

# GEMS FirstPoint School

## British Schools Overseas Inspection Report

Inspection Dates: 17-20 January 2022

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Age Group: 3 -18 years

Report Published: 7 February 2022

Report Reference Number: 02/009/2022



## Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection report follows the English Department for Education (DfE) Schedule for the inspection of British schools overseas. The inspection was carried out by three inspectors from Education Development Trust who spent four days at the school. Education Development Trust is a body approved by the British Government for the purpose of inspecting schools overseas and quality assured by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted).

Education Development Trust is one of the world's leading not-for-profit education companies, providing a range of education services in the UK and internationally. Education Development Trust employs over 2,500 staff worldwide, all working on projects relating to educational quality.

**To be recognised by the Department for Education, a British School Overseas must have an inspection report which shows that their performance against all the standards is at least satisfactory. This reflects the standards required for continuing registration as a school in England. Schools meeting the standards will have their inspection reports published on the Department's website and will be registered on Edubase.**

Inspectors report on the extent to which schools meet the relevant Standards for British Schools Overseas. These were updated with effect from September 2017. The inspection follows closely the framework for the inspection of independent schools in England but, where appropriate, also takes account of compliance with local regulations.

**A policy update was issued by the DfE in October 2018. The Department confirmed that 'our policy is now to accredit schools in countries where to meet certain standards would be in breach of the host country laws, as long as there is evidence to substantiate this, and all other standards are met'.**

The Standards are as follows:

1. The quality of education provided by the school (Curriculum, Teaching and Assessment)
2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils
4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff
5. The premises and accommodation
6. The provision of informatio.
7. The manner in which complaints are handled
8. The leadership and management of the school
9. The quality of provision for boarding

The purposes of the inspections are to:

- help schools to improve the quality and effectiveness of pupils' education and of the care for their welfare
  - provide rigorous and reliable inspection reports which help schools to recognise and celebrate their strengths and to identify and remedy any weaknesses
  - inform parents and the wider public of the quality of British schools overseas by placing reports in the public domain.
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### Key for inspection grades

<b>Grade 1</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
<b>Grade 2</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Grade 3</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>
<b>Grade 4</b>	<b>Inadequate</b>

### Proportions used in the report

90–100% Vast/overwhelming majority or almost all

75–90% Very large majority, most

65–74% Large majority

51–64% Majority

35–49% Minority

20–34% Small minority

4–19% Very small minority, few

0–3% Almost none/very few

## Information about the school

GEMS FirstPoint School is a British International school located in The Villa community in Dubai. The school is a member of the GEMS group of schools and was established in 2014. It offers education to 1506 pupils aged three to 18 years, making it smaller than many similar all-age schools in Dubai. The majority of pupils hold British passports. Large numbers of pupils come from India, Egypt and the UAE. Overall, there are 93 different nationalities represented in the school population. There is a high proportion of pupils for whom English is not their first language. It is an inclusive school that caters for the full range of abilities and needs. There are 137 pupils with identified additional needs and 250 pupils who have access to the whole-school literacy intervention programme at different levels. The school's ethos revolves around five core values: family first, happy, engaged, inquisitive learners, cutting-edge digital innovation, individualised learning journey for all, infinite opportunities.

Children in the early years follow the new English early years framework. Pupils in the primary school and key stage 3 follow the English national curriculum with an international perspective. In Year 11 pupils take GCSE, BTEC level 2 and bespoke pathways for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities such as Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and AQA unit award scheme qualifications. In the sixth form, students' study for AS, A levels, BTEC level-3 examinations and ASDAN international awards. They leave at the end of the sixth form to attend universities around the world and approximately half go to UK universities.

Regular and transparent communication with parents and all stakeholders regarding COVID-19 restrictions meant that the school received high levels of understanding and support for its excellent and extremely well-organised provision of online learning. Initially, distance learning had an impact on pupils' progress and the school has worked hard to assess and close gaps through a modified 'recovery curriculum'. Additional support for those with high levels of language need through new whole-school approaches to reading have been introduced. Safeguarding was given high priority. Families were visited, the counsellor remained online and the inclusion team also made checks. Online safety had a high profile and staff were fully trained regarding e-safety. The school has a dedicated well-being curriculum, calendar and leadership roles in the form of Well-being Warriors who are mental-health first-aiders. Robust

return-to-school plans, which were used as a model of good practice across GEMS, allowed face-to-face teaching throughout the last academic year, but the school had to revert to online learning at the start of this term to ensure the safety of pupils. All pupils were in school during the inspection. Attendance remained high for the period of online learning.

## Summary of the evidence base used by the inspection team

This BSO inspection was carried out by three Education Development Trust inspectors. The inspection dates were agreed upon with the school with 10 weeks' notice of the start date of the inspection. Inspectors had access to information about the school before the inspection.

Inspectors visited 77 part-lessons. Eleven were jointly observed by an inspector and a senior member of staff. Due to COVID-19 restrictions inspectors could not spend longer than 15 minutes in each lesson, but moved between lessons and returned as appropriate.

There were 25 meetings which took place with leaders, managers, teachers, teaching assistants, pupils, parents and carers, human resources (HR) personnel and members of the school's governing board.

Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work in books and the work produced digitally. They analysed a wide range of documents relating to assessment, policies and operational and strategic plans. The school's safeguarding arrangements were inspected. The views of parents, pupils and staff were also considered, through surveys, face-to-face interviews and informal conversations.

## Evaluation of the school

**GEMS FirstPoint School is an outstanding school and provides an outstanding quality of education for pupils from three to 18 years.**

The school meets all of the Standards for British Schools Overseas except those which it is precluded from meeting because of the host country's legislation. These are explained later in the report. The requirements of the host country take precedence and no action points are, therefore, specified in relation to these unmet standards and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.

Pupils across the school make outstanding progress and reach standards that are appropriate for their age and similar to expected standards in the United Kingdom. All pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress at or above their targets due to significant intervention. Those pupils with English as an additional language make accelerated progress as they develop their language skills.

In **English**, children in the early years, many from low starting points, make excellent progress in speaking, listening as a result of the wide-ranging indoor and outdoor learning opportunities available to them in their environment.

The many and varied opportunities provided for children to speak, and the well-designed language-rich learning environment ensure that their vocabulary expands rapidly.

Pupils in key stage 1 gain confidence in applying some of the early rules of grammar in their writing and by the end of Year 2, use more complex sentence structures and an appropriate range of adjectives and adverbs.

Attainment in English, at the end of key stage 2, is high compared with that of pupils of the same age in schools in England. Pupils continue to make excellent progress through targeted and explicit teaching of reading skills and writing development. As a result, Year 6 pupils use their increasing command of formal English and read a wide variety of fiction and non-fiction confidently. Pupils learning English as an additional language make rapid progress in their spoken and written English as a result of skilful teaching and focused interventions.

By the end of the secondary phase, pupils continue to achieve well and match UK averages in GCSE English literature and language examinations showing improvement from 2020 and a continued upward three-year trend. Pupils are articulate, express their opinions with confidence and employ a wide range of vocabulary.

Sustained progress is made by students in the sixth form and consequently they attain outstanding levels and exceed UK and world average outcomes year on year. In English language A level most achieved A\* to B grades and in literature all achieved A\* to A.

Pupils make outstanding progress through the **mathematics** curriculum.

In the early years, pupils make excellent progress in an environment that celebrates mathematics. They work through a range of practical ways to aid fluency in mathematics. For example, when learning about shape, pupils in Nursery classes manipulate sticks to form rectangles and squares and they are encouraged to investigate their perimeter.

In primary classes, pupils continue to progress well, with the progress of most-able pupils especially rapid. By the time pupils leave KS2, attainment at this level is high in comparison to the UK's latest national results in 2019.

Throughout key stages 3 and 4, progress continues at a pace. Assessment has been carried out differently in each of 2019, 2020 and 2021 but, across this three-year period, attainment has been rising. Pupils attained very high standards at GCSE this year when compared to UK equivalents. They are stretched and challenged. For example, an early-entry group studying binomial expansions in Year 11 thrived on the new, advanced content.

Mathematics is the most popular choice for A level as of last year, suggesting a high degree of satisfaction from pupils with the mathematics curriculum. In the sixth form, this growing number of students achieve very high standards at AS level and A level, including in further mathematics. They benefit from a highly personalised curriculum.

In the early years children make outstanding progress in understanding the world. Curiosity is encouraged and they begin to work scientifically from an early age being asked to predict and investigate.

Attainment in **science** is outstanding in the primary phase. Most pupils are working at or above age-related expectations and almost half are working above the aspirational targets set for them. In primary, international benchmark tests show growth year on year and significant improvement between testing dates. This rapid progress and improvement in attainment are due to a consistency of approach to working scientifically, curriculum adaptation to ensure a seamless transition from primary to secondary and rigorous planning across year groups that considers the needs of different groups of pupils.

Attainment in the secondary phase is also outstanding with GCSE results improving over the last three years, particularly at the top grades. These results were above UK averages. Almost all pupils made excellent progress and a large majority performed above their predicted targets. All pupils taking BTEC science made above expected progress.

Attainment at A level is also very strong and results have improved considerably over the last three years and particularly last year. Impressive progress over two years of study means that on average students now achieve one grade higher than they did in the past. This is in the

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context of an inclusive entry policy where there are no minimum GCSE grade requirements for taking A level courses.

As well as the outstanding attainment and progress of pupils in examinations described in the subjects above, pupils are very successful in a wide range of other subjects. A large proportion of pupils made better than expected progress in their GCSE examinations in other subjects to achieve grades higher than predicted. Their overall attainment at GCSE has been consistently above UK national averages. Every pupil with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) achieved a grade B in at least one subject. The school not only retains, but adds value for these pupils who thrive through personalised pathways. All groups of pupils achieve well and make excellent progress from their starting points. Challenge for the most able, in all subjects, identified as an area for improvement at the previous BSO inspection, is now fully evident.

The COVID-19 pandemic meant that, during the last twenty months, staff taught lessons remotely. The quality of the online resources, allied to the attention and guidance from teachers, has meant that the pandemic has had little negative impact on the academic progress of pupils.

## Summary of other judgements against the BSO standards:

- The quality of the curriculum provided by the school is outstanding (see Standard 1 below). COVID-19 restrictions have put a hold on many aspects of the curriculum beyond the academic, for example trips, competitions, activities, internships and enterprise activities.
- The quality of teaching and assessment is outstanding overall (see Standard 1 below).
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding (see Standard 2 below).
- The welfare, health and safety of the pupils are outstanding (see Standard 3 below).
- The standard for the suitability of the proprietor and staff is met (see Standard 4 below).
- The premises and accommodation meet the requirements of the standard (see Standard 5 below).
- The provision of information for parents meets the requirements of this standard (see Standard 6 below).
- The school's procedures for handling complaints meet the requirements of the standard (see Standard 7 below).
- The leadership and management of the school are outstanding (see Standard 8 below).

**As a result of this inspection, undertaken during January 2022, the school has demonstrated that it meets the Standards for British Schools Overseas (2017 updated), except for those standards that cannot be achieved legally in the United Arab Emirates. The school's provision prepares pupils well to enter or re-enter the UK independent school system. This judgement is endorsed by the British Government, quality assured by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and is valid for a period of three years.**

## Standard 1. The quality of education provided by the school

Most of the standards relating to the quality of the education are met except for the standard in paragraph 2 (2) (d) (ii). This is not met because of the requirements of the host country relating to the provisions of the UK Equality Act 2010.

The quality of the **curriculum** is outstanding. GEMS FirstPoint follows a British curriculum which is exceptionally well personalised to meet the needs of its pupils, including pupils who speak English as an additional language, those with SEND and those identified as the most able in the school. As a result, it prepares them well for the next stage in their education and to enter or re-enter the British educational system and gain access to British universities.

All children in the early years follow a well-planned programme of learning to attain early learning goals. The curriculum is then structured around progression ladders at key stages 1, 2 and 3, ensuring that the national curriculum is accurately sequenced. This leads to the vast majority of pupils achieving well in GCSE examinations at key stage 4 and A levels or BTEC qualifications in the sixth form across a wide range of subjects and disciplines. The school makes very effective use of the immediate environment and resource available in the local community. It is at the forefront of innovative partnerships with industry, providing internships that allow pupils to follow personalised routes. Its collaboration with the UAE Rahhal curriculum is allowing pupils to gain access to industry qualifications and employment routes. Such curriculum options, added to the comprehensive guidance and support in relation to careers, assist the school greatly in its aspiration to educate the 'leaders of tomorrow'. Unfortunately, some of these options have ceased temporarily due to COVID-19 restrictions.

The curriculum is centred on the UK national curriculum but the school has made it its own. There is a consistency in the teaching of each subject and at each key stage, allowing pupils to make connections and commit knowledge to long-term memory.

Leaders make every effort to personalise the curriculum for each pupil. There is a variety of pathways for pupils of all abilities to excel. Inclusive practices are especially well embedded. Indeed, the school has a growing reputation for adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of its pupils, recently winning the Best Mainstream School for Children of Determination in the UAE awarded by an external body.

The 'Britishness' of the school is very apparent and it promotes British values of tolerance and mutual respect. In doing so it meets the requirements of all UK equalities legislation and provides effective preparation for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in British society. Debates and peer challenge are common features of learning. In a history lesson, a Year 10 pupil analysed a friend's answer, providing encouraging feedback, and then suggested ways to improve. Other pupils told inspectors how their views are always listened to and respected.

At the beginning of 2020, the school was offering up to 70 extra-curricular activities per week. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this offer has been temporarily reduced significantly. Pupils cannot wait for them to start up again. Many of these clubs are pupil initiated, for example an e-sports club which gained such interest that pupils then organised a tournament with a cluster of local schools. Many of the clubs are supported by volunteer pupils attached to the Inspire Academy, an organisation created by the school to promote leadership and service. This is another exceptional enrichment to the overall curriculum offer.

The school's extensive, high-quality facilities greatly assist the delivery of the curriculum. Pupils reflect this quality through the care they show for resources and equipment that enhance their learning.

The school did not allow the COVID-19 pandemic to affect the academic curriculum. A full timetable continued online throughout the school closures. Where necessary, adaptations have been made to target any lost learning. For example, the design and technology curriculum has been re-timetabled to ensure that all pupils receive a course of practical lessons that were missed during the period of school closures.

The quality of **teaching and assessment** across the school is outstanding.

In the early years, children make an excellent start to their education. Teachers and adults know the children well. Children's learning journals chart progress at each stage and are planned with rigour. Teachers intervene in children's learning thoughtfully. For example, adults skilfully questioned a group of early years children about whether ice would melt when left outside, shaping their predictions and giving them time to think and reflect. The learning environment, both outside and inside, is bright and attractive, with a range of good-quality resources assisting pupils' development. The desert school is particularly effective.

Pupils are typically interested, determined and collaborative learners. They take ownership of their learning. In a Year 11 lesson, after assisting a friend with a geometric calculation, a pupil said, 'Why would we hold on to the information? We all want to do well!' Teachers set challenges which encourage this collaboration to great effect. For example, in a mathematics lesson in Year 7, a 'spot the mistake' problem was highly effective because pupils searched enthusiastically for the solution using correct vocabulary and clear reasoning, many finding the solution.

Subject knowledge is a strength of teaching. Teachers explain new content clearly and are quick to recap and reshape for any pupil who might need it. Subject expertise is further strengthened by the sharing of best practice, training from examination boards and working alongside local professional networks. Teachers constantly strive to improve, whether through consultations with coaches, or taking advantage of weekly shared 'Tuesday Tips' sessions.

Teachers question pupils deeply and they expect them to explain their answers in detail where appropriate. Typically, they do not accept the first answer, following up with probing questions to draw out deeper explanations from pupils. In lessons, they provide timely feedback and are generous with their time outside lessons, providing further guidance and support.

Teachers are highly adept at using technology to support effective learning. Their expertise has grown as a result of the remote-learning periods caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Even now, they effortlessly teach their class while engaging at the same time with those at home who may be unable to attend school because of the virus. However, technology does not dominate lessons, rather it enriches them.

Clear criteria for success feature in all lessons. Pupils are left in no doubt about what is expected of them. Teachers skilfully recap previous learning to assist pupils in seeing how learning links together. For example, in an English lesson in Year 7, pupils showed understanding of how the relationship between characters in a Shakespeare play reflected some of the features of Elizabethan society.

The school's work on assessment is exceptional and the improvements identified at the previous BSO inspection have been fully addressed. Teachers know in great detail how individual pupils are progressing. There are very thorough systems to track and assess pupils' attainment and progress. Pupils understand their own personal targets, which are reviewed regularly.

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## Standard 2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The standards relating to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) of pupils is outstanding.

The school is inclusive. Pupils appreciate the importance of treating all groups of people equally and with respect. Discussions with pupils and teachers and careful scrutiny of the school's curriculum in action confirm that the school pays due regard to the protected characteristics of race, religion, belief, disability, pregnancy and maternity and age (as laid out in the UK Equality Act 2010). The school always carefully considers the impact of all policies and processes and the implications for pupils with protected characteristics. Indeed, they consider it their fundamental responsibility to eliminate discrimination, ensure equality of opportunity and foster good relations. It cannot meet fully the requirements of the act in relation to marriage and civil partnership, sex and sexual orientation and gender assignment due to the laws in the United Arab Emirates.

Pupils flourish in the supportive environment and consequently grow in self-esteem. From an early age, the youngest children in early years learn to help each other and play cooperatively. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary, both in lessons and during unstructured times. Pupils consistently demonstrate excellent levels of self-discipline. Pupils have a clear understanding of right and wrong and treat one another, all staff and visitors with respect and courtesy. The school provides a safe and secure environment where pupils' emotional well-being is nurtured and where they feel valued.

Pupils actively support one another in conflict resolution. The school's restorative approach supports them in resolving difficulties in mature ways. Staff actively promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs through the personal social, health and economic education (PSHE) and moral education curriculum, the SMSC policy and the behaviour policy. In this highly diverse school, the curriculum and environment enable all pupils to explore the unique aspects of their own culture and background and respect the differences in others. Pupils refer to the school community as 'one big family'.

The school offers pupils of all ages opportunities to take responsibility in meaningful roles. Diverse opportunities for leadership include pupils being school council representatives, subject-specific class ambassadors, well-being warriors and house captains. These roles allow pupils to have a voice which is listened to by leaders. Elections for the school council give pupils insights into a democratic process and what it means to accept responsibility for representing the views of others.

Pupils understand the importance of looking after not only their school but the wider environment and helping others. Pupils often lead the organisation of charity work and volunteer work through the school's Inspire Academy. High-quality pastoral guidance provided by teachers, year heads and the school counsellor enable the pupils to make strong and well-informed choices about moral perspectives and how they would like to live their lives.

Pupils appreciate one another, irrespective of age, gender, race, ability or religion and both contribute to, and benefit from, the harmony created. Pupils have a good knowledge of organisations and of society in the UK. The school is organised similarly to schools in the UK and conveys a sense of being British through daily routines and the curriculum. The school balances learning about other cultures, times and traditions with ensuring that pupils' own cultural identity is maintained. International Day is one of the most popular days of the year. Pupils take pride in being members of an international community. Pupils of all ages have a strong awareness of being global citizens with a shared experience of living in the UAE. The

SMSC provision in the school produces well-informed and well-rounded individuals who have a strong awareness of the world and the diversity of its cultures.

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

The school meets the requirements of the standard, the regulatory requirements and the cultural obligations of the host country.

Arrangements for welfare, health and safety are outstanding and ensure that all pupils, staff and visitors are exceptionally well cared for. Pupils know how to stay safe both physically and online. They know that adults will listen to any concerns they have and do everything possible to promote their welfare and safety. Their behaviour is excellent and bullying is rare. The outstanding relations among pupils and between pupils and staff promote a welcoming environment where pupils feel confident in seeking support from adults in the school. Those new to the school settle quickly and say they know who to go to for support.

School leaders keep a close check on attendance. Attendance is higher than UK averages, at 96%. During the COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning attendance was equally high.

Leaders ensure that they take responsibility for, and pay meticulous attention to, all aspects of health, safety and welfare to ensure that policies and procedures are followed by all. There are robust safeguarding practices and procedures in place to ensure the safety and health of pupils and adults across the school. All necessary risk assessments are carefully carried out and specialist areas such as laboratories and sporting facilities are maintained well to meet regulatory requirements. Identified concerns or repairs are dealt with in a timely manner. Policies and procedures are comprehensive and are reviewed regularly to reflect and respond to changes in local or international requirements for school safety especially during the pandemic.

Child protection and safeguarding are high priorities for all staff. Arrangements conform fully to local and UK practices and requirements. All staff are made fully aware of their responsibilities and the need for vigilance through regular training. They know what to do if they have any concerns. The designated safeguarding leaders are trained to a high standard. All visitors are made aware of who they are. Parents and pupils are also fully aware of safeguarding procedures.

The school is diligent in its approaches to ensuring safety. Risk assessments and regular safety checks are robust and ensure that the school is a safe place for learning. Written policies are well implemented and reviewed regularly by the wider GEMS team. Fire regulations and procedures are as stringent as those in the UK and also meet UAE regulations.

The school has taken robust steps during the global pandemic to keep all pupils and adults safe and to ensure their well-being.

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

The school meets the requirements of the standard. All staff are Ministry of Education (MoE) and Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) licenced. The HR department diligently maintains a comprehensive single central record of all staff and governors. This shows evidence of police checks to confirm that prospective staff are not barred from regulated activity relating to children. The school checks identity, right to work in the UAE, medical fitness and qualifications. Audits by GEMS central office are regular. Outsourced staff are checked by the company employing them, but these are also checked randomly as an extra layer of security by GEMS.

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Twenty six new staff joined the school this year, including a new assistant head. Staff turnover last year was low at under 17% but this was higher than normal because some wished to return to the UK after the pandemic. The school invests heavily in its staff through professional development and with high levels of care and concern for their well-being. A safer recruitment policy is in place. Staff appraisal and performance management procedures are effective in supporting talent, identifying professional development needs and ensuring accountability.

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

The school meets the requirement of this standard.

The premises and accommodation are of a high quality and purpose built to support the learning needs of all pupils. They provide a welcoming, spacious, secure and safe learning environment which all pupils enjoy. Entrances and exits to the school are restricted to clearly identified points. All visitors are required to wear identity badges. Pupils arriving at and leaving school are carefully managed to ensure safety at all times.

The buildings are light, spacious and well ventilated. Classrooms are bright, airy and orderly and displays contribute to an attractive and interactive learning environment. Classrooms and teaching areas are fit for purpose.

Buildings meet local requirements for construction, safety and standards of hygiene. Cleaning has been of particular importance during the pandemic with the hygiene and cleaning teams ensuring that high standards of sanitisation are maintained throughout the day.

The school is well resourced with many specialist facilities including well-equipped swimming pools, sports pitches, an indoor sports hall, creative and performing-arts facilities with a 400-seat auditorium and primary and secondary school libraries. A variety of wireless technology is widely used throughout the building, including a 4D immersion space and a dedicated technology suite with tablets and laptops to allow pupils to have easy access to extensive digital resources. These excellent resources are used efficiently. Outside areas are suitably protected from the sun. Washrooms are sufficient for the number of pupils, all of which are regularly cleaned and provide appropriate washing facilities.

There is safe and secure access for all pupils, including those with SEND, and there are suitable medical facilities provided in the form of a well-equipped clinic containing treatment and recovery rooms which are staffed by a doctor and two nurses. There is also a separate isolation bay. The school has made carefully considered adjustments to its provision as a result of COVID-19 to ensure that everyone in the school remains safe. Pupils and adults wear face coverings, work in smaller groups in bubbles, maintain social distancing and follow all the COVID-19 protocols implemented at the school and regularly checked by the host country's officials.

## **Standard 6. The provision of information for parents, carers and others**

The school meets the requirement of this standard.

The school keeps parents fully informed about their child's education. This continued, and increased, throughout the school closures caused by COVID-19, as school leaders tried to keep the wider school community together online.

Parents receive regular communications such as a weekly newsletter and emails. They are also kept regularly updated through online parent information meetings. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the school also ran a series of curriculum information meetings that were well

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attended and valued and these continued in virtual form once the school moved to online learning.

Parents value the English curriculum, which promotes British standards and expectations. They appreciate the 'family feel' at the school, saying that nothing is too much trouble for leaders. The school's website provides a range of easily accessible information concerning all aspects of school life.

Parents receive regular reports as well as formal and informal updates about their child's academic and personal progress. There are regular parent-teacher consultations across the school year, moved online over recent terms. Parents speak enthusiastically about their effectiveness. Parents of children in the early years have continual access to information about their child's progress through online applications. Parents have the chance to speak to staff and pass on informal communications or raise any concerns.

Leaders meet parent representatives regularly through the parents' association which holds planned meetings, which continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The parents' association speaks highly of the school's attention to detail, the availability of leaders, and the very quick response when the school moved its curriculum online.

The school regularly runs workshops on aspects of the curriculum and specialist topics. It has made the most of the move to more technical ways of communicating, for example creating information podcasts about types of special educational needs.

Leaders consult all parents through regular surveys and consultations. They act on suggestions where appropriate. For example, after consulting parents about school reports, leaders changed the format to make them more specific and personal to the individual child. Parents are highly enthusiastic about the welcome they receive at school. In particular, they value the visibility of senior staff at the beginnings and ends of days, a culture set by the principal who leads by example. They feel that this is an inclusive school where 'everyone belongs'.

## **Standard 7. The school's procedures for handling complaints**

The school meets the requirements of this standard. The complaints policy is available to all on the website and is updated annually. The three-stage procedure outlines how complaints are resolved and the expectations of all parties within timescales. The school has a coordinator who makes sure that the complaints procedure runs smoothly, ensuring confidentiality and child protection. Dated records are maintained throughout. Parents say their concerns are dealt with in a timely manner and describe leaders as 'dynamic, accessible, approachable and responsive'. During COVID-19 restrictions parents had access to school personnel 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The school has dealt positively and fairly with a range of complaints to the satisfaction of all concerned.

## Standard 8. Quality of Leadership in and management of schools

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The leadership fulfils its responsibilities in ensuring that the BSO standards are fully met and that the areas for improvement identified at the previous BSO inspection have been addressed.

The principal has an inspirational vision for the school which is embodied in all the school does. All stakeholders enthusiastically spoke to inspectors of the family feel of the school. The strong sense of positive relationships, kindness and inclusion is palpable. The accessible and approachable nature of senior leaders is much appreciated by all.

There are a large number of leaders at both senior and middle level who support and challenge one another purposefully. All are competent and fully committed to the school's vision and development plan. Leaders have an accurate understanding of all aspects of the school and accurately focus on areas for development through the whole-school strategic improvement plan. The high quality of leadership and management in the early years ensures that children's personal and academic development and well-being are effectively nurtured. The school is committed to the development of potential leaders and nurtures talent appropriately. There is very strong capacity to improve still further.

FirstPoint is part of the GEMS group of 48 schools in the UAE. GEMS provides corporate governance and accountability. The local advisory board (LAB) with representation from parents, GEMS principals and others with a wide range of expertise, provides critical-friend support and accountability. The LAB knows the school well and members are regularly in school to conduct reviews. They have a good working relationship with the school's leaders, while understanding their separate responsibilities. The board has clear financial policies and ensures that the school operates legally and is compliant with all requirements. Safeguarding procedures are highly effective and meet the same expectations as in the UK. They also conform to the requirements of the UAE. The principal's performance is appraised. The board are very confident in the school's leadership team.

All leaders are good role models and proud to work at the school. Staff performance is formally reviewed through the appraisal process but leaders informally drop in to lessons daily to support and encourage teacher reflection. Teacher morale is high, particularly due to the support of one another in the 'staff family' and the culture set by the principal. They appreciate the regular, timely and meaningful professional development with opportunities to attend external courses and gain qualifications. Those new to the school appreciated the quality of their induction and the shared practice amongst colleagues. Teachers feel well supported by leaders and colleagues, most particularly during the periods of remote learning, when the school moved to live on-line lessons. Leaders work very hard to ensure that the COVID-19 protocols allow learning to continue almost seamlessly. Parents, pupils and KHDA inspectors say how successful this was. Unfortunately, some aspects of the wider curriculum such as extra-curricular activities and links with industry are still not back in place.

Gems FirstPoint is a highly inclusive school. The celebration of different talents, cultures and individuality is evident, with no hint of discrimination or inequality. It nurtures pupils on their personalised learning journey. Pupils thrive because they are happy. One pupil said: 'This feels like my second home.'

## Early years provision

The early years provision caters for children from three to five years. The majority of children speak English as an additional language and enter the school with skills in communication which are lower than those typical for their age. On-entry assessment, together with focused observations in the first few weeks, lead to teachers having an accurate assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of every child's skill. This enables teachers to map out support and activities which meet the children's needs to enable them to make incremental progress from their starting points. Teachers rigorously track and monitor children's progress. By the end of Reception, the proportion of children who reach a good level of development is above the national average in England. As a result, children are well prepared for the next stage in their learning.

Teachers have high expectations and routinely plan engaging activities for independent as well as whole-class work. The high-quality provision of indoor and outdoor areas as well as the new bamboo garden and reading areas, with a wide range of quality resources, contribute to children's accelerated progress. Children quickly learn routines and what is expected of them so that they can focus well on challenging activities. They are well behaved and eager to learn, gaining in independence and confidence throughout their time in early years.

Parents are fully involved in their child's learning through online applications which record activities and progress against the early learning goals. Workshops and regular communication allow effective transition over a period of time for children to settle in. At the end of each term parents receive a personalised report including three targets and a 'wow moment', which they are encouraged to respond to.

The leadership of the early years is strong and effective. Leaders are clear about the needs of the children, especially after COVID-19 restrictions. They have adapted the curriculum to ensure that communication and language, and personal, social and emotional development are developed further to make up for what could not be covered during absences related to COVID-19.

## Sixth-form provision

Students in the sixth form are extremely well prepared for life beyond school. Provision is outstanding.

In 2021, just under half of all students achieved A\*-A grades at A level, performing above the UK average. Most students achieved A\*-C grades in all subjects. This has improved considerably from 2018. Achievement above UK averages was particularly strong in English language and literature, mathematics, further mathematics, biology and chemistry. Students did not take external exams in 2021 due to COVID-19 but the school carried out a full schedule of assessments with rigorous standardisation and moderation, working closely with the examination boards to ensure validity. High expectations, positive relationships, individual support and teachers' excellent understanding of examination requirements all contribute to students' success.

All students are seen as individuals and their needs for a bespoke learning journey are met. This may be through a clear academic route towards a specific career or through innovative BTEC courses such as game design or the development of a talent, for example for golf. This holistic view of each student, incorporating personal and pastoral support, extra-curricular provision, careers guidance and much more, is key to their success and high-levels of retention on their courses.

Students are independent, mature and happy. They have excellent attitudes to learning and are conscientious and determined to succeed. They have a wealth of opportunities to develop

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their interests, talents and leadership skills. Some do internships in industry through the school's well developed industry links. Over the recent past, these have been put on hold due to COVID-19. All students go on to university around the world and about half go to UK universities. They say they are extremely well supported in their university applications by up-to-date guidance from the knowledgeable careers counsellor. In the time between examinations and the end of term, students are taught how to look after themselves and keep safe when away from home. Leadership of the sixth form is strong, with excellent support and guidance for students' journey beyond school.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

GEMS FirstPoint School meets all of the required standards except those that would be in breach of the host country laws.

It cannot fully meet the standards set out below that relate to the UK Equality Act 2010.

2(2)(d)(ii) encourages respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics of age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex and sexual orientation as set out in the Equality Act 2010;

5(b)(vi) encourage respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Act.

## What the school could do to improve further

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

Prior to COVID-19 restrictions, the school had a thriving programme of industry links and extra-curricular activities that contributed to pupils' academic progress and personal development. Leaders should resume these bespoke opportunities to develop world-ready global citizens and leaders.

## Summary of inspection judgements

Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
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### The quality of education

Overall quality of education	☺			
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils	☺			
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs	☺			
How well pupils make progress in their learning	☺			

### Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	☺			
The behaviour of pupils	☺			

### Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils	☺			
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### Leadership and management

Overall effectiveness of leadership and management	☺			
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## School details

<b>Name of school</b>	GEMS FirstPoint School
<b>Type of school</b>	Private
<b>Date school opened</b>	2014
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3-18 years
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll (full-time pupils)</b>	1506
<b>Number on roll (part-time pupils)</b>	n/a
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	AED 40,183 - 68,734
<b>Annual fees (boarders)</b>	n/a
<b>Address of school</b>	GEMS FirstPoint school, Al Ain Road, The Villa, Dubai, UAE
<b>Telephone number</b>	971 04 278 9700
<b>Email address</b>	registrar_fps@gemsedu.com
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Matthew Tompkins
<b>Proprietor</b>	GEMS MENASA Cayman Ltd

## GLOSSARY

**Achievement** – Progress made by a pupil taking his/her individual circumstances and starting point into account.

**Accreditation** – The system whereby a school or similar organisation is assessed against agreed standards and if deemed as having achieved the standards required is provided with some form of official certification or recognition.

**Accreditation Board** – The body responsible for the strategic direction, operation and conduct of the accreditation service provided by Education Development Trust

**Assessment** – The process of finding out how well pupils have learnt what they have been taught. It is a continuous process that occurs throughout the school year, using a variety of forms for different purposes.

**Attainment** – The level pupils reach, usually measured by reference to benchmarks, such as test and examination results.

**British Schools Overseas Inspection (BSO)** – Inspection framework and standards defined by the DfE for British schools overseas to opt to be inspected against.

**Education Development Trust** – Formerly CfBT Education Trust, we are one of the world's leading not-for-profit education companies providing a range of education services in the UK and internationally.

**Central Support Team** – Personnel based in Education Development Trust Head Office who are responsible for the administration of the various educational services provided to international schools.

**Combined or Joint Visit** – a BSO Inspection visit combined with an ISQM accreditation or re-accreditation visit conducted (or DSIB inspection in Dubai) at the request of the school. This will be carried out concurrently with reference to both frameworks and sets of standards. Some of the standards against which the school will be inspected are common, but some of the BSO standards relate to the British nature of the school.

**Cycle of Inspection** – The period of three years between BSO inspection visits.

**Curriculum** – The educational programmes or courses of study taught by a school including subjects and activities inside and outside the classroom, as well as extra-curricular enrichment programmes.

**Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB)** – All private schools in Dubai are required by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority to be inspected by the Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB). A joint DSIB/BSO inspection may be requested through the KHDA's strategic partner Education Development Trust.

**Leadership** – Leadership at any level (for example principals/headteachers, governors, board members, team/subject leaders) involves setting direction, empowering staff to work effectively, creating a suitable environment for learning, and setting an example to others. It entails different skills from management.

**Learning** – Pupils' gains in knowledge, skills and understanding.

**Management** – The practical business of running a school, department or aspect of a school's work in an efficient and useful way.

**Ofsted** – The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills is the non-ministerial government department of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England and is responsible for school inspections in England.

**Progress** – The gains in learning made between two points in time. A pupil can be described as having made insufficient progress, satisfactory, good, or outstanding progress in relation to his/her starting point.

**School self-evaluation** – The identification by the staff of a school of its strengths and weaknesses across the key aspects of its performance. Effective self-evaluation focuses specifically on the impact of the school's work on the outcomes for pupils.

**Standards** –

(1) The levels of knowledge, understanding and skills that pupils and a school demonstrates at a particular point in time.

(2) The evaluation requirements to be used in the inspection of British Schools Overseas.

**Teaching** – All activities undertaken by the teacher aimed at enhancing pupils' learning.

With 40 years' experience of delivering education services worldwide Education Development Trust exists solely to provide education for public benefit.

Teaching and learning are the essence of what we do and we have more than 2,500 staff around the world designing and delivering services. Education Development Trust staff support educational reform, teach, advise, research and train. As one of the top 30 charities in the UK, we work for and with individuals and communities in order to help them reach their potential

Education Development Trust has built a reputation for providing high quality educational support and inspection services to national organisations such as Ofsted, the Teacher Training Agency and to schools in the north of England. Our main aim is to improve schools through high quality school inspections. We have strong values and a clear vision to deliver a world class inspection service that will directly contribute to improving the quality of teaching, learning and care of all children and young people in settings, schools and colleges.

Education Development Trust first delivered inspections on behalf of Ofsted in 1993. Since then we have developed our experience and expertise in the field of school evaluation and improvement to become one of the UK's first major providers of inspection services.

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Report reference no: 02/009/2022