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Pupils enjoy lunch at Amity International School in Al Bahia. Officials hope the school facilities will inspire pupils to become Olympic sailors, marine scientists or microbiologists. Mona Al Marzooqi / The National

## Big dreams for new school pupils in Abu Dhabi

Roberta Pennington

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ABU DHABI // Parents of pupils in Abu Dhabi have proven willing to go the distance financially and geographically to ensure their children get a good education, the principal of a new Dh150 million school said.

**The Amity International School** is about an hour's bus ride from the Corniche and costs up to Dh50,000 in fees, but neither has deterred parents from enrolling their children in the British curriculum facility.

Amity, one of 11 schools to have opened in the capital this year, sits on the edge of a canal between Al Bahia and Al Raha Beach.

**Vajahat Hussain, chief executive of Amity Middle East,** said the school's address was "kind of far" but offered enhanced opportunities for learning.

"When we saw the location, we realised it's away from Abu Dhabi, but then because of this canal we saw a great potential to deliver something unique," said **Mr Hussain.**

To make the most of the location, school investors built a marine biology centre and a boat house on campus to offer students a sailing and marine biology programme.

The walls of the marine biology centre are covered with images of Arabian Gulf underwater life – the blacktip reef shark, orange spotted grouper, parrotfish.

"We want to teach them about conservation," said **Mr Hussain.**

"We want to teach them about marine biology, about the ecosystem that they live in.

"What we think is, once we see these little children with water and boats, we will have microbiologists, we will have marine scientists, we will have

Olympic sailors come out of the school in 10 years' time. That's the aspiration."

School principal Barbara Lubaczewska, who had been an educator in Britain for 25 years before taking up this job, said the school's distance from central Abu Dhabi had not been a deterrent to enrolment, with parents particularly attracted to the British curriculum on offer.

"Many of them will move from other curriculums to come to British," said Mrs Lubaczewska.

"They believe that the British curriculum provides an excellent education, and that's why they come, and we obviously agree."

This year, the school is open for children from foundation stage one to year three, with class sizes capped at 20 pupils per teacher.

Next September, classrooms will be added to facilitate pupils up to year seven.

The current capacity is for about 1,000 pupils. After phase two is completed – when the Dh150 million secondary school is built, along with other facilities such as an Olympic-size swimming pool – the capacity will be raised to about 3,500, said Mr Hussain.

The school now offers a 600-seat auditorium, an indoor learners' pool, a multilevel library, tennis courts, an indoor gymnasium and track and field facilities.

Annual tuition costs about Dh40,000 to Dh50,000, excluding uniforms and transportation. Annual transportation costs about Dh5,000.

Many of the pupils are neighbourhood children, including about 21 per cent who are Emiratis from Al Bahia.

Other pupils include children of staff at Etihad Airways, the headquarters of which is nearby, said Mr Hussain.

The school is the first kindergarten to Grade 12 school in the region for the Amity International Schools company, which is based in India.

It operates nurseries, schools and universities there, as well as universities in Europe, North America and Dubai.