



GEMS CASE STUDY

SUMMARY: What constitutes this report?

GEMS Jumeirah Primary School (JPS) and Jumeirah College (JC) are both rated as outstanding institutions by Dubai's education body: the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA). They were two of only 16 schools in Dubai given the outstanding rating after the 2017 KHDA inspections. It is also worth noting that six of the 16 were GEMS institutions.

Both are private schools following the English National Curriculum and both have been nominated for and won several awards of excellence and achievement. However, the essence of the education a child receives at either one of these schools is not quantifiable only through league tables and exam results. The institutions have multi-cultural, multi-ethnic school populations to whom they offer a well-rounded education leaving them prepared for the ever-changing global world in more ways than with simple knowledge.

The purpose of this report is to exemplify what these two schools offer to a child both inside and outside of the classroom and how this is reflective of the four core values of the GEMS ideology:

- Leading through innovation
- Pursuing excellence
- Growing by learning
- Global citizenship

The report will map out key highlights of the primary and secondary systems as well as including student testimonials. The focus of this report is to offer a case study of the two interconnected schools and to map out the ways in which they bolster and support a child's personal and academic development. It is not to focus on teaching methods or the ways in which the curriculum is administered or adapted. This is neither an academic report nor a study made inside the classroom; it is a document aimed at illustrating the additional values a child will gain if he or she chooses a GEMS school and in particular, GEMS Jumeirah Primary School (JPS) and Jumeirah College (JC).

INTRODUCTION

Since opening in 1997 and 1999 respectively, both Jumeirah Primary School (JPS) and Jumeirah College (JC) have remained on the same site – street 19 in Jumeirah 1, Dubai – despite many other international schools moving to out of the city into newly developed desert areas. Therefore, they retain a sense of community to those who attend as well as those who live close by. This seemingly small detail should not be overlooked, as it reflects the kind of inclusivity that the two schools hold at their core.

JPS and JC are non-selective institutions, meaning that less than 1.5% of applicants are turned away for academic reasons and there is a strong emphasis on learning support for any students who might be struggling in a specific area, meaning that every child is allowed to blossom to their full potential under this system.

On the other end of the scale, gifted and talented students are also celebrated and the overall results for GSCEs and A-Levels for the entire college are still within the top 10% percent of results across the country.

Both schools are ranked as outstanding by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), which rate institutions on a variety of areas including inclusion and innovation as well as children's levels of attainment.

In 2017, both schools were awarded the title of one of the top schools in Dubai by Which School Advisor and SchoolCompared.com and JC was shortlisted for four British International School Awards highlighting exemplary levels of teaching, senior leadership and pastoral care. JC was also shortlisted by the Times Educational Supplement for International School of the Year. However, just as the definition of success varies for each individual, the staff at JPS and JC work hard to ensure the education system supports each student according to their needs. Rather than focus on a singular end result, such as an award or rating, they tailor-make plans for each pupil and work on enhancing their natural abilities. There is a heavy focus on student-led initiatives, meaning that they are encouraged to be in control and learn independent thinking and the innate philosophy within all the teaching methods is to encourage each child to be a leader in their own personal way.

The extra value added onto the standard academic education is summarised through an independent system called Active Learning Practice For Schools (ALPS). Alps is a simple, student focused system designed to support schools and colleges in ensuring their students make the best possible progress. It takes into account results, standards of teaching and progression and quantifies the value in a single score called a 'T score'. In this measure, Jumeirah College achieved a 1, which places the school at the very top of the 0-100% range of all schools tested. Such a result is the closest thing to illustrating how full a child's education is throughout JPS and JC. The rest of the report details some specific areas to demonstrate this further.

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The Early Years: Setting a foundation at Jumeirah Primary School (JPS)

Large sprawling outdoor play areas, bright artwork adorning the walls and pint-sized desks and work stations in primary colours are just a few of the visual elements characterising JPS. The overall atmosphere of the school is buzzing with energy and at first glance, most of the activities and lessons happening within the campus appear to be playful and fun. This is a place for children.

But despite the seemingly frivolous exterior, this is highly structured play and directed learning, meaning that without the children knowing it, they are receiving a vital and invaluable foundation to prepare them for senior education and far beyond into later life.

"The most important skills that we equip our children with are flexibility and creativity. We try to provide all children with a virtual tool box to assess each situation in front of them." **Rachel Higgins, Principal, Jumeirah Primary School**

Do It, Use It, Own It

At JPS, each child in every curriculum subject area is working towards what they call an 'own it' stage. This is the last stage of a tiered way of learning that begins with the 'do it' stage where the teacher guides a child through a particular process and they do it together. After this, a child reaches the 'use it' stage where they act on their own but with prompting and supervision and then finally, they are able to 'own it' – meaning that the child can use the skill independently of the teacher and in a different context. This is something established at the foundation stage in FS1, FS2 and continued right the way through to Year 6.

In order for the children to truly master the skills they have learned in every subject whether it be maths and science or PE, they must encounter situations where they can operate without the teacher. These are deliberately generated and are what the teaching staff call "mastery moments". Essentially, to the children it seems as if they are making free choices but in fact, they are acting in controlled situations manufactured to allow children to go deeper and master the skills they have learned.

This system contributes towards accelerated progress, because the new skill becomes embedded in a child's skill set so that their front learning memory is free to take on new learning in the following months and years.

“Every single stage of our education system is about depth and mastery. We don't accelerate our pupils' knowledge, we accelerate their understanding.”

Rachel Higgins, Principal, Jumeirah Primary School

Listening Well

For children in FS1, FS2 and Year 1 who are highlighted by their class teachers in terms of find it challenging to focus and concentrate in a busy auditory environment such as a classroom, JPS offers access to The Listening Programme. It is completed on the computer with headphones and is administered in the form of a daily lesson for a period of ten weeks. This is a level of detail given right from the start of a child's education that can greatly benefit them in years to come.

Finding a Natural Base Line

In October of Years 4,5 and 6, a child is required to take a Cognitive Abilities Test (CAT4). It a diagnostic assessment that is designed to help students and their teachers understand how each child learns and what their academic potential might be. It assesses how students think in areas that are known to make a difference to learning. There is no reference to curriculum-based material nor of previous achievements or language. The test assesses four distinct areas of learning: verbal, non-verbal, mathematical and spatial and allows teachers to address patterns and to adapt teaching methods to suit individual needs, ensuring feedback is appropriate and targets are achievable.

This is standardised information accessible across schools but JPS takes an active lead with this information and celebrates each child for their own areas of strength.

Inclusion

JPS is equipped with one of the most advanced inclusion units in all private schools in Dubai. It was established in 1997 at the same time as the school and has been working with enriching a child's way of learning ever since.

The inclusion department includes a Dyslexia Unit which offers literary support for all children with a diagnosis of dyslexia and those that show weakness in this area on their CAT scores. The unit also covers dyscalculia, dyspraxia, autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and many other forms of learning difficulties.

Support comes in different forms: one-on-one lessons with a specific therapist; group lessons; learning support assistants inside the class room. As all of this is collated in one particular department of the school, the students can get the best care as different professionals can talk and confer with each other.

Crucially, there is generalised group learning support for all children in the school to boost whatever their skills are and to level out their weaknesses.

For gifted and talented students, there is also an enrichment department that supports high attaining children. Children are identified through their teacher assessment, CAT4 results and progress test scores. According to these results, group lessons will be set up in particular subjects such as maths, English or science to challenge these children further.

Groups remain fluid as it is important to give as much opportunity to as many children as possible. Children also have support when preparing for a particular competition such as the World Scholar's Cup - an international team academic program that challenges areas such as debating, writing and general knowledge.

Outside of the Classroom: After School Activities and General Well being

The majority of extra-curricular activities at JPS are led by teachers in subjects ranging from chess to science to a variety of sports. There are also optional classes in scores of specialities such as robotics, languages, music, swimming, gymnastics, dance, cross fit and parkour. Each child from Years 1-6 can sign up for one teacher led after school activity a week and from Year 3-6 there is the option of an extra activity. There is also squad training for the sports teams.

Outside of these activities, the school has a wellbeing department with two psychologists on hand to support children's pastoral needs as well as to offer parents help and advice. They organise regular seminars for parents on subjects such as creating a positive home environment or tackling problems such as bullying or peer pressure.

Sixth Formers from Jumeirah College also take part in regular activities with the primary children. This can be reading or maths support and is a great way to establish role models from the secondary school, which allows the younger children something to aspire to.

"Ours is an ever-evolving curriculum for an ever-evolving student. The general concept of our school is ensuring that all children are successful today and prepared for tomorrow."

Rachel Higgins, Principal, Jumeirah Primary School

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Growing Up: Making the Transition to Senior School

As a child enters Year 3, the second stage of primary learning begins. By the age of six years old, thanks to CAT4 testing and the kind of specialised education that JPS offers, it is clear where a child's innate skills lay. Rather than focusing on weaknesses, JPS celebrates the strength of every child and also tries to elevate the weak areas.

The inclusion department will begin to put together a file on each child in preparation for transition to senior school.

Those with identifiable special needs will be given specialised tuition and by the time a child reaches Year 6 and they are ready to take the entrance assessments for Jumeriah College, the teachers are fully aware of the child's profile.

Before a child graduates from the primary system, the inclusion team at JPS will discuss the results of every child with the parallel team at JC, giving them the best start at secondary school. Last year 95% of the children who left Year 6 with identified additional needs, made average or above average progress thanks to this level of expertise.

Furthermore, there are measures taken to make the transition as smooth as possible. Settling in days are allocated for the children going into Year 7 and, thanks to continued interaction with older children from the secondary school, most primary age children have an idea of what to expect from their new school.

"Our job as primary educators is to put the children in the best place possible to make that transition to secondary and access the secondary curriculum."

Sue Padmore, Head of Inclusion, Jumeirah Primary School

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Senior School: Preparing for a Life of Hard Work at Jumeirah College

The most important things that a student should have access to when graduating from secondary school are choices. They should feel empowered when choosing a career and motivated to make the best from their lives whilst simultaneously feeling unconstrained by the expectations of others. The education system at JC is geared specifically towards this holistic goal and is underlined by the school vision statement:

A vibrant learning community, nurturing happy, confident and accomplished students who, through a commitment to academic and personal excellence, progress beyond limits.

As soon as a child enters Year 7, they are expected to take responsibility for themselves and a certain level of maturity is required. Lateness is not tolerated and neither is a lack of personal care – shirts must be tucked in, hair tied back and politeness is expected at all times. However, these rules are fulfilled by the general ethos of the school, where such levels of behaviour are the norm and so pupils follow suit.

This also translates into the way students learn. Much as in the junior school, pupils know at what stage they are in within their learning progress, students in the senior school also have an understanding of what and why they are learning.

Caoimhe Sexton, the head girl at Jumeriah College in the 2017/2018 year was able to articulate what this means. “The way subjects are being taught is different nowadays,” she said. “It is not just about handing over information for regurgitation in an exam, it is about being able to look at information and contextualise it and then evaluate and analyse it. This way, we are able to train ourselves to be able to take on new activities and do them independently. As you progress through the school picking up new skills is quicker and easier and you find yourself way more equipped for GCSE’s and A Levels. Then, you are much better prepared for university.”

A Tailor-made Education

Whilst exam results are important, education at JC is not about ticking boxes. From the new starters in Year 7 all the way through to the graduates in Year 13, a deep understanding is promoted and, wherever possible, the education system works around the pupil to enhance their skills and to meet specific needs.

This begins at JPS when the CAT4 test results are assessed and at JC, in Year 7, students undergo a happiness survey, looking at students’ attitudes and how they feel about school. Each form tutor and subject tutor will then have a clear idea of the way every child learns as well as their outlook. There are also checks made on academic progress every half a term and any anomalies are identified.

There is a Support for Learning (SFL) Department at JC, where this data is analysed. If a student is struggling in an area then support will be offered, be it through the form teacher or through the academic or pastoral system. Even if they are classed as gifted and talented but falling behind in one subject, the SFL department will work with the teacher and see what can be put in place. Under this department all children are given help where seen fit and regardless of their academic level of progress – this is the very definition of an inclusive education.

“The purpose of education is not solely to get high grades. The purpose of education is to equip students with options so that when they leave school they have a foundation of knowledge and a skill set to guide them through the rest of their lives and they will continue to grow and learn.”

Simon O’Connor, Principal, Jumeirah College

Pastoral Care

During school term, students spend more time with their teachers and fellow class mates than they do with their parents and care-givers. This is not a responsibility taken lightly. Louise Rodger, vice principal of Jumeirah College and head of pastoral care ensures that an extra level of care is

extended to all students by providing a network of counsellors, psychologists and wellbeing co-ordinators as well as liaising with form tutors to provide relevant information.

There are regular social skills classes where each year group is given suitable tuition in subjects ranging from reading support, mentoring or how to deal with exam stress. They work hard to make sure every student is happy and there are measures in place to combat bullying or misbehaviour. In Year 13, to prepare them for university, the Sixth Formers are given life skill lessons. They learn skills such as:

- Changing tyres
- Laundry (how not to mix colours)
- Putting a duvet cover on
- Fire safety
- Cooking
- Coping with finance
- Making friends and keeping them

“Teachers are no longer just teachers of academics and knowledge; we work hard alongside the students to give them the best start in life.”

Louise Rodger, Vice Principal and Head of Pastoral Care, Jumeirah College

Outside of the Classroom: The Student Body

The range of extra-curricular activities at JC could keep a child busy from the early morning before school starts, throughout lunchtime and well into the time after school lessons have finished.

There are sports teams, drama groups, choirs, language clubs, science and maths organisations and societies ranging in subjects as far apart as economic trading and chess. Despite having limited sports facilities, JC has regular sports teams competing and holding their own against the best in the city and a wide range of student led activities such as talent shows, theatre productions and even beauty pageants.

The largest after-school club is the Charity Committee headed up by a member of the Sixth Form. Every month, its members adopt a cause and find ways to raise funds and awareness for that cause. They organise events from scratch, securing funding and participation and donate any proceeds to a given charity.

Importantly, the student body has direct contact with the school principal through the student council, which meets every two weeks with members from each year group. The head boys and girls then pass on suggestions, complaints and possible solutions to the principal and teaching staff, meaning that students play an active and valued role in the way the school functions and how they experience their daily life. This is the kind of mutual respect that fosters mature young adults and allows them to take control of their futures in a world that can otherwise be laced with uncertainty.

“School has been an opportunity to find out who I am and to grow as an individual. JC has given me so many options to explore and it has also taught me that I am the best person to make decisions about my future. I personally feel if I went to a different school I would be in a completely different place now.”

Alex Said, Head Boy, Jumeirah College (2017/18)



Preparing for University: Q&A with Amanda Jewell, Careers Advisor, Jumeirah College.

When do you start the process of careers advice?

We begin as early as Year 8, when the children do a ‘go-to-work-with-a-parent’ day and this starts them thinking about skills and behaviour needed for the professional world.

Are there activities in place every year to guide them?

Yes, of course. By Year 9, they start to choose GSCE options and we do a big careers evening where I bring in 25 employers from different backgrounds to give short talks about the route they took in their career. The students can talk freely and ask any questions they want.

In Year 10, they secure themselves a week's work experience placement by writing a CV and putting out speculative letters and phone calls and in Year 11, they each get an interview with me to talk about skills aptitude and they go away with an action plan for Sixth Form and beyond.

How do you make sure they get the best from their work experience?

We try to visit them all on their work experience or at least call. We also ensure they all make a daily diary, which the students turn into a presentation for the rest of their form. The best presentations are selected for the school assembly, giving them a sense of motivation.

How does careers advice work throughout Sixth Form?

Students can drop in and ask my advice whenever they want. They ask about university options, apprenticeships or gap years and we talk about their future plans. I also bring in speakers from different universities to try to ensure that they are well informed.

What is the one key piece of advice you give to a student?

I always tell them to do a degree that they love, because 60% will end up studying for a degree that has nothing to do with the career they end up in afterwards.

Do you try to address the constantly changing job market?

This is one of the most important parts of my job. I do a lot of reading and try to give talks about new ways of working such as the gig economy; which was my most recent presentation. I also do a monthly newsletter about where the jobs are emerging from and where jobs are being overtaken by technology. I try and talk about supply and demand.

Do you ever advise students against their choices?

I will always say if I believe a student is applying for something that is not suited to them either academically or according to their skills. I will often talk to the parents too, if that is the case and explain other options. I still always let them know that this is ultimately their decision.

Have you ever had a student with no offers from university?

Not in 11 years of working at JC. This is because, it is vital to be realistic with expectations. Also, it is important to remember that if you choose the right degree, then getting really high results is not always necessary. With good advice, you can go on to a great career.



Success Stories: Alumni Testimonials

Mark Matthews. Started in Jumeirah College when it was also a primary school then moved to JPS when the building opened. Left GEMS from year 3 – 6 and then returned to JC for his entire secondary education Years 7 – 13. He graduated in 2016 with three A-Levels: Applied Business Studies (B); ICT (C); and Drama and Theatre Studies (B). He is currently Head of 2nd Year BA (Hons) Creative Lighting Control at London's International Drama School.

He says: "Jumeirah College has a very positive and secure environment which allowed me to explore areas and skills which I never thought I would be able to do and, and excel in my studies whilst being there. Jumeirah College provided me with the experience and connections in Dubai to be able to seek placements and networking whilst studying there.

Being a student with Dyslexia and doing A-Level Drama was not an easy task with all the essays and reading. However, Miss Gemma Thornley, who was my Drama Teacher for A-Level and my GCSE English Teacher spent a lot of time with me and created a secure working environment, which allowed me to succeed in my A-Levels and to pursue my passion for lighting.”

Milli Midwood. Started JC in Year 7 and left after the end of Year 13 (class of 2010). She was active in music and art activities and graduated with three A-Levels: Art (A); Psychology (B); English (B). She now has her own creative content company in Dubai.

She says: “Some of the best years of my life were spent at school. When I graduated in 2010, I moved to Liverpool to study psychology. After just one term, I realised I had made a big mistake and moved back to Dubai with absolutely no plans or idea of what I wanted to do. I felt defeated, unmotivated and bit of a failure. One trip to JC to chat to my old tutors soon changed that. My art teacher reminded me of my passion for creating, my English teacher reminded me of my passion for storytelling, my music teacher reminded me of my love for performing and presenting and my careers adviser reminded me that starting again doesn't mean you've failed. With the help of all my teachers, I reapplied through UCAS and received an unconditional letter to study Fine Art at the University of Kent, where I went on to find my real creative passion and get my dream job. I now work in fashion where I write and present/host - all thanks to the skills I picked up in my A Level subjects.

None of this would have been possible without the sheer amount of support and positivity I received from the school. I am still in touch with all my old teachers and I visit the school regularly to meet the new students and offer any guidance I can.

I have never been particularly 'academic' - numbers and equations are a foreign language that I've never been able to get my head around, so one of the things I'm most thankful for at JC is their ability to nurture and enrich my creativity. There can be quite a stigma around subjects like art, but the school really helped me find my way and I couldn't be happier with where I'm at now.”

Fady Anis. Started at JPS in Year 5 and continued into JC until the end of year 13, graduating in 2014. He graduated with four A Levels: Chemistry (A); Physics (A); Maths (A); Biology (A); and two AS Levels: Further Maths (A); EPQ (B). He was awarded an Academic Excellence Award for his AS Level grades. He graduated with First Class Honours in medical science, taking him half way through his medicine degree at Nottingham University.

He says: “There is a culture within Jumeirah College that ensures students are pushed to their limits academically. The school possesses a flexible system by which students who perform well in exams are encouraged to sit additional GCSEs & A levels at an earlier stage. These opportunities undoubtedly made my application to university more competitive helping me receive an offer to study medicine.

I am most grateful for the support I received during the university application process. The school organised mock interviews and also advised me on an infinite number of personal statement drafts to ensure that the application we sent off was perfect.

“Reflecting on my school experience has made me appreciate that the diligence expected from students at Jumeirah College contributes to the discipline I have towards my university studies (an essential quality when balancing university life) and as a result I have high expectations of what I can achieve and therefore set myself challenging goals.”

Bethan Phipps. Started at JC in Year 5 and graduated at the end of year 13 in 2009 with three A-Levels: Psychology (B); Art (B) ; Biology (C). She was the head of the Arts, Drama and Music in her final year and went on to graduate in Masters of Chiropractic in 2014. Since, she moved to the Netherlands, learnt Dutch and started her own chiropractic practice with her partner.

She says: “The education at Jumeirah College has given me a steadfast foundation in my pursuing my career. JC not only provided me with world class education but the array of extra-curricular activities on offer provide students with a well-rounded experience. The staff/student relationship is one of mutual respect and maturity, which invites great support, confidence and continual self-development.

In the university/UCAS process, the staff at JC provided support and direction and supported my choice in career. They also gave me the opportunity to have a mock medical interview to prepare me for the university interview process.

Even 8 years on, GEMs education and core values have resonated through my career and will continue to do so.”

IN CONCLUSION

The overwhelming factor uniting each student, teacher and parent at the two schools in this case-study is that they are all working to the same goal. It is only natural that a parent wants the best for their child and that this concern would extend not just to knowledge and academic education but also in the social skillset picked up at school as well as confidence and ability to make sound judgements. However, it is clear from this report that the teachers also have this level of concern for the children placed under their care and the system supports them.

Crucially, the children themselves understand the process of their own education. Right from the outset, they are given the language and vocabulary to be able to express what they are learning and why. As they progress, this allows them to take stock of the education system in which they are in and allow them to assess the impact of it upon their characters and choices. This kind of self-reflection is an invaluable tool for later life and will affect every future relationship they have, whether personal or professional.

Outside of the classroom, extra opportunities are offered at every turn, meaning that a child at Jumeirah Primary School and / or Jumeirah College, will be an active member of the school's society and therefore be invested in their own future.

Measures are put in place to support children who need help in learning as well as to challenge those who are gifted in certain subjects and there is a level of pastoral care that seems almost parental in responsibility.

Parents of children at the two schools witness their children growing emotionally and academically before their eyes and feel able to entrust part of this process to the institutions, knowing that when they send their child off to school in the morning, they are sending them one more step forward into what will hopefully be a successful journey of life.

The results of this system are well-rounded, knowledgeable and sensible students who are equipped to enter adulthood with the foresight and maturity needed to ensure the best possible outcome in whatever decision they make.

By Anna Seaman