



**British School
Overseas**
Inspected by Penta International

Inspection report

GEMS Founders School

Masdar City

Abu Dhabi

United Arab Emirates

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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, 50 lesson observations took place. School documentation and policies were analysed and data reviewed. Pupils' workbooks were seen in lessons, and discussions were held with the staff, parents and informally with students. The inspection took place over three days.

The lead inspector was Karen Hanratty. The team members were Yasir Abrar, Jessie Joubert, Sarah Smith, with Andrew Williams supporting remotely.

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

GEMS Founders School Masdar City, which was established in August 2024, is a school undergoing a period of rapid growth and development, on a pathway to excellence. Students at the school achieve well, as a result of a broad, balanced curriculum and robust teaching, much of which is good or better. The school's key philosophy of 'Sustainnovation' strongly influences all aspects of school life. Students are well cared for; they value their place in the school community. School leaders have ambitious aims for the future, which are driving school developments in a positive manner.

3.1 What the school does well

There are many strengths at the school, including the:

- students' behaviour and positive attitudes to school life;
- clarity of vision of the principal, bolstered by the support of school governance;
- opportunities for student voice and leadership;
- values-driven school culture and ethos, underpinned by British and United Arab Emirates (UAE) values;
- warm and respectful relationships across the school, particularly between staff and students and within the student body;
- unrelenting focus on safety and wellbeing - students are extremely well cared for;
- 'Sustainnovation', which is giving students the opportunity to explore global challenges and consider their role as stewards for the planet;
- use of learning environments and displays to support and celebrate learning;
- high-quality, purpose-built school facilities and learning environments;
- focus on UAE national identity and Emirati heritage and culture;
- relationships and communications with parents.

3.2 Points for improvement

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

- i. Further improving the quality of teaching and learning, so that all teaching is as good as the best, by:
 - providing opportunities for students to develop skills of problem-solving, critical thinking and independent learning through high-level questioning and enquiry-based activities;
 - ensuring appropriate stretch and challenge for all learners, particularly the most able and higher achievers;
 - developing 21st century skills of communication, collaboration, resilience and creativity
- ii. Enhance learning review and feedback processes, so that students receive and respond to purposeful guidance on their strengths and next steps in learning;
- iii. Develop the use of assessment, data analysis and progress tracking practices to inform lesson planning, and curriculum adaptation and review.

4. The context of the school

Full name of school	GEMS Founders School Masdar City				
Address	Masdar City, Abu Dhabi, UAE				
Telephone number/s	+971 2 614 3400				
Website address	www.gemsfoundersschool-masdarcity.com				
Key email address	Registrar_gfa@gemsedu.com				
Headteacher/principal	Albie Huyser				
Chair of board/proprietor	Matthew Burfield				
Age range	3-13 years				
Total number of pupils	1,052	Boys	568	Girls	484
Numbers by age	0-2 years	0	12-16 years	147	
	3-5 years	321	17-18 years	0	
	6-11 years	584	18+ years	0	
Total number of part-time children		0			

GEMS Founders School Masdar City (GFA) opened in 2024 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, with an initial enrolment of just over 1,000 students. Located in the pioneering sustainable urban development of Masdar City, the school is part of the well-established GEMS Education network and the third in the GEMS Founders series, following its sister schools in Dubai.

The school caters to students from FS1 to Year 8, with Year 9 opening in August 2025, and is built on the core pillars of academic excellence, values-based education, and "Sustainnovation"—a strategic focus on sustainability and innovation in education. GFA places a strong emphasis on global stewardship and environmental responsibility.

The school's population is highly diverse, representing 66 nationalities, with the largest groups being Indian (29%), Emirati (20%), and Pakistani (12%). Approximately 90% of students are

English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners, and the school provides a robust programme of support to meet a wide range of linguistic and educational needs.

GFA follows the National Curriculum for England and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework, tailored to meet the needs of an international cohort and aligned with the regulatory expectations of Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK) and the UAE Ministry of Education (MoE).

Purpose-built facilities support high-quality learning, wellbeing, and innovation, in a modern and inclusive environment aligned with the school's net-zero sustainability vision.

4.1 British nature of the school

GFA follows the National Curriculum of England as well as the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework. The curriculum is adjusted to take into local context and to satisfy the requirements of the MoE and ADEK. The language of instruction is English.

Students wear uniforms and are members of houses, which are the prime focus for sports, competitions and events beyond the curriculum. The houses are named: Integrity, Respect, Honesty and Kindness, which reflect the way British values are incorporated into the curriculum and expectations of students' behaviour, reinforced by a Behaviour Policy based on rewards through house points. Around the school evidence of Britishness includes displays on the theme of 'British Values'.

The structure of the school is made up of year groups and Key Stages, aligned with UK norms. The school follows a three-term year and the timetable is British in format. 10 teachers are UK qualified, while most are predominantly trained to UK teacher standards. Performance is monitored via lesson observations, learning walks and work scrutiny. Professional development is prioritised and provided on a regular basis. The school is headed by a leadership team that is essentially British in its structure; all current senior leaders have previous experience in British schools.

Learning is assessed with UK benchmark taking place at appropriate times, including the end of key stages. Baseline, progress and well-being assessments, such as NGRT and PASS are provided by GL. Progress assessments are benchmarked against UK expectations. It is intended that the school will extend its secondary school provision to Year 13 and A level examinations.

Within the curriculum, British themed topics are sometimes chosen, such as the Great Fire of London. Where appropriate, resources are British. For example, texts include Wordsworth's poetry, 'Traction Man' and 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt'. The school also observes traditional British school calendar events such as international day, book week and odd sock day.

GFA emphasises holistic education. The school provides a range of curriculum enrichment activities. These include sports such as cricket, football, badminton and basketball, as well as more traditionally creative areas such as cooking and nutrition, and visual arts. Included in the formal curriculum is a focus on personal, social and health education (PSHE). Regular assemblies support the delivery of these areas alongside British values. Careers advice is facilitated along British lines via Unifrog.

The school prioritises student voice, and in the British tradition, a range of leadership positions are open to students. These include Head boy and girl as well as house captains and sports captains, which are elected and reinforce a commitment to democracy.

5. Standard 1

The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of education provided meets the standard for BSO, with elements that are good or better. A robust curriculum is in place, backed by comprehensive schemes of work and consistent lesson planning. Teaching and regular testing are aligned to the curriculum; as a result, students make expected or better progress and attain well.

5.1 Curriculum

The quality of the curriculum meets the standard for BSO and is good.

The curriculum at GFA is broad, balanced, and aligned with the National Curriculum for England and the EYFS Framework. It also fully meets the requirements of the UAE MoE and ADEK for Arabic subjects. From FS1 to year 8, the curriculum is designed to promote progression in knowledge, skills, and understanding, and to support students' academic and personal development. The curriculum allows students to enter or re-enter the UK education system at an age-appropriate level.

In EYFS, the curriculum is based on the UK's *Development Matters* framework and promotes the development of early literacy, numeracy, and social skills through play-based and child-led learning. *Letters and Sounds* is used to deliver phonics, while literacy is structured around high-quality texts, which provide links across areas of learning. Provision is adapted for the high proportion of EAL learners with the use of visual prompts (widgets), basic sign language, and a 'soft start' strategy. UAE heritage and culture are sensitively embedded into classroom routines and the continuous provision.

Key Stage (KS) 1 builds on the foundations established in EYFS, with continued emphasis on systematic phonics and thematic, cross-curricular learning. In this phase, students explore themes that link topics, including sustainability, to core academic subjects, helping them make meaningful connections. British values and UAE national identity are interwoven. In KS2, the curriculum maintains its thematic structure while integrating additional areas such as computing and PSHE. Platforms including *Flash Academy*, *Language Nut* and *Bug Club* support phonics and literacy development.

In KS3, a growing curriculum includes a wide range of academic subjects, including business studies and French. As the school prepares for iGCSE, the curriculum is being reviewed to ensure appropriate breadth and progression. Curriculum articulation, particularly vertical and horizontal coherence, is under development, and progression pathways, especially in KS3, require further formalisation to secure

continuity of learning. Plans are in place to introduce iGCSEs as the school expands into KS4.

A range of digital platforms are used to good effect across all Key Stages. Students in secondary regularly engage in online reading through *Accelerated Reader*, and platforms such as *Century Tech* are used for adaptive learning to help close learning gaps, particularly in English and mathematics. Real-life application is encouraged through cross-disciplinary tasks such as travel blogs using green screen technology and debates exploring contemporary issues. As part of the bring your own device (BYOD) policy, students make appropriate use of tablets and laptops to support their learning.

Across the school, a particular strength of provision is the focus on 'sustainnovation', with weekly timetabled sustainability lessons which encompass UN global development goals, ethical reflection and real-world application. The rich use of flight simulators, VR, podcasting, and green screen projects in both curriculum and extra-curricular activities (ECAs) both engage students and develop problem-solving skills.

A three-tiered approach to task differentiation (silver, gold, platinum) supports most learners across the ability spectrum, although further stretch and challenge for the most able, and adaptation for those with SEND and EAL, is not consistently evident in planning or delivery. Teachers have access to assessment data and class context sheets, however, curriculum planning and adaptation in response to this data vary in quality. The school's inclusion register is reviewed regularly and used to plan interventions, though further development is required in how curriculum planning responds to this information.

The curriculum is enriched with a range of ECAs, which offer students the opportunity to develop interests and talents beyond the formal curriculum. Further curriculum enhancements include a range of themed days and special events, including UAE Flag Day, International Day and a school production of 'The Jungle Book'.

British values are contextually embedded through PSHE, English and assemblies, as well as. The curriculum promotes personal development, and *PASS* data is used effectively to personalise support. Careers education is aligned with UK models and delivered through *Unifrog*.

Curriculum reviews are planned regularly. Term 1 reviews led to tangible adjustments in delivery, particularly in secondary subjects. Staff reflect on lesson outcomes and adapt units accordingly. Monthly and termly data drops are used to monitor progress, although a more systematic cycle of curriculum evaluation is needed to secure long-term impact and refinement.

5.2 Teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching and assessment meets the standard for BSO. Most teaching is at least satisfactory, with nearly half judged as good or better.

Planning reflects UK curriculum expectations and is sequenced effectively to build on students' knowledge and skills. Where best practice is seen, teachers adapt their planning based on their assessment of students' current and prior learning, which is revisited at the start of most lessons. Lessons are well-structured, with clear learning objectives and differentiated outcomes that are shared with students.

Consistency in planning across all phases of the school is evident. Differentiation is planned for through the silver, gold and platinum model. In the best lessons, this is used to meet the needs of the students. For example, in a year 2 English lesson, students were appropriately grouped together, which allowed the teacher to scaffold the activity, breaking down complex concepts into manageable steps and providing appropriate support. However, this model does not always provide sufficient stretch and challenge for the most able or personalised support for students with SEND. Teachers across all phases provide a range of high-quality resources to support learning. Links are often made to UAE heritage and culture. In the best lessons, teaching assistants (TAs) are used effectively to support student learning, providing targeted support and reinforcing key concepts. However, this is not yet consistent. Teaching in Arabic is effective, with high expectations of the students and clearly differentiated tasks.

Teachers demonstrate strong subject knowledge and foster an environment where students are eager to learn. High quality displays and classroom environments celebrate success and reinforce key concepts, contributing to a positive and inclusive atmosphere. Displays around the classroom which are labelled as 'Working Walls' encourage students to interact with their environments and use them as stimulus to answer questions or reflect on what they have previously learnt. In the best lessons, a brisk pace keeps students engaged, with teachers effectively incorporating technology to enhance learning experiences. Students are well behaved, eager to learn and demonstrate respect for each other and their teachers. They respond well to opportunities to discuss or work together in pairs or groups, however, opportunities for collaborative work are limited.

In the best lessons, questioning is used effectively to develop understanding, challenge students and extend their thinking beyond basic recall. For example, in a FS2 mathematics lesson, students were asked to explore how many more they would need to make a set of 4. They represented their learning using *Numicon*, numbers and objects. However, in less effective lessons, activities are predominantly teacher-led with only a few students answering questions. Questioning is not yet regularly

used to challenge students and develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Further development of independent learning, collaboration and enquiry-based activities in lessons will support the pace of learning and provide opportunities for the students to develop their resilience and equip them for future challenges.

In EYFS, varied play-based learning opportunities were observed. Where continuous provision was the strongest, the children engaged in purposeful play for extended periods of time. For example, in a FS2 class, children were challenged to create words and sentences using the 'air' grapheme. Further enhancement of provision would ensure student engagement and sustained independent learning.

GFA demonstrates a strong commitment to inclusivity, providing opportunities for all students to make progress and flourish. A systematic identification process is used to identify and assess students with SEND, allowing for tailored interventions that address individual learning needs. The *Learner Pathway* is used to track intervention progress. For EAL students, *Flash Academy* and the *Bell Foundation* assessments are carried which evaluate students' proficiency levels and guide targeted interventions, as well as track their progress in English language development. The inclusion lead is always available to meet with parents and support teachers by providing guidance and resources.

Marking and feedback practices across the school are being established. In the best lessons, live marking provides timely feedback that moves learning forward. The use of stamps for rapid teacher and self-assessment, linked to silver, gold, and platinum outcomes, alongside the use of purple pens in KS3, provides a framework for assessment. While some books show evidence of next steps marking and verbal feedback, much of the marking is limited to ticks and praise, while meaningful marking, and student response to feedback remains inconsistent.

Assessment systems and processes are currently being developed across all key stages. Teachers use a combination of formative and summative assessments, standardised benchmarking tests, and student self-assessments. In EYFS, observational assessments track progress against learner profiles and are recorded on the *ARC pathway*. Phonics progress is tracked through *Phonics Passports* in KS1 and the UK phonics screener. Assessment trackers within books provide a reflection of student progress over time, supporting individual achievement. In KS3, markbooks are to record summative and formative assessment data, and termly data points to measure progress. Class context sheets reflect students' CAT4, NGRT and SEND data. Evidence of the interpretation and application of this data to adapt teaching was seen in the best lessons. Further development of the use of assessment, data analysis and progress tracking, will ensure assessment informs planning systematically and drives curriculum adaptation to meet the needs of all students.

5.3 Standards achieved by pupils

The standards achieved by students meet the BSO standard.

A comprehensive internal assessment framework has been implemented across all phases. Diagnostic baseline testing is well established using CAT4 and NGRT on entry, particularly supporting grouping decisions and early intervention in KS3. In EYFS and primary, phonics screening and internal benchmarking support the tracking of early literacy skills. *Pearson* and other standardised assessments are used to inform subject-level progress tracking, most notably in KS3.

Assessment data is collected in accordance with the school's assessment calendar and is stored and monitored using the *Phoenix* platform. While the structural model for assessment is now embedded, the consistent use and interpretation of this data to adapt the curriculum, teaching and track longitudinal progress is not yet fully embedded and varies across phases and departments.

As a new school, external summative assessment data points are not yet available to establish sustained progress over time. However, the school is proactively using available tools to evaluate academic development. Positive movement across *NGRT* bands, teacher observation, and *PASS* survey outcomes suggest that most students make expected or better progress from their starting points, particularly those with lower or variable baselines. Students' attainment and progress, based on internal data and classroom observation, are in line with UK expectations.

Moderation and quality assurance processes are developing. Book looks and team-based student progress meetings contribute to shared standards and professional dialogue. GFA has the advantage of internal cluster moderation activities. In the secondary phase, subject departments engage in comparative marking and collaborative moderation.

Lesson observations and work scrutiny indicate that students are making measurable academic progress. In primary, there is evidence of increasing writing stamina, enhanced vocabulary, and greater independence in task execution. Assessment for learning practices, including self-assessment and effective feedback strategies, are evident from KS1. While teachers monitor development against *CAT4* predictions, the systematic evaluation of trends and the documented impact of interventions require further embedding.

Behaviour across the school is calm and conducive to learning. Students are respectful, engaged, and exhibit consistently positive attitudes. Behaviour and engagement are monitored using *PASS*, alongside academic platforms such as

Century Tech are used strategically to identify and address learning gaps, particularly in mathematics. These systems contribute to a supportive academic culture.

Attendance and punctuality are centrally tracked using *Phoenix*. Attendance is stable and in line with UK norms. Behaviour data reflects improved trends, and the overall climate is one of courtesy, focus, and responsibility.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students meets the standard for BSO and is outstanding. It is woven coherently throughout the school's academic and pastoral systems, curricular and co-curricular programmes, and daily routines.

A strong sense of community, inclusion, and personal responsibility permeates school culture. Leaders across the school ensure that personal development is not only promoted explicitly through PSHE and enrichment but embedded deeply into every aspect of school life. Students demonstrate the ability to reflect on their own values, respect those of others, and participate meaningfully in a wide range of social and cultural experiences.

The school fosters an inclusive and respectful environment where students develop strong social skills and a sense of shared responsibility. Relationships between students and staff are warm, supportive, and underpinned by clearly communicated expectations and routines. Across phases, students exhibit positive behaviours, high levels of self-regulation, and mature interactions. Systems such as class focus sessions and the use of *Upstrive*, encourage students to check in emotionally, with rapid follow-up from the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and pastoral team when needed. The strength of pastoral care, underpinned by consistent use of systems like *Phoenix* and *GEMS Connect*, ensures that students are safe, heard, and supported.

Students take pride in their contributions to the school community. Leadership roles such as house captains, class representatives and student prefects provide meaningful opportunities for voice, representation, and improvement. Student voice is systematically gathered through regular class-led forums and shared directly with senior leaders. Students speak with enthusiasm and confidence about their experience of school life, frequently citing the kindness of peers, the accessibility of staff, and the sense of belonging they feel. One student described the school as: "A place where people smile," while another commented: "When I first visited, it felt like the school was calling my name."

Moral development is exceptionally well supported through the school's embedded values-based approach, the PSHE curriculum, and reinforcement through behaviour policies. Students show a clear understanding of right and wrong, and demonstrate empathy and maturity in their interactions. High expectations modelled by staff are reflected in students' behaviour. The school's robust approach to bullying is well understood by students and underpinned by consistent enforcement. Students confirm that they know how to access trusted adults, including the DSL, deputy DSLs, school counsellors, and safeguarding team, and that concerns are acted upon swiftly. Behaviour records and student reflections confirm this proactive culture. Students also demonstrate understanding of ethical issues such as misinformation, fairness, and inclusion in lessons observed, particularly in English and PSHE. Spiritual awareness is cultivated through a combination of reflection, values education, and structured opportunities for awe and wonder. Students are encouraged to reflect on their goals, emotions, and personal growth through the personal development programme

delivered via *Upstrive*. Opportunities for creative exploration are beginning to expand, and plans are in place to further integrate drama, art, and music across the curriculum. The school makes sensitive provision for students of all faiths and backgrounds, and incorporates reflection on shared and individual values within school celebrations, assemblies, and themed weeks. Students are encouraged to consider their actions in the context of wider ethical and societal issues. During the student meeting, several described the impact of character-building experiences such as Model United Nations (MUN), the sustainability challenge and leadership responsibilities.

Cultural development is a strength of the school, reflecting its vibrant, international community. Students learn to appreciate both British values and the cultural norms and heritage of the UAE. This dual identity is embraced by the school and celebrated through curriculum content, themed events, and ECAs. Events such as Ramadan service-learning Fridays, Emirati day of education, and international week promote understanding and mutual respect. Students speak confidently about the languages and traditions represented within their peer groups and show a strong appreciation for diversity. In one group meeting alone, students reported home languages including Arabic, Urdu, Polish, Tagalog, Marathi, and English, with students sharing how cultural heritage is valued within the school.

A wide range of enrichment opportunities is available, with increasing student participation across the academic year. Activities such as MUN, flight simulation, VR, and use of the maker space are not only enjoyed but also seen by students as academically relevant and intellectually enriching. The school continues to audit and expand opportunities to ensure accessibility and balance across all year groups and demographics. Participation data is monitored through *Phoenix*.

The provision for personal development is also supported strategically through clear policies, structured curriculum mapping, and leadership oversight. Senior leaders responsible for wellbeing, curriculum development, and community engagement collaborate closely to ensure PSHE is not confined to discrete lessons but reflected in everyday practice. Monitoring tools such as *PASS* surveys, behaviour logs, and attendance tracking enable leaders to triangulate data and make targeted interventions. Feedback from student voice, parent surveys, and internal quality assurance further affirms the strength of provision.

Overall, the school's approach to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is embedded, intentional, and impactful. Students emerge as thoughtful, respectful, and globally aware young people who demonstrate empathy and a commitment to personal and collective growth.

7. Standard 3

The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for welfare, health and safety is outstanding and meets the standard for BSO.

Welfare and safeguarding are high priorities at GFA. It is a key principle for everyone to be safe, as a result, the feeling of being cared for, being cared about, is one of the school's most prominent features. The school succeeds in this through a series of comprehensive and robust policies, such as the child protection and safeguarding policy and the health and safety policy. Policies are available, known and embedded in practice. Staff across the school speak knowledgeably about their safeguarding duties and can articulate the procedures for reporting concerns. The whole school community wears lanyards that carry a QR code, which give access to forms with which to anonymously report safeguarding concerns.

Safeguarding logs are securely and systematically maintained via the GEMS *Guard* platform. The school's commitment to safeguarding is reinforced structurally through a comprehensive training programme: all eight members of the senior leadership team (SLT), including both school counsellors, are trained to Level 3. Five administration staff and the school nurse are trained to Level 2, and all staff and governors complete annual Level 1 safeguarding training in English and Arabic. This extends to visiting staff, extracurricular providers and bus guardians, each of whom receives appropriate safeguarding induction and verification.

The culture of safeguarding is also promoted beyond the school gates. Safeguarding advice and information is shared in the weekly newsletter, regular parent coffee mornings address key welfare themes, and a dedicated safeguarding page on the website outlines procedures, contacts and policies for the wider community. These initiatives reflect the school's belief that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

The school's behaviour policy is clear and consistently applied. It is values-led, built around the core principles of respect, integrity, kindness and honesty (also the names of the school's four houses). It rewards positive behaviour, applies proportionate sanctions where necessary, and is reinforced through a structured pastoral programme. Behaviour incidents and positive conduct are tracked using *Phoenix Classroom*, and serious incidents are followed up with formal communication home.

The school has a zero tolerance of bullying approach: in the odd instance when it does occur, it is swiftly addressed. The school's anti-bullying policy is understood by students, who actively contribute to creating a friendly and inclusive environment. Events such as odd socks day and student-led assemblies reinforce the message that bullying is not tolerated and that everyone has a role to play in standing against it. Students report feeling safe, respected and heard. The school's student councils actively contribute to the community ethos, including the promotion of anti-bullying campaigns and peer-led awareness initiatives.

Mental health wellbeing is an integral part of GFA's approach to welfare. The school understands wellbeing as the precondition for learning, and considerable thought and resource have been directed toward ensuring students feel supported and emotionally

secure. The school makes intelligent use of digital tools to track and support mental wellbeing. Among these is *Upstrive*, an online platform that enables students to log and reflect on their daily emotions.

Two qualified counsellors operate across the school, forming part of the safeguarding and pastoral infrastructure. Their work is visible and proactive. They support students experiencing emotional difficulty but also play a wider role in shaping a school culture that values openness, resilience and self-awareness. The counsellors are part of the safeguarding team and work closely with SLT, form tutors and teachers to identify, monitor and support vulnerable students.

Health and safety procedures are both comprehensive and carefully monitored. The school conducts termly fire drills and at least one lockdown drill annually. The school holds a detailed emergency plan aligned with UAE law and ADEK expectations. Students are well supervised at all times, including during transitions, break times, and before and after school. Duty rotas are thorough and visible.

First aid provision is excellent. The on-site medical clinic is staffed by two trained nurses, and 26 staff are certified in level 1 first aid. A clear first aid policy governs procedures, and posters reinforce awareness across the school. All incidents are logged. Medicines are dispensed in line with UAE law. The clinic holds medicines for ad hoc use as well as those prescribed for specific students. In both cases they are administered with parental permission either by phone call (the former) or by written authorisation (the latter). All medicines are kept in locked cupboards outside the main treatment room.

Attendance is in line with UK norms, averaging 95% daily. Absences are followed up, on the first day by email and subsequently by phone. Persistent lateness triggers staged interventions as per the school's attendance and punctuality policy.

Risk assessments are rigorous. On-site hazards and potential hazards are reported using *HS Guard* and are dealt with on a timely basis. All trips and external visits undergo thorough checks, with accompanying staff well-briefed on site-specific risks. The trips and visits policy ensures consistency of approach, and all locations and activities are regularly reviewed for safety.

School transport is provided by Bright Bus Transport, an accredited provider subject to external inspection. The school employs bus guardians, all trained in safeguarding. Positive behaviour is promoted through a bus role model system, while incidents are logged and reviewed by both the bus supervisor and SLT. A bus behaviour policy sets clear expectations and outlines consequences for poor conduct.

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

The suitability of the proprietor and staff meets the standard for BSO: procedures are excellent.

Recruitment processes are rigorous and align fully with safer recruitment practices in the UK. All required safeguarding checks, including confirmation of identity, attestation of qualifications, references, police clearance, prohibition orders, medical fitness and the right to work in the UAE are completed before an offer of employment is confirmed. Leaders involved in recruitment have all received safeguarding training. All newly hired staff undertake a comprehensive induction aligned to British curriculum expectations and safeguarding protocols. Staff are made aware of school routines, practices and expectations, as well as cultural norms.

Ongoing performance management through the BlueSky platform helps staff identify their strengths and targets for improvement. Individual targets and school-wide priorities are supported through a range of continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities, which include *GEMS-U*, *National College*, and *National Professional Qualifications (NPQs)*, alongside in-house and cluster CPD. Structured support plans are put in place for teachers requiring additional guidance, with opportunities such as team teaching, peer observation, and recorded best practice videos facilitating improvement.

The Single Central Record (SCR), back up with hard copy personnel files, is comprehensive, meticulously maintained and reviewed regularly by the Principal and DSL, ensuring full compliance and oversight. The SCR includes governors and volunteers. There is no use of supply staff at GFA.

Classrooms are supported by collaborative teams of teachers and teaching assistants who are trained and developed to ensure continuity of provision and student support. A structure of middle leadership is emerging, supported by senior leaders through coaching and clear role delineation. Structures are in place for succession planning as the school continues to grow.

Governance is a strength. GEMS corporate governance has oversight of the school, working closely with the principal and SLT. The link governor has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and development priorities, which are linked to key performance targets collaboratively established with the principal. The local advisory board (LAB) consists of school leaders, teachers, parents, other education professionals, local business owners and students. The LAB acts as a critical friend, considering factors affecting the educational offer and student outcomes, whilst also helping to keep leaders informed at a grassroots level.

9. *Standard 5* The premises and accommodation

Premise and accommodation of the school meets the standard for BSO and is outstanding.

The school occupies a newly constructed, purpose-built campus with high-quality facilities that support the effective delivery of the curriculum. Specialist learning environments, including a well-equipped makerspace featuring green screens, flight simulators, a recording studio, and virtual-reality (VR) headsets, significantly enrich students' educational experiences. Classrooms benefit from natural light, are well ventilated and have effective sound-proofing. Provision for physical education and recreation is strong, with a range of well-maintained indoor and outdoor spaces. The premises are maintained to a high standard, providing a safe, hygienic environment and fully complying with all relevant local regulations.

Toilets and changing facilities fully meet BSO requirements and are of high standard; disabled toilets as well as ramps and lifts are strategically installed throughout the school to provide safe access for all. Water stations are widely available inside and outside the building. Everyone is encouraged to be plastic free, living up to the 'sustainnovation' philosophy.

Highly effective systems are in place to ensure the security of the grounds and premises, with 24/7 security detail, 365 days a year. The CCTV room is carefully managed with clear protocols to view footage managed by the head of security and principal. All staff, parents and visitors wear colour coded lanyards to access to the site; this is strictly enforced. Where appropriate, students have lanyards with access cards for bus transport and payments in the canteen. Access to sensitive areas of the school is managed with a card access system.

A well-resourced clinic is staffed by two full-time nurses, who provide support to students and staff. Separate treatment rooms for girls and boys include toilet facilities. A register of medical supplies is maintained. Medical waste is disposed of safely in a separate waste chemical room. Detailed records are kept of any health issues or allergies and shared with necessary staff. A log is kept of student visits to the clinic and parents are contacted as appropriate.

Across the school, displays in corridors and classrooms are colourful, well-presented and informative. Students' work is displayed and celebrated, while curriculum information and working walls support students' ongoing learning. The school vision and ethos are also widely displayed throughout the school along with the British values and British-linked themes around the corridors.

Plans for Phase 2 of the school are in place and early construction work is underway. The completion of this second building will further the outstanding facilities available for students and staff as enrolment moves into KS4 and 5.

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 meets that standard for BSO; it is outstanding.

The school makes available detailed and clear information through a range of formal channels. The website is professionally maintained and easy to navigate, giving families access to key policies on admissions, curriculum, inclusion, safeguarding and complaints. Parent handbooks are informative and well-pitched. The school also makes highly effective use of multiple digital platforms, including *Phoenix Classroom*, *GEMS Connect*, regular teacher emails, and social media, to provide timely updates and personalised information. Weekly newsletters are supplemented by departmental bulletins, ensuring that parents are well informed about academic expectations, pastoral matters and day-to-day school life.

However, what truly distinguishes GFA's provision is the personal quality of its communication with parents. As a relatively new school, GFA has deliberately adopted a philosophy of 'over-communicate' and 'proactively share', not only to inform, but to build trust. This is evident in the work of the school's parent relations executive (PRE) and front of house team. GFA also excels at celebrating success. Through email updates, newsletters, and curated content on *Instagram* and *Facebook*, student achievements are regularly shared with the wider community, which contributes to a culture of pride and positivity.

From structured opportunities like academic review days and Tuesday drop-in sessions, to something as simple as a phone call to check in on a student's wellbeing, communication is underpinned by care. Staff take time to listen, respond and guide, often going above and beyond formal expectations. This relational approach is valued by families: in the March 2024 parent survey, parents reported a high degree of satisfaction with the school's communication, and with the school as a whole. The 'Parent Progressive Partnership' (PPP) illustrates the school's commitment to communication and transparency. Parents are actively involved in shaping school life, organising cultural celebrations, hosting wellbeing workshops, and participating in classroom sessions. They are not spectators but contributors, and the school welcomes their voice.

Written academic reporting is via termly reports. These are comprehensive and supported by explanatory webinars to aid parental understanding. Reporting is based on the 'mastery' approach: 'working towards', 'working at' and 'working beyond'.

In all respects, the school's provision of information is exemplary. What makes it outstanding is not just the clarity or the range of platforms used, but the quality of human connection that underpins every interaction. GFA does not communicate to fulfil a requirement - it does so to build a community.

11. Standard 7

The school's procedure for handling complaints

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

The school's complaints policy is fully compliant with both UAE and British regulations. It is clearly articulated and readily accessible to all stakeholders via the school website and printed handbooks. It outlines a structured process for raising concerns or complaints, defines escalation pathways, timeframes and provides a framework for impartial resolution. The school distinguishes between concerns and complaints, recognising that early communication and proactive engagement are the most effective means of reducing conflict or dissatisfaction.

This commitment to communication is evident across the school. GFA does not simply wait for complaints to arise, it works to prevent them through deliberate, open and respectful interaction. The front of house team and PRE serve as the first points of contact for queries and concerns, and do so with warmth and professionalism. QR codes and suggestion boxes offer additional informal routes to give feedback and ensure no voice goes unheard.

All these elements have contributed to a school culture in which issues are routinely 'nipped in the bud'. The PPP also plays a key role in this effort. Not only does it support school events and workshops, but it also acts as a listening post and community advocate, helping to identify and resolve issues early through informal dialogue and support.

Where a formal complaint is made, the school follows a clear and well-managed escalation route, including referral to the GEMS senior vice-president for education and a panel hearing if required. An additional adult may support the complainant and all outcomes are communicated in writing. The process is confidential, timely, and professionally executed. All formal complaints are recorded in a secure complaints log, maintained by the PRE, which includes details of the complaint, those involved, actions taken, and the outcome.

Staff are well trained in effective communication with parents and are supported by the senior leadership team when concerns are raised. The emphasis is on empathy, responsiveness and maintaining positive relationships, even when the discussion is difficult.

Feedback from the March 2025 parent survey affirms the school's approach. The school received a strong net promoter score (NPS) of 50, and parental comments consistently referred to the school's accessibility, responsiveness and professionalism in handling issues. Parents feel heard, respected, and confident that the school will act promptly and appropriately.

12. Standard 8

Leadership and management of the school

The leadership and management of the school are good with outstanding elements, and meet the standard for BSO.

School leaders, under the visionary guidance of the principal, have rapidly established a school culture where students' wellbeing is the key priority. Safeguarding procedures are well-embedded and understood, with staff, students and parents aware that students' safety is everyone's responsibility.

Leaders have created a vision and values that are central to the school's ethos and are key pillars of school life. 'Sustainnovation' is evident in the school's net-zero philosophy and aims, as well as in the curriculum. Students are enthused and inspired by this, eager to make personal contributions in the challenge to find solutions to global problems.

Through the development of consistent practices and a programme of professional development and support, leaders are setting high expectations for teaching, learning and assessment, which they are now working to consolidate and embed. Leaders work with uniformity to evaluate strengths in provision and provide individualised support where needed. All staff work towards collaboratively agreed professional targets, based on school and personal professional priorities.

As the school grows, plans are being implemented to expand the leadership structure. Middle leaders have been identified, and through a programme of mentoring and support are being prepared to take on increasingly significant roles within the school. A model of distributed leadership will provide a robust framework for school development and ensure effective succession planning into the future.

Leaders have created a culture where relationships and clear communications are key. Staff feel that their contributions are valued. Students feel part of a caring community. Parents are involved in an ongoing two-way dialogue with teachers about their child's development, and comfortably raise any concerns they may have, confident of a rapid solution.

Governance, through the GEMS corporate board and LAB, provides high levels of support and challenge; the LAB, including representation from across the school and local community keeps school leaders informed from a grassroots level.

Leaders have put clear systems in place for all aspects of school operation and management. As a result, the school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Budgets are managed judiciously; resources are of a high quality and appropriate to the learning needs of students.