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**School Improvement:
The Route Taken by an Urban
Primary School in the
Republic of Maldives**

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in Education at Massey University

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ABSTRACT

The primary and secondary schools in the Maldives serve over one third of the total population. Having achieved universalization of primary education, one of the challenges of the education system now is to improve the quality of primary education. Studies done in the past, to explore quality in primary education, have been quantitative in nature, telling only part of the story when it comes to describing improvement efforts. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore in detail how a primary school in an urban setting of the Maldives deals with school improvement efforts.

A qualitative case study, informed by the interpretivist research paradigm, was used to explore this issue. One of the primary schools in Male' was purposefully selected for this study and 48 participants took part, of whom thirteen were students. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observations, document reviews and administering of questionnaires.

The findings of this study suggest that there were three major dimensions or three interrelated, key concepts that together undergirded the improvement efforts in the school. They are change, leadership and culture. In action-oriented terms, these dimensions or concepts translated into managing change, attending to specific leader actions and influencing the school's culture, respectively, reflecting six themes of school improvement. They are: a focus on change, a focus on students, a teaching learning focus, investing in staff, strong leadership by the head and school culture. In addition to these, it was noted that these themes emerged as having significance to the school's improvement efforts against the backdrop of many stakeholder influences and contextual factors. In essence, the findings of this study portray the micro-level realities of the working of a school that is consciously and continuously striving for improving educational practice.

In conclusion to the study, research implications and areas for further research have been identified that would inform educational policy and practice in the Republic of Maldives.

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List of Abbreviations

ABC Survey: Assessment of basic competencies survey

EDC: Educational Development Centre

ESQIS: Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement Section

MCHE: Maldives College of Higher Education

MLA Survey: Monitoring learning achievement survey

MUHEC: Massey University Human Ethics Committee

MOE: Ministry of Education

NASAL: National assessment of student achievement level

PTA: Parent teacher association

SAP: Senior assistant principal

SMT: Senior management team