

Primary pulse

JANUARY 2025



MOMENTUM MATTERS:
Moulding The Future of Learning

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REBRANDED AND READY: RED AND WHITE STRIPES UNITE

Few topics in school life spark as much conversation as uniforms. They're more than just clothing – they're a visual representation of a school's identity, a symbol of community and, for many, a source of pride.

However, updating our uniform offer for all three schools is no small task. Change can feel unsettling, but it also offers an exciting opportunity to refresh and modernise, ensuring that students are dressed not just for the present but for the future.

For DESS, the improvements and additions to our uniform provision is a pivotal part of the ongoing rebranding process. It reflects our commitment to quality, functionality and inclusivity while staying mindful of the practical concerns that matter most to families. With the opening of DESS Primary Academic City, this fresh look takes on even greater significance, uniting our students across campuses and establishing a consistent identity that reflects the shared values of our expanding DESS family.

We Listened!

From the outset, the design and roll-out of the proposed new uniform changes involved extensive consultation. Parent and student feedback sessions highlighted key priorities: affordability, improved fit and fabric quality and updated PE kits that reflect current sporting trends.

While most families expressed positive feedback about the proposed daywear, there was a shared sentiment that PE kits and House tops needed further refinement. This feedback shaped a series of adjustments, including:

- Re-designing PE kits to improve style and functionality.
- Adding new, versatile items like a micro-fleece for cooler days.
- Aligning uniforms for DESS Primary Oud Metha and DESS Primary Academic City to ensure consistency across both campuses and **maintaining the red-stripes design for both schools.**
- Phasing out older, less efficient designs, to simplify options.

Partnering with trusted suppliers like Trutex and premium sportswear provider Surridge has made sure quality is consistent and concerns about pricing and inventory management have been addressed.



A Modern Uniform for a Modern School

The new uniform represents a thoughtful balance between tradition and innovation. It incorporates a clean, contemporary design that reflects the DESS identity while embracing practical improvements. Fabrics are lighter yet durable, fits are more inclusive, and the updated PE kits are designed for comfort and performance.

For families joining DESS Primary Academic City, the new uniform plays an integral role in helping students feel part of the wider DESS community from day one. It creates a strong sense of belonging while making a clear statement about our shared commitment to excellence and forward-thinking education.

Looking Ahead

The opening of DESS Primary Academic City marks a new chapter in the DESS journey. With the introduction of the new uniform, we are not only enhancing our visual identity but also reaffirming the values that define our schools: collaboration, inclusivity and progress. Whether in the classroom, on the sports field or participating in House events, every DESS student will feel comfortable, confident and ready to succeed.

Change may not always be easy but, at DESS, it's an opportunity to embrace progress while staying true to what makes our School and College communities exceptional.

CAMELS AND CRANES:

WHERE TRADITION MEETS TRANSFORMATION

In the shadow of towering cranes and against the buzz of construction, a group of camels strolls nonchalantly by. It's an 'only in Dubai' moment - a perfect snapshot of life where ancient traditions and cutting-edge progress exist side by side.

As DESS Primary Academic City rises from the desert sands, this scene captures the essence of its journey. Building a modern, state-of-the-art school in the heart of the desert is no small feat. From navigating shifting sand to accommodating unexpected visitors on four legs, the challenges have been as unique as the landscape itself. But that's what makes this project so special.



Dubai is a place where the past and the future dance in harmony. Camels wandering past construction sites are a nod to the region's proud heritage, while the cranes towering above signal a bold step toward the future. And as we prepare for September's opening, the same philosophy holds true – we must embrace the values of yesterday to inspire the trailblazers of tomorrow.

This blend of tradition and transformation isn't just about what's being built; it's about what's being preserved. As the foundations are laid for an innovative learning environment, the team behind our new school is also weaving the spirit of the desert into the school's story - a legacy for generations to come.

FRESH START FAMILIAR VALUES

Starting at a new school is one of life's big milestones. It's a moment filled with anticipation, excitement and, often, more than a little apprehension.

At DESS Primary Academic City, we understand that this transition can feel daunting, whether you're a child joining midway through primary school or a young learner stepping into a classroom for the very first time.

That's why we'll be working hard to ensure that every child and family feels supported, welcomed and ready to thrive from day one.

Dr Hannah Al Ali knows what it's like to walk through the gates of a brand-new school. Today, Hannah is an Associate Professor of Applied Mathematics and Dean of the School of Mathematics and Data Science at Emirates Aviation University, as well as a DESS Trustee. But back in 2005, she was one of the very first students at DESS College and she remembers that starting somewhere completely new wasn't easy.

"I was older, starting secondary school, but I still felt nervous", she admits. "I had questions: Would I fit in? Would I make friends? And would the school feel like a community straight away?"

Hannah recognises that for primary aged children, and especially for those starting school for the very first time, those questions can feel even bigger. "For a young child, it's not just about fitting in. It's about finding their footing, feeling safe and understanding that this new environment is going to be fun and nurturing."

It's this understanding that has shaped the way we are preparing to open DESS Primary Academic City's doors. With a focus on empathy, connection and community, the school is committed to turning first day nerves into lasting confidence and joy.

“I had questions: Would I fit in? Would I make friends? And would the school feel like a community straight away?”

A Legacy of Shared Values

The school will be the newest addition to the DESS family, joining DESS Primary Oud Metha and DESS College. But while it's a new chapter, it shares the same foundation: a commitment to values that unite all three campuses.

These values are more than words - they are the framework for everything we do, shaping the way children, staff and parents interact and work together. They create a shared sense of belonging, ensuring that every child, no matter their starting point, feels part of a wider, supportive community.

Hannah reflects on the power of these shared values. "At DESS, values aren't just taught; they're lived. That's what gives children the confidence to explore, make mistakes and grow. Knowing there's a clear set of principles guiding everyone - whether you're five or fifteen - makes a big difference."

To help families embrace this new chapter, clear expectations on what it means to be a DESS child will be communicated well in advance. These will ensure that parents and children understand what it means to be part of the DESS family, creating a sense of consistency and confidence even before the first day.

Preparing for a Smooth Transition

The transition to a new school is about more than just logistics; it's about ensuring every child feels seen, heard and valued from the start. That's why our programme of transition events will be designed to help children form connections and feel familiar with their new environment from the outset.

These events will include opportunities for children to meet their future classmates and teachers, play games and explore their new surroundings. For older children joining later in primary school, it's a chance to build friendships and ease any anxieties about fitting in an established year group. For those starting school for the first time, it's about creating a sense of excitement and wonder as they embark on their educational journey.

"Even the smallest details can make a big difference", Hannah adds. "Knowing what a child loves or who they already know helps teachers create a welcoming experience that feels personal and reassuring."

A Proven Track Record in Transition Support

Helping children settle into new environments has always been a real DESS strength. DESS Primary Oud Metha has a long-standing reputation for its thoughtful approach to transition, using buddy systems and tailored resources to ensure children quickly feel at home.



Hannah's Advice for Parents

For parents, navigating the start of a new school can be just as emotional as it is for their children. Hannah offers some thoughtful advice: "Talk to your children about what excites them - new friends, new activities, new opportunities. Frame it as an adventure, not a challenge. And remind them that it's okay to feel nervous. It's just a sign that they care."

Reassurance is key. Children look to the adults around them for cues, so maintaining a positive outlook can help ease concerns. Trust is equally important. By choosing DESS Primary Academic City, parents are joining a community built on excellence, ambition and collaboration. Every detail, from the curriculum to the facilities, has been designed to ensure success.

As one DESS parent put it: "It's not just a school; it's a family. The staff genuinely care about each child, and that makes all the difference."

A Bright Beginning

Starting at a new school is more than just finding your way to the right classroom. It's about discovering your place, building confidence and feeling part of a community.

As Hannah reflects, "The first day is always a leap of faith, but it's one worth taking. At DESS, you don't just start a school - you start a journey of growth, belonging and possibility."

At DESS Primary Academic City, we're ready to welcome every child with open arms, ensuring that this new chapter begins with confidence, connection and a shared belief in their extraordinary potential.

INVENT, EXPLORE, INSPIRE

WHAT YOUR CHILD WILL LEARN AT OUR NEW SCHOOL

At DESS, we believe the best primary school curriculums don't just teach - they inspire. They empower children to connect with the world around them, nurture curiosity and build resilience.

The Invent, Explore, Inspire (IEI) curriculum is our bespoke approach to delivering the British National Curriculum, tailored to reflect our forward-thinking ethos. It's a programme designed to spark creativity, foster critical thinking and develop principled, purpose-driven individuals ready to shape a better world.



What is a Curriculum?

For many of us, the word might conjure images of textbooks and rote learning. But we believe it's so much more. Our curriculum gently integrates academic, social and pastoral elements, providing children with a dynamic, well-rounded education.

While we remain grounded in the objectives of the British National Curriculum, our bespoke IEI framework gives us the flexibility to adapt these objectives to suit the needs of our learners. This ensures that every topic we teach is not just relevant, but irresistible.

Being in Dubai adds another exciting dimension. Children here benefit from a rich cultural offer, including Arabic, Moral and Social Studies, alongside specialist lessons in subjects such as music and physical education. These opportunities enrich our curriculum but also require creativity and efficiency in how we use our time.

What Makes IEI Unique?

We've adopted an interleaved approach, blending multiple subjects into themes or topics. This method maximises time while deepening understanding. Interleaving allows children to connect knowledge across disciplines, creating a richer and more critical understanding of the world.

Our IEI curriculum is authentically child-led, starting with what our children already know and, more importantly, what excites them. Through a pre-assessment process called Possible Lines of Development (PLOD), teachers explore children's curiosities and use these to guide their planning. By incorporating children's interests, we create learning experiences that are both meaningful and memorable.

Real-World Learning: Year 3's Green Finger Revolution

The topic 'Green Finger Revolution' perfectly illustrates the power of the IEI approach. This sustainability focused project challenges children to design their own sustainable gardens and pitch their ideas to experts. The ultimate goal? To bring their vision to life in their very own DESS Primary Oud Metha Sustainability Garden.

Here's how subjects integrate within this topic:

- Science: Children investigate the anatomy of plants and conduct experiments to grow sustainable vegetables in the UAE's climate.
- Design Technology and STEM: Students design recipes using their home-grown produce and pitch them to the school's head chef. They also explore composting solutions for food waste.
- Moral Education: Lessons on food shortages and the role of charity help children understand global inequalities and how communities can support those in need.
- Social Studies: Through visits to places like the Emirates Bio Farm, students explore the UAE's approach to sustainable farming.
- Literacy: From crafting advertising campaigns to writing formal letters, students use a variety of text types to communicate their ideas.
- Computing: Children create stop-motion animations to illustrate the life cycle of plants, merging creativity with technology.

Guiding Themes Across Terms

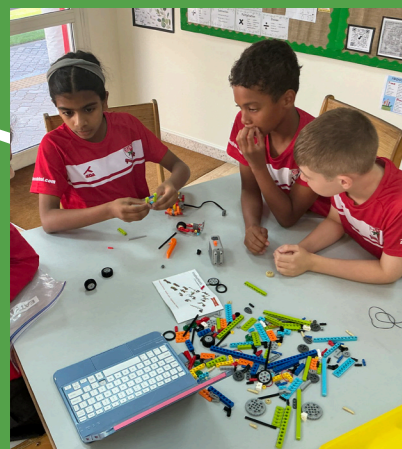
Each term the IEI curriculum revolves around a core theme, encouraging children to think critically and creatively:

- Term 1 – Invent: Solving real-world problems through innovation.
- Term 2 – Explore: Hands-on inquiry into the world around us, with a focus on geography and discovery.
- Term 3 – Inspire: Tackling social issues and becoming change-makers for a better tomorrow.

Outcomes that Go Beyond Academics

For DESS children, academic excellence is just the starting point. Our IEI curriculum develops values, behaviours and a strong moral conscience in every child. It's about shaping individuals who are not only capable of succeeding but who are committed to making a difference.

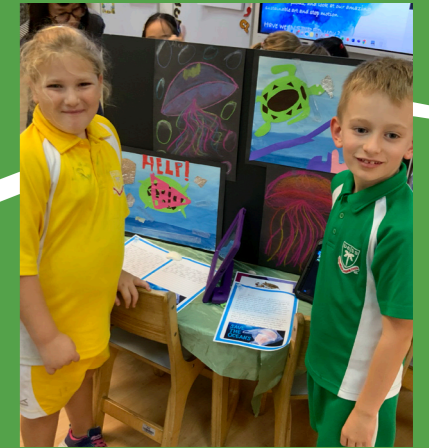
INVENT



Year 6 – Abigail – Invent

“Let’s face it, the world won’t survive with our growing population, so we need to create something that helps us to become more sustainable – we learnt that the weight of energy on this world is incredible! We had to combine lots of Mathematical thinking with research (we couldn’t help but keep researching in our spare time), and then we put this into reality by building our city – it was difficult! But, working collaboratively helped, and that’s what I loved most.”

EXPLORE



Year 3 – Agnes – Explore

“After my explorer day, I realised I loved tent building and doing a scavenger hunt – we had to find water! We also learnt that if we were stranded in the desert, we would need a mirror so airplanes could see us! We got to be an archeologist digging in the sand to look for gems. We found actual gems and crystals! I’m now even having an explorers’ birthday party.”

INSPIRE



Year 3 – Farah – Inspire

“There is always so much to do which makes it so exciting. Crafting, I just love crafting, and I can do this through the Art that’s linked to our IEI. I have been encouraging my family to use fewer plastic bags and I have to say, it’s going good so far.”

CONFIDENCE BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: WHERE SELF-BELIEF TAKES ROOT

At DESS, wellbeing isn't just a priority - it's the foundation upon which every child's success is built.

As we look ahead to September's opening of our new primary school, this commitment remains central to our ethos, and will guarantee that every child feels supported, valued and empowered from the moment they step through our doors.

Woven into daily life, wellbeing at DESS provides our children with the tools they need to flourish emotionally, socially and academically. With thoughtfully designed activities, expert guidance and a focus on building confidence and resilience, we create an environment where each child believes they're capable of anything.



Wellbeing in Action

The foundation of wellbeing at DESS starts in the classroom, where teachers build emotional literacy and self-awareness through engaging, age-appropriate activities. For our youngest learners in FS1 and FS2, the journey begins with creating an atmosphere of trust and security. Settling into school life can be a big adjustment, but our dedicated teachers and assistants use nurturing routines, calm spaces and mindfulness practices to help children feel at home.

In Key Stage 1 and beyond, wellbeing initiatives evolve to meet children's growing needs. Activities encourage collaboration, empathy and problem-solving, helping children build meaningful relationships with their peers and develop confidence in their abilities.

Parent-school partnerships are key to the success of our wellbeing strategy. Parents are actively involved through workshops and information sessions designed to align school and home approaches to wellbeing. These collaborative efforts ensure that children receive consistent support in managing their emotions and building resilience.

New School - Same Approach

As we prepare to carry our commitment forward, plans for the new school include the introduction of dedicated wellbeing areas within the new campus and workshops for parents to strengthen the home-school partnership further.

The new school will also expand on the buddy systems that have been so successful at DESS Primary Oud Metha, pairing older children with younger peers to foster a sense of belonging and mutual support. This ensures that every child feels connected and confident, ready to take on new challenges in a nurturing environment.

Real Stories, Real Impact

There's ample evidence of the ways in which our approach to wellbeing has made a measurable difference in the lives of our children and families.

For FS2 learners, settling into routines and participating in daily mindfulness sessions has led to notable improvements in self-regulation and emotional expression. Parents regularly share how these strategies have been applied at home, creating a ripple effect of positivity beyond the classroom.

In Year 3, peer-led initiatives have strengthened bonds within the school community. Children have shown remarkable enthusiasm for collaborative activities, from classroom kindness projects to group problem-solving challenges, embodying the values we strive to instill.



Building Resilience for Life

True success in this important element of school life goes beyond academic achievements. By embedding wellbeing into the fabric of everything we do and say, we prepare our children to navigate challenges with resilience, empathy and confidence.

Moving forward means reminding ourselves that we're not just shaping learners; we're nurturing even more confident, compassionate individuals who will contribute positively to the world.

MYTH BUSTERS

As excitement builds for the opening of DESS Primary Academic City, it's natural for parents to have plenty of questions about what to expect. Our **Myth Busters** section will tackle some of the most frequently asked questions, giving prospective families a clear picture of what life on the new campus will look like.

Have You Recruited Any Teachers Yet?

Yes – we're delighted with the start we've made.

Our search for the very best teachers has been in full swing for a few months – and we've already assembled an exceptional team.

All class teaching positions, senior leadership and head of year positions have been filled, whilst we are also currently appointing heads of department for specialist subjects. All of these staff have been carefully selected from a pool of over 3,500 applicants. This has allowed us to handpick the most passionate, skilled and experienced educators who are not only outstanding in the classroom but also the perfect fit for our DESS Primary Academic City community.

Our team brings expertise from across the globe, with teachers interviewed from the UK, Singapore, Qatar and right here in the UAE. As a Not-For-Profit school, we offer a great package that goes beyond salary, including bespoke training tailored to our children's needs - one of the many reasons top educators want to be part of our journey.

After all, a state-of-the-art school is only as good as the people within it. And at DESS, we've continued the trend of making sure we recruit the very best.

Will the New School Be Finished on Time?

Absolutely. When we say we'll be opening our doors at the start of the new school year, we mean it.

The school is being built by Chicago Maintenance & Construction, a highly respected Dubai-based contractor with a proven track record in delivering top-tier schools - three for the GEMS group, all completed in just nine months.

Unlike many urban projects, our site comes with big advantages:

- No residential neighbours – meaning round-the-clock construction with day and night shifts.
- Dedicated construction roads – ensuring smooth access with no transport restrictions.
- 360-degree site access – making deliveries and logistics seamless.

On top of that, our consulting team is working closely with the contractors to keep everything on track. With frequent site meetings and careful project management, we're fully confident that we'll be ready to welcome our first students.

How Much Thought Has Gone Into Road Access?

A lot - because a great school needs great roads.

We've been working closely with Dubai's Roads and Transport Authority (RTA) to design an access system that makes pick-up and drop-off fast, efficient and as stress-free as possible. As many of our staff are also parents, we truly understand the importance of a smooth start and end to the school day.

- Separate Access Roads – The new school will have its own dedicated access road, running parallel to the College but completely separate.
- Calm, Child-Centred Start – We're encouraging families to enjoy a short, relaxed walk to the classroom, helping children ease into their day at their own pace.
- Staggered Start & Finish Times – Carefully planned schedules will optimise traffic flow, making drop-off and pick-up times as smooth as possible.

We know that for many parents, school traffic is the biggest daily headache, and that's why we've put in the planning to try and make it a breeze.





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