BSME
BRITISH SCHOOLS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Newsletter

Term One
2026 - 27



* Artwork from the winners and runners-up of the BSME SRS Art and Photography Competition 2025-26

BSME
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Welcome to the BSME Newsletter

We're pleased to bring together stories, reflections, and developments from across our member schools, partners, and the wider BSME community. It highlights the innovation, collaboration, and commitment to education that continue to define our network, even in a year shaped by significant regional challenges.

The BSME Team



Debra Forsyth
CEO



Nalini Cook
COO



Tanya Rattan
Membership Lead



Kirsty Crosby
Professional Learning Lead



Xandra White
Marketing Lead



Natasha Etti
Finance Lead



Rachel Thomas
Student Events Lead



Amy Eckersley
Student Events Coordinator



Leila Hamad
Administration & Networks Assistant



Fatinah Hussain
Administrative Assistant

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BSME UPDATES

Accreditation

Please contact membership@bsme.org.uk if you have any queries

BSO Accreditation is the gold standard for British schools overseas and is the only accreditation scheme formally endorsed by the UK Government's Department for Education (DfE). Following a membership decision in 2016, BSO was adopted as the accreditation benchmark of choice for BSME. Since then, 96% of BSME member schools have achieved and maintained BSO accreditation.

For a number of years, BSME has allowed schools the option to meet membership accreditation requirements via a 'top-up' of other accreditations/inspections from CIS, COBIS or local UAE regulators ADEK or KHDA. With the vast majority of BSME schools now choosing to be BSO accredited, this 'top-up' option will no longer be available.

Going forward, all new BSME member schools will need to achieve BSO accredited status within two years of joining the organisation and all existing members will be required to maintain BSO accreditation status as a condition of membership.

For most member schools, which are already BSO accredited, this will be business as usual. For the few schools that have previously utilised the 'top-up' option, a grace period will be extended to allow for their transition to BSO accreditation.

Government-approved inspectorates **EDT** and **ISI**, can be contacted directly to book an inspection and BSME is also liaising with both organisations to offer Inspector Training for suitably experienced school leaders who may be interested in this opportunity.

The BSME Executive Committee has reaffirmed the organisation's commitment to the UK Government's BSO Accreditation programme and we are keen that all BSME schools fully understand the benefits of BSO accreditation, which include:

- Recognition by UK Department for Education with a unique DfE number
- Accredited as meeting standards aligned with those for independent schools in England
- Listing on UK Government's Get Information about Schools (GIAS) website
- Meets the accreditation requirements for membership of BSME, AoBSO, CIS and COBIS
- Allows the school to offer statutory Early Career Teacher induction (in conjunction with BSME membership)

Further information on BSO can be found in the **Introducing BSO** booklet.

BSME UPDATES

Examinations

The recent regional conflict brought many challenges to schools in the region, not least the pivoting from formal public examinations to non-examined assessments for GCSE and A-level. BSME was glad to be able to use our contacts with examination boards and government bodies to support schools through the fraught journey from entries to results and beyond.

Following coordinated effort between associations and examination boards, all affected students were provided with a route to qualification, sometimes requiring creation of completely new specifications overnight. The large-scale application of non-examination grading, whether via a portfolio of assessment, or extrapolation from NEA work, did though highlight some serious failings in the contingency measures currently available to examination boards, and we recognise that some students and staff will not have been satisfied with the assessment methods or their outcomes.

We are therefore continuing to work with JCQ, Ofqual and awarding bodies to ensure that all possible learning is taken from these recent experiences to improve communications and application of contingency measures in future scenarios.

International Education Strategy

The UK government's **International Education Strategy 2026** was published in January. The strategy sets out the government's plans to place the UK's world-class education system, from early years to schools, colleges and higher education, at the heart of the UK's global engagement. It recognises that partnerships are critical to this mission and sets out the government's ambitions to:

- Increase the UK's international standing through education and make UK the global partner of choice at every stage of learning
- Sustainably recruit high-quality international higher education students from a diverse range of countries
- Collectively grow education exports to £40 billion per year by 2030

The strategy is a joint commitment across government and is co-owned by the Department for Education (DfE), the Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade (DBIST) and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The strategy is now being converted into a set of Sector Action Plans by the Education Strategy Action Group, (ESAG), to which BSME is contributing. The latest Sector Action Plans can be seen here.

BSME UPDATES

BSME Action Research

BSME is pleased to support the University of Birmingham in Dubai in offering their Action Research programme to all teachers across our Member Schools. Action Research offers teachers excellent professional development that is personalised to the individual teacher and their context, benefitting both the researcher and their school. Participation is free of charge and teachers are supported in their own action research projects through a series of online, research-focused seminars offered by the university.

The first session of the programme for 2026-27 is taking place on Monday, 23rd November at 15:00 GST. This session will introduce the programme and give an opportunity to meet the tutors, with further sessions exploring how to collect and analyse data, synthesising and presenting your findings and showcasing your work online. The programme year culminates with an in-person celebration event in June and Action Research conference at the end of August for those who wish to attend.

To register your interest in taking part in this valuable professional development programme, please **complete this form** by Friday, 20th November.

Student Enrichment Committee

For many years now, BSME has had a Heads of PE (HoPE) committee to support the work of our Student Events Lead in delivering the multitude of sporting events we offer to schools each year. With the increase in number of non-sporting events on the calendar, such as MUN, EcoStem conferences, Dance Festival and Young Musician of the Gulf, BSME is now setting up a Student Enrichment Committee to support the HQ team in the strategic development of these non-sporting enrichment events. If your school regularly participates in BSME non-sporting events and a member of your team would be interested in serving on this committee, please complete the form **here**.

Safer Recruitment Training and Self Harm & Suicide Awareness Courses

Over the last twelve months, BSME has funded certification courses for over 350 staff from BSME member schools. Self Harm and Suicide Awareness training was provided to each school by our partner, **Mind Your Health**, whilst Safer Recruitment Training was provided by our partner, **The Safeguarding Alliance**. For schools that have joined BSME this year, or those which have not yet attended, there is one more online Safer Recruitment training course available on Tuesday, 12th January 2027. You can register your interest in taking part **here**.

ESP Education

Best Practice Network INTERNATIONAL

DfE accredited NPQs for leaders in BSME schools

Application Deadline: 22nd November 2026

NPQ Leading Teaching
NPQ Leading Teacher Development
NPQ Leading Behaviour and Culture
NPQ in Senior Leadership
NPQ SENCO
NPQ in Headship
NPQ in Executive Leadership



Discuss the right NPQ pathway for your school by emailing bsme@espeducation.co.uk

Advancing Saudi Vision 2030: BISJ Introduces ENHANCE Cognitive Training to Develop Future Leaders

By British International School Jeddah

At the British International School Jeddah (BISJ), learning has always extended beyond academic success. As education in Saudi Arabia continues to evolve in line with Vision 2030, BISJ is strengthening its holistic approach through the introduction of the ENHANCE cognitive training programme, designed to support student wellbeing, resilience, and future-ready learning skills.

The programme reflects BISJ's belief that students who are happy learn more effectively, and that wellbeing plays a central role in academic growth. With a strong focus on character development, lifelong learning, and well-being, the school continues to explore innovative approaches that help students understand not only what they learn but also how they learn. BISJ's interest in cognitive training began after the school was introduced to the ENHANCE BrainHQ programme at the British Schools of the Middle East Conference in February 2025. The research behind the programme, along with evidence from other schools already using it, highlighted its potential to support cognitive development, resilience, and student wellbeing.

The idea behind cognitive training is simple: the brain, like any muscle, can be strengthened through regular exercise. Through online, gamified activities, students work across key cognitive domains including speed, attention, memory, social cognition, cognitive flexibility, and executive function. The programme is personalised and adaptive, meaning each student is challenged at the right level and supported as they progress.

For the 2025/26 academic year, all students in Years 6 and 7 participated in the programme, with plans to expand to two further year groups this academic year and eventually offer access to parents as part of the school's wider learning community. To support this, BISJ has created dedicated time within the timetable and trained 24 staff mentors to guide students through the process. The role of mentors is central to the programme's success. They help students stay motivated, understand the purpose of the training, and connect the exercises to their wider learning and wellbeing. This ensures that technology is used meaningfully, with balance and structure, rather than simply becoming another screen-based activity.





The programme also supports the development of perseverance. Students are encouraged to concentrate, repeat tasks, and work through challenges over time, helping them build resilience and confidence as learners. This is particularly important in an age shaped by artificial intelligence and digital transformation, where adaptability, empathy, and problem-solving are increasingly essential. Looking ahead, BISJ sees ENHANCE as part of a wider shift in education across the region. As Saudi Arabia continues to invest in future-ready learning, programmes like this demonstrate how schools can combine innovation with wellbeing to prepare students for the challenges of tomorrow. Ultimately, BISJ's goal is not only to improve performance, but to help students become positive, productive and happy individuals, equipped with the skills and confidence to solve complex global challenges.



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TEACHERCON DXB26

What happens when you bring passionate educators from across the region together for a day of fresh ideas, lively discussions and shared learning?

On Saturday, 3rd October 2026, BSME TeacherCon made its much-anticipated return to Dubai, taking over Arcadia Global School for a day dedicated to all things teaching and learning.

With classrooms swapped for workshops and daily routines put on hold, educators had the opportunity to explore new approaches, challenge their thinking and connect with colleagues from across the region. From staff wellbeing and bridging curriculum gaps to reimagining Arabic language learning, the programme offered plenty of practical ideas to take straight back to school.

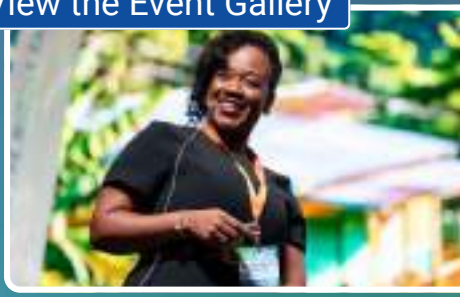
Dr. Dian Hamilton kicked things off with an inspiring keynote exploring resilience and the realities of being an educator abroad, setting the tone for a day of learning and reflection. After a packed programme of interactive workshops and thought-provoking discussions, Emmanuel Awoyelu brought the day to a close, challenging delegates to think about human potential and the kind of schools we're building for the future.

Of course, TeacherCon is about more than just listening and learning. It's about the conversations between sessions, the sharing of experiences and those lightbulb moments that happen when educators come together.

A huge thank you to Arcadia Global School, our keynote speakers, workshop hosts and exhibitors for helping make TeacherCon DXB26 such a success.

We hope to see you at an upcoming edition of our much loved TeacherCon! And you can **revisit some of the best moments from TeacherCon DXB26 via the links on the right.**

View the Event Gallery





Watch the Recap

SAVE THE DATE

TEACHERCON DOHA27
Saturday, 27th March 2027
Qatar International School

TEACHERCON KSA27
Saturday, 8th May 2027
British International School Jeddah

Hydroponics Harvest Sparks Student Innovation and Local Environmental Awareness

By Sharjah English School

A corner of the Sharjah English School Geography classroom has become a jungle! Secondary students have nurtured basil and kale seedlings, sewn in rockwool and positioned in a hydroponic system collecting harvests over a year now. An Eco-Club has become a daily hobby for some students ranging from Year 10 to 13 including the Head Boy Bowen.

"What started as a small idea I pitched to Ms. Lok has become one of the highlights of my year. I've always been passionate about science and sustainability and hydroponics felt especially relevant given how important water-efficient agriculture is becoming here in the UAE. We worked closely together to bring it to life, researching plant species and pH levels, sowing the first seeds, and leading the build with support from the club. Over the year we expanded into a vertical system, added UV lights to optimise growth and week-to-week I stayed involved in testing pH, adjusting nutrients and planting new seeds. One of the most rewarding moments was leading a teaching session for the visiting primary school and watching their eyes light up, pointing at the roots suspended in water. It's shown me how committing to an idea can turn an empty corner of a classroom into something that actually produces food and inspires others." (Bowen, Year 13)

Such was the success of our first harvest, we decided to make pesto and share with the wider community in jars. Our Head Teacher, various staff and Head of Operations relished the fresh taste to enliven their lunchbox!

“I really enjoyed being involved with the hydroponics project in Ms. Lok’s classroom because it was such a unique and hands-on experience. Watching plants like basil grow without soil felt really innovative and showed how science can be used in practical and sustainable ways! I especially liked seeing the process from the sprouting seeds to eventually tasting the delicious pesto we made, because it made the project feel rewarding and complete.” (Tara, Year 10)

"I thoroughly enjoyed being part of the hydroponics project because it was very cool to see how technology could be used to grow real food without soil. Seeing the process go from small seeds to making basil leaf pesto was interesting as it allowed us to experience the real effects of this technology firsthand." (Duncan, Year 10)

Social Studies teachers brought their students to see the operation and link it to their Water Security topic. Curiosity heightened as students asked questions such as ‘how are we growing without soil?’ and ‘how does it sustain growth at night? It's exciting to see how this initiative is embedding itself into the Geography, Science and Social Studies curriculum. Our next steps are to power the whole system with solar energy via a panel rigged up and linked to the roof of the Geography classroom. Innovation all the way!









A Legacy Sewn by Students: How one student-led initiative is changing lives across generations and continents

By Stephen Green, Secondary Headteacher, JESS Dubai

Some initiatives begin with a teacher's idea. This one began with a question from a group of students: what if a period didn't have to end a girl's education?

That was 2019. The Period Empowerment Project started as a small CAS commitment from a group of JESS Sixth Formers who refused to accept that a problem was too big, too awkward, or too far away to tackle. The students developed a fierce determination to tackle period poverty in Zambia. Seven years on, the project has visited communities in Cambodia, the Philippines and Zambia; raised over 45,000 AED in a single year; produced and hand-delivered hundreds of menstrual kits to girls who would otherwise miss school every month; and gifted sewing machines so that women could make their own pads and earn a living from the skill.

The numbers matter. After the team's visit to Palawan, the headmistress of San Rafael Elementary School reported that unexcused absences among female students fell by 57% in the months that followed. Mothers told students that the kits meant daughters could stay in school. Tribal chiefs asked to join the sewing workshops. Baker McKenzie, a local sponsor and supporter, described it as 'an incredible project with global impact.'

The numbers are not the point of this article.

What makes the Period Empowerment Project worth sharing with colleagues across the region is the model it has built over seven years: one of genuine student ownership, where each cohort inherits not a charity drive, but a responsibility. Students approach CEOs independently. They negotiate sponsorship frameworks. They lead menstrual health education in communities where the subject has never been spoken about openly. They sew, and they travel, educate, experience. When they leave school, the next cohort begins again.

Perhaps even more remarkable is the legacy impact. The founding students launched 'The Even Project'; a social enterprise that has already secured 44,000 pre-orders from NGOs. One student, Sarah, achieved a perfect IB score of 45 and had planned to become a lawyer. She changed her career path entirely, to dedicate herself to menstrual equity. The project changed her.

This year's team of ten has just started meeting. Carefully selected from applicants, they are sewing together each week and preparing for a June trip to Zambia.

This is where it all began; where Patricia lives; a young girl from a rural Zambian community, identified during an earlier project visit, whose school fees at The Tongabezi School have been funded by the team ever since.



Keeping her in education is not a gesture. It is a commitment that this year's new cohort inherits and honours. Last year was not without its challenges. The team adapted, as teams before them have always adapted. The commitment never wavered.

The continuity, from one generation of students to the next, carried by shared purpose rather than institutional instruction, is, we believe, what lasting enrichment looks like. Not something the school does for students. Something students do, with the knowledge that what they build will matter long after they have gone.





Beyond the School Gates: Building a Culture That Celebrates Sporting Ambition

By Dubai British School Jumeira

A strong sporting culture starts with access. Since Dubai British School Jumeira (DBSJ) opened, sport has been an intentional part of school life. Our PE department is built around a simple principle: every student should have the opportunity to experience different sports, develop their abilities and discover where they can thrive.

Across the school, students are introduced to a broad and varied sporting programme, creating opportunities to participate, compete and achieve at different levels. The emphasis is not only on developing strong school teams, but on building confidence, encouraging participation and giving every student meaningful experiences of sport.

Swimming is one example of how that commitment is embedded into school life. Every student, from Rising 3s through to Secondary, swims once a week throughout the school year.

Consistent access from the earliest years gives students the opportunity to develop confidence and skills in the water, while those with a particular passion for the sport can continue to pursue their ambitions further.

For some students, those ambitions extend well beyond the school gates.
Year 8 student Alana recently competed at national level for the first time at the Irish Age Group National Championships in Limerick. She returned as National Champion in both the 200m Individual Medley and 200m Backstroke, alongside silver medals in the 100m Butterfly and 100m Backstroke.

Year 7 student Isabella's competitive swimming journey has taken her across the UAE, Oman, Italy and Indonesia. At the Tuscany Regional Summer Championships, she became Regional Champion in the 100m Backstroke and secured two silver medals. During the summer, she also trained at a swim camp in Bali before competing in the Bupati Badung XI Cup, where she won seven medals and set a new competition record in the 50m Butterfly.

Their success reflects individual dedication and ambition, but their experiences also contribute to the sporting culture around them. When students see their peers pursuing sport at this level, achievement becomes tangible. Sporting role models are not only professional athletes; they can be students walking the same corridors and balancing the same demands of school life.

Creating that visibility is particularly important in encouraging girls to participate, compete and aspire through sport. Our DBSJ Girls in Sport video series builds on this approach by giving students across different sports a platform to share their ambitions, inspirations and experiences, making female participation and sporting ambition more visible across the school.

For our PE department, creating a sporting culture begins with giving every child access and opportunity. Where students choose to take that opportunity will differ: for some it may mean discovering a new sport, for others representing their school, and for some pursuing competition internationally.

What matters is creating an environment where every student has the opportunity, encouragement and confidence to discover how far they want to go.





View the **Student Events Calendar**

GET INVOLVED

Student Events

Please visit the **Student Events Calendar** on our website and click on the respective event thumbnails to view full details and access registration links. As capacity is limited for most events, we recommend registering your school as soon as possible to secure a place.

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Windows and Mirrors: Designing Belonging into the Primary Curriculum

By Nadia Low Ten Que, Head of Primary, Reach British School

Every child who walks into a classroom carries a quiet question: do I belong here? At Reach British School in Abu Dhabi, our primary pupils come from 70+ nationalities, and many are multilingual. We believe the curriculum itself should help answer that question.

Our approach draws on the idea of "windows and mirrors", first described by the educator Rudine Sims Bishop (1990). Children need mirrors: moments where they see themselves, their families, languages and cultures reflected in what they learn. They also need windows: genuine opportunities to look into lives and experiences different from their own. When both are present, children feel seen, and they learn to see others.

Starting with books

Our primary curriculum is book-led. Through our Read·Build·Soar approach to English, each unit is anchored in a high-quality text, and each half-term a humanities topic and a Big Question drive learning across English, Art and Design & Technology. This makes book choice one of the most powerful decisions we make. When selecting texts, our teams ask: whose stories are we telling? Who might see themselves here, and who might not?

The aim is balance, with books that mirror our community sitting alongside books that open windows onto unfamiliar places and perspectives.

Connecting learning to the UAE

Our medium-term plans for History, Geography, Art and D&T include deliberate links to the UAE: its heritage, its landscape and the many communities who call it home. For children who have recently arrived, this helps them put down roots. For those who have grown up here, it recognises that their home is worth studying.

Removing barriers to taking part

Belonging isn't only about content. If a child can't access the language of a lesson, they can't fully take part in it. That's why multilingual scaffolding is planned into every unit from the start rather than added afterwards, so every child can join the discussion rather than simply watch it.

What we are noticing

Children are excited about the books they are reading and are asking to share the stories with the leadership team.

We have also started using a mixture of English and Arabic words when speaking with the children. Children are growing in confidence as they help their English-speaking teachers learn Arabic words, and they light up when we use them. For our Arabic-speaking pupils, hearing their language valued by the adults around them is a powerful mirror. For everyone else, it opens a window.

Questions for other schools

This isn't a programme or a scheme. It's a lens we apply to everyday planning, and any school can start with three questions. Look at your core texts: who is missing? Where does your curriculum connect to the place your children live? And is language support built into planning, or bolted on afterwards?

Belonging doesn't come from a one-off event or a themed week. It grows from the choices we make in everyday planning and teaching.



Amplifying Young Voices: The Power of Student Led Podcasting

By Al Khor International School, Qatar

The Primary school podcast is turning student voice into a cross-phase conversation, developing interpersonal skills and leadership beyond the confident use of technology.

"Welcome to Head Talks, the podcast made by students for students." With this opening line, Primary Student Council hosts Abdul, and Illiyeen, invite their schoolmates into conversations about school life, wellbeing, and how to make AKIS the best it can be.

Students develop the technical skills involved in producing a podcast, but the real value lies in what happens beyond the recording. Hosts research topics, prepare questions, listen carefully, respond spontaneously, and communicate with guests of different ages and experiences. They learn that effective leadership is not simply about having a voice; it is about using that voice thoughtfully.

A good interview means hearing an answer and responding in the moment. When Year 3 Leader, Mrs Kirkhouse, spoke about the importance of sharing worries with someone you trust, one host asked whether keeping a diary might help pupils who find it hard to open up.

"You know what, that's a really good idea," she replied. It was a small moment, but it showed a young leader thinking on their feet and adding something of their own rather than simply following a script.

The podcast has taken the hosts beyond their immediate peer group. Interviewing Tara, a Year 11 student, who led a Year 5 sun-safety assembly, saw the hosts quiz her on UV rays and SPF before she turned the tables to ask what they had learned. This was cross-phase learning at its best with the hosts holding their own in a conversation with someone several years older.

Head Talks asks its hosts to conclude each episode with a message listeners can act on: talk to someone you trust, include others, and look after yourself. In their own words, “Teamwork and friendship start with kindness and including others”. The skills of empathy and engaging meaningfully often take years to develop, yet the podcast is giving students the opportunity to build them from an early age.

Primary Head Girl, Aiza, explains that Head Talks changed her own behaviour and hearing student leaders conduct interviews inspired her to apply for a leadership role, which is perhaps the strongest measure of success - the influence it has from one student to another. As the next generation prepares to navigate an increasingly digital world, the podcast demonstrates that some of the most important skills remain deeply human.

“It has given us chance to learn from other students about things that can help us in everyday life. After listening to the episode about sun safety, I started being more careful about putting on sunscreen, wearing a hat, and drinking enough water. Hearing last year’s head boy and head girl do the interview also made me want to become a student leader, and I am now proud to be the Primary Head Girl”.



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"Schoolbox has played a key role in shaping [our] reputation and will continue to support our growth."

Lee Hole, Principal
Dubai British School Jumeira



Developing Explorers: Building Engagement before Adolescence - RGS Riyadh Explorer Awards

By Reigate Grammar School Riyadh, KSA

What if preventing teenage disengagement begins years before adolescence? At Reigate Grammar School Riyadh Prep Schools, this question has shaped our Explorers Initiative, a recognition programme designed to nurture academic excellence, intellectual curiosity and outstanding personal qualities.

At Reigate Grammar School Riyadh Prep Schools, this question has shaped our Explorers Initiative, a recognition programme designed to nurture academic excellence, intellectual curiosity and outstanding personal qualities.

Our starting point was to work backwards from a challenge facing secondary education: how can schools sustain young people's desire to learn? Taking inspiration from Jenny Anderson and Rebecca Winthrop's The Disengaged Teen, we are seeking to establish an explorer mindset during the formative prep school years, helping pupils approach senior school with curiosity, confidence and increasing independence.

The international context adds urgency. OECD PISA 2025 results recorded unprecedented average declines in mathematics and reading once again, alongside evidence of longer-standing challenges. These findings do not establish disengagement as the sole cause of falling attainment. They do, however, reinforce the importance of examining both what children learn and how they experience learning.

To explore is to investigate, discover and seek deeper understanding. In education, this means asking questions beyond the immediate task, making connections and pursuing ideas because they matter to the learner. Our ambition is to develop that disposition alongside the knowledge and skills that make meaningful exploration possible. Explorer rewards recognise pupils who consistently go beyond expectations. This might involve independent research, wider reading, an additional project or sustained investigation of a personal academic interest. It can also emerge through insightful questioning, creative thinking and thoughtful connections across subjects. Sharing discoveries with others helps extend the benefits throughout our school community.

Crucially, exploration requires a willingness to encounter difficulty. We encourage children to understand that an unsuccessful attempt need not define their ability. With appropriate support, feedback and reflection, it can become the starting point for deeper understanding. Academic growth often involves uncertainty and discomfort; our role is to help pupils navigate these experiences with perseverance, rather than retreat from challenge.

This makes the qualities we celebrate important. Exceptional effort, resilience and initiative sit alongside academic achievement. Leadership means supporting others; independence includes knowing when to seek help. Kindness, collaboration and responsibility ensure that personal ambition contributes positively to the wider community.

Although Explorer rewards are prestigious accomplishments at RGSR, the mindset behind it is an aspiration for every pupil. Recognition should make the habits of purposeful learning visible and encourage children to see themselves as capable of developing them.

Our aim is to prepare confident, compassionate learners who carry these habits into senior school and beyond. By celebrating curiosity, courage and character early, we hope to strengthen children's relationship with learning before disengagement takes root, giving them the confidence to ask another question, attempt a harder task and continue exploring when the answer is not yet within their reach.



Codifying Great Teaching across GEMS Education: A system-wide transformation

By Steplab & Abeer Sakka, VP for Teaching & Learning, GEMS Education

With over 15,000 educators, GEMS sought to create a unified, evidence-informed model of world-class teaching across its network.

GEMS Education, one of the world's largest and longest-running private K-12 education providers, operates 47 schools across the UAE and Qatar, serving over 140,000 students from 180 nationalities across four curricula: British, American, Indian, and IB. With over 15,000 educators, GEMS sought to create a unified, evidence-informed model of world-class teaching across its network.

Challenge

Given the diversity of GEMS schools and the scale of the network, the challenge lay in achieving consistency in instructional quality and professional development. Leaders identified the need for a shared framework that could clearly define great teaching, translate research into practice, and ensure every teacher had the tools and language to deliver high-impact lessons.

Action: Teach Like a GEM Playbook and Steplab partnership

GEMS developed the Teach Like a GEM (TLAG) Playbook, a codified instructional framework that translates great teaching into clear, practical steps. It brings together eighteen evidence-informed techniques drawn from the work of Doug Lemov, Barak Rosenshine, and Daniel Willingham.

Each technique is rooted in cognitive science and breaks teaching down into precise classroom actions that help every child know more, understand more, and remember more.

To drive implementation, GEMS partnered with Steplab which provided the infrastructure to systematise instructional design and professional growth at scale, enabling consistent, high-quality instructional coaching across all schools.

GEMS built a bespoke TLAG Library of pedagogical strategies within Steplab, aligning every technique, micro-step and rehearsal task with our TLAG Playbook. All middle and senior leaders completed a Coaching Skills Builder course to strengthen their feedback and coaching expertise. Leaders also received in-person training from the Steplab team.

Utilising the Group PD builder tool, which produces consistent group training sessions across our network of schools, has streamlined the design and delivery of our Practice Clinics and given valuable time back to professional learning leads. School leaders use data and analytics to interpret trends from drop-ins, shoutouts, and coaching reflections, using real-time data to drive informed decisions and continuous improvement.

Impact

Our work to improve our professional development offer has resulted in:

- Greater coherence in instructional language and practice across all schools
- Personalised, immediate feedback through drop-ins and 1:1 instructional coaching
- A shift from evaluative lesson observations to an open-door culture of developmental drop-ins
- Whole-school PD that now embeds modelling, rehearsal, and deliberate practice for contextualised learning
- Sharper, data-informed decision-making through Steplab's analytics dashboard
- Stronger alignment between professional learning, classroom practice, and student outcomes

Sarah Warncken, Vice Principal at GEMS Wellington Academy Al Khail who were GEMS' earliest Steplab adopters, highlighted the positive impact a strong, evidence-informed PD programme has had on teaching quality: "This year we celebrated some of our best A Level and BTEC results, and we performed far better than we had anticipated in our GCSE outcomes. A huge number of factors translate to improved outcomes for students, but I am confident that the marked improvement in the quality of what happens in our classrooms is certainly a factor in our performance this year."

Through this system-wide transformation, GEMS is demonstrating that when thousands of educators share a common professional language and when instructional coaching sits at the heart of professional learning, great teaching becomes the norm not the exception and all students benefit.

To find out more about Steplab and how they can support your school with professional development that really works, head to their website.

What does it take to lead a school through a crisis?

What do teachers wish they'd known before moving abroad?

And what really makes a great school leader?

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SEASON TWO

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Organisational Learning starts with People, not Processes

By CIS

Rather than seeing people as resources to manage, we invite schools to recognise the collective knowledge, experiences, perspectives, relationships, and potential that exists across our community.



When we talk about school improvement, conversations often focus on strategy, systems, and outcomes. Yet sustainable improvement begins with people.

At CIS, we use the lens of socially responsible leadership to challenge ourselves and our member schools to rethink how we view the individuals within our learning communities.

Rather than seeing people as resources to manage, we invite schools to recognise the collective knowledge, experiences, perspectives, relationships, and potential that exist across our community.

This broader understanding of human capital shifts the focus from individual expertise to collective learning and shared responsibility.

Socially responsible leadership and human capital operate as a symbiotic relationship. Human capital encompasses the knowledge, capabilities, experiences, perspectives, relationships and potential of people within a learning community (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1971; Sweetland; 1996).

Organisational learning transforms potential into progress, and progress into lasting impact. Schools make progress when knowledge is shared, discussed, adapted, and applied across the community. Organisational learning transforms individual capability into collective capacity, creating the conditions for meaningful and lasting change.

Socially responsible leadership provides the purpose that guides this process. It asks school communities to consider how learning, decision-making, and innovation can contribute positively to learners, society, and the wider world.
Importantly, there is no single definition of socially responsible leadership. Each school community defines what it means within its own context, culture, and priorities.

The CIS International Accreditation framework positions every school as a learning organisation. Within that framework, the CIS Protocol for Developing Socially Responsible Learning Communities serves as a tool for innovative organisational learning and sustainable organisational development.

The most innovative schools recognise that improvement cannot sit solely with senior leaders. Meaningful change happens when every person in the school community—students, teachers, governors, families, and community partners—contributes to understanding challenges and shaping solutions.

Human capital is the engine. Organisational learning is the process. Sustainable organisational development is the outcome.

For school leaders across BSME, the challenge is to create the conditions in which learning can flourish across your school community, where each person learns and contributes as a socially responsible leader.

When schools harness the collective strengths of their communities, they are better equipped to respond to complexity, adapt to change, and create solutions that matter in their context.

The most important shift is this: schools should not think of themselves solely as places where students learn. They are learning organisations, where students, educators, leaders, governors, families, and partners learn together.
No single person has all the answers. Learning communities that listen, reflect, learn, and adapt can build the collective capacity to thrive.

That is the promise of socially responsible leadership: creating learning organisations capable of shaping a better future.

A Relational Model of Human Capital, Organisational Learning and Sustainable Organisational Development



Returning to Sri Lanka: How Amity Built a Lasting Community Partnership

By Twedex

Amity International School Abu Dhabi is preparing to return to Sri Lanka in January 2027, two years after 43 students and six staff first travelled to the country for a week combining community service, sustainability and adventure.

The return trip, organised in partnership with Twedex, will allow a new group of students to build on the work started by Amity's 2025 cohort—particularly its relationship with Vijayabahu Primary School.

Rather than visiting a different community, Amity has chosen to return to the same school, reconnect with its pupils and staff, and continue the work already underway. This commitment reflects the school's aim of making service learning part of a lasting relationship rather than an isolated experience.

We were clear from the start that we didn't want this to be a trip where we turned up, did some good, and left. Vijayabahu wasn't a stop on an itinerary — the plan was always to build something that outlasted the week, and that's exactly what it's become" said Matthew Miller, who led Amity's 2025 trip to Sri Lanka as the school's then Director of Co- Curricular & Sport.

During the original visit, Amity students worked alongside Vijayabahu's pupils and staff to paint classrooms, lead reading sessions with younger children, and deliver donated school supplies and sports equipment.

For many, it was their first experience of direct service learning in an under-resourced setting. It gave them an opportunity to work with children from a very different background while developing a greater awareness of their own privilege and responsibilities. The day ended with a friendly volleyball match between the two schools, making the experience as much about connection and shared enjoyment as contribution.

The partnership has continued beyond the visit. Vijayabahu Primary School receives support throughout the year from the Twedex Foundation, helping to maintain momentum between groups and ensuring that future visits can respond to the school's ongoing needs.

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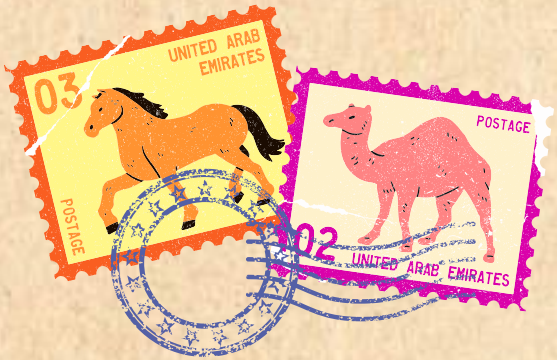
When Amity returns in 2027, its students will therefore not be starting from the beginning. They will be able to see how the relationship has developed and continue something established by the students who went before them.

The wider programme will again combine service with environmental, cultural and outdoor learning. In 2025, students participated in turtle conservation activities and completed a beach clean at Hikkaduwa, sorting the waste they collected to understand the scale of marine plastic pollution first-hand. Visits to Galle Fort, the Tsunami Museum and a tea factory added historical and cultural context, while surf lessons provided challenge and adventure.

The most important legacy of the 2025 trip, however, was the decision to return. By revisiting the same community and building on its previous work, Amity is showing how an international school trip can develop into a meaningful, long-term partnership—and how each new group of students can contribute to a story that extends far beyond a single week.



Where in the World is **BSME?**



It has been a very busy Term 1 for the BSME team as we continue to foster relationships and support collaboration with other associations and organisations across the globe, whilst also advocating for our members in the international education sector. The team was flying the BSME flag at the HMC Heads' Conference and International Association of Primary Schools Annual Conference in the UK as we welcome these two associations to the British International Schools Associations Group (BISAG), as well as participating in the inaugural meeting of the Global Education Assembly (GEA) at UNESCO HQ in Paris.

Closer to home, we've met with members at Teach Middle East's AI Summit, OneFour24's Schools in Action conference and Middlesex University's Digital Wellbeing Symposium. We also caught up with lots of school and partner members at GESS Dubai, where BSME were proud to be shortlisted for the Outstanding Contribution in Education Award, based on the support offered by the BSME community to our members and the wider education community during the regional conflict.

This month, our CEO, Debra Forsyth, also attended the AoBSO Conference in London and the FOBISIA Conference in Bangkok, where we were delighted to sign MoUs formalising our positive, collaborative relationships with these organisations.























Beyond the Curriculum: How MILLIE expanded University & Career Guidance at Doha College

By Jenna Ahn, CEO & Co-Founder, MILLIE

At Doha College (DC), students face overwhelming decisions about where to study and which degree to pursue, alongside considering options both at home in the Gulf and abroad.

To give them first-hand insight, MILLIE, in a long-standing partnership with DC, brought together alumni and industry professionals into interactive career panels, and hosted a profile-building seminar that brought parents into their children's university journey.

How can students be equipped with skills to face an AI-focused world?

Over the past year, MILLIE curated two panels for DC, including an Engineering & Medicine panel, which tackled competitive medical school applications alongside engineering careers in an increasingly technological world.

Speakers from the University of Cambridge, Mass General Brigham and a biomedicine graduate-turned-software engineer shared their journeys, closing with a key takeaway for the students: in an AI-reliant environment, interpersonal skills are a non-negotiable. This rings especially true for the healthcare sector, where human empathy cannot be easily replicated.

A STEM Degrees & Careers panel unpacked routes from applied science to software development, with DC alumni from organisations such as Mott MacDonald and Microsoft answering the students' questions. By building sessions around interactive discussion rather than traditional presentations, this created a space for a genuine and reflective conversation. Panelists shared how they chose their degree subjects, weighed universities across the UK, US, and the Middle East, and built global careers.

Through blending experience with sector-specific insight, these sessions left DC students ready to make informed university and career choices, and clear on which skills to start building in secondary school.

Bringing parents into the journey

Parents are an integral part of a student's university application process. Alongside the panels, MILLIE also hosted a parent information seminar for DC on Profile Building, showing families how students can strengthen their extracurricular profile and make the most of summer opportunities ahead of global university applications. The session gave DC families a clear, year-by-year picture of what meaningful involvement looks like, from early exploration in Years 7–9 to targeted competitions and leadership roles in Years 10–12. With an audience of 20 parents, the session allowed for an intimate, engaging conversation; the presentation was followed by a lively Q&A session where parents received expert advice first-hand from MILLIE's in-house counsellors.

> Everything we cover at MILLIE is what I wish I'd had in high school: we bring in mentors who are like the older sisters and brothers I always wished I'd had, giving students, parents, and schools the up-to-date guidance so many of them tell us they're missing.
>
> -Jenna Ahn,
> CEO & Co-Founder, MILLIE

Discussing a day in the life of a medical student during our Engineering and Medicine panel



Discussing Tisal's work on engineering the acoustics of concert halls during our STEM Careers panel



Examples of questions asked during a MILLIE parent-facing session



Keeping Subjects on the Timetable: How British School Muscat used remote teaching to expand its post-16 offer

By Teacher Horizons

British School Muscat's model retains an in-person classroom community: students learn together on site, with adult supervision and existing pastoral structures, while the remote specialist provides the subject expertise.

British School Muscat faced this challenge with A-level Psychology. The school wanted to add Psychology to its post-16 options, but the subject required only four and a half hours of teaching a week. As Principal Kai Vacher explained: "We couldn't justify employing a full-time psychology teacher to teach four and a half hours a week in an international setting."

The school instead brought in a remote subject specialist while keeping students on site. An adult supervises the classroom, while the specialist delivers the teaching remotely. Students can therefore choose Psychology through the normal post-16 options process, without a change to fees.

The approach was introduced deliberately. The school first produced a research paper examining the cost and management implications, secured governor approval, and then made the subject available as an option.

The school reports that it has not experienced resistance to extending its post-16 curriculum with online A-level Psychology, possibly because students are actively opting in. The experience has also prompted the Chair of Governors to consider whether Arabic could be developed further and whether Mandarin could be introduced using the same model.

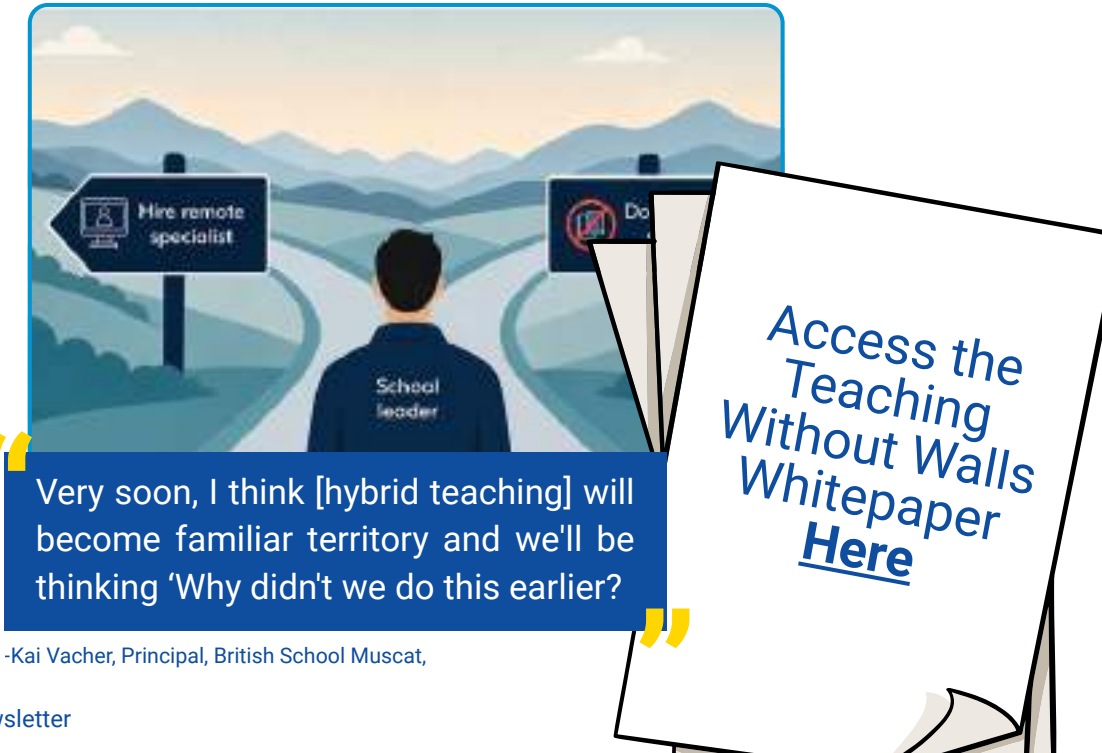
The case is particularly relevant as recruitment becomes more difficult across international schools. Teacher Horizons surveyed 74 senior leaders and 1,381 teachers across 139 countries for its Teaching without walls white paper. Some 77.8% of school leaders said teacher recruitment had become harder over the previous year. At the same time, 69% saw hybrid or remote teaching as a partial solution to recruitment challenges, while only 25% were confident their school could onboard and integrate a remote teacher.

The survey also highlights why careful implementation matters. Leaders and teachers identified concerns around human connection, engagement, academic rigour, screen time and safeguarding.

British School Muscat's model retains an in-person classroom community: students learn together on site, with adult supervision and existing pastoral structures, while the remote specialist provides the subject expertise.

For schools considering a similar approach, the experience points to three practical principles:

- Use remote teaching to fill a specific staffing gap rather than as a wholesale replacement for in-person teaching.
- Keep students on site with an adult supervising the class, preserving classroom relationships and pastoral support.
- Start with one subject or cohort, then expand once staff, families and governors have seen the model in practice.



> Very soon, I think [hybrid teaching] will become familiar territory and we'll be thinking 'Why didn't we do this earlier?

-Kai Vacher, Principal, British School Muscat,

BSME

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