GEMS Al Barsha National School

British Schools Overseas Inspection Report

Inspection Dates: 27 to 30 October 2025

Lead Inspector: Nadine Powrie

Team: Rekha Bakoo

Bill Burn

Age Group: 3 to 18 Years

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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 staff worldwide, all working on projects relating to educational quality.

To be recognised by the Department for Education, a British School Overseas (BSO) must have an inspection report which shows that its 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 added to the register, 'Get information about schools'.

Inspectors report on the extent to which schools meet the relevant standards for BSO accreditation. 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.

The DfE updated the standards in August 2023. The new standards aligned the BSO standards with the Independent School Standards (ISS) and National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Boarding applied to schools in England; clarified and reiterated the relationship between the UK and host country laws and reshaped staff recruitment standards to ensure international applicability.

The BSO standards are as follows:

Part 1. The quality of education provided by the school (Curriculum, Teaching and Assessment).

Part 2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.

Part 3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils.

Part 4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff.

Part 5. The premises and accommodation.

Part 6. The provision of information.

Part 7. The manner in which complaints are handled.

Part 8. The leadership and management of the school.

Part 9. The quality of provision for boarding.

The purposes of BSO 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 carers and the wider public of the quality of British schools overseas by placing reports in the public domain.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

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 founded GEMS Al Barsha National School in 2020. It is located in the Al Barsha 2 district of Dubai.

The school accommodates 883 pupils on roll aged from three to 18 years, making it smaller than many similar all-age schools in the region. There are 69 children in the early years provision, 413 in the primary school, and 401 in the secondary school, of whom 88 are in the sixth form.

The school is an international community with pupils from over 57 nationalities. At 64%, Emirati pupils form the largest ethnic group. The school is inclusive, catering for pupils with a range of abilities and aptitudes. There are 96 pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The vast majority of pupils speak English as an additional language (EAL)

Children in the nursery follow the early years foundation stage (EYFS) curriculum. From foundation stage 1 (FS1) to Year 4, girls and boys are taught in mixed gender classes and from Year 5 upwards, girls and boys are taught separately. Pupils in the primary school and key stage 3 follow the national curriculum for England (NCfE). In key stage 4, pupils choose from a wide range of GCSEs, IGCSEs and Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) level 2 qualifications. In the sixth form, students take A levels and BTEC National Diploma qualifications. Most students progress to universities abroad.

The principal joined the school in February 2024. Staff turnover was 35% in 2024/25. In September 2025, the school welcomed 31 new teaching staff, a new head of secondary, and a new head of English and science. The school increased the number of assistant principals to three in primary and three in secondary and promoted two senior leaders to overall charge as assistant principal primary and assistant principal secondary. The school appointed a literacy coach to improve pupils' reading and writing. There is a new chair of the local advisory board (LAB) who started in September 2025.

One of the greatest challenges facing the school is the mobility of its pupils in key stages 4 and 5, which has been significantly high in the previous two years. About a quarter of the current Year 11 pupils joined the school during Years 10 and 11, and of them, a quarter joined in Year 11. In the current Year 11, 40% of pupils started in the current academic year. In the sixth form, 25% of students joined Year 12 in 2024/25.

Almost all A level subjects have low numbers of students enrolled, and a small minority of other subjects at GCSE have low numbers of pupils taking examinations, making generalised statistical comparison unreliable.

GEMS Al Barsha National School is a member of British Schools in the Middle East (BSME), Council of British International Schools (COBIS), and the Association of British Schools Overseas (AoBSO). Al Barsha National School received the Optimus Well-being Award in 2024 and achieved Microsoft Showcase School status in 2025.

Summary of the evidence base used by the inspection team

This BSO inspection was carried out by three Education Development Trust inspectors. The BSO registration and self-review documents were completed and 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 55 lessons, 33 of which were jointly observed by an inspector and a senior member of staff. There were 20 meetings with leaders, teachers, pupils, parents, and members of the school's governing board.

Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work. They analysed a wide range of documents relating to assessment, policies, and strategic plans. They inspected the school's safeguarding arrangements. Inspectors also considered the views of parents, pupils and staff expressed in the BSO survey, which was sent to parents and teachers just prior to the inspection.

Evaluation of the school

GEMS Al Barsha National School is a good school and provides a good quality of education for pupils from three to 18 years. It shows outstanding capacity for further improvement.

The school meets all of the Standards for BSO 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.

Attainment in English is good and progress is outstanding across all phases.

In the early years, children enter with communication and language skills that are below those typical for their age, particularly as most speak English as an additional language. Through a language-rich curriculum, systematic phonics and purposeful talk, children make rapid and sustained progress.

The proportion of children achieving a good level of development in literacy has risen significantly to 81%, 11 percentage points above the England average. This reflects the school's relentless focus on early communication and language. Girls' attainment at 83% is slightly higher than that of boys at 78%, but both are well above the England average, demonstrating the impact of early targeted support and consistently high expectations. In Year 1, 81% of children met the screening standard, just above the England average of 79%.

In the primary phase, attainment is good and progress is outstanding. Around 77% of pupils meet or exceed age-related expectations in reading and writing, with a majority working at greater depth. Pupils read fluently, write imaginatively and use grammar and vocabulary with sophistication. EAL and SEND pupils make excellent rates of progress through precise assessment and finely attuned teaching that meets the needs of all learners.

In the secondary phase, pupils' attainment in English is good and their progress is strong. Over the past three years, GCSE English language outcomes have shown sustained improvement, with grades 9 to 4 rising from 66% in 2023 to 81% in 2025 and grades 9 to 6 increasing from 25% to 41%. Girls continue to outperform boys across all grade bands, particularly at grades 9 to 7 by 11 percentage points, although the gap narrows to 6 percentage points at grades 9 to 4, where both groups achieve broadly similar pass rates.

In the sixth form, students sustain their strong outcomes, attaining results well above international averages, almost one grade higher than predicted. A-level English began in 2023.

Students' written and spoken English show developing depth and precision, with some demonstrating mature analysis of complex texts. The quality of English provision supports students in becoming more confident communicators, preparing them suitably for the next stage of their education.

Attainment in mathematics is good and progress is outstanding across all phases.

In the early years, children make consistently strong rates of progress from their starting points, including those with SEND and EAL. A well-organised and engaging environment supports children in developing their early mathematical skills through meaningful opportunities to explore number, pattern, shape and measure. By the end of EYFS, 90% achieve the expected level for mathematics, exceeding the England average, and they are well prepared for the Year 1 curriculum. Girls outperform boys by 10 percentage points.

Across the primary phase, pupils continue to make rapid rates of progress in mathematics. Teachers' strong subject knowledge and the well-structured arithmetic sessions ensure that pupils develop secure fluency and confidently apply calculation strategies to new learning.

Pupils confidently reason mathematically, explain their thinking, and solve increasingly complex problems with accuracy and independence. About 79% of pupils meet or exceed age-related expectations in mathematics compared with the England average of 73%, with 65% working at greater depth. Structured support in algebra, ratio, and problem-solving enables pupils to grasp abstract concepts while visual representations and mathematical language frames help EAL pupils articulate their reasoning.

Pupils' rates of progress in secondary mathematics are strong. GCSE outcomes at the higher grades of 9 to 8 and 9 to 7 have improved securely over time. Around 30% of pupils achieved grades 9 to 6 in 2025. There is no significant gender gap in attainment at grades 9 to 6. There is a slight dip in GCSE outcomes at grades 9 to 4, falling from 64% in 2024 to 57% in 2025 but still in line with the England average. Girls outperform boys and pupils with SEND at the higher grades of 9 to 7 by five percentage points. In Year 11, most pupils can confidently manipulate algebraic expressions, solve multi-step equations and inequalities, and apply proportional reasoning accurately when interpreting real-life problems. They evaluate the efficiency of different methods, justify their reasoning clearly, using precise mathematical language.

In A-level mathematics, all students achieved A* to E with a third attaining at grades A* to C. A large majority make progress in line with or above expectations, reflecting consistently good teaching and effective levels of support, particularly for girls. Pass rates have remained consistently high at 100% over the past two years, demonstrating that students make secure progress from their starting points.

Attainment and progress in science are outstanding across all phases.

The attainment of children in the early years is excellent, with 90% meeting or exceeding the expected level, above the England average. Girls outperform boys by 19 percentage points. Children with SEND and EAL make strong rates of progress relative to their starting point. In FS2, children use scientific vocabulary well to describe how and why leaves change colour in autumn, showing an early understanding of seasonal patterns.

In the primary phase, pupils continue to make strong rates of progress. In Year 2, they acquire the vocabulary, for example, to describe the shape and texture of different kinds of stone and brick, prompted by exploring the school's grounds. There is a strong emphasis on ensuring that all pupils can gain access to the full science curriculum, including those with EAL. The use of word banks, glossaries and lists of specific key terms is a common feature of lessons. By the end of Year 6, 86% of pupils meet or exceed age-related expectations in science compared with the England average of 76%, with most working at greater depth. Girls outperform boys by eight percentage points.

In the first year of the dual-award science at GCSE in 2025, 23% of pupils achieved grades 9 to 7, well above the England average of 9%. Around 77% of pupils achieved grades 9 to 4, compared to 57% in England. Girls outperform boys at every grade; however, they close the gap at grades 9 to 7 by three percentage points. Pupils with SEND make good rates of progress, reflecting the school's commitment to inclusion and personalised support. Pupils demonstrate a secure understanding of key energy concepts, confidently naming energy stores, describing energy transfers, and linking kinetic and gravitational potential energy.

At A level, internal data shows that 100% of students make higher than expected rates of progress. There is no difference in rates of progress of boys and girls. All students achieved A* to E in biology and physics. In physics, the trend is upwards. It is the first year of the biology A-level course. A-level science students are able to think critically, analyse data with precision, and link theory to practice confidently, demonstrating strong practical and investigative skills. Results in BTEC have been outstanding, with a high proportion of distinctions and merits achieved. About half of BTEC applied science extended diploma students gained double distinction* grades (D*D*), equivalent to two A* grades.

Pupils make good rates of progress and attainment in a range of other subjects.

In primary, outcomes in art, computing, humanities and physical education (PE) are strong, with 63% achieving above expectations in computing by the end of Year 6. Pupils demonstrate well-developed collaborative and creative skills and strong levels of resilience. At GCSE, attainment in most subjects is above England averages. In food and nutrition, all pupils achieved grades 9 to 6 against the England average of 37%. Outcomes in art, design technology and media continue to rise. A-level results also exceed national rates, with all students achieving A*– to C in art and religious studies. Vocational outcomes are excellent. Over a third of BTEC business students gain triple distinction, reflecting teaching that consistently meets the needs of all students.

Summary of other judgements against the BSO standards:

- The quality of the curriculum provided by the school is outstanding (see Part 1 below).
- The quality of teaching and assessment is good overall (see Part 1 below).
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding (see Part 2 below).
- The welfare, health and safety of the pupils are outstanding (see Part 3 below).

- The Standard for the suitability of the proprietor and staff is met (see Part 4 below).
- The premises and accommodation meet the requirements of the Standard (see Part 5 below).
- The provision of information for parents meets the requirements of this Standard (see Part 6 below).
- The school's procedures for handling complaints meet the requirements of the Standard (see Part 7 below).
- The leadership and management of the school are outstanding (see Part 8 below).

As a result of this inspection, undertaken in October 2025, the school has demonstrated that it meets the BSO standards except for those standards that cannot be achieved legally in the host country. The school's provision prepares pupils well to enter or re-enter the independent school system in England. This judgement is endorsed by the British government, quality assured by Ofsted and is valid for a period of three years.

Part 1. The quality of education provided by the school

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 UK Equality Act 2010.

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

The curriculum is broad, balanced and inclusive, reflecting the NCfE while being contextualised for the United Arab Emirates. It promotes high academic standards, bilingualism, cultural awareness and global citizenship, preparing pupils exceptionally well for their future education and life in a diverse world. Curriculum mapping ensures clear progression from early years to the sixth form, with coherence across subjects and phases. The school embeds literacy, dual language development and moral education throughout, and promotes equality of opportunity within the expectations of the host country.

Leaders communicate an ambitious vision rooted in the school's mission to develop confident, articulate and compassionate global citizens who embody the values of: hardworking, ambition, well-being, innovation, agility, trust, empathy, excellence (HAWIATEE). These values are evident in pupils' learning and align with British values and the school's: 'Be a GEM' culture. The curriculum blends British educational practice with Emirati

heritage, promoting respect, tolerance and understanding in line with the Equality Act 2010. Staff model the British values through assemblies, literature and global themes. In Year 9, pupils explore Britain during the Second World War to understand the rule of law, liberty and mutual respect, while Sheikh Zayed's teachings foster pride in Emirati heritage and coexistence.

In secondary, pupils choose from 10 GCSE options and three BTEC level 2 courses. Sixth-form students follow A-level or International BTEC pathways, offering flexible routes to higher education or employment. The curriculum includes alternative pathways, such as second language English and foundation GCSE in science and mathematics, which provide effective support for learners with additional needs.

The curriculum is coherently sequenced to build knowledge over time. In early years, children learn through enquiry and play in bilingual environments inspired by UK forest-school approaches adapted to the desert. Dual-language teaching supports inclusion for pupils with SEND and those with EAL needs. Across phases, the 'Teach Like a GEM' and 'Read Like a GEM' frameworks ensure consistency in both teaching and learning.

Personal, social, health and relationships education is a well-structured part of the school's curriculum and is woven through lessons, assemblies and pastoral activities. It provides pupils with the knowledge and skills to develop healthy friendships, emotional resilience, and a clear understanding of personal responsibility. The values of respect, empathy and kindness underpin the school's ethos. Pupils talk openly about feelings and consider how their actions affect others. The programme supports pupils' personal development and prepares them well for the next stages of education and life in modern British society, while remaining respectful of the local cultural context.

Enrichment is extensive. Pupils engage in clubs across sport, arts, debate and service. Initiatives such as 'Students for Students' promote empathy and social action. Local partnerships and events such as the Dubai Fitness Challenge enhance pupils' well-being. As a Microsoft Showcase School, digital learning is a strength, with tools such as iPads and learning platforms extending pupils' learning.

A well-planned careers programme ensures pupils receive clear, personalised guidance from a dedicated counsellor to help them make informed choices about their next steps. Careers fairs, visits to employers and work experience help pupils make informed choices, with many progressing to universities in the UAE and abroad.

The curriculum reflects British standards and Emirati values. It promotes respect and awareness of protected characteristics under the Equality Act (2010), including age, disability, race, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity. However, some aspects such as gender

reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, sex and sexual orientation cannot be promoted due to local laws.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the school is good.

School leaders are increasingly successful in fulfilling their aim to ensure that teaching empowers pupils through excellence, fostering a culture of high achievement and continuous improvement.

Teachers at all stages demonstrate secure knowledge of the subjects they teach. They also understand the requirements of public examinations. Furthermore, teachers and teaching assistants analyse data and monitor their pupils' progress rigorously. In this way, they have a detailed understanding of how they can meet their pupils' needs most effectively.

Teachers use an extensive range of assessment data from internal and external sources. They analyse the attainment of different groups of pupils and modify schemes of work and their approaches to teaching accordingly.

Teachers make good use of the school's processes if concerns arise about a pupil's progress. Leaders provide clear training about how to make referrals for additional help. Teachers use classroom context sheets well. These contain detailed notes on meeting the needs of pupils with SEND. Similarly, teachers take note of pupils' other characteristics so that they can enhance their rates of progress. They refer consistently to this information to guide their practice.

Relationships between teachers and pupils, and among pupils, are strong, and this underpins their learning. Pupils become skilled at learning because they develop the attributes in the school's profile of what constitutes a successful pupil.

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are also highly supportive of learning. Pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of classroom routines. Lessons start promptly, and transitions between activities are smooth and efficient.

Teaching is demanding. In a Reception Year lesson based on *Jasper and the Beanstalk*, the teacher used the story to create a purposeful, hands-on learning experience. Children planted their own bean seeds, carefully following a clear sequence of steps, such as filling a pot with soil, making a small hole, and placing the seed inside. Staff modelled each stage and supported children's understanding through explanation and questioning. A Year 3 science lesson used mime and theatricality to bring the properties of brick and rock to life. A Year 8 design technology lesson enabled pupils to work independently through simple step-by-step instructions and clear success criteria to design a wooden puzzle with exemplary use of self-

assessment and modelling that led to good rates of progress for all pupils. A GCSE science lesson required groups to think about national energy demands and come up with a strategy to meet them into the future. Pupils responded well to the opportunity to work together and share ideas.

Opportunities for pupils to interact purposefully with each other vary across subjects throughout the school. As a result, pupils do not consistently engage in dialogue to extend their subject knowledge and deepen their understanding.

Teachers use questioning skilfully to invite predictions and hypotheses, extending and reinforcing pupils' learning. They are also rigorous about using questions to check pupils' understanding and recall and tackle any misconceptions. Teachers ensure that pupils who are reluctant to join in lessons are asked questions so that they are included. However, the strongest teaching practices in the school are not yet consistently shared or consolidated across all phases and subjects.

Pupils achieve well against aspirational targets set for them. The school sets high expectations for teachers and ensures that they follow a systematic programme of continuing professional development. School leaders have implemented a programme of lesson observations to monitor the quality of teaching and provide targeted support where needed. Teachers apply the fundamental principles of the 'Teach Like a GEM' framework consistently to maintain good-quality teaching and learning.

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

The standards relating to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development are met, except for paragraph 5(b)(vi), which cannot be met because of host-country legislation linked to the UK Equality Act 2010.

Pupils' SMSC development is outstanding and a defining strength of the school. The school's own core HAWIATEE values create a strong moral framework that shapes pupils' behaviour, attitudes and relationships. Pupils are kind, courteous and responsible. They are confident, reflective and considerate, showing maturity in their learning and interactions. Staff model high standards of respect and care, creating a calm, inclusive and purposeful atmosphere. Pupils display exemplary attitudes to learning; they are motivated, curious and take genuine pride in their achievements.

The school nurtures spiritual development through opportunities for reflection and self-discovery that encourage pupils to appreciate the world around them. In the early years,

children explore emotions and imagination through storytelling and play. Older pupils engage in thoughtful discussion of ethical and philosophical ideas in English, Islamic and social studies. Assemblies and well-being activities help pupils consider compassion, empathy and purpose, while creative subjects such as art, music and literature inspire wonder and appreciation for beauty.

Pupils' moral development is strong. Pupils understand right from wrong, act with fairness and integrity, and respond thoughtfully to moral dilemmas. Behaviour systems promote reflection and accountability, enabling pupils to learn from experience. Through enquiry-based learning, pupils explore themes such as equality, sustainability and justice. For example, Year 9 pupils debated the moral justification of atomic weapons, while Year 8 pupils studied civil-rights movements to consider freedom and fairness. Environmental initiatives and national climate-action projects allow pupils to translate principles into action.

Pupils' social development is exemplary. Pupils contribute positively to the school and to community life through a wide range of leadership opportunities, including the students' council, reading ambassadors, eco-committee and head boy and head girl. They work collaboratively, showing care and encouragement towards their younger peers. The appointment of a pupil to the first Dubai students' council reflects the pupils' confidence and civic awareness. Charitable initiatives such as Ramadan food collections, the GEMS Care and Share outreach programme and staff-appreciation events nurture pupils' empathy and gratitude. The school gathers pupils' views through surveys, discussions and leadership forums. Leaders act on this feedback to refine and improve provision, giving pupils a strong sense of belonging and influence. For example, psychology was not originally planned as a key stage 4 option, but following the pupils' voice feedback, the school introduced it in response to pupils' clear interest.

Pupils' cultural development is strong. The bilingual environment and diverse community help pupils appreciate their own heritage while respecting others. Events such as National Day, International Day and Arabic Language Week foster a sense of celebration and unity. Educational visits across the UAE and abroad, including a cultural visit to Japan, broaden pupils' world views. They learn about public institutions in the UAE, the UK and internationally, developing understanding of civic duty and global citizenship. Classroom learning connects to real-world contexts. For example, pupils studied the 10 Billion Meals campaign, a UAE-led initiative to combat hunger and promote food security, deepening their compassion and social awareness.

The school actively promotes the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance for those of different faiths and beliefs. Pupils learn to understand and respect the rules in games such as football, basketball and badminton. Lessons explicitly teach the principles of fair play and officiating, reinforcing the importance of upholding agreed rules and showing respect for others. These principles are

woven throughout the curriculum, assemblies and leadership opportunities. Pupils relate these values naturally to both British and Emirati contexts, recognising how fairness, service and respect underpin life in both societies.

Through its moral guidance, inclusive ethos and wide-ranging opportunities, the school enables pupils to develop confidence, empathy and social awareness. Pupils leave the school as principled, compassionate young people who show respect for others, pride in their identity and a commitment to contributing positively to both local and global communities.

Part 3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff is outstanding.

The school takes all reasonable steps to safeguard the welfare of all pupils through the effective implementation of its safeguarding policy. The policy is in line with UK expectations. In addition, the school has created a strong culture of safeguarding. This means that the school listens to its pupils and pupils are ready to make disclosures about any concerns that they may have. Pupils and parents are confident that they feel happy and safe in school, and that, if necessary, the school will deal with concerns promptly and effectively, including rare instances of bullying.

Staff training is regular and thorough, with all adults aware that safeguarding and child protection is everyone's responsibility. They use the school's reporting system to ensure that the safeguarding team learns quickly about any case which needs action. Pupils learn through assemblies and the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) programme how to keep themselves safe, including online. The school reinforces this work through regular, well-attended parent workshops. The safeguarding team makes external referrals through the group's central safeguarding office when needed.

School leaders actively promote awareness of mental health, linking it, for example, to World Mental Health Day. Staff encourage younger pupils to use the worry box, now activated by a quick response (QR) code. Older pupils confirm that there are multiple sources of support and guidance available to them in school. The work of the safeguarding team has been formally recognised within GEMS and beyond.

School leaders ensure that the premises are safe for all members of the community. They meet the requirements for local legal standards through suitable policies, including risk assessment, fire safety and first aid. The board reviews and approves these policies annually. A range of external contractors supports the school by conducting regular checks on, for instance, gas, electricity, fire precautions and catering. Staff monitor access to the site rigorously and allow entry only to adults who have passed the required safeguarding checks.

The school identifies and removes any hazards that could compromise safety. All staff understand that this is a collective responsibility and receive regular training to report any concerns to the site manager.

All arrangements have the welfare of members of the community in mind. At certain times of the year, for example, the school publishes a daily report on temperature and air quality which determines whether pupils will be allowed to exercise outside. Fire safety measures are thorough. The school conducts regular evacuation drills. Induction processes for new pupils and parents are effective and well developed. The school ensures good behaviour through the consistent application of requirements for teachers in lessons, and in the appropriate supervision of pupils at lunch times and breaks. Where necessary, the school administers first aid promptly and efficiently.

Attendance is at 93.4%, just above the England average and continues to rise. High rates of punctuality reflect the school's close partnership with parents.

Part 4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school meets the requirements of this standard.

The school employs a dedicated human resources (HR) manager who conducts all necessary background checks to meet the required safeguarding standards for staff working with pupils. The school upholds exemplary safeguarding standards by comprehensively recording details for all staff in a rigorously maintained single central record (SCR), including individuals not directly employed by the school such as members of the LAB and third-party providers such as facilities, cleaning, security and catering teams. The SCR covers checks on start dates, identity verification, medical fitness, the right to work in the host country, qualifications, criminal record checks, and references. The SCR register of checks is securely accessible only to the HR manager, the designated safeguarding lead and the principal. GEMS corporate office ensures full compliance and confidentiality through a rigorous annual audit.

The school implements a robust safer recruitment policy, ensuring a rigorous selection process that prioritises the safety and well-being of all pupils. Nine senior leaders and the HR manager have completed their safer recruitment training to maintain the highest safeguarding standards.

Part 5. The premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation meet the requirements of this standard.

The site is exceptionally well maintained and presented. Exemplary standards of hygiene and cleanliness create a fresh, welcoming environment that reflects the school's high expectations.

The classrooms, libraries, laboratories and other facilities support learning effectively, with furniture and equipment of appropriate quality. There is ample space for all activities including, for example, meeting rooms, a coffee shop for parents, and an auditorium for larger events. The quality and upkeep of the premises make a highly positive contribution to pupils' safety, well-being and learning.

Suitable risk assessments are in place for activities in the swimming pool, design technology workshop, and science laboratories, for example, to ensure the welfare, health and safety of those working there. Acoustics and lighting are appropriate throughout the school. Outdoor play space, playing fields and swimming pools are well used and well maintained, providing appropriate facilities for physical education lessons, games, and other recreational and athletic pursuits. Activities in PE lessons provide rich opportunities for children to develop their gross motor skills, improving their balance, coordination and confidence in movement. The quality of the premises and accommodation contributes highly to pupils' learning, regardless of their age or gender. There is outdoor space in the EYFS setting, for example, which enables the Desert School to enhance children's learning effectively.

The school fully meets the standards for toilet, washing, and changing facilities. These are separate for boys and girls, well designed, and maintained to a high standard to ensure privacy and dignity. Suitably labelled drinking water is freely available. Medical facilities are of high quality, with segregated provision for boys and girls, and qualified full-time staff, who can examine and treat those with short-term illness or injury. The school also has well-adapted accommodation to provide therapy for pupils with complex needs.

Corridors, landings and common spaces are spacious, so that all circulate freely and calmly. The site is readily accessible for those with restricted mobility with lifts to all floors.

Part 6. The provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school meets meet the requirements of this standard.

Parents express high levels of satisfaction with the school's communication and partnership. They describe the school as safe, inclusive, and family-oriented, where their children are happy, respected, and eager to learn. Inspectors' findings fully endorse parents' views.

Parents receive regular, high-quality information about their children's learning, progress, and personal development. The school issues written reports at key points during the year, providing parents with clear and detailed information about their child's attainment, progress and effort. Reports are clear and informative, and communication between teachers, leaders, and families is open, constructive, and supportive. Engagement events and workshops further strengthen relationships between home and school by helping families understand the curriculum and how their children learn.

Communication with families is warm, consistent, and responsive. Parents appreciate the regular updates shared through newsletters, assemblies, and school events that celebrate pupils' achievements and encourage their participation. Staff and leaders are visible and approachable, and families value the positive relationships that they have with teachers. Parents confirm that the school responds quickly and helpfully to any concerns, reflecting a genuine ethos of partnership.

The school's website is comprehensive and easy to navigate. It provides all required information, including the most recent inspection report, the school's aims and ethos, contact details, and details of the leadership team and governance. Policies on safeguarding, admissions, curriculum, inclusion, SEND, behaviour, anti-bullying, attendance, health and safety, first aid and the administration of medicines, and complaints are up to date and accessible.

Parents praise the strong focus on safety and well-being, referencing regular drills, clear security procedures, and caring relationships that make children feel secure. They describe the school as promoting respect, empathy, and high expectations for behaviour. Parents state that bullying is not tolerated and that staff respond swiftly and effectively to any concerns.

The school gathers feedback formally through surveys and informally through meetings, workshops, and community events. Parents feel that the school listens and acts on their feedback, pointing to improvements in communication, leadership visibility, and the quality of teaching across the school. They value the school's emphasis on Arabic language, Islamic culture, and UAE heritage, and they praise the balance between traditional and international celebrations that help children develop cultural pride and respect for others.

Inspectors' evidence confirms that communication between home and school is proactive, transparent, and inclusive. Parents play an active role as partners. The provision of information is comprehensive, timely, and of a high standard. Families express pride and confidence in the leadership and quality of education at the school, describing it as a community where children 'learn with happiness, respect, and a sense of belonging'.

Part 7. The school's procedures for handling complaints

The school meets the requirements of this standard.

The school implements a comprehensive complaints and feedback policy that promotes transparency and strengthens parental confidence. Staff communicate procedures clearly, and parents can easily gain access to the policy through the website and the school's communication channels, helping them feel informed and assured. The school encourages parents to share feedback or concerns early, supporting a culture of trust and partnership. Staff acknowledge all complaints within 24 hours and provide timely responses, reinforcing confidence that leaders take every concern seriously.

The policy sets out a well-structured escalation pathway, including five stages for academic and well-being matters and four stages for operational concerns, with precise response times at every point to ensure swift resolution. Leaders ensure that concerns go directly to the right person at each stage, ensuring prompt action and minimising the need for escalation. A class teacher or form tutor handles the first stage for academic or well-being matters, while the parent-relations executive leads on operational queries. Where dissatisfaction remains, senior leaders intervene quickly to resolve the matter.

When formal procedures are necessary, the policy ensures that parents can submit complaints in writing. A panel hearing process is in place, composed of at least three individuals who are not involved in the matter under review. One member of the panel is independent of the school's management and operations. Parents may choose to attend and bring someone to accompany them.

The panel's findings and recommendations are formally recorded, shared with relevant parties, and available for inspection. Leaders keep a comprehensive written log of all complaints, recording outcomes and actions taken. They handle all records confidentially and in accordance with local legal frameworks.

This highly structured and responsive approach demonstrates a strong commitment to resolving concerns constructively and maintaining positive relationships with families. There has been no formal complaint during the current academic year.

Part 8. Leadership and management of the school

Leadership and management of the school are outstanding.

The school's mission of 'empowering through excellence' permeates the entire organisation. The principal and LAB have driven a highly effective transformation through the 'GEMS National School (GNS) Journey', creating an ethos where inclusion and professional growth thrive in daily practice.

Staff share a clear moral purpose and high expectations, resulting in significant improvements to provision and in pupils' outcomes. Senior leaders at all levels are relentless in their pursuit of excellence and demonstrate a strong capacity to secure continuous improvement. New and highly effective distributed leadership has led to rapid improvement in key areas such as pupils' progress in core subjects, staff retention, the effectiveness of governance, and stakeholders' confidence.

GEMS Education provides corporate governance with responsibility for finance, resourcing, operations, human resources and safeguarding oversight. It ensures regulatory and legal compliance through external audit reports. The leadership team ensures that the BSO standards are consistently met through rigorous quality assurance mechanisms.

The chair of the LAB appraises the principal against a comprehensive range of key performance indicators. The chair meets the principal weekly, supported by regular learning walks every three weeks. A strong emphasis is placed on the well-being of the principal through regular meetings. There is a clear understanding and respect for the distinct responsibilities of the governors and school leaders.

Leadership at all levels, including the LAB, drives a culture of excellence through the GNS framework and the 'Be a GEM' ethos, motivating staff and pupils to reach exceptional standards. Senior leaders lead by example, modelling professionalism, integrity, and high expectations. Middle leaders deploy their teams effectively, using coaching, subject excellence plans, and data-informed dialogue to strengthen consistency and impact. Staff door signs showing 'What I'm reading' and the appointment of two 'Teach Like a GEM' Excellence Fellows and one 'Read like a GEM ' Fellow exemplify how leaders role-model reflective practice and the love of learning.

The school gathers parents' and pupils' views through regular surveys and ongoing informal engagement. Leaders maintain strong and open communication with parents through weekly 'Listening Ear' sessions alongside a termly 'You Said, We Did' approach.

Pupils report feeling safe, happy and well supported. They confirm that teachers consistently inspire them to aim high, think deeply and achieve the very best in their learning. This strong partnership between home and school contributes directly to pupils' excellent attitudes to learning and their personal development.

An overwhelming majority of staff are proud to work at the school. Staff report that the leadership team communicates clearly, supports them and puts pupils first, reflecting a culture of high expectations, professional trust and unwavering ambition for each pupil's success. Staff feel listened to, supported and motivated. Weekly continuing professional development (CPD) sessions ensure that staff strengthen their classroom practice and secure consistently strong outcomes for pupils. The presence of a dedicated well-being officer for both pupils and staff highlights the school's commitment to maintaining a positive and supportive environment.

All staff uphold the UAE code of conduct and the GEMS' behavioural value charter, which reinforce respect, diversity and high expectations for behaviour. Leaders champion equality, diversity and inclusion in everyday practice. Through professional learning, including a multilingualism programme, staff recognise and celebrate the value of the 57 nationalities represented in the school.

Regular lesson observations, 360-degree feedback, and professional learning goals link appraisal to staff development and accountability. All the senior and executive leadership hold the national professional qualifications (NPQ) or a UK Master's-level qualification in leadership. Currently, four senior, middle and aspiring leaders are taking their first NPQ.

Leaders maintain robust safeguarding procedures, promote inclusive practice, and cultivate a culture of care, compliance and excellence that drives the school's improvement journey. The rigorous self-evaluation, the school's excellence plan, and the school's rapid excellence plan demonstrate that leaders have cemented a strong culture of accountability, reflective practice, and continuous improvement. Subject excellence plans are systematically reviewed, ensuring consistency, coherence and accountability in delivering whole-school priorities. The cohesive and forward-looking leadership shows outstanding capacity for further improvement.

EYFS provision

The quality of early years' provision is outstanding. Children in the early years make strong rates of progress from their starting points. Many start with little English and developing communication skills, yet they settle quickly into the calm, nurturing environment where routines are clearly established. Staff promote curiosity and confidence, encouraging children to explore, make choices and talk about their learning. As a result, they become increasingly independent, resilient and articulate, developing positive attitudes towards learning. By the end of the phase, most achieve a high level of development and are well prepared for Year 1.

The curriculum is broad, coherent and thoughtfully planned. It provides purposeful learning opportunities across all areas of the EYFS framework. Teachers combine play-based exploration with focused teaching to develop children's communication, language, literacy and mathematical understanding. The dual-language approach builds confidence and strengthens comprehension for children with EAL needs.

Teachers teach phonics systematically, laying secure foundations for early reading. They weave mathematical learning through rich practical activities that help children apply their knowledge meaningfully. Teaching is effective and well adapted to meet children's individual needs. Children with EAL and SEND benefit from timely and well-targeted support, enabling them to make sustained progress from their different starting points.

Teachers enrich learning through creative, cultural and outdoor experiences, including the Desert School, which nurtures curiosity, independence and appreciation of Emirati heritage. Activities are engaging and relevant to children's interests, helping them make meaningful connections across their learning. Assessment is continuous and purposeful. Teachers use observations to plan next steps and ensure that they support all children effectively in their development.

The learning environment is safe, stimulating and well organised. Indoor and outdoor spaces are carefully designed to promote exploration, collaboration and creativity. Children behave responsibly, cooperate thoughtfully and respond positively to adults' expectations. Relationships between staff and children are warm and respectful, creating a strong sense of belonging and emotional security.

Parents play an active and valued role in their children's learning. Staff work closely with families to support progress and well-being, sharing information regularly and encouraging involvement in school life. Leaders ensure that health and safety procedures are consistently implemented and that safeguarding arrangements are robust. Children are safe, happy and confident in their early education.

Leadership maintains a clear focus on improving the quality of provision. The language-rich, inclusive curriculum enables children to make sustained progress and contributes positively to the school's overall effectiveness.

Post-16 provision

The quality of Post-16 provision is outstanding. The school prides itself on the distinctive strength of its small sixth form where students benefit from highly individualised attention and a strong sense of belonging. Small class sizes enable close academic support and deep relationships between staff and students. Teachers know each student well, challenge them appropriately, and guide them effectively. Students achieve highly across A level and BTEC

courses, particularly in applied science, English, business studies, and information technology (IT), where attainment exceeds England averages. The school is fully inclusive and the proportion entering with at least five good GCSE passes including English and mathematics has risen from 40% in 2023 to 71% in 2025. Students benefit from a programme dedicated to careers, led by the guidance counsellor, providing tailored support and advice. This high-quality guidance has contributed to a marked increase in the proportion progressing to UK universities, including the Russell Group, from none four years ago to eight in the current year, with girls leading this upward trend. Students demonstrate strong independent learning habits and are well prepared for higher education and employment.

Teaching is consistently effective. Teachers use assessment precisely to plan and adapt lessons. Students value detailed feedback and the close support that small class sizes make possible. They report significant improvement in science and mathematics teaching, with lessons that are calm, focused, and intellectually demanding. The curriculum offers an appropriate balance between academic and vocational routes. The breadth of subjects offered is extended through partnerships with other schools for physics and art.

Students' personal development is outstanding. They undertake a wide range of leadership roles including head boy and girl, student ambassadors, and representatives on the Dubai students' council and youth parliament. They contribute to the community through voluntary work, such as beach cleaning, and take initiative to enrich school life by organising theatre productions such as 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory', book clubs, and internal sports events.

Behaviour is exemplary. Students are respectful, courteous, and inclusive. They feel safe, confirm that bullying is rare and resolved quickly, and that pastoral support is effective in promoting their well-being.

Leadership of the sixth form is highly effective. Leaders maintain a clear vision for growth, monitor outcomes closely, and ensure that students receive high-quality academic and pastoral guidance. The sixth form reflects the school's values of ambition, respect, and service, and prepares students exceptionally well for the next stage of education and life.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the required standards except those that would be in breach of the host country laws. The requirements of the host country take precedence.

It cannot fully meet the standards that relate to 2(2)(d)(ii) or 5 (b)(vi). The school encourages respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics of age;

disability; pregnancy and maternity; race and religion or belief, as set out in the Equality Act 2010.

What the school could do to improve further

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

1. Opportunities for pupils to interact purposefully with each other vary across subjects and phases such that pupils do not always engage in meaningful dialogue to think more deeply about their learning. Leaders should ensure that teachers plan and deliver structured opportunities for peer interaction that promote discussion, reasoning, and shared responsibility for learning. As a result, pupils will engage more purposefully with their peers, articulate their thinking clearly, and deepen their understanding through effective dialogue and teamwork leading to improved outcomes across the curriculum.

2. The strongest teaching practices in the school are not yet consistently shared or embedded across all phases and subjects. Leaders should implement systematic processes to ensure that the expertise and highly-skilled practice of the strongest teachers is shared across subjects and phases to further enhance the overall quality of teaching. As a result, pupils will experience consistently high-quality teaching that enables them to achieve higher levels of attainment and develop a deeper understanding of key concepts and subject knowledge across the curriculum.

Summary of inspection judgements

The quality of education

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

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

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

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils	x			

Leadership and management

Overall effectiveness of leadership and management	x			

School Details

Name of school	GEMS Al Barsha National School
Type of school	Private
Date school opened	September, 2020
Age range of pupils	3 – 18 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed to Year 4 then separate boys' and girls' provision
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	883
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	N/A
Annual fees (day pupils)	AED 45,428.00 – AED 67,060.00
Annual fees (boarders)	N/A
Address of school	Al Barsha South 2 Dubai, UAE
Telephone number	+971 4-5069222
Email address	m.thomas_gns@gemsedu.com
Headteacher	Mrs Michelle Thomas
Proprietor	GEMS

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 His 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 50 years' experience of delivering education services worldwide Education Development Trust's vision is a world in which all lives are transformed through excellent education. We strive to improve education for learners globally, grounding our work in research and evidence. We support leaders to raise standards, improve school performance, develop great teachers and open career pathways.

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.

We have built a reputation for providing high quality educational support and inspection services. One of our main aims 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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Education Development Trust
16-18 Duke Street
Reading
RG1 4RU
UK

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