



**British School  
Overseas**  
Inspected by Penta International

**Inspection report**

**GEMS Founders Dubai  
South**

**Dubai  
United Arab Emirates**

Date **19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> May 2025**  
Inspection number **19052025**

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## 1. Purpose and scope of the inspection

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

The inspection and this report follow the 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; the school's complaints procedures; and leadership and management. If appropriate, there is a separate section on the quality of boarding provision. 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 DfE on the extent to which schools meet the standards for BSO.

During the inspection visit, 39 lesson observations took place. School procedures including social times, pupil arrival and collection were observed. School documentation and policies were analysed and data reviewed. Pupils' workbooks were seen in lessons and in a formal work scrutiny. Discussions were held with the staff, people involved in governance, parents and pupils. The inspection took place over three days.

The lead inspector was Lesley Birtwell. The team members were Phil Holden, Wendy King and Nicola Walsh.

## 2. Compliance with regulatory requirements

As a result of this inspection, the school has shown that it meets the standards for British Schools Overseas, except for those that cannot be achieved legally in the host country. These pertain to aspects of the UK Equality Act 2010. The relevant standards are:

Part 1 – ‘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;’

and

Part 2 – ‘5(b)(vi)- encourage respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010.

The school actively promotes tolerance and a respect for all human differences, within the confines of the law. This is embedded in the culture and ethos of the school. This judgement is endorsed by the British government and is valid for three years. The inspection process is quality assured by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted).

### 3. Overall effectiveness of the school

As a result of the passion and excellent leadership by the current principal/CEO and the close-knit senior leadership team, the school has developed rapidly since opening, has established firm foundations and is well positioned to grow and develop. There is a positive, inclusive ethos across the school, such that pupils enjoy school, attend well and make good progress.

#### 3.1 What the school does well

There are many strengths at the school, including the:

- the focus on the wellbeing of all pupils;
- the passion and drive of the current principal/CEO and senior leadership team that has enabled significant development over a short period of time
- relationships across the school community which promote a strong sense of community and belonging
- the pride and loyalty that pupils have in their school
- a fully inclusive ethos that provides well for pupils' specific needs
- the exceptional progress of pupils with SEND
- provision for the pupils' moral and social development
- the inspirational design of the premises;
- personalised communication between school and home. 'Family First' are not just words; it is the reality
- the use of data by senior leaders to identify the priorities for the school
- rigorous systems for Health and Safety

## 3.2 Points for improvement

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

1. Raise the quality of teaching and assessment to consistently good by:
  - a. sharing and building on the good and outstanding practice across the school;
  - b. planning tasks that excite and inspire learners to be the best they can be;
  - c. increasing opportunities for pupils to be active, independent learners;
  - d. enabling pupils to consistently engage with higher order questioning and extended talk.
  
2. Build on assessment practices to further promote progress by:
  - a. ensuring the use of data by teachers is embedded in classroom practice so that learning is personalised;
  - b. reviewing marking and feedback procedures to ensure consistency and meaningful feedback for pupils.
  
3. Build on the current leadership strengths to future proof the school as it grows and develops by:
  - a. extending the leadership teams to reflect the size and structure of the school;
  - b. distributing leadership responsibilities and further developing the role of middle leaders to raise the quality of teaching and learning.

## 4. The context of the school

Full name of school	GEMS Founders School – Dubai South				
Address	PO Box 390100 Dubai South Residential District Dubai South Dubai UAE				
Telephone number/s	+971 42031000				
Website address	<a href="https://www.gemsfoundersschool-dubaisouth.com/en">https://www.gemsfoundersschool-dubaisouth.com/en</a>				
Key email address	<a href="mailto:i.plant_gfd@gemsedu.com">i.plant_gfd@gemsedu.com</a>				
Headteacher/principal	Mr. Ian Plant				
Chair of board/proprietor	Mr. Puneet Vatish (Local Advisory Board) Mr. Matthew Burfield (Senior Vice President of Education)				
Age range	3-13				
Total number of pupils	<b>685</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>336</b>
Numbers by age	<i>0-2 years</i>	0	<i>12-16 years</i>	92	
	<i>3-5 years</i>	183	<i>17-18 years</i>	0	
	<i>6-11 years</i>	410	<i>18+ years</i>	0	
Total number of part-time children	0				

GEMS Founders School - Dubai South (GFD) 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. GEMS Founders School - Dubai South is part of a wider cluster of eight local schools namely: GEMS Founders School - Dubai South (GFD), GEMS Founders School – Dubai

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(GFS), GEMS Founders School – Al Mizhar (GFM), GEMS Founders School - Masdar City (GFA), GEMS Metropole School – Motor City (MTS), GEMS Metropole School – Al Waha (MTW), GEMS Wesgreen International School (WGP), GEMS First Point School (FPS).

GFD is a new and developing school that opened in August 2024. There are 685 pupils on roll from 62 nationalities. The school currently caters for pupils from foundation stage (FS) to year 8 (ages three to thirteen). Year 9 will be introduced in August 2025 with year 10 and 12 starting in August 2026. The school follows Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework, National Curriculum for England and Wales and UAE statutory requirements. Pupils will take international GCSE, A Levels and BTEC examinations in summer 2028. GFD prides itself on being an inclusive school catering for pupils with additional educational needs (SEND) (9.3%) and early learners of English (ELL) (10.7%). The language of instruction is English.

The schools vision is: “Grow, Flourish, Discover, You” and their mission states: “Together we foster an inclusive, kind and creative community that nurtures imagination and always puts wellbeing and family values first.”

## 4.1 British nature of the school

The British nature of GFD is evident in many ways. The school organisational structure, for example, year groups and key stages, is based upon those present in British education worldwide. The language of instruction throughout the school is English. Teaching staff are trained in teaching methodologies and practices consistent with British education. The structure of lessons is typical of the broad model found in British schooling. Furthermore, there is wide-ranging British school experience, either UK-based or elsewhere, across the staff body. Pupils wear a school uniform, and classrooms around the school are resourced and organised to enable and enhance a British education. The curriculum is modelled on the National Curriculum for England. British resources complement the delivery of education, for example 'White Rose Mathematics' and 'Oxford University Press'. The school plans to introduce British qualifications at Key Stages 4 and 5 in the form of International GCSEs and A-Levels. A good range of co-curricular activities enrich pupils' education, and these are set to expand as the school grows. The school's website includes a wide range of school policies that fully reflect the expectations and practices inherent to British education; this establishes Britishness in the fabric of GFD.

British values, promoted by the school's mission statement, are highly visible and strongly embedded into daily life at GFD. These values are explicitly displayed in many classrooms and serve as visual reminders of the guiding values for all. Respect between staff and pupils and among pupils is both the expectation and normal practice. Pupils understand the concept of respect and exercise it in their daily experience both in and out of the classroom. Tolerance and respect for differences are abundantly evident with all pupils reporting their sense of acceptance and community, their pride in their school and their friendships and sense of shared belonging towards other pupils; something extra impressive given this is such a new school. Pupils with learning challenges are fully included and embraced as members of the school community while the presence of a dedicated lead for inclusion highlights the school's strong sense of duty towards all pupils, reflecting fairness and equality in its Britishness.

Pastoral care and support are of utmost importance at GFD with checks and processes in place to ensure a broader education and appreciation of care, self-worth and principles of right and wrong. Personal, social, health and emotional education (PSHE) and pupil-centred resources such as *PASS*, *Upstrive* and the emerging 'Managing Your Thoughts and Emotions' (M.Y.T.E.) sessions support pupil welfare and well-being. Through this support, pupils are also given the opportunity to develop mindfulness, and to reflect on and manage their emotional growth.

A respect for the rules, and by extension for the rule of law, was evident in the very good behaviour of pupils throughout the school. Pupils' attendance, punctuality, movement around the school and in lessons all exemplified an awareness of, and

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respect for, what was expected of them. Pupils were observed to be reflecting on rules and consequences of transgression of rules in lessons as different as a PSHE lesson in a sports environment and in the study of a literary text in an English lesson. Teamwork and healthy competition are encouraged through a house system modelled in the traditional British school manner across four teams. Pupils can gain house points through good practice which fosters a sense of loyalty and togetherness for their house.

If anything, these multiple and intrinsic examples of Britishness in practice were stronger than overt displays of Britishness around the school. Despite the very strong embedding of key British values in the policies, processes and daily learning and interactions of pupils, there were no visible displays indicating the British nature of GFD in the reception hall area of the main building.

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

The quality of education provided is good.

### 5.1 Curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) the curriculum, classroom environments and structure of the day align with those of the UK. The curriculum is delivered through a balance of whole class and small group teaching alongside child initiated planned play. Planning across the EYFS ensures progressive coverage of the seven areas of learning. Key texts provide a stimulus for learning. The school follows the 'Floppy Phonics' scheme which is delivered in an engaging and active way. Pupils are taught as a class, followed by small group activities and opportunities to practise and apply what they have learned in their play. Pupils are eager to write. In one class there was a prompt to write a perfect sentence to which a child confidently told me that 'they can'.

Relationships are excellent between pupils and between staff and pupils. Teachers and teaching assistants are flexible and responsive to individual needs. This enables every child to access and feel successful in their learning including those with SEND. Classrooms are welcoming and well resourced. Continuous provision is planned reflecting current and previously taught key concepts, providing opportunities for consolidation and practise. Where teaching is most effective, resources are presented to capture interest and inspire curiosity resulting in highly engaged, immersed play. Pupils have access to a large, inviting outside area with a wide range of resources. They play safely and collaborate well. There are plans to continue to develop resources in this area and to further utilise the space to support learning.

The primary curriculum provides pupils with a broad curriculum well matched to their needs. Policies, curriculum maps and plans ensure there is clear progression, and these are regularly reviewed by senior leaders. Coverage is ensured using published schemes of work in English, mathematics, science and foundation subjects. This supports teachers with lesson planning and provides well-structured resources to enhance delivery. This was observed in a year 3 geography lesson where pupils identified map symbols on an extract of a map, as a hard copy. This was simultaneously displayed on the interactive whiteboard where the teacher annotated the features for pupils to identify. Sustainability is timetabled as an additional subject which enables pupils to learn about relevant and interesting topics linked to their everyday lives. Reading is promoted through phonics teaching and

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weekly library visits where pupils have time to choose books and enjoy reading. The PE curriculum is very effectively delivered by specialist teachers who understand the requirements of the curriculum. They ensure that progression in skills are clear and pupils are active. Homework provides pupils with opportunities to embed their learning at home using online apps which can be monitored by teachers remotely.

At Key Stage 3 pupils receive a broad and balanced curriculum which includes lessons in mathematics, English, science, humanities, Arabic and physical education, alongside lessons that allow pupils to develop their creativity and innovation, such as art, drama and digital innovation. PSHE, the Ministry of Education's compulsory moral, social and cultural studies and sustainability promote the development of pupils' personal and interpersonal awareness and help support their sense of global citizenship and responsibility. Opportunities for the stretching of the most able learners exist in the curriculum, alongside pathways for independent learning and critical thinking. In the best practice observed, pupils were able to access higher order skills. While there was evidence of technology use in the classroom, this was mostly restricted to pupils using QR codes to access learning support such as dictionaries and thesauruses and, occasionally, extension exercises. Currently the school does not provide a careers education programme, however, plans are in place for provision to develop as the age range of the school expands including links with local universities.

Across the school, SEND and ELL pupils are catered for well, with adapted curricula. Provision for SEND pupils is strong. They are supported in lessons and by specialist provision. Individual education plans and pupil passports ensure that they can access the curriculum at their level, and can make sustained and significant progress. Provision ensures a fully personalised curriculum tailored for the individual pupil.

A growing range of co-curricular activities enrich the curriculum. From the pre-school debate club and MUN activities, to the super curriculum options built into school time once a week, all pupils access a broader curriculum. Educational trips occur, such as a recent visit to the Dubai Aviation Centre and overseas trips are being planned.

Throughout the curriculum tolerance, respect and inclusion are strongly evident. The British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance are actively promoted and embedded. Pupils are effectively prepared for future opportunities and responsibilities.

## 5.2 Teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Over half of the lessons observed were good or better, a few were outstanding.

The EYFS curriculum is planned across Foundation Stage 1 (FS1) and Foundation Stage 2 (FS2) with clear skills and knowledge identified for each term. This ensures that all lessons have a clear learning focus which is taught with confidence. The delivery of the lessons and learning through continuous provision is generally interesting so pupils are eager to get involved. In an FS2 writing lesson, pupils were keen to write and proud of their achievements. FS1 pupils planting seeds were excited to talk about their learning. The school is focussed on developing the outside area to match the most effective provision inside. Overall teaching is good and at its best is highly engaging using every opportunity to extend and develop learning.

Teachers know their children well and use encouragement, praise and targeted intervention to support progress. Data from assessments and observations is used to identify children who need support. In the most effective classrooms, strategies are implemented successfully with teachers observing closely using their knowledge of the curriculum to move learning on for pupils at all levels.

Behaviour and attitudes to learning are good across the foundation stage. Pupils are able to persevere, to work independently and to collaborate. In many classes, they respond well to being challenged and are happy to have a go even when they are faced with something new. Individual achievements are celebrated with joy and pupils are confident and excited about their learning. Generally, expectations are high and progress across all areas of learning is good.

Primary teachers plan lessons that engage most pupils. Learning objectives are routinely shared so pupils are clear in what they are learning to do. In the strongest lessons teachers use questioning to check on understanding and prompt deeper thinking which was evident in a year 4 maths lesson learning about the value of English money. In a year 4 history lesson questioning encouraged pupils to compare the leadership styles of Roman Emperors. This sparked curiosity as pupils questioned why Julius Caesar was murdered and yet Augustus was a similar leader and admired. Teachers' strong subject knowledge lends confidence to their teaching, such as in a year 6 lesson where pupils were tasked with creating the transcript for a voice note. This not only fully engaged pupils but deepened thinking about the practical applications to their life. Where teachers plan tasks that use real objects and encourage pupils to be active, then engagement is high. A year 2 lesson based on the novel 'Rosie Revere the Engineer' inspired pupils to write messages to the character in the story.

Assessment practices across the primary section are not yet fully embedded. The school's wealth of summative data based on cognitive ability testing, standardised reading tests and teachers' judgements enables senior leaders to monitor pupils' performances. However, most teachers do not yet use this data sufficiently to inform planning. Where it is in use to identify higher attaining pupils and those who require more support, progress in learning is clear. However, this is not yet consistently in use across the school in lessons. Formative assessment processes rely heavily on questioning in class and most teachers are not yet regularly monitoring pupils' recording of work in exercise books and using this to inform their planning.

In Key Stage 3 teaching was observed to be broadly impactful and occasionally extremely effective. All teachers demonstrated strong subject knowledge. While most communicated a learning objective, in a number of cases these were a task rather than an objective. When most effective, teachers were observed to manipulate and adjust the flow of a lesson in response to on-the-spot judgement of how the lesson was unfolding. Teachers were able to utilise smartboards to communicate information, but in the best lessons observed a more imaginative use of technology and apparatus was used. In a Year 7 mathematics lesson the teacher showed excellent command of the full functions of the smartboard to use a virtual protractor to measure angles. In a Year 8 art lesson the teacher had pre-recorded herself completing a water colouring technique. She showed the video to her class and then discussed the skill demonstrated with pupils, resulting in a tangible improvement of the pupils' own efforts. In a Year 7 science lesson the teacher demonstrated the path of a laser pen's light through a mist of water spray eliciting an audible 'gasp of understanding' from his class.

Questioning by teachers, as a technique to assess understanding, was frequent, but often limited to requiring closed responses and it was rare for teachers to use higher ordering questioning or more inventive techniques such as asking pupils to verbally critique a peer's spoken contribution.

Pupils' work in exercise books showed thoughtful and ordered presentation in the best cases while this was less evident in other examples of pupils' work. Teachers across Key Stage 3 were consistent in their use of green pen in their own written feedback to pupils' work in exercise books, with pupils' using purple pens for guided self-assessment; a system fully understood by pupils. Teachers' written assessment of pupils' work was often limited and only rarely delivered meaningful and detailed guidance for improvement to pupils. One exceptional example in a Year 7 humanities exercise book saw the teacher's adaptation of the pupil's work to better explain water flow in the meander of a river.

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Across the school teaching was less effective when over reliance on *MS PowerPoint* directed the pace of the lesson or closed activities were planned that did not inspire learning. As a result, pupils were passive rather than active learners.

## 5.3 Standards achieved by pupils

Academic and personal standards achieved by pupils are good.

Across the school pupils behave well and enjoy school. This is evident in the good level of attendance which is closely aligned to UK expectations. Behaviour logs indicate that misbehaviour is rare and where it occurs, it is dealt with positively. As a result, recurrence is minimised. Pupils conduct around school and between lessons is purposeful and appropriate. In lessons pupils are attentive and respectful of staff, their peers, and their environment.

Across the school pupils make progress, they develop a secure knowledge of the subjects delivered. The school's summative assessment data indicates that standards in reading are high across the school. This was also observed listening to pupils read in the library and in lessons. Standards in writing and mathematics are aligned to age related expectations for most pupils in primary and secondary. The school's internal data indicates that most pupils by the end of Key Stage 2 are at or above the expected standard and progress is good. The school reported that pupils who participated in an online maths challenge were awarded a high position against other schools.

In EYFS pupils demonstrated high standards in reading and writing and acquisition of phonics. Pupils' progress towards the early learning goals in EYFS has been tracked across the 2 terms. Most pupils are on track to attain a good level of development, and this was observed in lessons.

Pupils with special educational needs make consistently strong progress from low starting points. This is due to exceptionally well targeted support that meets pupils' individual needs. The pupils identified with low levels in English language demonstrated strong progress. This enabled ELL pupils to quickly access the curriculum and join mainstream classes with support.

Pupils were observed working at curriculum levels across the school. However, standards of presentation and the quantity of work in pupils' recording of their work in lessons was inconsistent. There was limited evidence of pupils writing at length in English, or of investigative work in science and independent work in mathematics.

Standards in the pupils' wellbeing has improved over time. This was evident in the school's PASS data scores and in lessons and at break times. Pupils who had recently joined the school settled quickly into their class groups and every pupil was included.

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

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is outstanding.

GFD is a school where pupils genuinely care deeply about one another and their school community as a whole. It is an environment in which all pupils are given the opportunities, and are expected, to show respect and care for others, irrespective of their culture and background; to develop an understanding of the difference between right and wrong; and to develop a sense of personal and communal responsibility to help them to grow into a reflective and positive citizen.

The spiritual development of pupils is evident. Pupils are able to explore self-reflection and self-discovery through programmes such as PASS and Upstrive and the emerging M.Y.T.E. process which encourages mindfulness and allow targeted classes to begin their day with thoughtful analysis of their feelings. This has had a tangible impact. Pupils said they felt it had led to a better understanding of themselves and their behaviour. In one instance, a Year 8 pupil reported how M.Y.T.E. had helped in the management feelings allowing them to replace instantaneous reaction with a measured reflection. Pupils who attend Islamic Studies gain an understanding of responsibility and all pupils have access to an onsite prayer room.

The moral development of pupils is especially strong, being embedded through co-curricular activities as well as class lessons. Younger pupils are aware of the conduct flow and all pupils are given opportunities to consider correct actions and the chance to discuss appropriate measures when faced with judgements. In a Year 8 PSHE lesson, pupils discussed the rules of a ball game and team selection and extended their observations to respect for the rule of law and democratic decision making. In an exceptional Year 6 sustainability lesson, pupils were able to distinguish between personal liberty and collective responsibility through the example of the personal right to enjoy a picnic existing alongside the societal responsibility to ensure minimal environmental impact and the clearing away of any litter. Pupils participating in debate club and MUN, voting for their pupil leaders, engaging in orderly movement around the school and queueing for canteen service, and in standing to attention to respect the national anthem, were able to consistently demonstrate good moral judgement in their choices. In the fine behaviour and exceptional manners the pupils displayed most of the time, their positive moral awareness shone through. This was helped and supported at all times by the highly visible and consistent behaviour of leadership and staff, who modelled positive behaviour. Where behaviour doesn't meet expectations, it is notable that the school cites restorative reflection as its response as opposed to punishment or sanction. The school management believes strongly in this approach as it permits development of moral awareness and points to data-supported evidence of a fall in repeat offending as a measure of its impact.

The social development of pupils is very secure. They form meaningful and strong friendship bonds, which is all the more impressive given the newness of their school. Pupils expressed

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that they felt safe from unpleasantness or bullying by other pupils and that on the rare occasions unkindness did emerge, they knew it was wrong and felt able to seek support in the knowledge the school would not permit such actions. Pupils feel they belong to the school and to their house and enjoy the friendly rivalry between houses in the same school. This is reinforced through house activities, for example when dressing up in house colours which, when modelled also by staff, proved powerful. Pupils are immensely welcoming and tolerant. Pupils who joined during the year spoke of incumbent pupils being proactive in supporting them and pupils with SEND were observed to be fully included in school life. Above all, pupils expressed themselves as happy and proud of their school. Their sense of loyalty towards the school was evident and all asked could express the importance of cooperation and respect being at the core of their enjoyment of life at GFD.

Pupils are provided with multiple opportunities to develop and demonstrate leadership and teamwork skills through positions such as class prefects and the pupil leadership council. The selection of pupils for these roles demonstrates a respect for the democratic process. Pupils were able to identify how they helped shape their environment and this invested in them a sense of responsibility and awareness of action leading to progress. A Year 7 girl identified that a significant change in the canteen menu broadened the options for pupils who do not eat meat following a pupil request. Likewise members of the pupil leadership council were proud to report it was upon their recommendation that the canteen introduced a more successful queueing system with mobile barriers which prevented queue-jumping.

The cultural development of pupils exists through activities such as International Day and the celebration of music, foods, and costumes with parents invited to take part. The richly diverse nature of the pupil body lends itself well to this appreciation of different backgrounds yet a single school. Pupil participation in two MUN conventions since the start of term with a third close at hand illustrates perfectly how they are encouraged to consider issues from a different cultural standpoint. Nevertheless, there is a strong ongoing respect for the local UAE culture, with several classroom displays celebrating aspects of UAE life and with the national anthem played each morning to mark the start of the day.

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

The provision for welfare, health and safety of pupils is outstanding.

Pupils in this school feel safe and are very well cared for. They are happy to come to school and integrate well with each other. There are a number of pupils SEND and the respectful culture, supported by the very effective work in the 'Small Steps' provision, ensures these pupils are fully involved. This is an inclusive and happy school.

The policy and practice for safeguarding is robust and effective. Every member of staff is trained annually to the appropriate level and communication with staff in a range of roles evidenced their confidence. Safeguarding training is thorough and complies with the requirements of Keeping Children Safe in Education. It is adapted for staff members who do not have English as a first language; this is excellent practice. The school ensures that any teachers joining outside of the usual cycle are trained before they have unsupervised contact with pupils. Procedures for reporting concerns are embedded, and the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) is vigilant in her monitoring of these reports and taking appropriate action. Summary information is analysed at a minimum of twice a week with patterns identified and action taken. This includes, for example, the counsellor working with a class where there have been reports of unkindness and teachers providing input and assemblies on safe touch.

Conduct and behaviour are very good at break times and when pupils move round the school. Supervision levels are appropriate, and staff consistently interact with pupils at these times. The school is responsive to changing circumstances, for example providing additional supervision when hot weather dictates that breaks are taken inside. The school has a positive approach to behaviour with notable impact on behaviour around the school and in class. The pathways for any behaviour which does not meet expectations is detailed in the Conduct Flow with response and escalation procedures detailed. Record keeping is strong. Restorative approaches are central and the school uses the principle of reflection to encourage change. Communication with parents is very good at all points. Excellent practice is in place with leaders adapting the policy to meet individual need. In lessons, behaviour for learning is generally good and, in the best lessons, pupils are highly engaged and actively involved.

The school has an effective anti-bullying policy. The caring culture alongside the PSHE scheme of work ensures pupils understand the importance of positive relationships and respect. Any concerns about behaviour which may be identified as bullying are recorded on 'Guard'. This is reviewed by the DSL and appropriate action taken; parents are always involved. The approach ensures the victim is supported while also considering the underlying reasons for the behaviour. This was recognised by parents as a strength. Pupils report that bullying is rare and that any incident is quickly and efficiently resolved. They appreciate the 'I care, I

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listen' approach knowing that at any time there is someone they can talk to. No issues relating to social media were raised and the school has robust procedures for this area of work.

The school's health and safety policy is implemented effectively and reviewed regularly. The Manager of School Operations (MSO) holds operational responsibility for health and safety and procedures are rigorously implemented. Risk assessments are completed in line with requirements including for children with SEND, medical needs, school trips and for all appropriate areas of the school. Health and safety walks take place daily, and fire and emergency evacuation drills are carried out regularly with appropriate adjustments made in response.

The school prioritises wellbeing and pupils confidently talk about how to keep themselves safe and healthy. Key messages are reinforced around the school. Pupils are emotionally literate and, especially at the older end of the school, happy to talk about their emotions. They have daily access to 'Upstrive' where they can record how they are feeling, confident that anything they raise will be seen and action taken. Pupils are encouraged to be active through the PE curriculum and initiatives such as Dubai 30-30. Here pupils took part in a competition against all Dubai schools where they were challenged to complete a physical activity every day for 30 days; the school achieved an impressive 3<sup>rd</sup> place. This was supplemented by a range of coaches and sporting opportunities being offered in school.

Procedures for the school buses and for collection at the end of the day are highly effective. Systems are in place to ensure every pupil is safely on the bus before it leaves school. At the end of the day pupils leave safely in age appropriate ways. All procedures are adapted in light of feedback from staff and parents.

The admission policy is clearly available on the website and effectively takes parents through the admission process. Parents describe the process as friendly and efficient. During the inspection multiple admission visits were observed with parents being given a tour of all the school facilities.

Attendance is good and at 94.2% in line with UK averages. Pupils are generally punctual. Procedures for monitoring attendance and punctuality are robust with clear escalation channels. Parents are included when needed to support improvement.

Pupils' health is promoted through a well equipped clinic managed by a full-time qualified doctor and nurse. They maintain records of pupils' health needs, attend to pupils who are sick and maintain records of visits to the clinic. They are vigilant in effectively implementing the school's first aid and administration of medicines policies. They attend off site trips where required and ensure first aid kits, sited strategically around the site, are maintained. Staff are trained to deliver first aid, including staff who are in high risk areas such as PE and EYFS.

The school's proactive approach, robust policies and a strong commitment to support pupil wellbeing, fosters an environment where pupils feel safe, supported and encouraged to flourish.

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

The suitability of the proprietor and staff meets the standard for BSO.

At GFD robust recruitment and safeguarding policies, procedures and training are in place in line with current UK guidelines and best practice ensuring staff, support staff and governors fulfil their roles very effectively.

All staff undergo stringent recruitment checks which are recorded on a single central register. This includes records of past and current employees, board members and external providers, confirming their legal right to work and verifying necessary criminal record checks. Rigorous recruitment is managed by GEMS including job advertisements, application forms, shortlisting and employment checks. GFD staff are involved from the interview stage. Staff describe interviews that probe into them as a person as well as their teaching ability ensuring a good fit for the needs and ethos of the school. GFD does not use external supply teachers.

Teachers employed have the qualifications and skills for the current school's needs. The school is fully aware that the size of the school limited the number of leadership posts available and made appointments to reflect the priorities and ethos of the school. Staffing is in place for the growth of the school in 25/26 including specialist teachers for secondary subjects, a head of secondary and a wider range of subject leaders. A staffing plan is in place to ensure future recruitment meets the pupils' educational needs when international GCSEs and A levels are introduced.

Induction, professional development and performance management support all staff to fulfil their role effectively. The school inauguration enabled previous GEMS employees to take on new roles and move forward in their careers. Staff praised the way induction enabled them to settle into Dubai, their new roles and a completely new school. They highlighted the team building focus at the start of the school year which quickly developed a sense of community amongst pupils and staff. Well thought out induction was a factor behind the successful development of a whole school culture and ethos which ensured wellbeing has become the heart of the school. With 96% staff retention for 25/26, the school has established firm foundations for the future.

As part of GEMS, GFD has a dual governance structure. GEMS Education Governance is a corporate body which maintains an operational and academic strategic overview. The GFD Local Advisory Board (LAB), established in January 2025, acts as a critical friend. LAB members bring a wealth of skills, experience and interests to the school. Both layers of governance are fully involved in the monitoring and evaluation through formal meetings, contact with the principal/CEO, reviewing monitoring reports focussing on progress against the school strategic plan and learning walks in school. Safeguarding is a standard item on all agenda. As a result,

governance is developing an understanding of the strengths and areas for future development enabling them to support and challenge the school.

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

Premises and accommodation of the school are outstanding.

The school's buildings and premises are exemplary in significant elements. The high quality of the design of the building provides the whole school community with a clean, bright, spacious and attractive environment in which to work.

The quality of the internal cooling, ventilation and lighting meet modern standards. Lights are activated by motion sensors so that the use of electricity is efficient. Large glass screens are used extensively throughout the building to create spaces for communal and visible working areas.

Regular cleaning and maintenance checks ensure that the school site is safe. Washrooms are provided on each floor and are designated for use by staff, pupils and visitors. For the youngest pupils washrooms are provided adjacent to classrooms and in close proximity to learning spaces. The provision of showers and changing accommodation is well provided in the school's sports facilities. Clean fresh drinking water is available from dispensers situated around the school site.

The school has a well-equipped clinic that includes two separate treatment rooms and a separate isolation room ensuring pupils medical needs are met. The school's cafeteria and the canteen are well equipped and provide healthy and nutritious snacks.

Corridors, communal areas and classrooms are spacious. The facilities are very well suited to support the delivery of the English national curriculum and early years foundation Stage. Specialist facilities for PE, include a large well-equipped sports hall and outdoor areas for a wide range of sports. These include tennis courts, football pitches, swimming pools and a multi-use area. Specialist areas such as science laboratories, music, art and drama rooms and computer rooms are well equipped. The school's library has a wide range of fiction and non-fiction books reflecting stock available in UK libraries. Outdoor areas are shaded and attractive. Separate areas designated for use by SEND pupils are well resourced, safe and include a sensory room that pupils enjoy.

The accommodation for pupils in early years is modern and matches a high standard of provision in the UK. Indoor classrooms are provided with an interactive whiteboard, washrooms suited for the youngest pupils, low level sinks and a wide range of appropriate equipment. Classrooms are adjacent to an attractive outdoor area through a connecting door enabling pupils to free flow between indoor and outdoor areas in the cooler months.

The school is fully accessible. Ramps and a lift are in place to provide alternative access to the stairways. Washrooms are provided that can be accessed by pupils and staff with disabilities.

The school site is secure. An external wall marks the perimeter of the site and gates are monitored by security staff throughout the day and night. Visitors to the school are signed onto the site and provided with a lanyard that allows the school to quickly and easily identify when visitors are on site. Parents at the start and end of the school day are respectful of the guidance that the school provides regarding pick-up and drop-off for pupils. Bus transport provided by the school is safe and efficient. Systems around transportation are embedded and appropriate.

A strong feature of the school is the impressive reception area which hosts permanent displays of the school's vision and mission statements, a small cafeteria which can be used by visitors and a wide staircase that features an additional seating area. The reception area is used by the school for meetings to assemble small groups and embeds the school's ethos of community. Displays across the school are appropriate and permanent displays are inspirational.

Overall, the premises and accommodation at GFD are well-maintained, safe and conducive to learning.

## 10. Standard 6

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

The provision of information provided by the school to parents, carers and others is outstanding.

Relationships and partnerships with parents are a strength. They are extremely positive about all aspects of school life and everything that the school offers. All staff, including senior staff, are visible, accessible and parents have confidence in them and in the effectiveness of communication. The 'Family First' philosophy is seen as the heart of the school and the parents appreciate feeling part of a family.

The website is easy to navigate and clearly frames the philosophy and aims of the school. It contains up to date information for current and prospective parents including, factual information about the school, principal and governance, curriculum, relevant school policies, and advice about the admissions process. Policies related to complaints, admissions, attendance, behaviour, wellbeing, first aid, health and safety, first aid and safeguarding are easily accessible. The website is clearly divided into the different areas of the school enabling ease of access. Parents can also find additional information on the *PADLET* site. Each year group produces a weekly newsletter, with information about the learning that has taken place and the 'GEM of the Week'. Regular letters provide additional opportunities for communication as well as celebrating and sharing success. Key information is translated into other languages represented in the school and there are plans to extend this further.

Parents overwhelmingly feel their child is safe at school as is seen in their eagerness to come in each day. The focus on 'I Care, I Listen' ensures children are confident that they have a safe person to talk to. One parent described his child, who has SEND, as one who previously resisted going into school. Now he attends GFD he jumps up, switches off the TV and goes in happily. Many children have joined outside of the usual admission cycle and their parents appreciate the care and flexibility shown by the teachers who ensure they settle quickly and soon become part of the school community. Parents of children in the 'Small Steps' provision appreciate how well their children are supported and cared for and praised the daily communication they receive.

Parents describe the school as warm, open and kind and say that this permeates the school from the security staff, to the administration team to the principal/CEO. Teachers are approachable, easily accessible and available at the beginning and end of the day. Any emails are responded to quickly and meetings are arranged if needed. Communication regarding any issue is excellent and dealt with promptly and effectively. The sense of personal support is palpable and parents welcome the individual communication regarding their child.

Reports are issued termly with progress and attainment data. The term three reports will also include written comments linked to social and emotional development. The school offers a

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termly opportunity for parents to meet teachers over a two week period providing flexibility to enable parents to attend. Meetings can also be arranged at other times as needed.

Parents appreciate the focus on academic standards alongside the priority the school places on the development of the whole child. They recognise the number of the co-curricular and enhancement opportunities and talked about the enjoyment children gain from school visits. There are many opportunities to learn about the curriculum and aspects of school life through the 'Coffee and Conversations' sessions and spending time in the classroom to observe teaching.

## 11. Standard 7

### The school's procedure for handling complaints

The school's procedure for handling complaints meets the standard for BSO.

GFD has a well-structured and transparent written complaint-handling process that fully aligns with BSO standards. The policy is clearly documented, readily accessible to parents, and complies with local regulatory requirements. It outlines a systematic approach that includes both informal and formal stages to ensure concerns are addressed effectively and in a timely manner. The formal stage includes an appeal process if the complainant is not happy with the outcome. At all stages there is a clear time limit for a response and written records are kept. All records are confidential and securely stored.

Since opening the school has dealt with a number of informal concerns which have been monitored for trends and, where necessary, led to school improvements. Two formal complaints have been made which were successfully resolved.

Parents are confident to approach the school with concerns and ideas. They feel that the school's timely and personal response ensure that concerns do not become complaints. Pupils are also confident to approach school staff with concerns and say "Mr Plant will always listen to us".

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

The leadership and management of the school meet the standard for BSO and are good with outstanding features. The principal/CEO and current senior leadership team are providing excellent leadership.

The passion and drive of the close-knit senior leadership team, led by the principal/CEO, has created a clear vision and ethos that is understood and articulated by all stakeholders. The vision *Grow, Flourish, Discover You* reflects both the school's unique provision and the GEMS organisation as a whole. The strong emphasis on pupil wellbeing is at the centre of all decision making. It drives the direction of the school. Leaders are ambitious for their school. Their collaborative approach is creating a staff culture that wants to improve and do well. Since opening, the pace of development has been rapid. Strong foundations are in place for the future.

The initial school strategic plan is appropriate for the school's current stage of development and is shared with stakeholders. The broad targets focus on embedding the school culture, ensuring high quality teaching and developing a unique curriculum for the school. Detailed action plans include both quantitative and qualitative performances measures. A broad three year plan is in place. Future development plans will align the school's strategic goals with those of other GEMS schools. The LAB and GEMS governance are fully involved in its monitoring and evaluation. The use of data by senior leaders to evaluate progress, ensures they have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas of development for the school. The LAB and GEMS governance are well informed about the school enabling them to act as a critical friend, offering support and challenge where appropriate. Because the school is at an early stage of development, strategic planning and governance has not yet had an impact on the long term progress of pupils.

The school is well aware of the need for leadership development to meet the needs of a growing school. A senior leadership (SLT), associate senior leadership (ASLT) and middle leadership (MLT) structure is in place. Current roles reflect the school's emphasis on well-being, the holistic education and a strong focus on developing literacy skills. ASLT staff have a clear job description which includes monitoring and evaluation. At present middle leaders have a developing role in monitoring and evaluation; plans are in place to upskill them in the future.

Structures and processes for induction, professional development and performance management have been established. Staff describe the weekly professional development programme as helping to develop a shared view of teaching and learning across the school. Teaching and support staff have embraced the opportunity provided by a new school to develop their skills and move forward in their careers. Particular examples of this are teaching assistants who are training to support phonics teaching, and the MSO and HR manager who

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have been upskilled to take on higher levels of responsibility. Through formal and informal observations, alongside coaching and mentoring activities, a culture of improvement and excellence is being established. The school is able to identify and share good and outstanding practice. Once fully embedded, this will improve the practice of all staff.

There is a robust approach to health and safety, safeguarding and recruitment. This is underpinned by a raft of policies, procedures, and staff training which ensures everyone is clear of their roles and responsibilities. As a result, pupils are safe and their well-being is actively promoted.

The organisation runs smoothly and is well supported by GEMS. The school operations management team is highly skilled and very efficient.

The strong staff relationships provide an excellent role model for the pupils. They have 'gelled' together as a team with a strong sense of community. This leadership by example ensures pupils develop excellent moral and social values. Staff are proud to be part of a school that supports their wellbeing alongside that of the pupils. Staff morale is high and, with all staff returning for the next academic year, the school is well placed to continue its rapid pace of development.

Strong leadership with a relentless focus on establishing a shared culture for learning that places the wellbeing of pupils at the heart of decision making has established an inclusive community where pupils are thriving.