ARABIAN
EDUCATION
DEVELOPMENT

Curriculum Improvement
& National Identity Mapping

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1. Introduction

The Curriculum Improvement Framework for the academic year 2024-2025 serves as a cornerstone for enhancing the quality of education across Al Ittihad Private Schools (IPS) under the Arabian Education Development Company. This initiative is rooted in a commitment to aligning national and international educational standards, and local regulatory requirements. By addressing critical areas such as student attainment, alignment with international and national benchmarks, and fostering inclusivity, the framework ensures a rigorous and cohesive learning environment for all students. Through this initiative, IPS aims to prepare students not only for academic success but also for navigating the challenges of a dynamic and interconnected global landscape. This initiative aligns with national goals by embedding the UAE National Identity Framework into all subjects and grade levels. This integration ensures students develop a deep understanding of their linguistic heritage, civic responsibilities, and cultural values while maintaining academic excellence.

The sections outlined below encompass key aspects of this initiative, from overarching aims and objectives to detailed strategies for enhancing performance in international assessments and managing transitions between educational phases. Each section elaborates on the structured processes, methodologies, and focus areas that contribute to a unified curriculum model promoting equity, cultural relevance, and academic rigor.

2. Aim

The aim of the initiative for the academic year 2024-2025 is to establish a robust, unified educational framework that guarantees high-quality teaching and learning experiences across all Al Ittihad Private Schools (IPS) within the Arabian Education Development Company. This initiative is specifically designed to address the requirements of the UAE School Inspection Framework and other local inspection bodies, which emphasize improving student attainment, progress, and readiness for standardized assessments such as MAP, TIMSS, and international benchmarking tools.

The initiative is grounded in the principles of equity, rigor, and inclusivity ensuring that all students have access to high quality learning experiences. The initiative focuses on improving student attainment by ensuring that the curriculum for all grade levels and subjects is aligned with internationally recognized standards such as the California Common Core State Standards (CCSS), California Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), College Board Advanced Placement (AP) requirements, and the UAE Ministry of Education guidelines. The goal is to create a guaranteed and viable curriculum that provides equal opportunities for students to succeed, regardless of their teacher or school. A key aim is to cultivate national identity and pride among students through the structured inclusion of the six domains: *Language & Communication*, *Citizenship*, *Values*, *History & Heritage*, *Culture*, and *Geography*. This complements the global competitiveness promoted by international benchmarks.

A significant focus of this effort is bridging gaps in student performance, particularly during transitions between educational phases, to ensure continuous progress. Through enhanced alignment, targeted interventions, and data-driven instruction, the curriculum fosters measurable improvements in student attainment and readiness for high-stakes assessments. To achieve this, we aim to clearly define learning outcomes for each subject and grade level, ensuring that all instructional materials and assessments align horizontally across the same grade levels and vertically from one grade to the next. This alignment eliminates instructional gaps, builds upon prerequisite knowledge, and incrementally increases the rigor of

concepts, processes, and skills. Through these efforts, the curriculum fosters a student-centered approach that encourages ownership of learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills while addressing the diverse needs of students.

By adopting and unpacking internationally recognized standards, such as the California Common Core State Standards (CCSS), Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), and College Board Advanced Placement standards, the curriculum ensures depth of knowledge and differentiation in learning objectives. Simultaneously, the curriculum aligns with the UAE Ministry of Education standards and complies with the UAE School Inspection Framework's requirements, ensuring sensitivity to cultural considerations and national values. Through these efforts, the curriculum delivers a guaranteed and viable learning pathway for all students.

3. Objectives

The curriculum improvement initiative is founded on a set of carefully crafted objectives designed to provide a comprehensive and cohesive learning experience for all students. These objectives address the need for alignment with international and national standards, cultural relevance, and the development of critical skills required for success in both local and global contexts. By focusing on inclusivity, rigor, and consistency, the initiative aims to create a curriculum that meets the diverse needs of students while adhering to the expectations of regulatory authorities and international benchmarks.

Each objective is structured to ensure a seamless integration of global standards, such as the California Common Core State Standards (CCSS), Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), and the College Board Advanced Placement framework, with the UAE Ministry of Education guidelines. Additionally, the curriculum emphasizes the importance of fostering UAE national identity and complying with cultural considerations to maintain the integrity of the local context. Through these efforts, the initiative seeks to address critical areas such as standards alignment, teacher capacity building, improving student attainment, fostering equity, and enhancing performance in standardized assessments like MAP and TIMSS.

One of the objectives is to promote the UAE's cultural values through integration in core and non-core subjects, ensuring consistency with the National Identity Mark Framework. For instance, Arabic and Islamic subjects emphasize classical Arabic and Emirati heritage, while English, Science, and Art highlight local environmental, historical, and social contexts.

The following points outline the objectives in detail, showcasing how each contributes to the overarching goal of providing high-quality, inclusive, and culturally responsive education that prepares students for academic excellence and lifelong success:

- *Ensuring Standards Alignment Across All Grade Levels and Subjects*
  A key objective is to align curriculum content, teaching strategies, and assessments with the California CCSS for English and Math, NGSS for Science, the College Board AP requirements for advanced courses, and the UAE Ministry of Education standards for Arabic, Islamic Studies, Social Studies, and Moral Education. This alignment guarantees consistency in instructional quality and depth across the school system.

- *Unpacking Standards into Differentiated Learning Objectives*
  International standards have been systematically unpacked into grade-specific learning objectives. These objectives include varying levels of depth of knowledge, such as recall, conceptual understanding, application, and extended thinking, ensuring a comprehensive approach to skill development and critical thinking.

- *Incorporating UAE National Identity*
  The curriculum embeds UAE national identity across all subjects through the integration of Arabic, Islamic Studies, Social Studies, and Moral Education, aligned with UAE Ministry of Education standards. Additionally, subjects such as English and Science include UAE-relevant content to contextualize global standards within the local culture.

- *Ensuring Compliance with Cultural Consideration Policies*
  Standards, objectives, or statements inconsistent with local cultural norms or the UAE's regulatory framework have been omitted or adapted. The curriculum aligns fully with the Cultural Consideration Policy to respect and reinforce the local context while maintaining the rigor of international benchmarks.

- *Promoting Horizontal and Vertical Curriculum Coherence*
  Horizontal alignment ensures that all teachers teaching the same grade and subject address identical standards and learning objectives. Vertical alignment ensures that learning progresses logically, with concepts in earlier grades serving as a foundation for more advanced topics in subsequent grades. This coherence eliminates redundancies, addresses learning gaps, and increases conceptual rigor over time.

- *Developing Teacher Capacity*
  Professional development sessions have been conducted to ensure teachers are equipped to unpack and implement standards effectively. These sessions included training on using rubrics, developing student-centered lesson plans, and implementing project-based learning approaches to enhance engagement and independent learning.

- *Ensuring Smooth Transitions Between Phases*
  A key objective is to close performance gaps during transitions between educational phases, such as from KG2 to Grade 1 or Grade 5 to Grade 6. This involves vertically aligning standards, reinforcing prerequisite knowledge, and implementing intervention strategies to support students at critical junctures.

- *Fostering an Inclusive and Technology Curriculum*
  The curriculum integrates Information and Communication Technology (ICT) starting from KG1 and KG2, ensuring alignment with the California Computer Science Standards to foster digital literacy at an early age. From Grades 1 to 8, the ICT curriculum is designed to progressively build students' proficiency in foundational and advanced technology skills, preparing them for future challenges and opportunities in areas such as artificial intelligence (AI) and other future-ready competencies. Beyond the core ICT courses, students in higher grades have access to a wide array of elective options, including specialized fields like cybersecurity and networking, providing them with the skills necessary to thrive in an increasingly technological and interconnected world.

- *Improving Student Attainment and Progress*
  The curriculum emphasizes improving student attainment in standardized assessments such as MAP and TIMSS by embedding assessment-specific skills and competencies. This ensures that students develop strong foundational knowledge while preparing for rigorous global benchmarks.

- *Enhancing Assessment Practices*
  To improve assessment quality, rubrics have been created for every standard, enabling teachers to accurately evaluate students' mastery during continuous assessments. These rubrics ensure fairness and consistency, providing teachers with a structured framework to identify and address individual student needs effectively.

- *Enhancing Performance in Standardized Assessments*
  The curriculum is designed to enhance student performance in MAP assessments by embedding critical thinking, data interpretation, and problem-solving skills across subjects. Additionally, the inclusion of TIMSS-aligned content in Science and Math ensures readiness for these international benchmarks.

- *Promoting Equity and Inclusion*
  The curriculum framework ensures that all students, regardless of their individual needs, have access to quality education. This is achieved through differentiated instruction, enrichment activities for advanced learners, and remedial support for students needing additional help.

4. Process & Purpose

The curriculum improvement process was designed as a comprehensive and systematic approach to ensure the delivery of a robust, standards-aligned educational framework. This process aimed to address critical gaps, align with the UAE School Inspection Framework expectations, and incorporate international standards such as MAP and TIMSS, while maintaining cultural relevance and inclusivity. By integrating research-driven methodologies and a collaborative approach, the process sought to create a curriculum that is dynamic, equitable, and adaptable to the evolving needs of students and educators.

The improvement initiative was implemented in distinct, interconnected phases, each building on the insights and outcomes of the previous. From initial curriculum analysis to resource development, teacher training, and continuous monitoring, every step was aligned with the overarching goal of enhancing student achievement and ensuring readiness for local and international benchmarks.

The curriculum development process included cross-referencing National Identity components during curriculum mapping, lesson planning, and resource design phases. Teacher training incorporated cultural identity elements, reinforcing instructional practices that reflect UAE values and traditions.

The following points provide a detailed account of the phases involved in this structured process, illustrating the collaborative efforts that contributed to a successful curriculum transformation:

- *Curriculum Analysis and Framework Design*
  A thorough review of the existing curriculum was conducted to identify gaps in standards alignment, assessment practices, and instructional methodologies. This analysis was informed by the UAE School Inspection Framework, MAP assessment requirements, TIMSS objectives, and other international

standards. The resulting curriculum framework integrates these benchmarks, ensuring all learning objectives are measurable and relevant. Based on this analysis, a unified curriculum framework was designed for K-12, specifying the standards to be covered in each subject and grade level.

- *Development of Teaching Resources and Assessment Tools*
  In the second phase, teaching resources such as lesson plans, pacing guides, and assessment rubrics were provided via different adopted resources. These resources were tailored to each phase of schooling:
  o For Pre-KG to KG2, the Creative Curriculum was adopted to emphasize play-based learning and early literacy and numeracy skills.
  o For Grades 1 to 5, resources focused on foundational concepts and inquiry-based learning aligned with CCSS and NGSS.
  o For Grades 6 to 12, resources included advanced topics in core subjects and preparation materials for AP courses.

- *Teacher Training and Capacity Building*
  Extensive professional development sessions were held before the start of the academic year. These sessions introduced teachers to the updated curriculum framework, provided guidance on unpacking standards, and trained them on implementing student-centered teaching methodologies. Teachers were also trained in the use of rubrics for continuous assessments and strategies for reteaching and enrichment based on student mastery levels.

- *Implementation, Monitoring, and Continuous Improvement*
  During the implementation phase, curriculum delivery was closely monitored through classroom observations, lesson plan reviews, and student performance data analysis. Feedback was collected from teachers, students, and school leaders to identify areas for improvement. This iterative process ensured the curriculum remained dynamic and responsive to the needs of the school community.

5. Structure of the Revamped Curriculum

The initiative adopted was created based on a combination of Tyler's Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction Design Model (*Determining the purpose, Identifying educational experiences related to the identified purposes, Ascertaining how the experiences are organized, and evaluating the purposes*) and Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe Backward-Design Model. The initiative is grounded in the principles of equity, rigor, and inclusivity ensuring that all students have access to high quality learning experiences. The initiative focuses on improving student attainment by ensuring that the curriculum for all grade levels and subjects is aligned with internationally recognized standards such as the California Common Core State Standards (CCSS), California Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), College Board Advanced Placement (AP) requirements, and the UAE Ministry of Education guidelines. The ultimate goal is to create a guaranteed and viable curriculum that provides equal opportunities for students to succeed, regardless of their teacher or school.
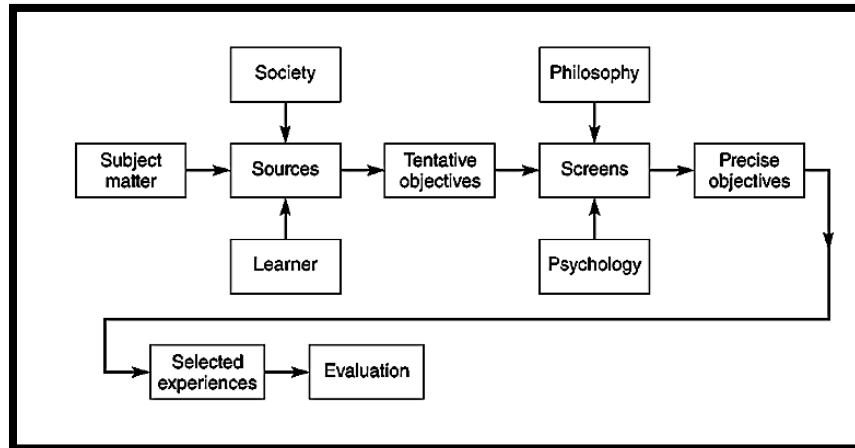
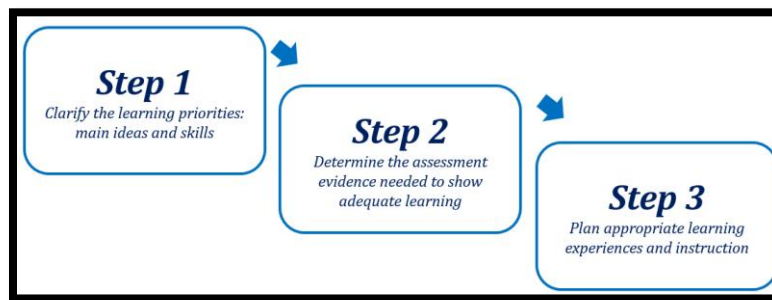***Figure 1:*** *Tyler's Curriculum Development Model (Tyler, 1949)*

Figure 2: *Backward-Design Model (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011)*

The initiative is constructed in distinct, interconnected phases, each building on the insights and outcomes of the previous. From initial curriculum analysis to resource development, teacher training, and continuous monitoring, every step was aligned with the overarching goal of enhancing student achievement and ensuring readiness for local and international benchmarks. The following points provide a detailed account of the phases involved in this process:

- *Phase1: Curriculum Analysis and Framework Design*
  A thorough review of the existing curriculum (shared by every school) was conducted to identify gaps in standards alignment, assessment practices, and instructional methodologies. This analysis was informed by the UAE School Inspection Framework, MAP assessment requirements, TIMSS objectives, and other international standards. The resulting curriculum framework integrates these benchmarks, ensuring all learning objectives are measurable and relevant. Based on this analysis, a unified curriculum framework was designed for K-12, specifying the standards to be covered in each subject and grade level. Based on the unpacked standards, specific learning outcomes were crafted for all grades (K-12), ensuring clarity in what students are expected to achieve. Emphasis was placed on enhancing both literacy and numeracy through integrated learning activities across all subjects. The piloted curriculum ensured compliance with the *Cultural Consideration Policy*, respecting UAE heritage, traditions, and values while fostering global citizenship. Clear pacing guides were created for teachers to help them implement the curriculum. This ensures that all key concepts are covered within the academic year, and students are adequately prepared for assessments.

- *Phase 2: Teacher Training and Capacity Building*
  Extensive professional development (PD) sessions were held before the start of the academic year. These sessions introduced teachers to the revamped curriculum, provided guidance on unpacking standards, and trained them on implementing student-centred teaching methodologies. Teachers were also trained on the use of rubrics for continuous assessments and strategies for reteaching and enrichment based on student mastery levels. Learning experiences are planned with cultural authenticity, and student performance in National Identity integration is monitored through specific learning outcomes and student-led initiatives.

- *Phase 3: Implementation, Monitoring, and Continuous Improvement*
  During the implementation phase, curriculum delivery was closely monitored through classroom observations, lesson plan reviews, and student performance data analysis. Feedback was collected from teachers, students, and school leaders to identify areas for improvement. This iterative process ensured the curriculum remained dynamic and responsive to the needs of the school community.

6. Addressing Key Focus Areas

The curriculum improvement initiative focuses on addressing critical areas essential for fostering student success and meeting both local and international benchmarks. These focus areas have been carefully identified to ensure that the curriculum not only promotes academic achievement but also supports smooth transitions across educational phases and respects the cultural and societal values of the UAE. By embedding targeted strategies, the curriculum is designed to provide a comprehensive and inclusive educational experience. Each key focus area, from attainment to transition, reflects the inclusion of national values. Cultural sensitivity extends to celebrating UAE heritage, using classical Arabic in context, and integrating UAE history and geography throughout grade levels.

The following points outline the key areas of focus where each focus area plays a vital role in shaping an education system that meets the needs of students while maintaining alignment with both global standards and local expectations:

- *Improving Student Attainment*
  Improving student attainment remains at the heart of the curriculum improvement initiative, with a focus on integrating critical skills necessary for excelling in MAP assessments. These skills include critical thinking, data interpretation, and advanced problem-solving, which are woven into the curriculum across core subjects to ensure students develop competencies aligned with global benchmarks. Furthermore, the curriculum incorporates TIMSS-aligned objectives in Science and Math, with specific emphasis on Grades 4 and 8. These objectives aim to enhance conceptual understanding and real-world application, preparing students to meet and exceed the expectations of international assessments while building a solid foundation in STEM-related disciplines.

- *Enhancing Transitions Between Phases*
  To facilitate smoother transitions between educational phases, targeted strategies have been implemented to address potential performance gaps. Vertical alignment of standards ensures that concepts and skills build progressively from one grade level to the next, reducing redundancies and reinforcing foundational knowledge. Additionally, phase-specific teacher training equips educators with the tools and methodologies necessary to support students effectively during critical transitions, such as

moving from KG2 to Grade 1 or Grade 5 to Grade 6. These strategies collectively aim to ensure that students are adequately prepared for the challenges of the next phase in their academic journey.

- *Cultural Sensitivity and Relevance*
  Cultural sensitivity and relevance are integral to the curriculum design, ensuring that educational content respects and reflects local values and societal norms. The curriculum has been carefully reviewed to align with UAE cultural considerations, adapting or omitting any standards or objectives that may conflict with these principles. By embedding local cultural identity into the educational framework while maintaining academic rigor, the curriculum strikes a balance between global competitiveness and local relevance, fostering a learning environment that respects diversity and promotes inclusivity.

7. Alignment with Inspection Framework Expectations

The curriculum improvement initiative has been meticulously designed to align with the UAE educational expectations, addressing its key focus areas to ensure compliance with national standards and international benchmarks. This alignment reflects a commitment to enhancing educational quality, fostering student achievement, and ensuring effective teaching and assessment practices across all schools.

By integrating clear and measurable learning outcomes, the curriculum provides consistency and rigor in instruction. Professional development and standards-based rubrics equip teachers with tools to implement effective teaching strategies that align with the expectations of the inspection framework. Continuous assessment practices, tailored to MAP and TIMSS benchmarks, ensure that student progress and attainment are accurately evaluated and tracked.

Moreover, the curriculum harmonizes international standards with local regulatory requirements, ensuring it meets the diverse needs of the student population while respecting cultural and societal values. This curriculum meets MOE and ADEK expectations for National Identity through embedded cultural objectives, student projects, and assessment rubrics focused on Emirati values and citizenship.

The following points detail how the curriculum improvements address each focus area of the UAE School Inspection Framework, demonstrating the initiative's comprehensive approach to achieving excellence in education.

- *Student Achievement*: Clear learning outcomes are defined for each subject, ensuring consistency and rigor across schools.
- *Teaching for Effective Learning*: Standards-based rubrics and professional development empower teachers to deliver effective instruction.
- *Assessment*: Continuous assessment practices are aligned with MAP and TIMSS benchmarks to evaluate progress and attainment.
- *Curriculum Adaptation*: International standards and local regulatory requirements are harmonized to meet diverse student needs.

8. Enhancing MAP and TIMSS Performance

The curriculum improvement initiative places a strong emphasis on preparing students for success in key international assessments, particularly the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Recognizing the significance of these assessments

as benchmarks for student achievement and school performance, the curriculum is designed to integrate the skills and competencies essential for excelling in these evaluations. By focusing on both foundational and advanced skill-building, the initiative ensures that students are not only assessment-ready but also equipped with critical thinking and problem-solving abilities that extend beyond the classroom.

The following sections outline the strategies implemented to enhance performance in these high-stakes assessments:

- *Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking*: A focus on cultivating higher-order thinking skills in Math and Science to address the complex challenges presented in MAP and TIMSS assessments.
- *Inquiry-Based Approaches*: The adoption of inquiry-driven methodologies in Science and Math, aligned with TIMSS objectives, to foster analytical reasoning and conceptual understanding.
- *Continuous Skill-Building*: A structured, progressive approach to developing skills across grade levels, ensuring students are well-prepared for the increasing rigor of international benchmarks.

9. Addressing Phase Transition Challenges

Transitions between educational phases are critical junctures in a student's academic journey, often presenting challenges that can impact learning continuity and overall achievement. The curriculum improvement initiative prioritizes addressing these challenges by implementing phase-specific strategies that ensure smooth and effective transitions. These strategies focus on reinforcing foundational skills, providing targeted interventions, and aligning instructional practices to support students as they progress from one phase to the next.

The following sections outline the key measures taken to address phase transition challenges:

- *Reinforcing Foundational Skills*: Strengthening essential literacy and numeracy skills for students transitioning from KG2 to Grade 1 to establish a solid academic foundation for early learning success.
- *Targeted Interventions*: Implementing tailored support programs for students moving from Grade 5 to Grade 6 to address potential performance gaps and ease the transition to more rigorous academic expectations.
- *Instructional Coherence*: Ensuring consistency and continuity in learning through vertical curriculum alignment and enhanced collaboration among teachers across grade levels.

10. Conclusion

The Curriculum Improvement Initiative for 2024-2025 is a testament to IPS's commitment to delivering excellence in education. By addressing key focus areas, aligning with inspection frameworks, and integrating international standards with cultural considerations and National Identity Framework, the initiative fosters a learning environment that prepares students for academic success and global competitiveness. This comprehensive approach ensures that IPS remains at the forefront of educational innovation, meeting the diverse needs of its students and the expectations of national and international stakeholders.

References

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