most classroom spaces. The acoustic properties of the large spaces including gyms have been considered in the building design and work very well. Movement around the site is exemplary considering the number of students and staff.

Drinking water supplies for students and staff are available through well marked water fountains across the site that are readily accessible to all. There is suitable access to water in

the toilet and changing facilities. Hot water is available and delivered at a suitable temperature so it is not a danger to users.

The school facilities have a disability access. Outdoor and indoor physical education spaces that are age appropriate are provided for curriculum use and play. The children enjoy utilising the varied outdoor play areas. Classrooms are an appropriate size and resourced according to age and stage with sufficient effective materials.

There are two full size outdoor football pitches, five multi use games areas that are shaded, centrally air-conditioned multi-purpose sports/performance hall; centrally air-conditioned multi-purpose sports areas, outdoor sports areas/courts including a roof space. There are large covered play areas; outdoor learning areas for EYFS, learning resource centres, dining rooms, specialist student support and growing counselling facilities, a parent cafe, six prayer rooms and breakout learning spaces. There is a swimming pool on site, but this is contracted out and utilised in the co-curricular program. Specialist subject specific rooms are available to support the curriculum needs. Provision for specialist lessons includes thirteen science laboratories, music rooms, three libraries, art and music rooms, design and technology and food technology rooms.

## 10. Standard 6

### The provision of information for parents, carers and others

The provision of information provided by the school to parents, prospective parents and its wider community is excellent. The school fully meets all BSO requirements.

GFS publishes a comprehensive selection of documents for parents, including an excellent parent handbook for new and existing parents. The information relating to admissions, behaviour, inclusion, curriculum policy and more can be found easily on the school website, and is outstanding in quantity, ease of use and depth. The school website and social media accounts are updated frequently, sharing information, updates and events to keep parents informed.

Parents reported that the provisions of the school are excellent, particularly the accessibility and communications with teachers and management. The most recent parent satisfaction survey shows 79% of parents were extremely or somewhat satisfied with the school overall. The school has a direct parent relations executive as the primary contact for non-academic related school matters with parents, a system that received outstanding feedback from parents in a focus group. The parent group reported that the pastoral care provided to their children and the efficiency of issues being dealt with by the school is excellent.

IGCSE and A Level performance data is available and celebrated on the school website for all stakeholders to access and review.

The GEMS Founders Parent Association (GFPA) is well established and is involved in many aspects of school life. The GFPA has representatives from parents of pupils in a wide range of year groups and is overseen by the parent relations executive and a member of the management team. Successes of the group include their charitable work and event organisation, such as the *Pinktober* event, raising money for cancer charities. The GFPA creates activities and opportunities for the whole school community. Parents can apply to join the parent association at the beginning of a school year, with information shared through the parent newsletter.

Parent-teacher meetings are scheduled once a term for each year group, and parents can make appointments via an accessible online system. Parent meetings were reported to be informative for parents in supporting their child's academic progress and celebrating their successes. The school issues academic reports to parents regularly throughout the year, at the end of each term. A detailed end of year report is issued for each subject. Reports include information about pupil's attainment and progress, learning skills, along with baseline assessment information. The progress and attainment of pupils is closely monitored, and concerns are shared with parents through reports, parent teacher meetings and phone calls to parents.

## 11. Standard 7

### The school's procedure for handling complaints

GEMS Founders meets the BSO standard fully.

Complaints are rare, but the school has a detailed written policy and appropriate procedures in place. These reflect good practice from the UK. Complaints received are acknowledged immediately upon receipt if received during term time and as soon as possible during holiday periods. The school aims to treat all complaints seriously and sensitively. Following resolution of a complaint, the school keeps a written record of the complaint and whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing. The school reserves the right to keep additional records which may contain the following information:

- date when the issue was raised
- name of parent
- name of student
- description of the issue
- records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
- witness statements (if appropriate)
- name of member (s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
- copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)

If a complaint pertains to child protection or safeguarding issues, it will be immediately referred to the school's designated safeguarding lead for urgent review. If a complaint is received about a member of the leadership team, the principal or the director of education, it is hoped that the matter is resolved informally. Any complaint that cannot be resolved at the school level will be referred to GEMS Corporate Office and an independent investigation team will provide support and suggestions to the Leadership team in order to find solutions. The final arbiter will be the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) in Dubai.

## 12. Standard 8 Leadership and management of the school

School leadership and governance are outstanding features of GFS.

The quality and immense depth of the leadership structure has adapted and expanded to meet the exponential but very successful growth of the school from a roll of 1800 in its first year in 2016 to 5800 at the time of inspection in May 2022. The school leadership effort benefits from expert strategic support from its parent organisation GEMS which is a substantial global education management company. Its work also receives valuable, 'critical friend' support from a stable local advisory board consisting of members with a wide range of expertise. All BSO standards have been met to a high order in this inspection.

A mark of the school leadership's success is that when you experience the school, you never have a sense of its enormity. Furthermore, GFS has sustained, despite its rapid expansion, outstanding outcomes for the majority of its pupils and continued to improve pupil attainment and progress where needs have been identified. At the same time, it has developed an exceedingly strong provision for over 500 children with SEND. It embraces challenge and improvement, implementing fully the recommendations of its last BSO and local inspections.

The school's vision, values and strategic direction is shaped by an experienced, inspirational principal and executive leadership group. Their drive and passion for the school seeds commitment and loyalty among the many tiers of distributed leadership teams as well as within the staff group as a whole. This is reflected in excellent rates of teaching staff retention and frequent internal promotion of teachers to leadership positions. The philosophy of leadership builds strongly on the school's mission statement "Grow Flourish Succeed". It extends to a steadfast commitment to excellent relationships and care for all members of the school community. Safeguarding is at the forefront of each leadership meeting at every level of the school.

The Executive Leadership Team is proud of its unified, consistent and transparent leadership approach. This provides the template that the many lower tier leadership teams follow. A major element of this unified consistency is the whole school's adherence to the principles and character attributes of the Higher Performance Learning (HPL) programme which is being rigorously embedded across the school. The school encourages both its staff and pupils to take risks, innovate and not to be afraid of making mistakes. As a result of these leadership initiatives, pupils, staff and parents feel very much at the heart of the school's collective endeavours. They trust that the school leadership teams support them and are working in their interest. Relationships throughout school are indeed excellent. This ethos has led to and underpins excellent pupil behaviour from the Foundation Stage to KS5.

School leaders implement highly effective systems of accountability and monitoring so that they are always quickly informed how the school is functioning. This maintains a relentless

focus on pupil well-being and academic outcomes. Effective performance management triggers focused personalised professional development for academic staff including classroom assistants. There was some evidence during the inspection that further training would improve the impact of individual learning support assistants embedded in the classroom supporting children with SEND.

Staff training is delivered bilingually in English and Arabic. It is impressive that the school is able to facilitate PGCE, ECT, QTS and IQTS acquisition for colleagues who do not have this British qualification. Equally, the school's praiseworthy relocation services and essential support for new teachers mirror the leadership's duty of care towards its staff in general. Senior and associate leadership teams appreciate the considerable investment that the school makes in their professional development, valuing the coaching and mentoring from senior colleagues. They applaud the visible presence of the executive leadership team around the school. In an open consultation process, they also contributed persuasively to the school's decision to create 30 new assistant middle leadership positions in the next academic year to reduce workload and secure further improvement in standards.

School administration and facilities management is overseen by an experienced operations manager whose leadership ensures that vital administrative services supporting the school's core business of caring for and educating 5,800 children operate effectively. Financially, the school operates a proven zero-budget system that responds agilely to developing needs according to the school's forward strategic planning and review cycle. This is a considerable accomplishment with 5,800 children on roll. There is a great deal of productive shared financial leadership between the school and its parent GEMS organisation. Both the GEMS organisation and GFS benefit from good relationships with the local Dubai authorities. Overall, GFS provides superb value for money and this explains why it is such a popular oversubscribed school.

It is a strength of the school that it is embracing, along with other schools in the local GEMS school cluster, the national agenda of promoting vocational courses and pathways. This is still in its early stages but seems likely to be part of its highly successful inclusive education offer.