

DUBAI ENGLISH SPEAKING SCHOOLS



2025—2028



# DIRECTION

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# CREATING GREAT PEOPLE FOR LIFE



## Legacy

Our story begins in the early 1960s, long before skyscrapers, superhighways, or the world stage Dubai commands today. Back then, a small community of European families had made their home in the Gulf, and education was improvised; lessons held in living rooms and spare corners.

Among those early pioneers was Flight Lieutenant Freddie Loughman, an RAF education officer who began teaching a small group of children in a Bur Dubai apartment in 1963.

As numbers grew, so did ambition. A move to Port Rashid followed. Then in 1966, by sheer chance, a passing encounter on horseback changed everything. The late Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum

offered a piece of land in Oud Metha; a gift that became the permanent home of DESS Oud Metha. That moment shaped a legacy rooted in care, community and aspiration.

## Family

From that modest start, DESS has grown into a family of schools, with three campuses now forming a shared story: the original Primary in Oud Metha, DESS College launched in 2005, and our newest chapter, DESS Academic City, opened in 2025.

What has remained constant through every phase of growth is the heart of the model: not-for-profit, people-first and committed to character. We don't just aim to shape strong learners. We aim to grow thoughtful, confident people who are ready

to contribute - to their communities, to their professions and to the world around them.

## Belief

Looking ahead, we have asked ourselves a simple but important question: what does it really mean to create great people for life?

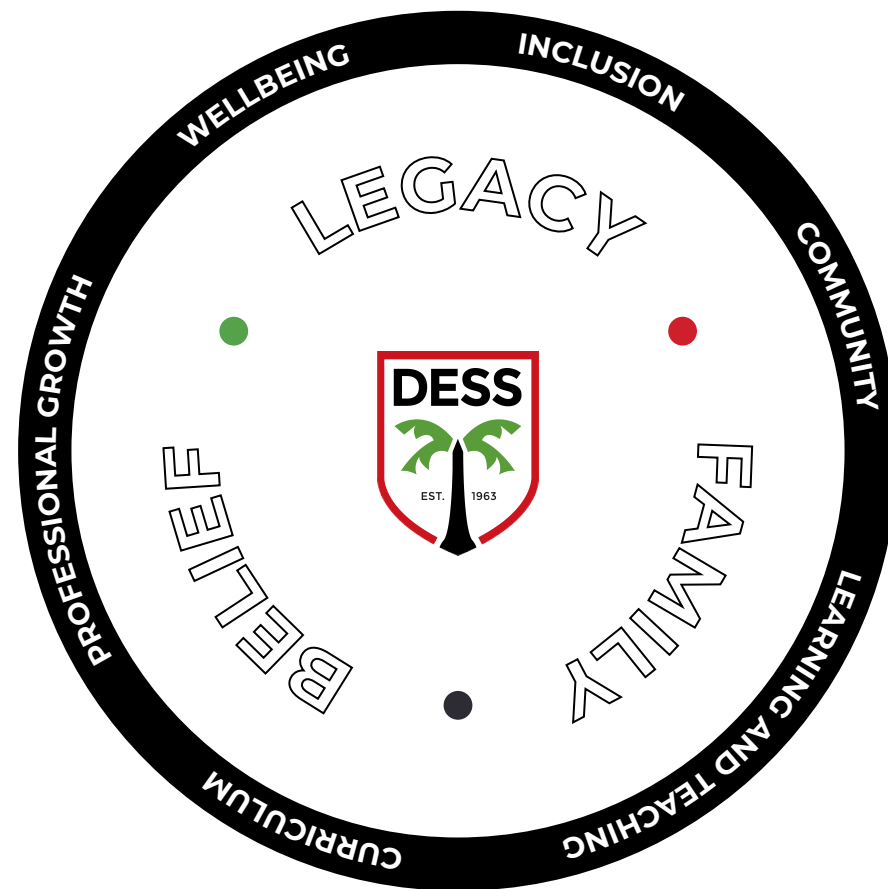
Our new three-year strategic plan sets out that answer. Built on six core pillars, it captures both where we have come from and where we are going. Each school will lead its own path through:

- Wellbeing
- Inclusion
- Community
- Learning and Teaching
- Curriculum
- Professional Growth

It is not just a document. It is a mindset. A shared commitment to doing things well and doing them with purpose.



Harry Atkinson (the first DESS headteacher) and his class of '65, with Sheikha Hind bint Maktoum, Juma Al Maktoum and Sheikh Saeed bin Maktoum bin Juma Al Maktoum.



CREATING GREAT PEOPLE FOR LIFE

## Anchors

Legacy, Family and Belief are themes that run through everything we do. Sometimes they are obvious - the milestones, the big decisions. Other times, they show up in quieter ways: how a child is greeted at the gate, how a colleague is supported behind the scenes.

These are our anchors. They shape how we lead, how we grow and how we stay true to what matters.

Legacy reminds us of the standards set by those who came before. Family keeps us grounded in care and connection. Belief moves us forward, pushing boundaries, challenging assumptions and trusting one another to make it better.

This is the DESS way. It always has been. It always will be.

# CREATING GREAT PEOPLE FOR LIFE



## Our Process

Ensuring that these areas remain our main focus is a simple and effective approach to ensuring that DESS continues to provide excellent educational provision. However, the complexities that surround these as our world changes means that great schools must constantly audit, adapt, change, develop and improve these aspects to maintain standards and secure the best outcomes for our children. The context of each school, the stage the children are at in their learning and the approaches to each aspect will differ, but the core purpose always remains the same.

When we begin a development phase, we spend time reflecting on where we are currently. We look at inspection reports, data, the feedback we have from

stakeholders and analyse what we do well and what areas we can focus on. We also look forward and try to gain an insight into what is ahead of us, what will change or needs to change and what we want to be like in the future.

Behind each school's development plan is a detailed action plan that we use as a framework for our improvement in the next phase. As with all plans, these are flexible and adaptable, providing us with the agility to move in the required direction at any given time based on what we feel is right for each school at that time. What follows on the next few pages, however, is an outline of the key areas for focus for each school. You will see alignment to our key values and approaches to education. You will see aspects that are the same as you would expect in any quality organisation

but you will also see differences pertinent to each school's individual needs, context and situation.

## Our Stability

Underpinning these plans, for Dubai English Speaking Schools, is an executive approach to governance ensuring the organisation remains stable, is financially viable, focuses on strategy and is well led. Ultimately, we pride ourselves on being people-orientated and our community of children, parents, staff and trustees are the most important part of who we are. We do our best to get as many areas of provision as good as they can be as often as possible. We work in partnership with each other and have an enormous sense of pride in where we have come from, who we are and what lies ahead.



On point — Flt Lt Freddie Loughman leads the first DESS class towards a bright new tomorrow.



# DESS OUD METHA



We are delighted to share our ambitious new three-year school development plan, which sets a clear and exciting direction for the future of DESS Oud Metha. This plan is the result of a truly collaborative effort, shaped by the voices of staff, children, parents and trustees. It reflects not only who we are as a school but also who we aspire to become.

At the heart of our vision is a deep commitment to nurturing the whole child, grounded in strong values and high expectations. We know that children thrive when they feel safe, happy and connected, and when they are given opportunities to grow as learners and as people. We are focused on strengthening our inclusive culture, enhancing the experiences we offer and making sure every child feels a true sense of belonging in our community.

We are proud of the excellent reputation we have built over time, and this plan represents our determination to build on that legacy with energy, creativity and care. It is a plan that looks forward, celebrates the strengths of our past and recognises the evolving needs of our children and families.

Above all, this development plan is driven by our ambition for every child. We want them to feel inspired and challenged, to discover their passions and to develop the confidence and character that will serve them well beyond their time with us. Together, we will ensure DESS Oud Metha continues to be a place where every individual is known, supported, and able to shine.



Wellbeing will be at the heart of our new school development plan, guided by our WeShine curriculum and the dedicated support of our Wellbeing Team. We recognise that mental and physical health are vital for children and staff to truly thrive. Through a nurturing environment, purposeful wellbeing initiatives and a curriculum that promotes emotional literacy and resilience, we aim to build a positive, balanced culture where everyone feels supported, valued and empowered to be the very best version of themselves.



Inclusion will continue to be a key focus over the next three years, rooted in the belief that every child has the right to a high-quality education. We are committed to creating an environment where all learners develop a strong sense of self, feel supported and are able to shine. Engaging and supporting parents will be central to this aim—strong partnerships are key to every DESS child's success. We will also ensure our learning spaces and provision are inclusive, accessible and responsive to the diverse needs of our wonderful community.



## COMMUNITY

Building a strong, resilient community where everyone feels a deep sense of belonging is central to our vision. We are committed to nurturing relationships, fostering trust and celebrating the strengths of every individual. By building on the strong legacy and excellent reputation we already have, we aim to create an inclusive and supportive environment where all members of our community, children, staff, parents and carers, feel valued, connected and empowered to contribute, grow and thrive together as part of the DESS Oud Metha family.

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## CURRICULUM

We are excited to continue developing our Invent, Explore, Inspire (IEI) curriculum, which allows children to follow their interests and passions while building character and developing key personal qualities. Through magical learning experiences our IEI curriculum will connect learning across subjects in meaningful, engaging ways that deepen understanding and inspire children to make a difference. As part of this development, we will work closely with the College to ensure a smooth and purposeful transition to secondary school, enabling children to build on strong foundations and begin their next phase of learning with confidence and accelerated starting points.

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## LEARNING AND TEACHING

Learning and Teaching will continue to be the core of what we do, with a clear identity established that is rooted in the Science of Learning and evidence-based practice. We aim to deliver consistent, high-quality learning that ensures all lessons are engaging, challenging and responsive to individual needs. Rigorous quality assurance processes will drive continuous improvement, support staff development and ensure our standards remain at the highest level. Most importantly, we are committed to making learning meaningful, where every child is inspired, supported and knows that what they are learning truly matters.

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## PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

We want all members of our staff team to flourish and love what they do. We will offer inspirational professional development opportunities that support continuous growth across the school. From our DESScovery Lab, where colleagues engage in innovative professional learning, to our in-house coaching programme, every staff member is encouraged and supported to reflect, develop and grow in their role. By investing in everyone, we ensure our whole school community continues to flourish for the benefit of every child.

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# DESS ACADEMIC CITY



As we open an exciting new chapter in the legacy of Dubai English Speaking Schools we are thrilled to welcome children and families to our new campus at DESS Academic City.

This is a primary school with a difference; designed by our own expert teachers who learn with the children in the classrooms every day. The school is open for children aged 3-11 years with strong links to our original DESS Oud Metha school and DESS College site opposite.

DESS Academic City offers everything you would expect from a primary school and more.

Our ambitions are high; we want to ensure we are at the forefront of education and be a trailblazing school, linking the most

up-to-date educational research and over 60 years of experience in Dubai. We have an innovative, child-led curriculum with state-of-the art facilities to match. With versatile classrooms and shared learning spaces we offer education without walls to suit all learners. The campus includes: a theatre, recording studio, drama and music ensemble rooms, a completely bespoke library, grass sports pitches, gymnasium and swimming pools, dance and gymnastic studios, a multi-use games area and a unique desert school offering.



**Our philosophy is underpinned by our aspirations for all children.**

**01**

Academic Excellence - whilst we recognise children will develop at different rates, we are unapologetically ambitious for the outcomes they achieve.

**02**

Wellbeing – if children are not happy, they cannot learn. Wellbeing is at the heart of what we do. Care, attention and developing relationships are fundamental in ensuring children thrive at school.

**03**

Being a good person – we develop skills of problem solving, teamwork, negotiation and resilience through a specialised curriculum. These are skills for life not just for school.

**04**

‘Puff your chest out’ opportunities – recognising and developing talents across the curriculum so that all children have a chance to shine.





We appreciate that many of our children are joining us from schools across Dubai and also further afield. Our focus initially is to ensure the smooth transition of all children into the new school. This will include supporting and developing friendships, understanding the new school values and offering opportunities to develop physical and mental health. With our 'WeShine' curriculum and the specialist support of our student advisor and school counsellor we know our offer puts children and their wellbeing first.



All children deserve the right to a high-quality education. We live in a diverse community with children who present with a range of needs. As a school, we embrace this and use this to our advantage. We know our children as individuals, understand their needs and tailor the support we provide. We know parents are essential in ensuring the success of our children and will work closely to ensure we have the right support in place. Our highly skilled inclusion team will establish themselves and the ways of working across the schools.



## COMMUNITY

When establishing a new school many focus on the buildings rather than people. Our organisation is all about people and therefore we will be focusing on establishing our culture and ensuring that our expectations are aligned. We will work closely with different stakeholders to develop our communities in school.

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## CURRICULUM

Using the renowned IEI (Invent, Explore, Inspire) curriculum developed by our teaching staff at DESS Oud Metha, our children get to learn things they are excited about in different subject areas. We reinforce core knowledge across subjects which helps them to know more and remember more. As we establish the site and develop our facilities the curriculum will evolve to reflect the new opportunities we have to enrich the learning experiences. We will work together to ensure there is smooth transition between the School and College so children's starting points at secondary are accelerated.

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## LEARNING AND TEACHING

Our core business is ensuring that children are learning. This is not an accidental process and is carefully planned and considered. As a new school, ensuring that your children have the best teachers is vital. We will ensure all staff know what is expected and have well- established systems in place for quality assurance. By having a clear baseline for understanding children's academic strengths we will tailor teaching and our support throughout the term and adapt our teaching in individual lessons. Learning is challenging. This is not the privilege of the most able, we teach and support all children to reach the highest standard.

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## PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

We want our teachers to thrive and love what they do. We have inspirational programmes in place to ensure they continue to be the best teachers for the children. From our DESScovery lab (where teachers engage in professional growth learning) to our own coaching programme, all staff will feel inspired to continue growing as educators.

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# DESS COLLEGE



As we begin an exciting new chapter in the DESS legacy, we are proud to share our vision for the future of DESS College. This three-year development plan outlines our ambitions for an exceptional secondary education rooted in tradition, shaped by research and designed for the world our students will inherit.

DESS College is no ordinary school. We offer a vibrant, inclusive and high-performing environment where young people thrive. Our personalised approach to learning is built around each student's strengths, interests and needs, with research-led practice and high-quality teaching at its core. We don't just focus on what students learn, but how they learn, building independent, confident learners who think critically, solve problems and apply knowledge meaningfully.

Wellbeing is central to everything we do. Guided by the RISE Framework (Relationships, Interests, Skills and Emotions), we are committed to nurturing confident, emotionally literate young people who feel safe, supported and ready to take on the world.

Our curriculum is dynamic, diverse, and designed to inspire, preparing students for academic excellence and life beyond the classroom. Inclusion is not an add-on at DESS College, it is who we are. Every learner is valued, seen and supported.

We are also a school where community matters. Strong parental partnerships, growing alumni links and our service learning programmes connect us to the world around us and help build purpose in every student's journey.

Our staff are learners too, supported by a rich Professional Learning Community and inspired by innovation. Together, we are creating a culture where both staff and students strive to be their very best, every single day.

DESS College is ready for the future—and we are proud to share our plan with you.





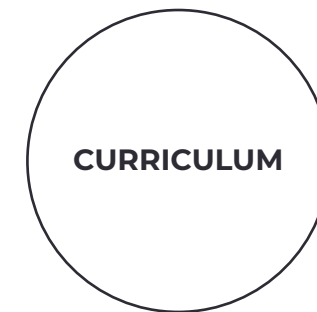
Our Wellbeing Development Plan is built around the RISE Framework, focusing on Relationships, Interests, Skills and Emotions. Over the next three years, the RISE programme will develop further across the College to help support holistic student growth. In addition, by continuing to improve our pastoral care system including nurturing our phone-free environment, refining our wellbeing curriculum and expanding our school counsellor provision, we aim to ensure that every student feels safe and supported. All strands and activities within the RISE Framework will be used to foster a stronger sense of self in our students, strengthening a sense of belonging at the College. We aim to help our young people to build confidence, resilience and emotional literacy.



At DESS College, inclusion is not merely a policy but the heart of our educational philosophy. We believe that every student deserves to thrive in an environment where diversity is celebrated and individual differences are recognised as strengths rather than barriers. In the period of this new plan, we will commit to inclusive practices to develop a golden thread of inclusion that runs deep within the College, making it a unique hallmark of the DESS experience. Our approach to inclusion will be shaped by the social model of disability - recognising that barriers to learning exist within environments and systems that must be redesigned, not within individuals themselves. A redesign of our Learning Support environment and an expansion of our support provision will be key indicators of our commitment to inclusive education over the next three years.



The DESS Community forms the foundation of our College family. Over the course of the life cycle of this new plan, strong parental partnerships will underpin a sense of togetherness so that it can be clearly felt by all of our stakeholders. Sustainability projects, alongside charity work and international community trips will form part of the exceptional experiences that DESS College students can engage with. We aim to develop both student and parent voice over the next few years and to strengthen our ties with our alumni, ensuring that the DESS experience is maintained far into our students' futures.



Over the next three years, we aim to evolve our curriculum so that it balances proven traditional methods with innovative educational practices. Our diverse curriculum will undergo review to ensure that it becomes intellectually stimulating, culturally inclusive, personally relevant and experientially rich. Our goal is to comprehensively equip young people for success in their GCSE and A-level examinations, while simultaneously fostering their emotional intelligence and personal development. Further research and development into Alternative Education Pathways will result in a curriculum that is truly inclusive, fostering the critical foundations that will propel our learners to extraordinary academic success.



At DESS College we adopt a personalised approach which tailors learning experiences to each student's strengths, needs and interests to make learning effective, engaging and meaningful. Over the next three years, a new Learning Model, underpinned by the Science of Learning and novel Assessment for Learning strategies will enable students to independently evaluate their strengths and areas for growth. Innovative resources, alongside research-driven AI initiatives, will enhance the quality of teaching even further at the College. Teachers will continue to be supported by the Learning and Teaching Team, with pedagogical coaching being rolled out across the College.



At DESS College, we aim to build a unique, dynamic learning community underpinned by relevant research and the best proven methods of practice. We will continue to instill a strong commitment to professional growth, recognising that the continued development of our teachers directly enhances student success. We aim to introduce a tailored cycle of professional development which supports teachers in better identifying their areas for growth. This new plan will provide individuals with the time and resources necessary to refine their practice further, offering in-house CPD activities together with external support led by experts in the field. Continuing to invest in all our staff will ensure that our learners are supported by the very best practitioners; individuals who are committed to lifelong learning and model a truly reflective approach to teaching.

# ACTIONS FOR SUCCESS



We will manage the success of our plans as follows:

## For Learners

- Focusing on relationships and wellbeing
- Providing the best teaching every day
- Designing a thoughtful and challenging curriculum
- Having high expectations for behaviour and attitudes
- Helping children to recognise their responsibility to each other, and the world around them
- Ensuring we see potential as limitless

## For Staff

- Prioritising Wellbeing and providing the best resources and working environment
- Empowering staff with diverse opportunities to develop
- Ensuring professional growth is innovative and outward facing

## For Our Community

- Nurturing effective partnerships
- Ensuring organisational management is outstanding
- Raising empathy and actioning it





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