

# *Emirates International School*

## *AFG Mid-Point Written Report*

### **I. Introductory Comments**

The *Accreditation for Growth (AFG)* process is a five to seven-year accreditation protocol available to the member institutions of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. Focusing on a preferred vision of the future, *AFG* utilizes a strategic planning model to ask institutions to develop two to four measurable student performance objectives as the lynchpin of an assessment of growth in school improvement. The process requires institutions to establish a planning ethic, develop a five to seven-year strategic plan, and meet established standards. Committing to *AFG*, **Emirates International School** has agreed to the following:

- 1) It has committed to focusing on the end result—improved student performance—as the priority for school improvement efforts.
- 2) It has committed to operating from a vision of where it wants and needs to go with the mission and beliefs serving as a unifying force for change.
- 3) It has committed to including a varied spectrum of stakeholders in the process of continually defining a preferred vision, in developing the means to get closer to that vision, and in implementing action plans developed by these stakeholders.
- 4) It has committed to a process where progress will be continuously reviewed.
- 5) It has agreed to participate in a peer review and external validation process by accepting outside visitors.

Developed by the Commission on Secondary Schools (CSS), *AFG* requires institutions who have committed to *AFG* to be visited every seven years by a team of volunteer educators acting as critical friends to validate the institution's plan and to assure that standards are being met. At the two and one half year mark in the seven-year cycle, a one person, one-day visit is arranged to review the institution's progress. The Mid-Point Reviewer is specifically charged with examining:

- ◆ the continued wide-spread acceptance of the plan
- ◆ the culture of planning and review that indicates that the school has been critical and reflective about its progress
- ◆ The projected ability of the school to meet its accreditation obligations within the cycle

The Mid-Point Reviewer to **Emirates International School** spent approximately ten hours discussing the current status of the school's *AFG* plan with staff, administrators, and students. Although the visit was brief, the Reviewer interacted with over forty individuals who were able to demonstrate the commitment of the school to its strategic plan and the role it plays in the continuous progress toward improved student performance. Indeed the Reviewer was impressed with the degree to which staff and parents were committed to the accreditation process, and with

the improvement in the action plans to meet the three stated objectives over the seven year period.

## **II. Context of Emirates International School**

Emirates International School – Jumeriah was established in 1991 as a private proprietary school owned by the Al Habtoor family, prominent in Dubai. Dubai is one of the seven emirates which make up the United Arab Emirates. Dubai is considered the commercial and financial center of the UAE. The school climate of EIS-J reflects the cosmopolitan and international composition of Dubai as a whole.

EIS-Jumeirah is situated on 12 acres in a well developed residential area of Dubai, in the shadow of the Burj-Al Arab. The school incorporates grade levels from primary through grade 13. The buildings are one or two story structures with some green space, a swimming pool, two large playing fields, covered walkways, and shade trees. Primary classrooms are grouped together for easy teaming and communication among the teachers. The Primary/Junior School has its own library, two computer labs, playgrounds, a grass field, and sports facilities.

The Secondary School consists of six buildings. Recently one of these buildings has become a center for grade 12 and grade 13 students in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program. Facilities also include a full sized gym, ten science labs with four preparation areas, six computer labs, a language lab, a grass sports field, a 650 seat theater, rooms for music and drama, plus a food science kitchen.

The school is staffed with 223 teachers and 43 administrative positions for 1700 students from Kindergarten through Grade 13. This student body is remarkably diverse, representing over 82 different countries. The school has a new director, Ms. Amna Al Habtoor, who represents the Al Habtoor family and who also serves as a member of senior management. Ms. Marianne Deacon, Principal of the Primary/Junior School, also the AFG Internal Coordinator, has a 13 year tenure there while the High School Principal, Mr. Jason Kirwin, began his duties in April, 2007. The teaching staff is well qualified and for the most part experienced, and represents more than 55 different countries. Staff turnover is quite low for the region. The administrative teams for both sections are strong and united in their vision for EIS-J.

Emirates International School-Jumeirah is an associate member of the Near East/South Asia Council of Overseas Schools (NESA), the European Council of International Schools (ECIS), and British Schools in the Middle East (BSME). EIS-J is a founding member of the Middle East International Baccalaureate Organization (IB) and the International Primary Curriculum (IPC).

When established in 1991, EIS-Jumeirah determined to be the first truly international school in Dubai to focus on preparing both local and expatriate students for university admissions abroad. Their mission statement is to “provide a broad international education, in English, designed for local and expatriate students that promotes excellence in all academic activities. It is our mission to enhance the educational, social and physical development of our students encouraging them to think analytically and creatively in preparation for the next stage of their education.” Despite increasing competition from other local schools, EIS-J has maintained its student numbers and its strong reputation in the community.

As a result of growing student enrollment, the school recently (September, 2005) opened Emirates International School – Meadows for 1200 children from KG 2 to Grade 10. An attempt to provide a “Girls only” branch of Jumeirah in November, 2004 was disbanded due to low enrollment. These efforts demonstrate EIS-J’s ongoing commitment to be responsive to the perceived needs of the community. The Primary and Junior sections at EIS-J are currently at capacity, with the High School section nearing capacity.

The Primary/Junior School serves students from KG2 to Grade 6 and has implemented the International Primary Curriculum (IPC) since 2001 – a groundbreaking move as the curriculum was brand new at that time. The IPC continues to be widely regarded and is a recruitment tool for the earlier grades. In Grades 7 – 9 students study an internationally designed program in preparation for the rigors to come. Students in Grades 10 and 11 follow the Edexcel International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), and the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses which culminate with examinations in Grade 11. All students then go on to take the two year International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IB DP), selecting either the Certificate or Diploma courses. The IB DP is a comprehensive and challenging pre-university curriculum. The Reviewer saw significant evidence that EIS- J “provides a safe yet challenging environment that develops in students an inter-cultural sensitivity, and a responsibility towards the people and environment of our local and global community.”

In keeping with the school’s mission to “enhance the social and physical development of the students” EIS-J provides an array of extra-curricular activities. These include sporting activities as well as dramatic and creative arts. Physical education and music classes are compulsory twice per week in grades KG through 9. Students study Arabic five times per week with an additional two lessons per week for native Arabic speakers. After school activities are widely available, offered by qualified staff members.

Because EIS-J is a proprietary school, indeed “a Community Service of Al Habtoor Group,” a strong working relationship with the Al Habtoor family is essential to the school’s success. The newly appointed school Director appears committed to ensuring that the school has the financial resources needed to achieve its long range goals. Mr. Pradeep Kumar, Manager of Finance and Administration, is kept apprised of the school’s necessary financial outlay in order to continue to provide the highest quality of educational excellence. Principals and Senior Management meet weekly to improve communication and share information on the school’s day to day operation and vision.

In meeting with representative staff members during the visit, the Reviewer found a thorough understanding of the AFG process, and shared ownership in achieving the stated objectives in the next four years. Teachers for the most part felt listened to, supported, and excited by the challenge of reaching the benchmarks each year. Statements indicated that the AFG process has given EIS-J a shared focus for improvement. While the parent community was not necessarily aware of each component of the AFG process, all knew that the school was accredited and working toward improvement in specific areas. The strong and consistent AFG leadership since 2001 has been a key factor in this culture/enthusiasm.

### III. Mid Point Review Checklist

The Mid Point Reviewer examined evidence that Emirates International School – Jumeirah has:

COMPONENT	Limited/No Evidence	Sufficient/Some Evidence	Satisfactory Evidence	Exceptional Evidence
<b>Planning</b>				
A committee or team representative of the school's stakeholders continues to oversee, review, and make decisions about the strategic plan for school improvement.				X
Key individual(s) are in place to ensure the continuing process, and are successful in fostering that culture of planning.				X
Documentation exists that illustrates how the plan has been reviewed at least annually.				X
A general understanding of the planning process and plan is found among the members of the school community.			X	

Summary:

**Is there a viable internal monitoring process that has put an accountability system in place for monitoring accomplishment of the action plans?**

The chronology of planning events from 2004 on at EIS-J is very thorough and reflects the school's accountability in achieving its objectives. The Planning Team at EIS-J, made up of approximately 16 diverse stakeholders, responsibly oversees the school's strategic plan and progress toward each objective. The Planning Team meets twice monthly; the Action Teams also meet monthly and appear to represent a shared vision and focus for the staff. The fact that the Internal Coordinator has been consistent during the original and continuing AFG process has been an enormous impetus to ongoing improvement. Although students were a little less clear on what the objectives were, all knew that the school was accredited, was working hard to improve, and they were appreciative of the changes that had been made. Parents and staff were unanimously aware of the AFG process and felt that it had led to improved student learning and greater transparency in the operation of the school. It is recommended that the action plans and the annual reviews are shared more widely with stakeholders, such as the parents and the governing board.

**Has the annual review process provided continuous evaluation and a dynamic process that shows flexibility in modifying action plans?**

The annual review process has been diligently performed, with evaluation of progress and areas of needed improvement focused upon. The annual reviews narratives are a bit perfunctory and narratives on each objective are written by the Action Plan Teams rather than one person, each with a slightly different style and format. While the work clearly has been done, the annual reports do not adequately give the "whole picture" or celebrate progress made. Parents interviewed were unaware that such a report took place, although the staff were keenly aware of

it. Nevertheless, the annual reports have led to significant modifications in both the format and substance of the action plans, which have become more targeted and specific with each successive year. It is recommended that the annual reviews, rather than being objective specific, be a more consolidated document, incorporating general statements about the climate of the school, changing demographics, and staffing, as well as providing objective specific narratives regarding progress or regress on each objective.

COMPONENT	Limited/No Evidence	Sufficient/Some Evidence	Satisfactory Evidence	Exceptional Evidence
<b>Content of Plan</b>				
Growth in student performance as shown by measurable student performance objectives is evident.			x	
The objectives remain the primary focus for improvement in student performance with significant changes occurring only after consultation with Middle States.				x
Action plans have been updated to reflect more detail in the latter half of the 7 year cycle.				x
<p>Summary:</p> <p><b>Are school improvement plans aimed at student learning, student performance, and student results?</b></p> <p>EIS-J is proud of the fact that since their re-accreditation in 2004, they have implemented many of the recommendations made by the Validation Team at that time. While some of these recommendations had to do with facilities, or staffing in general, some of the more significant improvements which will directly impact student learning are expansion of library resources and personnel, improved technology throughout the school, and adoption of additional curricula such as the Personal Development Program in the Primary/Junior section, and a renewed focus on the EIS Award Programme with additional staff, energy, and resources.</p> <p>The evolution of the action plans at EIS-J is quite dramatic, with the current plans incorporating (rightly so) a timeline, person(s) responsible, indicators of success, and resources necessary. Staff members report having felt heard in making recommendations to change or enhance the action plans. It was evident to the Reviewer that all staff are committed and feel a shared responsibility to participate in the action plans.</p>				

COMPONENT	Limited/No Evidence	Sufficient/Some Evidence	Satisfactory Evidence	Exceptional Evidence
<b>Organizational Growth</b>				
EIS-J is using data to inform its decision making regarding its plan for school improvement.				x
Appropriate changes to members of the committees have been made to reflect changes in the school's structure, personnel etc.			x	
EIS-J has committed the resources (human, monetary etc.) necessary for successful implementation of the plan.			x	
The planning process, as well as the plan, is evaluated through the annual review.				x

Summary:

**Is a culture of planning evident as shown by development of long-term strategic action plans that integrate programs, services, facilities, and support to address growth needs?**

EIS-J has done an excellent job of data collection and analysis since 2004. Breaking the reading objective action plans into specific grade levels shows commitment to integrating programs, services, facilities and support to achieve this objective. The changing demographics of the school, with increasing numbers of students being non-native English speakers, and how this could possibly negatively impact achievement of anticipated improved performance will need to be addressed in the 2007 and subsequent years' action plans. New staff are introduced to the AFG process upon hiring, and are expected to "get on board" with the action plans. Additional professional development days would be helpful to ensure successful implementation of the plans. Professional growth opportunities for staff through attendance at conferences and training to use new teaching strategies such as guided reading, or teaching EAL students, will also be key. An example of the school's planning process, and how it uses data to improve student learning is provided via the substantial revision of Objective 2's Action Plans in 2006 to more accurately reflect both progress made and steps still required to achieve this goal. Since EIS-J is currently at capacity in terms of student numbers, a strategic plan to maximize campus facilities will need immediate attention.

**Is there a climate of inclusiveness with evidence of continued involvement and collaboration of stakeholders in the planning process?**

There is no question that EIS-J staff members are involved with and have ownership of the AFG planning process. Parents that this reviewer met with indicated knowledge of accreditation and, in fact, stated that it was one of the reasons their children were enrolled. They noted significant positive changes in the school, but were unclear how these changes related to the AFG process or about the specific objectives. They appreciated the improved staff access via email, and the school's greater efforts at communication noted in the past year. Steps that the school has taken

to invite stakeholders to be involved, such as newsletters, email notices, and the webpage are commendable.

#### **IV. Mid-Point Review Objectives Narrative Review**

In November, 2004, EIS - Jumeirah was visited by a team of five educators representing MSA for re-accreditation. EIS - Jumeirah was successful in gaining re-accreditation for a further seven years. The Team reported a successful process in place for planning and commended the school on developing three objectives that were in keeping with the mission and beliefs of the school. As part of their process the school continued both Action Plan Teams and Implementation Teams to enable the school to reach these objectives. The Reviewer found evidence of a commitment to planning and improved student performance as measured by the following objectives.

##### **Objective 1: Reading in the Primary and Junior School**

By the year 2011, 100% of Emirates International School Grade 1 to 5 students will demonstrate improved reading skills as measured by:

- a) An increase of 12 months in reading ages between September and May each academic year as measured by the Suffolk Reading Test [External Assessment].
- b) An increase of 100% in the number of students attaining over 80% in the Emirates International School Bi-annual Comprehension Test.
- c) An annual increase in at least three \*Ginn Reading Levels for each Primary student as recorded by the teacher Reading Records. [\*Ginn is a graded Reading Scheme].
- d) A 10% increase in the number of students in the Junior School achieving Gold and Silver library awards each academic year. [This is a Junior School reading incentive scheme operated in the library].
- e) A 5 % improvement in the number of parent responses to the “Annual Parent Survey” on the reading programme.

Progress toward this first objective for students in grades 2 through 6 has been inconsistent. The Implementation Team has analyzed the data over the past three years and has documentation to assist this analysis. Reasons given for the inconsistent results are an increase in non-native English speakers in the lower grades, and an increase in Arabic speaking students in the upper grades, for whom English is not the home language. The team is addressing these concerns by the implementation of a guided reading program, improved EAL support, modification of the required book report to prove a student is reading to achieve reading awards, and consideration of better ways to administer the Reading Comprehension Test. The Reviewer recommends that EIS-J continue to provide evidence of growth and improvement in a given year, so that even if the objective is not attained in 2011, demonstrable progress from September to May will be available. The changing demographics at EIS-J will no doubt continue to be a formidable challenge to the achievement of this objective.

## **Objective 2: International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme**

By the year 2011, Emirates International School-Jumeirah graduates will demonstrate excellent intellectual, social and critical perspective as measured by:

- a) 85% of graduates (Diploma and Certificate) will achieve a total score of 30 points or above.
- b) 85% of graduates will complete the Diploma.

The annual review process analyzed results on this objective over the past nine examination periods. Regarding Objective 2a), in May, 2006, 64% of the students scored 30 points or higher on the IBDP; in May, 2007, 45% scored 30 points or higher. The Implementation Team suggests that this significant drop is as a result of the changing demographics of the school. While this may be the case, it is suggested that the Implementation Team take proactive steps to address this, either by imposing more stringent selection criteria or enhancing the program to ensure greater student achievement. Additional staffing, remediation, and learning support may be a necessity. Regarding Objective 2b), the number of IB Diplomas awarded has increased from 21 in 2004 to 68 in 2007. A total of 85 candidates sat for the May, 2007 exam; 71 were registered for the Diploma and 68 completed it successfully, for a percentage of 80%, on target for 2011.

Data regarding this objective has been carefully analyzed and the action plans revised to better reflect student accomplishments and student needs. The AFG action plans are meant to be “where the rubber meets the road”: practical, measurable, achievable. The school is commended for their vision in this regard. The Reviewer found that progress toward this objective is partially achieved and that appropriate modifications to the action plans have been addressed.

## **Objective 3: EIS Award Programme (Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme)**

By the year 2011, Grades 9 – 13 Emirates International School-Jumeirah students will demonstrate growth in out-of-school self-development as measured by:

- a) 15% of students in Grade 9-13 will earn the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award each year.
- b) 8% of students in Grade 9-13 will earn the Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award each year.
- c) 5% of students in Grade 9-13 will earn the Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award each year.

The annual review process conducted by the Planning Team in conjunction with the Action Plan Team and Implementation Team showed results that were below expectations. However, the Reviewer heard renewed enthusiasm and commitment on the part of Mr. Munnery and his expanded team of teachers toward meeting this objective. Efforts are being made throughout the school via bulletin boards, newsletters, awards assemblies, and on the website, to “sell” the EISAP, and increase student participation and completion.

In analyzing the results this year, the Implementation Team felt a significant challenge is that the program is so “open-ended” with students having until the age of 25 to complete it at any level. And since many of the expectations can be completed off campus and independently, it is

difficult to monitor students. However, the team has tackled these challenges with an ambitious action plan for the 2007 – 2008 school year. Expanded staffing, more exciting and well planned expeditions, a mentoring program, built-in completion deadlines for students, and an email database to improve communication are all in place. It is suggested that EIS-J partner with another school or schools in the region to allow greater collaboration and enhanced student opportunities to achieve the EISAP objective.

## **V. Concluding Comments**

It would not be an exaggeration for the Reviewer to say that Emirates International School is an example of “*doing it right*” (the AFG protocol). There is significant data documentation, shared ownership of the vision, insightful reflection on the school as a whole and progress toward objectives specifically, as well as evidence of a culture of continuous planning at EIS-J. Students, parents, staff, and administration share a dedication to the school and a passion for learning in a truly international setting.

The Reviewer appreciates the time dedicated to making the Mid Point Review Visit productive, and wishes to thank Ms. Deacon, the staff, and the parents of Emirates International School for their openness and thorough preparation. The Reviewer would definitely recommend that EIS-J celebrate its accomplishments at least annually.

The Reviewer has adequately reviewed EIS-J’s progress toward achievement of its objectives and fulfillment of its commitment to the AFG protocol. Emirates International School-Jumeirah is congratulated for its progress to date and toward re-accreditation in 2011.

Respectfully submitted,

Margaret McGrath Porter  
Mid Point Reviewer  
January 11, 2008