

**GFM Local Advisory Board Meeting
Term 3 2024-2025**

Meeting Information

- Date & Time: 2025-06-17 12:00:00
- Location: GFM Conference Room
- Attendees: Akram, Mary, Jacquie, Mia, Saba, Kashif, Saba, Fida, Marwa, Salwa
- Apologies: Mr. Matthew and Student representatives

Meeting Notes

1. School governance updates, leadership appointments, safeguarding, academic progress, curriculum and technology strategy, and device policy implementation.

- **Welcome and Introductions**
The meeting began with a welcome to attendees and a special introduction for Ms. Salwa, a new member joining the group. Ms. Salwa introduced herself as a mother of three children at GFM, having joined in 2019, and expressed her intention to contribute positively.
- **Appointment of Vice Chair**
Nominations for vice chair were opened. Only one nomination was received for Ms. Marwa, who accepted. The group confirmed her appointment with no objections.
- **Safeguarding Lab Lead Appointment**
With Ms. Jacquie moving on, the safeguarding lab lead position needed to be filled. The chair nominated Ms. Mia, who is also the new Vice-Principal, to take over safeguarding responsibilities.
- **Review of Previous Minutes and Actions**
The group reviewed previous meeting minutes, focusing on the appointment of vacancies. It was agreed that the minutes would be recirculated for reference.
- **Principal's Lab Termly Report**
The principal's termly report was summarized, highlighting key achievements, including reaccreditation from the British Schools Overseas Inspection (BSO) in April 2025, where all eight standards were rated outstanding, an improvement from the 2022 inspection.
- **Academic Outcomes and Reading Progress**
Assessment data from GLs, GCSEs, and internal reviews show strong academic progress, especially in reading. Reading fluency, measured by NGRT, increased from 65% to 72% school-wide since 2023, with a target of 90% fluency within the next three years.
- **Curriculum Review and Initiatives**
The curriculum has been under review, focusing on assessment redesign, reading, and alignment with 'Teach Like a Gem' and 'Read Like a Gem' initiatives. Details are in the draft SIP.
- **Leadership and Staff Development**
All key leadership positions for the next year have been filled, with leadership development and executive coaching ongoing. Staff turnover is steady at 21, with targeted retention and onboarding strategies in place.
- **Safeguarding and Well-being**
Safeguarding systems remain robust, with a successful BSO safeguarding audit. Transition of safeguarding responsibilities from Ms. Jacquie to Ms. Mia is underway.

- **Technology and Digital Strategy**

From September, digital curriculum and assessment platforms will be implemented. Chromebooks will be mandatory for Years 5 to 13, while FS1 to Year 2 will transition to a device-free learning environment. A campaign on delayed smartphone use is planned, recommending age 16 for smartphone ownership.

- **Discussion on Chromebook Policy**

Questions were raised about the rationale for mandatory Chromebooks in Years 5-13, balancing screen time concerns with instructional needs. The lack of systematic use was attributed to inconsistent device availability. The policy aims for 100% Chromebook presence to enable consistent teaching and policy enforcement.

- **Use of Educational Apps in Early Years**

Discussion covered which apps (e.g., Readingwise, Flash Academy) would be used in early years and how device-free policies would affect access. It was clarified that targeted interventions would still provide device access where needed.

- **Practical and Financial Considerations for Devices**

Concerns were raised about the practicality (weight, carrying devices daily) and financial burden (cost of Chromebooks and books) for parents. The school clarified that Chromebooks are not sold for profit, parents can choose any brand meeting specifications, and licenses are required for security.

- **Device Security and Policy Enforcement**

Issues with students bypassing device licenses and bringing unauthorized devices were discussed. The school emphasized that universal Chromebook use is necessary for effective control and policy enforcement.

Conclusion

1. Ms. Marwa was appointed as vice chair.
2. Ms. Mia was nominated and agreed upon as the new safeguarding lead.
3. Minutes to be recirculated by Ms. Danica.

2. Improvement and implementation of bilingual Arabic education, device strategy, and teaching quality across the school.

- **Device Strategy (Chromebook vs Apple)**

Discussion on the pros and cons of using Apple devices versus Chromebooks for students, including cost, effectiveness, and implementation challenges. Concerns about inconsistent device usage and the impact on teaching were raised.

- **Mandating Device Usage**

Debate on whether to mandate device usage for students, with concerns about charging parents and inconsistent enforcement. Teachers report difficulty teaching when not all students have devices.

- **Training and Education on Device Use**

Acknowledgement that both students and teachers need better training on how to use devices effectively in class.

- **Government Initiative on Arabic Bilingual Education**

Update on a new government initiative in Dubai requiring a bilingual approach to Arabic instruction in FS2 and Year 1, with at least one third (30%) of instructional time delivered bilingually.

- **Early Years Arabic Lead and Staff Training**

Appointment of an early years Arabic lead and initiation of staff training to embed bilingual learning, with timetable adjustments for next year to ensure compliance.

- **Instructional Time for Arabic**
Clarification that at least 30% (one third) of instructional time in FS2 and Year 1 must be in Arabic, though exact minutes per week are not specified.
- **Student Outcomes and Assessments**
School participation in PISA and PIRLS national agenda assessments, with results expected within the next 12 months.
- **Community Recognition and Awards**
Recognition of school achievements, including World Peace Games and other awards.
- **Strategic Improvement Plan (2025-2028)**
Presentation of a draft strategic improvement plan for 2025-2028, seeking feedback from governors on priorities and suggestions for strengthening the plan.
- **Arabic Language Improvement (Primary and Secondary)**
Discussion on improvements in primary Arabic instruction, with positive parent feedback, but ongoing challenges in secondary. Noted inconsistency in class visits and need for more engaging teaching methods.
- **Innovative Teaching in Islamic Studies**
Example shared of an engaging debate activity in Year 12 Islamic class, which encouraged student participation and learning.
- **Teach Like a Gem Training**
Ongoing training for Arabic and non-Arabic teachers based on cognitive science and evidence-based research to unify and improve teaching quality across the school.
- **Student Motivation in Arabic and Islamic Lessons**
Concerns raised about student engagement and motivation in Arabic and Islamic lessons, with suggestions for campaigns to highlight their importance.
- **Bilingual Approach and Early Immersion**
Support for the bilingual approach, especially early immersion in Arabic from age four or five, to build fluency and prevent widening gaps as students age.

3. School Operations, Arabic Curriculum Enhancement, Student Performances, Teacher Turnover, Supervision and Safety, and Organizational Improvements

- **Reviving Student Performances and Cultural Activities**
Discussion about reintroducing student-led plays and performances, especially for early years, inspired by past events like the Bumble B play. Suggestions include organizing rehearsals, campaigns for FSU1, and YouTube performances involving students, parents, and teachers.
- **Arabic Curriculum and Teaching Methods**
Exploration of initiatives to improve Arabic teaching, such as 'Read Like a Gem' and curriculum unification across GEMS schools. Emphasis on enhancing student engagement and enjoyment, and aligning topics with student interests.
- **Family Involvement in Student Learning**
Proposal for families to participate in school events celebrating students' Arabic learning, including performances and classroom celebrations at least once a year.
- **External Partnerships for Student Productions**
Consideration of engaging external companies for student productions and teacher training, while also recognizing the value of internal teacher-led initiatives.
- **World Peace Games and Strategic Thinking**
Introduction of World Peace Games to teach teamwork, critical thinking, and peacemaking. Plans to expand participation to the entire cluster, with investment in materials and teacher training.

- **Teacher Turnover and Staffing Concerns**
Concerns raised about 21% teacher turnover, especially in secondary (years 10, 11, 12), and its impact on students and parents. Discussion of reasons for turnover, including promotions, compliance, and organizational growth.
- **Mid-Year Teacher Changes and Student Impact**
Issues with mid-year teacher transitions, especially in secondary, raised by LAB. Calls for better planning and communication.
- **School Growth and Organizational Challenges**
Rapid growth over the past two years (increase of 1,000 students each year) has led to organizational challenges, including induction, orientation, and logistics (lockers, toilets, pick-up/drop-off).
- **Book Sales and Distribution**
Discussion on book sales and distribution challenges. Proposal to revert to the old system where parents can choose to buy books at school.
- **Classroom Cameras and Student Supervision**
Concerns about fights and incidents between sessions, and whether to install cameras in classrooms. Discussion of privacy, investment, and current practices (CCTV in corridors and labs).
- **Lost and Found and Incident Verification**
Parents' concerns about lost items and lack of camera coverage for incident verification.
- **Year 7 and 8 Rooming and Student Movement**
Update on trial of static classrooms for years 7 and 8; decision to revert to students moving between subject classrooms.

4. School strategic planning, quality assurance, and stakeholder engagement for improvement.

- **Locker System and Student Belongings**
Discussion about the inadequacy of the current locker system, issues with locker availability (not enough for all students), broken lockers, and students carrying heavy bags all day. Concerns raised about missing items and the need for better locker distribution and maintenance.
- **Classroom Materials and Student Notebooks**
Problems with students not finding their notebooks in classrooms due to shared spaces and lack of consistent storage. Suggestion that teachers should keep student notebooks in their own classrooms to avoid confusion.
- **Inspection Reports and Quality Assurance**
Principal referenced two inspection reports and a deep dive report by Mr. Tim Bristow on teaching and learning, emphasizing the importance of quality assurance and ongoing improvement.
- **Teach Like a Gem Framework**
Positive feedback on the implementation of the Teach Like a Gem framework and its impact on student learning. Plans to involve governors in understanding and quality assuring this approach.
- **Three-Year Strategic Plan (2025-2028)**
Presentation of the draft three-year strategic plan, structured around three pillars: Grow, Flourish, Mindful. Each pillar has specific strategic priorities and targets, with year-by-year breakdowns and a vision for 2028.
- **Strategic Pillar: Grow**
Focus on community and people, including partnerships, student voice, values, induction, integration, retention, and professional growth for staff.

- **Strategic Pillar: Flourish**
Emphasis on curriculum excellence, embedding Teach Like a Gem, curriculum review, and a strong focus on reading and narrowing achievement gaps.
- **Strategic Pillar: Mindful**
Focus on holistic outcomes, well-being, UAE national agenda, and strengthening Arabic and Islamic studies. Discussion about possibly renaming 'Mindful' to 'Mastery'.
- **GEMS Values Integration**
Clarification that the school's pillars do not replace GEMS values but are mapped to them. The four GEMS values (care, excellence, one team, always learning) are integrated into the school's own values.
- **Stakeholder Feedback on Strategic Plan**
Governors and stakeholders are asked to review the draft strategic plan and provide feedback within two weeks before the end of the academic year. The plan is in consultation phase and open to challenge and suggestions.
- **Future Induction and Training for Governors**
Proposal to include a Teach Like a Gem induction session for governors, similar to teacher induction and safeguarding training.
- **Friends of Founders and Parent Engagement**
Reference to ongoing and future initiatives for parent engagement and innovation spaces for parents and the school community.

Conclusion

4. Feedback acknowledged and will be considered for improvement.
 5. Reports shared for review; governors encouraged to read and provide feedback.
 6. A session for governors on Teach Like a Gem will be planned.
 7. Values are complementary and mapped; not being merged or replaced.
 8. To be planned and scheduled.
5. School development, student engagement, leadership roles, alumni relations, and future planning.
- **School Vision and Pillars (Mindfulness vs. Mastery)**
Discussion on whether to shift the school's core pillar from 'mindfulness' to 'mastery', referencing the three core pillars of GFM and comparisons with sister schools. Consideration of the meaning and implications of both terms for the school's direction.
 - **Parent Engagement and School Innovation**
Emphasis on the need to innovate and increase parent engagement as part of the school's next development stage.
 - **Year 12 and Year 13 Internship and Volunteering**
Discussion about providing internship opportunities for year 12 and year 13 students within the school to build skills and confidence. Clarification that year 12 volunteering is mandatory, but year 13 participation is low. Certificates are provided for work experience.
 - **External Work Experience Challenges**
Noted difficulties in organizing external work experience for year 12 students in the country. Some students are working in FS, year one, and year two within the school.
 - **Alumni Engagement and Tracking**
Discussion on improving alumni engagement, tracking university destinations (over 73% known), and using the alumni app. Some year 13 alumni returned for internships. Suggestion to create a website or alternative platform for alumni.
 - **Student Leadership Roles (Head Boy/Girl, Lab Committee)**
Review of the roles of head boy and head girl, and the suggestion to select student

representatives from year 12 for continuity. Proposal to have a student application process for lab/board participation.

- **Upcoming Meetings and Events**

Schedule for next year's meetings: November 2025, February 2026, June 2026. Mention of graduation rehearsal and ceremony preparations.

- **Acknowledgements and Thanks**

Expressions of gratitude to staff, governors, and students for their contributions and support throughout the year.

Conclusion

1. Action to send out a survey to governors to vote on changing terminology from 'mindfulness' to 'mastery'. Governors to review and provide feedback on the draft.
2. Year 12 students receive certificates for work experience this week. Consideration to offer earlier and more structured opportunities next year.
3. Idea to explore a website or alternative alumni engagement platform for next year.
4. To consider and discuss with Mr. Akram about student board/lab representation for next year.

Next Arrangements

- [] Ms. Danica to recirculate previous meeting minutes to governors.
- [] Safeguarding lab lead responsibilities to transition from Ms. Jackie to Ms. Mia.
- [] Implementation of mandatory Chromebooks for Years 5-13 starting September 2025.
- [] Transition to device-free learning environment for FS1 to Year 2.
- [] Sustained campaign on delayed smartphone use, recommending age 16 for smartphone ownership.
- [] Continued review of practical and financial aspects of device policy.
- [] Governors to review and provide feedback on the draft strategic improvement plan for 2025-2028.
- [] Continue staff training for bilingual Arabic instruction and device usage.
- [] Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of device usage and bilingual education initiatives.
- [] Await PISA and PIRLS assessment results within the next 12 months.
- [] Structure and schedule student performances for Arabic native students at least once a year, with guidelines and accountability.
- [] Expand World Peace Games to the entire cluster in the next academic year.
- [] Reduce teacher turnover to 15-18% for the next academic year.
- [] Improve induction, training, and minimize mid-year teacher changes.
- [] Revert to the old book sales system and communicate details to parents earlier.
- [] Increase supervision and enhance duty areas during student transitions.
- [] Continue to increase the number of cameras in communal areas.
- [] Revert to students moving between subject classrooms in secondary school.
- [] Governors to review the draft three-year strategic plan and provide feedback within two weeks before the end of the academic year (by 2025-06-30).
- [] Plan and schedule a Teach Like a Gem induction session for governors.
- [] Stakeholder feedback to be incorporated into the strategic plan before finalization.
- [] Continue to address locker system issues and classroom material management.
- [] Further discussion and possible decision on renaming the 'Mindful' pillar to 'Mastery'.
- [] Survey to be sent to governors to vote on changing terminology from 'mindfulness' to 'mastery'.
- [] Governors to review and provide feedback on the draft document regarding school pillars.
- [] Year 12 students to receive certificates for work experience during the week of 2025-06-17.
- [] Consider offering earlier and more structured internship/volunteering opportunities for year 12 next year.
- [] Explore the creation of a website or alternative platform for alumni engagement.

- [] Discuss with Mr. Akram about student board/lab representation for next year.
- [] Next formal meetings scheduled for November 2025, February 2026, and June 2026.