

Primary pulse

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A **ONCE-IN-A-GENERATION** OPPORTUNITY TO BE PART OF SOMETHING TRULY SPECIAL

Let's face it, it's not every year that your child gets a chance to shape the future of a school from its very first day.


But the children who walk through the doors of DESS Primary Academic City next September, will get the feeling that they're not just starting school, they're creating history.

Their first step into new facilities, the special bonds they will form, the traditions they will establish, and the impact they will make, will all belong uniquely to them and their fellow founding students.

For parents, we understand that choosing a school still under construction may feel like a bold move. But it's this very step that offers your child something extraordinary: the chance to help define what DESS Primary Academic City becomes. This is a truly bespoke educational experience, crafted not just around individual needs, but around a pioneering group that will set the tone for the future.

Choosing DESS Primary Academic City isn't just about enrolment - it's about embracing a rare opportunity for your child to play a formative role in a community that will grow, evolve, and thrive with them at its heart. Don't let your family miss out on something truly extraordinary.





SHOWCASING THE FUTURE:

Join Mr Neil Brinicombe 'On Tour!'

We're excited to invite parents and prospective families to experience the vision of DESS Primary Academic City through the lens of the man tasked with giving it a life force; Headteacher Neil Brinicombe.

Our showcase exhibition based at DESS College offers a rare chance to see beyond the brochures and step into the future we're building. These stunning displays do more than just highlight the features of our new school - they bring our promises to life, illustrating exactly how DESS Primary Academic City will deliver on the high expectations we've set.

While words and pictures can paint part of the story, there's no substitute for seeing it in person. As your guide throughout the tour, Mr Brinicombe will show you the plans, designs, and educational philosophy that will define the new primary school when it opens in September 2025. Mr Brinicombe will also share his unique insights and vision for the school in conversations about the future of education at DESS.

Even better news, these exhibitions are just the beginning. As the structure rises from the sand, you'll get a real sense of how we're laying the foundations for an exceptional learning environment. We will keep all our families updated with regular communication about the site progress and exciting developments as they happen.

We encourage all families to take advantage of this opportunity to explore our showcase displays and see why DESS Primary Academic City is generating such excitement. So, sign up today for one of Mr Brinicombe's virtual tours, and enjoy a glimpse of the exciting next new chapter in DESS history.

To learn more about the tour schedule or to arrange a personal visit, click on our website at **www.dess.sch.ae**.



PARENT PERSPECTIVES: DEPENDING ON TRADITION, TRUSTING IN THE FUTURE

When it comes to our children's education, few decisions feel more important - or more daunting, than choosing the right school. For Lauren Savill, it was also deeply personal.

Once a DESS Primary Oud Metha pupil herself - and the daughter of the school's former Headteacher Arnie Cartwright and Year 1 teacher Barbara, getting her own daughters Paige and Peyton into Years 3 and 4 at her old primary school, was a dream come true for Lauren.

So, when news broke of plans for a new DESS campus in Academic City, it presented Lauren and husband Andy with an opportunity and a challenge of equal measure.

Hours of discussion focused on one key question: could the magic of DESS Primary Oud Metha, with its deep sense of community and personal touch, truly be replicated in a brand-new setting?

Though the pull of the new school's convenient location near to their family home in Mudon, was a strong one, convenience wasn't enough on its own. Lauren's and Andy's main concern, like so many other DESS Primary Oud Metha parents, was whether the cherished ethos and close-knit community of the original school would be carried over to the new campus.



Reassurance from the Heart

“We wouldn’t have even considered applying to move the girls had we not been certain that all the things that make DESS Primary Oud Metha so special would be available at the new campus,” said Lauren. “I mean, come on - where else can you arrive for drop-off and find a Deputy Headteacher playing football with children in the playground before school even starts! Within a few weeks of arriving at DESS, it seemed like every teacher knew both our girls by name. It’s astounding how they still manage to do what they do, 60 years since the school started.”

For Lauren and Andy, DESS isn’t just a school; it’s a chance to be part of an extended family that nurtures and supports both students and parents. Lauren is convinced that the DESS Primary Academic City campus will continue this tradition.

“It’s easy to get excited about the fantastic new facilities, but it’s so much more important to know that the core values and community feel of the Oud Metha campus will remain intact. Having met new Headteacher Neil Brinicombe, it’s clear that everything everyone cherishes - and many of the people responsible for delivering the magic - will remain intact.

“It’s such a pleasure and privilege to be able to drive the girls to school, and I never take it for granted. But it’s quite a journey for us every day. However, school run journey time pales into insignificance if your children aren’t happy when they get there. Our decision to apply for a place for Peyton and Paige came down to trust, and we’ve never been more certain that we won’t be let down.”



CURATING EXCELLENCE:

THE THOUGHTFUL APPROACH TO BUILDING A WORLD-CLASS TEACHING TEAM

The selection of teachers isn't just a matter of staffing at DESS - it's a considered process that speaks to the heart of how we believe education should be delivered.



So, the question is who will join the DESS team next September, and help shape young minds, instil a love of learning, and uphold the values that have made DESS a trusted name in Dubai for over six decades.

The recruitment process has therefore been intentionally rigorous, with over 2,800 applications received for just 17 initial teaching and leadership positions. This overwhelming response has allowed Catherine Dando, Neil Brinicombe, Tony Clarkson and the DESS leadership team to focus on selecting individuals who not only bring expertise in their fields but also reflect the ethos and culture that has defined DESS Primary Oud Metha.

This balance of continuity and fresh perspective is crucial. While some teachers will transition from our Oud Metha campus in order to spread the incredible expertise of our existing DESS staff, new educators – other highly skilled professionals carefully chosen from the UK, Dubai, and leading international schools will have the opportunity to join the team. What will unite them all though, is a shared commitment to a child-centred approach and maintaining the standards and values that have long been hallmarks of DESS education. It's not about replicating the familiar but rather evolving it in a way that honours the past while embracing the future.

Such lofty goals mean the decision-making process has gone beyond simply filling positions. It has been about aligning the strengths and professional passions of each teacher with the needs of the students and the broader vision for the school. As the team evaluate which teachers will join the new campus, they are mindful of maintaining the integrity of both schools - ensuring that each thrives and continues to offer children a meaningful, holistic and engaging education experience.

To be certain that the integration of new teachers into the DESS family is as thorough as their recruitment, a comprehensive onboarding and induction programme is in place to support each educator as they adapt to the DESS culture. This has been done with the goal of creating a unified teaching community that thrives on shared values, collaboration, and a deep understanding of our educational philosophy.

At its core, our vision is about more than just academics. It's about creating an environment where students are inspired to ask questions, challenge ideas, and engage critically with the world around them. We believe this can't be achieved unless teachers move beyond traditional instruction and engage in deeper dialogues with their students. In turn, this requires educators who understand that their role is not just to deliver knowledge, but to help children navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing world.

In selecting the right team, we are laying the foundation for an educational experience that prioritises both intellectual rigour and emotional well-being. It's a reminder that a truly great school is not just built on its facilities or its reputation, but on the passion, expertise, and integrity of those who teach within its walls.





UNLOCKING NATURE'S CLASSROOM TO DISCOVER THE MAGIC OF THE DESERT

The 'Desert School' Concept: Nature as a Teacher

The idea of a 'Desert School' taps into the natural wonders of the surrounding environment, transforming our outdoor spaces into classrooms without walls. From the dry wadi areas to the rooftop garden that will have sweeping views of the desert, DESS Primary Academic City will offer students a learning experience grounded in the local habitat.

The design of the school features outdoor annexes, shared courtyards, and open-air classrooms that will blend seamlessly with the environment. Here, children won't just learn about ecosystems, geography, and the sciences through textbooks—they'll see it in action. Imagine your child exploring the native desert during a hands-on science lesson or using the shifting dunes and wind

patterns as a living laboratory to understand geography.

"Why settle for four walls when the greatest classroom is right outside?"

That's the driving question for Headteacher Neil Brinicombe, whose vision for DESS Primary Academic City is as bold as it is brilliant. Mr Brinicombe sees the desert as an untapped wonder - one that will inspire curiosity, ignite creativity, and give our children a chance to learn from the vast, awe-inspiring landscape on their doorstep.

In a world where childhood is increasingly dominated by screens and structured indoor activities, the opportunity for children to

engage with the natural environment is more precious - and more necessary- than ever. That's why at DESS Primary Academic City, we're embracing the desert's beauty and its potential as an unparalleled learning resource for our students.

Mr Brinicombe's vision is for the desert to become much more than a backdrop - it will be the stage for dynamic learning experiences that foster curiosity, creativity, and a connection to nature. He sees the desert as a treasure trove of inspiration, adventure, and discovery.

A Space for Mind, Body, and Soul

Studies have consistently shown the mental and physical health benefits of outdoor learning, with children experiencing increased focus, creativity, and well-being when regularly exposed to nature. At DESS Primary Academic City, we're taking this to heart. Our desert environment will provide ample opportunities for physical activity, from running across open spaces to engaging in outdoor games, while also creating moments of calm and mindfulness.

The desert, with its vast skies, rolling dunes, and quiet serenity, offers a natural counterbalance to the fast-paced, digital world our children are growing up in. Here, they will not only build their knowledge and skills but also develop a sense of wonder and appreciation for the natural world.

Embracing Sustainability and Stewardship

By immersing our students in the desert's ecosystem, we also nurture a sense of responsibility for the environment. They'll come to understand the delicate balance of desert life—the resilience of its flora and fauna, the importance of water conservation, and the need for sustainable living. This early connection to the environment encourages a deeper awareness of global sustainability challenges and inspires future leaders who will care for our planet.

An Unforgettable School Experience

For prospective parents, choosing DESS Primary Academic City is choosing a school where your child's education won't be confined to four walls. It's a place where your child will also explore, play, and learn in a landscape that, far from being barren, is teeming with life and opportunity. The desert will become a source of inspiration, an extension of the classroom, and a space where young minds are free to grow.

At DESS Primary Academic City, we're redefining what it means to learn outdoors. Through the Desert School concept, we're not just teaching subjects—we're inspiring future generations to explore, appreciate, and protect the world around them. And with the desert at their doorstep, your child's journey of discovery will be truly extraordinary.



DESIGNING A LEGACY: THE VISION BEHIND THE VENTURE

In a city where ambition often meets reality,
designing a new school is about more than
just blueprints and brickwork.

It's about shaping the future, and for DESS Principal Catherine Dando, the vision of how a new DESS primary could look has been evolving gradually for over a decade.

Since her first days as Headteacher at DESS Primary Oud Metha back in 2014, Mrs Dando has been struck by the potential for creating learning spaces that are as dynamic as the children who fill them.

Her early 'what if' moments were spent imagining open, flexible classrooms that encouraged movement and creativity, calm environments designed to inspire curiosity and exploration, and an end to sterile corridors and compartmentalised rooms.

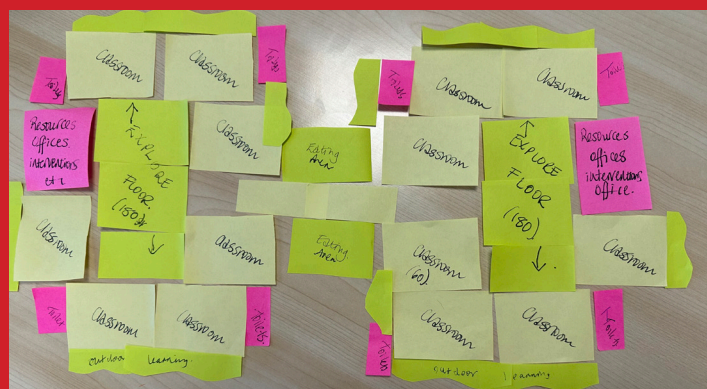
Fast forward to 2018, and those early ideas began to take shape through conversations with her teachers and senior leadership team.

When land was found adjacent to DESS College in Academic City, the plan was initially to replace DESS Primary Oud Metha in a new, modern building. The campus would be designed to embrace the team's vision while also carrying forward the legacy of a school celebrated for over 60 years. The fact that the DESS Direction for 22-23 was 'Aim High, Dream Big', was a happy coincidence.

But feedback from parents shifted the narrative. They didn't want to say goodbye to the cherished DESS Primary Oud Metha. Suddenly, the vision transformed: instead of replacing Oud Metha, the task became to design a second DESS primary school. This new campus would reflect the spirit and ethos of the original, but without the limitations of an older building. Again, the DESS Direction for 23-24 proved to be very appropriate as it was around the theme of "Flourishing."

By January 2024, approval was granted for what would become DESS Primary Academic City. It was no longer about replication - it was about evolution. The new school would be designed to preserve everything that made DESS Primary Oud Metha exceptional, while embracing a cutting-edge layout that would carry the DESS legacy into a new era.

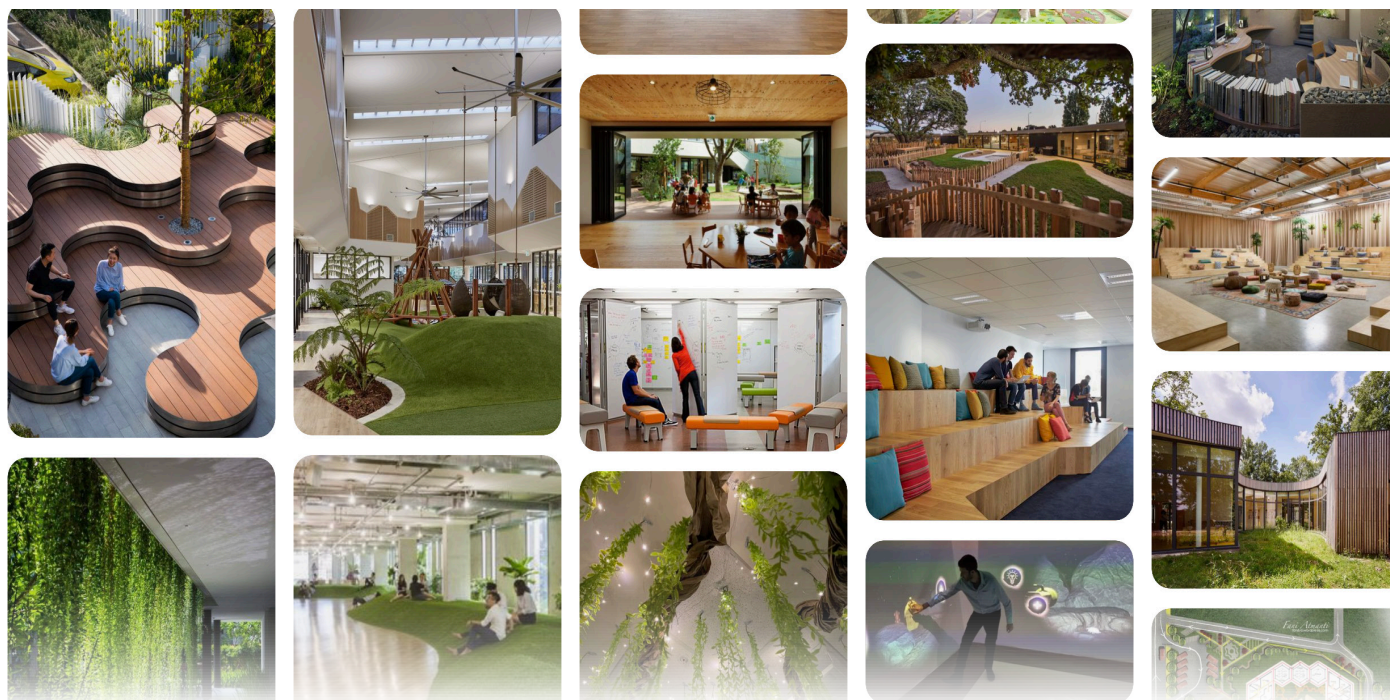
"It was never going to be about copying what we already had," said Mrs Dando. "This was an opportunity to take the best of DESS Primary Oud Metha and create something that would honour our history while shaping our future."



A Design That Honours Tradition and Embraces Innovation

The design process wasn't just a technical exercise - it reflected the DESS spirit, shaped by years of feedback from children, teachers, parents, and leaders. From the start, it was decided that DESS Primary Academic City wouldn't be a through-school that shared resources with DESS College. Instead, it would stand proudly alongside, offering a distinct, nurturing environment focused solely on primary education. Adjacent but not adjoined.

Initially, the plan called for a single-storey layout, echoing the beloved community feel of DESS Primary Oud Metha. And, whilst the younger children will all be firmly planted on the ground, the decision was made to add a second level for Year 5 and 6 students, preparing them for their eventual transition to secondary education. This shift in design also allowed for the addition of a rooftop garden - offering older primary students a special place of their own, an environment where they could reflect and prepare for the next stage of their journey.



From Vision to Reality: The Stages of Design

The design evolution followed a carefully structured process:

Vision: The DESS team's initial ideas for a new school, inspired by the success of DESS Primary Oud Metha in combination with the best practice in school design internationally.

Pre-Concept: Defining the goals, philosophy, and culture that would underpin the new school. This stage was heavily influenced by the existing DESS community, including teachers and staff who understood what made the original school such a success. Seeing the school through the eyes of the children from FS to Year 6, was key in ensuring that the design was a success, and so the vision of "A Day in the Life of Dessie" was created.

Concept: The early brainstorming, which began as sketches on Post-It notes arranged on Mrs Dando's desk top, visualising her team's dream of a space that would foster both community and innovation.

Schematic Design: These ideas were formalised into more detailed plans, focusing on space arrangements, outdoor learning zones, and community spaces. Everything from classroom layouts to parking areas were considered as the school's design was finalised.

Detailed Design: The final stage of the design process, signed off in September 2024, solidified the refined concepts that would bring DESS Primary Academic City to life. This locked-in version - known as the Issues for Construction (IFC) stage - is now in the hands of the contractors, ensuring that every vision becomes a reality, brick by brick.

"This is a new school born from years of learning, dreaming, and imagining a better way to educate children," added Mrs Dando. "We're not just building a place to learn - we're creating a place where tradition and innovation will unite to give our children the very best of two worlds. With the DESS spirit embedded in every corner of the new campus, DESS Primary Academic City promises to be a place where students will feel they belong from the very first day.

Space Planning

Ground Floor

- Cultural Center
- Entrance lobby
- wellness Hub
- Arabic Classrooms
- FS 1& FS 2 Block
- FS 2 Classrooms
- FS 1 Classrooms
- Y1 & Y2 Block
- Y2 Classrooms
- Y1 Classrooms
- Y3 & Y4 Block
- Y4 Classrooms
- Y3 Classrooms
- Sport pitch
- Natatorium
- Changing rooms
- Storage
- Visitors Car parking
- Faculty car and Bus Parking
- Security gates
- Technical Block
- School Forest
- Playground
- Forest





“A truly great school honours its legacy whilst looking forward. As it gleams with the excitement of modern spaces, our new DESS Primary Academic City will prove that innovation doesn’t have to come at the expense of tradition. It will still feel like home.”

-Catherine Dando, Principal



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