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New school appointments across the Gulf for the 2026-27 academic year
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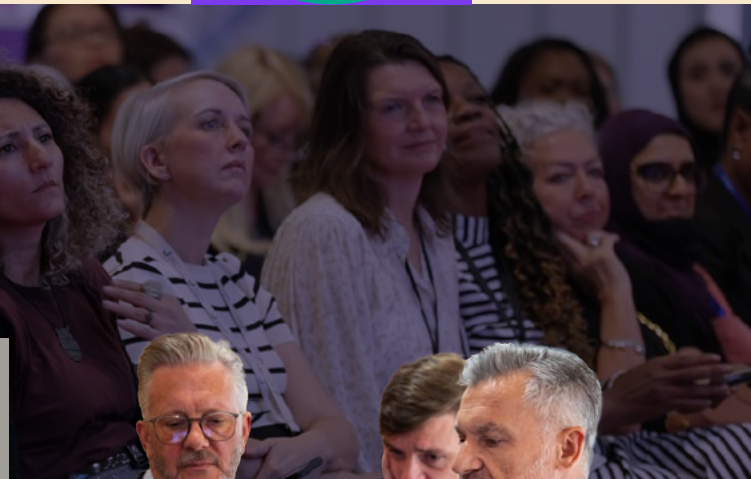
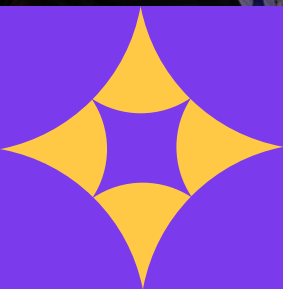
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Market Outlook

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Editor's Note

As the new academic year begins across the GCC, this Back to School edition looks into the resilience and structural shifts reshaping school operations.

Enrolment data shows the private school sector regaining steady momentum, even as international groups race to scale multi-curriculum networks against rising costs and fierce competition. And to match the growth and advancements, recruitment has grown more demanding, with schools now seeking teachers who combine subject expertise with technological fluency.

Behind the scenes, institutions are consolidating fragmented tech stacks into unified systems ahead of the AI-driven demands even as on campus, infrastructure is being reimagined around how children actually learn.

For schools in the region, 'Quality' is not just about meeting regulatory compliance, but an obsession to deliver both students and parents the best it can.

Joseph George
Editor



Editor
Joseph George
editor@educationmiddleeast.com

Editorial Team
Ritika, Amitha R

Design & Layout
Vahiju P C

Advertising
Mathew, Cecelia M
info@educationmiddleeast.com
T: +971 58 5277050/+971 54 3916932

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The UAE leads a growing GCC international schools market, with enrolment up 23% over five years

Private schools regain momentum

Latest figures point to steady enrolment across the GCC private school sector while operators redirect new capacity towards affordable and mid-market segments

By **Joseph George**

Private school enrolment across the GCC is picking up again, driven by strong demographic growth, expatriate inflows and an accelerating appetite for international curricula.

Across the region, private operators and regulators are reporting increased seat utilisation and steady demand as families prioritise academic continuity and long-term stability. This has also driven fresh investment and expansion

by several international school brands across the GCC.

According to data from ISC Research, the GCC international schools market expanded 32% over the past five years to reach \$14.4 billion annually, up from \$10.9 billion. Across the region, the sector now encompasses 1,785 schools serving 1.8 million students and employing approximately 142,000 educators.

The UAE continues to lead regional activity, accounting for 898

institutions, representing half of all regional schools and 53% of total market value. UAE enrolment climbed 23% over five years, outpacing the 15% regional average. Saudi Arabia follows with 332 international schools, then Qatar with 219, Kuwait with 150, Oman with 117 and Bahrain with 69.

"Enrolment is steady across the GCC; many schools still have healthy wait lists, families are prioritising continuity over relocation, and new school openings are still going ahead," says Malia Rowe, Head of Insights at ISC



Enrolment is steady across the GCC; many schools still have healthy wait lists, families are prioritising continuity over relocation, and new school openings are still going ahead

— **Malia Rowe,**
Head of Insights, ISC Research



The GCC international schools market now encompasses 1,785 schools, serving 1.8 million students and employing approximately 142,000 educators

Research. According to Rowe, British curricula account for 40% of GCC international schools, compared with 28% for the US curriculum, while growth is increasingly tilting towards affordable mid-market provision.

The impact of expatriate relocation prompted by the region's recent conflict appears to have been largely mitigated. As of July, GEMS Education said it had secured about 90% of its targeted student places for 2026-27, following the temporary relocation of an estimated 1,500 to 1,600 students, roughly 1 to 1.5% of its 146,000-student base.

Institutional expansion reflects this sustained demand. GEMS Education committed Dh\$2 billion over three years to add 20,000 seats across Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Announcing the investment, senior leadership confirmed that while premium schools will still be added, a significant majority of the new seats being created are earmarked specifically for the value and affordable segments.

David Coakley, Senior Vice President for Human Resources at GEMS Education attributes enrolment momentum to "a combination of population growth, talent inflows and increasing demand for premium educational experiences."

Ahead of the new term, GEMS Education said it had recruited 1,550 new educators for 2026-27, drawn from more than 112 nationalities

and more than 500,000 global applications, taking its total teaching community past 10,000.

Operators have also reported resilient balance sheets alongside capacity growth. Taaleem posted second-quarter revenue of Dh\$399.8 million, up 19.2% year on year, with net income rising 21% to Dh\$105.6 million, supported by additions across its network. Alef Education, whose revenue is underpinned by a contract with Abu Dhabi's Department of Education and Knowledge running to 2033, reported second-quarter revenue of Dh\$181 million and an EBITDA margin of 75%.

"While we experienced a brief pause in enquiries during the height of the recent regional tensions, confidence returned quickly and we are now seeing strong growth in applications and enrolments across our portfolio," says Nicki Williams, Director of Education at Taaleem. Williams says the continued demand reflects the strength of Taaleem's

academic outcomes, its commitment to innovation and well-being, and the continued expansion of its network.

Other regional operators report parallel trends. Artemis Education registered GCC enrolment growth of nearly 30%. "Some of this movement is internal, where students are transferring from other schools within the region, alongside families moving into the GCC," says Darren Acomb, Director of Education at Artemis Education.

Meanwhile, Dubai's Knowledge and Human Development Authority froze private school tuition for 2026-27 as part of a Dh\$1.5 billion support initiative, bringing total education relief in the emirate to Dh\$2.5 billion. In Qatar, where the private sector comprises 351 schools and nurseries educating 228,488 students, authorities confirmed six new government schools for the term, while Bahrain's Education and Training Quality Authority cited continued operational improvement across its private and public institutions. ■



School technology demand is gathering pace in the GCC as schools prepare for the new academic year

GCC schools consolidate fragmented tech stacks ahead of new academic year

As the new academic year begins, educators, group technology chiefs and platform providers across the Gulf describe a decisive move away from standalone classroom apps towards unified institutional systems, driven by cost pressure, data compliance requirements and the demands of responsible artificial intelligence adoption

By **Joseph George**

Schools across the GCC are auditing their technology stacks and consolidating standalone applications into unified platforms ahead of the 2026-27 academic year.

The shift, which many have described as long overdue, is being driven by rising costs, data fragmentation, tighter regulatory reporting requirements and the need to roll out artificial intelligence safely across teaching, administration and communication.

GEMS Education, which operates 47 schools across the UAE and

Qatar, says its schools were using 1,600 different applications in 2026. The group has since narrowed that number to 400 applications that align with its principles of learning science and data science, as part of a move to unify five separate student information systems onto a single cloud-and-artificial-intelligence platform called tmrw.

Dr Aidan McCarthy, Interim Chief Technology Officer at GEMS Education says the group expects to save \$5 million in the coming school year through the consolidation, while more than 700 on-premise servers could be decommissioned, adding

further savings in infrastructure and technical management.

Dana Alqinne, Head of Pedagogy Innovation and Early Years at Parent, points to external research to frame the scale of the problem across the wider sector. Parent is a management software for childcare centres. Alqinne says, "Instructure's 2026 EdTech Top 40 report found the average district [in the US] has access to over 3,000 different digital tools, but staff and students only actually use about four of them regularly," noting that information technology leaders now refer to the worst version of this as "zombie licenses", a

reference to subscriptions that keep renewing for tools almost nobody opens anymore.

Alqinneh cites US' Oklahoma City Public Schools, which reduced its application count from 1,800 to 250 over a five-year plan, as an example of how far schools are willing to go. "Schools aren't tolerating fragmentation anymore; they're actively dismantling it," she says.

Changed procurement conversation

Providers say the nature of inbound requests from Gulf school procurement teams has changed markedly over the past year. Cillian Morgan, Middle East and Africa Director at Faria Education says inbound requests declined in the first half of the year but have since picked up substantially ahead of the new school year, with schools expanding subscriptions within their current systems and acquiring services such as professional development and support. Morgan links this partly to consolidation and partly to "an urgency around safe, responsible AI rollout in terms of technology and professional development and upskilling for staff and senior leadership."

Bosco Sabu John, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of KreupAI Technologies, describes a similar evolution. "A year ago, procurement discussions were often focused on features and individual use cases. Today, schools are asking broader questions around integration, scalability, cybersecurity, compliance and long-term return on investment," says John, adding that where schools do seek replacements, it is typically because they are struggling with fragmented workflows, poor interoperability or the rising operational cost of managing multiple vendors.

Alqinneh says Gulf inbound has shifted from requests for a single feature towards requests framed around consolidation from the outset, particularly among multi-site school groups. She attributes part of that shift to regulatory pressure, noting that reporting requirements from Dubai's Knowledge and Human Development Authority and Abu Dhabi's Department of Education and Knowledge are more specific than what many standalone tools were built to handle, and part of it to budget scrutiny catching up with years of tool sprawl.

At Fortes Education, the audit has focused on removing duplication rather than adding new software. "The issue is no longer whether schools have enough technology. In many cases, the issue is that they have too many tools doing overlapping jobs,"



The [GEMS] group expects to save \$5 million in the coming school year through the [tech] consolidation, while more than 700 on-premise servers could be decommissioned, adding further savings in infrastructure and technical management

— **Dr. Aidan McCarthy**,
Interim Chief Technology Officer,
GEMS Education

says Dr Sreejit Chakrabarty, Group Head of Technology, AI and Innovation at Fortes Education. Chakrabarty says a proper audit should assess cost, usage and impact together, and that the aim is not only cost reduction but time saved for staff, reduced complexity for families, better data flow and stronger compliance.

Legacy systems and integration

Connecting new platforms to older school databases remains one of the sector's biggest technical challenges. Morgan says Faria Education's software syncs with older databases while newer application programming interface, or API, work continues through a dedicated integrations team. "This 'old' database syncing with new and developing technology is one of the biggest challenges schools face," he adds.

John says KreupAI Technologies' approach is to build flexible integration capabilities rather than rebuild software as a temporary workaround, allowing schools to connect existing databases while gradually modernising. "Educational institutions cannot afford disruptive platform migrations," he says, adding that recent advances in cloud infrastructure, API connectivity, artificial intelligence and data orchestration have made more connected educational ecosystems achievable than before.



Schools are moving from experimentation to structured AI use within clear guardrails, alongside growing demand for a single connected staff portal and more disciplined procurement questions: "Does it reduce workload? Does it improve learning? Does it integrate? Is it secure? Is it worth renewing?"

— **Dr Sreejit Chakrabarty**,
Group head of technology,
AI and innovation, Fortes Education

Vendor vetting has tightened accordingly. Chakrabarty lists the absence of an open API, reliance on manual CSV exports, weak single sign-on support, unclear data storage and high customisation costs for basic integrations among the red flags Fortes Education now screens for. McCarthy says GEMS Education requires single sign-on capabilities and APIs that provide full access to transformed data, with a preference for hosting third-party applications within its own environment or, failing that, applications that recognise data sovereignty rules. "No student or school data can be used for external organisations' marketing, or training of AI learning models," adds McCarthy.

Alqinneh says data migration is often the biggest fear schools have when considering a switch, citing a client running close to 90 locations who described the migration as "a relief" once completed cleanly.

Building the ecosystem

Pointing to specific product developments underpinning the shift towards unified platforms, Morgan says Faria Education's admissions platform, OpenApply, now syncs with its transport platform, Vectare, for shared communication and

insights, with artificial intelligence agents being deployed to consolidate interfaces and navigation across products. Faria Education is also preparing to launch a data platform, Spotlight, and an all-in-one parent application offering a single log-in across products. “The parent experience is a top school priority, therefore it’s ours too,” says Morgan.

Chakrabarty says Fortes Education is centring its own in-house Intranet application as the staff portal and deploying an artificial-intelligence-powered workspace to support teaching and learning, alongside reviewing core school systems for better integration and reporting.

Alqinneh describes building live, cross-location reporting for multi-site operators as a central shift. She cites one operator running 16 centres who previously had to pull data manually from 22 separate programmes to get a single occupancy figure, and now toggles between sites on one live dashboard. “That’s the difference between ‘another app’ and an actual ecosystem,” Alqinneh says.

Making the case to CFOs

Regarding justifying a premium, consolidated platform to a budget-conscious CFO weighing cheaper, open-source alternatives, providers point to total cost of ownership rather than sticker price. Morgan says the real question is the cost of




Individual principals still shape day-to-day buy-in and rollout success even when procurement conversations begin at group level

— Dana Alqinneh,
Head of Pedagogy Innovation
and Early Years, Parent

the alternative, “We’ve seen schools forego a subscription to our market-leading platforms and instead opt for a cheaper or stitched-together alternative. They’ve then faced major problems from day one because they miss out on real expertise, focused implementation, year-round support, real people on the other side and a stable, diligently QA’d product.”

John says open-source or low-cost tools often carry hidden costs in maintaining multiple systems, managing integrations, training staff and correcting data inconsistencies. “The key question is no longer, ‘What does the software cost?’ but rather, ‘What is the operational cost of maintaining complexity?’” he says.

Alqinneh makes a similar point using a client example: one school’s onboarding, budgeted for a year, took three months instead because a single team was accountable rather than several vendors “pointing fingers at each other.” She says that hidden cost, once named clearly, is usually what moves a CFO.

Group consolidation vs school-level autonomy

How far have purchasing decisions shifted from individual principals to centralised, group-wide technology directors? Morgan says the picture is mixed: some school groups keep decision-making decentralised, giving individual schools autonomy, while larger groups tend towards central oversight as they grow and standardise operations. John says the shift towards centralised decision-making is more pronounced among large groups operating multiple campuses, with executives responsible for governance, cybersecurity, compliance and consistency increasingly setting standardised platform requirements, though local flexibility remains.



Schools place the parent experience at the heart of their technology strategy



GCC schools are consolidating standalone applications into unified platforms to support teaching, enable safe AI adoption, meet reporting requirements and address rising costs and data fragmentation

Alqinneh agrees the shift is real but not complete, noting that individual principals still shape day-to-day buy-in and rollout success even when procurement conversations begin at group level.

Moving forward

Every provider points to artificial

intelligence as the dominant trend shaping school software beyond consolidation itself, alongside a harder-nosed approach to procurement. Chakrabarty says schools are moving from experimentation to structured AI use within clear guardrails, alongside growing demand for a single connected staff portal and more disciplined procurement questions: "Does it reduce workload? Does it improve learning? Does it integrate? Is it secure? Is it worth renewing?"

McCarthy says artificial intelligence built for education, alongside intelligent devices including wearables, is core to where GEMS Education's tmrw platform is heading. John points to growing demand for real-time dashboards and predictive insights over static reports, alongside cybersecurity and data privacy becoming board-level concerns. Alqinneh says interoperability is moving from best practice to a buying mandate, citing 1EdTech's 2026 trends report, and that schools are increasingly demanding evidence before adopting new tools rather than adopting them because they "looked promising." Morgan says the market is seeing "the cream of the AI crop" forming, as schools work out which platforms and tools best support ethical, responsible use of data. ■



This 'old' database syncing with new and developing technology is one of the biggest challenges schools face

— **Cillian Morgan**,
Middle East and Africa Director,
Faria Education



A year ago, procurement discussions were often focused on features and individual use cases. Today, schools are asking broader questions around integration, scalability, cybersecurity, compliance and long-term return on investment

— **Bosco Sabu John**,
Founder and Chief Executive Officer,
KreupAI Technologies



International school groups are adapting their programmes to support GCC priorities around AI, innovation, entrepreneurship and leadership

International school groups widen curriculum offering across the GCC

International school groups expand their footprint across the GCC using multi-curriculum, multi-school models to meet rising demand even as construction costs, tuition fee caps and competition for teachers test their growth plans

By **Ritika**

International school groups operating across the GCC are expanding their regional networks as the new academic year begins, thanks to rising demand for multi-curriculum private education and government plans to align schooling with future labour-market needs.

Cognita, Global Schools Foundation (GSF) and International Schools Partnership (ISP) alone run 23 schools across the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar,

Oman and Kuwait, offering British, American, Indian and International Baccalaureate (IB) curricula to a mix of expatriate and citizen families.

Regional footprints

Cognita's first school in the region, Dasman Bilingual School in Kuwait, became part of the group in 2024. It expanded into Saudi Arabia, Oman and Qatar in 2025 through strategic partnerships, and now operates six schools across four countries, including King's College Riyadh, Downe House Riyadh, Downe House

Muscat, Cheltenham Muscat and King's College Doha. "Together, these schools educate thousands of students and represent some of the most respected school brands in the region," says Darren Gale, GCC Managing Director, Cognita Middle East.

GSF entered the GCC in 2014 with the launch of Global Indian International School (GIIS) in Abu Dhabi. It now operates six schools across the UAE and Saudi Arabia spanning four curriculum frameworks, including Glendale

International School and Emirates American School (EAS) in Sharjah, One World International School (OWIS) in Riyadh, a second Riyadh campus, OWIS Al Jazeera, which opened in August 2026, and two GISS campuses in Abu Dhabi and Dubai that follow India's CBSE curriculum, says Amol Vaidya, Deputy Chief Operating Officer – Middle East, Global Schools Foundation.

ISP, a global network of 120 schools across more than 26 countries founded in 2013, entered the Middle East in 2015 with its first acquisition in Qatar. It now operates 11 schools across the UAE and Qatar, six in Dubai, two in Abu Dhabi and three in Doha, including The English College, the Star International schools, Reach British School and Nibras International School, most of which joined the group as established, well-regarded schools. "Schools such as The English College, the Star International schools, Reach British School and Nibras International School reflect this successful buy-and-build approach," says Kam Bhamra, Regional Managing Director, ISP Middle East.

Curriculum diversity

Cognita's GCC schools currently include premium British curriculum schools alongside a bilingual American-Arabic curriculum school. Gale says the group maintains "common frameworks for leadership, safeguarding, quality assurance, professional learning and school improvement," while allowing each school to retain its own identity.

GSF operates across British, American, IB and Indian frameworks, with



The GCC is not one market. Riyadh, Doha, Abu Dhabi, Muscat and Kuwait each have different demographics, expectations and levels of competition

— **Darren Gale**,
GCC Managing Director,
Cognita Middle East

dedicated curriculum leadership and pedagogical specialists at each school. Teacher development follows what Vaidya describes as a two-track approach: curriculum-specific training at school level, and group-wide programmes covering differentiated instruction, education technology and student wellbeing.

ISP delivers 24 curricula across its global network; in the Middle East, its portfolio is predominantly British, alongside American and IB provision. The group's Learning. First approach and proprietary Learning Improvement Process give the schools a shared framework for evaluating what most improves student learning, Bhamra says, while its Learning Hub gives teachers access to CPD courses, including modules on artificial intelligence (AI) and education technology.

A multi-tiered market

"The GCC is not one market," Gale says. "Riyadh, Doha, Abu Dhabi, Muscat and Kuwait each have different demographics, expectations and levels of competition." Cognita adapts pricing, admissions strategy, parent experience and marketing to local conditions in each city.

At EAS Sharjah, more than 75% of students are Emirati, while GSF's two GISS campuses together host students from more than 50 nationalities, according to Vaidya. Fee structures are calibrated against each emirate's or kingdom's regulatory framework, and the group does not operate on a premium-

only model, he says, combining data-driven outreach for expatriate families with referral-led engagement for local communities.

ISP takes a similar approach, investing in schools with existing roots in their communities rather than applying a single model across the network, Bhamra says, allowing each school to retain its market position while drawing on the group's global resources.

Aligning with national development goals

Gale says GCC governments are focused on developing skills in AI, digital literacy, innovation, entrepreneurship and leadership, and that a multi-school group can combine international best practice with local priorities to support those ambitions.

GSF established its Global Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at GISS Abu Dhabi in 2014, before innovation centres became a standard market feature, says Vaidya. That work has since expanded into makerspaces and innovation hubs across its campuses, where students engage with robotics, coding, design thinking and applied sciences. "The structural advantage a group brings is the ability to test, refine and scale," says Vaidya, positioning GSF as "an active implementation partner" for Saudi Arabia's Human Capability Development Programme and the UAE Centennial 2071.

ISP points to its AI Toolbox and LabSchools innovation programme, alongside its Learning Hub, as mechanisms for developing AI, coding and advanced literacy skills that support national priorities, says Bhamra.

Growth strategy

Cognita says it is open to both greenfield and brownfield growth, with Saudi Arabia, particularly Riyadh, offering the greatest near-term opportunity given the pace of Vision 2030. The group also sees opportunities in Qatar, Oman and Kuwait, and continues to invest in the UAE, most recently through the announced expansion of Horizon English School. "Growth is not simply about opening more schools," says Gale. "It is about strengthening existing schools, improving outcomes, increasing enrolment and expanding our impact."

GSF funds its expansion through international investment and internal capital and does not pursue partnerships or joint ventures. "Education is a long-horizon business," says Vaidya. "Decisions that shape a school's quality such as curriculum, staffing, culture, community trust,



ISP's regional growth has come primarily through acquisitions though it also pursues selective greenfield projects

— **Kam Bhamra**,
Regional Managing Director,
ISP Middle East

MARKET EXPANSION

require full operational control.” The group has two greenfield developments under way in the UAE and is pursuing further greenfield growth in Saudi Arabia, alongside brownfield acquisitions; Vaidya names patience with land, licensing and regulatory timelines as the main operational challenge.

ISP’s regional growth has come primarily through acquisitions though it also pursues selective greenfield projects, says Bhamra. The group aims to grow from its current 11 schools to between 15 and 20 across the Middle East, with the UAE and Qatar remaining its core markets.

Cost pressures

Rising construction and supply chain costs, combined with regulatory tuition fee caps, are directly affecting GSF’s greenfield projects, says Vaidya. “Yes, this is a real pressure point, and we would rather be transparent about it than minimise it,” he says, adding that the group is “in a reset period,” recalibrating capital planning and weighing sequencing and phasing to avoid compromising the quality of its school buildings.

Competing for teaching talent

Gale says retention is increasingly driven by leadership quality, culture, well-being and professional growth rather than remuneration alone, and that the group invests in leadership development, coaching and career pathways that standalone schools cannot offer.



Rising construction and supply chain costs, combined with regulatory tuition fee caps, are directly affecting GSF’s greenfield projects. Yes, this is a real pressure point, and we would rather be transparent about it than minimise it

— Amol Vaidya,
Deputy Chief Operating Officer -
Middle East, Global Schools Foundation

GSF says its scale - multiple locations, curricula and school cultures - within one group is a strong differentiator in a competitive recruitment market, and that it builds regional subject-specific degree requirements into

recruitment planning from the outset rather than treating them as a compliance afterthought.

ISP says being part of a 120-school global network gives teachers career pathways and international collaboration opportunities. The group offers more than 120 expert-led CPD courses through its Learning Hub, including modules on AI and education technology and an integrated AI Tool Box, alongside relocation support.

National identity, global curricula

All three groups say integrating Arabic literacy, Islamic Studies and national values into internationally branded schools has not posed a challenge. “International education and national identity are not competing priorities; they are mutually reinforcing,” says Gale, adding that Cognita aims to develop students who are “globally minded whilst remaining proud of their culture, language and heritage.”

Vaidya says embedding national values across GSF’s 72 campuses in 11 countries “is not a compliance requirement for us. It is a founding principle,” built into curriculum, events and everyday school life. Bhamra says multilingualism and community connection are fundamental to how ISP schools operate, with Arabic, Islamic Studies and national curriculum requirements delivered in line with regulatory expectations across its regional schools.

Cognita balances central procurement, which it says provides value, quality assurance and operational efficiency, with school-level autonomy. Its message to suppliers, Gale says, is to “understand the needs of our schools, demonstrate impact, focus on implementation and be prepared to work in partnership.”

GSF’s procurement is rooted locally, with central offices in the UAE and Saudi Arabia providing group-wide support while principals retain autonomy over hyper-local and niche education-technology decisions. Vaidya’s advice to suppliers seeking to enter the network: “Come with a clear understanding of the markets we operate in and the communities we serve.”

ISP describes its model as “Globally Supported, Locally Empowered,” with central teams evaluating core educational resources and digital infrastructure while school leaders retain autonomy over specialist edtech. Bhamra says the group looks for suppliers “who understand education and can demonstrate measurable value for students and teachers.” ■



International school groups expand across the GCC as demand for multi-curriculum education continues to grow



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Natural materials, flexible layouts and sensory-rich spaces are reshaping early years classrooms

Rethinking early years education

As UAE regulators raise the bar on safeguarding and quality, nursery leaders say compliance is only the starting point. From redesigned classrooms to AI-assisted teaching, they explain where early years education is really heading and why the daily experience of the child, not the inspection report, remains the true measure of quality

By **Amitha R**

Nursery leaders across the UAE say the early education sector is being reshaped by tighter regulation, but insist the real gains lie beyond compliance. Frameworks from MOE, KHDA, ADEK and SPEA have raised the floor on safeguarding, inclusion and well-being. Many, however, argue that quality is ultimately measured in daily practice, not inspection reports.

Classrooms are increasingly treated as a “third teacher,” built around natural materials, flexible layouts and calm, sensory-rich areas, while STEAM, coding, sustainability and emotional intelligence are being woven into everyday play rather than delivered as standalone subjects.

Technology while being used to support educators and family engagement is being limited so that it does not replace hands-on, outdoor and sensory experiences that remain central to early learning,

including balancing screen time with active play.

Beyond compliance

Across the UAE, regulatory bodies have sharpened their expectations for what early years providers must demonstrate, from safeguarding to child well-being. Nursery leaders say the more meaningful shift, however, has been in mindset: treating these frameworks as a baseline for something better, rather than a hurdle.

Maha Eid, Education, Quality and Compliance Director at Blossom Nursery says the UAE has made real progress in strengthening the quality of early years provision. “One of the most positive shifts has been the move from seeing quality as simply meeting compliance requirements and recognising that true quality is reflected in children’s well-being, inclusion, safeguarding and their everyday experiences,” says Eid.

Dr Vandana Gandhi, CEO and Founder of British Orchard Group, UK and UAE,



It should, however, always remain a support tool and never replace the relationships, interactions and hands-on experiences that are central to early learning

— **Maha Eid**,
Education, Quality and Compliance
Director, Blossom Nursery

points to the specific frameworks driving that change. “MOE, KHDA, ADEK and SPEA frameworks have raised expectations around quality, safeguarding, inclusion and child well-being, encouraging providers to focus on continuous improvement and measurable outcomes,” says Gandhi.

For Melonie Karriem, Founding Director of Nurseries at Royal Kids Nursery, the distinction between compliance and quality is the crux of the matter. “Compliance is the floor, not the ceiling,” Karriem says. “Meeting standards keeps children safe and creates consistency across the sector. What ultimately defines quality, however, is the daily experience of every child.”

Jade Peter-Swain, Group Director at Step by Step Nursery frames the opportunity in terms of how frameworks are built. “When regulation is approached as a partnership for improvement rather than simply a compliance exercise, it can be an extremely powerful driver of quality,” explains Peter-Swain.

Professional development, redefined

The expectations placed on educators themselves have shifted just as sharply. As regulatory expectations rise, so too does the bar for those delivering early years education. There is a decisive move away from one-off certificates and training towards professional development that is embedded, ongoing and built into the rhythm of everyday practice.

Eid says professional learning at Blossom no longer looks like a single workshop. “It is no longer about attending a one-off training session; it is about creating a culture of continuous learning that combines research, coaching, reflection and practical application,” Eid says.

At British Orchard Nursery (BON), that culture is formalised through the British Orchard Centre. “CPD has evolved beyond curriculum delivery to encompass neuroscience, emotional intelligence, inclusion, SEN, safeguarding, sustainability and child well-being,” Gandhi says, adding that every educator receives a minimum of 100 hours of professional learning annually.

Karriem argues the expectation placed on educators has never been greater. Alongside a deep understanding of child development, educators, according to her, are expected to build authentic relationships with children and families, embrace emerging technologies, create inclusive environments and make thoughtful decisions that respond to every



CPD has evolved beyond curriculum delivery to encompass neuroscience, emotional intelligence, inclusion, SEN, safeguarding, sustainability and child well-being

— Dr Vandana Gandhi,
CEO and Founder,
British Orchard Group, UK and UAE

child’s unique strengths, interests and individual needs.

“The greatest investment any nursery can make is not so much in resources or equipment. It is in the people who bring learning to life,” adds Karriem.

Peter-Swain sees the training model itself changing shape. “There is increasingly a move towards more reflective, sustained and practice-based professional learning rather than relying solely on one-off training courses,” Peter-Swain says, citing coaching, mentoring and peer observation as more durable than one-off courses.

The third teacher

There is a growing understanding that the learning environment is an essential part of children’s development. Spaces are no longer viewed simply as places where learning happens; they actively influence how children feel, interact and explore.

Physical space has become as deliberate a design choice as curriculum. Eid says Blossom Nursery starts with a simple question when designing any room. “A thoughtfully designed environment should evolve with children’s interests and encourage independence, creativity and exploration,” says Eid.

Gandhi describes a similar philosophy at BON, built around natural materials and calm, sensory-rich spaces. “At British Orchard Nursery, we

believe the environment is the ‘third teacher’, intentionally designed to spark curiosity, independence and wellbeing,” says Gandhi.

According to Karriem, in modern early childhood education, the environment is no longer simply the setting for learning. It is an intentional part of the curriculum. “Beautiful classrooms may capture attention. Thoughtful environments sustain learning,” says Karriem.

Peter-Swain says the test of a good space is what it enables a child to do unprompted. “For us, the key question is always: What does this environment allow a child to do, discover and become increasingly capable of doing independently?” says Peter-Swain.

Learning through play

The key is understanding that young children do not learn through separate subjects; they learn through experiences.

STEAM, coding, sustainability and emotional intelligence are no longer just add-on subjects. Eid says the concepts already live inside everyday play. “When these concepts are introduced through play, relationships and exploration, children engage with them naturally and meaningfully,” says Eid.

Gandhi says the same integration underpins BON’s approach across all its branches. “By integrating STEAM, coding, sustainability and emotional intelligence into everyday learning, BON nurtures confident, curious, resilient and compassionate learners who are well prepared for their future education and life,” says Gandhi says.

Emphasising a similar message, Karriem says young children do not experience the world through timetables or isolated lessons. They learn by asking questions, exploring ideas and making connections. “Future-ready education is not about introducing more programmes but about creating richer learning opportunities,” says Karriem.

Peter-Swain, describing a National Day project in which children coded a robot to greet visitors, says the lesson was in the purpose, not the subject label. “Young children do not need more subjects. They need rich experiences through which different knowledge, skills and dispositions naturally come together,” says Peter-Swain.

What moves the needle

When asked about the innovative tools or programmes that have delivered the strongest positive impact on children’s learning and development in the recent past, Eid says, “One of

EARLY EDUCATION

the most positive changes has been the stronger connection between research and everyday practice.” The focus, she says, is increasingly moving towards approaches that are supported by evidence and child development research. She also points to other factors, such as investing in high-quality open-ended resources, strengthening educator-child interactions and creating environments where children can think independently, explore ideas and develop problem-solving skills.

Gandhi says initiatives such as BONSAI have significantly strengthened personalised learning, inclusion and early intervention, which, along with project-based learning, continues to positively impact children's creativity, communication, collaboration and critical thinking skills. “Observation-led assessment tools enable educators to better understand each child's developmental journey and tailor learning experiences accordingly,” she says, adding that BON, through the British Orchard Training Centre, has also launched Dubai's first KHDA-approved AI Academy for Educators, equipping teachers and leaders with future-focused skills.

According to Karriem, aspects such as pedagogical documentation, open-ended resources and stronger partnerships with families have shifted the focus from delivering activities to creating meaningful learning experiences. Innovation, she



The greatest investment any nursery can make is not so much in resources or equipment. It is in the people who bring learning to life

— **Melonie Karriem**,
Founding Director of Nurseries,
Royal Kids Nursery

argues, should never be measured by how new a programme is. “Its value lies in whether it deepens children's thinking, strengthens relationships and creates richer opportunities for learning,” says Karriem.

Role of technology

Peter-Swain sets a similar bar, emphasising that some of the most significant developments have been in the technology surrounding the child rather than technology being placed directly in the child's hands. “Innovation is valuable only when it improves the experience of the child or the effectiveness of the educator. Technology for technology's sake has very little place in early childhood education,” he adds.

On the broader question of technology's role, providers argue that while technology can enhance efficiency, innovation and family engagement, it must always complement, rather than replace, high-quality play-based learning experiences.

Eid says technology, apart from supporting more effective teaching and learning, gives families greater visibility of their child's progress. “It provides families with greater visibility of their child's progress and helps create stronger connections between home and nursery,” she says, adding that it should, however, always remain a support tool and never replace the relationships, interactions and hands-on experiences that are central to early learning.

Gandhi points to AI easing administrative load at British Orchard Nursery. “AI-assisted tools

help educators with classroom planning, resource preparation and KPI evaluations, allowing teachers to spend more time focusing on meaningful interactions with children,” says Gandhi.

Karriem sees AI as a multiplier for good teaching, not a substitute for it. “Artificial intelligence will never replace great educators, it will amplify the impact of those who know how to use it well,” adds Karriem.

For Peter-Swain, while technology is increasingly becoming part of the infrastructure that supports high-quality early childhood education, with AI beginning to offer interesting possibilities, professional judgement will continue to remain essential.

“The question we should continually ask is not, ‘How much technology can we introduce?’ but ‘Does this technology enable adults to be more present with children?’” ask Peter-Swain.

“An algorithm does not know the child in the way that a skilled educator does. Assessment in early childhood depends upon knowing a child's personality, relationships, interests, culture, language, development and the context in which something occurred,” says Peter-Swain.

Screens, senses and the outdoors

That same caution carries into how nurseries manage screen time against hands-on and outdoor play. “Technology can complement learning when used intentionally, but it should never replace real-world exploration and human connection,” says Eid.

Gandhi ties British Orchard Nursery's outdoor and sensory programming directly to school readiness. “We firmly believe that social interaction, active play and authentic experiences during the early years lay the strongest foundations for lifelong learning, well-being and school readiness,” Gandhi says.

Karriem says the choice is not screens versus play but intentionality in both. “Technology has a place in early childhood education when it encourages children to think, investigate and create. It should complement rich, hands-on experiences, never compete with them,” says Karriem.

Peter-Swain describes the pull of unstructured outdoor time in more visceral terms. “There is something incredibly powerful about watching a young child run through a natural space – grass beneath their feet, wind on their face and complete freedom to explore,” adds Peter-Swain. ■



Innovation is valuable only when it improves the experience of the child or the effectiveness of the educator. Technology for technology's sake has very little place in early childhood education

— **Jade Peter-Swain**,
Group Director, Step by Step Nursery

Building independent readers in English and Arabic

Chapters & Co's sMiles for English and Basamat for Arabic take children on a structured journey from sounds to words, connected text and meaningful expression, combining explicit instruction and guided practice with decodable reading, vocabulary, comprehension, handwriting and storytelling

Learning letters and sounds is only the beginning. The real goal of early literacy is helping children use what they know to read words, understand stories, express ideas and gradually become independent readers

That transition does not happen automatically. Children need a carefully structured pathway that connects sound awareness, letter knowledge, decoding, vocabulary, comprehension, writing and storytelling in a logical sequence. When these elements are taught as isolated skills, children may perform well in individual activities yet struggle to transfer what they have learned to real reading.

Chapters & Co developed sMiles for English and Basamat for Arabic around this challenge. Both programmes are designed to move children systematically from sounds to words, from words to connected text, and from reading to meaningful expression.

Although English and Arabic have very different writing systems, the underlying learning journey can still be coherent. sMiles and Basamat therefore follow a shared instructional philosophy while respecting the linguistic structure of each language. This creates a more consistent

One Method. Two Languages.



sMiles and Basamat give schools a structured, consistent approach to building literacy skills across English and Arabic

experience for children learning to read in bilingual school environments.

Lessons combine explicit instruction with guided practice, decodable reading, vocabulary development, comprehension, handwriting and opportunities to tell and write stories. Visual language and illustration are also used as early tools for expression, allowing children to communicate

meaning before their writing skills are fully developed.

The approach extends beyond individual lessons. Teachers are encouraged to give children regular opportunities to apply literacy through creative, informative and opinion-based projects, supported by guided play and classroom learning centres.

For schools, the objective is not simply to cover phonics content. It is to build a literacy pathway in which each stage prepares children for the next, reducing unnecessary complexity while strengthening transfer to independent reading.

With sMiles and Basamat, Chapters & Co brings this approach together under one principle: One Method. Two Languages.

For schools reviewing their early years literacy provision, the question is simple: are children learning literacy skills, or are those skills actually becoming reading?

That distinction can shape how confidently they enter the next stage of learning.

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From Sounds to Stories



sMiles and Basamat take children on a structured journey from sounds to words, to connected text and meaningful expression



The OpenApply admissions CRM empowers international school admission teams to attract and engage families

What does your admissions process say about your school?

Admissions is more than an administrative process. It is the first meaningful experience many families have with your school. The OpenApply admissions CRM can take the administrative load off your teams while creating a clearer journey for families

Across the UAE and the wider GCC, school leaders are heading into the new academic year under familiar financial pressures. Regulated fee caps hold revenue steady while families expect more. Dubai's KHDA has confirmed no private school fee increase for 2026-27, and Abu Dhabi's ADEK regulates tuition rises through its Education Cost Index, so every operational decision is measured against value.

In that environment, admissions can easily be reduced to an administrative function. But it is much more than that. It is often a school's first meaningful interaction with a family, shaping their experience before the first day of term. The schools that start the year strongly are those that have made that experience work well from the outset.

The scale of the challenge is growing. ISC Research counts 14,833 K-12 international schools worldwide educating 7.4 million students, with enrolment up 13% over five years. More schools, more families,

more applications, all landing on admissions teams that are much the same size as before.

Through their conversations with school leaders, Faria Education discovered that those who set themselves up for success share one habit. They stop handling the admin manually and let software carry the load, so returning and prospective families get the same clear, consistent experience.

Families move through one online portal at their own pace, uploading documents and tracking their progress. Re-enrolment runs in the background, confirming returning families early so the team can focus on new intake. Payments, deposits and consents are collected seamlessly, and every record flows into the school's systems without manual re-entry. Leadership gets a single, honest view of the funnel and can forecast intake rather than guess.

This is where operational efficiency translates into a better family experience. Less chasing and re-keying give the

team more time to focus on the human side of admissions: the conversations that actually win a family over.

The schools starting September on the front foot did not build their advantage in the rush. They built it before the rush arrived. Trusted by more than 800 leading international and independent schools worldwide, OpenApply helps schools do the same. ■



Download the full guide,
The Ready Year: A Smoother Admissions Season.

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+900 schools
+30 countries
+10 languages

Optimise and Digitise your School Bus Routes for Safety and Security



Rethinking school transport through real-time visibility

BatOnRoute is helping schools make transport more efficient, transparent and reliable, giving school leaders greater visibility and families greater confidence

As schools continue to prioritise student safety, operational efficiency and stronger engagement with families, technology is playing an increasingly important role in school transport. BatOnRoute has been developed to help schools manage these demands through a single digital platform, providing real-time visibility of bus operations while improving communication between transport office, transport providers and parents.

By providing live tracking of school buses, the solution enables school administrators and families to monitor active routes, offering greater transparency throughout every journey. Automated notifications keep parents informed when buses are approaching designated stops, while schools can quickly communicate delays or route changes, helping to reduce uncertainty and improve the overall transport experience.



In addition, BatOnRoute also supports data-driven decision-making. Reporting tools provide school staffers with valuable insights into route performance, arrival times and student distribution across bus stops, allowing transport managers to evaluate operations and identify opportunities for continuous improvement.

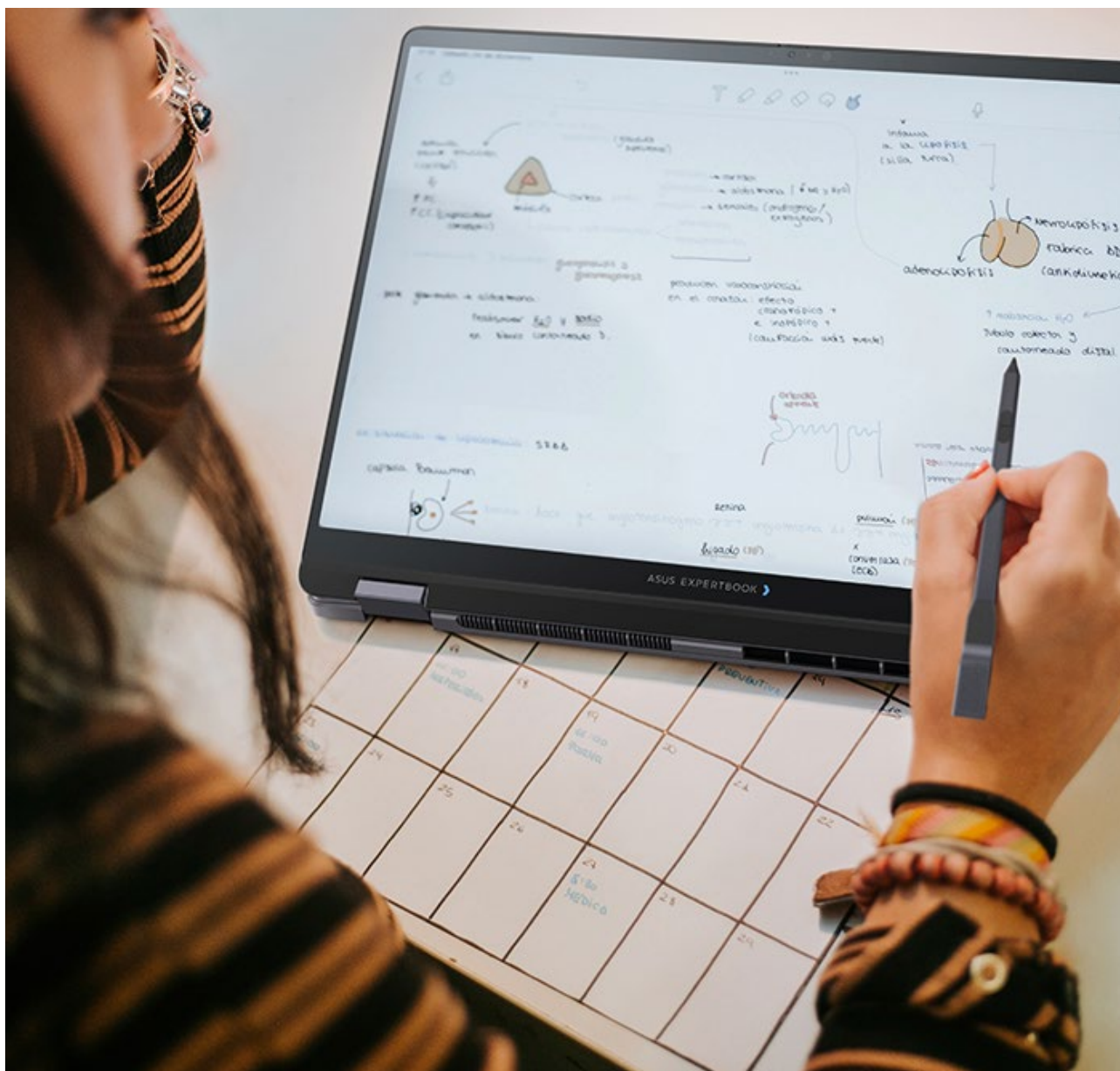
An important consideration for many centres is the ease of implementation. BatOnRoute has been designed to integrate into existing transport operations without requiring additional GPS hardware or changes to current transport providers. Instead, route monitoring is carried out using the GPS capabilities of the mobile device used by the route supervisor, enabling

schools to adopt the system with minimal disruption.

BatOnRoute is also compatible with a range of school management systems and is available in multiple languages, including Arabic. The platform already helps to manage the routes in more than 900 schools in 30 plus countries, some of them located in the Middle East.

As expectations around student safety, operational accountability and parent engagement continue to grow, digital transport management solutions are becoming an increasingly valuable part of modern school operations. By combining real-time visibility, automated communication and practical operational insights, BatOnRoute demonstrates how technology can help schools deliver a more efficient, transparent and reliable transport service while supporting the confidence of both school leaders and families.

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ASUS ExpertBook B5 Flip G2

A versatile convertible laptop
built for modern learning

As the new school year approaches, students are now on the hunt for the right laptop to support them with their studies. Beyond the latest specifications, the ideal school laptop needs to offer the mobility and flexibility that a student needs for their day-to-day school activities.

With learning now extending beyond traditional classrooms to

include online collaboration, digital assignments and project-based activities, students and educators alike need a device that can easily adapt to different ways of working and learning.

The ASUS ExpertBook B5 Flip G2 brings together the versatility of a 360° convertible design with features tailored for both students and educators. It is powered by up to the latest Intel Core 7 Series 3 processor

with a 17 TOPS NPU, which delivers AI-accelerated performance that is perfect for research, assignments and projects. As AI-powered learning tools are becoming increasingly common, the integrated NPU helps with optimising these experiences while maintaining responsive performance and power efficiency. It also supports up to 32GB of LPDDR5X memory and up to 1TB of PCIe 4.0 SSD storage, providing

users with plenty of room for files, coursework and multitasking.

It's lightweight as well, weighing only up to 1.34 kilograms and just 14.9 mm thin, making it an ideal companion for busy students. The convertible design means the laptop can be used in laptop, tablet, tent and display modes. Note-taking and sketching are made much easier with the garaged MPP 2.0 stylus that keeps it secure and ready to use. In fact, a 15-second charge equals up to 60 minutes of use. This versatility allows students to comfortably switch between typing assignments, reading digital textbooks, presenting group projects and taking handwritten notes without needing multiple devices.

There's a 14-inch NanoEdge display with an 84% screen-to-body ratio. The 16:10 panel delivers 400 nits of brightness and is also TÜV Rheinland-certified for comfortable extended viewing. It also comes with a touchscreen, which lets students take full advantage of interactive learning and collaboration.

From the outside, the ExpertBook B5 Flip G2 boasts a premium aluminum chassis with an elegant Gentle Gray finish, making it ideal for everyday use. Since this device is meant to be used almost on a daily basis, ASUS has ensured that it is strong enough to withstand daily wear and tear thanks to the MIL-STD 810H US military-grade durability standards. It even features Wi-Fi 7 connectivity, a spill-resistant keyboard, reinforced hinges and strengthened I/O ports, helping ensure long-term reliability for both students and educational institutions.

The device also comes with a wide range of ports for optimum connectivity. There are two Thunderbolt 4 USB-C ports, HDMI 2.1, two USB 3.2 Gen 1 Type-A ports and an audio/microphone combo jack. The device also supports two cameras. One is a user-facing camera perfect for video calls and the other is a world-facing camera for capturing photos and documents. Both cameras even include a physical privacy shutter for instant privacy when needed. Audio experience for calls and meetings is further enhanced with

dual speakers, dual-array microphones and Smart Amplifier.

To safeguard student data, the ExpertBook B5 Flip G2 has enterprise-grade security with a NIST SP 800-193-compliant BIOS, Windows 11 Secured-core technologies and five years of security updates. Additional security features include a fingerprint sensor integrated into the power button, TPM 2.0 for hardware-based file encryption and dual BIOS support for automatic backup protection against firmware corruption. For schools and universities managing multiple devices, ASUS also offers management tools that simplify deployment and administration, helping IT teams maintain devices more efficiently across campuses.

This device was designed with sustainability in mind and also uses recycled materials in its construction. It reflects ASUS's commitment to reducing environmental impact with energy-efficient devices, responsible sourcing and lower carbon emissions across the product lifecycle. The device is built for long-term reliability, meaning that it extends its usable life to help reduce waste.

Whether it's an online class or a group activity, the ASUS ExpertBook B5 Flip G2 is designed with all aspects of the student's life in mind. It combines performance, versatility and durability, making it the ideal device to support students and educators throughout their academic journey.

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SIL EYQM: Now available online

From recognising excellence to strengthening practice, the Early Years Quality Mark empowers schools and nurseries evaluate their provision, showcase their achievements and demonstrate their commitment to quality

SIL's Early Years Quality Mark (EYQM) is a respected and innovative accreditation that recognises excellence in early years education. Designed to support schools and early education settings in demonstrating their commitment to high-quality practice, it provides an opportunity to celebrate achievements, reflect on provision and gain external validation.

Now available as an online assessment, the process is more accessible and convenient than ever before. Achieving the EYQM enables early education providers to review, reflect on and articulate their strengths, while also evaluating practice, leadership and impact.

Preparing for assessment is a valuable professional development opportunity in itself, and the guidance tools ensure schools and settings are supported to identify strengths, celebrate successes and plan for future development.

From the moment you express an interest, your dedicated assessor will support you throughout the process — from preparation through to final assessment. Delivered by SIL's Early Years team, the programme is underpinned by extensive expertise across the early years sector. Combining specialist knowledge with practical experience, their offer is



All SIL EYQM assessors are experienced educators and leaders with extensive expertise in quality improvement across schools and early years settings

always shaped by the latest evidence, intelligence and research.

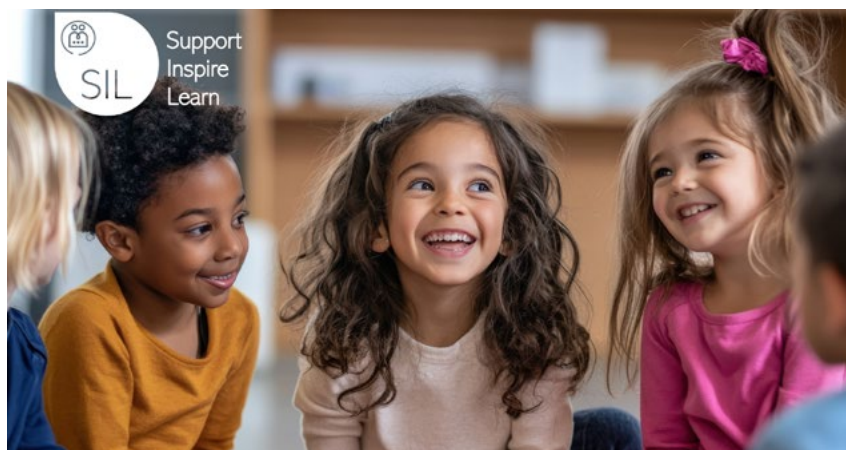
The assessment team has a proven track record of building positive relationships that strengthen workforce confidence, develop leadership capacity and secure positive outcomes for children in their critical early years and beyond.

With flexible timescales, you can choose how much time you would like to spend preparing and when your assessment takes place. This approach

helps ensure your provision reaches the highest standards and receives robust external validation.

The Early Years Quality Mark is an opportunity to celebrate the dedication of your team, demonstrate excellence to parents and carers, and showcase your commitment to the very best for children. Assessment is available from £650 + VAT, and accreditation is valid for three years.

For more information about SIL's EY products and services, visit their website: [Early Years | SIL](#)



The Early Years Quality Mark provides a powerful way to demonstrate quality and inspire confidence among parents and carers

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The assessment day felt positive, supportive, and celebratory. They listened closely and encouraged us to lead the conversation about our work and our approaches.

Dubai's highest-rated schools have something in common: Kidzink

By **Ambreen**
Marketing Director, Kidzink

Kidzink delivers functional, considered and award-winning learning environments at speed, taking a holistic approach that sees schools as complete learning ecosystems rather than standalone architecture projects

Dubai's highest-rated private schools are measured by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) against rigorous standards for academic performance, teaching quality, student well-being and school leadership. Behind many of these high-performing schools is another important factor: the environment in which learning happens.

Kidzink approaches schools as complete learning ecosystems, not standalone architecture projects. Architecture, interiors, engineering, acoustics, furniture, manufacturing, procurement and project management are brought together under one integrated team, carrying the same vision from concept through to delivery.

That integration also changes what is possible in terms of speed. While conventional school project timelines can extend to 18 months or more, Kidzink has delivered learning environments in as little as 60 days. This is achieved through coordination, not compromise. When design, construction and production teams work together, decisions happen faster, delays are reduced, and design intent is protected.



Dubai British School – Jumeira (DBSJ)

Client partnership is equally important. When school leaders and stakeholders trust the process and empower teams to make informed decisions, approval cycles shorten, scope creep reduces and projects maintain momentum.

Kidzink's work is guided by its proprietary Enriched Environment Model™, informed by more than 250 peer-reviewed studies exploring the relationship between physical environments, learning and well-being.

This research shapes decisions around acoustics, light, movement, sensory needs, furniture and spatial configuration.

The company's approach has also received industry recognition, including the 2026 Architecture Leaders Award for Educational Building of the Year.

The back-to-school season puts enormous pressure on school leaders, architects and

procurement teams. Deadlines tighten and compromises can become tempting. Kidzink's integrated model is designed to prevent that, delivering functional, considered and award-winning learning environments at speed.

As a family-owned business, Kidzink also takes a long-term view. Its name sits behind every project it delivers, creating a strong sense of responsibility towards quality, reputation and the communities that use its spaces.

School leaders and stakeholders are not simply choosing someone to deliver classrooms. They are choosing a partner responsible for shaping how those classrooms perform for years to come.

Middle East's best schools do not just happen. They are designed by [Kidzink](#).



Repton Nad Al Sheba

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How Teachmint X is transforming classrooms

with AI and connected learning in the Middle East

From AI-powered learning and multilingual teaching to dependable hardware and dedicated support, Teachmint X is helping schools across the region build more connected, future-ready classrooms

The education sector across the Middle East is undergoing a profound shift. Government initiatives, national strategies and growing private investment are accelerating demand for future-ready skills and pushing institutions beyond standalone technology purchases towards integrated digital ecosystems that enhance teaching and learning.

At the centre of this shift is a simple philosophy: technology should simplify the teaching experience, not complicate it. Educators need intuitive tools that let them focus on what they do best, teaching, inspiring and engaging with students. The most valuable classroom technology today isn't defined by how many devices or platforms a school has, but by how well those tools work together.

Even as AI reshapes classroom tools, teachers remain central to how learning happens. Technology can inform and personalise learning, but it is teachers who understand learners, inspire curiosity and guide the process, so effective classroom technology should strengthen that human connection, not replace it.

AI in everyday teaching

Teachmint X puts this philosophy into practice. At its core is EduAI, an intelligent teaching assistant built around the rhythm of a class. Teachers can generate curriculum-aligned lectures, create quizzes and homework



Teachmint X offers Arabic support across the whiteboard, mobile app and EduAI, including handwritten Arabic recognition



Teachmint X brings AI-powered teaching into a connected ecosystem that links teachers, learners and administrators beyond the classroom.

in seconds, summarise content and revisit lessons through Class Recap. EduAI also draws on what is actually taught in class, powering revision rather than relying on generic material, and works directly with books, PDFs and images to move quickly from content to explanation, assessment or reinforcement. With Global EduAI, this extends across third-party apps, so AI becomes part of the teaching process rather than another tool to switch to.

Built for Arabic and multilingual classrooms

Multilingual capability matters deeply where Arabic and English are often taught side by side. Teachmint X is built for this, with Arabic support across the whiteboard, mobile app and EduAI, including handwritten Arabic recognition. Its AI Pen supports more than 90 languages, backed by translation, multilingual search, speech-to-text and read-aloud tools.

Why connected classrooms matter

Beyond the classroom, the real value of connected technology lies in how it links teachers, learners and administration. Through the Connected Classroom App, teachers take attendance, share lessons and generate assessments, while students complete homework and tests and parents stay informed. VisionX extends

this further for institution leaders, bringing live monitoring, broadcasts and alerts, device controls, and usage reports into one system across every branch, helping institutions manage classrooms at scale.

Reliable hardware, backed by support

None of this works without dependable hardware. Teachmint X runs on an octa-core processor with a dedicated NPU for AI tasks, built on Android 16 with Google EDLA certification, native Google apps, automatic updates and built-in antivirus protection. Institutions also get structured local support, training, onboarding and after-sales, so they can adopt AI with confidence.

One device for the modern classroom

As the Middle East invests in future-ready education, institutions that pair ambitious technology adoption with a clear focus on people, pedagogy and purpose will be best placed to shape what comes next. Teachmint X brings AI, multilingual teaching, connected workflows, dependable hardware and support together in one system, helping classrooms stay ready today and prepared for tomorrow.

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Teachmint X

AI-Powered Interactive Classroom
Device with Google EDLA Certification



Available in 165.10 cm (65"), 190.50 cm (75"), and 218.44 cm (86") screen sizes - designed to suit every classroom

EduAI
AI-Powered Intelligent
Teaching Assistant

**Arabic
Classroom Ready**

**Google EDLA Certified with
Complete Google Ecosystem**

**VisionX
Device & Admin Management**

**Neural Processing Unit
Built for AI Tasks**

**Connected Classroom App
Keeps Teachers, Students
& School connected**

Certified & Trusted for Education



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Singapore - 179094

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Manila:
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Makati, Metro Manila, Philippines



For enquiries: support@teachmint.com

*Terms and conditions apply.

Soft Surfaces

strengthens its presence in Saudi

From sports facilities to complete school environments, Soft Surfaces' thoughtfully designed spaces support learning, activity and the well-being of future generations

Over the past three years, Soft Surfaces has successfully delivered a growing portfolio of projects for schools and educational institutions across Saudi Arabia. The company's experience extends beyond sports facilities, covering school renovation, upgrades, recreational spaces, flooring, safety solutions, seating and other infrastructure requirements.

Soft Surfaces has worked with leading international schools, educational institutions and major organisations, delivering solutions designed around quality, safety, functionality, durability and the everyday needs of students and school communities.

Soft Surfaces has delivered educational projects for French International School, Al Khobar; King Fahd University of Petroleum & Minerals (KFUPM), Dhahran; Saud International School, Riyadh; Saudi Aramco Al Ahsa Special Needs School, Al Ahsa; 20 Saudi Aramco-built government schools at Al Ahsa; Kingdom International School, Riyadh; Beach Hall School, Riyadh; The International Programs School, Al Khobar; King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center (KAPSARC), Riyadh; Ruya Schools, Dhahran; British International School Riyadh; British International School Jeddah; American School Riyadh; and many other schools and educational institutions across the country.

The company's completed projects



Indoor basketball sports court with PU and wooden flooring

span a diverse range of requirements, including football grounds, artificial turf, EPDM running tracks, acrylic sports courts, indoor sports flooring, playground and safety surfaces, seating and bleacher systems and other school facility improvements.

However, Soft Surfaces' capabilities go far beyond individual sports installations. Through its growing school-focused expertise, the company is positioned to support schools with complete renovation and upgrade requirements, from individual spaces and specialist facilities to larger school improvement projects.



The company understands that renovating a school requires careful coordination, quality workmanship and minimal disruption

to daily operations. Its team works with clients and project stakeholders to plan and execute works efficiently, with attention to safety, functionality, aesthetics and long-term performance.

Complete school renovation

Today, Soft Surfaces is expanding its role as a turnkey school renovation and construction partner, providing comprehensive solutions under one coordinated team. The company's capabilities can cover the transformation and upgrading of classrooms, sports facilities, playgrounds, multipurpose halls, flooring, outdoor areas, seating and other school spaces.

From design and planning to supply, installation, renovation and project completion, Soft Surfaces aims to provide schools with a single point of responsibility for their project requirements.

Its experience across the past three years has given Soft Surfaces a strong understanding of the needs of modern educational environments. Whether a school requires a targeted upgrade, refurbishment of specific facilities or a complete school renovation, the company brings together the expertise, resources and project coordination needed to deliver the transformation.

Contact Soft Surfaces for a free site assessment: sales@softsurfaces.com | +966 0541787485 | www.softsurfaces.com

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Soft Surfaces PU flooring system is engineered to deliver exceptional durability, a seamless finish and enhanced safety, creating a high-performance surface



Empowering teachers, inspiring thinkers

HUMMINGo provides AI-powered essay assessment tools for K-12 English teachers, designed to reduce grading time by 97.2%

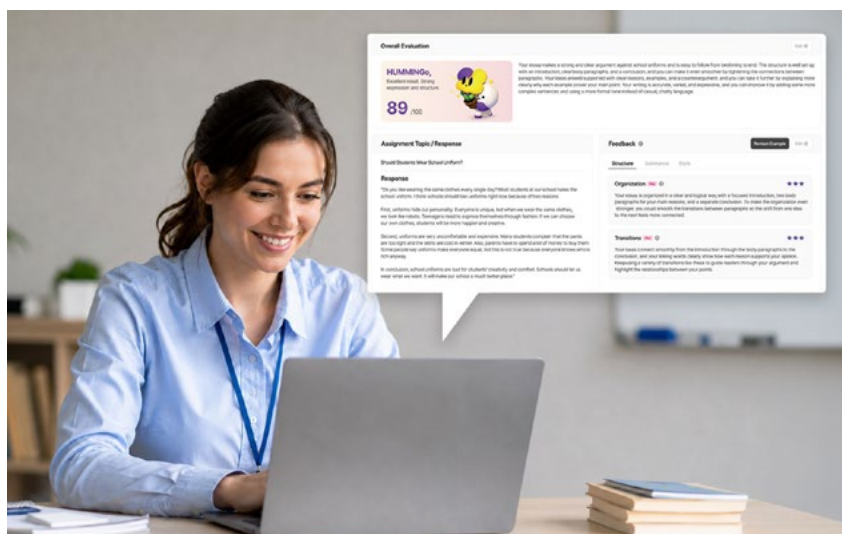


Recognised as one of TIME's Top EdTech Companies 2026, HUMMINGo is an AI writing assessment platform for K-12 English teachers, owned by Creverse. It reduces the time spent marking essays, and it assesses the reasoning behind the writing rather than only its surface.

Less marking, not less teaching

Essay marking is the heaviest recurring demand on an English teacher's week. HUMMINGo returns a complete, rubric-aligned assessment in under a minute, reducing grading time by 97.2%.

Teachers then review, adjust and approve, so every piece of feedback passes through the person who actually knows the student. What changes is the hours spent, not who holds the professional judgement.



Grammar is not the lesson

Most writing tools correct what is on the page.

HUMMINGo asks what the writer was trying to say, then tests whether the writing earns it: is the main idea clear, does each piece of evidence support the claim it sits beneath, and does the reasoning hold from one paragraph to the next?

Aligned to CCSS and IGCSE rubrics and applicable across essay types,

it gives students something a spellchecker never can, which is a reading of how their thinking lands.

Proven at scale, and getting sharper

HUMMINGo was refined over two years and more than 550,000 essays across Creverse learning centres, serving 30,000+ students monthly.

Every submission is measured against the same fixed rubric. Where a general-purpose LLM improvises a standard each time, HUMMINGo applies one consistently and sharpens it with real classroom outcomes.

Speed changes behaviour too: 86% of students revise and resubmit while the writing is still fresh, the moment at which revision genuinely teaches something.

Built for schools

HUMMINGo integrates with Google Classroom, accepts handwritten submissions through OCR, and offers institutional plans sized to school and group requirements.

Meet the HUMMINGo team at GESS Dubai, November 2026, or contact infoGCC@hummingo.ai to arrange a pilot.

— Partner Content

HUMMINGo's rubrics follow global K-12 writing standards

Aligned with CCSS, IGCSE, and IB frameworks





GCC schools are recruiting earlier to stay ahead in the race for top teaching talent

A new era of teacher recruitment

International schools face a tougher recruitment challenge as they seek teachers with subject expertise, adaptability, technological fluency and cultural awareness amid rising standards, cost pressures and new vetting requirements

By **Joseph George**

International schools across the GCC have wrapped up recruitment for the new academic year, and the story this year is no longer filling vacancies but finding the right teacher. Demand spans every phase of education, from early years and primary classrooms to advanced-level International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement and A Level programmes, with schools competing hardest for STEM and technology-literate specialists.

GEMS Education led the hiring wave with more than 1,500 new teachers this academic year, followed by

close to 150 appointments at Bloom Education and a roughly 30 percent staffing increase at Artemis Education. As regional standards rise and artificial intelligence reshapes classrooms, school groups say they are prioritising adaptability, technological fluency and cultural awareness over qualifications alone. Expatriate candidates, meanwhile, are weighing lifestyle and career progression as closely as salary, prompting schools to treat retention and recruitment as one strategy.

Quality over quantity

Schools across the GCC are launching international recruitment campaigns earlier in the cycle to secure top-

tier candidates before competition intensifies. "Recruiting early enables us to appoint the very best candidates rather than simply recruiting from those still available later in the recruitment cycle," says Nicki Williams, Director of Education at Taaleem.

Nilay Ozral, Chief Executive Officer of Bloom Education says most appointments support natural growth, internal promotions and specialist programme expansion.

GEMS Education is balancing expansion-driven hiring with sustained investment in professional development, resulting in declining

turnover. “Our recruitment strategy is influenced by a combination of factors, including enrolment growth, workforce planning, and our commitment to delivering exceptional educational outcomes across our schools,” says David Coakley, Senior Vice President of Human Resources at GEMS Education.

Recruitment across the region is increasingly defined by quality over quantity, says Asim Waheed, Chief Executive of Teach For Life, a specialised education recruitment agency and professional training provider. “We are seeing a shortage of teachers across parts of the GCC, but it is important to look at the quality and experience of the teachers coming through, not just the number of candidates available.”

That shortage is sharpest in specialist, future-focused disciplines. Darren Acomb, Director of Education at Artemis Education says demand spans early years to advanced levels, but “outside of the traditional shortage subjects of physics and mathematics, Artemis schools are fortunate to receive a consistently high volume of applications for each advertised position.”

Williams says Taaleem is seeing the same pattern, with “demand for high-calibre teachers in these specialist subjects” continuing to outpace supply as countries

invest heavily in STEM education. Coakley says GEMS Education faces strong demand “for high-quality teachers in key STEM disciplines, including mathematics, science, computer science and technology-related subjects.” Ozral says Bloom Education’s demand is concentrated among elementary teachers and specialists in Special Educational Needs and Inclusion, educational technology and careers guidance.

Linking the pattern to curriculum growth Waheed says, “With the growth of British, IB, American and other international curricula, we’re also seeing more demand for teachers with experience in areas such as STEM, coding, digital literacy and project-based learning.”

Hiring priorities

The constraint on recruitment meanwhile, has shifted from volume to quality. “The greater challenge today is not attracting applicants but identifying teachers who possess the right combination of strong subject knowledge, outstanding classroom practice, adaptability and the ability to embrace innovation,” says Ozral, adding that teachers today “need to be confident using data to inform instruction, comfortable integrating technology and AI into learning, and skilled at developing critical thinking, creativity and collaboration.”

Coakley describes a similar recalibration at GEMS Education. “Our ambition is not to recruit good teachers, but to attract and retain world-class educators who can inspire young people and deliver transformative learning experiences,” he says, adding that the lookout is always for educators who are curious, agile and willing to embrace new ways of thinking and teaching.

This year’s new recruitment has taken GEMS Education’s educator community past 10,000 for the first time, drawing on 112 nationalities. The group received more than 500,000 job applications over the year.

According to Williams, vacancies at Harrow International School Dubai attracted more than 2,000 teaching applications, “reflecting both Dubai’s continuing appeal and Taaleem’s reputation for educational excellence, innovation and investment in its people.” Taaleem is also looking for teachers who “see teaching as a long-term profession and who aspire to develop into future leaders” within the organisation.

Acomb frames recruitment at Artemis Education as an extension of the group’s culture, prioritising staff who are “adaptable, open minded



The schools that retain the very best teachers are those that invest in people, not only through compensation, but through meaningful career development, recognition and a culture of continuous improvement

— Nilay Ozral,
Chief Executive Officer, Bloom Education

and increasingly nimble,” drawing in “passionate individuals who share our drive to improve education.”

Meanwhile, soft skills, including communication, collaboration, creativity, emotional intelligence and cultural awareness, are becoming just as important as subject knowledge: “We’re seeing a real shift towards teachers who are adaptable, confident with technology, open to using AI and able to engage students in different ways,” says Waheed.

AI reshapes teacher profiles

AI adoption and curriculum change are altering what schools look for in a teacher, pushing the role towards higher-order mentoring and digital readiness. “AI, technology and new curricula are definitely changing the type of teachers GCC schools are looking for,” says Waheed. “Schools want teachers who are adaptable, comfortable with technology and able to use tools such as AI to genuinely enhance learning rather than simply rely on them.”

Williams terms it an evolution, not a threat: “Artificial Intelligence and emerging technologies are reshaping education, but they are enhancing great teaching rather than replacing it.” Coakley says the group has built “dedicated teacher assessment tools that help us evaluate an educator’s readiness to effectively operate in a technology rich learning environment.” Acomb points to a partnership with



GEMS Education’s own careers site is outperforming external platforms, generating a substantial and growing volume of high-quality applications each year through a highly refined and bespoke recruitment strategy for each school and cluster

— David Coakley,
Senior Vice President of Human
Resources, GEMS Education



Candidates are prioritising organisations that genuinely invest in their professional growth, provide clear career pathways, offer supportive leadership and foster positive, collaborative school cultures over simply taking the next overseas posting

— **Nicki Williams**,
Director of Education, Taaleem

Codiplay: “A central element of teaching within our schools is the ability to integrate technology, without the technology taking over.”

Expat expectations

Expatriate teachers are increasingly looking beyond compensation alone, weighing safety, healthcare, modern infrastructure, dependents’ schooling and manageable workloads, while seeking employers that offer supportive leadership, collaborative cultures and long-term stability amid rising living costs and stricter qualification requirements.

Coakley says GEMS Education views the employee proposition holistically, citing “lifestyle, professional development, well-being and meaningful career progression” as increasingly decisive, with staff sentiment tracked in real time now at its highest level to date. “When educators are happy, supported and fulfilled in their roles and lives in the UAE, they are best placed to deliver outstanding outcomes for students.”

Williams says Taaleem sees the same pattern, with candidates prioritising organisations that “genuinely invest in their professional growth, provide clear career pathways, offer supportive leadership and



That [teacher] shortage is sharpest in specialist, future-focused disciplines

— **Darren Acomb**,
Director of Education, Artemis Education

foster positive, collaborative school cultures” over simply taking the next overseas posting.

Expat candidates have become considerably more informed and selective, Waheed says, weighing accommodation, healthcare, flights, working hours, school leadership and workload alongside salary as



Demand remains strong for high-quality STEM teachers across schools in the region

rising costs prompt closer scrutiny of whether a package genuinely improves quality of life. “Candidates are also asking more about location, school culture and long-term stability before committing to a move,” he says, adding that stricter vetting introduced by UAE authorities means fewer candidates are now deemed suitable, so placement success rates have fallen even as overall teaching quality entering the market has improved. Pay and benefit disparities across curricula, nationalities and GCC countries remain significant, he says, with those holding strong international curriculum experience or specialist skills able to command higher packages; Teach For Life tries to remain transparent with both schools and candidates, matching people to opportunities that work for both sides.

Schools are managing recruitment through a multi-channel approach blending digital platforms with internal networks and local pipeline development. “Locally, our strongest recruitment pipeline comes from our reputation within the UAE education sector, recommendations from existing staff and our partnerships with universities to identify and develop talented graduate teachers, including Emirati educators,” says Ozral.

Williams says Taaleem’s strategy combines “early international planning, leading global recruitment fairs, specialist education recruitment partners, professional networks and digital recruitment platforms,” adding that reputation does the rest.

Coakley says GEMS Education’s own careers site is outperforming external platforms, generating “a substantial and growing volume of high-quality applications each year” through a “highly refined and bespoke recruitment strategy for each school and cluster.” Acomb says Artemis Education tailors channels to each curriculum: “For our British curriculum schools we use TES. For our US curriculum schools we focus on US-centric platforms,” noting that LinkedIn has also become an important avenue. Waheed says Teach For Life is building an entirely new channel to address the quality gap directly.

Retention strategies

School groups have achieved high staff retention by prioritising continuous professional growth, internal career pathways and strong community cultures. Artemis Education reports staff retention of approximately 95%, which Acomb attributes to “our focus on community and a people first approach,” while GEMS Education’s internal mobility programme lets teachers move between schools, roles and



Teachers are weighing lifestyle and career progression alongside salary, making retention as important as recruitment

geographies without leaving the organisation. This has been a central pillar of retention, Coakley says: “It is this combination of opportunity, investment, fairness, well-being and culture that has proven most effective in strengthening retention and enabling our teachers to build long and fulfilling careers within GEMS.”

Taaleem says career development remains a cornerstone of its employee experience, delivered through personalised development plans and coaching, with many principals and senior leaders having progressed from within. Ozral says professional development, leadership pathways and internal promotion are central to retention at Bloom Education, alongside cultures where teachers “have a voice, feel connected to the organisation’s purpose and are empowered to innovate in the classroom.”

Looking ahead

School groups view recruitment and retention as one long-term strategy centred on investing in people through career development, recognition, fairness and supportive culture rather than compensation alone. “Ultimately, the schools that retain the very best teachers are those that invest in people, not only through compensation, but through meaningful career development, recognition and a culture of continuous improvement,” says Ozral.

Waheed says the coming years will bring a more competitive, quality-



Schools want teachers who are adaptable, comfortable with technology and able to use tools such as AI to genuinely enhance learning rather than simply rely on them

— **Asim Waheed**,
Chief Executive, Teach For Life

focused approach to hiring, with recruitment becoming more data-driven and greater emphasis on pre-screening, qualification verification, safeguarding and cultural fit rather than simply filling vacancies. “The biggest shift will be towards quality over quantity,” he says. “The schools that succeed will be those that understand what good teachers are looking for and invest in attracting, developing and retaining them.” ■



Infrastructure catches up

From flexible furniture and AI-driven classrooms to labs, sports facilities and school transport, school leaders and education solution providers across the GCC say infrastructure is evolving around how children actually learn, with safety, well-being and flexibility shaping decisions

IT hardware shifts from support role to strategy

By **Ritika**

From AI-ready networks to biometric logins, school IT hardware is being planned less around individual devices and more around the systems that connect them, even as hardware itself keeps ageing faster than budgets allow.

“The biggest shift is from IT infrastructure as a support function to technology as part of the learning experience,” says Aliasgar Dohadwala, Chief Executive Officer of Visiontech Systems International LLC, an IT systems and infrastructure integrator.

Austin Paul Antony, Chief Managing Director of EEST Computer Systems Services LLC, an IT infrastructure and systems provider, says schools are moving fast. “Today, schools are building more connected, intelligent and secure digital environments that support artificial intelligence, cloud-based learning, collaboration, data analytics and smart campus technologies,” he says.

Tolga Özdil, Regional Commercial

Director for the Middle East, Turkey and Africa at ASUS points to the rapid advancements in device capabilities and says, “Devices are also becoming more advanced as schools try to find reliable and lightweight AI PCs that will be able to perform all sorts of tasks from video collaboration tools to creative applications.”

At Queen Elizabeth’s School, Dubai Sports City, Founding Principal Dan Clark says the school is rolling out a 1:1 device strategy alongside specialist hardware including robotics kits and VR/AR equipment. “This has been chosen to ensure that safeguarding is of the highest possible standards when children are using IT,” he says.

At British International School Riyadh (BISR), Director of IT Paul Collins says this year’s upgrades are concentrated on standardising network infrastructure across all campuses, alongside AI-aware interactive boards. “Our investment in robust network infrastructure and cutting-edge, AI-aware interactive boards is about removing the technological friction from the classroom,” he says.

At ACS International School Doha, Facilities Manager Samuel Gathoni says maintenance matters as much as new purchases. “The Facilities and IT teams work closely together to ensure that sensitive



Our investment in robust network infrastructure and cutting-edge, AI-aware interactive boards is about removing the technological friction from the classroom

— **Paul Collins**,
Director of IT,
British International School Riyadh



Devices are also becoming more advanced as schools try to find reliable and lightweight AI PCs that will be able to perform all sorts of tasks from video collaboration tools to creative applications

— **Tolga Özdil**,
Regional Commercial Director for the Middle East, Turkey and Africa, ASUS



The biggest shift is from IT infrastructure as a support function to technology as part of the learning experience

— **Aliasgar Dohadwala**,
Chief Executive Officer,
Visiontech Systems International LLC

equipment, such as the server room infrastructure and other teaching and learning tools, are properly maintained and monitored,” he says.

Not every school is convinced hardware cycles are getting easier to manage. “One of the greatest challenges is that devices can become outdated remarkably quickly. Schools must continually balance investment in hardware with ensuring value for money for families,” says Jamie Hughes, Principal, Compass International School Doha.

At GEMS Winchester School – Dubai, Chief Executive Officer and Executive Principal Matthew James Lecuyer says the conversation has moved from devices to impact. “Investment in reliable infrastructure, high-performance networks and classroom technology enables teachers to spend less time managing systems and more time focusing on learning,” he says.

For Antony, that is ultimately the measure of success. “The most successful school IT infrastructure will ultimately be the infrastructure that becomes almost invisible: secure, reliable, intelligent and easy to use,” he says.



School design centres on the whole child



Good furniture does not simply fill a learning space. It helps the learning space perform better

— **Silvio Azorin**,
Interior Design Director, Kidzink



School design is being rethought from the building down to the furniture inside it. Architects are reevaluating the traditional classroom layout altogether, while furniture is increasingly treated as part of the same environment rather than a separate afterthought, with ergonomics, flexibility and a growing body of research on how physical space affects learning shaping decisions at every scale.

“One of the most exciting shifts I’m witnessing in education is the way we are beginning to question what a classroom should actually look and feel like. For too long, the familiar image of rows of desks, with a teacher positioned at the front, has defined the learning environment. I don’t believe that model reflects how children learn, collaborate or discover the world today,” says Eno Akpan, Senior Architect at Kidzink.

“Classrooms are becoming more open, flexible and collaborative, spaces that give children greater choice, encourage curiosity and allow different learning styles to flourish.”

That shift, he says, is formalised in what he calls the firm’s ‘Enriched Environment Model,’ which “brings together neuroscience, psychology and design research to translate these principles into actionable frameworks. We design for the whole child — their learning, well-being, creativity, confidence and sense of belonging.”

Silvio Azorin, Interior Design Director at Kidzink describes a similar rethink at the furniture level. “One of the biggest shifts we are seeing in school furniture is that it is no longer treated as a collection of isolated tables and chairs. It is becoming part of a wider learning ecosystem, helping shape how

students move, focus, collaborate and interact throughout the day,” he says. Corridors, libraries and dining areas are being drawn into that same thinking, he adds, becoming “learning spaces,” “social and collaborative environments” and “part of the educational experience.” As Azorin puts it, “Good furniture does not simply fill a learning space. It helps the learning space perform better.”

This is being driven by a wider set of design priorities, according to Ahmad Alokosh, General Manager and partner at Penta Innovative Industries. “School furniture design is rapidly evolving from traditional fixed desks and chairs into flexible, technology-enabled and student-centred learning solutions,” he says. He points to “lightweight desks, chairs with castors, modular tables, nesting tables and height-adjustable furniture,” letting classrooms shift quickly between individual and group work, and to furniture that is “durable, repairable, modular and recyclable,” and “designed to accommodate different body types, abilities, ages and learning preferences.”

Hiba Sharfi, Head of Marketing at VS Furniture Middle East points to the concept of the environment as the ‘Third Teacher.’ “A study of 3,766 pupils across 153 classrooms found that classroom design accounted for 16% of the variation in students’ learning progress,” she says, adding that separate research across nine secondary schools “found that students in flexible learning spaces spent significantly more time collaborating,



A study of 3,766 pupils across 153 classrooms found that classroom design accounted for 16% of the variation in students’ learning progress

— **Hiba Sharfi,**
Head of Marketing,
VS Furniture Middle East

interacting with peers and actively engaging with lesson content.” In the GCC, she says, “we are seeing a shift away from simply specifying a certain number of chairs and desks towards asking what kind of environment will best support students.”

Schools describe similar priorities on the ground. At Queen Elizabeth’s School, Dubai Sports City, Founding Principal Dan Clark says: “Our campus is equipped with ergonomic, age-appropriate and flexible furniture across all phases. Early Years features child-sized, mobile furniture to promote independence and active learning. Across the school, modular desks, adaptive seating, writable surfaces and sensory-friendly options are introduced to support diverse learning needs.”

At British International School Riyadh, Head of Facilities Yousuf Akubat says the school’s furniture strategy is part of a broader campus development plan running through the 2026-27 academic year, shaped by “a comprehensive, year-long assessment process” in which school leadership works with departments “to identify specific spatial needs.” “The school works with specialist providers of innovatively designed educational furniture,” says Akubat says. “These intentional design choices ensure that classroom spaces are agile, modern and perfectly calibrated to support collaborative, student-led innovation.”

The next phase, according to Akubat, extends outdoors, with a new Eco



These intentional design choices ensure that classroom spaces are agile, modern, and perfectly calibrated to support collaborative, student-led innovation

— **Yousuf Akubat,**
Head of Facilities,
British International School Riyadh

Garden, “a dedicated green space featuring freshly laid grass and custom outdoor benches” designed as “an open-air sanctuary where students can study, collaborate, or simply pause to embrace nature.” The review has also reached staff: having found that “existing seating did not meet optimal ergonomic standards,” the school is “investing in premium chairs for all staff members to actively support their health and daily well-being.”

At GEMS Winchester School – Dubai, Chief Executive Officer and Executive Principal Matthew James Lecuyer says: “Flexible classroom environments continue to replace traditional static layouts. Furniture is increasingly adaptable, allowing teachers to quickly move between collaborative learning, direct instruction and independent study. Well-designed spaces improve engagement while supporting inclusion, accessibility and student wellbeing.”

Not every school is buying new. At ACS International School Doha, Facilities Manager Samuel Gathoni says the priority this year has been matching furniture already on hand to students rather than replacing it. “Our main objective is to ensure that we fully utilise the furniture already available within the school while matching student furniture sizes appropriately to support ergonomics and comfort. This year, the school did not purchase any new furniture, as our current inventory is sufficient to meet our needs,” he says.



School furniture design is rapidly evolving from traditional fixed desks and chairs into flexible, technology-enabled and student-centred learning solutions

— **Ahmad Alokosh,**
General Manager and Partner,
Penta Innovative Industries



School labs shift from fixed to flexible

School laboratories are being redesigned around flexibility rather than a single subject, equipping science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) spaces for the new academic year.

Rooms once built as subject-specific labs are increasingly expected to serve physics, chemistry, biology, robotics and design technology alike, while safety compliance and maintenance work seamlessly in the background to keep them running.

"The main shift we're seeing is away from fixed, single-subject labs. Schools want rooms that work for physics, chemistry, biology and increasingly robotics or design technology, all in the same space," says Harvey Liptrot, General Manager of Classic Educational Supplies, a school science and laboratory equipment supplier. "That's pushing demand towards mobile benching and modular storage instead of the fixed installations that used to be standard."

Curriculum choice is compounding the shift, says Liptrot. "Many schools here run UK and US pathways side by

side, so labs need to satisfy both sets of accreditation requirements from the outset rather than being adapted after the fact."

On equipment, he says digital tools "like data loggers and digital microscopes are increasingly sitting alongside traditional apparatus rather than replacing it," while "safety compliance has also moved up the priority list, particularly chemical storage and fume extraction, as schools face closer scrutiny ahead of opening."

Schools describe that flexibility playing out at scale. At Queen Elizabeth's School, Dubai Sports City, Founding Principal Dan Clark says: "The campus includes multiple specialist physics, chemistry and biology labs. A Centre for STEAM and Science will be developed, aligned with UAE innovation priorities such as the Mars programme. Robotics, coding, AI and project-based learning are embedded to support interdisciplinary learning."

At Compass International School Doha, Principal Jamie Hughes says lab investment is being driven by how



The main shift we're seeing is away from fixed, single-subject labs. Schools want rooms that work for physics, chemistry, biology and increasingly robotics or design technology, all in the same space

— **Harvey Liptrot**,
General Manager,
Classic Educational Supplies

quickly the subjects themselves are changing. "Science and technology education is evolving rapidly and learning environments must evolve with it. At our school, we have

upgraded our science laboratories to ensure students have access to the equipment, technology and practical learning experiences needed to develop curiosity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills," he says. "STEM education is most powerful when students are actively experimenting, investigating and discovering for themselves."

At British International School Riyadh's Al Waha campus, STEAM Coordinator Jon Andrews describes some of the more ambitious ways that space is being put to use. "Our state-of-the-art sports hall recently transformed into a high-octane arena, welcoming over a 1,000 students to engineer and test custom-built racing carts during our immersive STEAM Week," he says. "Utilising the facility's impressive vertical clearance, students safely launched student-designed 'Moon Landers' — a project directly inspired by NASA's pioneering Artemis programme."

The campus's Design Technology department is expanding alongside these projects, Andrews says, "rapidly integrating industrial-grade 3D printers and laser cutters into daily learning." The school is also extending its STEAM provision beyond campus, he adds, "deepening our ties with elite local partners" to give students "exclusive access to highly specialised



Utilising the facility's impressive vertical clearance, students safely launched student-designed 'Moon Landers' — a project directly inspired by NASA's pioneering Artemis programme

— **Jon Andrews,**
STEAM Coordinator, British International
School Riyadh, Al Waha campus

tech ecosystems, featuring high-tech after-school drone building and racing courses, alongside advanced 3D printing labs."

At GEMS Winchester School – Dubai, Chief Executive Officer and Executive Principal Matthew James Lecuyer frames the shift around future careers. "Preparing our students for careers that may not yet exist requires schools to think differently about specialist learning environments. STEM rooms and learning spaces are becoming collaborative innovation hubs where students apply scientific thinking, engineering principles, coding and design technology to solve authentic real-world problems. This even includes our VR Bus, Electric Vehicle mechanics and FinTech clubs," he says. "These spaces are designed not simply to teach knowledge but to cultivate curiosity, creativity and critical thinking."

Behind these ambitions sits routine, less visible work. At ACS International School Doha, Facilities Manager Samuel Gathoni says sensitive areas such as science laboratories, gas systems and chemical storage rooms are kept under close watch. "Specialised contractors have already been engaged to undertake the required maintenance works," he says, adding that deep cleaning, including the maintenance of drainage systems, is carried out across all laboratories during the summer break "to ensure that facilities are safe, clean and fully operational for the new academic year."

Schools expand access to digital learning platforms

Does the device matter as much as the network behind it? Schools are converging on one goal: giving students consistent access to learning, wherever they are.

"Increasingly, schools are exploring Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) models, allowing students to access learning through familiar technology while maintaining secure school networks and appropriate safeguarding measures," says Jamie Hughes, Principal of Compass International School Doha. "Digital learning platforms are transforming how students learn and collaborate."

At Queen Elizabeth's School, Dubai Sports City, Founding Principal Dan Clark describes a similarly broad rollout. "Students will access adaptive and AI-enabled learning platforms, VR/AR immersive tools, gamified applications and digital portfolios. Real-time dashboards will

support personalised learning and progress tracking. Every classroom is equipped with the latest SMARTboard technology," he says.

Some schools are using the same platforms to standardise how curriculum itself is tracked. Alex Turner, Group EdTech Lead at British International School Riyadh (BISR), says Toddle, the school's group-wide learning platform, is "utilising the system's analytical capabilities to ensure meticulous monitoring and optimisation of curriculum coverage" across all campuses.

Priorities for the coming year include "ensuring consistent, network-wide curriculum mapping" — work he says ultimately benefits students most. "The ultimate winners? The students, who benefit from a more connected, data-informed, and cohesive learning experience," he adds.



The ultimate winners? The students, who benefit from a more connected, data-informed, and cohesive learning experience

— **Alex Turner,**
Group EdTech Lead,
British International School Riyadh



Schools consolidate sports infrastructure under one contractor

Sports infrastructure at schools is being bought differently and being built differently. Alongside climate-appropriate surfaces and safety upgrades, schools are increasingly asking a single contractor to manage sports facilities alongside classroom flooring, seating and acoustics, while several schools are treating sport as part of a wider push on student well-being and character development, not just competition.

"School sports infrastructure is evolving fast. Schools now want multi-sport surfaces, safety-first flooring and fencing, and materials engineered for our climate — all delivered within an increasingly tight summer renovation window before the new academic year begins," says Hammad Rehman, Chief Operating Officer, Soft Surfaces.

The bigger shift, he says, is one of scope. "Schools no longer want to coordinate a different vendor for every space on campus. Alongside sports facilities, they're now requesting classroom and corridor flooring, auditorium furniture and seating, acoustic sound control, wall



 Schools no longer want to coordinate a different vendor for every space on campus

— **Hammad Rehman**,
Chief Operating Officer, Soft Surfaces

protection padding, and classroom furniture — all managed under a single contractor rather than five separate ones." That demand led the company to launch EduBuilt, a single-roof

service "delivered under one team, one schedule and one warranty." For facilities directors working to a fixed start-of-term deadline, he says, that consolidation is what matters most: "Rather than coordinating multiple contractors and site visits, they gain a single point of accountability for the entire environment a student experiences — classroom, corridor, hall and court alike."

At Queen Elizabeth's School, Dubai Sports City, Founding Principal Dan Clark describes investment on a similarly wide scale. "Significant investment is being made into a premium sports ecosystem, including indoor and outdoor sports halls, a semi-Olympic swimming pool and access to football, tennis, padel, athletics and cricket facilities via partnerships with ISD. Partnerships with the Els Golf Club and elite academies further enhance provision," he says. "The school will also introduce an Elite Sports Programme, an E-Sports lab and an Outdoor Education programme."

At British International School Riyadh (BISR), Director of Physical Education,

Sport and Activities Harrie Thomson says infrastructure upgrades are under way across the school's campuses "to support our broad sporting curriculum and continue our legacy of producing regional champions and high-level athletes." At the Al Waha campus, that includes a new 400-seat bleacher area, "brand-new pitch fencing and advanced floodlighting systems" for evening tournaments, and "high-spec retractable basketball hoops" for the elite basketball squads. Aquatic facilities are also being upgraded, Thomson says, with the Diplomatic Quarter campus pools receiving "upgraded professional lighting and extensive regrouting" over the summer. As he puts it: "By providing safe, high-quality and inspiring facilities, we are empowering our pupils to test their limits and develop a fierce competitive spirit, and also ensuring our coaches have the ultimate toolkit to build the champions of tomorrow."

At Compass International School Doha, Principal Jamie Hughes frames sport as part of a wider commitment to student development. "Sport and the performing arts remain central to a well-rounded education. Schools have an important responsibility to provide facilities that allow students to discover and develop their talents beyond the classroom."



By providing safe, high-quality and inspiring facilities, we are empowering our pupils to test their limits and develop a fierce competitive spirit

— **Harrie Thomson**,
Director of Physical Education, Sport and Activities, British International School Riyadh

This summer we have continued to enhance our sports facilities while also investing in specialist learning environments that support music, drama and performance," he says. "These experiences build confidence,

teamwork and leadership skills that stay with students long after they leave school."

At GEMS Winchester School – Dubai, Chief Executive Officer and Executive Principal Matthew James Lecuyer strikes a similar note. "Modern sports facilities are no longer viewed solely as venues for competition. They are essential components of physical health, GEMS Beyond 100, resilience, teamwork and character development," he says. "Investment this year has focused on ensuring students have access to high-quality facilities that encourage participation at every level, from recreational activity through to performance pathways."

At ACS International School Doha, Facilities Manager Samuel Gathoni says the school's sports upgrades this summer are more targeted. "General and specialised maintenance activities are carried out during the summer break for all sports facilities. Required upgrades and maintenance needs are identified well in advance to allow sufficient time for completion during the holiday period," he says, pointing to planned upgrades to the swimming pool dosing systems and "the installation of new protective padding on all outdoor play equipment to further enhance student safety."

School software converges into single platforms

Are school systems finally catching up to the apps parents use everywhere else? Schools are consolidating management, communication, assessment and payments into single connected platforms.

"Parents increasingly expect seamless digital experiences similar to those they receive in banking, retail and travel," says Matthew James Lecuyer, Chief Executive Officer and Executive Principal of GEMS Winchester School, Dubai. "Integrated software solutions on GEMS Connect allow families to access attendance, reports, communications, payments and school services through connected platforms, reducing administration while strengthening engagement between home and school."

At Queen Elizabeth's School, Dubai Sports City, Founding Principal Dan Clark describes a similar convergence. "Core systems include MIS platforms

such as iSAMS, assessment tools and a parent portal for real-time communication. These systems integrate data analytics, safeguarding and communication functions," he says. The school is also planning to partner with local banks "to offer flexible payment solutions and seamless digital transactions."

At British International School Riyadh (BISR), Group EdTech Lead Alex Turner describes a comparable effort. "British International School Riyadh is currently implementing a strategic initiative to integrate Toddle as its group-wide Learning Management System (LMS)," he says, aimed at "optimising teaching methodologies, curriculum oversight, and administrative efficiency across all campuses." The goal, Turner says, is straightforward: "By consolidating these critical functions into a unified ecosystem, BISR aims to reduce administrative complexity."



Parents increasingly expect seamless digital experiences similar to those they receive in banking, retail and travel

— **Matthew James Lecuyer**,
Chief Executive Officer and Executive Principal, GEMS Winchester School, Dubai

Smart classrooms move beyond the screen

Modern classrooms are defined by how effectively they enhance the continuity of the learning experience. Schools are leveraging artificial intelligence and connected school systems to bridge the gap between lesson planning, delivery, assessment and revision, while integrating core multilingual tools to expand accessibility.

“One pattern stands out: the most effective smart classrooms are not necessarily the ones with the most technology, but the ones that remove the most friction from the school day,” says Gurusharan Singh, Business Head for the Middle East and Africa, Teachmint, a global classroom technology company. “That is changing how schools evaluate classroom infrastructure.”

Artificial intelligence, he says, is proving valuable mainly where it shortens the distance between what a teacher intends and what happens in the classroom. “A topic can become a lesson, a lesson can become an assessment, and what was taught can feed directly into revision,” Singh says. “For learning, that means faster reinforcement, more relevant follow-up and less disconnect between teaching, assessment and revision.”

The same pattern is showing up in how school systems are wired together, he adds. “Attendance, assignments, assessments, classroom activity and administrative visibility are increasingly expected to connect. That continuity helps students stay engaged with the learning journey beyond a single lesson, while giving teachers a clearer view of progress and participation.”

Multilingual capability is following the same trajectory, says Singh,



The most effective smart classrooms are not necessarily the ones with the most technology, but the ones that remove the most friction from the school day

— Gurusharan Singh,
Business Head for the Middle East
and Africa, Teachmint

“from a supplementary feature to core infrastructure.” He explains: “Translation, speech-to-text, read-aloud tools and multilingual content access can reduce language barriers, improve comprehension and make the same lesson more accessible to a wider range of learners.” Taken together, he says, “the broader trend is that smart classrooms are becoming less about the screen at the front of the room and more about the quality and continuity of the learning experience.”

On the infrastructure side, Fujio Hiramori, Marketing Manager at Panasonic Middle East & Africa describes a parallel shift towards software-defined systems. “Smart



Ultimately, smart classrooms are becoming more intelligent and adaptable, helping educators focus on teaching while technology makes learning more accessible, engaging and efficient

— Fujio Hiramori,
Marketing Manager,
Panasonic Middle East & Africa

classrooms are moving towards IP-based, software-defined AV environments that connect video, collaboration and streaming across the campus,” he says, pointing to Panasonic’s Broadcast & ProAV solutions, which support the shift “with flexible networked workflows using technologies such as NDI, SRT and SMPTE ST 2110.”

That shift is also changing how content is produced and managed, says Hiramori. “PTZ cameras, remote operation and AI-driven features such as auto-tracking and auto-framing are making high-quality teaching content easier to produce with smaller teams,” while “centralised management also enables institutions to monitor, configure and maintain AV systems remotely, improving scalability across multiple classrooms and campuses.” Broadcast-grade video and distributed production, he adds, are “enabling more immersive, hybrid and remote learning experiences.”

“Ultimately, smart classrooms are becoming more intelligent and adaptable, helping educators focus on teaching while technology makes learning more accessible, engaging and efficient,” says Hiramori.



Digital teaching tools shift focus to teacher time

Are digital teaching tools saving teachers time, or is it just a novelty? Assessment is moving away from periodic testing towards continuous, low-stakes feedback, and artificial intelligence is being positioned mainly as a productivity layer for teachers rather than a replacement for them.

“Evidence and outcomes are becoming the selling point,” says Christian Viland, Growth Director for MENA at Kahoot!, the game-based learning platform. “Schools and districts increasingly demand proof of efficacy before even considering a tool, so vendors are increasingly looking for third-party validation. This has quickly become a license to operate.”

That demand for evidence is reshaping assessment itself, says Viland. “Formative assessment is shifting from grading, to real-time diagnostic feedback. The trend here is a move away from assessment as a periodic, summative event and toward continuous, low-stakes checks that inform same-day instructional adjustments.”

Artificial intelligence’s role within these platforms is narrower than its reputation suggests, he argues. “AI’s in-platform value is its impact on prep-time, not as a content replacer. AI education tools are now almost exclusively focused on providing time savings for teachers,



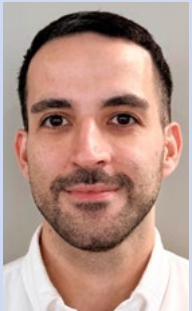
be it prep, differentiation, adapting existing material.”

Underpinning all of this, Viland adds, is a need for consistency: “Technology needs to be built to provide flexible, consistent delivery that functions even when students and teachers are not physically in the same space.”

Schools describe similar tools already at work in classrooms. At Queen Elizabeth’s School, Dubai Sports City, Founding Principal Dan Clark says, “Teachers are equipped with data dashboards, AI-supported planning tools and collaborative platforms. A strong CPD programme ensures effective use of PedTech, AI and bilingual digital pedagogy.”

At British International School Riyadh (BISR), Group EdTech lead Alex Turner says the school’s rollout of Toddle as its group-wide learning platform is also standardising how teaching itself is delivered. One of three core objectives behind the rollout, he says, is “standardising teaching practices and embedding the platform within daily operations,” alongside “promoting a culture of continuous development through staff training and the adoption of Toddle’s AI capabilities.” The aim, Turner says, is to reduce administrative complexity, “thereby enabling educators to focus more effectively on facilitating student learning and data-informed instruction.”

At Compass International School Doha, Principal Jamie Hughes says digital teaching tools at the school



AI’s in-platform value is its impact on prep-time, not as a content replacer

— **Christian Viland**,
Growth Director for MENA, Kahoot!



Teachers are equipped with data dashboards, AI-supported planning tools and collaborative platforms

— **Dan Clark**,
Founding Principal, Queen Elizabeth’s School, Dubai Sports City

have moved from optional extras to essential practice. “Digital teaching tools are no longer optional additions to classroom practice; they are becoming an essential part of high-quality teaching. The most effective schools are using technology not to replace great teaching but to enhance it. Digital assessment tools, collaborative planning platforms and emerging AI technologies all have the potential to reduce workload, improve consistency, and allow teachers to spend more time focusing on what matters most: supporting students.” That potential, he cautions, “must be managed carefully.”

Transport becomes an extension of the school day



Infrastructure should never be viewed simply as a collection of buildings, buses, or technology. Every investment should support a school's core purpose: providing outstanding learning experiences for young people

— **Jamie Hughes**,
Principal, Compass International
School Doha

Schools view student transport as a vital, integrated extension of the learning day that demands the same standards of care, safety and operational excellence as the classroom. By leveraging technologies like GPS tracking and route optimisation, designing campus infrastructure with dedicated drop-off zones, and conducting proactive annual performance reviews with providers, schools are proactively engaged in high regulatory compliance and transit efficiency.

"Transport remains an important extension of the school day. Increasing use of GPS tracking, digital communication, route optimisation and enhanced safeguarding measures provides reassurance for families while improving efficiency and reliability," says Matthew James Lecuyer, Chief Executive Officer and Executive Principal of GEMS Winchester School – Dubai.

At ACS International School Doha, facilities manager Samuel Gathoni says transport planning for the new year begins with reviewing the last

one. "We hold review meetings with the transport provider to evaluate the previous year's performance, identify strengths and areas for improvement, and implement necessary measures well in advance," he says. "This proactive approach helps us maintain high standards of student safety while ensuring continued compliance with all regulatory requirements and expectations set by the authorities."

At Compass International School Doha, Principal Jamie Hughes ties transport back to the realities families face. "With both parents often working, families rely on safe, reliable and well-managed transport services. Schools have a responsibility not only to provide transportation but to ensure it reflects the same standards of care and safeguarding that students experience throughout the school day," he says. "Ultimately, infrastructure should never be viewed simply as a collection of buildings, buses, or technology. Every investment should support a school's core purpose: providing outstanding learning experiences for young people." ■





Schools turn to fintech to ease fee payments

As digital payment expectations rise across the GCC, schools in the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are turning to fintech to simplify fee collection, widen payment flexibility and cut the friction parents face at checkout

By **Ritika**

From co-branded credit cards and instalment plans to fully digital, single-dashboard payment portals, schools across the region are rethinking how parents pay tuition fee. The shift is being driven as much by rising parent expectations as by schools' own need to cut administrative overhead, and it is unfolding differently depending on each market's banking infrastructure and regulatory environment.

A wide range

At GEMS Winchester School – Dubai, the focus has been on giving parents as many ways to pay as possible. Matthew James Lecuyer, CEO and Executive Principal at the school says financial technology is central to making the payment experience easier for families.

"Our school offers families the flexibility to pay using all major payment methods available in the UAE, including cash, cheque, credit

card, bank transfer, co-brand cards, reward points and secure online payment platforms," says Lecuyer. "This wide range of options ensures convenience while meeting the diverse needs of our parent community."

A key part of that approach is the GEMS Co-brand Card, which gives parents fee discounts, reward points and access to a 12-month easy payment plan, helping families manage fees "in a way that best suits their financial circumstances," says Lecuyer.



When you give those same parents the option to spread the same fee over months, schools see fewer missed payments, not more

— **Zarik Nabi**,
Chief Commercial Officer, Tabby

Beyond payment methods themselves, Lecuyer points to fintech's role in the wider parent experience. "By integrating digital payment technologies with our finance systems, we are reducing payment friction, improving security, increasing transparency and providing parents with a faster, more intuitive payment journey," he says, adding that the same tools are freeing administrative teams to focus on families rather than paperwork. Looking ahead, Lecuyer expects fintech to move towards greater personalisation and automation, "strengthening the partnership between home and school through smart, customer-centric financial services."

That expectation is echoed elsewhere in the region. Jamie Hughes, Principal at Compass International School Doha says platforms such as Zenda are already changing how schools and parents interact around fees. "Fintech solutions such as Zenda are helping

schools simplify fee payments, offering parents greater flexibility while reducing administration for school teams," says Hughes. "As families become increasingly busy, creating simple digital payment journeys is no longer a luxury but an expectation."

Flexible, parent-first plans

The push towards more flexible fee payment is also being shaped by fintech providers building tools specifically for the education market. Zarik Nabi, Chief Commercial Officer at Tabby, a UAE-based fintech that lets shoppers split payments over time, says school fee collection across the UAE and Saudi Arabia typically follows one of two models: payment in full upfront, or a split across the academic year's terms. "That works for the school's cash flow on paper, but it puts the burden on parents to find a lump sum at a fixed point in time," says Nabi.

Nabi says flexible payment tools can now sit inside the systems schools



already use, removing the trade-off between getting paid on time and giving parents room to manage costs. He points to Tabby research that found 88% of UAE parents feel financial strain when school fees are due, and that half struggle to pay the full amount upfront. “When you give those same parents the option to spread the same fee over months, schools see fewer missed payments, not more,” says Nabi.

On late payments specifically, Nabi says the underlying issue is rarely an unwillingness to pay. “They’re usually about timing, a fee due date that doesn’t line up with a parent’s pay cycle, or a bill so large it gets deprioritised against more immediate costs,” he says. Tabby addresses this by breaking one large payment into smaller instalments for parents, while collecting the full fee from the school upfront. “When we speak with schools that offer Tabby, they consistently highlight the improvement in cash flow,” says Nabi. “Tabby collects the full fee from parents over time, while the school gets paid in full upfront.”

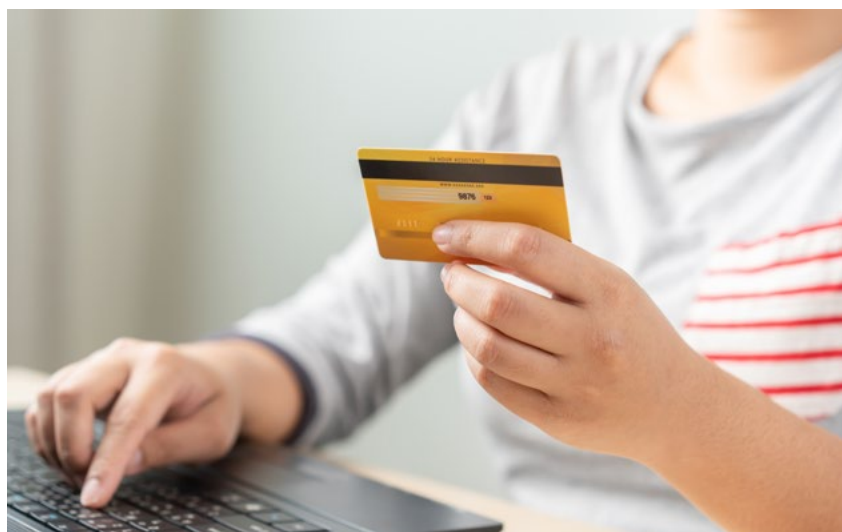
That structure also feeds into budgeting, Nabi says, since schools are no longer left estimating which families will pay on time. “There’s no manual chasing of payment plans or late payers, because that responsibility sits with us,” he says. “For an accounting team, that turns fee income from something you estimate into something you can actually plan around.”

Looking ahead, Nabi expects fintech’s role to expand beyond the payment moment itself and into how schools plan financially across the year, and into costs beyond tuition such as transport, activities and materials. He cites further Tabby research showing that nine in 10 parents said spreading payments would let their child take part in activities they currently have to skip, and 97% said they would use such a solution if their school offered it. “That tells you flexibility is becoming an expectation from parents,” says Nabi.

In-house mechanisms

Not all schools have partnered with fintech solutions. Those who aren’t have devised their own mechanisms to create easy payment solutions to parents.

Queen Elizabeth’s School, Dubai Sports City, has created a flexible model through payment structure rather than platform. Founding Principal Dan Clark says the school offers a three instalment model – 40% in August, 30% in December and 30% in March – alongside a full annual payment option that carries a 5% discount, as well as sibling discounts and scholarships.




 School is continually balancing the need to keep education accessible and affordable for families while investing in the highest standards of teaching and learning

— **Helen Olds**,
Director, British International
School Jeddah

Clark says fintech is the next step. The school is planning to partner with local banking institutions to offer flexible payment solutions and seamless digital transactions, with future plans including payment automation, financing options and integration with parent portals “to minimise friction.”

Solving for Saudi’s payment rules

In Saudi Arabia, schools face a payment challenge that is as much regulatory as technological. The technology committee at BISR, a not-for-profit school in the kingdom, says most international school software is not built for the local market. According to them, they don’t support

Saudi Riyals (SAR) out of the box or comply with local regulations.

That gap has pushed the school towards a split payment setup. Large tuition payments currently run through manual bank transfers ‘to avoid losing thousands to merchant fees,’ while smaller payments – for school trips, yearbooks or concert tickets – go through Payfort/Amazon Payment Services (APS), with the school absorbing the card charges. As a not-for-profit school, every single Riyal we save on credit card fees goes straight back into our classrooms and student resources, the school committee says.

For the 2026/2027 school year, the school is working with a new provider to consolidate the two systems into what the committee calls a “one-stop-shop” portal, built on a SAMA-approved gateway. Saudi Arabia limits payment operations to six approved gateways, and the new provider is building a direct integration with one of these licensed local rails. Instead of making parents log in to different platforms for tuition invoices, field trips and activities, the school is trying to bring everything into a single centralised dashboard.

The committee says the goal is to keep every transaction compliant and in Saudi Riyals, thereby eliminating the unfair cross-border fees and foreign-exchange markups that typically arise with international ed-tech software.

Across the three markets, the common thread is a push to make fee payment less of an administrative burden for schools and parents alike, whether through more ways to pay, instalment plans offered directly by fintech providers, income diversified beyond tuition, or compliant, single-dashboard systems built from the ground up. ■



Rana Sangram Singh Bhadauria named Principal of Indian School Al Seeb

Indian School Al Seeb has appointed Rana Sangram Singh Bhadauria as its new Principal.

Bhadauria, an IIM Indore alumnus and NABET Certified Accreditor, holds academic credentials from the University of Kanpur, University of Lucknow and Jamia Millia Islamia University. He is currently pursuing doctoral studies at Jananayak Chandrashekhar University in Uttar Pradesh.

With more than 23 years in Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) school education, including more than 14 years as Principal of various institutions in India, Bhadauria has held multiple key roles with the CBSE. He has previously contributed to institutions such as Seth M. R. Jaipuria Schools and MIT World Peace Schools.



Ruth Burke steps into the Founding Principal role at AIA Mankhool

Ruth Burke has been appointed Founding Principal of Ambassador International Academy (AIA) Mankhool. Operated by Bridge Education, AIA Mankhool is an International Baccalaureate (IB) school that opened in August 2026.

Burke brings more than 30 years of experience across leading schools in Ireland, the UK and the UAE. She has previously held senior leadership roles at Swiss International Scientific School Dubai, Deira International School, GEMS Wellington International School and Jumeirah English Speaking School.

Speaking on the school's vision, Burke says, "AIA

Mankhool is focused on developing confident, curious learners who are prepared for the opportunities and challenges of the future.

Through inquiry-led learning and global perspectives, students are encouraged to think critically, collaborate effectively and engage with the world around them to grow as compassionate leaders and engaged global citizens."



Geneva school Director General to head SISD

Nord Anglia Education has appointed Swiss education leader Pauline Nord as the new Principal of Swiss International Scientific School Dubai (SISD).

Nord joins from Collège du Léman in Geneva, where she has served as Director General for seven years, leading the academically diverse international day and boarding school.

With more than 30 years' experience in Swiss and international education, Nord has led multiple academic pathways including the IB Diploma Programme, Swiss Maturité, French Baccalauréat, American High School Diploma and integrated bilingual programmes.

Having long championed bilingual education, Nord's experience closely aligns with SISD's distinctive model. She also began her career as a teacher and boarding house tutor and has extensive experience aligning day and boarding provision into one cohesive student experience.

Nord holds a degree in Primary Education from University of Edinburgh, a Master's in International Education from King's College London and a Certificate in Advanced Educational Leadership from Harvard University.

Having lived in Switzerland for more than three decades, and as a parent of two daughters who graduated through different Swiss pathways, she brings both professional expertise and personal insight into the Swiss model.

"SISD stands out for its clear identity made up of Swiss values, bilingual pathways, academic ambition and a vibrant international community. I'm excited to build on that strong foundation and ensure every student achieves excellent outcomes while feeling known, supported and inspired," says Nord.

Nord assumed the role in August 2026, following the departure of outgoing SISD Principal Ruth Burke, who has led the school since 2021.



Rebecca Crean appointed to lead GEMS FirstPoint School

GEMS Education has appointed Rebecca Crean as the new Principal of GEMS FirstPoint School (FPS). She started her role in August 2026.

Crean joins FPS, bringing more than 20 years of educational leadership experience across the UK and international contexts. This includes senior leadership roles including Head Teacher at Tonbridge Grammar School and Deputy Head Teacher at Eltham Hill School. Her career also includes international experience at Dulwich College Shanghai.

She holds a Master's degree in Education and Professional Studies from King's College London, and a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) in Modern Foreign Languages from Goldsmiths College, University of London.

Speaking about her appointment, Crean says, "Working in close partnership with students, staff and families, my focus will be on developing confident learners, empowered leaders and a school community that is truly future-ready."



Tracy Crowder-Cloe joins Repton Abu Dhabi as Principal

Repton Abu Dhabi has announced the appointment of Tracy Crowder-Cloe as its new Principal, effective from the start of the 2026-27 academic year.

As an accomplished educational leader with more than 25 years of executive experience across the UK and the UAE, Crowder-Cloe brings extensive expertise in education.

She also brings a wealth of experience from within the Repton family of schools, having previously served

on the Repton Abu Dhabi Board of Directors and as Vice Principal and Head of Senior School at Repton Dubai from 2019 to 2023. During this period at Repton Dubai, she led the strategic direction of the Senior School, Sixth Form and Boarding, driving academic performance, operational delivery and student well-being. Most recently, she served as Principal of Cranleigh Abu Dhabi, where she has held full strategic and operational responsibility for the school.

She holds a master's in educational leadership, a National Professional Qualification for Headship and previously served as Designated National Leader of Education with the UK Department for Education, supporting schools and leaders across the North of England.

Commenting on her appointment as Principal of Repton School Abu Dhabi, Crowder-Cloe says, "It is an honour to return to the Repton family of schools as Principal of Repton Abu Dhabi. The school's focus on character development, personalised learning and a nurturing environment that supports every student reflects values I hold deeply."



Nord Anglia International School Abu Dhabi appoints Thomas Kinnersley as Principal

Nord Anglia Education has appointed Thomas Kinnersley as the new Principal of Nord Anglia International School Abu Dhabi (NAS Abu Dhabi).

Kinnersley joins from Compass International School Doha in Qatar, where he was Head of Secondary, leading provision across two campuses. He replaces the outgoing Principal, Liam Cullinan, who is returning to the UK.

Kinnersley's appointment highlights Nord Anglia's focus on developing and promoting talent from within its global family of schools.

Kinnersley brings more than 10 years' senior leadership experience across the Middle East and the UK. He has led the growth of Sixth Form provision, creating clear pathways that support student progression to leading universities worldwide.

Kinnersley says, "Nord Anglia International School Abu Dhabi is a school with a strong sense of community and clear ambition for its students. I'm excited to build on that... I'm very much looking forward to joining the school and serving the Abu Dhabi community."

Kinnersley holds a Master's in International Education from King's College London.

NEW APPOINTMENTS



GEMS American Academy – Abu Dhabi appoints Keith Chicquen as Superintendent

GEMS Education has appointed Keith Chicquen as the Superintendent of GEMS American Academy – Abu Dhabi (GAA).

Chicquen succeeds Interim Superintendent Dr Ethan Hildreth. A school founder and education leader, he brings 35 years of experience across K-12 day, boarding, public, private and post-secondary institutions in Portugal, Canada and Singapore. He joins GEMS Education from TASIS Portugal, where he has served as Founding Headmaster since 2019.

A hands-on educator, he remains closely connected to the classroom and student experience, having taught mathematics, coached athletics and led student leadership initiatives throughout his career.

He has also held senior leadership roles at Vancouver Island University (VIU), Shawnigan Lake School, Lower Canada College (LCC) and Collingwood School in Canada. He began his career as part of the founding leadership team of the Canadian Overseas College (now the Canadian International School) in Singapore.



Nicholas Soar takes charge at GEMS Founders School – Dubai South

GEMS Education has announced the appointment of Nicholas Soar as the Principal and CEO of GEMS Founders School – Dubai South (GFD). He succeeds Interim Principal John Stapley.

Soar brings more than two decades of educational

leadership experience in the UK. Throughout his career as a Headteacher, Executive Principal and Deputy Headteacher, he has led multiple schools.

Soar joins GEMS Education from the Harris Federation, one of the UK's leading education organisations, where he served as Executive Principal across several schools in London.

His experience extends beyond school improvement. He has played a key role in developing leadership programmes for aspiring Headteachers and Executive Leaders across the UK, contributed to international education partnerships spanning China, Ghana and Eastern Europe and worked with organisations including the OECD to advance educational practice and opportunity.

Soar says, "This is a rare moment when an ambitious school, a rapidly developing region and my own leadership experience align powerfully. What excites me the most is the opportunity to help shape a school that becomes central to an evolving community..."

Located at the heart of Dubai South, GFD was established in 2024 to serve the expanding community.



Edward Staton takes the helm at GEMS Metropole School Motor City

GEMS Education has promoted Edward Staton to Principal of GEMS Metropole School Motor City (MTS), effective August 2026. Staton succeeds outgoing Principal and CEO Nav Iqbal, bringing more than two decades of senior educational leadership experience across the UK and the UAE to the position.

Staton previously served as Vice Principal of Academics at MTS for two years. His background spans primary, secondary and all-through school contexts, with a focus on curriculum development, staff mentoring and school turnaround strategies.

"My philosophy is founded on a simple belief: every child deserves an exceptional education that unlocks their future," Staton said, emphasising inclusive and ambitious educational standards for the school's upcoming chapter.

In his new role, Staton will oversee the next phase of development for the British curriculum school, focusing on academic performance, holistic student development and institutional growth.