

# Primary pulse

APRIL 2025



**PEOPLE POWER:**  
MEET THE TEAM BEHIND THE VISION



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# BUILDING THE FUTURE: LIFE ON SITE WITH ALAA AL JBAE OF GRAPHITE

Alaa Al Jbae of Lead Consultant Graphite doesn't just oversee our construction site - he orchestrates a high-stakes, high-energy operation that's transforming open desert into the region's most exciting new school.

As Resident Engineer for the project, he's the man in charge of keeping things moving, keeping things safe, and keeping a close eye on every detail that brings our vision to life.

## No Longer A Blank Canvas

A year ago, the site was nothing but sand, camels and the occasional snake. Today, it's a fully operational construction hub with up to 300 workers on-site - a number that will rise to 800 as the project races towards its September 2025 opening.

The blank canvas handed to Alaa came with advantages: no traffic congestion, no buildings to work around, and total freedom to shape the school from the ground up. But that also meant starting with nothing on day one - no infrastructure, no power, no water. Every pipe, cable and road had to be built from scratch.

## Safety First, Always

For Alaa, safety isn't just a box to tick - it's the foundation on which everything else is built. "Without the highest standards of site safety, there can be no construction," he says simply. That means daily inspections, rigorous protocols and a zero-compromise approach to risk.

The site staff are hired based on their respect for safety, and every aspect of site operations - from crane lifts to electrical work - is governed by world-class health and safety standards.

But keeping people safe is just part of the equation - keeping them well is just as important. Air-conditioned rest areas, hydration stations, prayer spaces and proper meal facilities are all in place to ensure that the workforce stays healthy and motivated. "The welfare of our site staff is our main priority," Alaa adds, "and if you take care of your people, they will take care of the project."



## The Road Ahead

All stakeholders have collaborated to ensure the successful connection of the school with a newly developed road, aimed at facilitating smoother access management. This joint effort underscores the commitment to enhancing transportation efficiency and ensuring seamless connectivity for students, staff and visitors. By working together, the project team has addressed logistical challenges to support the school's accessibility needs.

The building envelope of the school is steadily nearing completion across various zones, reflecting solid progress on site. With precast elements and structural steel works largely finalised, the project has now moved into the finishing stage. This phase includes interior fit-outs, external façade works, MEP installations, and detailed architectural works both inside and out, setting the stage for the final construction phase and ensuring a high-quality educational environment upon completion.

Meanwhile, external works - such as boundary wall construction, utility infrastructure, and preparations for authority inspections (DEWA, DCD, BCC, and other relevant entities) - are progressing in parallel. These coordinated activities also mark a significant step towards completion, with all efforts aligned to meet the targeted handover milestones and final approval requirements.

For Alaa and the wider Graphite team, it's all about momentum. Every day, the site evolves, moving closer to becoming a vibrant, future-ready school that will soon be filled with students, teachers, and possibility.

From virgin desert to world-class learning environment - it's a transformation happening in real time, and Alaa Al Jbae is making sure every detail is executed to perfection.

# KICKING OFF A NEW CHAPTER: NEIL BRINICOMBE'S GAME PLAN FOR SEPTEMBER

When Neil Brinicombe and his family touched down in Dubai last August, they were braced for a blistering blast of summer.

Though retreating into air-conditioned exile became a daily ritual, they've since been embracing the Emirates' warm weather and endless blue skies, making the most of an outdoor lifestyle that suits them perfectly.

For Neil, the new Headteacher of DESS Primary Academic City, balance is the ultimate goal, whether that's helping children juggle academics, sports and creativity when the new school opens in September, or finding time to cycle, run and unwind with his family at the beach.



## A Family That's Found Its Feet

Joining Neil from their home in Dover, UK last year, were wife Katy and their three children: Harry, Louis, and Edie. A fellow teacher, Katy has temporarily swapped classrooms for coursework; studying to become a family mediator, whilst also keeping in touch with some supply teaching in school.

Harry, in Year 12 at DESS College, is tackling A levels and BTECs while playing football for Dubai Irish. Meanwhile, Louis has thrown himself into rugby with Dubai Exiles alongside his GCSE studies in Year 10. Edie, the youngest, is enjoying her own Yr 6 adventure at DESS Primary Oud Metha ready to make the transition to the College in September.

The move hasn't been without its challenges. For teenage children with established friendships moving schools is hard, let alone moving countries. Both boys transitioned from a UK Grammar School and found DESS academic standards to be slightly higher - but nothing that hard work and support from the school couldn't fix. As Neil says, "The rewards are worth it. The children all recognise how fortunate we are to be able to call Dubai home."

## Running, Rugby and Resilience

A lifelong sports enthusiast, Neil has wasted no time in getting back to his favourite pursuit of running. He recently ticked off the Burj 2 Burj event and is already eyeing the UAE's rugged trails for his next challenge. "There's something about running out here - just you, the horizon, and a lot of sand," he laughs. The whole family shares a love of the outdoors, whether it's walking along Dubai's coastal paths or spending weekends at the beach.



## Lessons in Leadership

Neil's approach to leadership is focused on relationships and people. He quotes from Brad Johnson, an educational expert; 'Love what you teach but love who you teach more.' His years as an Executive Headteacher of two primary schools in Kent taught him that children need to feel happy, safe and supported to thrive. "That's why wellbeing is central to our ethos," he explains.

His football coaching experience in the USA has also shaped his leadership style, teaching him that kindness and respect should never be overshadowed by competition. It's a philosophy that fits perfectly with DESS's ethos.



## Building Our Community

Neil's journey to Dubai is a story of seizing opportunities. After 20 years in education, teaching across the primary age range and leading schools, he felt it was time for a new challenge. The appeal of broadening his family's horizons while being part of an ambitious project like DESS Primary Academic City was irresistible.

"There's something special about building a school community from the ground up," Neil says. "We've got the legacy of Dubai's oldest British school behind us and the opportunity to create something truly exceptional."

## Looking Ahead

With September's grand opening fast approaching, Neil's focus is clear: Creating a school whose foundations are in creating great people for the future. "We believe in ensuring that all children achieve academic excellence; that children leave the school with a secure grasp of right and wrong and know what impact being a good person has on others, as well as giving them the confidence to truly be inspired and believe in themselves so they can achieve exceptionally in the areas of the curriculum they love."

## NEW SCHOOL, SAME BOLD VISION: GEORGIA LAVERY'S PASSION TO INSPIRE EVERY CHILD

When Georgia Lavery packed her bags for East London, she was looking for an exciting yet challenging start to her teaching career. She was looking for impact.

Drawn to the challenge of working in schools in the UK capital's deprived inner-city suburbs, she became a guide and support for children navigating complex personal and cultural challenges.

Fast forward to 2002, and another leap of faith: this time to Dubai, where husband Mark, a Structural Engineer, had landed a new role. Georgia saw an opportunity - not just to build a life in a new country, but to bring her passion for inclusive, community-driven education to a place where schools were evolving at breakneck speed.

Two decades and leadership roles at four Outstanding Dubai schools later, including two years as Primary Headteacher, she's getting ready to take on another big challenge: helping to launch DESS Primary Academic City.

Moving from her Assistant Headteacher post at DESS Primary Oud Metha to become one of the new school's Deputy Headteachers, Georgia brings not only decades of leadership experience but a lifetime spent ensuring every child - no matter their background, feels valued, supported and inspired to thrive.



### A Journey of Purpose

Born and raised in Liverpool, Georgia knew from the start that she wanted to teach where she could have the greatest impact. That's why, after completing her B.Ed at Liverpool Hope University, she chose to begin her career in East London - an area renowned for its cultural diversity and complex social challenges.

"It was about more than just teaching," Georgia recalls. "It was about understanding the children, their families, and the barriers they faced. Making a difference there was very important to me."

## The Dubai Adventure

In 2002, Georgia's husband Mark, a structural engineer, was offered a job in Dubai, and the pair lost no time making the leap. What was meant to be a temporary move soon became home.

Georgia quickly found herself at the heart of Dubai's education scene, securing leadership roles in four Outstanding-rated primary schools - including DESS Primary Oud Metha.

"I've had the privilege of working in some of the best schools in Dubai," Georgia says. "But DESS has always been special. It's the community, the values and the sense of belonging. It's the magic that sets it apart."

After leaving DESS Primary Oud Metha to take on a promotion elsewhere, Georgia returned in 2024 as an Assistant Headteacher - drawn back by the school's commitment to excellence. Now, as a Deputy Headteacher at DESS Primary Academic City, she's ready to help shape its future.



## Leading with Heart

Georgia's leadership philosophy is built on connection. Whether guiding teachers, mentoring students, or working with parents, she believes that relationships are at the core of every great school.

"Every child deserves to feel like they belong," she explains. "School should be a place where they feel safe, supported, and excited to learn. It's our job to make that happen."

For Georgia, that means ensuring students have a say in their education, that their wellbeing is prioritised, and that the DESS magic with which she first fell in love, remains as strong as ever.

## Life Beyond the Classroom

When she's not at school, Georgia's life is just as full. She and Mark share a love for travel, aiming to visit several new countries each year with their two sons, Luke and Bear. As Luke gets his sights set on university, Bear; currently in Year 4 at DESS Primary Oud Metha, will move with Georgia to Academic City in September.

An avid home cook, Georgia has a particular love for Spanish cuisine - something she explores whenever she gets the chance. And if she wasn't in education? "I'd still be working with children," she says. "Probably in a therapeutic or counselling role. Because for me, it's always been about supporting young people and helping them become the best versions of themselves."

## A School Built on Magic

With the new school opening its doors in September, Georgia is focused on what really matters: the people inside it.

"The building will be brand new, but what makes a school special isn't the facilities, it's the children, the teachers, the parents, and the sense of community," she says. "That's what makes DESS different. And that's exactly what we'll create at DESS Primary Academic City."

For Georgia, education isn't just about lessons - it's about legacy. And as she steps into this new chapter, she's ready to make sure every child at DESS Primary Academic City feels the magic, too.

# BEYOND BORDERS:

## HOW KENYA HELPED SHAPE RUTH GIBSON'S VISION FOR WELLBEING

With a career spanning three continents, a passion for inclusion, and a belief that every child should leave school not just smarter, but stronger, Ruth Gibson isn't just shaping education, she's helping Team DESS to redefine it.

Currently a Deputy Headteacher at DESS Primary Oud Metha - and soon to expand that role to include DESS Primary Academic City as well, Ruth is leading the charge on Safeguarding, Wellbeing and Inclusion. Her mission? To ensure that every child, no matter their background, ability or starting point, feels valued, supported and empowered to thrive.



But her journey to this expansive role has been anything but ordinary.

### A Career Born from Connection

With sights initially set on becoming an educational psychologist, Ruth realised that working directly with primary school age children each day was where her heart truly lay.

Her teaching career started in Bristol, where she worked across all the primary years and specialised in behaviour management. Armed with her SENDCO qualification, she soon found herself also supporting other schools, helping them create environments where every child could succeed.

### Kenya: A Different World of Education

In 2014, Ruth and husband Terry; whom she met while at university and who is also a teacher, leapt at the chance to move to Mombasa, Kenya. As Deputy Headteacher at a successful international school, Ruth got her first exposure to multiculturalism and life as an expat.

"It was certainly a lifestyle packed with contrasts. For instance, there was a beautiful creek at the bottom of our enchanting garden but then sometimes we were without mains power for a week!" Ruth laughs.

The experience cemented Ruth's belief that education is about more than academics; it's about understanding, empathy, and making every child feel seen and heard.



## The Magic of DESS: Wellbeing, Inclusion & the IEI Curriculum

Since joining DESS Primary Oud Metha in 2016, Ruth has been instrumental in building a school culture based on wellbeing. She has been a driving force behind the IEI Curriculum (Invent, Explore, Inspire), an approach designed to ignite curiosity, encourage problem-solving and connect learning to real-world challenges.

“This isn’t about children passively absorbing information,” Ruth explains. “It’s about them asking the big questions, taking risks and making sense of the world around them.”

Whether it’s STEM projects that solve real-world problems or outdoor adventures that turn nature into a classroom, Ruth is committed to making learning irresistible.

### A Family Affair

Ruth’s passion for education is very much a family affair. Husband Terry is also a teacher in Dubai, and both their daughters will join the new school in September; Clara in Year 1 and Connie in Foundation Stage.

“It’s not just about opening a new school,” Ruth says. “It’s about recreating the sense of family and community that makes DESS special. I want parents and children to walk through the gates on day one and feel that magic immediately.”

### Clever Creativity Creates Big Opportunities

At DESS Primary Oud Metha, the leadership team has packed every corner, corridor and cupboard with learning materials and information. With more space available at the new Academic City campus, Ruth is determined to make every area work hard. “Space means nothing if you don’t use it well,” she insists. “It’s the life, energy and creativity you fill it with that matters.”

### The Heart of the Matter: Wellbeing and Inclusion

For Ruth, wellbeing isn’t just an add-on, it’s the heartbeat of school life. Her vision is clear: a community where every child feels safe, supported and inspired to grow.

DESS Primary Academic City will build on the proven approaches at DESS Primary Oud Metha, with dedicated wellbeing leads, open-door policies for parents, and a culture that promotes kindness, respect and inclusion at every level.

“Starting a new school can be daunting, but when families feel connected, everything else falls into place,” Ruth explains.



### A New Chapter at DESS Primary Academic City

With the September opening fast approaching, Ruth is ready to bring her experience, passion and unwavering commitment to inclusion and wellbeing to this exciting new chapter.

Her advice to families joining the school?

“Trust the process. We’re not just creating a school; we’re building a place where every child is valued, challenged and empowered to thrive.”

## BUILT TO LEAD, READY TO INSPIRE: SAM BOWEN AND HIS A-GAME GET SET FOR SEPTEMBER

On the face of it, flying discs, local radio show scriptwriting and vegetarian cooking might seem to have little in common.

Yet each has had a hand in helping Deputy Headteacher Sam Bowen to step out of his comfort zone and develop the skills he knows he'll need as he tackles one of the most exciting educational leadership roles in Dubai.

Whether competing for Great Britain in the World Ultimate Frisbee Championships, writing creative content for local radio while at university, or experimenting with new vegetarian recipes, Sam has always embraced challenges that he felt could shape his leadership and communication skills and develop his mindset.



Born in the central England city of Coventry, Sam grew up on the south coast. His teaching career began after completing his English Language degree at Cardiff University, followed by a PGCE at the University of Portsmouth. His first job was at Craneswater Junior School in Portsmouth, where he developed his interest in supporting children with social, emotional and behavioural needs.

In 2015, he moved to Dubai, where he's since held middle and senior leadership roles across two primary schools, specialising in Literacy, Learning and Teaching and Professional Development. Most recently, as Assistant Headteacher at DESS Primary Oud Metha, he's been instrumental in shaping the curriculum and fostering a strong school community.

Now just months away from starting his Deputy Headteacher role, he's relishing the opportunity to help build a school from the ground up.

"It's a rare privilege to be part of something brand new while also carrying forward the values and traditions that have made DESS so special for over six decades," he says. "We are excited to continue the long standing DESS commitment to delivering high academic standards within an educational experience that is both rigorous and inspiring. By making every child feel like they belong and that they are part of something special, we will ensure that they receive a well-rounded and meaningful education from their own individual starting point. The new school will be built around our children - and we can't wait to welcome them."



### A Family Affair

For Team Bowen, education is in the blood. Sam's parents both work in the education sector in the UK and his wife, Amie, has worked in PE and sport in Dubai's not-for-profit sector for over a decade.

Sam has recently started a young family. Daughter Winnie (1), is already keeping them on their toes, and with baby number two due in May, life is about to get even busier!

Despite the demands of leadership and family life, Sam still finds time to stay active. While his frisbee and football boots have been temporarily retired, he's taken up kitesurfing. When he's not on the water, he can be found in the kitchen, perfecting his latest vegetarian-inspired dish – a pursuit indulged by signing up for a cooking class whenever he travels.

## Building Trust, One Child at a Time

Sam believes trust and integrity sit at the heart of every successful school, and that they can only be built with open, honest relationships between teachers, parents and children.

“Trust is a two-way street,” he explains. “If something doesn’t go as planned (and when you’re opening a new school not everything will go to plan!), it’s important that families trust that we are there for them. And in return, it’s important that the school trusts families to keep an open dialogue, share their worries or concerns and work collaboratively with us to support their child’s learning and wellbeing. We are all in this together, and that is what’s so exciting!”

Recognising that families will be joining DESS Primary Academic City from a range of backgrounds - some moving from DESS Primary Oud Metha, others transferring from schools across Dubai and many arriving from overseas - Sam is keen to help make the transition as smooth as possible for everyone.

“There’s something really special about opening a school with a completely new community,” he says. “Some children will already know and love what DESS stands for, others will have heard about it, and for those arriving from abroad - well, they’re in for something special!”

To help every child feel settled from the start, the school will be reaching out to families with surveys, taster sessions and personalised transition support. “Making those early days very special for our children is crucial. It’s the start of an incredible journey for all of them, and we want to celebrate that,” Sam adds.



## Moments That Matter

Sam has seen first-hand how the right school culture can shape a child’s confidence. One of his most treasured memories from his time at DESS Primary Oud Metha was a Sports Day shortly after he arrived at the school.

“Milou Paul was the first DESS pupil to rely on a wheelchair for mobility and is an absolute treasure. Perhaps surprisingly, Sports Day is something she looks forward to as much as every other student. I remember watching Milou for the first time as she competed in the running race with the help of her one-to-one supporter, Rochelle. It wasn’t a specially arranged event or one that needed extra focus or fanfare. It was just another race. That was the beauty of it. Milou didn’t see her disability, and neither did anyone else. It’s moments like that that make me feel proud to be at DESS. It’s a special place, and I’m so excited for more families to experience what we have to offer and for more people to feel this pride. That really matters to us.”

# A PASSION FOR INCLUSION, A VISION FOR DESS

From a childhood shaped by books and self-discovery to becoming a trailblazer in early years education, Asma Bi's journey to DESS Primary Academic City is one of passion and purpose.

As the first external appointment to the new school's leadership team, Asma brings not only years of expertise in Early Years education and inclusion but also a deep-rooted belief that every child deserves to be seen, heard and valued.



## The Making of an Educator

Born and raised in Greater Manchester, Asma's early years were steeped in the history and hard work of the region's once-thriving textile industry. With both parents working long hours in the mills, Asma found solace and adventure in books, becoming an avid reader and, in turn, a lifelong learner.

"I was one of those children who absolutely loved school," she recalls. "It was my world. I was inspired by the teachers who nurtured my curiosity, and I knew from an early age that I wanted to do the same for others."

After graduating with a degree in Primary Education, Asma began her teaching career at a local primary school, quickly establishing herself as a champion of inclusive education. Alongside her classroom experience, she pursued a Master's in Education, and then a degree in Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), leading to qualified SENDCO status.

Over 13 years at the same school, she became a specialist in Primary & Early Years learning through play, developing initiatives to identify and support children experiencing early signs of wellbeing challenges. Her approach? Empathy, understanding and ensuring every child feels they belong.

## Inspired by Family, Driven by Purpose

While Asma's career has been shaped by her professional experiences, it has also been profoundly influenced by her late brother, a humanitarian who dedicated his life to charity work in Mozambique.

"He was my biggest supporter," she reflects. "Losing him was devastating, but I carry his values with me every day. He believed in education as the most powerful tool for change, and I know he would be so proud of this next step."

That step is DESS Primary Academic City, a school that mirrors Asma's ethos - one where community, diversity and opportunity take centre stage.



## From Manchester to Dubai: The DESS Opportunity

When Asma first visited Dubai to see her sister Aisha, now the owner of a popular online party supplies and giftware shop, she never imagined she'd one day be moving her family here. But when she saw the vision for DESS Primary Academic City, she knew it was where she belonged.

"The more I learned about DESS, the more I knew this was the perfect fit," she added. "It's not just about academic excellence - it's about creating a nurturing space where children develop confidence, character and resilience."

Asma, her husband Rizwan, and their two daughters Maya (9) and Sofia (6) will make the move to Dubai in August, with both girls set to start at the new school.

"It's not just a new adventure for me, it's for our whole family," Asma smiles. "Maya and Sophia are just as excited as I am!"

## A Champion for Inclusion - and the Scouts!

Beyond the classroom, Asma has another passion: the Scouts movement. As a Cub Leader with the Scouts, she has seen firsthand how Scouting builds confidence, independence and teamwork in young people.

“I love how Scouts teaches resilience and leadership in a way that’s fun and engaging,” she explains. “It’s an amazing way for children to step outside their comfort zones, connect with their peers and gain real-life skills.”

Asma hopes to explore opportunities for Scouting in Dubai, encouraging families at DESS Primary Academic City to embrace adventure, community and outdoor learning.



## Looking Ahead

As she prepares to help shape the future of DESS Primary Academic City, Asma is clear on her mission:

“I want to help create a school where every child is celebrated for who they are, supported in every way possible, and given the confidence to achieve whatever they set their minds to.” With her experience, passion and total commitment to inclusion, there’s no doubt that Asma Bi will play a pivotal role in making DESS Primary Academic City a place where every child can thrive.

# BLACK BELT, BIG MOVE, BRIGHT FUTURE

## – MEET ANTHONY HALL

Many educators move overseas for an adventure. Others go for career progression. Our new Assistant Headteacher Anthony Hall demanded something much bigger from Dubai. He came to find a school that felt like home.

Having found it, he's spent the past 15 years as a teacher, a year group leader, a mentor, a respected colleague and if you've had children at DESS Primary Oud Metha, probably your child's rugby or football coach at some point too.

Anthony's journey in education started far from the desert heat. It was in the rolling valleys of South Wales that he discovered his love of teaching and honed his leadership skills in classrooms across the country. A history specialist with a passion for helping children grow, he spent a decade teaching in Welsh primary schools before an unexpected conversation changed everything.



### A Leap of Faith

"I often felt the urge to work abroad but it always seemed like a huge move, and life kept getting in the way," Anthony recalls.

It was a parent football coach who first suggested Dubai, a place Anthony knew little about at the time. Curious but cautious, he decided to see for himself, taking a family holiday in the UAE in 2008.

"It was love at first sight," he adds. "The city, the culture, the energy – we all felt the same. We knew straight away that we wanted to be a part of it."

Parked for a year, the plan quickly regained momentum when Anthony spotted an advert for a Year 4 teaching role at DESS Primary Oud Metha. Taking a deep breath, he applied. One interview and a whirlwind relocation later, he arrived in Dubai with wife Maria and son Marc, ready to start the 2010 school year.

### A Family Affair

From the moment Anthony set foot in DESS Primary Oud Metha, he knew he was in the right place. What he didn't realise was just how deeply embedded in the school his family would become.

While Maria was helping out at a school event one evening, a casual chat with staff led to an invitation for an interview, followed by a job offer. She accepted, became a Learning Support Assistant (LSA) in 2010 and, like Anthony, never looked back.

Son Marc also joined the DESS family, starting in Year 8 at DESS College as soon as the family arrived from Wales. Today, he's back in South Wales, building a career of his own, but he remains forever grateful for the education and experiences DESS provided.

## From Teacher to Leader

Anthony's career at DESS has been one of constant evolution. From his early days as a Year 4 Class Teacher (where his line manager was the current DESS Primary Oud Metha Headteacher, Tony Clarkson!), he quickly moved into leadership roles.

Over the years he's been a Year 6 Class Teacher, Head of Science, Year 4 Leader, Year 5 Leader (helping to guide the school through COVID), and, for the past four years, Year 6 Leader. His passion for leadership, combined with his tireless commitment to the children, made him a natural fit for one of the Assistant Headteacher roles at DESS Primary Academic City.

"I feel blessed to have been part of DESS for so long," he says. "The new school is an exciting next step - not just for me, but for every family joining us on this journey."

## More Than a Job

Ask Anthony what he loves most about his work, and his answer is instant: "There aren't many jobs where you get a smile every day - no matter how that child's day is going."

For him, teaching isn't just about academics; it's about relationships. He believes in open, honest conversations with parents, knowing that strong partnerships lead to the best outcomes for children. "Parents should always feel comfortable coming to us, whether it's to ask a question, share an idea or just have a chat."



## A Passion for Sport, a Love of Community

Away from the classroom, Anthony's love of sport runs deep. A former Welsh karate champion, he represented his country in the World Championships and began coaching martial arts at just 16. He's also been heavily involved in school sports, coaching rugby and football throughout his time at DESS.

But while his competitive karate days are behind him, his passion for fitness remains. These days, you're more likely to find him running, hitting the gym or strolling along Dubai's beaches.

## The Heart of DESS

Despite the excitement of helping to launch a brand-new school, Anthony is keen to keep things in perspective. "The new school will look and feel amazing, but it's what sits beneath it that really matters. And that's what makes DESS so special."

His proudest moments? Seeing children grow, flourish, and return to visit long after they've moved on. "Sometimes I hardly recognise them," he laughs. "But they always know they'll get a warm welcome."

And as for that lump in the throat when Year 6 students move on? "We don't really get any respite from that feeling because no sooner have we recovered from saying goodbye to one cohort of leavers, than we have to prepare to go through the sense of loss all over again the following year!"

For Anthony, the DESS journey continues with a new school but the same big heart.

# 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.

## With such amazing facilities, is there any danger that academia will be overshadowed?

Never. But let's be clear - education at DESS isn't just about grades; it's about balance.

We believe academic excellence is non-negotiable, but it's also deeply personal. Every child, whatever their starting point, should feel like they're excelling. That's why we explicitly teach character alongside academics, ensuring our students grow into great people, not just great exam-takers.

And the final piece? A platform for every child to shine. Whether that's in maths, music, sport or drama, we make sure every student finds their moment. Because true excellence comes in many forms - and at DESS, we celebrate them all.

## Where will meals be served?

Forget the vast, echoing canteens the characterised schools of old - at DESS, we believe mealtimes should be social, not overwhelming. No eating in classrooms, no chaotic lunch halls - just a calm, communal space where children can recharge, refuel and enjoy their break.

## How are you approaching Arabic and Islamic studies?

With pride, passion and a stunning Cultural Centre that celebrates the region's rich heritage.

On the first floor two Islamic classrooms are centered by a Majlis and are inspired by Islamic architecture. We have eight Arabic classrooms and a talented team of Arabic teachers to inspire children's Arabic adventure.

It's not just about learning a language - it's about experiencing culture, history and tradition in a space that makes it all come to life.

## Are you taking wellbeing seriously within the design of the school facilities?

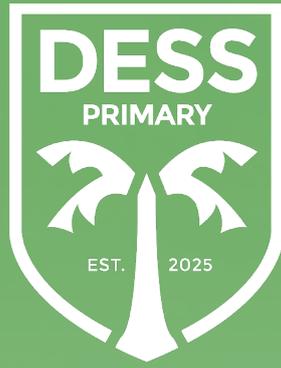
Absolutely - wellbeing isn't an afterthought at DESS, it's woven into everything we do.

We know that challenges come in all shapes and sizes, from a lost pet to big family upheavals. That's why we have a dedicated Counsellor and Wellbeing Lead on hand, supporting not just children but parents too.

And because feeling part of a community is key to mental health, we're focused on helping families connect - whether that's through coffee mornings, yoga sessions or parent meet-ups.

No child or parent should ever feel isolated. Wellbeing is about connection, and we're building that from day one.





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