



# Raising standards, building capacity and promoting cultural heritage in Abu Dhabi schools



## Key points in this case study

Extracts from the inspection reports focus on several key areas of TEL's work with Abu Dhabi schools:

- Building leadership capacity
- Continuous professional development and teacher training
- Emphasising local culture and heritage in the curriculum and around the school
- Developing a positive educational and social ethos
- Meeting ADEC (Abu Dhabi Education Council) criteria for school development

## Overview

Created in 2009, TaaleemEdisonLearning (TEL) is an educational organisation formed to meet the needs of Abu Dhabi's public-private educational partnership programme. The company is currently working with a group of Cycle 3 schools in the Baniyas, Al Shamkah and Al Wathba regions of Abu Dhabi, which have been recently assessed by inspectors.

**“The lead adviser has been fundamental in building and maintaining a strong rapport with the principal and her staff. The partnership is therefore working well and involves the whole school in both the planning and delivery of the school improvement plan (SIP). Strong foundations have been set for further improvement of the school, and its work with students, staff and the community.”**

– extract from Al Taleaa Secondary School Monitoring Report, Abu Dhabi Education Council

TaaleemEdisonLearning's aim is to enhance Abu Dhabi's vision of a world class education system and enable it to become a reality. The TEL team supports schools and enables them to foster the kind of creativity and critical thinking the 21st century demands, by offering new models for curriculum implementation and teaching methods, building capacity and encouraging collaboration.

Fundamental to the TEL approach is a clear progression in development of skills, and a strong emphasis on adaptability and cooperation resilience, thoughtfulness, and

respect. This helps create a culture in which students learn how to become successful learners, confident individuals, and responsible citizens.

TEL utilises educational research and best practices from excellent schools around the world. These are combined with Abu Dhabi's unique culture and heritage to ensure that all students make progress and improve the standards of their achievement, in partnership with principals, teachers, parents, the students themselves and the local community. The unique TEL approach ensures that developments

and improvements are embedded into the values and culture of the school and are sustainable in the longer term. All capacity building directly helps to achieve student learning goals and support student learning needs. Improvement work is collaboratively planned and evaluated, differentiated to teachers' needs, supported in a range of ways by the TEL team, and aligned to the school's SIP and the Abu Dhabi Education Council's performance measures.

In March 2010, inspectors visited four schools for ADEC and reported on progress made since the schools had been working with TEL. Despite the timing of the inspections – only a few months into the schools' collaboration with TEL – the reports note considerable improvements. The four schools, Omamah Bint Al Harith Secondary School, Hamdan Bin Mohammad Secondary School, Al Taalea Secondary School, and Al Hosn Secondary School, all face challenges in a number of areas. The reports focus initially on the quality of the working relationship between TEL and each school. At Hamdan Bin Mohammed School, they note that the advisors form 'a highly cohesive team with a real desire to turn around a school designated by ADEC as failing', and describe the team's work with individual teachers and improvements to the learning environment: '...as a consequence teachers are happier and students more motivated.' At Al Taalea, 'student behaviour, attendance, and

punctuality to lessons have improved as a result of the push on making the learning environment more vibrant and inviting.' The report observes that 'student aspirations are rising as a result of the motivating talks and creative sessions provided for them by outside speakers as well as their own teachers.' At Omamah Bint Al Harith, 'the operator's strategy to strengthen the students' personal development is successful. Students enjoy school, have positive attitudes to learning and behave well.'

A key priority for TEL is the development of leadership team in each school, and at Omamah Bint Al Harith, 'the reviewers observed a strong partnership between the principal and the operator.' TEL advisors work closely with each school's principal so that the overall guidance of the school's staff is clear and consistent. At Hamdan Bin Mohammed Secondary School the inspectors noted this crucial working partnership: 'The lead advisor has been in post since the end of December 2009 and the relationship between him and the principal, based on mutual trust, is remarkable. The pace of change is rapid and has been very challenging for many of teachers but, because the leadership is so strong, they are willing to work hard.'

Teachers too benefit from long term intensive input from the TEL team, as the report on Al Taalea Secondary School observes: 'There

has been a strong input on teacher development and all staff have targets to improve their practice. The training programme implemented by the operator team covers a wide range of developmental opportunities for staff. This involves one-to-one and group training sessions as well as empowering school staff to train each other. This in-house training model and sharing of good practice is having a positive impact on student learning. Teachers are willing to practice new strategies learnt on training sessions and implement them enthusiastically.' At Al Hosn, 'lesson planning is informed by exemplary teacher assessment practice. Lessons are accordingly well matched to the differing learning needs of the students.'

In keeping with the goals of TEL and the Abu Dhabi Education Council, local culture is an important theme in all the schools, and is portrayed through the sciences and English studies as well as through History, as at Al Hosn: 'UAE culture and heritage are celebrated across the curriculum, and are central to the life of the school. The whole school assembly introduces students to their cultural roots and affirms pride in their heritage through music, poetry, and classical Arabic.'



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