OECD Review of Well-being Policies and Practices in Dubai's Private School Sector

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Foreword

High levels of happiness and well-being have wide benefits for individuals, and more broadly for the performance of education systems, the economy and society. As a result, in recent years, there has been growing interest on how education systems can support students', teachers' and other non-teaching staff's well-being. The COVID-19 crisis has further strengthened this trend. While this is in part because the pandemic has aggravated well-being challenges worldwide, it also reflects a better understanding and recognition of the broader value and role of education institutions and relationships. With institutional closures, education institutions have clearly emerged as more than a space for learning. Schools can also foster social relationships and nurturing environments that promote individuals' well-being and help them reach their full potential.

As measures to monitor and strengthen well-being in education have emerged across the OECD and beyond, it has become possible to take a comparative perspective on the matter, benchmarking countries' experiences with well-being policies, identifying key policy challenges and how they relate to countries and economies' wider socio-economic context, as well as promising practices. At the national or local level, looking beyond one's borders can help inform more effective policy design, implementation and monitoring, all of which can, in turn, ultimately, help strengthen well-being in education.

It was with this intention that the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) requested that the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills undertake an in-depth review of the Emirate of Dubai's private school sector's well-being policies and practices. In recent years, KHDA and Dubai's private schools have pursued a number of initiatives to increase levels of happiness and well-being across the sector. Such efforts have helped raise awareness of the importance of well-being across the sector. More importantly, they have encouraged school leaders, teachers, parents and students to better understand the concept of well-being, not only in the form of daily habits but also as a long-term commitment for themselves and the system as a whole. However, in spite of their best efforts and intentions, stakeholders often lack the necessary guidance, information, skills or resources to implement meaningful and impactful well-being policies and practices.

This review argues that more is needed to translate stakeholders' growing understanding and commitment into more effective change in Dubai's classrooms and schools that supports improvements. The next steps in the Emirate's well-being journey call for new strategies, and a re-examination of the organisation's priorities, activities and stakeholder engagement methods. Our report provides suggestions on how KHDA, together with key stakeholders, can meet these challenges.

Acknowledgements

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We are grateful to the researchers, non-governmental organisations, school governors, school leaders, school counsellors, teachers, parents and students, that kindly gave their time to share their views, experience and knowledge with us. We would especially like to thank the schools for welcoming us so warmly during our virtual review visits.

We are also grateful to the many international policymakers and experts who graciously shared their insights with us, in particular, Nic Marks, David Bott, Louise Lambert, Michelle McQuaid, Mike Thiruman, and colleagues at the South Australian Department of Education. Our sincere appreciation goes out to the GwE (*Gwasanaeth Effeithiolrwydd*, the North Wales consortium) team, notably Arwyn Thomas, Ruth Thackray, Gavin Cass, Marc Hughes, Tamasine Croston, Sharon Williams, Joanne Davies, for their advice and kindness. This report has benefitted hugely from Simon Thacker's (World Bank) detailed revision and thoughtful suggestions.

The OECD team was led by Elizabeth Fordham, co-ordinated by Manuela Fitzpatrick, and included Pablo Fraser (Chapter 4) and Soumaya Maghnouj (Chapter 3). Majda Eddaifi and Alissa Deleverova provided invaluable research support. Within the OECD Secretariat, we would also like to thank Tracey Burns, Francesca Gottschalk, Rowena Phair, and Javier Suarez-Alvarez for their support. The team is grateful for the support and advice from Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills, and Paulo Santiago, Head of Policy Advice and Implementation Division. Sara Gouveia provided administrative support, Lidia Gromadzka organised the publication process. Rachel Linden and Sophie Limoges helped to prepare the draft for publication.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

CPL	Continuous professional learning
DEC	Dubai Executive Council
DHA	Dubai Health Authority
DSIB	Dubai Schools Inspections Bureau
DSWC	Dubai Student Wellbeing Census
EHRC	Education and Human Resources Council
EmSAT	Emirates Standardised Test
ESCS	PISA Index of Economic, Social and Cultural Status
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IB	International Baccalaureate
ICT	information and communications technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPEN	International Positive Education Network
KHDA	Knowledge and Human Development Authority
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MoE	Ministry of Education
PASS	Pupil Attitudes to Self and School
PERMAH	Positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment and health
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	OECD Programme for International Student Assessment
TALIS	OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey
TELS	Teacher and Educational Leadership Standards
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WYP	Welsh Youth Parliament

Executive Summary

In the mid-2010s, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), the government agency that oversees the Emirate of Dubai's private schools, embarked on a "well-being journey" to increase levels of happiness and well-being across the sector. To achieve this, KHDA leveraged existing and new initiatives, drew on emerging practices worldwide, and partnered with a number of institutions and experts. The results have been remarkable. Most stakeholders have high well-being literacy levels and have appropriated the concept of well-being, not only in the form of daily habits but also as a long-term commitment for themselves and the sector as a whole. However, despite these many successes, KHDA's approach no longer seems to be serving the Emirate's private school sector as effectively as it might. In many cases, in spite of their best efforts and intentions, stakeholders lack the necessary information, skills or resources to implement meaningful and impactful well-being interventions. This is particularly common in the most disadvantaged schools. Moreover, limited research evidence and monitoring mechanisms prevent KHDA and others in the system from knowing whether measures that are in place or are being promoted are actually supporting stakeholders' well-being and what the priority issues/groups are. These gaps are particularly concerning as the sector grapples with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals' welfare and the Emirate's economy.

Against this backdrop, the OECD has been asked to analyse the well-being policies and practices that KHDA and schools have implemented in Dubai's private school sector. This report provides an overview of the Emirate's journey and offers considerations on how to strengthen current policies and practices. Overall, this review argues that there is need to translate the Emirate's strong commitment to the well-being agenda into effective change that supports improvements in the long run. In order to do so, this review encourages KHDA to take a new approach to well-being policies and practices, by making fuller use of the policy levers at its disposal to provide schools, teachers and students with:

- Further opportunities and the conditions to collaborate, learn, and engage in the development of solutions.
- Stronger incentives and strategic guidance on what they should be working towards.
- Additional support to build a conducive context that supports well-being and enables Dubai's private school sector to achieve its goals.
- Relevant and rigorous information that supports the development of data-led and evidence-informed policymaking across the sector.

Well-being in Dubai's private schools

School practices and initiatives can help – or indeed hinder – efforts to build an environment and the social connections that nurture and enhance the well-being of students and staff. A positive school atmosphere can, in turn, strengthen teaching and learning. Recognising the crucial role of schools, KHDA has placed well-being at the centre of discussions on school quality. In recent years, the organisation has helped raise school actors' awareness of the topic and provided schools with tools to better understand how their

students and staff feel. In addition, KHDA has leveraged existing platforms for schools to convene and learn from experts and from each other. As a result, most schools in Dubai's private sector are now familiar with the different dimensions of well-being, and many have introduced activities meant to foster the welfare of students and, increasingly, staff. However, the extent to which schools have prioritised well-being, embedded it into their daily operations and culture, and successfully introduced initiatives differs significantly across the sector. While it is unclear how fact-finding mission suggests that it is not widely disseminated. This is a missed opportunity for the sector given its effectiveness at supporting children's development and building positive learning environments. Chapter 3 offers advice on how KHDA can provide the guidance, resources and tools schools need to develop effective policies and practices that support students and staff.

Prioritising and supporting teacher well-being

Recognising that teachers' cognitive, emotional, health and social well-being have important implications for the performance of education systems, KHDA has helped raise awareness of the issue in Dubai's private school sector. In addition to initiatives such as the Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey and the Teachers of Dubai campaign, KHDA has also provided several opportunities for teachers' professional collaboration and development. Inspired by KHDA's efforts, private schools are increasingly providing teachers with tools and information to encourage them to adhere to healthy habits that support their physical and mental well-being, and to help them cope with the challenges that arise from work.

Despite these achievements, evidence reveals some reasons for concern. Teachers in Dubai report some of the highest stress levels across countries and economies participating in the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), and many complain of heavy workloads, pressure from school management and parents, as well as short-term contracts. These challenging working conditions might explain the high degree of turnover among teachers in Dubai. Alarmingly, many of these issues are believed to have worsened since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the current socio-economic and health crisis has helped elevate the importance of teacher well-being on the policy agenda, the current state of affairs has also made visible the many gaps in Dubai's policy framework, and the risks associated with them. Chapter 4 looks at how KHDA – in collaboration with other stakeholders – can build on current policies and practices to ensure the conditions that allow teachers to work effectively and to thrive are present across Dubai's private schools. As will be argued in this chapter, strengthening teachers' well-being is not only important from the perspective of human dignity and good labour policy, but it is also key for the performance of Dubai's private education sector in the long-term.

Supporting student well-being in Dubai's private schools

Since the mid-2010s, KHDA has been a strong advocate for student well-being. Measures have focused on raising awareness on the topic, and collecting data on students' psychological, social, cognitive and physical states. Following KHDA's lead, a range of initiatives have been introduced in schools across the sector, aimed at developing students' health literacy and encouraging healthy lifestyles. While students in Dubai report relatively high rates of life satisfaction on average, evidence suggest that there are some concerning issues within the private school sector, including bullying and schoolwork-related anxiety. In addition, a high proportion of students engage in unhealthy habits on a regular basis, which can put their well-being at risk and have long-term adverse effects on their development. The OECD review revealed the need for stakeholders to draw more systematically on the evidence, complement comprehensive approaches to well-being with targeted interventions focused on priority issues and sub-groups, and engage students in decision-making to foster students' well-being and sense of agency.

Key insights

Introduction

In the mid-2010s, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), the government agency that oversees the Emirate of Dubai's private schools, embarked on a "well-being journey" that has been transforming practices across the sector. KHDA's journey started from within. In keeping with the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) and Dubai's philosophy and in consultation with local and international experts, KHDA made fundamental changes to the organisation's strategy and management structure with the aim of fostering well-being in its own working environment and among its own staff. Once the shifts in the organisation's internal processes and culture had been effectively implemented and understood, KHDA began to look outwards, encouraging a change in focus across the private education sector and inviting other stakeholders, including school leaders, teachers, parents and students, to join their journey.

The destination? To increase levels of happiness and well-being among all stakeholder groups in Dubai's private school sector. Behind this vision lies a widespread recognition of the importance of individuals' welfare for strengthening the fabric of UAE's society, retaining the Emirates' attractiveness to expatriates, and supporting academic excellence and high levels of productivity.

To achieve this, KHDA leveraged existing initiatives, such as the What Works events, and the Lighthouse project. In addition, the organisation drew on emerging practices worldwide, notably a strengths-based approach, and partnered with a number of institutions and experts, including the International Positive Education Network, and The Wellbeing Lab. To support its new well-being agenda, KHDA also developed various new activities, such as the Dubai School Wellbeing Census, the Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey and the Hatta Wellbeing Campus.

KHDA has not only acknowledged but also deliberately embraced the diversity of the sector. Recognising the limitations of a "one size fits all" approach in a highly varied sector, KHDA has opted against a directive strategy or a narrow definition of well-being (see Box 1), preferring instead to encourage a more "organic" adoption of well-being practices. Under this approach, schools and other education stakeholders have the autonomy to take action based on their own priorities, resources and interests. In this context, KHDA has focused on raising stakeholders' awareness, and disseminating what has worked – or is believed to have worked – encouraging others to follow suit.

The results have been remarkable in many respects. Initiatives have helped build stakeholders' well-being literacy and encouraged school leaders, teachers, parents and students to consider and adopt the concept of well-being, not only in the form of daily habits (e.g. regular physical exercise) but also as a long-term commitment for themselves and the sector as a whole. In addition, schools have increasingly adopted a whole-school approach to well-being. Research shows that a comprehensive, whole-school approach to well-being produces a wide range of benefits for schools and school actors (see Chapter 3). Through its multiple data collection tools, KHDA has also built one of the richest education-related well-being datasets in the world, covering self-reported data on students' and staff's social and emotional states and physical health.

Despite these many successes, KHDA's approach no longer seems to be serving the Emirate's private school sector as effectively as it might. In many cases, in spite of their best efforts and intentions, some stakeholders lack the necessary information, skills or resources to implement meaningful and impactful well-being policies and practices. This is particularly common in schools with fewer resources. Faced with significant market pressure, and with limited tools and capabilities to discern what is effective, schools are also increasingly investing in fashionable and visible programmes and tools, such as mindfulness sessions or school gyms. While potentially beneficial, these often come at the expense of evidence-based, sustained and concerted programmes focused on developing a whole-school approach to well-being. Moreover, limited research evidence and monitoring mechanisms prevent KHDA and others in the system from knowing whether measures that are in place or are being promoted are actually supporting stakeholders' well-being. These gaps are particularly concerning as the sector grapples with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals' welfare and the Emirate's economy.

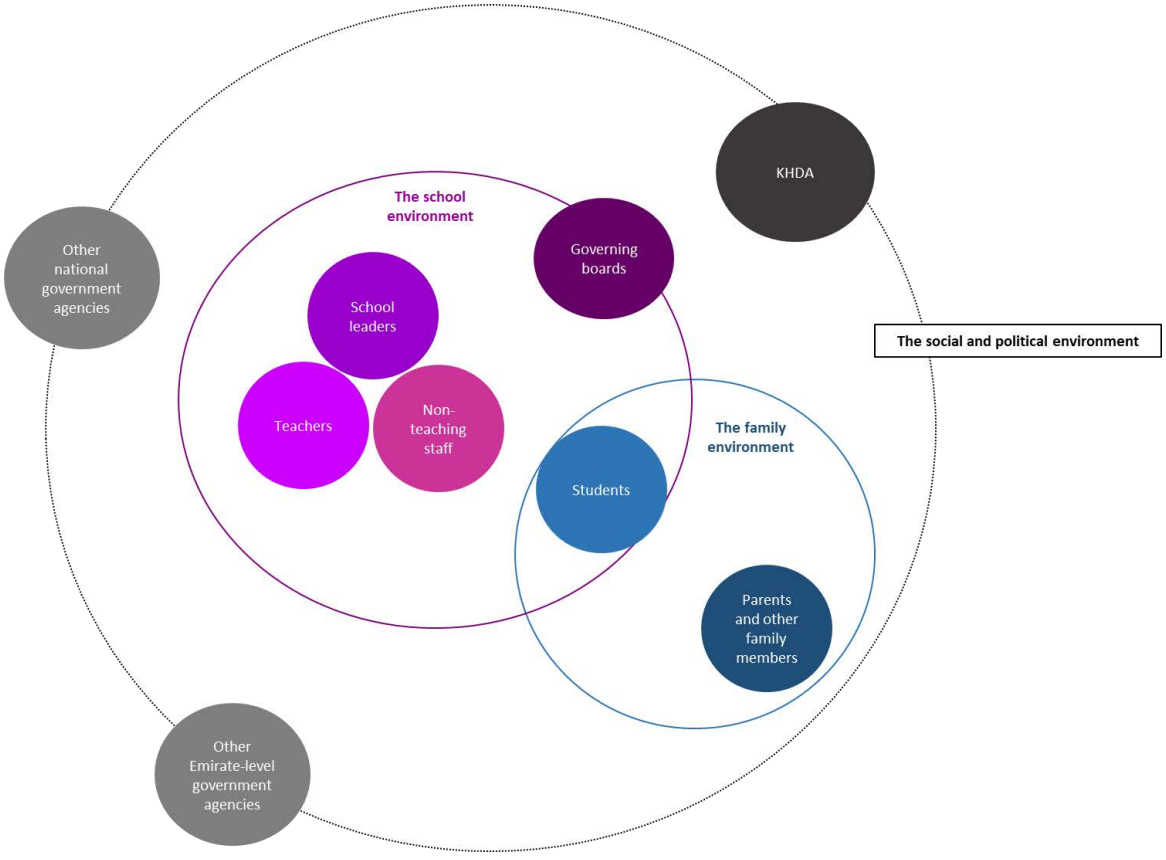
The time has come to translate stakeholders' awareness and commitment to the well-being agenda into effective change in Dubai's classrooms and schools. In order to do so, this review argues that KHDA would need to take a new approach to well-being policies and practices, which makes fuller use of the policy levers at its disposal to provide schools, teachers and students with:

- **Further opportunities and the conditions to collaborate, learn, and be actively engaged in the development of solutions.** At the school level, this would mean linking sector-wide peer-learning programmes, such as What Works, the Hatta Wellbeing Campus and the Lighthouse project, to in-school activities, and facilitating access to coaching and professional development to help disadvantaged schools. For teachers, this would be a matter of developing the networks that support a highly-professionalised workforce, a key pillar of their professional and personal well-being. For students, this would require equipping them with the skills and knowledge to make informed decisions about their own health and well-being, and to empower them to become agents of change.
- **Stronger incentives and strategic guidance on what they should be working towards.** First and foremost, this would mean developing a vision for well-being in Dubai's schools, defining the sector's priorities and stakeholders' roles and responsibilities. Embedding this vision in the accountability structure would ensure that it becomes a reference for school quality and encourage the adoption of effective well-being policies and practices. In addition, a long-term strategic plan to enhance teachers' well-being could help elevate this issue and strengthen the attractiveness of Dubai for high-quality expatriate teachers. This review identifies support for teachers' well-being as the main area in need of attention.
- **Additional support to build a conducive context that supports well-being and enables Dubai's private school sector to achieve its goals**. Providing schools – and in particular the most disadvantaged ones – with targeted support and capacity-building opportunities could also encourage the development of effective practices and the widespread adoption of a whole-school approach to well-being where they have the potential to have the most impact.
- **Relevant and rigorous information that supports the development of data-led and evidence-informed policymaking across the sector.** This would require, first, strengthening KHDA's research culture and capacity to encourage and support a more systematic, data-led and evidence-informed approach to policy development, implementation and regulation within the organisation. By making fuller use of KHDA's rich dataset and analytical capacity, the organisation would also be able to offer stakeholders the evidence they need to drive change. This may involve adaptations to existing data collection tools, and the development of a clearinghouse platform.

However, KHDA will not be able to achieve this on its own. The next steps of KHDA's well-being journey will be demanding and, in many cases, will require engagement with and/or direct action by other players (e.g. government agencies, school governing boards, school leaders, teachers, parents, and students).

For this reason, this report provides considerations that have implications for KHDA as well as other actors in Dubai (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Main players and operating environments in Dubai's private school sector and environments



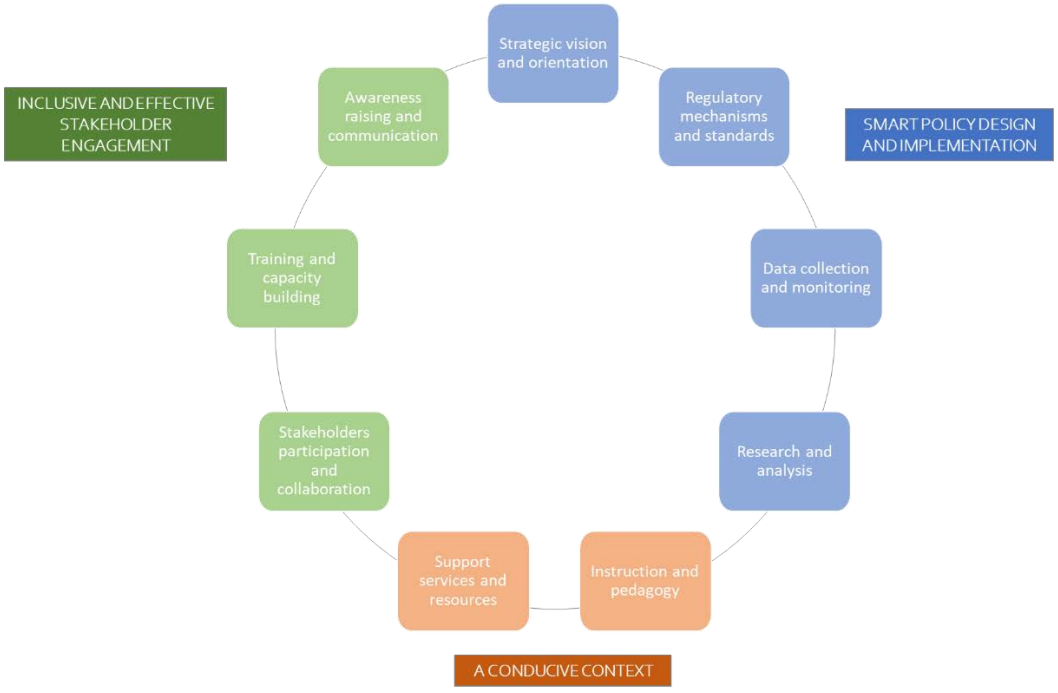
The OECD analytical lenses

Given the inherently holistic nature of well-being (see full definition in Box 1), the OECD has opted for a broad set of analytical lenses (described in-depth in Chapter 2). The OECD analysis takes into consideration the multiple education stakeholders (see Figure 1) that can impact (and/or be impacted by) well-being policies and practices, the different environments in which they operate, as well as the policy levers and channels (e.g. data collection, regulation tools and processes) available to actors (see Figure 2).

As discussed in Chapter 2, in applying these lenses to Dubai's private school sector, the OECD analysis has been mindful of and adapted to the specifics of the Emirate's environment, culture and history. In many cases, this has meant taking the particularities of the UAE's governance system into account when offering policy considerations to ensure their relevance and appropriateness. In other cases, this meant focusing the analysis on stakeholders on whom sufficient well-being data were available (i.e. school leaders, teachers and students).

In addition, employing the OECD analytical lenses to the Dubai's context was key to advance the OECD analysis and policy considerations. For example, the categorisation of the Emirate's existing policies and practices according to the OECD's classification of policy levers and channels (see Table 2.1 in Chapter 2) helped reveal the strengths in KHDA's policy approach, as well as missed opportunities. These will be discussed in further detail in the next sections.

Figure 2. Key levers and channels for well-being policies and practices in education



Note: Chapter 2 provides the specific definition of each of the policy levers showcased above.

Box 1. A brief overview of well-being: its definition and history

The notion of well-being has gained increasing traction over the last 20 years as an agenda for research, measurement and policy. There is now a solid and well-established case for looking "beyond GDP", using well-being metrics in the policy process and assessing economic growth in terms of its impact on people's well-being and on societies' standard of living.

But what is well-being? According to the OECD Well-Being Framework (see Chapter 2 for full definition), well-being is defined in terms of material living conditions, quality of life and natural, economic, human and social assets. This report will draw on the OECD Well-Being Framework as well as other frameworks to discuss how well-being emerges and is conceptualised in education.

Dubai's understanding of well-being

Definitions of well-being – and its sub-dimensions - vary across and within countries. Despite the emphasis has been placed on well-being by government authorities in Dubai and the UAE more generally, up until now no attempt has been made to define an Emirati view of well-being. This review argues that a shared vision and common understanding of well-being could support improvements in the private school sector, giving stakeholders a sense of direction (see Chapter 3). The necessary conditions to organise a fruitful discussion on the topic are already in place. There is widespread understanding and recognition of well-being among education stakeholders and, after many years, Emirati-based and Emirati-oriented approaches to well-being have consolidated.

In what follows we summarise the key insights of the report's main chapters. Chapter 3 looks at Dubai's private schools as a whole, focusing on the school leadership and other key school staff; Chapter 4 focuses on teachers and their well-being, which has been relatively overlooked in the Emirate until recently; and,

finally, Chapter 5 discusses student well-being and empowerment. Each chapter looks at strengths and challenges of the approach taken in Dubai, and discusses potential steps that could support higher levels of well-being in the Emirate's private school sector.

Key Insights from Chapter 3: Well-being in Dubai's private schools

School practices and initiatives can help – or indeed hinder – efforts to build an environment and the social connections that nurture and enhance the well-being of students and staff. A positive school atmosphere can, in turn, strengthen teaching and learning. Recognising the crucial role of schools, KHDA has placed well-being at the centre of discussions on school quality. In recent years, the organisation has helped raise school actors' awareness of the topic and provided schools with tools to better understand how their students and staff feel. In addition, KHDA has developed platforms for schools to convene and learn from experts and from each other. Most private schools in Dubai's private sector are now familiar with the different dimensions of well-being, as well as with the positive education model, and many have introduced activities meant to foster the welfare of students and, increasingly, staff. However, the extent to which schools have prioritised well-being, embedded it into their daily operations and culture, and successfully introduced initiatives differs significantly across the sector. At present, few schools have implemented whole-school approaches to well-being, which evidence shows to be most effective at supporting children's development and building positive learning environments. Chapter 3 considers the following to be the key policy objectives that can support higher levels of well-being in Dubai's private schools.

Policy Objective 3.1. Developing a unifying vision and policy framework for well-being in Dubai schools

In just a few years, KHDA's well-being journey has had a remarkable impact on Dubai's private school sector. Stakeholders have not only developed an increasingly sophisticated understanding of well-being and its multiple dimensions, but also a greater appreciation for its importance. The majority of schools have developed programmes and activities to support and monitor student and, in some cases, staff well-being. Naturally, given the diversity of Dubai's school sector, differences have emerged. While a certain degree of variation is normal, evidence collected by the OECD review team reveals some reasons for concern. Not only do schools' approaches differ significantly, so too does their commitment to the well-being agenda. In addition, there is considerable heterogeneity with regards to the effectiveness of the initiatives and measures schools implement.

Potential next steps

Consideration should be given to the following policy actions:

- **Establishing a common vision and unified policy framework for well-being in schools:** KHDA could work with stakeholders to co-develop a common and coherent vision for well-being in schools. The OECD advises that this document be accompanied by a unified policy framework for well-being that defines quality standards, indicators, stakeholders' roles and responsibilities, and implementation guidelines for schools. Ensuring alignment between both documents is key. A sector-wide vision and policy framework would ensure that stakeholders are working towards common goals, and that all schools are able to address students' and staff's well-being needs.

Policy Objective 3.2. Aligning incentives and the accountability structure with the framework for well-being in schools

KHDA could encourage the adoption of effective well-being policies and practices by more effectively drawing on its regulatory tools, notably the quality assurance processes. By embedding its "well-being in school vision" in the accountability structures, KHDA could ensure that well-being becomes a reference for school improvement and a priority for school leadership. This would require rethinking the current inspection framework and process, and adapting other compliance and regulatory tools. Dubai's accountability mechanisms proved to be key for the sector's improvement trajectory, and have the potential to be equally important for the Emirate's well-being journey.

Potential next steps

Consideration should be given to the following policy actions:

- **Educating parents and the local community can help build a strong demand for well-being policies and practices in schools:** A two-pronged approach could be considered. First, KHDA could establish an awareness-raising campaign to provide information to parents and the local community about well-being and its multiple dimensions. Second, KHDA could encourage and guide schools to better engage with parents and families.
- **Reviewing the accountability and incentive framework to further embed a culture of well-being in schools:** Based on the experience from the 2020 Dubai Schools Inspections Bureau (DSIB) virtual school inspection reviews and the well-being in schools framework, DSIB should consider undertaking a thematic review of school well-being practices and policies. This could inform proposed next steps. Furthermore, KHDA could advocate for a stronger emphasis on well-being in the revised UAE School Inspection Framework. Alternatively, KHDA could develop a Dubai-based supplement on well-being. Given KHDA's understandable concern that this information be mis-used by the press or other stakeholders, internal discussions should be held on the best way to collect and disseminate well-being information from schools. If this recommendation is taken forward, school inspectors will require adequate training and guidance to engage meaningfully with schools and assess the quality of their well-being programmes. Efforts to reward and give visibility to schools with strong well-being practices should also be maintained.
- **Rethinking the inspection process to limit pressure on schools, teachers and students**: DSIB should consider reducing the frequency of school inspection visits to alleviate some of the pressure on schools. After over a decade of inspections, most schools in Dubai have developed a culture of self-improvement and achieve adequate outcomes. The school sector is sufficiently mature to enable a shift towards a greater reliance on school self-evaluation. At first, inspection visits could be spaced out for schools that reach "good", "very good" or "outstanding" marks and, gradually, this can be rolled out to all schools reaching at least an "acceptable" mark.

Policy Objective 3.3. Supporting schools to design and implement effective well-being policies

In an effort to improve the quality of education provision in Dubai's private education sector, KHDA has put in place a set of initiatives to encourage schools to work together and to learn from each other. These have included, among others, the Living Arabic, What Works and What Works X events, as well as the Abundance and Lighthouse projects. In recent years, well-being has become a growing focus of these programmes. Moreover, KHDA's well-being data collection tools offer relevant information on the state of students' and staff's feelings and habits to help schools design and implement targeted and effective responses. Despite the apparent success of these initiatives, some schools still struggle to design and implement meaningful well-being policies.

Potential next steps

Consideration should be given to the following policy actions:

- **Providing schools with further guidance to support evidence-informed practices:** By providing more granular information, KHDA could help schools identify the key issues that need addressing. This would require adaptations to the existing data collection tools. In addition, modifications to how the evidence is analysed and presented to schools and the training on offer could be considered. Schools would also require more guidance on how to integrate well-being into regular school activities.
- **Providing targeted support to schools struggling to implement well-being policies:** Support will be critical to enable all private schools to fulfil their duty of protecting and nurturing children in Dubai and providing adequate working conditions for the staff. KHDA could consider establishing a team responsible for identifying schools that need help in improving the quality of learning and offering targeted support to help strengthen students' and staff's well-being. For example, KHDA can play an active role in identifying and disseminating appropriate coaching and professional development services to help low-fee schools that are struggling to address their students and staff's well-being needs. The OECD would also recommend that Dubai government agencies provide disadvantaged schools and students with access to free and/or low-fee health and counselling services. KHDA could help advocate for this.

Policy Objective 3.4. Developing capacity of school leadership and well-being champions to develop a whole-school approach to well-being

There are a number of opportunities for school leaders and school staff in Dubai's private school sector to participate in peer-learning and professional development. However, participation in these programmes, such as the Hatta Wellbeing Campus, remains relatively limited. The structure and broad focus of the programmes also means that stakeholders are not always able to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to implement effective well-being policies and practices. Moreover, there are no expectations that school leaders will translate what they learnt into their schools' daily lives, and no mechanisms and resources to support them in this endeavour.

A whole-school approach requires significant in-school capacity, in particular from the schools' leadership team and from highly-qualified specialised workers (e.g. psychologists). Many schools, in particular low-fee schools, cannot afford to hire this staff or to access these services. Moreover, at the moment, the roles of non-teaching staff remain loosely regulated and, as a result, practices vary significantly between schools.

Potential next steps

Consideration should be given to the following policy actions:

- **Providing further guidance to school principals and other leadership staff on designing and implementing a whole-school approach on well-being:** This would require first and foremost reviewing the governors' guidelines to ensure that Governors Boards are endorsing and supporting the well-being agenda. It will also require surveying principals' professional learning needs; appointing thematic experts to help guide and facilitate peer-learning; and setting the expectation that school principals share learnings with the school staff.
- **Professionalising the roles of school counsellors and other key non-teaching staff:** KHDA could work with relevant stakeholders to define the role and responsibilities of key non-teaching staff (e.g. school counsellors), and to review minimum requirements for student-to-staff ratios, qualification and experience. In addition, peer-learning networks could be facilitated to encourage knowledge sharing.
- **Encouraging schools to develop well-being committees:** A well-being committee with elected representatives from the entire school community, including the school governing boards, school leaders, teachers, non-teaching staff, students and parents, could help promote greater coordination, and ensure that all aspects of school life as well as all school actors are being taken into account.

Key Insights from Chapter 4: Prioritising and supporting teacher well-being

Recognising that teachers' cognitive, emotional, health and social well-being have important implications for the performance of education systems, KHDA has helped raise awareness of the issue in Dubai's private school sector. In addition to initiatives such as the Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey and the Teachers of Dubai campaign, KHDA has also provided several opportunities for teachers' professional collaboration and development. Inspired by KHDA's efforts, private schools are increasingly providing teachers with tools and information to encourage them to adhere to healthy habits (e.g. exercise) that support their physical and mental well-being, and to help them cope with the challenges that arise from work.

Despite these achievements, quantitative and qualitative evidence reveals some reasons for concern. Teachers in Dubai report some of the highest stress levels across countries and economies participating in the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), and many complain of heavy workloads, pressure from school management and parents, as well as short-term contracts. These challenging working conditions might help explain the high degree of turnover among teachers in Dubai. Alarmingly, many of these issues are believed to have worsened since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the current socio-economic and health crisis has helped elevate the importance of teacher well-being on the policy agenda, the current state of affairs has also made visible the many gaps in Dubai's policy framework, and the risks associated with them.

Chapter 4 looks at how KHDA – in collaboration with other government departments, Dubai's private schools, the school governors, and teachers themselves – can build on current policies and practices to ensure the conditions that allow teachers to work effectively and to thrive are present across Dubai's private schools. As will be argued in this chapter, low levels of teacher well-being are not only harmful to teachers, but also to students' achievement and well-being. Strengthening teachers' well-being is therefore not only important from the perspective of human dignity and good labour policy, but it is also key for the

performance of Dubai's private education sector in the long-term. The following policy objectives are considered to be the most important to support KHDA and Dubai's private sector in this endeavour.

Policy Objective 4.1. Developing a strategy to improve the well-being of teachers

While there is growing recognition of the importance of teachers' well-being in Dubai's private sector, for the most part, existing policies and practices do not cater to their specific needs and circumstances, and few explicitly target teachers. As a result, teachers often find these initiatives unsuitable or insufficient both in terms of format and focus. This policy gap is concerning given that Dubai's teachers face high levels of stress and employment instability, among other issues – concerns that have escalated during the pandemic. By developing a sector-wide strategy, KHDA can help build the impetus and commitment across private schools to strengthen teacher well-being, much like it did in the past with regards to school improvement and collaboration.

Potential next steps

Consideration should be given to the following policy actions:

- **Developing a long-term strategy to improve teacher well-being in the sector:** In conjunction with the other measures discussed in Chapter 4, developing a strategy on teachers' well-being in consultation with key stakeholders establishing clear goals, benchmarks and a timeline could not only help guide efforts, but also, more importantly, place teacher well-being firmly as a policy priority for the sector. This will be critical for the sector to retain its attractiveness to highly-qualified expatriate teachers and, in turn, to ensure that Dubai continues on its improvement path.
- **Rethink data collection mechanisms to ensure that KHDA and schools have the information they need to support improvements:** Strengthening the reliability and relevance of the evidence collected would require efforts to promote participation and trust in the survey, and revising the questionnaire to ensure it collects useful and more detailed information. If KHDA opts to maintain the Dubai Adults@Schools Wellbeing Survey, it will be important that the organisation work together with The Wellbeing Lab to adapt the survey in order to make it a more useful tool for the Emirate's private education sector. KHDA could also consider developing its own teacher and staff well-being survey. In either case, KHDA would benefit from undertaking an in-depth analysis of the evidence available.

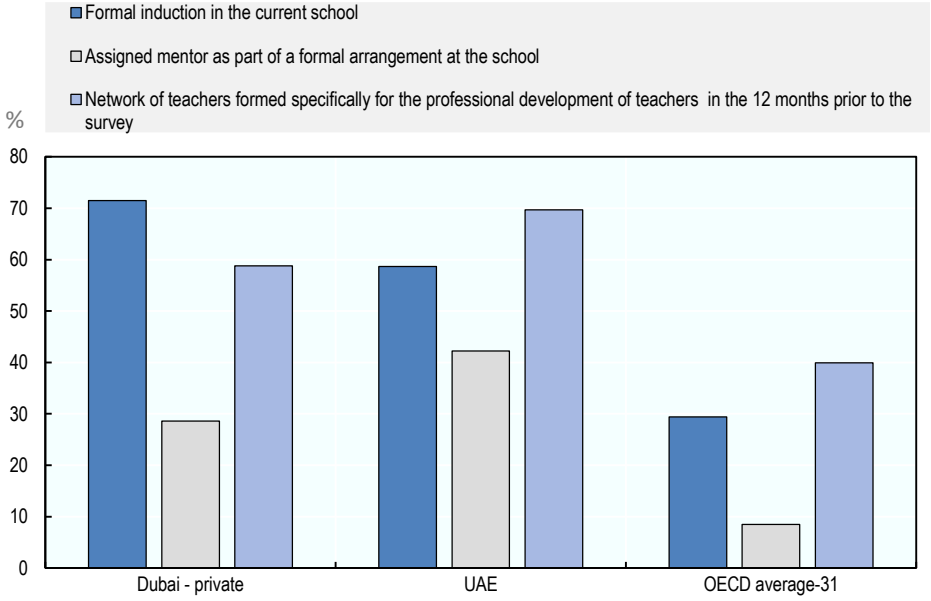
Policy Objective 4.2. Fostering and supporting a professionalised teaching workforce

One of the key features of high-performing education systems is the existence of a highly-professionalised teaching workforce. An important dimension of professionalism, in teaching as in other jobs that require specialised knowledge and skills, is giving teachers a leading role in defining policies related to their practice, development and career. This implies the existence of fora – such as teacher professional bodies and networks – where teachers can collectively reflect upon and shape such policies and practices. For teachers, participation in such fora can create a sense of ownership of their work, identity around knowledge and skills, and agency and responsibility for the profession's development. This can not only support teachers' practices, but also foster their well-being. Since the mid-2010s, KHDA's efforts to strengthen collaboration across Dubai's private school sector have led to the development of professional networks of teachers. Evidence also points to a strong collaborative culture among teachers within schools (Figure 3). In addition, through social media campaigns and other initiatives, KHDA has helped raise awareness of and appreciation for the important role that teachers play in Dubai's education system.

However, for the most part, the types of collaboration that are common in Dubai fail to promote a sense of professional agency that supports teachers' well-being and high-quality teaching. Teacher representatives and teacher organisations are also rarely invited to take part in policy debates at the school, sector or national level.

Figure 3. Teachers' participation in induction, mentoring and professional networks, TALIS 2018

Percentage of lower secondary teachers who report participating in the following activities



Source: (OECD, 2019[1]), *TALIS 2018 Database*, https://www.oecd.org/education/talis/talis-2018-data.htm (accessed 15 June 2021).

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Potential next steps

Consideration should be given to:

- **Strengthening teachers' professional identity and agency:** Given Dubai's unique school system and highly mobile teacher workforce, teachers will need even greater support to connect and build the types of relationships that foster a professional identity and agency. KHDA can play an important role in this endeavour by supporting the development of teacher-led organisations and networks, strengthening the engagement of teachers in the policy development and implementation processes, and encouraging school boards and leaders to consult with teacher representatives on a regular and systematic fashion (e.g. inviting them to join school boards).
- **Supporting peer-learning, collaboration and networking among teachers within and across schools.** This would require, first, mapping opportunities for and challenges with regards to professional learning opportunities and collaboration. KHDA could also support teacher-led and school-led efforts by revisiting teacher professional standards to ensure they promote well-being and professional collaboration, investing in platforms for professional exchange, and identifying and encouraging pairings of schools and/or teachers.

Policy Objective 4.3. Improving teachers' working conditions to support their well-being

Dubai's private schools offer, for the most part, clear career paths and relatively generous salaries and benefits to teachers. Attractive working conditions are important in a context where nearly all teachers are expatriates. In addition, an increasing number of schools have been setting up programmes to support students' and staff's well-being. Nevertheless, evidence collected by the OECD review team suggests that some school practices and environments may be negatively impacting teachers' well-being. Pressure from school management and parents, heavy workloads, as well as uncertain contractual conditions have left many teachers feeling stressed and anxious, and a significant share report wanting to leave the school in which they work. While rare, there are also reports of malpractices. These issues – many of which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic – can have significant detrimental effects on teachers' quality of life and on teaching and learning. Moreover, in the medium- to long-run, this could damage the attractiveness of the Emirate for expatriate teachers. Efforts are therefore needed to improve and regulate teachers' working conditions as a way to strengthen teachers' well-being and ensure the sustainability of Dubai's education system. By collaborating with other federal governmental institutions in the UAE, the private sector, teacher professional organisations and Dubai's schools, KHDA could help support decent working conditions across the sector.

Potential next steps

Consideration should be given to:

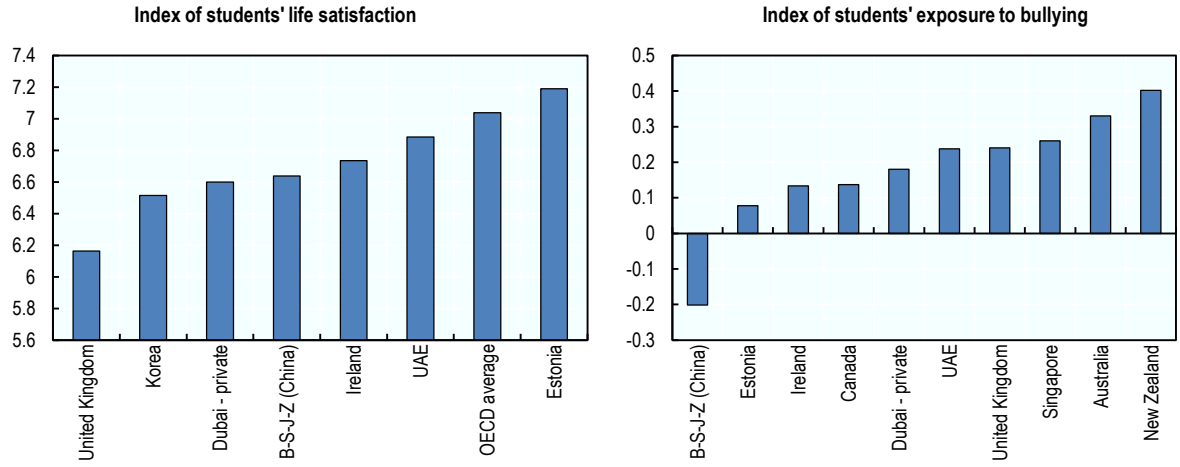
- **Strengthening teachers' well-being by supporting better working conditions across the sector:** As the private sector regulator, KHDA can help advocate for teachers' well-being by drawing on the school visits by the Dubai Schools Inspections Bureau (DSIB) and compliance teams to monitor teachers' working conditions and well-being. More in-depth analysis of the data collected could support monitoring and follow up efforts. In partnership with other UAE and Dubai government bodies, KHDA could help revise the UAE's teacher standards to ensure they support teacher well-being and/or develop its own supplement; promote teachers' employment stability and longer-term residency status. School guidelines could help specify stakeholders' roles and responsibilities in this endeavour. KHDA could also communicate with teachers directly through an online platform to provide them with relevant and timely information on key matters important for their well-being and jobs (e.g. local legislation, licensing).

Key Insights from Chapter 5: Supporting student well-being in Dubai's private schools

Since the mid-2010s, KHDA has been a strong advocate for student well-being. Measures have focused on raising awareness on the topic, promoting a strengths-based approach, and collecting data on students' psychological, social, cognitive and physical states. Following KHDA's lead, a range of initiatives have been introduced in schools across the sector, aimed at developing students' health literacy and encouraging healthy lifestyles. While students in Dubai report relatively high rates of life satisfaction on average (see Figure 4), evidence suggest that there are some concerning issues within the private school sector, including bullying and schoolwork-related anxiety. Also, a high proportion of students engage in unhealthy habits on a regular basis. For example, data from the 2020 Dubai Student Wellbeing Census (DSWC) suggest that between around half of Dubai students rarely get a good night's sleep (KHDA, 2021[2]). This can put their well-being at risk and have long-term adverse effects on their development. The OECD review revealed the need for stakeholders to draw more systematically on the evidence, complement comprehensive approaches to well-being with targeted interventions focused on priority issues and sub-groups, and engage students in decision-making to foster students' well-being and sense of agency. These policy objectives are discussed in greater depth in the section that follows.

Figure 4. Overview of student well-being, PISA 2018

Based on 15-year-old students' self-reported data



Notes: In the right chart, the OECD average index = 0.0.
B-S-J-Z (China) refers to the four Chinese provinces that participated in PISA 2018: Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang.
Countries and economies ordered from smallest to largest.as measured by the two indexes. For a full discussion on the indexes please check (OECD, 2019[3]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives*.
Source: (OECD, 2019[4]), *PISA 2018 Database*, https://oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database (accessed 15 June 2021).

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Policy Objective 5.1. Strengthening evidence-based and data-driven policymaking to support student well-being

Policy Objective 5.1 argues that KHDA could draw more effectively on the rich evidence base on well-being it has built, as well as on other sophisticated instruments at its disposal, including the DSWC and the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), to inform policy development and implementation. This would require strengthening KHDA's research and analysis capacity and mining the data available. Mobilising this systematically throughout the policy cycle – before, during and after a policy is implemented – will enable KHDA to build an evidence-led approach to policymaking, which can support more effective and impactful interventions. With stronger research and analysis capacity, KHDA will also be in a better position to support private schools by providing relevant data and evidence on what measures work.

Potential next steps

Consideration should be given to:

- **Strengthening KHDA's research culture and capacity to support evidence-based policymaking.** This would require, first and foremost, establishing larger in-house technical capacity and elevating the role of research and analysis within the organisation. Based on agreed-upon research priorities, KHDA could undertake a planned and sustained approach to research and data analysis. The rich evidence available should be analysed in-depth. Other key steps would include steering developments in data collection to ensure that schools have access to the data they need to make improvements; disseminating data and findings among Dubai's community; and directing stakeholders towards useful and rigorous research, as well as evidence-based resources and tools. Given limited resources, KHDA could consider partnering with Dubai-based and foreign researchers, universities and research centres to undertake these steps.

Policy Objective 5.2. Developing a more targeted approach to address priority issues and support at-risk student population groups

At present, student well-being initiatives in Dubai's private school sector tend to be relatively broad in scope and address a wide audience. While there is considerable evidence supporting a holistic approach to well-being, relying exclusively on comprehensive policies can be inadequate to address some key challenges, and to reach specific population groups. For this reason, Policy Objective 5.2. suggests that Dubai's current well-being approach should be complemented by more targeted initiatives. Greater visibility on the state of student well-being in Dubai's private sector – based on an in-depth analysis of the evidence available (see Policy Objective 5.1) – will enable KHDA to identify the sector's and/or sub-sector's main priorities. With a greater understanding of the key areas and target audiences, KHDA will be better positioned to develop and implement fit-for-purpose and targeted policies. This has the potential to raise the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of measures. In addition, with clearer targets, KHDA will be better able to monitor and measure programmes' impact, which can enable improvements and support greater accountability. By communicating the main well-being priorities to others in the sector, KHDA will also provide much-needed guidance to schools and school-level stakeholders. Being able to focus their efforts and resources on key issues and/or groups will be particularly important for schools at a time of budget constraints.

Potential next steps

Consideration should be given to:

- **Identifying and communicating student well-being priorities for the sector.** This exercise could be informed by – and, later, feed into – qualitative and quantitative research carried out by KHDA and external partners (see Policy Issue 5.1). Based on the identified priorities, KHDA would be able to map existing initiatives in relation to the priorities and, in doing so, identify overlaps and gaps**.** This analysis could inform policy adjustments and development.

Policy Objective 5.3. Empowering students.

Finally, Policy Objective 5.3 explores the issue of student empowerment in Dubai's private school sector and how this can support the Emirate's well-being agenda. Empowering students to be informed decision-makers when it comes to their own lives and well-being and allowing them to be agents of change not only promotes individual, but also collective gains. International experience has shown that education systems and schools can play a key role in this endeavour: first, by developing the competencies students require to become responsible and informed individuals who are able to make decisions for the good of themselves and their communities; and second, by offering some of the first opportunities for them to actively participate in societal conversations and to engage in decision-making.

Once again, Dubai's private education sector has been ahead of the curve in many respects. Students' voice – directly captured and disseminated by the DSWC – have been the backbone of Dubai's well-being policies and practices. There are some examples of well-being initiatives being co-led by students (e.g. the Dubai Student Wellbeing Summit), although they remain rare. There are also multiple initiatives in Dubai's private schools aimed at raising students' awareness and encouraging healthy habits. In order for the next steps in KHDA's well-being journey to bring about long-term improvements, students will need to be invited along as partners. For this reason, Policy Objective 5.3 argues that engaging students in policy discussions and decision-making in a more deliberate and inclusive manner can not only help empower them, but also ensure that well-being interventions are more effective.

Other steps can help enhance children's quality of life in the short-, medium- and long-term. Notably, ensuring students develop strong well-being and health literacy can help set them up for success. High-quality evidence on students' current level of knowledge and skills in this area could help inform sector- and school-level initiatives.

Potential next steps

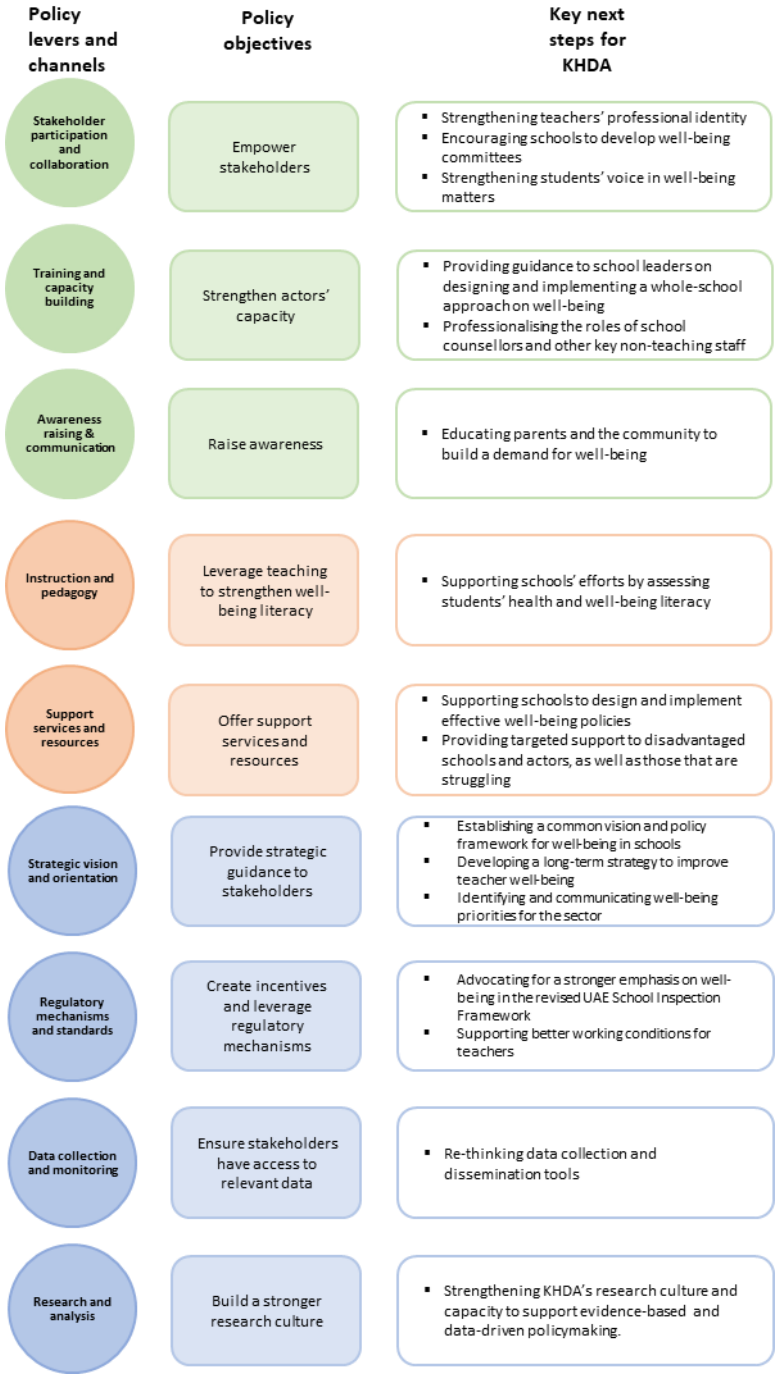
Consideration should be given to the following policy actions:

- **Strengthening students' voice in well-being matters:** KHDA could offer guidance for schools on how to empower and engage students effectively (e.g. guidelines). The organisation could also optimise its own communication channels with students to strengthen their engagement in decision-making. Among other things, this might include creating and engaging with KHDA Student Reference Groups and setting up a student representative body.
- **Assessing students' health and well-being literacy to inform policy responses that aim to inform improvements:** The first step would be for KHDA, in partnership with relevant local and national stakeholders, to adopt a definition of well-being and health literacy and agree on its multiple dimensions. In consultation with schools, KHDA could map the information required and consider options for data collection. Later, KHDA could use an online platform, such as the New Days New Ways platform or KHDA Chatter, to provide tools and resources to schools to support the development of students' well-being and health literacy. This activity should be undertaken in collaboration with school leaders and stakeholders.

An action map for potential next steps

Figure 5 puts forward an action map of the key steps – proposed in this report – that KHDA and other stakeholders could consider to strengthen well-being policies and practices in Dubai's private school sector. Implementing the proposed actions would require a shift in KHDA's approach to well-being policies and practices, with greater attention being given to smart policy design and implementation practices (e.g. strategic vision and orientation; regulatory mechanisms and standards) and to building a conducive context that supports well-being. This does not imply that KHDA should leave behind the successful initiatives and programmes it has carried out in the past years. On the contrary, the next steps of Dubai's well-being journey will require building on past successes and lessons learnt, and striving for improvements.

Figure 5. An action map for KHDA based on the OECD's recommendations



It should be noted that the proposed actions are not equally important nor equally urgent. In the short-term, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals' welfare will require stakeholders' immediate attention. For this reason, the OECD review highlights the urgent need for increased and improved support services to individuals and schools that need them the most. In the medium- to long-term, however, other policy actions might be more impactful to strengthen well-being in the Emirate. Notably, efforts to define a common vision and goals for the sector, and to build them into Dubai's accountability and incentive structures have a particularly significant potential to encourage effective change in schools and classrooms.

As the main audience for this review, the action map has focused on the actions that KHDA could take forward. However, this report has proposed several steps, including some of those highlighted below, that would require engagement with and/or direct action by other agents (e.g. school governing boards, other government agencies). KHDA's leadership and authority will be key to influence the sector and steer the necessary actions.

As an immediate next step, KHDA might consider organising stakeholder consultations to discuss ways forward. A collective discussion with key stakeholders around this report's diagnosis and proposed actions could serve as an opportunity for the sector to identify key issues and concerns, and to agree on the next steps, including which are immediate priorities and which are long-term goals, as well as stakeholders' roles and responsibilities. If successful, this type of approach could be adopted for other of the policy considerations proposed in this report (e.g. defining a common well-being vision).

References

KHDA (2021), *Distance brings us closer - Dubai Student Wellbeing Census Results 2020*, https://www.khda.gov.ae/CMS/WebParts/TextEditor/Documents/DSWC2020Infographic-En.pdf. [2]

OECD (2019), *PISA 2018 Database*, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/. [4]

OECD (2019), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/acd78851-en. [3]

OECD (2019), *TALIS 2018 Database*, https://www.oecd.org/education/talis/talis-2018-data.htm. [1]

1 Education and well-being in Dubai's private school sector

This report analyses the well-being policies and practices that the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) and schools have implemented in Dubai's private school sector. As background for the analysis that will follow, this introductory chapter examines some of the most relevant features of Dubai's socio-economic context and private education sector.

Introduction

In the last decades, the Emirate of Dubai has become a global hub for innovative businesses, and a popular destination that attracts expatriates and tourists from across the world. Dubai's rapid transformation was impelled and shaped by ambitious Emirate and Federal development plans aimed at building a competitive knowledge-based economy (see Box 1.1).

Education has been – and remains – at the heart of such efforts. A strong education system is considered important not only to develop the Emirate's home-grown skills, but also to attract a highly-qualified expatriate population. To sustain and advance its economic development and diversification, Dubai's leadership introduced a number of measures to improve educational outcomes in the late 2000s. This includes, notably, the creation of a private education sector regulator, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), and the introduction of an annual school inspection. Progress has been remarkable. Student learning outcomes as measured by international assessments have improved significantly across all domains. In the last rounds of the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey, Dubai's private sector has overtaken the OECD average. This is no small feat given the sector's rapid expansion.

In recent years, the Emirate has been placing a stronger emphasis on people's well-being with the aim of making Dubai "an inclusive and cohesive society … that is the preferred place to live, work and visit and a pivotal hub in the global economy" (Government of Dubai - The Executive Council, n.d.[1]). As part of this trend, KHDA and private schools have introduced a number of initiatives to help raise awareness, measure and support students' and staff's well-being. Given the central role education and educators have in fostering and supporting empowered, healthy and happy communities, these interventions hold great potential.

This report analyses the well-being policies and practices that KHDA and schools have implemented in Dubai's private school sector. In order to fulfil this objective, the OECD has taken a holistic view of well-being in education (discussed in Chapter 2); Chapter 3 looks at Dubai's private schools as a whole, focusing on the school leadership and other key school staff; Chapter 4 focuses on teachers and their well-being, an issue that has been relatively overlooked in the Emirate until recently; and, finally, Chapter 5 discusses student well-being and empowerment. Each chapter will look at strengths and challenges of the approach taken in Dubai, and discuss potential steps that could support higher levels of well-being in the Emirate's private school sector. As background for the analysis that will follow, this introductory chapter examines some of the most relevant features of Dubai's socio-economic context and private education sector.

Box 1.1. OECD Review of well-being policies and practices in Dubai's private schools

Remit

At KHDA's request, the OECD has been asked to undertake a review of well-being initiatives in Dubai's private school sector with the goal to:

- Provide a brief overview of the education policies and practices currently in place in Dubai's private sector to support well-being, underlying the trends in policy approaches and how these compare to OECD and benchmark countries.
- Identify the main strengths and gaps in KHDA's approach, relative to their stated goals (i.e. encouraging children's holistic development and supporting schools to put forward whole-of-children approaches to teaching and learning).
- Provide policy options to ensure that Dubai's school-level practices, and system-level policy and regulatory environment that are informed by evidence and follow best international practice.

Given the nature of well-being, the OECD has opted for a broad set of analytical lenses (discussed in Chapter 2). The OECD's analysis takes into consideration the multiple actors (e.g. KHDA, Dubai Health Authority (DHA) and policy levers (e.g. data collection, health regulation) that can impact education stakeholders' well-being. Consequently, this report provides policy considerations that have implications for KHDA as well as other bodies in Dubai.

Background

This project builds on the OECD's knowledge of the dimensions of student well-being, including the organisation's work on student well-being – undertaken as part of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the OECD's 21st Century Children project – and teacher well-being. In addition, this review draws on the OECD's past work on schools as learning organisations.

This exercise also draws on the OECD's extensive experience in reviewing education policy across all the world's major developed and emerging economies. The OECD has conducted a series of education policy reviews in the Gulf region, including in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Emirate of Abu Dhabi and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, through which it has developed an extensive understanding of the unique social and economic context of the region.

Scope

This report examines school education, or ISCED 1 to ISCED 3 according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED).

Methodology

This review adopted a mixed-methods approach and uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis. The exercise involved a self-assessment report prepared by KHDA, a virtual fact-finding mission to Dubai by a team of OECD analysts, and desk-based research. In addition to stakeholder interviews, evidence was drawn from secondary literature, and the most recently available evidence and data, including international and national sources. This includes data from PISA, the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), the Dubai Student Wellbeing Census (DSWC),

the Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey. When available, this report draws on trend data to monitor progress and trends in performance.

Benchmark countries and jurisdictions

This report uses the OECD average as the main benchmark. In addition, the OECD review team identified ten benchmark jurisdictions with education systems that share key socio-economic and political characteristics with Dubai and/or carry relevant insights for Dubai. These countries and jurisdictions were chosen because they meet one or more of the following criteria:

- High-performing education systems in terms of the quality and equity of outcomes: Australia, China, Canada, Estonia, Korea, New Zealand and Singapore.
- Systems that serve as a policy reference in one or more areas: Australia, Ireland, the United Kingdom.

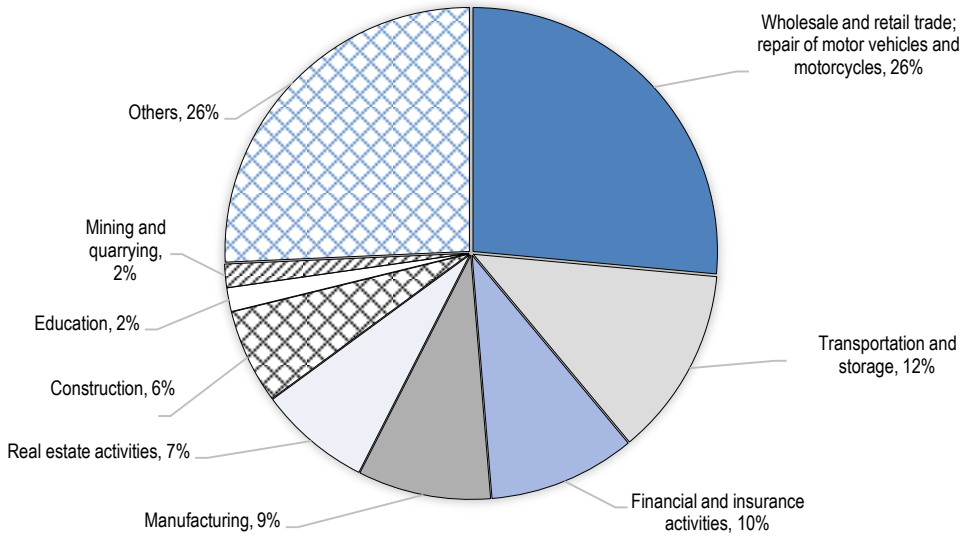
The evidence from these countries was used selectively, and where relevant. Additional countries have been included as a reference when their experience and policies in specific areas were considered particularly informative for Dubai.

Socio-economic context

Dubai's economy has a dynamic and diversified economy

Dubai is one of seven Emirates[1] that make up the United Arab Emirates that was established in 1971. Unlike the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, Dubai's oil and gas reserves are relatively limited (Embassy of the United Arab Emirates - Washington D.C., n.d.[2]). Between 1960 and 1990, most of the wealth derived from Dubai's natural resources was used to build the city's infrastructure and develop different sectors of the economy (OECD, 2020[3]). This enabled and, at the same time, drove Dubai to build one of the most dynamic and diversified economies in the Middle East, based primarily on international trade, transport, real estate and tourism (see Figure 1.1) (OECD, 2014[4]) (OECD, 2020[3]).

Figure 1.1. Dubai's GDP by sector, 2019



Source: Dubai Statistics Center (2019[5]), *Gross Domestic Product at Constant Prices 2019*, https://www.dsc.gov.ae/en-us/Themes/Pages/National-Accounts.aspx?Theme=24 (accessed 12 March 2021).

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Box 1.2. National and Emirate-level long-term development strategies

In the last 20 years, the UAE and its Emirates have articulated their development ambitions through a number of medium- and long-term strategies and visions that lay out detailed plans and targets for different sectors. These visionary documents have driven ambitious reforms in the country aimed at modernising the public sector, diversifying the economy and making the UAE attractive for investors and individuals. The latest strategies refer to – more or less explicitly – individuals' well-being, attesting to the UAE's commitment to this goal, and helping create a common vision and sense of direction around the issue.

The UAE Vision 2021

The UAE Vision 2021 was launched in 2010 by H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai. The Vision aims to place the UAE among the best countries in the world by 2021 (the Union's 50th anniversary). The vision is based on six national priorities:

- Sustainable environment and infrastructure
- World-class healthcare
- First-rate education system
- Competitive knowledge economy
- Safe public and fair judiciary
- Cohesive society and preserved identity

Dubai Plan 2021

The Dubai Plan 2021, announced in 2015, highlights six areas for strategic development that together form the city's vision for 2021. They are:

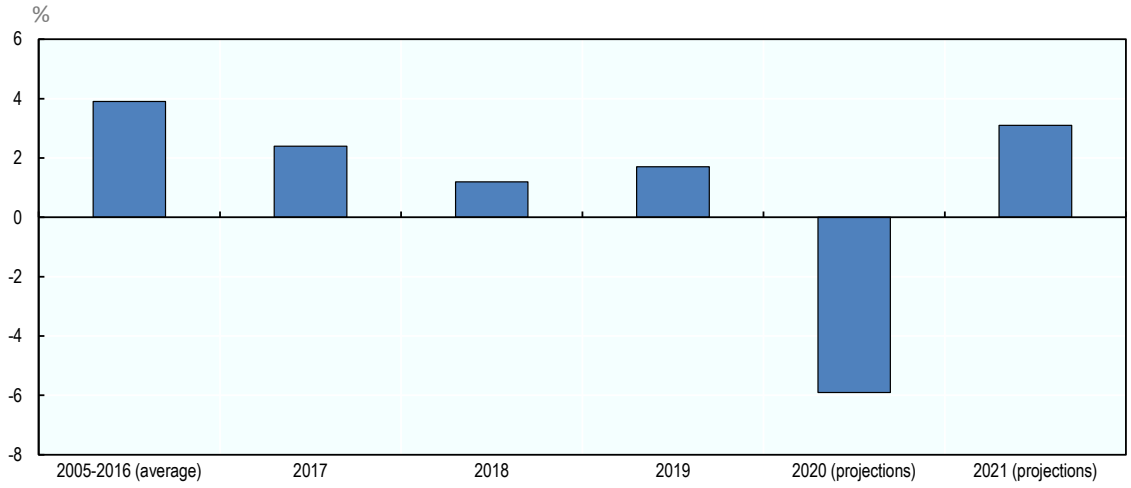
- The people: city of happy, creative and empowered people
- The society: an inclusive and cohesive society
- The experience: the preferred place to live, work and visit
- The place: a smart and sustainable city
- The economy: a pivotal hub in the global economy
- The government: a pioneering and excellent government.

Source: (Government of Dubai - The Executive Council, n.d.[1]), *Dubai Plan 2021*, https://tec.gov.ae/en/dubai-plan-2021 (accessed 21 March 2021); (The Government of the United Arab Emirates, n.d.[6]), *UAE Vision 2021*, https://www.vision2021.ae/en (accessed 21 March 2021).

Dubai's economy has been hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic recession, but is expected to recover in 2021

After high rates of economic growth into the beginning of the 21st century, the Emirate was hard hit by the 2008 financial and real estate crisis (Figure 1.2). As a response, the Emirate of Abu Dhabi provided financial support to its neighbouring Emirate, after which, Dubai experienced a decade of steady economic recovery, although at a relatively slow place (OECD, 2014[4]) (Government of Dubai - Dubai Economy, 2018[7]). This was brought to an abrupt stop by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a significant impact on Dubai and its economy (World Bank, 2020[8]). The collapse of international tourism, in particular, hit many sectors, and contributed to job losses, especially among expatriates, and an overall contraction of GDP by 6.2% in 2020 (IMF, 2020[9]). To mitigate the impact of the recession, the government launched a number of financial stimulus packages (The UAE Government, n.d.[10]). Measures included the deferral or exemption from taxes and fees, and the extension of school licenses, among others.

Figure 1.2. Annual GDP growth rates in the UAE, 2005-2021



Source: IMF (2020[9]) *Economic Prospects and Policy Challenges for the GCC Countries*, Policy Paper No. 2020/065 https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/Policy-Papers/Issues/2020/12/08/Economic-Prospects-and-Policy-Challenges-for-the-GCC-Countries-49942 (accessed 16 March 2021); IMF (2021[11]), *Country Data*, https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/ARE (accessed 2 May 2021).

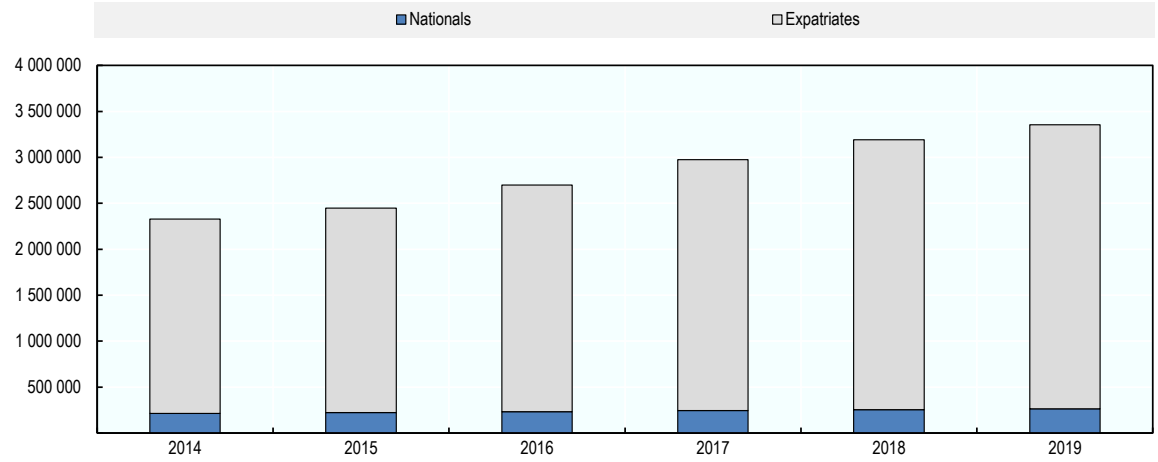
StatLink https://stat.link/yt54go

While forecasts project a fast recovery for the Emirate – Dubai's GDP is expected to grow by 4% in 2021 (OECD, 2020[3]) – uncertainty around the pandemic's development, slow inoculation campaigns worldwide and increased fiscal deficits could pose significant risks for the economy (IMF, 2020[9]). In the medium-term, these could have implications for education and student well-being, be it through potential future school closures, or outflows of expatriates.

Dubai has a very diverse population, made up predominantly of expatriates and individuals of working age

Over the past decades, Dubai's dynamic economy has attracted a large influx of expatriates from all over the world. The Emirate's population has increased almost fourfold since 2000 (Dubai Statistics Center, 2020[12]). At 3.4 million inhabitants, Dubai is now the most populous and diverse Emirate in the UAE. Emiratis account for only 7.9% of the city's population (Dubai Statistics Center, 2020[13]) (see Figure 1.3). The expatriate community is made of over 200 nationalities with the majority coming from Southeast Asia (e.g. Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Philippines), although a significant share come from other Arab countries (e.g. Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon) and Western countries (e.g. the United Kingdom). This diversity is also reflected in Dubai's school population and the structure of the private school sector.

Figure 1.3. Population breakdown by nationality in Dubai, 2014-2019



Source: (Dubai Statistics Center, 2020[13]), *Number of Population Estimated by Nationality- Emirate of Dubai (2020-2018)*, https://www.dsc.gov.ae/Report/DSC_SYB_2020_01_03.pdf (accessed 5 July 2021); (Dubai Statistics Center, 2018[14]), *Number of Population Estimated by Nationality- Emirate of Dubai 2018-2016*, https://www.dsc.gov.ae/Report/DSC_SYB_2018_01%20_%2003.pdf (accessed 5 July 2021); (Dubai Statistics Center, 2016[15]), *Estimated Population Number by Nationality- Emirate of Dubai (2016-2014)*, https://www.dsc.gov.ae/Report/Copy%20of%20DSC_SYB_2016_01%20_%2002.pdf (accessed 5 July 2021).

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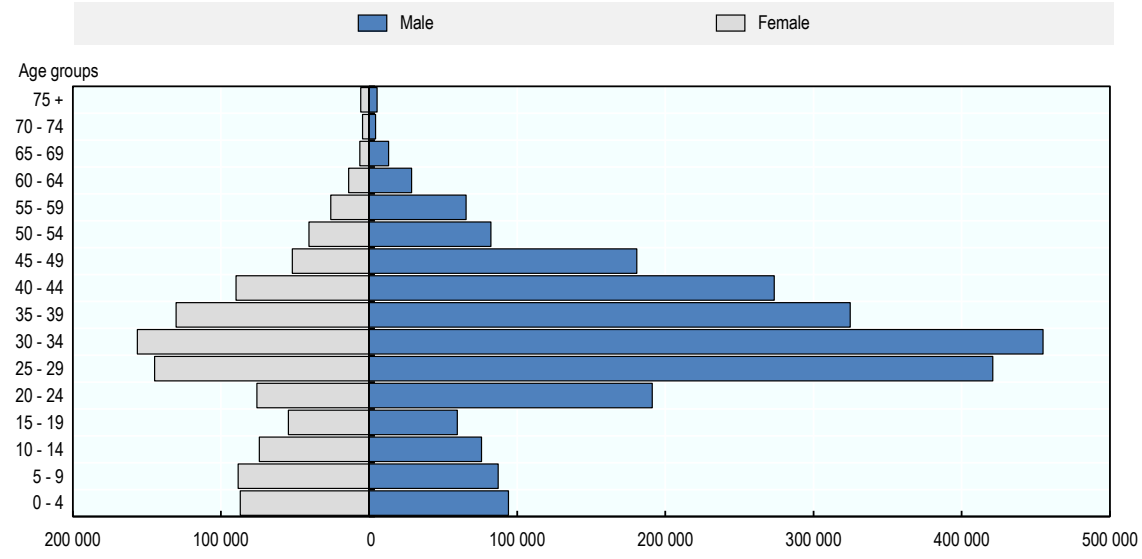
While still relatively small for a young society (see Figure 1.4), Dubai's school age population (aged 5-19 years-old) has grown significantly – by over 150% since 2005 – and in 2018 made up more than 13% of the Emirate's total population (KHDA, 2020[16]).

Figure 1.4. Dubai's population age pyramid by gender, 2020



Source: Dubai Statistics Center (2020[17]), *Population by Gender and Age Groups - Emirate of Dubai (2020-2019, 2005)*, https://www.dsc.gov.ae/Report/DSC_SYB_2020_01_05.pdf (accessed 5 July 2021).

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Dubai's private school sector

Governance

While this report focuses on KHDA as the agency with the main responsibility for overseeing the private school sector, it is important to look at it within the wider governance context (see Figure 1.5), as several other bodies have significant influence over education and well-being in Dubai.

Institutions

At the national level, the Supreme Council of Rulers is the top policy making body in the country, and the Council of Ministers, or Cabinet, appointed by the President, is responsible for overseeing the implementation of federal policy (Embassy of the United Arab Emirates - Washington (D.C), n.d.[18]). At the Emirate level, the Dubai Executive Council (DEC) is Dubai's main legislative body, responsible for supervising and guiding government policies and services, with the goal of implementing the UAE's and the Emirate's vision (The Executive Council - Government of Dubai, 2021[19]).

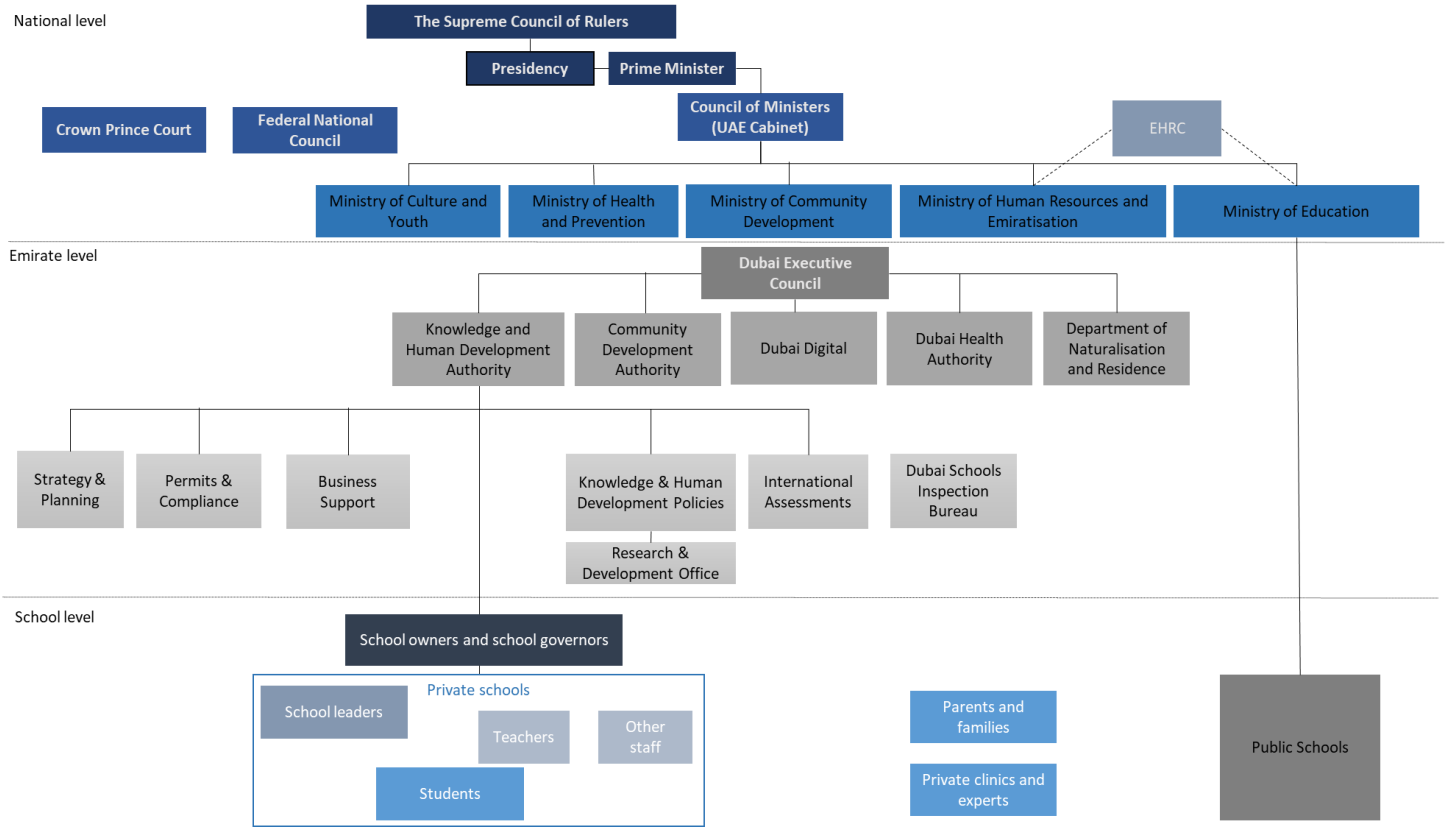
Operating under the DEC's leadership, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) is the key body in Dubai's private education system. Created in 2006, KHDA is a public entity responsible for overseeing and supporting the private education sector in Dubai, including early childhood education centres, schools, higher education providers, and training institutes. KHDA's main tasks include: licensing and regulating private schools and institutions, accrediting and authenticating certificates issued by such schools and institutions, approving principal appointments, and school calendars and tuition fees; investigating complaints filed against private schools; defining requirements and standards for high-quality educational provision. The Dubai Schools Inspections Bureau (DSIB) is a semi-autonomous agency under KHDA. It is responsible for inspecting Dubai's private schools, producing school inspection reports, and disseminating results (Thacker and Cuadra, 2014[20]).

The Ministry of Education (MoE) sets education policy at the national level, including curriculum, assessment and teacher standards. The Ministry oversees and runs public schools across the UAE, which enrol less than 15% of students in Dubai. Other Emirates also have private sector regulators, such as the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK) and the Sharjah Private Education Authority (SPEA), which are other important education actors.

Other noteworthy bodies include, at the national level, the Crown Prince Court, the Education and Human Resources Council (EHRC), the Ministry of Health and Prevention, the Ministry of Community Development[2], the Ministry of Culture and Youth, and the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation. At the Emirate level, relevant agencies include the Department of Naturalisation and Residence Dubai, the Community Development Authority (CDA), the Dubai Health Authority (DHA), and the Dubai Statistics Center.

In addition to the above, Councils for Happiness and Wellbeing, established in 2016, bring together representatives from government entities, including KHDA, as well as other sectors, to ensure that all plans and activities follow a unified approach based on the National Programme for Happiness and Well-being (UAE Government, n.d.[21]).

Figure 1.5. An abridged governance structure



Note: Only a selection of government agencies has been included in the visual. Likewise, the figure does not account for the full complexity of relationships that exist and take place in the system. Unless specified with a dark line, the position of stakeholders in the figure does not necessarily imply a hierarchical relationship. For a more precise picture of the UAE's governance structure, readers are encouraged to check updated official sources.

Source: Author's design based on (The UAE Cabinet, n.d.[22]), *The United Arab Emirates - Federal System*, https://uaecabinet.ae/en/federal-system (accessed 9 July 2021), and (Embassy of the United Arab Emirates - Washington (D.C), n.d.[18]), About the Government, https://www.uae-embassy.org/about-uae/about-government (accessed 9 July 2021).

Well-being as a key goal of KHDA's forward-looking strategy

National- and Emirate-level development plans have guided education policy in Dubai for the past decades, as described in Box 1.2. Over time, well-being has come to feature prominently in the country's vision for the future and, in particular, in Dubai's Plan 2021. KHDA has been among the first government bodies to reflect this trend in its own strategy (see Box 1.3) (KHDA, n.d.[23]), demonstrating a high degree of responsiveness to emerging needs as well as a readiness to act. These are features that have defined the organisation since its early days and that have systematically helped it advance its goals over the years. Moreover, KHDA's updated strategy map from 2018 reveals a strong commitment to the well-being agenda. Among its six main goals for Dubai's private education sector, it identifies "[increasing] levels of happiness and wellbeing across all stakeholder groups", as well as "[building] a world class quality education system".

Box 1.3. KHDA's strategy map

KHDA's strategy map outlines the following:

- **Vision**: lifelong learning to fulfil Dubai's aspirations
- **Mission**: to assure quality and to improve accessibility to education, learning and human development with the engagement of the community
- **Purpose**: Every learner is assured of high-quality learning experiences, availability of choices through effective engagement
- **Values**: the Nahjona Promise
- **Objectives**:
  - Quality: to build a world class education system
  - Access: to create a diverse education service that is accessible and available to everyone
  - Engagement: to engage with all stakeholders to improve education in Dubai
  - Happiness and well-being: to increase levels of happiness and well-being across all stakeholder groups
  - Innovation: to embed innovation within the education system and KHDA
  - Sustainability: to embed sustainability within the education system and KHDA

Notes: The Nahjona Promise stands for three values: (1) benevolently team working across KHDA to develop and share our learning, knowledge and skills; (2) approaching work practically with a focus on doing a few things well rather than many things less well; and (3) being transparent in all our dealings through using evidence to support our policies and actions
Source: (KHDA, n.d.[23]), *KHDA's Strategy Refresh [PPT].*

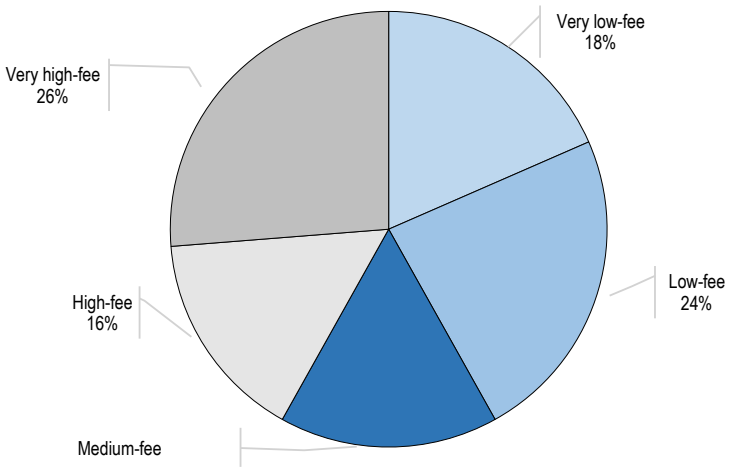
Funding

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated disparities in the private sector

KHDA does not provide direct funding to private schools or other educational institutions. School funds come primarily from tuition fees paid by parents or, less frequently, by employers. In 2019/20, the average tuition fee was equivalent to AED 29 057 (United Arab Emirates dirhams) per year (equivalent to around EUR 6 800[3]) (KHDA, 2020[24]), but there is wide variation in the system (see Figure 1.4), with fees from around AED 3 000 to over AED 100 000 per year (equivalent to around EUR 700 and EUR 23 500, respectively) (KHDA, 2020[16]). These fees closely reflect the income levels of communities, with the low-fee schools serving families in low wage, low-skilled jobs and high-fee schools catering to the children of

affluent families (OECD, 2017[25]). In contrast to many OECD countries, there are no redistributive mechanisms (for example, student voucher schemes or school subsidies) to help offset the inequalities that emerge from such market conditions (KHDA, 2020[16]).

Figure 1.6. Breakdown of the number of schools by school-level fee, 2021



Notes: Very low-fee schools refer to schools with tuition fees below AED 10 000/year (EUR 2 348/year). Low-fee schools refer to schools with tuition fees between AED 10-20 000/year (EUR 2 355-4 709/year). Medium-fee schools refer to schools with tuition fees between AED 20-30 000/year (EUR 4 709-7 064/year). High-fee schools refer to schools with tuition fees between AED 30-50 000/year (EUR 7 064-11 773) and very high-fee refer to schools with tuition fees above AED 50 000/year (EUR 11 773/year).
Source: (KHDA, 2021[26]), *KHDA's Open Data - Dubai's Private Schools Open Data,* https://www.khda.gov.ae/en/opendata (accessed 19 April 2021).

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Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, many families have been confronted by a sudden income shortage or even unemployment. As a result, many are struggling to cover tuition fees (OECD, 2020[3]) and, in some cases, have had to leave the country (BBC, 2020[27]). Schools have, in turn, had to take difficult decisions to make up for lower revenues by, for example, cutting down on non-essential expenses, or laying off or cutting back the salary of their staff. This has had important repercussions on individuals' well-being. As reported in fact-finding interviews, many teachers and other staff feel worried about their job security – which, in the case of expatriate teachers, is connected to their residency status, thus making the situation even more challenging – or their financial circumstances.

School choice is shaped by perceptions of quality, demographics and a unique job market

In Dubai's private education sector, students and families are free to choose the school that best meets their needs. In systems that offer school-choice opportunities for students, school quality is an important factor driving parental choices (OECD, 2019[28]). To ensure that parents have accurate information about schools with which to make informed decisions, the DSIB conducts yearly school inspections and disseminates the results publicly (see Chapter 3). DSIB's school inspection is meant "to promote transparency about the quality of schools in a system that was seen to be operating in the dark" (Thacker and Cuadra, 2014[20]).

Other factors play an important role in school choice. Parents also select schools for their instructional language, curriculum, geographical location and values, among others. Because of Dubai's unique job

market and demographics, these considerations carry significant weight in parents' decisions. However, as discussed above, market conditions mean that, for many parents, their choices are limited to what they can afford to pay. This has implications for the quality of schooling they can access (see Chapter 3).

Market pressures can encourage improvement, but may create unintended consequences

There is a widespread belief – although not an uncontested one (Boeskens, 2016[29]; Urquiola, 2016[30]; OECD, 2019[28]) – that competition between schools can foster innovation and improve school efficiency. The fact that parents may select (or leave) their child's school supposedly gives schools a compelling incentive to improve the education they provide in order to attract (and retain) students. Schools that cannot do so are driven out of the market. Financial benefits linked to higher DSIB inspection results (e.g. that allows those schools to increase tuition fees) further encourage schools to improve outcomes (see Chapter 3).

However, market competition can also have unintended consequences on individuals' well-being and on school climate. For example, in order to attract and/or retain parents of students, schools may invest in fashionable well-being initiatives, such as mindfulness sessions, or visible programmes, such as a new school gym. While this type of investment can sometimes be beneficial, they may come at the expense of evidence-based, sustained and concerted programmes focused on developing a whole-school approach to well-being (see Chapter 3). In addition, poor inspection results and/or a drop in enrolment can indirectly impact teachers and staff, for example, through salary cuts, freezes or terminations. This can, as discussed above, be a source of anxiety and stress for staff. As will be discussed in further detail in the next chapters, these issues need to be carefully monitored and addressed to ensure that they do not undermine efforts to strengthen well-being in Dubai's private school sector.

Dubai's private education sector has become a profitable sector of the economy

The Emirate's development and the education sector's impressive expansion in recent decades (see below) have attracted investments from large schools and school networks such as GEMS Education and Taaleem (KHDA, 2020[16]). Private schools' revenues are reported to have reached AED 8.6 billion per year (KHDA, 2020[24]). However, the COVID-19 crisis disrupted the sector in many ways, and the medium- and long-term effects of the pandemic on the sector's profitability and growth remain unknown.

Moreover, concerns have been raised regarding the prominent role of for-profit providers. Their dominance means that "financial returns, rather than a belief in the importance of education for both the individual and society, begin to influence discourse in the education sector overall" (Ridge, Shami and Kippels, 2016[31]; Gallagher, 2019[32]).

The sector has attracted professionals and centres that provide important services for strengthening well-being

To effectively meet students' and staff's well-being needs, education systems need to provide – or draw on – specialised services and support, for example, psychological counselling, nutritional advice or career guidance. This type of service can be provided by specialised school staff and/or by external experts within or outside schools. It can be targeted at a specific student or student group, or at the whole-school body, and be provided for free or at a fee. Internationally, school systems have dealt differently with these options. The same is true for Dubai. The types of services that are provided by schools also vary considerably across Dubai's private sector.

As the Dubai private school sector expanded, the number of specialised clinics and experts has grown substantially in recent decades. These are, for the most part, private institutions and individuals that provide services and/or resources for a fee, and many on a for-profit basis. Unlike what is observed across OECD countries, there are no public alternatives or mechanisms to subsidise access to these services in Dubai.

As a result, disadvantaged stakeholders and schools often find it difficult to access key services, which can significantly hinder their well-being journey (see Chapter 3).

The issue of access to specialised clinics and professionals has become even more pressing since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. First, evidence suggests that individuals' mental health deteriorated, indicating a growing need for specialised support (OECD, 2020[3]) (OECD, 2021[33]). Second, with lower incomes, schools and families are even less likely than before to be able to afford these services. Third, social distancing measures may have led to the disruption of mental health services, in particular those that are face-to-face, even if many services have been quick to adapt (e.g. moving to online formats).

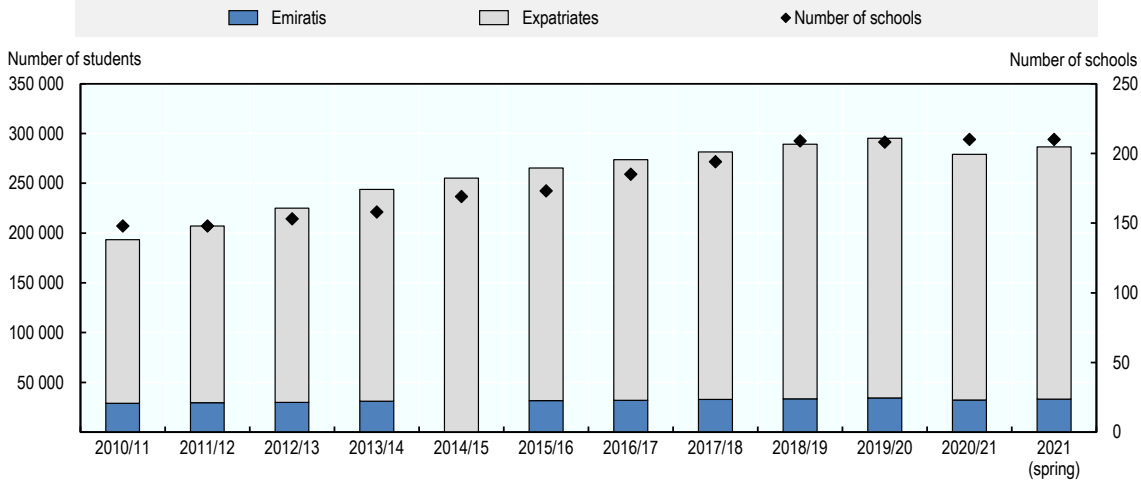
In interviews with the OECD review team, stakeholders also raised concern regarding the qualification of some alleged experts and clinics, as well as the effectiveness of some of the tools and programmes in the market.

The structure of Dubai's private school system

Dubai has a large and expanding private education system

Dubai's economic development and population growth have led to a remarkable expansion of the school sector (see Figure 1.7.). This trend has been particularly strong in the private sector, which now makes up 76% of the total number of schools (KHDA, 2021[26]) and 90% of the total student population in the Emirate (KHDA, 2020[16]).

Figure 1.7. Number of schools and students enrolled in Dubai's private school system, 2010-21



Note: The exact number of Emirati students in 2014/15 was not available.
Sources: Author's figure based on data compiled by KHDA (2021[34]) (2021[35]) (2020[24]) (2019[36]) (2018[37]) (2017[38]) (2015[39]) (2014[40]) (2013[41]) and DSIB (2017[42]) (2016[43]).

StatLink https://stat.link/o2z7aj

Access to public schools is largely limited to Emiratis[4], leading to a high demand for private education amongst the expatriate population. Another factor behind the sector's recent expansion is the flow of Emirati students to the private sector. Emirati families are increasingly opting to – and being encouraged to (Arabianbusiness, 2017[44]) – enrol their children in private institutions, where they can access what is considered to be higher-quality education, an international curricula, and/or bilingual instruction (Gallagher,

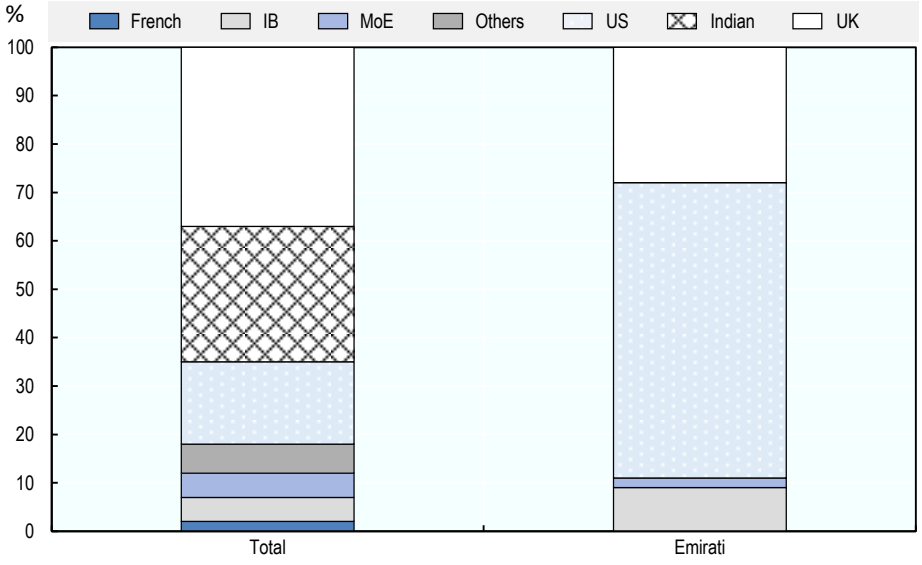
2019[32]). As a result, almost 60% of Emirati students living in Dubai now attend a private school (KHDA, 2020[16]).

There is a wide diversity of curricula on offer

There are over 15 different curricula on offer in Dubai's private school sector. The most popular curricula (i.e. the International Baccalaureate (IB), Indian, UK and US curricula) account for over 90% of the total private student population (see Figure 1.8). Niche curricula, such as the German, French or Russian curriculum, target specific communities and account for a much smaller number of students (KHDA, 2020[16]).

Figure 1.8. Student enrolment, by curriculum type, PISA 2018

15-year-old student enrolment rates by curriculum type, and nationality group



Source: (OECD, 2019[45]), *PISA 2018 Database*, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/ (accessed 14 April 2021).

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Private schools in Dubai benefit from a high degree of autonomy over teaching and learning

In Dubai, private schools have considerable discretion over resources, staff recruitment and professional development, school calendars, testing schedules, assessment and admission policies, language of instruction, pedagogical approaches and course offerings. Internationally, private institutions also enjoy a higher degree of autonomy than public ones, although government-dependent private schools[5] are usually required to comply with government regulations to a greater extent than independent private schools.

Nevertheless, there are increasing efforts to establish national standards for quality in the Emirates, across the public and private sectors. For example, the introduction of the national assessment, the Emirates Standardized Test (EmSAT) Achieve, as a national requirement for Emiratis to enter tertiary education in the UAE, together with new equivalency arrangements for international qualifications, reflect a drive to establish more consistency in the system (Gallagher, 2019[32]) (OECD, 2019[46]). For private schools, this means that they must comply with national and local regulations, including the recently introduced licensing

scheme for teachers (see Chapter 4 and Box 1.4) and the UAE Moral Education programme (see Chapter 5).

Teachers and teaching

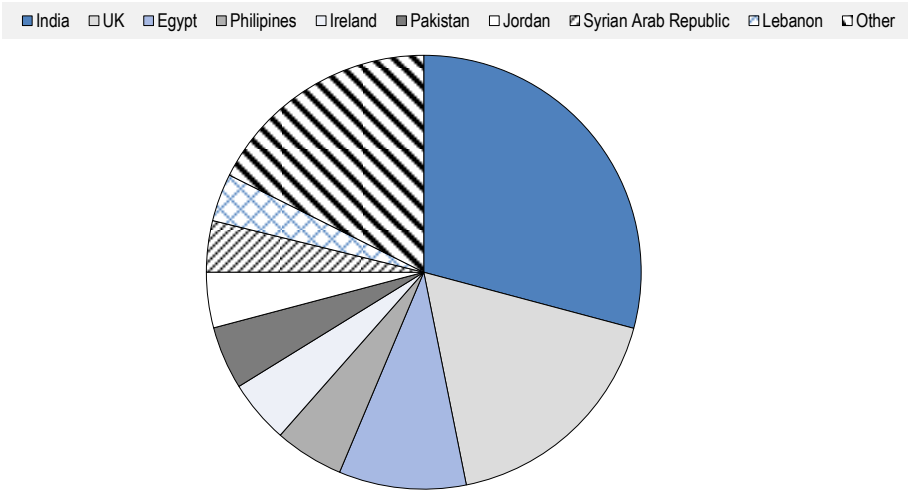
Effective teaching is at the heart of a successful education system and there is a growing recognition that supporting teachers' professional learning and strengthening their well-being is critical to improve outcomes for all. Teachers are an important focus of this report: Chapters 3 and 5 discuss the role of teachers in supporting well-being in Dubai's private school sector, and Chapter 4 focuses on the state of their own well-being. This section presents a brief overview of the teaching landscape in Dubai that will inform this analysis.

Dubai has a diverse teacher workforce, made up predominantly of expatriates

In Dubai's private school sector, virtually all teachers are expatriates, with more than half coming from (by population size) India, the United Kingdom or Egypt (see Figure 1.9). Less than 1% of private school teachers are Emirati. There are a number of factors that explain this composition. First and foremost, the diversity of the sector means that teachers need specific qualifications or profiles (e.g. training in the Pakistani curriculum or proficiency in French). Second, there is a certain reluctance among nationals to join the profession. Among Emiratis, a teaching career is not considered prestigious (Gallagher, 2019[32]), because of its low social status, a flat career structure (i.e. the absence of opportunities for professional advancement in the classroom) and the low remuneration compared to other opportunities in the public sector.

Figure 1.9. Teachers' country of origin, 2020-21

Share of teachers



Source: (KHDA, 2021[35]), *School for all seasons, private schools landscape 2020-21,* https://www.khda.gov.ae/Areas/Administration/Content/FileUploads/Publication/Documents/English/20201110163139_Private-Schools-Landscape-En-2020-2021.pdf (accessed 21 April 2021).

StatLink https://stat.link/esav2f

The expatriate nature of Dubai's teaching workforce means that most teachers in the Emirate were trained in their home countries. According to PISA 2018, 86% of students had teachers that reported studying abroad[6]. Given the diversity of expatriate teachers' backgrounds, it is likely that the teacher training and education programmes that they undertook in their home countries also vary considerably, not only in format and content, but also in quality and approach. Informed by their different training and home cultures, teachers are likely to use different kinds of instructional practices, hold different expectations for themselves as professionals and for their students, as well as have different understandings of well-being. As will be argued in this report, this diversity must be taken into consideration more systematically when designing and implementing well-being policies and practices to ensure their effectiveness.

Dubai's private sector benefits from a highly-qualified teacher workforce, with access to support and development opportunities

Although there is no simple correlation between teacher qualification levels and teaching quality, this can have implications for teachers' status, their content-mastery and the future of the profession (OECD, 2019[47]). The qualification profile of Dubai's private teacher workforce is comparable to that of the OECD. Nearly half of Dubai's private sector teachers (47%) – compared to the OECD average of 46% – have pursued studies beyond a bachelor's level. This share is lower among female teachers (35%) than male teachers (52%).

In addition to high-quality initial training, opportunities for effective induction, mentoring and continuous professional learning can significantly improve teaching practices and retention (OECD, 2019[47]). The need for strong induction and professional development arrangements is particularly important in Dubai, given a highly mobile and international teaching population (see Chapter 4). According to TALIS 2018 results, most private schools in Dubai provide teachers with professional development support and opportunities. Nearly three-quarters of teachers in lower-secondary have participated in induction activities in their current school (71%). This figure is higher than in the UAE (59%) or in OECD countries (29%). Mentoring is not as common. Only 29% of lower-secondary teachers in Dubai's private systems report having a mentor. This is significantly higher than the OECD average of 9%, but lower than the UAE average (42%). In addition, 98% of lower-secondary teachers in Dubai participated in some form of professional development prior to the survey in 2018.

Despite overall high rates of participation in induction, mentoring and continuous professional learning opportunities, there is some indication that the quality of these programmes is in not always adequate to meet the needs of Dubai's teacher workforce. Few schools offer a sustained period of mentorship that is characteristic of induction systems in high-performing countries. Schools' induction programmes also tend to be focused on practical concerns and administrative procedures and fail to prioritise the intensive pedagogical coaching and direct feedback that supports their practice. Evidence suggests that the training on offer tends to be of limited quality and relevance to their practice (Gallagher, 2019[32]). Addressing these shortcomings will be important not only to improve the quality of teaching in the Emirate, but also to reduce teacher attrition, help new teachers integrate into the local teaching community and strengthen their professional identity (see Chapter 4).

Box 1.4. The Teacher and Educational Leadership Standards (TELS) and the licensing programme

Teacher and Education Leadership Standards

The UAE Teacher and Educational Leadership Standards (TELS), introduced in 2015, represent a potential lever to improve teaching in the UAE. They offer a shared vision for quality teaching, which is vital with a heterogeneous teacher workforce that lacks other shared reference points. They also provide a basis to guide important reforms bearing on teacher licensing, teacher performance appraisal and the professional development offer.

Teachers' licensing process

A professional licensing system for teachers is being rolled out to cover all schools across the UAE. In-service teachers will have a 3-year grace period to attain licensure. The initial licensing process will involve exams on subject content and pedagogical knowledge, which teachers will have three attempts to pass. The license needs to be renewed every 3-4 years based on the evaluation of an e-portfolio. A corresponding licensing process for school leaders is under development and is expected to be introduced in the 2019/20 academic year. Ensuring a baseline of quality, while at the same time signalling high expectations for teacher growth, is critical in a system where only a minority of teachers receive their initial teacher education locally. The licensing system has several promising elements that – if built on and reinforced – could help accomplish these goals:

- *Emphasis on a clear framework to determine the equivalency of international qualifications*: Qualified expatriate teachers will be eligible for a "transitional license", which allows them to teach for two years before sitting the licensure exams. In addition, selected countries' teacher qualifications will allow their expatriates to skip one or both of the initial licensure exams. These measures are important to avoid additional barriers and bottlenecks in the supply of well-qualified international teachers. A clear framework to determine the equivalency of international qualifications is critical for this effort.
- *Ongoing re-evaluation of teachers*: A well-designed re-licensing process can ensure that teachers continue performing at the expected level and the e-portfolio could be a tool to promote teachers' professional growth. Performance on the e-portfolio, for example, could inform teachers' career progression or their professional development plans in areas of identified needs. For this process to be effective, it will be necessary to manage tensions between the e-portfolio's role in the high-stakes re-licensing process and its potential to drive formative appraisal processes.
- *Communication to stakeholders across the UAE*: The creation of a dedicated platform is a welcome initiative to inform teachers of the new licensing process and allay concerns about the high-stakes exams associated with it. Nevertheless, few teachers are currently aware of the process' rationale, its expectations and the standards that underpin it. To avoid tensions and unease, they will need to be more proactive communication efforts.

Source: (OECD, 2019[46]), *OECD Review of Abu Dhabi's Education System – Action Report II*.

Main trends in participation, outcomes and equity

This section will examine the issues of students' access, student learning outcomes and equity in Dubai's private schools. This analysis provides insights into the capacity of the sector and its sub-sectors to support students' development, a key dimension of their students' well-being, referred to as their cognitive well-

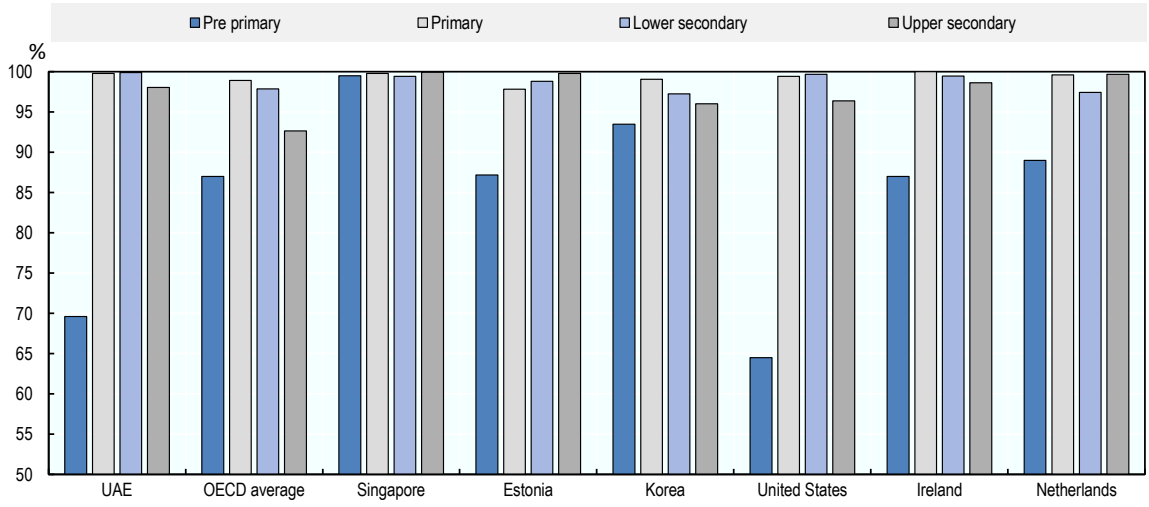
being (see Chapter 5). Moreover, this investigation reveals important differences across the sector and the student population that will be further explored in the next chapters. Policies and practices aimed at supporting students' well-being must take these disparities into consideration.

In the last three decades, Dubai's private student population has increased three-fold and enrolment is high

As Dubai's student-age population has grown, enrolment in private schools has increased significantly. The total student population has nearly tripled since the early 2000s and reached 286 588 (see Figure 1.7. above). At the same time, the number of Emirati students has also increased three-fold, making up around 11% of the student population (KHDA, 2021[48]). Dubai and the other Emirates record rates of school enrolment close to those of OECD and benchmark countries (see Figure 1.10).

Figure 1.10. Net enrolment rates in education, 2018

Per ISCED 2011 level



Notes: Net enrolment rates reflect the proportion of students of the appropriate age for the given education level. Countries are ordered from largest to lowest according to enrolment rates in lower-secondary education. Data for the UAE include all students in the country's education system regardless of their nationality. Data used for the UAE is from 2019, data used for the other countries is from 2018.
Source: (UNESCO-UIS, 2021[49]), *Education: Net enrolment rate by level of education (Database)*, http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?queryid=144# (accessed 15 June 2021).

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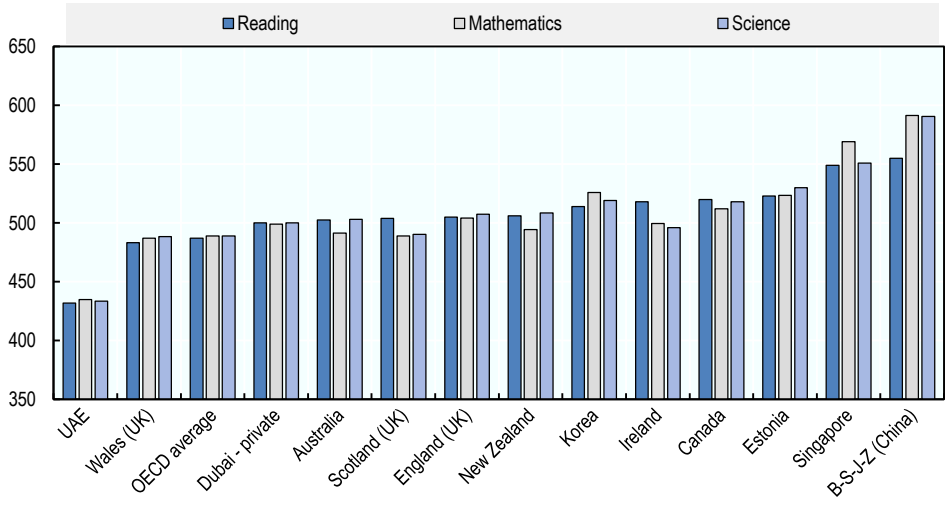
Student learning outcomes are high, compared to benchmark countries

Student learning outcomes can be an important source of information regarding their cognitive well-being as well as their ability to participate effectively in today's society, as lifelong learners, effective workers and engaged citizens (OECD, 2019[50]). Dubai's outcomes in international assessments are better than all Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries, including the UAE average, and slightly above the OECD average. However, average scores are below top-performing systems, such as B-S-J-Z (China)[7] and Singapore (Figure 1.11) (OECD, 2019[45]).

Figure 1.11. Students' performance across all domains, PISA 2018

Score points



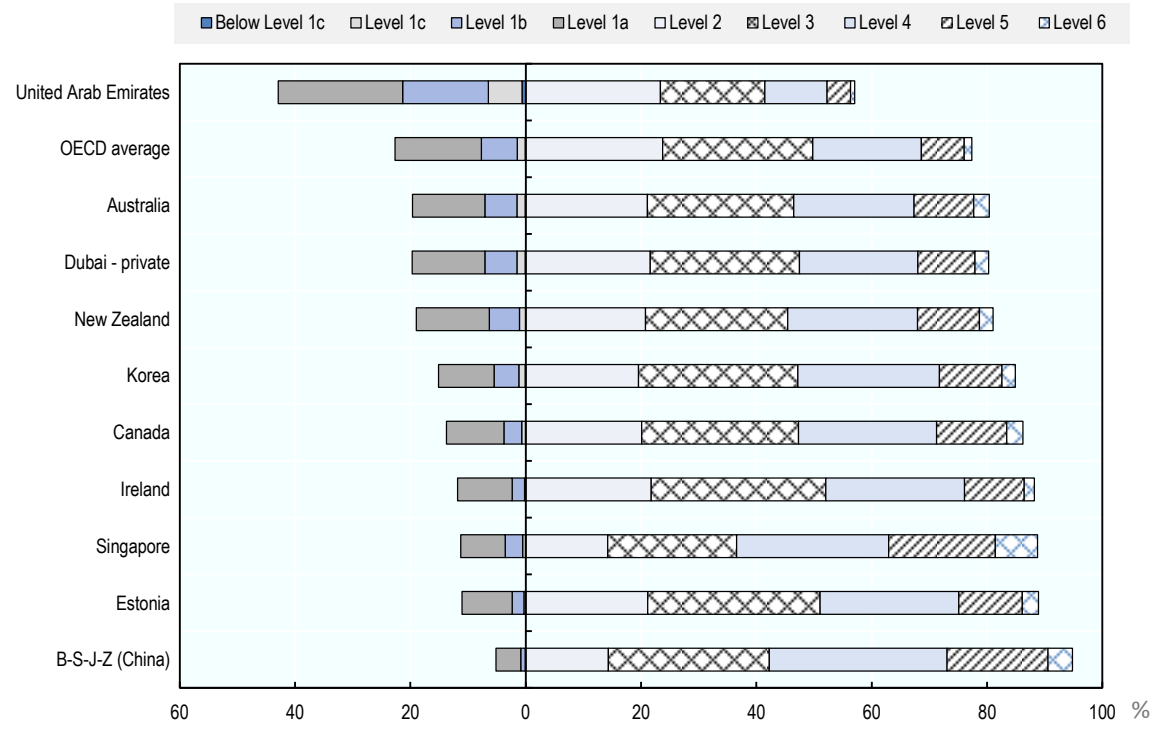
Notes: The OECD averages for PISA 2018 relative to reading do not include Spain. Countries are ordered by their average reading score in PISA 2018 from lowest (left) to highest (right).
Source: (OECD, 2019[45]), *PISA 2018 Database*, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/ (accessed 15 April 2021).

StatLink https://stat.link/3e7nip

Results from the latest PISA cycle reveal that 12.3% of students in Dubai's private sector are high performers in reading, higher than the OECD average (8.7%). "Top performers", as they are known, perform at or above Level 5 in the assessment, meaning that they can creatively, critically and autonomously apply their knowledge and skills to a wide variety of situations, including unfamiliar ones. On the other hand, while slightly lower than the OECD average, approximately 20% of students perform below Level 2 in reading (OECD average: 22.6%), a level of minimal competency. This is concerning because it suggests that a large share of students do not attain the basic skills they will need to succeed in future studies and life (OECD, 2019[45])(Figure 1.12).

Figure 1.12. Students' proficiency levels in reading, PISA 2018

Percentage of 15-year-old students



Notes: Countries are ordered by students' performance levels in reading in PISA 2018. Countries at the top of the chart have a high share of students performing at or below Level 2, whereas those at the bottom have a small share of low-achieving students, and a higher share of top-performing students (scoring at or above Level 5).
Source: (OECD, 2019[45]), *PISA 2018 Database*, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/ (accessed 15 April 2021).

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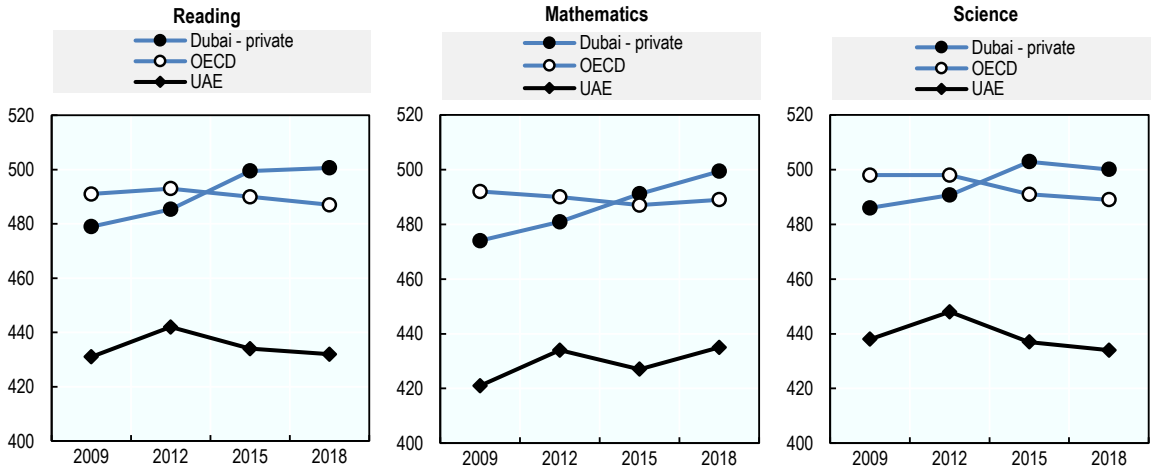
Students' outcomes have improved in Dubai's private sector

Dubai's private sector has seen its PISA performance improve across all domains[8] (see Figure 1.13). Students' outcomes in the assessment increased by 15 score points in reading, 18 score points in mathematics and 9 score points in science since 2012 (OECD, 2019[45]). It is important to note that this progress is taking place while the sector is simultaneously enrolling more children. Students' performance in other international assessments, such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), have likewise improved significantly in the last decade. In contrast, the UAE average has remained relatively unchanged (Mullis et al., 2020[51]) (Mullis et al., 2017[52]).

Figure 1.13. Changes in student performance, PISA 2009-2018

Score points



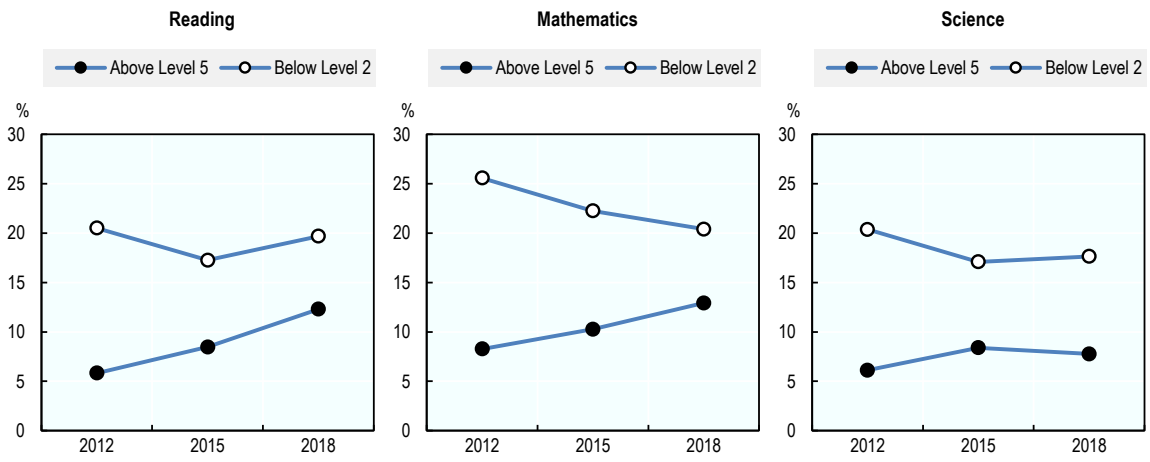
Notes: For Reading: score changes between PISA 2012 and 2018 were statistically significant for the UAE and Dubai private. For Mathematics: score changes between PISA 2015 and 2018 were statistically significant for Dubai private. Score changes between PISA 2009 and 2018 were statistically significant for the UAE. For Science: Score changes between PISA 2012 and 2018 were statistically significant for the UAE, Dubai private and the OECD average. Score changes between PISA 2009 and 2018 also significant for the OECD average.
Source: (OECD, 2019[45]), *PISA 2018 Database*, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/ (accessed 15 April 2021).

StatLink https://stat.link/7r16tc

Changes in average performance can result from improvements or declines in performance from different student groups. An in-depth analysis of Dubai's trend performance suggests that the increase in the share of top-performing students explains Dubai's performance improvement in PISA. Between the PISA 2012 and 2018 cycles, the private sector witnessed a drastic improvement in reading (where the share of top performers more than doubled) and mathematics, and a slighter increase in science (equivalent to 6.5, 4.7 and 1.7 percentage point improvements respectively) (see Figure 1.14) (OECD, 2019[45]). In the meantime, the share of low performers decreased across all domains: by 0.8 percentage points in reading, 5.2 percentage points in mathematics and 2.7 percentage points in science. This suggests improvements in students' cognitive performance in the recent decade.

Figure 1.14. Changes in the share of top and low performers in Dubai private sector, PISA 2018

Across all domains



Notes: High performers are students who score above Level 5, and low performers are those that score below Level 2. The authors were unable to calculate the statistical significance of the changes in the share of top performers across cycles because the link errors for comparisons of proficiency levels between PISA 2018 and previous assessments for Dubai were unavailable.
Source: (OECD, 2019[45]), *PISA 2018 Database*, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/ (accessed 15 April 2021).

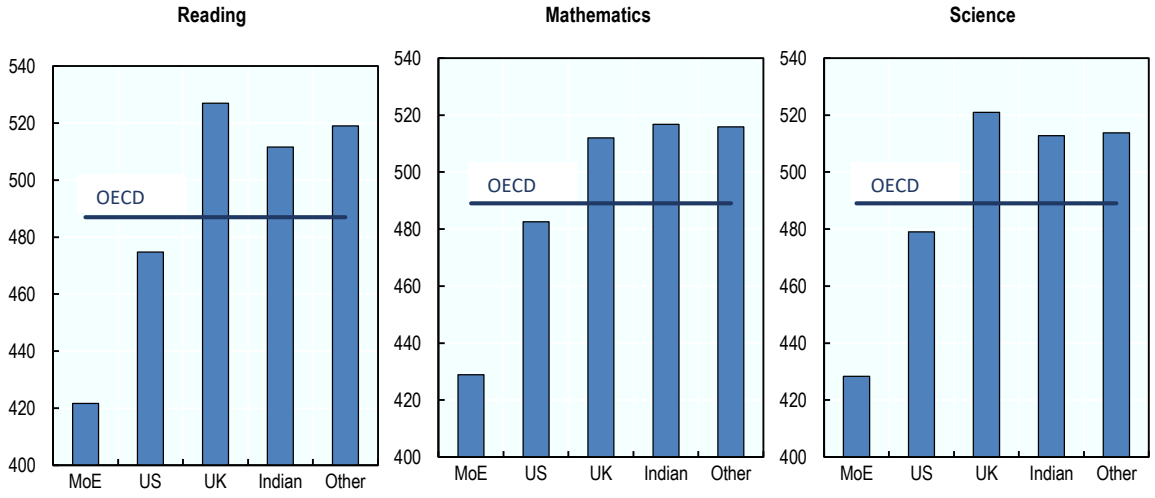
StatLink https://stat.link/9pb6cy

Disparities in performance across the sector and the student population

As observed in, there are considerable differences across Dubai's private sector (Figure 1.15). In PISA 2018, students enrolled in US and, in particular, MoE curricula schools attained much lower scores in reading, mathematics and science than their peers following other curricula, and in comparison to the OECD average. On the other hand, students following the UK and Indian curricula are performing similarly to 15-year-olds in Canada and Estonia.

Figure 1.15. PISA 2018 performance, by curriculum type

Score points



Notes: Differences in performance between the United Kingdom, Indian curricula or other category are mostly statistically insignificant. The dark blue line indicates the OECD average score in each domain.
Source: (OECD, 2019[45]), *PISA 2018 Database*, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/ (accessed 15 April 2021).

StatLink https://stat.link/yxotsp

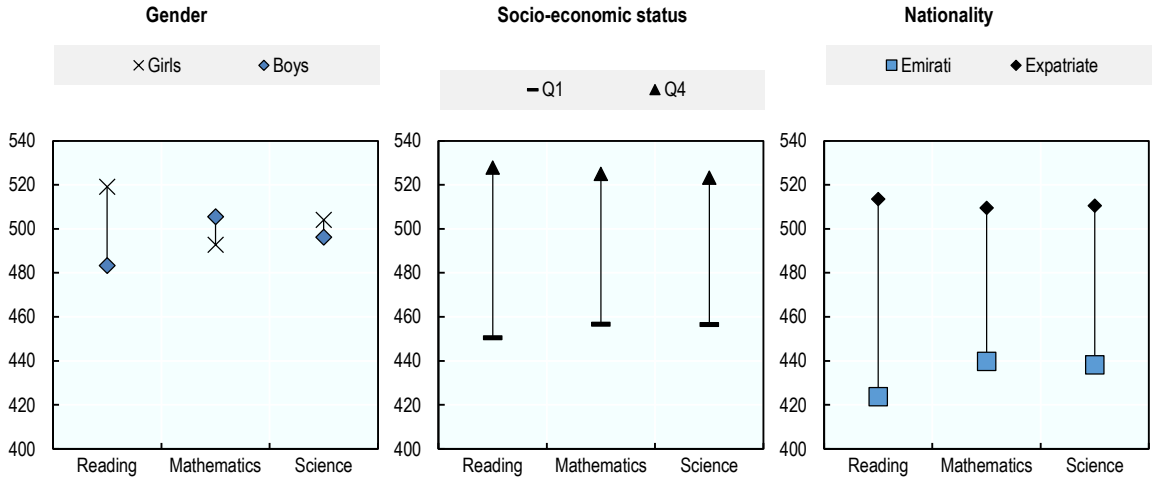
PISA 2018 results indicate that students learning outcomes can also vary significantly according to their (Figure 1.16):

- **Socio-economic background:** internationally, socio-economically advantaged students tend to outperform students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is also the case in Dubai, where students from advantaged households, as measured by the PISA Index of Economic, Social and Cultural Status (ESCS index), scored 527 points in reading, compared to 450 points by disadvantaged students. The 77-score-point difference is slightly lower than the OECD average (89 score points).
- **Gender**: as is the case in most OECD and benchmark countries, in Dubai's private sector, girls have better outcomes in reading, whereas boys tend to perform better in mathematics and have similar performance levels in science.
- **Nationality**: the performance of immigrants/expatriates differs across countries. In countries with less selective migration policies, the parents of expatriate students tend to be less educated and work in lower status jobs. Their children tend to lack the resources that national students enjoy and perform comparatively worse (OECD, 2015[53]). In contrast, in countries with more selective migration policies, such as Australia and Singapore, expatriate students score at least at the same level as national students. The UAE falls between these categories – as migration policies allow both highly-educated and low-skilled migrants to enter the country, but only those with higher social status are allowed to bring their families.

  In the UAE and Dubai, the distinction between expatriate students (that is, those born to parents who are not Emirati) and national students (whose parents are Emirati) is particularly important to understanding student outcomes. As observed in Figure 1.16. PISA 2018 results show that nationals underperform relative to expatriates in all domains.

Figure 1.16. Students' performance across all domains, by students' profile, PISA 2018

Score points in reading, mathematics and science, by gender, socio-economic status and nationality



Notes: Q1 refers to the lowest socio-economic quartile, as measured by PISA's ESCS index, and Q4 to the highest ESCS quartile. See (OECD, 2019[54]) for a full explanation of how the ESCS index is measured across PISA-participating countries and economies.
Source: (OECD, 2019[45]), *PISA 2018 Database*, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/ (accessed 15 April 2021).

StatLink https://stat.link/6n0pal

The next chapters will resume this discussion. Chapter 3 will recommend that KHDA work with other Dubai government agencies to support low-fee schools and disadvantaged students. Chapters 4 and 5 will highlight the potential of more systematic data analysis, such as the one conducted in this chapter. Greater visibility on the state of student and teacher well-being in Dubai's private school sector will enable KHDA and other stakeholders to identify the sector's and/or individual school's main priorities.

Stakeholders, including parents and students, have high aspirations for their future

Stakeholders in Dubai's private school sector are committed to achieving the highest standards and there is a collective and constant drive for improvement and innovation. According to anecdotal evidence, parents hold high expectations for their children's progression and achievements. Results from PISA's student questionnaire indicate that students also set ambitious goals for themselves. Over 80% of students expect to complete higher education (ISCED 5A or 6) (OECD average: 69%) (OECD, 2019[45]). However, data show some differences across students, with Emiratis reporting lower expectations for their future. Only 70% expect to complete a university degree. High aspirations can incentivise stakeholders to work hard to reach their goals and, in turn, encourage improvements. For example, longitudinal studies have demonstrated that students with ambitious objectives tend to be more determined and focused, which can support higher achievement levels (OECD, 2017[25]). However, this mentality can give rise to – as it seems to be the case in Dubai – a high-pressure culture, which for many stakeholders is one of the main sources of their stress and anxiety (see full discussion in Chapter 5).

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Notes

[1] The UAE is comprised of 7 Emirates: Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah and Umm al-Quwain.

[2] In 2016, the UAE government created the post of Minister of State for Happiness. Following the Cabinet reshuffle in 2017, the Minister of State for Happiness also incorporated the “well-being portfolio”. In the 2020 cabinet reshuffle, the "Quality of Life and Happiness" portfolio was transferred to Ministry of Community Development.

[3] Based on the exchange rate from 8 November 2021 (1 AED = 0.23546 EUR), https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?Amount=1&From=EUR&To=AED.

[4] While there are some exceptions, for the most part, expatriate students are not able to attend public schools. Emirati students do not pay any fees to attend public schools.

[5] A government-dependent private school receives 50% or more of its core funding from government agencies or its teaching personnel are paid by a government agency. The term “government-dependent” refers only to the degree of a private institution’s dependence on funding from government sources, and not to the degree of government direction or regulation.

[6] It is unclear how teachers understood this question. Therefore, teachers who reported undertaking their studies abroad may be referring to having completed their entire degree in another country or studied abroad for a short period of time.

[7] In 2019, four provinces/municipalities of China that participated in the study – Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang (B-S-J-Z).

[8] In PISA 2009 cycle, Dubai participated as a separate economy, while the other Emirates participated in PISA 2009+. The PISA 2009+ participants administered the same assessments and were subject to the same technical and quality standards as their PISA 2009 counterparts. However, the PISA 2009+ assessments were administered in 2010. The data from Dubai and the other Emirates have been merged in the PISA 2009 database and are reported as a single entity: the United Arab Emirates. With the exception of Dubai, data cannot be disaggregated at the Emirate level.

2. Well-being policies and practices in education: an overview

This chapter provides an overview of the Emirate of Dubai's well-being journey thus far, as well as the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA)'s current approach to well-being in schools. In addition, this chapter presents the OECD's analytical lenses, and discusses how it has been applied to Dubai's private school sector.

Introduction

In recent years, the Emirate of Dubai has been placing a stronger emphasis on people's well-being with the aim of making Dubai "an inclusive and cohesive society … that is the preferred place to live, work and visit and a pivotal hub in the global economy" (Government of Dubai - The Executive Council, 2021[1]). As part of this approach, KHDA and Dubai's private schools have introduced a number of initiatives to help raise awareness, measure and support students' and staff's well-being. This report analyses the well-being policies and practices implemented in Dubai's private school sector, looking at the strengths and challenges of the approach taken in Dubai, and discussing potential steps that could support higher levels of well-being in the Emirate's private school sector. As background for the discussion that follows, this chapter provides an overview of the Emirate's journey thus far, presenting KHDA's current approach to well-being in schools. In addition, the next sections discuss the OECD's analytical lenses, and how it has been applied to Dubai's socio-economic context.

Well-being: the OECD's perspective

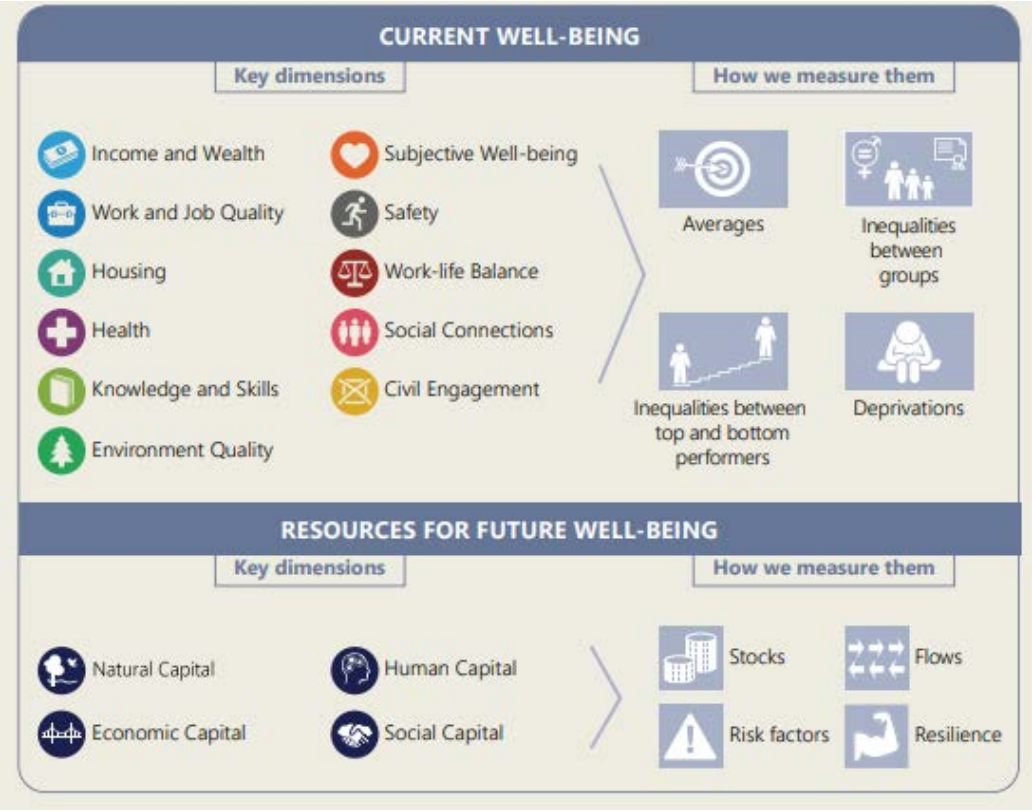
The notion of well-being has gained increasing traction over the last 20 years as an agenda for research, measurement and policy. The OECD has played a prominent role on all of these fronts. It has contributed to the development of better metrics, quality data and comparable indicators. There is now a solid and well-established case for looking "beyond GDP", using well-being metrics in the policy process and assessing economic growth in terms of its impact on people's well-being and on societies' standard of living.

But what is well-being? It can be defined as the quality of people's lives and their standard of living. It is often quantified both via objective measures, such as household income, educational resources and health status, and via subjective indicators such as experienced affect (or emotions), perceptions of quality of life and life satisfaction (OECD, 2019[2]). According to the OECD Well-Being Framework (see Figure 2.1 below), well-being is defined in terms of:

1. **Material Living Conditions and Quality of Life**, captured through 11 different dimensions that shape people's lives. These dimensions are: income and wealth, work and job quality, housing, health, work-life balance, knowledge and skills, social connections, civic engagement, environment quality, safety and subjective well-being;
2. Four types of **assets** (natural, economic, human and social) that drive well-being over time (Llena-Nozal, Martin and Murtin, 2019[3]).

The most notable features of the OECD Well-Being Framework are that: 1) its dimensions and indicators are people-focused rather than economy-focused; 2) it captures outcomes (i.e. life conditions and experiences) as opposed to inputs (i.e. health status rather than health care spending) or outputs (i.e. number of patients treated); 3) it pays attention not only to averages but also to the distribution of outcomes; and 4) it takes account of both the objective and subjective aspects (i.e. people's evaluations) of well-being. (Llena-Nozal, Martin and Murtin, 2019[3]).

Figure 2.1. The OECD Well-Being Framework



Source: (OECD, 2020[4]), *How's Life? 2020: Measuring Well-being*, https://doi.org/10.1787/9870c393-en.

And why does well-being matter for policy? A focus on well-being provides policymakers with a broader picture of the state of their country/jurisdiction and the way in which its economy is performing for its population. The potential of this broader approach for improving policy decisions and outcomes is significant. Through a broader focus on multi-dimensional well-being, policymakers can better identify the areas of good performance, detect challenges and areas of strain at an early stage and understand the way in which different components of well-being interact within their specific national contexts. This can allow them to set priorities more effectively, better assess the cost and benefits of different policy options and select levers for high-impact action (Llena-Nozal, Martin and Murtin, 2019[3]). The following chapters draw on the OECD Well-Being Framework as well as other analytical frameworks to discuss how well-being emerges and is conceptualised in education and education policy.

Dubai's private school sector well-being journey

Inspired by the vision of the UAE's and Dubai's leadership and the responses from staff engagement surveys, KHDA embarked on a "well-being journey" to increase levels of happiness and well-being among all stakeholder groups in Dubai's private school sector. The journey first began within the organisation itself, with the adoption of a strengths-based system approach, a reprioritisation of KHDA's strategy as well as fundamental changes to the organisational culture based on the New Economics Foundation's work on "5 ways to wellbeing" (Aked et al., 2008[5]). Once shifts in the organisation's internal processes and culture had effectively bedded down, KHDA began to look outwards, disseminating positive practices across the private sector and inviting other stakeholders, including school leaders, teachers, parents and students, to join their journey.

As part of this journey, KHDA leveraged existing initiatives in Dubai, such as the Lighthouse project, What Works and What Works X events (see Box 3.6 in Chapter 3). In addition, the organisation drew on emerging practices worldwide, notably a strengths-based approach to education (see Box 2.1) (KHDA, 2020[6]). As part of these efforts, KHDA collaborated with a number of institutions and experts, including the International Positive Education Network, and The Wellbeing Lab (KHDA, 2020[6]). KHDA also developed new programmes to measure well-being levels, such as the Dubai Student Well-being Census (see Box 3.5 in Chapter 3 and the Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey (see Chapter 4).

All the while, KHDA's approach to well-being policies and practices has not only recognised, but also embraced the diversity of the sector. With the understanding that a "one size fits all" approach to well-being cannot and should not be imposed in Dubai's private sector, KHDA has avoided a directive style or a narrow definition of well-being, opting instead for an "organic" adoption of well-being in Dubai's private education sector (KHDA, 2020[6]). Under this model, schools and other education stakeholders have the autonomy to take action based on their own priorities, resources and interests. In this context, KHDA has focused on building stakeholders' well-being literacy, and disseminating what has worked – or is believed to have worked – encouraging others to follow suit.

As will be discussed in the next chapters, the results of this approach have been remarkable in many respects. KHDA's efforts have helped raise awareness of the importance of well-being across the sector. More importantly, it has encouraged school leaders, teachers, parents and students to better understand the concept of well-being, not only in the form of daily habits but also as a long-term commitment for themselves and the system as a whole.

However, evidence from the OECD fact-finding mission indicates that, in spite of their best efforts and intentions, stakeholders often lack the necessary guidance, information, skills or resources to implement meaningful and impactful well-being policies and practices. This suggests that KHDA's "organic" approach may be nearing its limit in many respects and that more will be needed to translate stakeholders' growing understanding and commitment into more effective change in Dubai's classrooms and schools that supports improvements. This review argues that to succeed in the next steps of its journey, KHDA will need to consider new strategies, and a re-examination of the organisation's priorities, activities and stakeholder engagement methods.

Box 2.1. What is positive education?

Positive education has been defined as: "the application of the science of wellbeing and principles of positive psychology within education which enhances student, staff and wider community wellbeing – both in boosting wellbeing and reducing ill-being" (Positive Education Schools Association (PESA), 2020[7]) The positive education approach acknowledges "the importance of, and teach(es) the skills required to enhance wellbeing and character development as an essential component of academic achievement and personal flourishing over an individual's lifetime" (Norrish et al., 2013[8]).

Despite its growing popularity, the positive education approach is not fully established – or indeed unanimously accepted by education experts (see Box 5.2 in Chapter 5) – as a pedagogical model. Early adopters of the positive education approach have drawn on different frameworks, including:

- The PERMA(H/+) framework which consists of: Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment and Physical Health. (Positive Psychology Center, Penn Arts & Science, 2021[9])
- Five-ways of well-being that identifies five key actions to improve well-being: connect, be active, take notice, keep learning, and give (Aked et al., 2008[5]).

- The PROSPER framework that highlights Positivity, Relationships, Outcomes, Strengths, Purpose, Engagement and Resilience (Noble and McGrath, 2015[10]).

Similarly, various positive education models have promoted different interventions and strategies, although some features appear common across the board, including:

- Appreciative inquiry or strengths-based approach: positive education is built on an approach to change that focuses on what is working well, and stakeholders' strengths. KHDA is an advocate of this approach.
- Character development: at the core of positive education is the understanding that values and character traits can be taught and developed, and that the "formation of character" should be at the heart of schooling.
- Mindfulness: those who practice mindfulness exercises can become more attentive of their thoughts and surroundings. Mindfulness interventions include exercises on breathing, body scans, movement, and sensorimotor awareness (Napoli, Krech and Holley, 2005[11]). Meta-analyses show that regular mindfulness practice can improve cognitive performance as well as physical and psychological health and overall well-being (Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz and Walach, 2014[12]) (OECD, 2018[13]) (Weare, 2013[14]) (Burke et al., 2009[15]).
- Staff well-being: there is growing recognition of the importance of staff well-being. Many positive education manuals and frameworks highlight the importance of providing teachers and school staff with the knowledge, skills and tools they need to look after their own well-being and that of their colleagues.
- Student agency: positive education calls for students to take an active role in their own learning and well-being. This can involve opportunities for authentic student decision-making, as well as the teaching of social and emotional skills (Positive Education Schools Association (PESA), 2020[7])

It is important to note that many of these elements were not born from or are exclusive to the positive education approach.

Positive education in Dubai

KHDA has adopted a strengths-based approach to education and well-being (discussed above). Positive education, on the other hand, has not been formally taken up by the organisation. Nevertheless, since 2016-17, KHDA has partnered with a number of institutions and experts that promote a strengths-based approach, including the International Positive Education Network, the Geelong Grammar School, and The Wellbeing Lab. Together with these partners, KHDA has helped organise conferences, meetings, workshops for principals, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders to develop their knowledge and skills. As a result, many schools and school networks have since committed to the tenets of positive education, embedding it into their curricula, appointing Heads of Positive Education and/or Well-being champions, re-thinking student discipline policies, renovating the school's physical environment (e.g. mindfulness and well-being rooms), training their staff and introducing new practices and initiatives (e.g. positive affirmation and gratitude exercises) (KHDA, 2020[6]). Despite the fact that no specific positive education approach or products have been officially endorsed by KHDA, stakeholder interviews revealed the widespread influence of this specific approach among KHDA's leadership and staff.

An overview of the OECD's analytical lenses

High levels of happiness and well-being have wide benefits for individuals, and more broadly for the performance of education systems, the economy and society. Conversely, low levels of welfare can

negatively impact teaching and learning and jeopardise individuals' and countries' present and future. As a result, increasing attention is being given by policymakers and educators to how the education system can support students', teachers' and other non-teaching staff's well-being.

As measures to monitor and strengthen well-being in education have emerged across the OECD and beyond, it has become possible to take a comparative perspective on the matter, benchmarking countries' experiences with well-being policies, identifying key policy challenges and how they relate to countries and economies' wider socio-economic context, as well as promising practices. At the national or local level, looking beyond one's borders can help inform more effective policy design, implementation and monitoring, all of which can, in turn, ultimately, help strengthen well-being in education. However, undertaking any type of comparative review meaningfully requires caution, and in the specific case of well-being policies and practices, careful consideration of:

- **The actors/players/stakeholders involved**: More so than other education policies, the broad nature of the well-being issue implies a large number of stakeholders, including, for example, teachers, school leaders, and relevant government authorities (e.g. health and education agencies). Stakeholders can be both active agents, meaning players involved in the design and implementation of policies, and/or passive players, in that they are the target or beneficiary of certain policies.
- **The environment/context in which they operate and co-exist:** The manner in which stakeholders interact; including who leads efforts or monitors the impact of policies, how and whether collaborative work is undertaken, vary across countries and sub-national entities depending on the regulations, processes and culture that exist in the environment in which they operate (see Figure 2 in the Key Insights).
- **The levers/channels on which well-being policies and practices draw:** different levers and channels can (and should) be leveraged to support well-being policies and practices in education. As a reference, Figure 2.2 illustrates how they can be categorised under the following dimensions of an effective education policy approach:
    - **Smart policy design and implementation:** this implies a policy that is well justified, based on evidence, and supported by relevant and appropriately-aligned incentives and regulations.
    - **A conducive context:** effective policy design and implementation processes recognise the influence of the existing policy environment, the educational governance and institutional settings and external context.
    - **Effective and inclusive stakeholder engagement:** whether and how key stakeholders are recognised and included in the policy design and implementation processes, is crucial to its success. It is equally important to build their capacity and knowledge to ensure the effectiveness of the policy.

As shown in Figure 2.2, the different policy levers are interconnected and interdependent. A successful policy approach to well-being in education requires a combination of these different channels, often at different points of the policy cycle. For example, strategies and visions can offer common orientation and goals, and define stakeholders' roles and responsibilities. This is particularly relevant at the starting point of any reform process. It is important that these types of interventions be accompanied by relevant services and resources (e.g. psychological counselling and guidelines) that enable stakeholders to successfully implement this vision.

The OECD's analytical lenses applied to Dubai's private school sector

With the aim of providing relevant and appropriate policy considerations to the Emirate of Dubai, the analysis undertaken in this review accounts for the specificities of Dubai's context. The particularities of the Emirate's social and economic environment (e.g. diversity of the school system and population) as well

as the private school sector environment (e.g. wide disparities between schools) – discussed in detail in Chapter 1 – were carefully considered when developing the diagnosis and policy recommendations.

Other deliberations were taken when applying the OECD's analytical lenses to Dubai's private school sector. For example, although the OECD's analysis accounts for the multiple stakeholders in Dubai's private school sector, from students and families to the school leaders and governing boards, and the multiple government agencies (see Figure 1 in the Key Insights), the analysis has focused predominantly on three stakeholders: students (Chapter 5), teachers (Chapter 4) and school leaders as key school actors (Chapter 3). This selection is due to the fact that existing surveys and data collection tools (e.g. TALIS, PISA, the Dubai Student Wellbeing Census (DSWC) and the Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey) in Dubai have focused on these actors. While the welfare of other stakeholders (e.g. well-being counsellors, nurses, parents, governing board members) is also critically important and will be discussed to some extent, the information available on their subjective and objective well-being remains more limited thereby precluding a more in-depth analysis.

Importantly, as discussed above, this review has not only considered the different players as the *target* of well-being policies and practices, but also as *agents of change*. As argued in the next chapters, the OECD's diagnosis has revealed that this view is not yet as widely shared in Dubai as in some OECD countries and economies (e.g. Wales [United Kingdom]), in particular with regards to the perception of teachers and students as empowered actors. Chapters 4 and 5 offer some policy considerations to support KHDA in this endeavour.

As part of the OECD's diagnosis, the OECD's analytical lenses were used to categorise the existing well-being policies and practices in Dubai's private school sector, including those implemented by government agencies and those implemented by schools according to the main policy lever/channel leveraged. Table 2.1 provides a broad overview of this categorisation, following the colour coding from Figure 2.2.

Table 2.1. Categorisation of Dubai's well-being policies and practices according to policy levers

Dimensions	Key policy levers	Definition	Level	Examples of existing policies and practices
Smart policy design and implementation	Strategic vision and orientation	Visions and strategies that provide a common logic and understanding for well-being, propose a vision and goals for the sector, define roles and responsibilities	System or sector	- KHDA's informal dissemination of the positive education approach - KHDA strategy map
			School or school network	- Reports suggest some schools (or school groups) have developed their own well-being strategy or frameworks
	Regulatory mechanisms and standards	Regulations, laws, standards and other instruments that regulate the actions of stakeholders to support well-being	System or sector	- The UAE Child Protection Law - The UAE Labour Law - Executive Council Resolution No. 2 of 2017 regulating private schools in the Emirate of Dubai - DSIB School Inspection
			School or school network	- School-level regulations (e.g. code of conduct)
	Data collection and monitoring	Surveys, assessments and other tools that collect quantitative and qualitative data on well-being	System or sector	- KHDA's DSWC - PISA and TALIS - KHDA's Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing survey - KHDA's Ad-hoc student surveys (e.g. impact of COVID-19) - KHDA's Parent Survey
			School or school network	- Student surveys developed by schools - Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS) surveys - Staff consultations/surveys
	Research and analysis	Drawing on the evidence to research specific areas of interest, inform programmes and policies, report	System or sector	- Ad-hoc research projects being conducted by KHDA or external contractors - KHDA's Infographics on survey results
			School or school network	n/a
Inclusive and effective stakeholder engagement	Awareness raising and communication	Communication mechanisms and resources to disseminate knowledge, create awareness surrounding certain issues	System or sector	- UAE Bullying Prevention Week - Dubai Fitness Challenge 30x30 - KHDA's Teachers of Dubai - KHDA's Teach Together - KHDA's What Works, What Works X and Living Arabic - KHDA's Abundance
			School or school network	- School-level campaigns
	Training and capacity-building	Tools, courses and systems to develop skills among stakeholders	System or sector	- KHDA's Training for DSWC - KHDA's Positive Parenting Workshops
			School or school network	- Engaging with external experts to provide training or workshops on specific topics (e.g. mental health safeguarding) - Some schools organise seminars for students and/or staff
	Stakeholder participation and collaboration	Regular and/or ad-hoc committees, groups and/or platforms to enable stakeholder engagement and collaboration	System or sector	- The UAE Well-being Council - The Ministry of Youth's Youth Circles and Councils - The KHDA Student Summit on Well-being - On-going projects co-led by KHDA and students - KHDA's What Works, What Works X and Living Arabic - Teachers Social - Lighthouse
			School or school network	- Many schools have student councils and/or buddy programmes
A conducive context	Support services and resources	Tools and resources to promote well-being, identify issues, meet individual needs and address barriers	System or sector	- KHDA's New Days New Ways Platform - International Positive Education Network (IPEN) resources on offer to schools as part of the DSWC school report
			School or school network	- Some schools offer school counselling, and other forms of pastoral care
	Instruction and pedagogy	Curriculum, assessment and pedagogical strategies to help students develop cognitive and non-cognitive competences that support their overall well-being	System or sector	- UAE Moral Education Curriculum and assessment
			School or school network	- Reports suggest most school curricula incorporate dimensions of student well-being and health literacy to some extent

Note: the table is colour-coded to match Figure 2.2.

This exercise has revealed some of the sector's main strengths, as well as key policy gaps. As illustrated in Figure 2.2, KHDA has relied predominantly on three policy levers and channels to support well-being in Dubai's private school sector, namely awareness raising and communication; stakeholder participation and collaboration, and data collection and monitoring.

Figure 2.2. Main policy levers and channels used in Dubai's private school sector to support well-being

Note: Darker shades indicate policy levers that have been emphasised by stakeholders in Dubai.

Nevertheless, as will be argued in the following chapters, KHDA could be making fuller use of these levers in many respects. For example, while KHDA's measures have fostered collaboration between schools, more could be done to ensure stakeholders translate what they learned from these opportunities into their schools' daily lives (see Chapter 3). More attention could also be given to stakeholders' engagement in system- and sector-level policymaking and implementation (see Chapters 4 and 5). Moreover, KHDA's surveys – and their reporting - could be re-examined to ensure that they provide relevant data to stakeholders (see Chapters 3, 4 and 5).

As will be discussed in the next chapters, the OECD's analysis also reveals that certain policy channels are currently underutilised in the Emirate. The main reason for this is that, as a government agency that "does not regulate curriculum, pedagogy, assessment of teacher development" (Al Karam, n.d.[16]), KHDA's leadership considers many of the policy levers specified in Figure 2.2, such as instruction and pedagogy, to be off limits. Still, KHDA could take fuller advantage of other key levers at its disposal, including notably regulatory mechanisms and standards (see Chapters 3 and 4) and research and analysis (see Chapter 5) to provide stakeholders with the strategic orientation and evidence they require to strengthen well-being policies and practices in the sector. This means, for instance, directing stakeholders towards evidence-

based interventions and tools and re-thinking Dubai's accountability structure so as to encourage the adoption of effective well-being policies and practices.

Other stakeholders seem better positioned to use the remaining policy levers – e.g. instruction and pedagogy, support services and resources – to support higher levels of welfare across Dubai's private schools, including school governing boards and other government bodies (e.g. Dubai Health Authority, DHA). However, KHDA's orientation, incentives and advocacy will be key for this to take place effectively, supporting those that need it the most.

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3 Well-being in Dubai's private schools

What happens in schools is key to understanding whether students, teachers and staff enjoy good physical and mental health, and how happy and satisfied they are with different aspects of their life. School practices and initiatives can help – or indeed hinder – efforts to build a nurturing environment and positive social connections. This chapter looks at the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA)'s and Dubai's private schools' efforts to foster well-being in schools, highlighting some of the strengths and limitations of the current approach. Moreover, this chapter discusses some of the steps that could help ensure students and staff across the sector are adequately supported in the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the years to come.

Introduction

What happens in schools is key to understanding whether students, teachers and staff enjoy good physical and mental health, and how happy and satisfied they are with different aspects of their life. School practices and initiatives can help – or indeed, hinder – efforts to build a nurturing environment and positive social relations. A growing body of research shows that promoting well-being in schools can also strengthen teaching and learning, and lead to improvements in these areas.

Recognising the crucial role of schools in supporting well-being, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) has placed well-being at the centre of discussions on education quality. In recent years, the organisation has helped raise school actors' awareness on the topic and provided them with tools to better understand how their students and staff feel. In addition, KHDA has developed different platforms for schools to convene and learn from experts and from each other. As a result, most private schools in Dubai are now familiar with the issue, as well as with the positive education approaches, and many have introduced activities aimed at fostering the welfare of students and, increasingly, staff.

However, the extent to which schools have prioritised well-being, embedded it into their daily operations and culture and designed and implemented initiatives successfully differs significantly across the sector. Some schools – which the OECD review mission suggests are mostly high-fee institutions catering to wealthier families – have implemented whole-school approaches, in line with what evidence shows to be most effective at supporting children's development and building positive learning environments. On the other hand, evidence also gained from the OECD review mission suggests that capacity and resource issues have prevented other schools from adopting such comprehensive approaches, or from providing students and staff with the help they need. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has also taken its toll on individuals' well-being as well as on households' and schools' incomes, with particularly adverse effects on the least advantaged stakeholders.

Providing Dubai's private schools with the guidance and tools they need to develop effective policies and practices will be key to ensure students and staff across the sector are adequately supported in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic and the years to come. Policy Objective 3.1 argues that the most important step for KHDA and the sector will be to develop a comprehensive policy framework for well-being in Dubai's private schools. As will be discussed in Policy Objectives 3.3 and 3.4, schools that are struggling should also benefit from targeted support and capacity-development opportunities. Finally, in the medium term, rethinking the existing regulatory and accountability tools and processes can help both disseminate and embed a new approach to well-being and school improvement across the sector: one that recognises and embraces well-being as a key dimension of a school's mission and a measure of its quality. Dubai's accountability mechanisms proved to be key for the sector's improvement trajectory, and have the potential to be equally important for the Emirate's well-being journey (see Policy Objective 3.2).

The research on well-being in schools

This section presents a brief overview of the research on well-being in schools, including the definition and analytical framework that will be used in this chapter. While Chapters 4 and 5 will focus on teachers' and students' well-being respectively, this chapter will focus on what it means for a school to promote well-being, and the main factors associated with a positive school environment.

Definition and analytical framework

Well-being in schools is one of those concepts that is both difficult to define and measure, but everyone recognises it when they see it. In a school with a positive environment, students and teachers feel physically and emotionally safe; teachers are supportive, enthusiastic and responsive; the school community is built around healthy, respectful and co-operative relationships; and everyone looks after the school premises and each other, working together to develop a constructive school spirit. While the recipe

for ensuring high levels of well-being in a school has many ingredients, two main factors are worth highlighting. The first is the school's climate, which is defined as a multidimensional construct that represents "virtually every aspect of the school experience" (Wang and Degol, 2016[1]). Researchers have not reached a consensus on what exactly makes up school climate, however four elements often emerge (Thapa et al., 2013[2]; Cohen J et al., 2009[3]; Wang and Degol, 2016[1]):

- **Safety**[1]: includes maladaptive behaviours, (such as disciplinary problems in the classroom) and truancy, as well as the rules, attitudes and school strategies related to these maladaptive behaviours.
- **Teaching and learning**: includes aspects of teaching, such as academic support and feedback, aspects of the curriculum, such as civic learning and socio-emotional skills, and indicators of teacher professional development and school leadership, such as teacher co-operation, teacher appraisal, administrative support and the school vision.
- **School community:** includes aspects of the school community such as student-teacher relationships and student co-operation, respect for diversity, parental involvement and community partnerships.
- **Institutional environment**: includes school resources, such as buildings, facilities, educational resources and technology, and indicators of the school organisation, such as class size and school size (OECD, 2020[4]).

A second factor is required, and it is the policies and practices that purposefully support key dimensions of students' and staff's quality of life, including:

- **Student well-being**: schools can directly and/or indirectly support all dimensions of student well-being – psychological, social, cognitive and physical (see Chapter 5). Examples of school initiatives that can support students include a well-designed timetable with sufficient breaks and opportunities for physical exercise and social interactions, open spaces for dialogue, provision of healthy meals in the school's cafeteria, establishment of anti-bullying and anti-discrimination rules, etc.
- **Staff well-being**: teachers' working environments – including job demands and resources – are a key factor shaping their well-being (see Chapter 4). Supportive measures include, for example, adequate salaries and working conditions, opportunities for staff's learning development, sufficient time for rest (including breaks during working hours and annual leave), open and trusting spaces for dialogue, etc.

Key features of schools and school systems with effective well-being practices

International evidence suggests that schools and school systems that have been successful in fostering well-being tend to have certain elements in common. This chapter's analysis and recommendations build on many of these features.

Schools tend to adopt a whole-of-school approach to the promotion of well-being

Research shows that a comprehensive, whole-school approach to well-being produces a wide range of benefits for schools and school actors (National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), 2019[5]; Weare and Gray, 2003[6]). A whole-school approach involves addressing the needs of learners, staff and the wider community through all aspects of school life – from the school's culture to the teaching that takes place in classrooms. It implies engaging all members of the school community in collective and collaborative action (Department for Education, 2018[7]) (IBE-UNESCO, n.d.[8]). This is illustrated in Figure 3.1 taken from Ireland's Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023 (National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), 2019[5]).

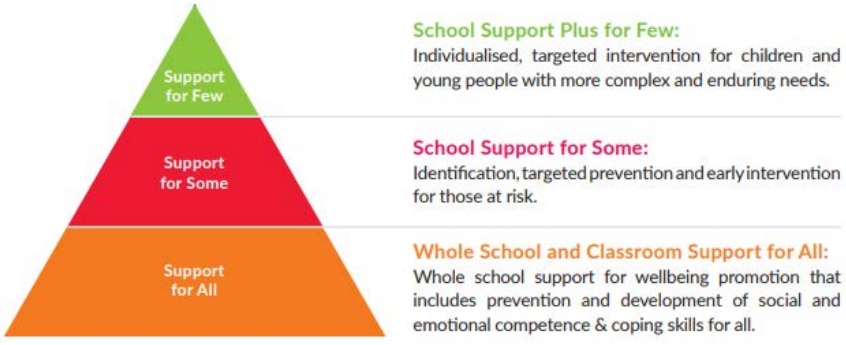
Figure 3.1. Ireland's whole-school approach

Source: (National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), 2019[5]), *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice - 2018-2023*, https://assets.gov.ie/24725/07cc07626f6a426eb6eab4c523fb2ee2.pdf (accessed 15 April 2021).

Schools have support systems that combine universal and targeted interventions, and often integrate the wide community

An important aspect of a whole-school approach is the recognition that individuals have different needs at different times. A combination of universal and targeted interventions, undertaken within the classroom and/or at the school level, can ensure that these needs are effectively met. There are multiple ways of implementing this principle in schools. For example, the Irish Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice proposes a support continuum: (i) whole school and classroom support for all; (ii) school support for some (at risk); and, (iii) school support plus for few (with more complex and enduring needs) (see Figure 3.2) (National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), 2019[5]).

Figure 3.2. Continuum of support



Source: (National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), 2019[5]), *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice - 2018-2023*, https://assets.gov.ie/24725/07cc07626f6a426eb6eab4c523fb2ee2.pdf (accessed 15 April 2021).

Partnerships between schools and education systems with mental health professionals and medical practitioners are critical. Even in schools and school systems with high technical capacity, certain specialised interventions need to be undertaken by experts. In many OECD countries the school serves as a location for students and staff to access important health services and information (e.g. vaccinations, eyesight and nutrition screening). In other systems, students or staff may be referred to health centres. Regardless of the approach, there is a need for coherence and coordination between health and education authorities and providers.

Well-being is part of the school culture

In institutions and systems where well-being is embedded into the school ethos and vision, stakeholders are committed to common values, aspirations and expectations. This shared vision gives schools a sense of direction and serves as a motivating force for sustained and collective action (OECD, 2016[9]). Under these circumstances, stakeholders will tend to be more attuned to and reflect on the ways in which different practices and interventions – from the school's curriculum to its physical environment – support or hinder individuals' well-being. While processes and mechanisms can be put in place to reflect these concerns systematically and deliberately (e.g. performance indicators for monitoring the impact of a new measure), when well-being is a pervasive element of the school's culture, they are also likely to surface organically as part of informal exchanges (e.g. as part of a group discussion).

Well-being practices are integrated in regular school planning and activities

International experience has highlighted the value of promoting well-being through *all* aspects of school life at *all* times, encompassing every environment, connection and activity that takes place within a school. This means that the teaching and learning that takes place in classrooms should enable students' cognitive, social and emotional development and build students' well-being and health literacy (discussed in depth in Chapter 5). In addition, warm, respectful and trusting social relationships should be the norm, helping support individuals' engagement with school and positive emotions. Finally, the school's premises and policies should allow and encourage stakeholders to have healthy lifestyles.

For example, a school may consider introducing relaxation activities to support students' well-being, in particular before high-stakes exams. While similar initiatives might prove beneficial in some cases, if students' overall workload and the pressure put on them by teachers and parents remain the same, these activities are unlikely to have any real and lasting impact. In fact, they might even increase students' level of anxiety and stress if they are left with little time for other important activities. Embedding a comprehensive approach to well-being in schools' *regular* activities and planning can help prevent such disincentives or misalignments and be more effective at strengthening well-being in schools.

Well-being makes up a key component of staff's professional development

School actors and, in particular, school leaders, teachers and support staff, often lead the design and implementation of well-being policies and practices. For staff, this can prove to be quite challenging, in particular if they are unfamiliar with the topic or asked to take on responsibilities and tasks they are untrained for. In these cases, high-quality training is key to ensure staff have the knowledge and skills needed to carry out new practices successfully (see Box 3.1 for a discussion on effective professional learning practices). This includes, for example, training on how to help build students' social and emotional skills. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, professional learning also fosters staff's professional development and identity, which helps strengthen their well-being. In most cases, training is provided by staff within the school, or in partnership with external specialised experts or centres inside or outside the school.

Box 3.1. What makes for effective professional learning?

In a systematic review of the empirical literature, Darling-Hammond (2017[10]) finds that successful professional development with demonstrated benefits for student learning generally displays one or more of the following seven characteristics:

1. It is content-focused.
2. It incorporates active learning utilising adult learning theory.
3. It supports collaboration, typically in job-embedded contexts.
4. It uses models and modelling of effective practice.
5. It provides coaching and expert support.
6. It offers opportunities for feedback and reflection.
7. It is of sustained duration.

A significant body of research continues to refine our understanding of the features that make continuous professional learning (CPL) activities effective and of the mechanisms that might explain why and when specific features of professional learning matter the most. Yet, despite significant progress, there is no consensus on a set of necessary or sufficient characteristics that could ensure the success of teachers' learning. In fact, recent evidence has cast doubt on the notion that specific design features could be reliable predictors of the success of professional learning programmes across contexts.

While there may not be a definitive set of professional learning practices that work, or a single scale to measure the effectiveness of different professional learning activities, the research overwhelmingly supports a shift away from passive, standardised, one-off seminar-style courses. Learning opportunities that fail to provide teachers with structured opportunities to understand, practice and reflect on the implications of the new approaches and practices they learnt are unlikely to be effective.

Source: (Boeskens, Nusche and Yurita, n.d.[11]), *Policies to support teachers' continuing professional learning: a conceptual framework and mapping of OECD data*, https://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=EDU/WKP(2020)23&docLanguage=En (accessed 15 April 2021).

Drawing on data and evidence can support greater effectiveness of well-being practices and policies.

Effective use of data and evidence by teachers, school leaders and support staff is central to supporting well-being in schools. Information collected through school inspections, student and/or staff surveys, assessments, and other sources support evidence-informed action. Data collection and research tools can help stakeholders identify issues and at-risk groups, and assess the impact of interventions. International evidence and local expertise can also offer important insights into what works (or doesn't). This can enable the development of appropriate and successful interventions. The process of collecting, reflecting on and exchanging knowledge and data is – in and of itself – beneficial for the school as an organisation, because it helps build collective knowledge and strengthen social ties and collaboration. However, using data and evidence to improve day-to-day practices can be a complex undertaking, and often requires a combination of:

- structures for regular dialogue and knowledge exchange to be in place
- systems for monitoring progress and impact to be developed
- information to be easily available and accessed

- staff to have the capacity to analyse and use multiple sources of data
- processes for reflection, self-assessment and evaluation to be established (OECD, 2016[9]).

Well-being in Dubai's private schools: key features and trends

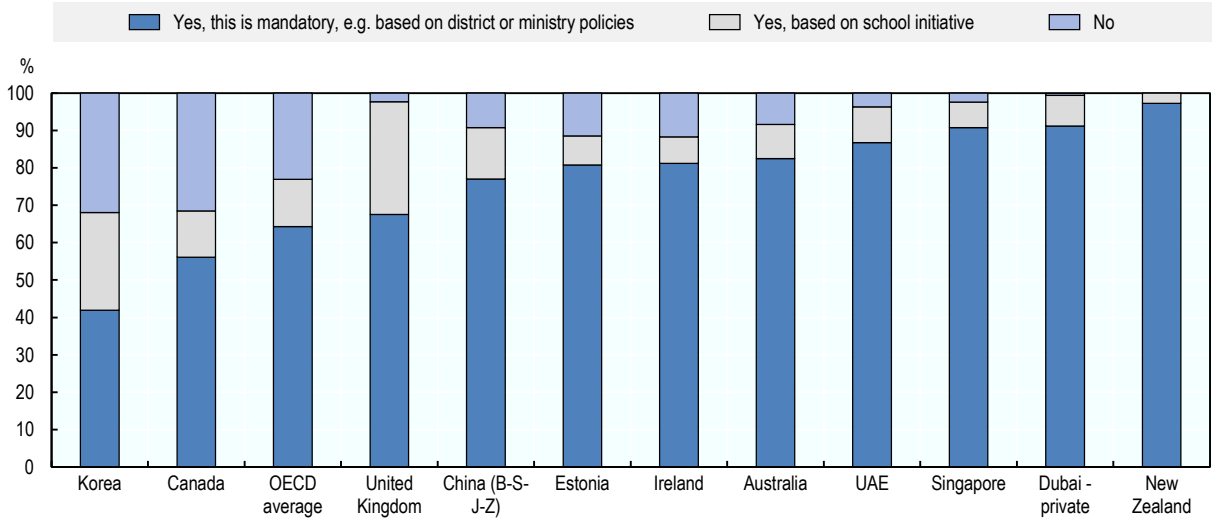
An analysis of well-being policies and practices in Dubai's private schools needs first to examine some key features of the sector as well as relevant trends that impact the context in which they operate. This section examines the sector vis-à-vis the analytical framework described above. See Table 1.1 in Chapter 1 for a discussion on the methodology and main data sources used for this purpose.

A well-established school inspection process has created a culture of improvement and transparency

Dubai's private schools[2] are inspected on an annual basis by the Dubai Schools Inspections Bureau (DSIB), following standards and indicators set out in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) School Inspection Framework 2015-16. Among the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 participants, Dubai and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as a whole had some of the most evaluated schools and stand above the OECD average (see Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3. External evaluation in schools, PISA 2018

Percentage of students in schools whose principal reported that external evaluation is in place in the school



Notes: Countries ordered by the share of students in schools whose principal reported that external evaluation is in place in the school and is mandatory (smallest to largest). B-S-J-Z (China) is an acronym for the four Chinese provinces that participated in PISA 2018: Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang

Source: OECD (2020[4]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume V): Effective Policies, Successful Schools*, https://doi.org/10.1787/ca768d40-en.

StatLink https://stat.link/xc32er

Overall, the current UAE's school evaluation process compares well to those in well-established school evaluation systems with strong accountability models, such as the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The key strengths of the DSIB School Inspection approach are:

- The School Inspection Framework draws on the school quality standards from well-established European evaluation agencies such as Ofsted in England (United Kingdom) and covers some of

the key features of a whole-school approach to well-being outlined above (e.g. student-teacher relationships, curricula, partnership with parents and the community).

- The inspection process encourages schools to reflect on their strengths and issues. This helps foster a culture of self-evaluation and self-improvement.
- Inspection uses a variety of sources of information (e.g. classroom observations, interviews, classroom documents and school performance outcomes). This enables a more comprehensive picture of schools' culture and environment, which are key factors in well-being.
- Evaluation results are made public, and allow stakeholders to compare schools by curriculum type, performance and other criteria. This is particularly important to inform school choice in a large private system.
- School evaluation results are used to regulate schools' enrolment policies. A school that receives a score of "weak" in the school evaluation cannot enrol Emirati students.
- School evaluation results are tied to tuition fees. While all private schools in Dubai receive a similar percentage raise in fees, those that witnessed improvements in the school evaluation results are able to increase fees further than others.
- The school quality standards have played a key role in creating a unified vision for school quality, with minimum requirements for all schools regardless of sector, fee level or curriculum (OECD, 2019[12]).

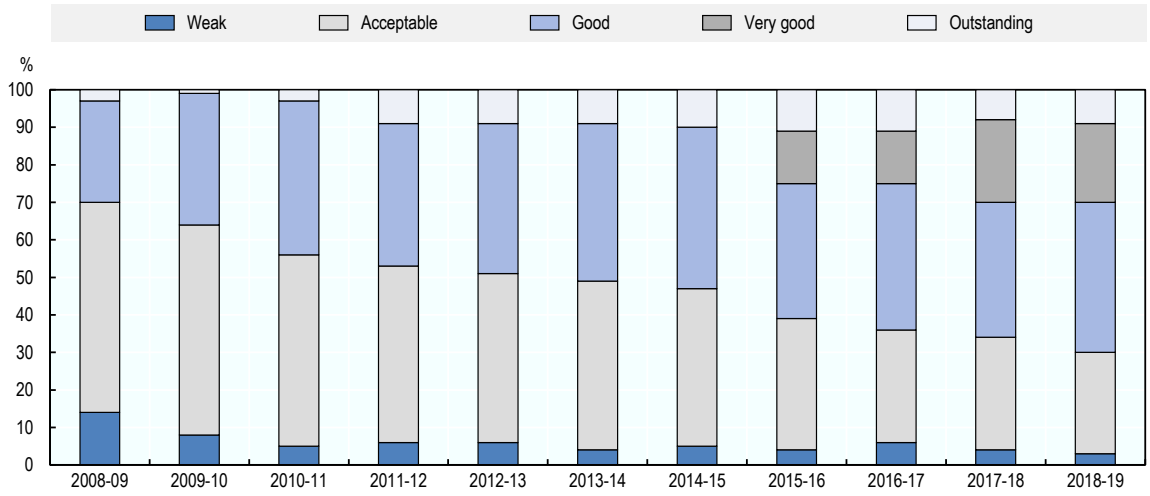
Despite the many strengths of the system, there is growing awareness of the need to update the framework and approach to align to emerging priorities and needs. In particular, since the UAE School Inspection Framework was published in 2015-16, well-being has become a much higher priority for the sector. For this reason, KHDA's leadership and other key stakeholders believe that the framework and process should give greater attention to school's ability and efforts to nurture students' well-being and develop a positive environment for all. At the time of drafting, the UAE School Inspection Framework was being revised by the key education bodies in the country. Policy Objective 3.2 raises key considerations that can help inform this process.

School inspection results have improved in the last decade

The performance of schools has been improving since the first rounds of inspections. While the share of schools described as "weak" fell from 14% in 2008-09 to 3% in 2018-19[3], the share of "outstanding" schools rose from 3% to 9% in the same time period. This is in line with improvements in students' average outcomes international student assessments discussed in Chapter 1 (see Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4. School inspection ratings, 2008-19

Proportion of students in private schools, by school inspection rating



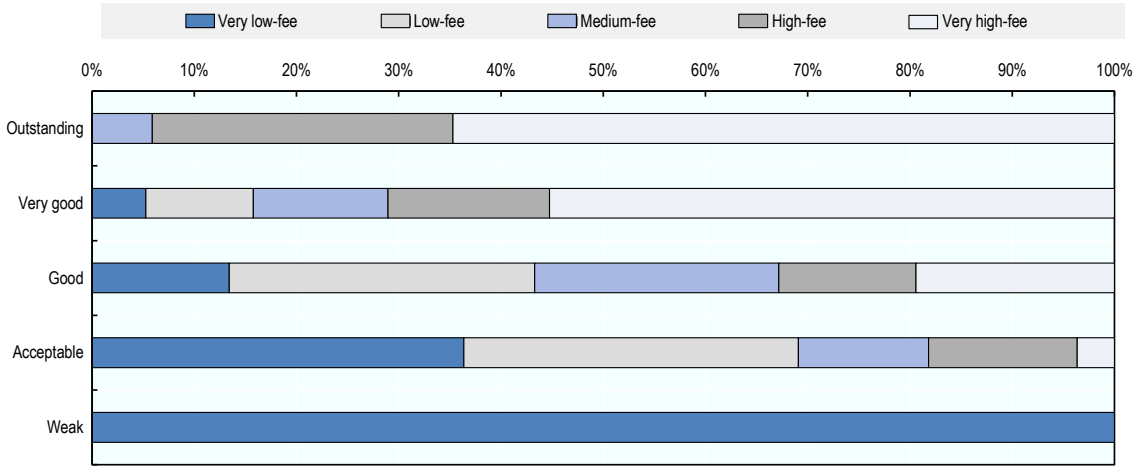
Notes: The six levels of quality on the UAE School Inspection Framework 2015-16 scale are defined as follows: outstanding schools are those in which the quality of performance substantially exceeds the expectation of the UAE; very good schools are those in which the quality of performance exceeds the expectation of the UAE; good schools are those that meet the expectation of the UAE (this is the expected level for every school in the UAE); acceptable schools meet the minimum level of quality required in the UAE; and weak schools are those in which the quality of performance is below expectations.
The "very good" rating was added when the UAE School Inspection Framework in 2015-16.
Source: (DSIB, 2019[13]), *Dubai School Inspection Bureau - Inspection key Findings 2018-2019*.

StatLink https://stat.link/gai74n

Evidence from DSIB inspections reveals a link between fee levels and inspection ratings (see Figure 3.5). "Weak" and "acceptable" schools are almost all low-fee schools (i.e. average annual fees below AED 20 000 [United Arab Emirates dirhams], equivalent to around EUR 4 700), whereas the majority of "very good" and "outstanding" schools tend to be high-fee schools (i.e. average annual fees above AED 50 000, equivalent to around EUR 11 800). Many low-fee schools not only struggle to offer high-quality learning opportunities to their students, but also other important services and resources (e.g. career advice, psychological counselling). As will be discussed in this chapter, this has important implications for students' and staff's well-being.

Figure 3.5. Inspection ratings by school's tuition fee, 2019

Share of schools, according to tuition fees and school inspection results



Notes: Very low-fee schools refer to schools with tuition fees below AED 10 000/year (around EUR 2 350). Low-fee schools refer to schools with tuition fees between AED 10-20 000/year (EUR 2 350-4 700). Medium-fee schools refer to schools with tuition fees between AED 20-30 000/year (EUR 4 700-7 065). High-fee schools refer to schools with tuition fees between AED 30-50 000/year (EUR 7 065-11 800) and very high-fee refer to schools with tuition fees above AED 50 000/year (EUR 11 800).
Source: (DSIB, 2019[14]), *Private schools - DSIB School Inspection Results 2019*, https://www.khda.gov.ae/en/DSIB/Reports (accessed 15 June 2021); (DSIB, 2019[15]), *Inspection Key Findings - Academic Year 2018-2019*, https://www.khda.gov.ae/en/publications/article?id=10255 (accessed 15 June 2021).

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Policy Objective 3.1. Developing a unifying vision and policy framework for well-being in Dubai schools

In just a few years, KHDA's "well-being journey" (see Chapter 2) has had a remarkable impact on Dubai's private school sector. Stakeholders have not only developed an increasingly sophisticated understanding of well-being and its multiple dimensions, but also a greater appreciation for its importance. The majority of schools have developed programmes and activities to support and monitor students' and, in some cases, staff's well-being. However, significant differences have emerged across private schools. While a certain degree of variation is natural given the diversity of the system, evidence collected by the OECD review team suggests some reasons for concern. Not only do schools' visions of well-being differ significantly across the sector, so too does their commitment to the well-being agenda. In addition, there is significant heterogeneity with regards to the quality of school practices.

This review recommends that KHDA leverage its convening power to work with schools to define a unified framework for well-being in Dubai's private school system. This would help ensure that stakeholders are working towards common goals and that students and staff well-being needs are effectively addressed by schools across the sector.

Opportunities

Schools benefit from a broad understanding of well-being and a common language

As discussed in Chapter 2, KHDA has adopted a strengths-based system approach and also drawn heavily on positive education (see Box 2.1 in Chapter 2). In addition to partnering with a number of institutions and experts that promote these approaches, such as the International Positive Education Network, KHDA has also rolled out several well-being initiatives and data collection surveys that are closely related to – if not explicitly aligned with – the positive education approach (see Table 3.1). However, without ever imposing any definition of or specific approach to well-being in the sector, KHDA has been able to raise awareness of the topic among school actors and to introduce a common language around well-being, with which most stakeholders are now familiar.

Table 3.1. Domains and sub-domains of well-being in students and adults at school well-being surveys

	Domains	Sub-domains (examples)
Dubai Student Wellbeing Census	Demographic questions	Travel to school, language spoken, grade
	Social and emotional wellbeing	Happiness, optimism, satisfaction with life, perseverance
	Relationships and learning in school and at home	Connectedness to adults at school, connectedness to adults at home, school climate, school belonging
	Physical health and lifestyle	Overall health, eating and sleeping habits, use of electronic devices
	After school activities	Music and arts, physical activity
Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey	Personal context	Age, gender, nationality, role, education level
	Positive emotions	Feelings
	Engagement	Goals and stress levels, commitment
	Relationships	Respectful and trusting relationships, support
	Meaning	Flow, purpose
	Accomplishment	Job satisfaction, performance, confidence and motivation levels
	Health	Sleep quality, work hours

Source: (KHDA, 2020[16]), *Questionnaire – Dubai Student Wellbeing Census 2020*; (KHDA, 2021[17]), *Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey - 2020 results*, https://www.khda.gov.ae/CMS/WebParts/TextEditor/Documents/Adult-Wellbeing-Infographic-En.pdf (accessed 15 June 2021).

KHDA is uniquely positioned to drive change of practices and attitudes on well-being in the Dubai private school sector.

In the last decade, KHDA has initiated significant policy shifts in Dubai's private school sector and the UAE as a whole. As discussed in the World Bank's "The Road Traveled: Dubai's Journey Towards Improving Private Education" review, the high-stakes accountability structure that KHDA introduced in the late 2010s in Dubai, based on common quality standards and annual school inspections, was instrumental in raising transparency and building a culture of quality and improvement across schools.

In 2017, KHDA played a central role in raising the issue of inclusion across the country and changing schools' practices. Dubai's Inclusive Education Policy Framework established quality standards and guidance to schools on how to support the inclusion of students with special education needs and disabilities (often referred to as "people of determination" in the UAE) in mainstream schools. The Framework was enforced by drawing on KHDA's regulatory arms, in particular, school licensing and accreditation.

More recently, KHDA has relied on its convening role to inspire collaboration in the sector. Through What Works and What Works X events, the Lighthouse project and other initiatives, KHDA has helped connect schools and encourage peer-learning and dissemination of effective practices (to be discussed in further detail in Policy Objective 3.2).

These examples demonstrate KHDA's power to influence the sector and steer change. As part of its current well-being journey (see Chapter 2), KHDA has been relying on many of the same strategies and policy levers. For example, KHDA has leveraged its collaborative platforms and international partnerships to develop stakeholders' well-being literacy through seminars and presentations. As a result of these efforts, most schools embraced the well-being agenda to some degree, with many adopting the positive education approach and a few implementing a whole-school approach. Despite these achievements, this chapter argues that KHDA's "organic" approach may be nearing its limit in many respects and that, to succeed in the next steps of its journey, KHDA will need to consider new strategies, which require in turn a re-examination of the organisation's priorities, activities and stakeholder engagement methods.

Formally establishing KHDA's role in supporting student well-being could strengthen the well-being agenda

As established in Law No. 30 (2006), KHDA's mandate does not attribute any role to the organisation with regards to student well-being, or well-being in schools, more generally. Nevertheless, over time, its role and mission have evolved. One notable example is that KHDA's most recent strategy map now includes "increasing levels of happiness and well-being across all stakeholder groups" as one of the organisation's six objectives (see Box 1.3 in Chapter 1). However, in many respects, KHDA still opts for a more cautious approach, possibly because they are wary of being perceived as overstepping boundaries. This concern is understandable, and should not be dismissed. In a decentralised and relatively autonomous system (see Chapter 1), one of KHDA's most important leverages is its influence, and this depends on its ability to develop and sustain positive and constructive relationship with schools. A clearer mandate for KHDA on supporting well-being could not only help KHDA to fully embrace its new role, but also support its acceptance by stakeholders in the sector.

Areas for improvement

A coherent well-being vision for schools could support more strategic planning in schools and encourage improvements

While schools and other stakeholders seem to share a broad understanding of well-being and of a strengths-based approach – it is left to schools to develop their own visions of well-being. As a result, schools have developed very different perspectives. For example, social well-being (defined as the quality and depth of social interactions) is perceived very differently across schools. Schools have also opted to recognise and prioritise (or not) different well-being dimensions. Evidence from the fact-finding interviews revealed notably that, while most schools have a well-rounded and comprehensive approach to well-being, some have focused almost exclusively on one of its specific elements (e.g. students' and staff's physical fitness or students' cognitive development). The emergence and co-existence of different understandings of well-being is natural, in particular in such a diverse ecosystem, and not an issue per se. However, allowing some schools to sustain a narrow or superficial vision of and approach to well-being, one that overlooks key dimensions of individuals' quality of life (e.g. social relations, working conditions) or specific stakeholder groups, could have detrimental impacts on students' and staff's welfare.

Approaches to well-being also vary significantly in depth and relevance in Dubai's private education sector. Some schools interviewed by the OECD – mostly advantaged schools with highly-qualified staff and access to external support – had adopted holistic and whole-school approaches to well-being, which as discussed above, is linked to a wide range of benefits for schools and school actors. Others however have

adopted a more compartmentalised approach, introducing well-being activities as an add-on to regular schoolwork and activities. In these cases, stakeholders may not take well-being practices as seriously or prioritise them to the same extent.

Potential next steps

Establishing a policy framework for well-being in schools

Why this is needed

A framework for well-being across private schools in Dubai is needed to ensure a common understanding of well-being among stakeholders and elevate its importance in school policies and practices. A shared vision would also give schools a sense of direction. In addition, it could provide orientation to national efforts to revise the school inspection framework (see Policy Objective 3.2).

KHDA should consider developing a framework that sets out principles, standards and definitions, specifies stakeholders' roles and responsibilities, provides guidelines to schools and outlines goals. The Dubai's Inclusive Education Policy Framework can serve as a blueprint for a policy framework for well-being in schools, both in terms of the process of development and of the end document itself. The experience of OECD countries and economies, such as Ireland (Box 3.2) and Wales (United Kingdom), might also serve as a source of inspiration for this exercise.

Considerations

In developing a policy framework for well-being in schools, KHDA should consider the following:

- **Consulting schools and other key actors to define a common vision:** Similarly to what was done with the Dubai Inclusive Education Policy Framework, KHDA should consult with key Dubai agencies such as the Dubai Health Authority, as well as school actors, parents and the local community to ensure that the vision for well-being in Dubai schools reflects the views of key stakeholders and is appropriated by all stakeholders. While this is challenging in Dubai's culturally diverse school system where definitions and priorities may vary across communities, it is particularly important for the success of the sector's well-being journey.
- **Defining quality standards and indicators:** The policy framework should define what it means for a school to support and achieve high levels of well-being among students and staff. Standards, indicators and descriptors help clarify expectations for schools across different domains. The indicators should be aligned with the Dubai Student Wellbeing Census (DSWC) and Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Surveys. In the medium term, they should also be aligned with the Inspection Framework (see Policy Objective 3.2).

  The South Australian Wellbeing for Learning and Life Framework may serve as an interesting model for KHDA, as it establishes three main quality standards ("Engage", "Empower", "Inspire"), under which there is a set of sub-indicators and descriptors.
- **Defining roles and responsibilities:** The policy framework needs to clearly define schools' roles and responsibilities in ensuring the well-being of students and staff. These responsibilities should also be reinforced through KHDA's regulatory processes (see Policy Objective 3.2). The policy framework should also define the role and responsibilities of schools, KHDA and other governmental agencies in supporting student and staff well-being in schools. For example, it will be important to determine whether psychological counselling should be provided by schools and if so, whether to impose a requirement for the number of qualified psychologists a school would need to employ.

- **Providing guidelines on implementation:** The policy framework should also include guidelines to help schools design and implement meaningful well-being policies. See the full recommendation in Policy Objective 3.3.

Box 3.2. The Ireland Wellbeing in School Framework

The Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice was first published in 2018. According to this Framework, "wellbeing is present when a person realises their potential, is resilient in dealing with the normal stresses of their life, takes care of their physical wellbeing and has a sense of purpose, connection and belonging to a wider community. It is a fluid way of being and needs nurturing throughout life".

The Framework states that the school can be a powerful context for healthy development in enhancing protective factors and minimising risks. As well as being a place of academic learning, schools and centres for education provide are considered as providers of opportunities to develop friendships and social networks, to respectfully encounter diversity and access support structures.

The Framework comprises key areas of well-being in education on which schools are advised to focus, the indicators of success in each of these key areas, as well as statements of effective practice to guide schools. In addition, a suite of resources to support schools in this work has been developed. Schools and centres for education are asked to add well-being promotion (its development, implementation and review, including tracking impact) as a focus for their school self-evaluation.

Source: (National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), 2019[5]), *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice - 2018-2023*, https://assets.gov.ie/24725/07cc07626f6a426eb6eab4c523fb2ee2.pdf (accessed 15 April 2021).

Policy Objective 3.2. Aligning incentives and the accountability structure with the framework for well-being in schools

As the private sector regulator, KHDA can play a key role in keeping schools motivated and accountable for supporting the well-being of students and staff. Drawing on its compliance and regulatory tools more effectively, KHDA can encourage adoption of effective well-being policies and practices, such as a whole-school approach to well-being, and ensure that well-being becomes a genuine priority for schools. This will require rethinking the current inspection framework and process, and adapting other compliance and regulatory tools. The next section discusses the opportunities and areas for improvement upon which KHDA can base its efforts.

Opportunities

The current UAE School Inspection Framework focuses on some key aspects of student well-being

Similar to established school inspection systems in OECD countries, the UAE School Inspection Framework includes indicators related to student well-being, such as student health, socio-emotional development and relationships with adults in the school (see Table 3.2). These indicators are accompanied by descriptors. The high stakes associated with the school inspection and, with meeting or not the standards set in this Framework, have helped elevate the topic in Dubai and ensure that schools consider issues of students' well-being seriously in their planning and activities.

Table 3.2. Well-being in the current UAE School Inspection Framework

A selection of indicators taken from the current UAE School Inspection Framework

Domain	Indicators	Sub-indicators	Elements	Brief descriptors
1	Students' achievement	1.3 Learning skills	1.3.1 Students' engagement in, and responsibility for, their own learning	Students' enthusiasm and responsibility for their own learning in sustained ways
2	Students' personal and social development, and their innovation skills	2.1 Personal development	2.1.1 Attitudes	Attitude of the students, level of self-reliance, capacity to respond to critical feedback
			2.1.2 Behaviour	Level of self-discipline of the students, capacity to resolve problems, bullying
			2.1.3 Relationships	Relationships amongst students and with staff
			2.1.4 Adoption of safe and healthy lifestyles	Understanding by students of safe and healthy living, participation in activities that promote safe and healthy lifestyles
			2.1.5 Attendance and punctuality	Level of attendance and punctuality
		2.3 Social responsibility and innovation skills	2.3.1 Community involvement, volunteering and social contribution	Proactivity and responsibility of students, ability of students to initiate and lead activities
3	Teaching and assessment	3.1 Teaching for effective learning	3.1.4 Teaching strategies to meet the needs of individuals and groups of students	Meeting individual needs of students, providing support
			3.1.5 Teaching to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, innovation and independent learning skills	Development by teachers of students' critical thinking, problem-solving, innovation and independent learning skills
		3.2 Assessment	3.2.5 Teacher's knowledge of and support for students' learning	Provision of personalised support to students
4	Curriculum	4.1 Curriculum design and implementation	4.1.3 Curricular choices	Provide students with learning experiences that nurture their talents, interests and aspirations
			4.1.5 Review and development	The curriculum should meet the academic and personal development needs of all students
		4.2 Curriculum adaptation	4.2.2 Enhancement, enterprise and innovation	The curriculum should offer an excellent range of opportunities to motivate and inspire all students
5	The protection, care, guidance and support of students	5.1 Health and safety, including arrangements for child protection / safeguarding	5.1.1 Care, welfare and safeguarding of students, including child protection	Rigorous procedures of the school for the safeguarding of students including child protection. Protection of students from abuse, including bullying and via internet and the social media
			5.1.2 Arrangements to ensure health, safety and security	The school should provide a fully safe, hygienic and secure environment for students and staff
			5.1.5 Provision for, and promotion of, safe and healthy lifestyles	Promotion of safe and healthy living by the school
		5.2 Care and support	5.2.1 Staff-student relationships and behaviour management	Quality of staff-student relationships. Effectivity of systems and procedures for managing students' behaviour
			5.2.3 Identification of students with special educational needs and those who are gifted and/or talented	Capacity of the school's systems to identify students with special educational needs and those who are gifted and/or talented
			5.2.5 Guidance and support for all students	Monitoring of the well-being and personal development of students
6	Leadership and management	6.1 The effectiveness of leadership	6.1.2 Educational leadership	Effectiveness of leaders at all levels in establishing an inclusive school with a purposeful learning culture and in achieving very high standards of students' learning and personal development
			6.1.3 Relationships and communication	The school's distributed leadership should build capacity, empower individuals and teams, and create an ethos of collective responsibility

Source: Ministry of Education of the UAE (n.d.[18]), *United Arab Emirates School Inspection Framework,* https://www.moe.gov.ae/ar/importantlinks/inspection/publishingimages/frameworkbooken.pdf (accessed 9 May 2021).

A new UAE School Inspection Framework is currently under development. While stakeholders reported that the new framework will have a stronger focus on student well-being, the revised document was not publicly available at the time of drafting. The OECD review team was therefore unable to examine or assess its appropriateness.

DSIB inspectors discuss how schools use survey results to inform change

DSIB inspectors draw on schools' DSWC and Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing survey results during the yearly school inspection visit. Rather than focusing on schools' average results, the discussion is structured around what schools have learnt from the data, how they have used it in their school plan, and how they have evaluated what they have done. This approach is meant to help schools reflect on their performance and to integrate well-being actions within school regular planning and self-evaluation practices.

Schools seem to approve of DSIB's use of the DSWC evidence. In interviews, school actors reported that using their survey results to evaluate them would be unfair, because they believe that many factors associated with well-being are beyond their control. However, many complained that inspectors tend to give limited attention to plans and programmes developed to support students and staff's well-being. This may be due to the limited emphasis placed on well-being in the current inspection framework.

DSIB's distance learning evaluation tool emphasises student well-being as a key outcome of schooling

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of DSIB has shifted from an external evaluation role to one of support and guidance. In 2020, during school closures, KHDA and DSIB set up a distance learning evaluation tool to monitor and assess schools' performance and to provide guidance to schools on how to carry out their activities virtually. Unlike the usual school inspection process, the distance learning evaluation tool emphasises students' well-being as a central objective for schools, placing it at the same level as students learning outcomes. The new evaluation tool paves the way for a new UAE School Inspection Framework that places student well-being at the centre of schooling and as a key mission for all schools.

Schools with strong well-being practices are rewarded and given visibility at the Emirate level

KHDA gives visibility to schools with strong well-being practices to encourage action and elevate well-being in the education policy debate. Schools with promising or consolidated programmes have been invited to share their experiences with other schools through the What Works events and What Works X webinars. For example, one school rated as "outstanding", which pioneered a positive education approach, was invited to discuss their journey in a widely viewed What Works X webinar. In 2016, three schools were awarded the Happy and Healthy School Award for their well-being initiatives. This came with a prize and media coverage[4]. At the national level, the Well Schools Network awards the Well Schools Mark for distinguished schools to highlight their outstanding efforts in promoting positive education and well-being (UAE Ministry of Education, n.d.[19]). In a highly competitive market such as Dubai's private school sector, public recognition and publicity can serve as strong incentives for schools. However, without clear indicators of quality and selection criteria, there is a risk that KHDA is not always able to select and showcase relevant or effective examples.

Areas for improvement

Misalignments and gaps in the UAE School Inspection Framework need addressing

Although the current UAE School Inspection Framework includes some key indicators on student well-being (e.g. socio-emotional development, physical health and relationships), these are mostly seen as factors that support learning. As is the case in inspection frameworks in OECD countries, students learning progression and academic results are considered schools' main objectives; and student well-being is, at best, a secondary goal. Moreover, while the Inspection Framework covers most of the domains in the DSWC, the indicators differ substantially across both, which may lead to confusion (see Table 3.2). For example, indicator 2.1.2 of the Inspection Framework focuses on the behaviour of students and their capacity to be self-disciplined, to respond to others and to resolve difficulties, while the DSWC mentions other socio-emotional skills, such as emotion-regulation and life satisfaction. It is unclear whether revisions to the Framework will address these misalignments.

At present, the UAE School Inspection process puts little emphasis on teacher well-being

Despite growing evidence of the importance of teacher well-being for students' development and learning, few School Inspection systems pay adequate attention to the matter. This is also true of Dubai. Teacher well-being is not referred to explicitly in the current UAE's School Inspection Framework. As work to revise the UAE School Inspection Framework is ongoing, there is an opportunity for UAE stakeholders to introduce and emphasise this issue in the next version of the Framework. As will be argued in Chapter 4, teacher well-being deserves greater consideration from Dubai's school community. Giving schools a clear mandate for ensuring the welfare of its staff – in combination with a sector-wide teacher well-being strategy (proposed in Chapter 4) – could help ensure a comprehensive and coherent approach to well-being. In recent years, some education systems in the OECD have been taking steps in a similar direction to the one proposed here. For example, since 2019, England's (United Kingdom) Ofsted Education Inspection Framework has required inspectors to examine staff well-being as a measure of leadership and management's effectiveness (Box 3.3).

Box 3.3. Ofsted Education Inspection Framework – focus on staff well-being

In 2019, Ofsted – the evaluation agency in England (United Kingdom) – introduced a new requirement under its Education Inspection Framework's "Leadership and Management" section for leaders to engage effectively with their staff, to be aware and take account of the main pressures on them and be realistic and constructive in the way that they manage staff and their workload. It further provides that leaders will "protect their staff from bullying and harassment". To achieve an "outstanding" rating in this area, leaders should ensure that there is meaningful engagement with staff and that issues are identified and dealt with consistently, appropriately and quickly. To achieve a "good" rating, leaders should be aware of and take account of the main pressures on staff and be realistic and constructive in their management of staff. At present, the impact of Ofsted's new framework has encouraged effective policies and practices targeted at teachers and staff remains unclear.

Source: (Woodehouse and Barker, 2019[20]), *New Oftsed Education Insection Framework - an explanation of the inspection criteria relating to staff well-being and staff supervision within schools*, https://www.stoneking.co.uk/literature/e-bulletins/new-ofsted-education-inspection-framework-explanation-inspection-criteria (accessed 15 April 2021); (Ofsted, 2021[21]), *Education Inspection Framework*, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework/education-inspection-framework (accessed 15 April 2021).

An alleged overemphasis on students' outcomes in the inspection process puts pressure on schools, teachers and students, as does its frequency

In interviews with the OECD review team, many teachers and school principals explained that the inspection is a source of anxiety and stress for the school body. According to stakeholders, there are two main reasons for this. First, because schools need to repeatedly show high performance in the inspection process and, in some cases, obtain quick improvements. The latter can be particularly challenging, given that improvements take time to concretise. Second, because the preparation involved (e.g. collecting the documents and evidence to be reviewed and discussed during the inspection visits) can add to teachers and school leaders' already heavy workload. Given that school inspection takes place every year, school staff devote a considerable amount of time to this (see Chapter 4).

Moreover, the focus on preparing for inspection and on supporting students' learning in core academic subjects can limit the time schools devote to less valued domains, such as well-being. A narrow focus on students' demonstrable achievement (i.e. scores in standardised tests) can also lead schools to overlook the abilities and attitudes that enable students to develop as life-long, self-directed learners.

Inspectors require training and guidance on how to meaningfully engage with schools on well-being issues

DSIB school inspectors are highly-qualified officers, with years of training and experience in evaluating teaching and learning practices as well as school planning and policies. However, at present, few have the skills, knowledge and tools required to assess or guide schools' well-being policies and practices. Stakeholders also reported that few inspectors are familiar with the positive education approach and well-being initiatives that are currently being rolled out in many of Dubai's private schools. As the inspection framework is revised to align with the well-being in school policy framework, DSIB should pay close attention to training its staff and ensuring their understanding of the well-being indicators as well as the policies and practices that can support staff and student well-being. For example, the Welsh School Inspectorate, Estyn, provides inspectors with guidance handbooks and regular conferences in various areas of well-being and effective school practices (see Box 3.4).

Box 3.4. Supporting inspectors engage with well-being – Wales (United Kingdom)

Estyn, the Welsh School Inspectorate, provides its inspectors and peer inspectors with guidance on how to engage with and judge schools on their well-being practices through handbooks, supplementary resources, annual training, and monthly updates by e-mail. Estyn also holds regular conferences and events providing inspectors with case studies on effective practice in schools' well-being. These are identified as part of the school inspection process, and also published on Estyn's website.

Drawing on peer inspectors who are also regular practitioners is another way to bring up to date knowledge and understanding of well-being issues in schools to the process and to enable full-time inspectors to learn from their colleagues' experience.

Source: (Estyn, 2020[22]), *Inspection guidance*, https://www.estyn.gov.wales/inspection-process/inspection-guidance?sector=38 (accessed 15 June 2021).

Schools are under pressure from parents and school owners to improve student outcomes

As is the case elsewhere, parents in Dubai give a lot of importance to their children's academic achievement and progression, recognising this as a means to secure a bright future. However, school leaders and teachers reported that managing expectations and demands of overly involved, intrusive parents can be strenuous. Moreover, stakeholders reported that school owners and governors often prioritise schools' academic outcomes as a way to attract enrolment and, in doing so, raise revenue and profit. For example, reports suggest that school owners frequently ask school leadership to raise instruction time of core subjects and reduce breaks or extra-curricular activities (e.g. theatre, music). In contrast, considerably less emphasis is placed on issues and programmes that are seen as non-essential, but that are critical to supporting students' and staff's well-being. Fortunately, many of these trends have reportedly lessened since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic as awareness of the importance of well-being has grown.

Potential next steps

Educate parents and the local community to build a strong demand for well-being policies and practices in schools

Why this is needed

Parents have a lot of power over private schools in Dubai. Their views can influence school activities and planning significantly. Ensuring parents and others in the local community are aware of the importance of well-being for children's holistic development and future will be critical for well-being in school to become a reality.

Considerations

KHDA can play a direct and indirect role in educating parents and local actors on the importance of well-being in school:

- **Establishing an awareness-raising campaign to inform parents and local communities about well-being**. This communication strategy can include videos explaining why well-being matters and the role of schools in this task (defined in the policy framework for well-being in schools, as discussed under Policy Objective 3.1). Organising in-person meetings and/or webinars

can give stakeholders the opportunity to ask questions. The communication strategy should show the importance of well-being in improving learning outcomes and future life opportunities for students. This would help alleviate some parents' concern about well-being activities taking time away from learning core subjects.

- **Encouraging and guiding schools to better engage with parents on well-being**. Such support can take various forms. For example, KHDA can leverage What Works X to disseminate successful case studies and practices. Through its brokerage platform, KHDA can also make resources available to schools (e.g. brochures and testimonial videos).

Review the accountability and incentive structure to further embed a culture of well-being in schools

Why this is needed

As discussed in Chapter 1, the UAE School Inspection Framework and the DSIB's school visits have encouraged greater transparency and strengthened school quality in Dubai's private sector in recent years. Aligning Dubai's accountability and incentive structure with KHDA's vision for the sector will be a key step to foster a culture of well-being across the sector. This will be particularly important in the Dubai private school context, where school inspections can have high stakes for schools.

Considerations

When reviewing the accountability and incentive structure in Dubai's private sector, consideration should be given to:

- **Undertaking a thematic review of well-being**: Based on the experience from the 2020 DSIB virtual school inspection reviews and the well-being in schools framework (see Policy Objective 3.2), DSIB should consider undertaking a thematic review of school well-being practices and policies. The information collected could be brought together in a sector-wide report, and also help inform the other steps proposed below.

  A recent Estyn's report [Wales (United Kingdom)] offers an interesting example of the type of focus the inspection process could have and how the information collected can be disseminated (Estyn, 2019[23]). A thematic inspection on well-being would provide Dubai's leadership with high-quality qualitative evidence on the issue, allowing to complement the quantitative evidence KHDA already collects.
- **Advocating for a strong emphasis on well-being in the new UAE School Inspection Framework**: KHDA and DSIB can play a central role in raising the issue of student and staff well-being with the Ministry of Education, the body responsible for developing and issuing the new UAE School Inspection Framework. KHDA and DSIB can advocate for greater emphasis to be placed on well-being as a key dimension of school quality. While the new school inspection framework is still in review and the current UAE School Inspection Framework is still in use, an additional module could be added to the DSIB inspection supplement, enabling inspectors to look at some key indicators of student and staff well-being. This module could be refined and included in the UAE School Inspection Framework at a later stage.
- **Reviewing school inspection frequency**: given stakeholder reports that school inspection is a source of considerable pressure and is very time consuming for staff, DSIB should consider lessening the frequency of school inspection visits. After over a decade of inspections, most schools in Dubai have developed a culture of self-improvement and achieve adequate outcomes. The school sector is sufficiently mature to enable a shift towards a greater reliance on school self-evaluation. In the short term, DSIB can space out inspection visits (e.g. every three years rather than annually) for schools that reached "good", "very good" or "outstanding" marks in the previous

inspection round. Gradually, this can be rolled out to all schools reaching at least the "acceptable" mark.

- **Continuing to reward and give visibility to schools with effective well-being practices**: KHDA should maintain its programmes that give visibility and reward schools with effective well-being practices. Once the new UAE School Inspection Framework is in place, indicators for well-being can be used to identify successful cases more accurately.
- **Training and providing guidance to school inspectors on how to engage with schools on their well-being practices**: DSIB should invest in training inspectors on well-being practices to ensure that they are able to engage with schools meaningfully and assess the quality of their programmes. Box 3.4 provides some examples of the types of resources that DSIB might develop for its own staff.

Policy Objective 3.3. Supporting schools design and implement effective well-being policies

In an effort to improve the quality of education provision in Dubai's private education sector, KHDA has put in place a set of initiatives to encourage schools to work together and to learn from each other. These include the Living Arabic, What Works and What Works X events, and the Abundance and Lighthouse projects, among others (Thacker, Abdo and Nichifor, 2019[24]) (see Chapter 2). In recent years, well-being has become a growing focus of these programmes. Moreover, KHDA's surveys offer relevant information on the state of students' and staff's feelings and habits to help schools design and implement targeted and effective responses. Despite the popularity of these initiatives, some schools still struggle to design and implement meaningful well-being policies that go beyond awareness-raising. These scho3ols require further guidance and support to create a more positive environment that benefit students and teachers. This means helping schools identify key issues that need addressing and supporting them to design policies and practices that are integrated into regular school activities. Notably, some low-fee schools may also require additional resources to meet their students and staff's needs.

Opportunities

KHDA's surveys provide valuable information on well-being

There is an expectation – including, as part of the school inspection process (discussed in Policy Objective 3.2) – that schools make use of the evidence from the DSWC and Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Surveys to make changes. The school inspection process is taken seriously by schools and is one of the most influential instruments shaping school practices in Dubai. Having a clear, consistent signal that a positive environment is core quality dimension is an essential anchor for any improvement effort.

To help schools in this mission, KHDA provides schools with a detailed breakdown of their DSWC survey results. In school-level reports and an online dashboard, responses are disaggregated across different measures (e.g. social and emotional well-being, relationships and learning in school and at home) and respondents' key characteristics (e.g. gender, nationality). Based on respondents' responses, overall results are broken down by performance levels – e.g. high, medium, low in the case of the DSWC (see Figure 3.6) – which enables stakeholders to perceive how serious an issue may be, or identify a specific group that is really struggling. This can help schools select the most important or urgent issues that need action, select the most adequate measures and determine the groups that require targeting.

Schools are also able to see how their DSWC results compare to the Dubai average or to relevant benchmarks (e.g. schools following the same curricula). Being able to see how they perform in comparison to peers can encourage change. Information on high-performing schools can also be used to design peer-

learning activities. Moreover, data from different cycles allow stakeholders to monitor and track trends and even – with the adequate tools and procedures – analyse the impact of measures.

KHDA also conducts regular workshops for schools' well-being champions about the DSWC survey, including on how to administer the census, read their results and use the data to action change. KHDA also invites local and foreign experts as well as schools to speak to peers about their experience using the information from the survey. As extra support for schools, in the 2020-21 academic year, KHDA organised follow up clinics, offering well-being champions an additional opportunity to run-through the different ways in which to access and unpack the DSWC results, and to ask specific questions.

Box 3.5. The Dubai Student Wellbeing Census

Since 2017, KHDA has been conducting an annual survey of private school students' well-being levels in partnership with the South Australian Government (SAG) as part of a 5-year initiative.

Participation

The first DSWC took place in 2017 with almost 65 000 students participating across Grades 6 to 9 (Years 7 to 10 in the UK curriculum) from 168 schools. The second year of the Census was expanded to include senior year's students in Grades 10 to 12 (Years 11 to 13 in the UK curriculum). In 2020, the last cycle of the survey to date, more than 100 000 students from 189 schools and 163 nationalities took the survey (equivalent to an 83.1% response rate) (KHDA, 2021[25]). While schools receive summary data, student identification enables the tracking of student and student cohort results over time.

Scope

The survey includes questions about young peoples' social and emotional development, physical health and well-being, connectedness with others, experiences at school and activities outside of school. For example, in order to measure students' engagement/flow, they are asked to what extent they agree with the following statements:

- I get completely absorbed in what I am doing
- I get so involved in activities that I forget about everything else
- When I am learning something new, I lose track of how much time has passed
- When I do an activity, I enjoy is so much that I lose track of time

Reports and dashboard

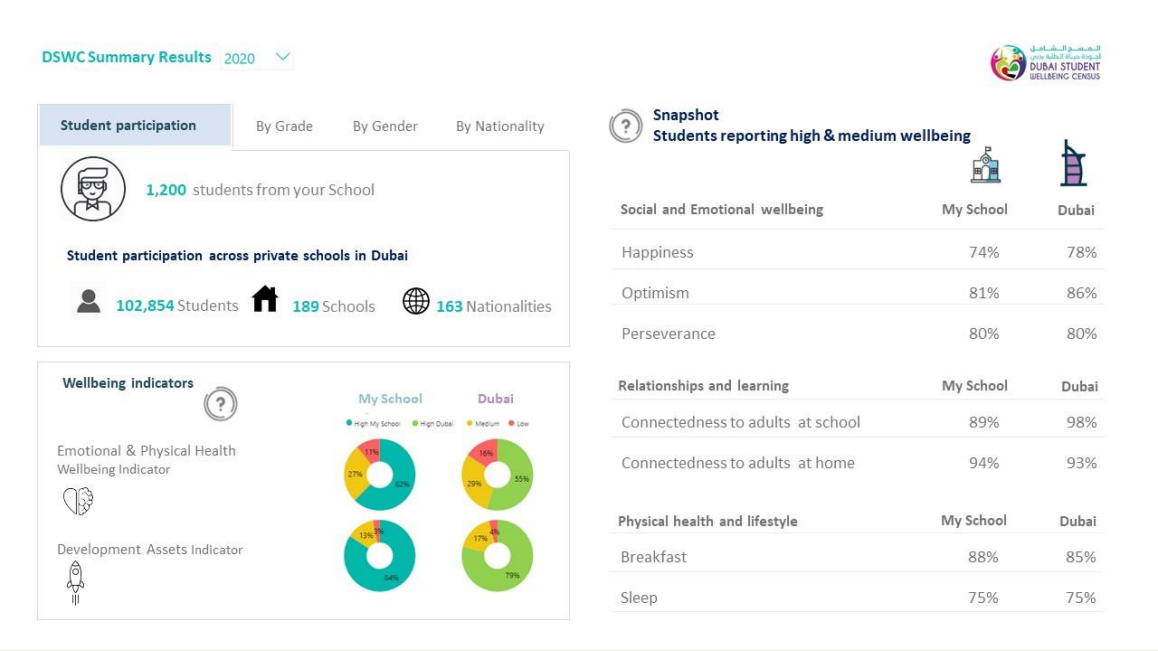
After undertaking the DSWC, every school leader receives a detailed report on their school's performance in the survey (produced by SAG). In addition to a brief description of the survey, the report provides information on students':

- participation and demographics (e.g. nationality, languages, living conditions)
- social and emotional well-being (e.g. happiness, satisfaction with life, worries/anxiety)
- relationships and learning in school and at home (e.g. relationships with the adults in their schools, relationships with adults at home, ability to meet expectations)
- physical health and lifestyle (e.g. general health and body image, sleeping and eating habits)
- after school activities (i.e. types of activities and barriers)

The report spells out to school leaders why the different areas measured are important, what precise questions were used to calculate the different scores and levels (e.g. high, medium and low), and how their school population compares to the average in Dubai's private sector. The data are disaggregated by grade and gender and the nationality profile of students.

KHDA has recently developed a digital dashboard that each school can access to see how their school compares with the Dubai average (see Figure 3.6) and schools of similar profiles (e.g. by curriculum type or rating). At the request of school stakeholders, KHDA has also introduced new features that enable schools to track and compare how student cohorts change across time.

Figure 3.6. DSWC digital dashboard



Note: This image represents a "dummy" school, meaning that it does not provide results from an existing school.
Source: (KHDA, 2020[26]), *DSWC digital dashboard*.

In addition, school leaders receive a brief **summary report** of the DSWC sector-level results. This is produced by KHDA and based on the system-level report SAG develops.

Goals and purpose

The intent behind the DSWC is to encourage schools to take action towards the well-being of their students. The DSWC supports schools "make evidence-based plans and policies to further improve the well-being of students at their schools". School leaders are encouraged to the use the DSWC report and data to:

- talk to students about their results
- talk to staff and parents
- reflect on the results
- share with other schools with the same curriculum or similar profile to share insights and encourage peer learning
- select areas for improvement
- identify school support resources to facilitate improvement in student well-being

Source: (KHDA, 2020[27]), *Background report.*

Well-being is a central topic of KHDA's school peer-learning activities

Through the Living Arabic, What Works and What Works X events, the Abundance and Lighthouse projects and other initiatives, KHDA provides private schools with numerous opportunities for collaboration. Findings from the World Bank's "Collaboration Road: Dubai's Journey towards Improved School Quality"

review and the OECD fact-finding mission suggest that these initiatives are quite popular among school stakeholders, and have become a reference in the UAE and the Gulf region (Thacker, Abdo and Nichifor, 2019[24]). School principals interviewed by the OECD review team reported appreciating the opportunity to connect with other school leaders and learning from their experiences. The fact that these programmes have developed a culture of peer-learning across schools is particularly remarkable given the highly competitive nature of Dubai's private sector (see Chapter 1).

As well-being has become a priority for KHDA and the sector, its coverage in peer-learning activities has also expanded. At present, well-being is a regular topic in the What Works conferences and the What Works X virtual events (see Box 3.6). In these seminars, schools share promising well-being practices, and experts are frequently invited to discuss specific topics (e.g. positive education, mental health disorders, and bullying) and potential interventions. Since 2019, the Lighthouse project, a peer-learning programme for principals has also focused on well-being (see Policy Objective 3.4).

Box 3.6. Peer-learning in Dubai's private school sector: What Works and What Works X

With the goal of fostering improvement in the private school sector, in 2012, KHDA developed a platform for schools to collaborate, reflect on their work and share promising practices. What Works, as it is known, is a series of events created by educators for educators. It is anchored in a strengths-based approach focused on collaboration.

Each event has a different theme (e.g. future education, tolerance), under which 30 to 35 workshops are delivered. The sessions are free, interactive and provide actionable strategies. Both school stakeholders and experts are invited to participate in these events. From 2012 to 2020, 42 What Works events were held with over 20 000 educators attending these events.

In April 2020, when schools in Dubai moved to distance learning as a result of the global pandemic, What Works transformed into What Works X. Based on the same concept of What Works, What Works X was on a digital platform and with the support of technology allowed more educators to participate and sessions were more regular - up to three times per week. What Works X sessions were closely aligned with supporting schools with the current challenges, such as assessment during distance learning, safe school protocols, well-being for staff and students during distance learning and face to face teaching with physical distancing, etc.

While What Works events had already featured well-being themes prominently, What Works X has placed an even greater emphasis on it. This is partly due to the increased demand from schools who faced new struggles and challenges with the move to distance learning.

Source: (KHDA, 2020[27]), *Background report.*

Schools have access to some resources to support the implementation of well-being programmes

KHDA provides access to tools, resources and guides to help schools design activities and plans that can support students' and staff's well-being. KHDA recently launched the New Days New Ways portal – formerly known as "Inthistogether" – which features websites, activities and other tools that organisations from the UAE and elsewhere provide free of charge. This includes, for example, the resources developed and offered by the International Positive Education Network (IPEN), the Lighthouse Center for Well-being and the Crown Prince Court. The platform also serves as repository for the What Works X webinars and tools shared during these events. The resources on display on the portal come with a brief description and categorised by stakeholder audience, although more detailed guidance could prove beneficial for users

(e.g. recommended target group, requirements, context for use), in particular for school staff that have limited training and experience on the topic. Additionally, expanding the offer of resources in other languages, and in particular in Arabic would be an important step.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, KHDA and DSIB have increased regular support to schools on well-being

In 2020, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the move to distance learning led to a significant shift in the DSIB's approach towards school inspection (discussed in Policy Objective 3.2) and, consequently, to inspectors' practices and engagement with schools. Instead of carrying out the regular inspection process, DSIB's inspectors took on advisory and support roles. During school closures, DSIB inspectors made weekly check-in calls to schools to monitor and discuss the main issues stakeholders were facing with regards to distance learning and student and staff well-being. Inspectors also helped connect struggling schools with other institutions and provided guidance and support.

This shift has been observed in other high-stakes inspection models, such as Scotland and Wales (United Kingdom). While it is still too early to tell whether these changes will be permanent, some researchers and policymakers argue that there is a value to rethinking the role and purpose of external school evaluation in the medium- and long-term (Chapman et al., 2020[28]; Ehren, Chapman and Montecinos, 2020[29]).

The Abundance programme is a successful model of peer-learning between schools

KHDA's Abundance programme offers Dubai's schools rated by DSIB inspections as "outstanding" or "very good" the opportunity to share their knowledge and best practices with others (KHDA, 2020[27]). In addition to encouraging peer learning, this initiative aims to foster a sense of community across the sector, breaking down silos and reducing schools' isolation. For schools that are invited to participate, it can also be a very rewarding experience that both signals their role and status in the community and offers them an opportunity to assist others.

However, it is important to acknowledge that practices that work in the top-performing schools, which tend to have high-fee tuitions, can't always be replicated in other schools. Inadequate resources and capacity constraints can often prevent low-fees schools from accessing key services or tools, or from rolling out certain measures and programmes successfully. To ensure that all schools are able to implement effective well-being practices, it is therefore crucial that peer-learning opportunities be complemented by targeted coaching and other forms of support.

Areas for improvement

Supporting schools in using the survey data effectively

School actors often struggle to use the data to effect change and inform their activities. The DSWC and Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Surveys school reports and dashboard provide high-level descriptive analytics, which, while helpful, provide schools with limited guidance – and no personalised advice – on what issues are more urgent or important and need to be prioritised. In interviews with the OECD review team, stakeholders also mentioned other concerns, including that the surveys did not ask the right questions, the results did not come in a timely fashion, the reports and the DSWC dashboard were not user-friendly, and the training provided by KHDA is relatively basic and repetitive.

KHDA has worked on and is continuing to work on addressing many of these issues, in particular those regarding data visualisation. In the meantime, many schools have implemented additional surveys, including the Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS) survey and self-developed surveys, to get hold of what they consider to be more disaggregated, informative, timely and actionable evidence. This points to a need for KHDA to consult with stakeholders and examine their own surveys in relation to those conducted

by schools, as a means both to make them more meaningful but also to improve efficiencies within the sector.

Evidence also suggests that school leaders and staff need further support and guidance not only to read and interpret the data they receive or collect, but also to know how it can (or cannot) be used to effect change. This is particularly true for disadvantaged schools that tend to have more limited internal capacity.

Supporting schools integrate well-being as part of their regular planning and activities

As is the case elsewhere, many schools in Dubai struggle to integrate well-being meaningfully in their regular planning and activities. Very few schools interviewed by the OECD review team had a comprehensive whole-school approach to well-being. While research indicates that this approach can be particularly successful in supporting students' cognitive and non-cognitive development and overall well-being, as well as staff's quality of life, it can be very challenging to do so. A whole-school approach to well-being often requires a high level of resources and capacity. This may explain why schools that have successfully implemented a whole-school approach in Dubai's private sector tend to be high-fee, to be doing well in other areas of school quality and recognised as "outstanding" or "very good" by the DSIB school inspection.

Instead, many schools interviewed by the OECD review team set-up discrete activities targeting one or two issues related to well-being, often outside of school regular hours. Stakeholder interviews also revealed that many well-being activities schools have introduced are not backed by evidence or reflect issues the school community faces. This is concerning for the schools and the sector overall, because this type of approach is unlikely to be successful at promoting well-being and could lead to a waste of resources.

Rethinking the design of peer-learning programmes could help support improvements

Existing school collaboration and peer-learning initiatives are meant to provide motivation and inspiration to school leaders and educators to action change. However, with no processes or guidelines in place to ensure alignment or continuity between the learning that occurs between schools and in-school professional development and learning, it could prove difficult to promote effective cross-fertilisation of ideas. For example, there is no expectation that principals who participate in the Lighthouse project share the learning with their staff, or implement what they have learnt in their schools, nor are there any tools to support them in this endeavour or mechanisms to monitor whether they have followed up on their learning. By not explicitly linking peer-learning and professional development that take place outside and inside schools, there is a risk that schools with little in-school capacity or a weak culture of improvement will not action change. This is particularly concerning as these schools are most likely to be serving disadvantaged student populations.

Limited financial resources and lack of access to public alternative services prevent some schools from supporting students' and staff's needs

Despite their best efforts, financial, technical and human resource constraints may prevent some schools from successfully meeting their students' and staff's well-being needs, in particular if they face complex issues or have particular needs that require specialised support. For example, low-tuition fees schools are often unable to provide staff the time and/or training to, for example, develop and implement a whole-school approach to well-being. Their resources to hire qualified staff that play a key role in designing and carrying out well-being activities or providing specialised care (e.g. psychologists) also tend to be limited.

The shortage of free or subsidised health or educational services in Dubai aggravates this issue. At present, there are few centres or professionals offering children and adults key services, such as coaching, therapy or guidance. Not only is the current offer unable to meet the sector's demand, but there are very

few free or affordable alternatives. This issue affects students from low socio-economic backgrounds the hardest. As discussed in Chapter 1, the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have further magnified this issue. Not only is revenue likely to fall for many schools, as families are unable to pay their tuition fees or leave the Emirate altogether, but the crisis may also trigger or worsen symptoms of mental disorders in children, adolescents and adults, who will require additional and potentially more specialised care

Potential next steps

Provide schools with further guidance to make informed decisions on their well-being practices

Why this is needed

Schools in Dubai's private sector will require further guidance as well as granular information to successfully design and implement well-being policies and practices that are able to foster students' comprehensive development and enhance schools' environment. This is particularly important given the magnitude of the cultural shift that is taking place in Dubai. It can be very challenging for institutions to move from a predominantly academically driven model to a more balanced approach that values and promotes students' and staff's well-being in combination with academic excellence. KHDA can provide the direction and support these schools require by building on the successful programmes and tools developed over the years.

Considerations

KHDA may consider the following actions to strengthen in-school capacity and understanding:

- **Adapting the DSWC and other data collection tools to ensure KHDA and schools have access to the data they need to make improvements**. See Chapters 4 and 5 for the full recommendations.
- **Giving schools access to their well-being data**: KHDA could give schools access to their raw data. The school data dashboard that KHDA has developed could be leveraged for this purpose. Giving schools access to their raw well-being data and encouraging them to explore the results can not only lead to the development of more effective practices, but can also help build in-school capacity. Inquiry-based learning, in particular when done within the schools and as part of regular school activities is among the most effective professional development tools there is (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017[10]). If this recommendation is taken forward, it is important that students and staff results be anonymised, otherwise there is a risk that stakeholders will lose trust in the instruments.
- **Providing processed data and personalised analysis of schools' strengths and challenges in DSWC and Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey school reports and the school data dashboard**: Schools would benefit from more personalised analysis of their results (e.g. key strengths and challenges) and processed information (e.g. indicators and indexes). This can be made available in the reports and the school data dashboard. This is particularly important for schools with limited capacity, who may be otherwise unable to read and understand their raw data.
- **Revising the content and/or target of the workshops provided by KHDA on the DSWC.** KHDA might consider targeting the weaker schools, helping them build analytical capacity and the evidence-based approach. Activities might start with small interventions around a particular issue, such as student bullying or teacher stress (see Chapters 4 and 5). For example, participating schools might receive support in scanning the DSWC dashboard to identify and understand one or two priority concerns/opportunities. Afterwards, they would be helped to identify relevant and effective interventions that could help address these issues.

Adjustments to the content of the DSWC workshops could also be made based on KHDA's experience with the DSWC clinics – or future ones, should they be maintained. The issues and questions that emerge as part of the clinic's Q&A sessions offer valuable information of the type of additional guidance and support schools may required. KHDA might also consider exploring the Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey as part of these workshops.

- **Developing guidelines for a whole-school approach to well-being**: Many schools in Dubai require explicit guidance on how to integrate the dimensions of well-being in their regular planning and activities in a meaningful manner and create the structures and working practices within the school that enable collaboration and development. As part of the policy framework recommended in Policy Objective 3.1, KHDA should consider developing accompanying guidelines on how to implement a whole-school approach on well-being (see introduction for some key features of a whole-school approach to well-being). These guidelines should offer a degree of flexibility for schools to adapt a whole-school approach to their needs.

  KHDA might draw on the Welsh Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being, which offers detailed guidance to schools and other stakeholders on how to develop a whole-school approach, outlining the different steps and considerations. The document also provides an overview of the research and the rationale for the whole-school approach to well-being (Welsh Government, 2021[30]). Other interesting models include the Irish Well-being Framework (see Box 3.2) and the New Zealand Wellbeing@school toolkit, which provides schools with tools to reflect on well-being in their schools and act on this self-evaluation.

- **Explicitly linking peer-learning activities outside of schools with in-school professional development**: KHDA should create the expectation that school leaders who join peer-learning activities and events later share their learning with others in their schools by regularly highlighting the importance of knowledge transmission. Another mechanism that may be considered is inviting more mid-level school management to join the programmes, which would allow them to support school leaders in this task.
- **Developing a clearinghouse or knowledge brokerage platform** where schools can access relevant and objective research evidence, and useful resources and tools to support their well-being practices and initiatives. See Chapter 5 for full recommendation.

Provide targeted support to schools struggling to implement well-being policies

Why this is needed

Some schools in Dubai struggle to implement meaningful and effective well-being policies and practices. While this is in part a result of school staff's and leadership's limited understanding and training, it is also often correlated with schools' funding levels. By playing a more active role and offering targeted support to low-fee schools that lack the necessary resources, KHDA can ensure all private schools fulfil their duty of protecting and nurturing children in Dubai and providing adequate working conditions for the staff, regardless of the schools' socio-economic profile.

Considerations

KHDA should consider establishing a team responsible for supporting schools improve the quality of learning and strengthen students' and staff's well-being. Members of this unit should have the necessary training and resources, and work in close collaboration with other Dubai agencies, such as the Dubai Health Authority (DHA). In the area of well-being, the KHDA school improvement unit can be responsible for:

- **Drawing on the inspection results and well-being surveys to identify schools in need of support**: Drawing on the student and staff well-being surveys and the school inspection results, the DSIB and KHDA should determine which schools have persistent or severe well-being issues in the key well-being priority areas identified by KHDA (see Chapter 5). These schools should then be referred to the newly established KHDA school improvement unit, which would offer targeted support and guidance to help the schools address their specific issues. Some of the types of support that the schools may benefit from are listed below.
- **Facilitating access to coaching and in-school professional development**: KHDA can play an active role in identifying and disseminating appropriate coaching and professional development services to help low-fee schools that are struggling to address their students and staff's well-being needs. DSIB inspectors should raise awareness for these services in their discussions with schools.
- **Working with other Dubai government agencies to ensure access to free and affordable health and counselling services**: Limited in-school resourcing can often prevent students and teachers from accessing key health and social services. KHDA should therefore seek the assistance of other agencies in Dubai such as the Dubai Executive Council and the DHA to explore providing free and/or subsidised health and counselling alternatives to these communities. For example, KHDA may take inspiration from Finland's experience where school health staff (nurses) and psychologists are available at the municipal level to support schools. This staff make regular school visits to conduct health screenings. Schools can also refer students to these individuals in need of counselling or diagnostic (OECD, 2013[31]). KHDA can also partner with private centres and experts to ensure access to affordable services to the wider community.
- **Pairing schools with whole-school approaches to well-being to schools that are struggling**: Similar to the Abundance programme which encourages collaboration and sharing of best practices by schools rated "very good" and "outstanding", KHDA should consider pairing schools that face important well-being issues with those that have developed successful whole-school approaches to well-being. Peer-learning activity might take place through observation visits and collaboration on projects. In the short term, KHDA and DSIB can use the survey results to identify good and struggling schools. In the medium term, once the UAE School Inspection Framework is revised, inspection results can be used to identify schools.

Policy Objective 3.4. Developing school leadership' and well-being champions' capacity to develop a whole-school approach to well-being

At present, there are a number of opportunities for school leaders and school staff in Dubai's private schools to participate in peer-learning and professional development. Activities focus on issues related to well-being, as well as other topics. However, participation remains relatively limited and does not always guarantee that stakeholders will develop the necessary skills and knowledge or that they will implement effective well-being policies and practices in their schools.

As previously discussed, a whole-school approach to well-being requires significant in-school capacity, in particular from the school leadership team and from highly-qualified specialised workers (e.g. psychologists). Many of Dubai's private schools, in particular those that charge low tuition fees, are unable to invest in the necessary human resources or in the training, tools and services their staff requires. With limited resources and in-house capacity, these schools are often unable to provide staff and students with the support they need, much less to develop a whole-school approach to well-being. This section suggests ways in which KHDA can strengthen schools' leadership and staff's capacity and, in doing so, help disseminate a whole-school approach to well-being.

Opportunities

School principals are provided with opportunities for peer-learning and professional development focused on issues related to well-being

KHDA has set up promising programmes to support principals' professional learning and foster their own well-being. The most notable of these initiatives is the Lighthouse project, which brings together school leaders to research a specific topic in groups. Each group is assigned a contact person in KHDA who is responsible for facilitating the activities. The Lighthouse project started in 2016 and focused on a particular theme each year. In 2017 and 2018, it focused on issues related to character strengths and well-being. An inquiry-based approach, such as the one used in the Lighthouse project, has proven to be an effective method for professional development for teachers and school principals (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017[10]), because it helps break school principals' isolation and promotes collaboration and peer-learning. Moreover, KHDA organises the Hatta Wellbeing Campus, yearly retreats for school principals to help them connect with each other and with the KHDA staff and learn more about well-being. Principals are reported to appreciate the initiative and see it as a recognition of their value. As part of the Hatta Wellbeing Campus, principals also take part in informal coaching.

In many schools, well-being champions support the implementation of well-being policies and practices

Several private schools have appointed a staff member to oversee well-being matters, including the implementation of the DSWC. Well-being champions, as they are known, tend to be staff who have been selected or who have volunteered. Many are school counsellors or psychologists, that is, staff members with experience and expertise in issues related to students' socio-emotional development. In addition to their regular job, as well-being champions they are responsible for helping schools integrate well-being considerations in their regular activities meaningfully and successfully.

The role of champions has considerable potential for strengthening the well-being agenda across the sector; within an individual school, champions can raise awareness of the topic, foster a school culture around well-being, and at the sector level, ensure coherence and coordination between schools.

School governing boards could help support the well-being agenda in Dubai

Private schools in Dubai are overseen by a governing board, made up of independent individuals with a specific set of skills or areas of expertise. These individuals usually comprise owners and investors, school leaders, parents, students and other members of the community. Given the private sector's complex governance and funding structure, school boards play an important role in setting the school's strategic direction and ensuring accountability (KHDA, n.d.[32]). Until recently, members of the board have focused predominantly on strengthening schools' educational performance and financial conditions, which is believed to have contributed the sector's recent improvement trajectory (see Chapter 1). Partnering with school boards could prove to be equally important for the sector's well-being journey.

Across the sector, many school governors are already endorsing the well-being agenda. However, some are reported to be predominantly concerned with maximizing financial profits and tend to be less open to investing in practices and policies that they perceive to be unnecessary and expensive. Ensuring that all governing boards are on the same page and fully committed to strengthening well-being in schools will be key. While KHDA has a role to play in this regard, in terms of raising awareness and creating the necessary incentives (see below), this cultural shift will also require significant changes from school governing boards themselves.

Areas for improvement

Rethinking peer-learning programmes could ensure school leaders are prepared and supported to introduce a-whole-of-school well-being approach

At present, the Lighthouse project focuses on relevant topics for school leaders' professional learning. The thematic focus changes on a yearly basis and is informed by international evidence on the factors that matter for school effectiveness. While school leaders seem to appreciate the programme and benefit from their participation in it, the current design has a few limitations that hinder its effectiveness. First, the thematic focus is not chosen based on observed or self-reported information on school principals' and leadership teams' current capacity and needs. This creates a number of risks, including that the training offer is not as relevant as it might be, or that schools' gaps remain unaddressed.

Second, the Lighthouse project focuses mostly on content knowledge (e.g. the different dimensions of positive education). Building an in-depth understanding of the key components of well-being and its underlying factors is important, but school leadership also need to develop more practical skills. For example, in what concerns this report, it is clear that principals need know-how on the best strategies to implement a whole-school approach to well-being.

Ensuring highly-qualified and professionalised roles for pastoral and well-being staff

Counsellors, psychologists, nurses, and other pastoral care staff play a key role in supporting students' and staff's well-being. For this reason, it is important to ensure that these positions are regulated and that staff receive adequate training, support and oversight.t. At present, the Dubai Community Development Authority is responsible for the licensing and re-licensing of staff counsellors and psychologists. School compliance visits also monitor schools' adherence to existing requirements and the impact of their work on students.

Nevertheless, the quality and length of pastoral staff's training can still vary considerably across schools and curriculum types. For example, while some school counsellors are trained in child or developmental psychology or psychotherapy, many have more general profiles. Some schools have high student-to-pastoral staff ratios, while others may not even have an in-school psychologist. This heterogeneity is a shortcoming of Dubai's private school sector to the extent that some schools may be unable to support their student and staff needs.

Moreover, many of the individuals in these types of jobs report being overwhelmed by their workload. For example, the majority of well-being champions maintain their other functions and, as a result, many expressed difficulties in juggling their multiple responsibilities. Counsellors said that they often struggled to meet existing demands.

Potential next steps

Provide further guidance to school principals and other leadership staff in schools on designing and implementing a whole-school approach on well-being

Why this is needed

Principals play a central role in leading change and coordinating action across the school. The success of a whole-school approach to well-being depends to a great extent on school leaders' capacity to identify their school's main strengths and challenges, soft skills necessary to encourage collaboration among school actors, and ability to action change. This requires significant content knowledge, know-how, as well as soft skills and attitudes.

Targeted training and opportunities for peer-learning can provide school leaders with the necessary knowledge and skills. However, at the moment, not all school principals in Dubai's private school have access to such training. Peer-learning opportunities provided by KHDA, while valuable, tend to focus predominantly on broad content knowledge and on school principals' own well-being rather than on the practical skills they require to implement a whole-school approach to well-being effectively. Complementing the existing programmes with training, resources and peer-learning focused on practice can support the dissemination of a whole-school approach to well-being in the sector. KHDA can help facilitate this.

Considerations

KHDA can consider the following actions to help principals develop their competencies in leading well-being activities in schools:

- **Updating KHDA's school governors' guide to ensure that Governors Boards endorse the sector's well-being agenda, encourage and monitor well-being policies and practices in schools.** Revisions could be made to the existing guide to include a definition of well-being in schools (based on Policy Objective 3.1), as well as the role of school governing board members in this regard.
- **Surveying school principals' training needs on well-being and use results to refine the Lighthouse project and other initiatives:** At present, KHDA has limited information on school principals' and leadership teams' main challenges and needs. Data collection could be carried out as a complementary module of the DSWC and/or as part of the school inspection visit. The former would allow a more systematic compilation of information and may also put school management more at ease than a survey led by inspectors. The information should be used to define the focus of the Lighthouse project and other initiatives.
- **Appointing thematic experts to help guide and facilitate peer-learning as part of the Lighthouse project**: To strengthen the relevance of the Lighthouse project, KHDA may appoint well-being experts to help coach Lighthouse participants. Such guidance would help improve the quality of peer-learning and also incentivise groups to go deeper in their research and learning.
- **Setting the expectation that school principals share learnings with the school staff**: KHDA should set clear expectations that the Lighthouse project and Hatta Wellbeing Campus participants should share their learnings with the school body. For example, as part of the Lighthouse project, school principals could be asked to implement or trial findings from their group work in their school context and involve other school staff in the process.

Professionalise the roles of school counsellors and other key non-teaching staff

Why this is needed

Schools require qualified specialists, such as school counsellors and nurses, to identify, monitor and address issues faced by students and staff and broader school-level concerns. At the moment, the qualification and roles of non-teaching staff often vary significantly between schools. KHDA should work with schools to professionalise the role of school counsellors, psychologists and other key well-being actors.

Considerations

- **Setting guidelines defining the roles and responsibilities of school counsellors and other key non-teaching staff**: KHDA should define the key competencies expected of school counsellors and other key non-teaching staff to guide schools in the hiring, appointment and appraisal process. These guidelines should also clarify expectations for the roles and responsibilities of these staff in overseeing well-being activities at schools. In the medium- and

long-term, these guidelines can also be used as reference in the school licensing process. Existing guidelines should be revised and updated, as needed.

- **Reviewing experience and qualification requirements of school counsellors, psychologists and other key well-being actors**: KHDA should work with other government agencies, such as the DHA and the Dubai Community Development Authority, to review existing requirements for specialist well-being-related non-teaching staff (e.g. student-to-staff ratios, qualification and years of experience) to ensure they meet Dubai's private school needs. For example, KHDA may consider introducing student-to-staff ratios. Reviews such as these should be undertaken regularly.
- **Promoting peer-learning networks for school counsellors and other well-being actors**: KHDA should use its convening power to facilitate peer-learning between school counsellors, school psychologists and other key actors to share their experiences and learn from each other. The peer-learning network could be structured around key events and well-being topics and facilitated by professionals with relevant experience and expertise. KHDA can leverage existing networks, or create new ones. In the future, the same model can also be used to focus on other issues, if desired.

Encourage schools to develop well-being committees

Why this is needed

At present, most schools have appointed an individual staff member to oversee well-being policies and practices – the well-being champions. They have been key to move the well-being agenda forward. However, the next steps in Dubai's well-being journey will require even greater efforts from schools, and well-being champions will not be able to take the next steps alone.

Implementing a whole-school approach to well-being, in particular, can be a major undertaking and requires all staff to be on board. A well-being committee with elected representatives from the entire school community, including teachers, non-teaching staff, students and parents, can help promote greater coordination, and ensure that all aspects of school life as well all school actors are being taken into account in the schools' well-being policies and practices. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, this will be an important step in promoting teacher well-being. In addition, a well-being committee with representatives from key school stakeholders can help empower school actors at an individual and collective level, in particular, teachers and students who have been less active in Dubai's journey so far (see Chapters 4 and 5).

Considerations

- **Organising internal deliberations on the purpose and basic structure of the school well-being committees**. While schools should be given some degree of flexibility, it is important that KHDA – in consultation with key stakeholders (e.g. current well-being champions) – reflect on the purpose of the well-being committee, its role, potential organisation structures, whether the committee reports to or is part of the school's governing board and if so, how this would take place, and types of selection methods (e.g. biannual election), and whether it should be mandated or optional.
- **Consideration should also be given to the communication strategy used to disseminate this idea across the sector.** KHDA could, for example, leverage existing programmes (e.g. a series of What Works events).

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Notes

[1] PISA 2018 questionnaires cover several dimensions of school climate. Reports have grouped these aspects into three broad spheres: (i) the student disruptive behaviour, (ii) teaching and learning, and (iii) school community, and (iv) the institutional environment. Note that the “safety” sphere is renamed as student disruptive behaviour in PISA reports as only maladaptive behaviours are examined in the questionnaire.

[2] The DSIB publishes a supplement to the UAE School Inspection Framework, which covers a range of additional dimensions including assessments, literacy outcomes, moral education and inclusion policies.

[3] Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the DSIB school inspection process was curtailed in 2019/20 and no schools were inspected in 2020/21. For this reason, the review has drawn on the latest available data from the DSIB school inspection.

[4] This award has been discontinued.

4 Prioritising and supporting teacher well-being in Dubai's private school sector

Teacher well-being – defined as the cognitive, emotional, health and social conditions pertaining to teachers' work and their profession – has important implications for teaching and learning. This chapter looks at the current state of teachers' well-being in Dubai's private school sector and explores how the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) – in collaboration with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Federal Government, private schools, the school governors, leaders and teachers – can build on current policies and practices to ensure the conditions that allow teachers to work effectively and to thrive are present across Dubai's private schools.

Introduction

The OECD defines teacher well-being as the cognitive, emotional, health and social conditions pertaining to teachers' work and their profession (Viac and Fraser, 2020[1]). Research has shown that teacher well-being has important implications not only for the individual, but also for teaching and learning. Teachers that report high levels of well-being tend to have better job performance (OECD, 2014[2]) and are better able to support school improvement (OECD, 2019[3]). In contrast, teachers that experience high levels of stress report lower levels of self-efficacy, job satisfaction and commitment (Collie, Shapka and Perry, 2012[4]; Klassen et al., 2013[5]; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2016[6]), and are more likely to leave the profession (Kyriacou, 2001[7]; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2018[8]). Given the importance of teacher well-being for the success of education systems, it has become a prominent topic in policy debate worldwide in recent years (Viac and Fraser, 2020[1]).

In Dubai, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) has helped raise awareness of teacher well-being through initiatives such as the Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey and the Teachers of Dubai campaign. In addition, KHDA has provided several opportunities for teachers' professional collaboration and learning. All of these offer key dimensions of teacher well-being. Inspired by these efforts, private schools are increasingly providing teachers with tools and information to encourage them to take on healthy habits (e.g. exercise) that support their physical and mental welfare, so that they can better cope with the challenges that arise from work. Despite these achievements, some concerns remain. On average, in 2018, teachers in Dubai reported some of the highest stress levels across countries participating in the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), and many complain of heavy workloads, significant pressure from school management and parents, as well as employment instability.

High levels of stress and anxiety are not only harmful to teachers but may also impact students' achievement and well-being. Supporting teachers is therefore not only important from the perspective of human dignity and good labour policy, but also for the performance of Dubai's private education sector. Despite growing recognition among key stakeholders in the sector of the relevance of teacher well-being, this issue did not gain prominence in Dubai's policy agenda until very recently. The COVID-19 pandemic has helped underline the importance and urgency of the matter.

This chapter looks at how KHDA – in collaboration with other government departments, Dubai's private schools, the school governors school leaders and teachers – can build on current policies and practices to ensure the conditions that allow teachers to work effectively and to thrive are present across Dubai's private schools. Policy Objective 4.1 argues that a strategy on teacher well-being with clear goals, benchmarks and a timeline will not only help guide efforts, but also, more importantly, will firmly establish teacher well-being as a policy priority for the sector. Policy Objective 4.2 looks at how teacher collaboration and professional networks can be leveraged to strengthen teachers' well-being and the profession as whole. Finally, Policy Objective 4.3 discusses how KHDA can partner with other organisations to improve teachers' working conditions and, in doing so, help strengthen Dubai's attractiveness to expatriate teachers.

The research on teacher well-being

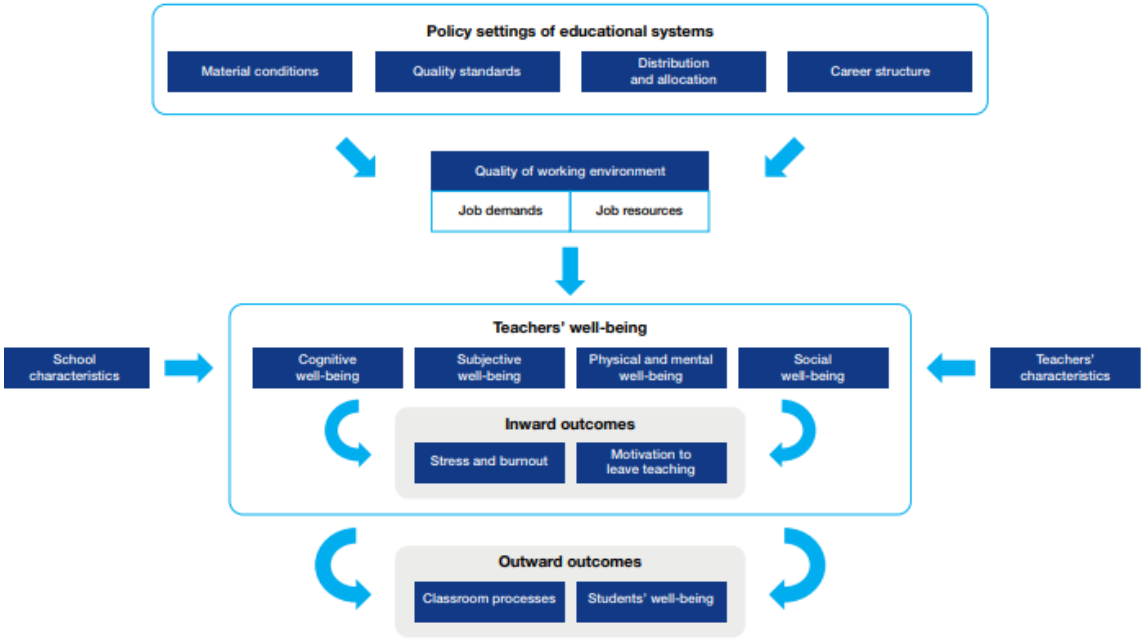
While it is commonly acknowledged that the success of education systems relies on the knowledge, experience and skills of their teachers (Barber and Mourshed, 2007[9]), the importance of teachers' *well-being* to build and sustain a high-quality teaching workforce has only emerged in the policy debate relatively recently. As a result, research on teachers' well-being – what it is, why it matters, and how it can be fostered – is still in its infancy, although it is becoming increasingly popular. This section presents a brief overview of the current state of research on teacher well-being, including the definition and analytical framework that

will be used in this chapter, and key findings from the literature on the factors and outcomes associated with well-being.

A conceptual framework of teacher well-being

The OECD conceptual framework defines teacher well-being as "teachers' responses to the cognitive, emotional, health and social conditions pertaining to their work and their profession" (Viac and Fraser, 2020, p. 18[1]). This is based on the concept of "occupational well-being", which refers to the meaning and satisfaction that individuals get from their work.

Figure 4.1. Conceptual framework for teachers' occupational well-being



Source: (Viac and Fraser, 2020[1]) "Teachers' well-being: A framework for data collection and analysis", OECD Education Working Papers, No. 213, https://doi.org/10.1787/c36fc9d3-en.

The teacher occupational well-being framework identifies four interrelated dimensions of teachers' well-being (see Figure 4.1):

- **Cognitive well-being**: this encompasses processes such as attention, the development of knowledge, judgement and evaluation, problem solving and decision-making.
- **Subjective well-being:** this refers to good mental states, including all of the various evaluations, positive and negative, that people make of their lives and the affective reactions of people to their experiences (OECD, 2013[10]). It addresses topics such as satisfaction with the working environment and sense of purpose with the work.
- **Physical and mental well-being**: this addresses psychosomatic symptoms and complaints experienced at work.
- **Social well-being**: this refers to the quality and depth of teachers' social interactions with their peers, school management staff, parents and students.

As observed in Figure 4.1, a number of **external factors** shape teachers' working conditions and can affect their well-being. This includes, primarily, the quality of teachers' working environment, which can be broken

down into job demands (e.g. workload, performance evaluation) and job resources (e.g. training opportunities, level of autonomy). Factors at the system level, such as the teaching career structure and material conditions, also matter for teachers. Policies and practices must therefore act on and take into consideration the external factors that support (or hinder) teachers' well-being.

Key findings from the literature

Typically, interventions aimed at improving teaching practices have failed to recognise their impact on teachers' well-being. This deserves closer attention from policymakers and practitioners in Dubai and elsewhere. This section explores some of the factors and outcomes associated with teacher well-being.

Factors associated with teacher well-being

Research has identified several key factors associated with teacher's occupational well-being, which include teachers':

- **Job satisfaction**: high levels of job satisfaction are positively associated with teachers' self-efficacy, motivation and commitment to teaching (Collie, Shapka and Perry, 2012[4]).
- **Working conditions:** psychosomatic complaints can often be traced to unfavourable work circumstances such as long working hours (Van Horn et al., 2004[11]), high job demands or low job control (De Lange et al., 2003[12]).
- **Social relations:** collaboration between teachers signals a healthy working climate, which is a vital ingredient of social well-being (Viac and Fraser, 2020[1]). Moreover, it helps build networks where teachers can access knowledge and mobilise skills (Chan, 2002[13]; Collie and Martin, 2017[14]; Desrumaux et al., 2015[15]; Hakanen, Bakker and Schaufeli, 2006[16]). On the other hand, student misbehaviour, issues with parents, lack of support from management and leadership, and challenging situations that arise with students can be damaging (Mccallum et al., n.d.[17]).
- **Professional development and learning:** Teachers' participation in professional development activities, including induction and mentoring programmes, classroom observation visits and conferences, provide teachers with the skills, knowledge and expertise needed for effective teaching. This is conducive to teachers' cognitive well-being (Viac and Fraser, 2020[1]).

Outcomes associated with teacher well-being

As revealed in the OECD conceptual framework, teachers' state of well-being can have a number of implications for themselves and the system more broadly (see Figure 4.1).

- **Inward outcomes** for teachers include, for example, teachers' work engagement, their willingness to stay in the profession, and teachers' levels of stress and burnout. Evidence shows that high levels of job satisfaction are positively associated with teachers' self-efficacy, motivation and commitment to teaching (Collie, Shapka and Perry, 2012[4]). In contrast, high levels of stress and feelings of burnout can lead to lower levels of self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and commitment (Collie, Shapka and Perry, 2012[4]; Klassen et al., 2013[5]; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2016[6])and a higher number of teachers' leaving the profession (Kyriacou, 2001[7]; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2018[8]).
- **Outward outcomes** refer to classroom processes (e.g. support for students, frequency of feedback) and direct outcomes on students (e.g. students' motivation and attitude towards learning, students' self-efficacy). For example, research indicates that teachers' commitment to teaching lead to better job performance (OECD, 2014[2]). Chapter 5 discusses how the student-teacher relationship influences students' well-being.

Teacher well-being in Dubai

An analysis of well-being policies and practices in Dubai's private sector first needs to examine the main issues related to teachers' occupational welfare, or in other words, the challenges that policies and practices need to address. See Table 1.1 in Chapter 1 for a discussion on the methodology and main data sources used for this purpose.

The state of teacher well-being in Dubai

Evidence from TALIS 2018 and the Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey offer an overview – albeit incomplete – of the state of teachers' well-being in Dubai. Overall, the majority of teachers in Dubai (90% of lower secondary teachers[1]) is satisfied with their jobs. This is similar to the average across the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (90%) as well as Australia (90%), Korea (89%) Singapore (89%) and the OECD average[2] (90%). These findings are echoed in the Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey (The Wellbeing Lab, 2018[18]). While causality cannot be demonstrated, the following factors may help explain Dubai's high levels of job satisfaction:

- **Teachers feel valued:** self-reported data suggest that nearly three-quarters of teachers in Dubai (72%) feel that their profession is valued in society, three times higher than the OECD average (26%). While it is still early to tell what the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been – and will be – in this regard, there is some indication that the educational community has recognised and appreciated teachers' hard work over the past months. Data from the Dubai Student Well-being Census (DSWC) 2020 show that the share of students who report a high emotional engagement with their teachers increased significantly – from 59% and 57% in 2019 to 70% and 65% among Grades 6-9 and 10-12, respectively (KHDA, 2021[19]).
- **Teachers have plenty of opportunities for professional collaboration and networking:** Table 4.1 shows that a high percentage of teachers in Dubai engage in collaborative activities in their schools, such as team conferences and discussions. In addition, 59% of teachers report participating in inter-school professional networks for professional development purposes. These types of networks are important for building a support system that goes beyond the boundaries of a given school. Although participation is higher than the OECD average (40%), it is lower than the UAE average (70%). Moreover, a high share of teachers participates in other forms of development: 71% of teachers participate in induction, compared to 59% of teachers in the UAE and to 29% across the OECD. Nearly 30% of teachers have a mentor, compared to 42% on average across the UAE and to only 9% of teachers in OECD countries. These forms of support can be particularly important for new or incoming teachers to become familiar with the culture, policies and procedures of the school and sector.

  The move towards digital or hybrid modes of schooling – brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic – can pose a challenge to teacher co-operation. At the same time, recent developments have created new opportunities. Initiatives such as What Works X have not only helped sustain the culture of collaboration across Dubai's schools during this period, but may prove valuable in the medium- to long-term as well.

Table 4.1. Teacher collaboration

Percentage of lower secondary teachers who report that they do the following in their school at least once a month[1]

	Professional collaboration				Exchange and co-ordination for teaching			
	Teach jointly as a team in the same class	Observe other teachers' classes and provide feedback	Engage in joint activities across different classes and age groups[2]	Participate in collaborative professional learning	Exchange teaching materials with colleagues	Engage in discussions about the learning development of specific students	Work with other teachers in this school to ensure common standards in evaluations for assessing student progress	Attend team conferences
Dubai (private)[3]	20.3	19.9	20.3	46.0	69.0	69.3	59.8	53.9
United Arab Emirates	26.3	28.0	29.1	53.7	60.8	64.1	58.4	64.7
Australia	23.5	10.5	13.0	39.0	78.5	80.0	62.3	52.4
England (UK)	13.5	11.5	5.7	25.5	70.1	73.9	45.8	32.9
Korea	18.7	6.0	4.6	12.8	20.2	34.1	17.0	6.3
Singapore	38.9	11.0	11.9	47.7	60.3	64.5	55.3	62.7
OECD average-31[4]	27.9	8.8	12.3	21.2	46.9	61.1	39.9	43.4

Notes: "At least once a month" covers to the following response options: "1-3 times a month", "Once a week or more".
Privately managed school is a school whose principal reported that it is managed by a non-governmental organisation (e.g. a church, trade union, business or other private institution).
Arithmetic average based on lower secondary data teacher across 31 OECD countries and economies with adjudicated data that took part in the TALIS study
Source: OECD (2020[20]), *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume II): Teachers and School Leaders as Valued Professionals*, https://doi.org/10.1787/19cf08df-en.

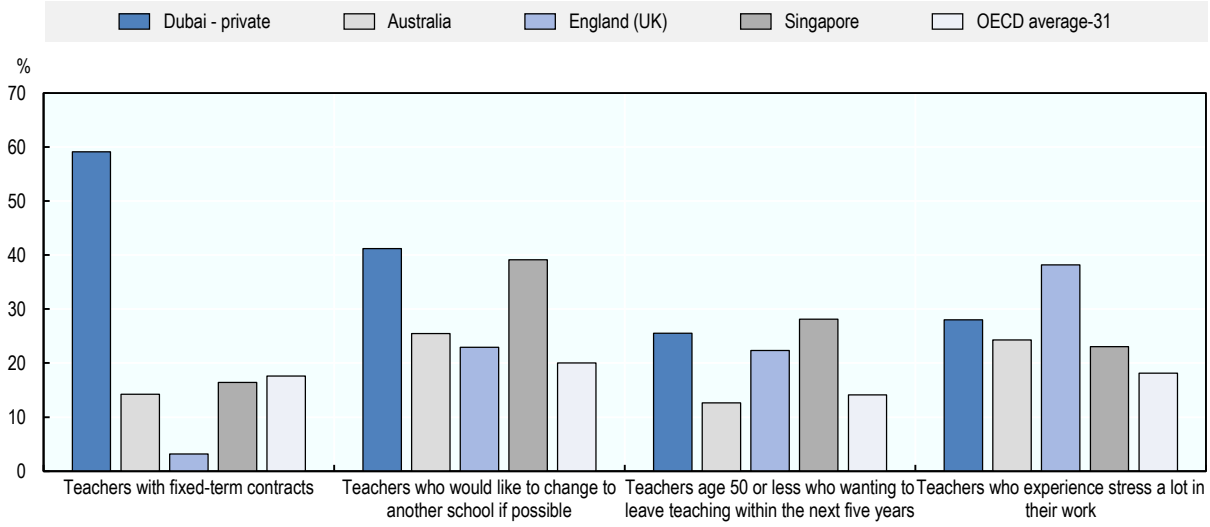
Nevertheless, teachers experience issues that can negatively affect their well-being, including:

- **A high degree of turnover:** less than one-third of teachers (29%) have been at the same school for six years or more (KHDA, 2020[21]). Moreover, TALIS 2018 data show that 41% of teachers of Dubai would like to change to another school if that were possible, which is higher than the UAE average (38%) and double the OECD average (20%) (Figure 4.2). In addition, 26% of teachers under 51[3] would like to leave teaching within the next five years (OECD average 14%). Although a regular rotation of teachers might be desirable for the professional development of teachers and to provide students with equal access to high-quality teachers, high levels of attrition can reflect poor management as well as challenging working conditions within schools. Teacher turnover is expected to increase in the short- and medium-term because of the impact of the pandemic (see Chapter 1).
- **High prevalence of short-term contracts**: 59% of teachers in Dubai's private school sector have a fixed-term contract in contrast to 18% across the OECD. Around 10% of teachers have fixed-term contracts of under a year, although this is lower than the UAE average (20%) (OECD, 2019[22]). This type of working arrangement gives schools the flexibility to respond to changes in their organisational and teaching needs and evaluate the skills of new teachers without the commitment that a permanent contract would bring (Bruns, Filmer and Patrinos, 2011[23]). However, from teachers' perspective, fixed-terms contracts – in particular short-term fixed-term contracts – can cause anxiety and stress, which can undermine their well-being and performance.

Moreover, the dual market that emerges from this state of affairs can create inequalities (e.g. teachers with fixed-term contracts may have different statutory rights) and hinder collaboration and professional growth (OECD, 2019[3]).

Figure 4.2.Teachers' working conditions, mobility and risk of attrition

Percentage of lower secondary teachers, based on self-reports



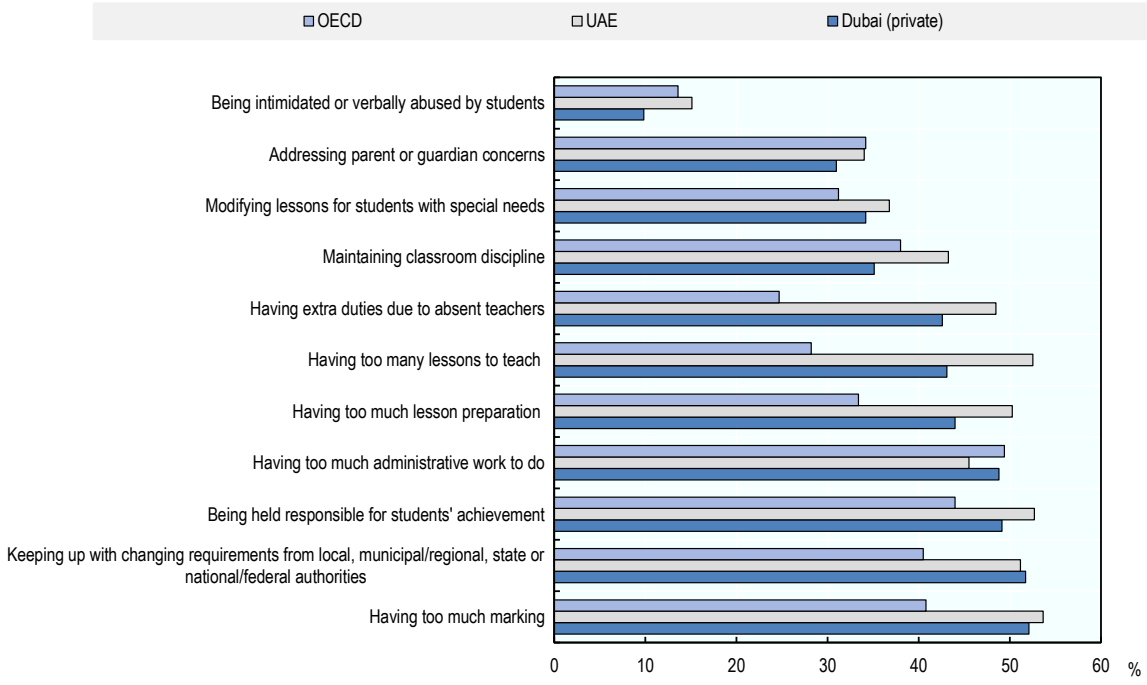
Notes: Privately managed school is a school whose principal reported that it is managed by a non-governmental organisation (e.g. a church, trade union, business or other private institution).
Arithmetic average based on lower secondary data teacher across 31 OECD countries and economies with adjudicated data that took part in the TALIS study.
Source: OECD (2020[20]), *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume II): Teachers and School Leaders as Valued Professionals*, https://doi.org/10.1787/19cf08df-en.

StatLink https://stat.link/ganpq6

- **High levels of stress:** 28% of teachers in Dubai's private schools report experiencing stress a lot, compared to only 18% on average across the OECD. The main sources of stress relate to having too much marking, keeping up with changing requirements from authorities, being held responsible for students' achievement and having too much administrative work to do (see Figure 4.3).
- **Mental and physical health issues:** 9% of teachers in Dubai report that their job negatively impacts their mental health (OECD average: 7%), and 10% report that their job negatively affects their physical health (OECD average: 8%). According to the 2018 Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey, teachers tend to get less sleep than most other school staff (The Wellbeing Lab, 2018[18]).

Figure 4.3. Teachers' sources of stress

Percentage of lower secondary teachers for whom the following are sources of stress "quite a bit" or "a lot"



Note: Items are ranked in descending order of the percentage of teachers stating that the following are sources of stress in Dubai's private schools.
Source: (OECD, 2019[22]), *TALIS 2018 Data*, https://www.oecd.org/education/talis/talis-2018-data.htm (accessed 15 June 2021).

StatLink https://stat.link/x972p6

Quantitative and qualitative evidence reveal a **high degree of heterogeneity** in terms of teacher well-being and working conditions. According to TALIS 2018 results, 15% of the variance in teacher's well-being levels is explained by differences between schools in the United Arab Emirates. Across private schools in Dubai, 9% of the variance is explained by differences between schools, suggesting that the Dubai private sector is more homogeneous than the UAE school sector as a whole. That being said, the variance explained by schools differences is higher in Dubai than in Australia (8%), England (United Kingdom) (4%) and Singapore (4%) (OECD, 2019[22]). In other words, school differences could be playing a larger influence in teachers' well-being levels in Dubai than in aforementioned systems. Likewise, stakeholder interviews indicated considerable differences in teachers' experiences and perceptions. While most reported working in positive and open school environments, some reported feeling disregarded and isolated in the schools in which they work or had worked. This points to the need for KHDA to undertake a more disaggregated analysis – and, potentially in the future, reporting – of the data to identify and monitor the schools and sub-sectors in which teachers' well-being may be particularly at risk.

Policy Objective 4.1. Developing a strategy to improve the well-being of teachers

KHDA can help build the impetus and commitment to strengthen teacher well-being much like it did with regards to school improvement and collaboration (Cuadra and Thacker, 2014[24]) (Thacker, Abdo and Nichifor, 2019[25]). By developing a long-term strategy for teacher well-being, KHDA will not only direct stakeholders' efforts, but also, more importantly, help place teacher well-being firmly as a policy priority for

the sector. Clear targets and performance indicators can enhance accountability and monitoring. In conjunction with the other measures discussed in this chapter, a strategy will be critical for the sector to retain its attraction to highly-qualified expatriate teachers and sustain its improvement path (see Chapter 1).

Opportunities

Surveys collect data on teachers' and other school staff's well-being that can inform action

KHDA has built a rich dataset on teacher well-being. In collaboration with The Wellbeing Lab, KHDA has been conducting the Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey in Dubai's private schools annually since 2018 (see Box 4.1 for further information on the survey's design, implementation and dissemination). The Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey covers a comprehensive set of well-being dimensions, including individuals' positive emotions and social relations. The selection of indicators is not only aligned with what international evidence shows matters for teachers' well-being (see section "The research on teacher well-being"), but also focuses on factors that can be improved upon through individual, school and system action. The UAE's participation in TALIS in 2018[4] provides internationally comparable data on teachers' and school leaders' working conditions and learning environments. This includes indicators on teachers' employment status, working hours, participation in professional development opportunities and job satisfaction.

Growing awareness of the importance of teacher well-being

The implementation of the surveys and the dissemination of the results have raised awareness around the importance of teacher well-being and its many dimensions. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has also helped elevate the issue on Dubai's policy agenda. On one hand, school closures and the move to distance learning have magnified existing challenges (e.g. work-life balance) and/or created new difficulties for teachers (e.g. use of information and communications technology [ICT] for teaching). On the other hand, the crisis has exposed some of the gaps in Dubai's policy framework, in particular with regards to teachers' contracts (see Policy Objective 4.3). While it is still early to tell what the outcomes of the COVID-19 crisis will be, growing pressures could help accelerate changes in the sector.

Box 4.1. The Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey

The Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey was developed by The Wellbeing Lab, a private organisation. In partnership with KHDA, this survey has been implemented in Dubai's private school sector since 2018 to measure and monitor the well-being of principals, teachers and ancillary staff working in private schools.

Survey design/operationalisation

The Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey defines well-being as the ability of workers – in this case, school stakeholders – to feel good and function effectively (i.e. thrive) as they navigate the highs and lows of their work (i.e. struggles). The survey's questionnaire and indicators are based on the PERMAH model (acronym stands for positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment and health) (The Wellbeing Lab, 2018[18]).

Based on the scores for each of these dimensions, respondents are ranked into four categories: (i) Consistently thriving, (ii) Living well, despite some struggles, (iii) Not feeling bad, but just getting by, and (iv) Really struggling.

Survey implementation

The Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey is conducted annually in November (about half way during the academic school year). The Survey is open to all school staff in Dubai's private school system, including school management staff (principal, head of departments, deputy and assistants), governing board members, teachers (including teacher assistants and special needs teachers) and administrative staff (ICT support, reception, admissions, security, accounts, others). It covers staff in kindergarten to upper secondary education (K-12) institutions.

In 2018, over 13 000 people from 184 schools completed the survey. While 69% of the sample were teachers, this represents only 54% of all teachers working in Dubai's private schools (The Wellbeing Lab, 2018[18]).

Overall results

System-level results in 2018 showed that, on average, 24% of respondents were "consistently thriving", 28% "living well, despite struggles", 43% "not feeling bad, but just getting by", and 5% "really struggling". A more detailed analysis reveals that some groups were more likely to be thriving than others. For example, a breakdown by occupation reveals that teachers are more likely to report to be "really struggling" than principals or board members (The Wellbeing Lab, 2018[18]).

Dissemination

All participants receive an individual report with their individual results and school leaders receive a report with their aggregated results. Both contain some background information (e.g. the definition of the PERMAH framework) as well as generic interpretations of the results and recommendations for actions. A system-level report is produced and shared with KHDA and schools. In addition, an infographic with a summary of Dubai's system-level results is made publicly available.

Use

There is an expectation that schools and individuals use the data to inform change. For example, the Survey report offers a list of potential interventions (e.g. making meetings uplifting, giving strengths-based feedback). Some interviewees mentioned that the recommendations provided "useful hints".

Areas for improvement

A more targeted focus on teachers could help strengthen the effectiveness of programmes

The OECD fact-finding mission revealed that most interviewees, including board members, school leaders, teachers, parents and students, were aware of the importance of teachers' welfare. Some revealed, however, a "utilitarian approach" to teacher well-being, seeing this as a means of improving students' and schools' outcomes rather than as a goal in and of itself.

In addition, there was a reported feeling among many teachers that existing policies and practices could be more attuned to their needs and circumstances. With the exception of the Teachers of Dubai social media campaign, there are few programmes at the sector level that specifically target or cater to teachers. While teachers can participate in most programmes and events organised by KHDA, such as What Works, the emphasis of these activities is often placed on schools as a whole. As a result, discussions or trainings can be unsuitable or insufficient for teachers, both in terms of format and focus. This prevents them from making the most of this experience.

Across schools, the emphasis on and commitment to strengthening well-being still rarely extends to teachers. Even in schools that invite and encourage teachers to take part in well-being initiatives (e.g.

Mindfulness Mondays), these tend to be much too broad. While a comprehensive approach to school well-being is crucial and can support teachers' well-being (see Chapter 3), it is important that it be complemented by targeted interventions that address teachers' specific needs.

Rethinking the Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey and its analysis can raise its relevance and usefulness

The Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey has provided periodic and reliable data on teachers' well-being (see Box 4.1). The clear language and presentation of the reports have enabled a clear understanding of the results and encouraged discussions around the topic. However, there is scope for making this a more effective tool, yielding actionable information to support stakeholders make improvements and monitor progress.

First, because this is an off-the-shelf workplace survey that has undergone few adaptations[5], many items are quite broad and not specific to education. For example, questions include whether interviewees had "opportunities to build competence", or were "satisfied with their work". While it is important for a survey to include general questions, introducing more specific questions could not only enable respondents to reflect on a deeper level, but also provide much more detailed information on their well-being. This can help schools and teachers identify the precise issues that require addressing. Survey items could be further detailed or complemented with follow-up questions. For instance, the example provided above could be accompanied by the following question: "I had opportunities to build competence around: a) administrative tasks, b) classroom management, c) pedagogy".

Second, by collecting data on teachers' working status and conditions (e.g. type of contract, working hours, roles and responsibilities of teachers in the school) (see Policy Objective 4.3), the Survey could offer relevant evidence for policymakers. For example, this type of information can reveal whether specific teacher groups are struggling, and/or which dimensions of their working conditions may be particularly concerning (e.g. residency status, length and conditions of contract). These results can guide KHDA's efforts in improving teachers' working conditions (see Policy Objective 4.3)

Similarly, a more systematic linkage of the Survey with other sector-level programmes could enable more tailored and effective policies in this area. For example, linking the Dubai Student Wellbeing Census (DWSC) and the Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey results could provide relevant evidence on the associations between teacher and student well-being, as well as teacher well-being and student achievement. Chapter 5 will discuss the some of the steps KHDA can take to support this type of exercise.

Debunking misunderstandings over the anonymity of Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey can strengthen the validity and relevance of its results

Neither schools nor KHDA can access or identify individual-level results from the Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey. Nevertheless, according to stakeholder interviews, many teachers and other school staff doubt the anonymity of the survey. One of the main reasons for their distrust comes from the fact that they often receive the link to the Survey in their professional emails, which they believe to be easily accessible to schools. Teachers' uneasiness around the survey means that many are wary of expressing their true thoughts for fear of retaliation from the schools' management and leadership. This has important implications for the reliability of the survey's results and might explain why a large share of school staff fails to take part in this exercise. In the 2018-2019 iteration, only around half of teachers in Dubai's private schools (54%) answered the survey (The Wellbeing Lab, 2018[18]). Improving coverage can enhance the usefulness of the tool, in particular for schools where staff participation is particularly low. Reassuring teachers will be critical to encourage them to participate in the survey in an open and truthful manner.

Shifting the discourse from individual to collective responsibility can make teachers feel more supported

In Dubai's private school sector, discussions and interventions around teacher well-being tend to place a strong emphasis on individuals' self-reliance and self-accountability. For example, mindfulness practices are encouraged as a way for teachers to cope with and reduce feelings of stress and anxiety. Research has shown that individuals' actions and perceptions play a large role in determining their own well-being (OECD, 2020[20]; Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2021[26]). However, relying solely on this type of approach can make teachers feel isolated and unsupported, in particular when they are struggling with job demands, including many which may be beyond their control (e.g. lesson preparation and classroom management). As KHDA sets up a policy framework for well-being in schools and an increasing number of schools develop a whole-of-school approach to well-being (see Chapter 3), there is scope for strengthening the message that teachers' well-being is also a collective responsibility.

Potential next steps

Develop a long-term strategy to improve teacher well-being in the sector

Why this is needed

While there is growing recognition of the importance of teachers' well-being in Dubai's private sector, for the most part, policies and practices do not cater to their specific needs and circumstances, and few explicitly target teachers. This policy gap is concerning given that Dubai's teachers face high levels of stress and employment instability, among other issues, concerns that have escalated during the pandemic.

A long-term strategy can create the blueprint for improvements in the sector. First, it can help crystallise and disseminate a sector-wide commitment towards teachers' well-being that sends an important signal to teachers in the Emirate and abroad. Second, it can offer direction to stakeholders' actions. This can not only help bring cohesion to existing initiatives, but also guide stakeholders' focus towards the most important and urgent issues as well as the most effective strategies. Third, it provides a tool for monitoring that can keep stakeholders accountable and on track, and enable policies to be adapted in light of experience.

Engaging schools, teachers and other key actors in the development of this strategy will be key to build a sense of ownership and ensure its take-up by the community. It is also a way to ensure it addresses the practical challenges teachers face (see Policy Objective 4.3). Likewise, this strategy needs to be firmly aligned with other key documents, including KHDA's strategy map and the Policy Framework for Well-being in Schools (see Chapter 3) to ensure a coherent approach to well-being in Dubai's private school sector.

Considerations

KHDA has significant experience with strategic plans, which should be leveraged during this exercise. The strategy's successful implementation will require:

- **Clearly defined goals:** a strategy on teachers' well-being should define concrete goals guiding the action of stakeholders. The goals should specify areas of intervention (e.g. teachers' training, school community, recruitment, workload, etc.). Performance indicators – linked to the Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey – and a timeline can enable monitoring. The Australian Northern Territory Teacher Wellbeing Strategy 2021-22 (Box 4.2) offers an interesting model of this approach that have valuable insights not only for monitoring at a system level but also for school operations.

- **Sector-wide consultation with stakeholders:** given the relevance of this strategy, it needs to be developed in consultation with key stakeholders, including school governors, parents, principals and teachers. It is particularly important that teachers recognise themselves in this strategy and feel a sense of ownership towards it.
- **Sector-level coherence:** the teachers' well-being strategy must be aligned with other initiatives, including those recommended in this report, notably the Policy Framework for Well-being in Schools (see Chapter 3) and guidelines of teachers' working conditions (see Policy Objective 4.3).
- **Periodic reviews:** the strategic plan would benefit from periodic reviews to assess whether key targets are being met and/or additional goals and indicators need to be included. These reviews offer an opportunity for reflecting changes to teachers' working reality.
- **A collective approach to teacher well-being:** the Emirate's current focus on individual accountability and self-care should be complemented with a message on collective responsibility. It will be crucial for the strategy to emphasise this message.

Box 4.2. The Australian Northern Territory Teacher Wellbeing Strategy 2019-22

The Education Northern Territory (NT) Teacher Wellbeing Strategy 2019-22 outlines priority areas and actions to improve teacher well-being. These are based on recommendations from The Northern Territory Teachers' Occupational Health and Wellbeing Survey: 2019 Data report and direct engagement with teachers. Three priority areas were identified – each of them with its own success indicators, timeline and priority actions:

Table 4.2. The Australian Northern Territory Teacher Wellbeing Strategy 2019-22

Priority areas	Success indicators	Priority actions and timeline	Description
Support for success	Teachers are supported across the profession and connected with their colleagues	Develop and early career teacher programme (between 12 and 24 months)	Develop and implement a comprehensive and formalised early career teacher program (1-5 years) that includes induction, mentoring and coaching practices.
		Provide well-being conversation for teachers (less than 12 months)	Trial and measure the impact of providing well-being conversations for classroom teachers. These reflective and restorative conversations will focus on well-being, emotional needs and goal setting and will be conducted by skilled professionals.
		Connect for growth (between 12 and 24 months)	Research and trial a range of ways for connecting teachers across the NT including face-to-face and technology-based options to create communities of like-minded educators.
Optimise time to teach	Teachers are enabled to focus on their primary task of teaching and learning	Reduce non-teaching and learning workload (less than 12 months)	Consult directly with teachers to identify key tasks impacting on their ability to focus on teaching and learning and act to streamline, change or remove red tape. This work will be done in consultation with school practitioners to ensure workload implications are included in any changes to process.
		Improve reporting to parents (less than 12 months)	Upgrade the current system for reporting to parents to improve the experience for teachers by reducing administration time.
		Replace the reporting to parent systems (longer than 24 months)	Explore future enterprise solutions to replace the current system for reporting to parents, encompassing other student administration functions.
Promote a safe and respectful workplace	School communities are places where respectful relationships thrive	Support a positive school community (less than 12 months)	Develop and introduce a system-wide code of conduct for parents, careers and school visitors, backed by department policy to build a culture underpinned by respectful behaviours.
		Strengthen relationships between teacher and students (less than 12 months)	Explore options to build and strengthen relationships between teachers and students with a focus on providing supports for student behaviours in schools.
		Engage the nation (less than 12	Take the NT teacher voice forward to engage with other

		months)	education jurisdictions to seek partnership in a nation-wide respectful relationships community education campaign that supports positive and respectful behaviours towards teachers.

The NT Department of Education will measure the impacts of this strategy across a range of datasets within the agency, including workforce data around the retention and separation of our teaching workforce. In addition, the department will continue to measure the well-being of teachers through ongoing implementation of the NT Teachers' Occupational Health and Wellbeing Survey. This data will provide the department with longitudinal trend data and the ability to measure impact over time.

Source: (The Northern Territory Department of Education, 2019[27]), *Education NT Teacher Wellbeing Strategy 2019-22*, www.education.nt.gov.au (accessed 3 March 2021).

Rethink data collection mechanisms to ensure that KHDA and schools have the information they need to suppport improvements

Why this is needed

At present, issues related to the design, implementation and dissemination of the Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey mean that the data collected is not as reliable and relevant as it might be, therefore preventing stakeholders from using it to action change effectively.

The OECD review team would encourage the organisation's leadership to reconsider its current approach. The next steps would depend on whether KHDA can work together with The Wellbeing Lab to adapt the Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey in order to make it a more useful tool for the Emirate's private education sector. If there is limited flexibility to make the necessary changes to the current instrument, KHDA could consider developing its own survey in-house and/or in partnership with other stakeholders. Regardless of the approach KHDA opts for, the OECD would strongly recommend that the organisation continues collecting sector-wide comparative information, which will be key for KHDA to monitor teacher well-being across the sector and design and implement relevant policies and practices.

Considerations

If KHDA opts to maintain the Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey it should consider the following actions:

- **Promoting and building trust in the Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey:** As reported, the percentage of teachers answering the Survey is relatively low. This presents a significant limitation if the instrument is to inform action at the sector and school levels and to monitor the implementation of the teacher well-being strategy (see above). To address this issue, KHDA may consider:
  a. **Organising a communication campaign to promote the Survey and debunk any misunderstandings.** Involving teacher representatives and networks (see Policy Objective 4.2) will be important to ensuring that the tone and messaging are adequate.
  b. **Asking teachers and other staff to sign a confidentiality agreement before answering the survey.** It will be equally important to clearly communicate to teachers what protection this offers them.
  c. **Reminding teachers that they are able to respond to the Survey by logging in through their personal email addresses.** In the immediate term, this might be an option to help teachers feel secure.

- **Taking advantage of the periodic implementation of Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey to build longitudinal data that supports policy design and implementation:** Since the Survey is implemented on a yearly basis, it presents the ideal vehicle to track the progress of school and individual teachers across time. The Wellbeing Lab already undertakes some analysis of these data. However, there are opportunities to make further use of these results. For example, to monitor the progress of the strategy (see above), and to enable timely interventions. The Australian Northern Territory Teachers' Occupational Health and Wellbeing Survey collects longitudinal data (see Box 4.2).
- **Revising the questionnaire to ensure that it collects useful evidence:** in consultation with schools, teachers and teacher networks, KHDA and The Wellbeing Lab should revisit the questionnaire to ensure that it provides stakeholders with useful data, and the appropriate level of disaggregation to inform action. Current items could be expanded to collect more detailed information. For example, the current item "I had all the resources I needed to successfully do my work" could be revised to cover the *types* of resources that individuals might need (e.g. infrastructure, computers and other ICT tools, books, etc.).

If, however, KHDA opts to discontinue the Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey, it should consider:

- **Developing its own teacher and staff well-being survey:** this exercise should be undertaken in consultation with schools, teacher networks and teacher representatives to ensure that the new instrument collects useful data, and the appropriate level of disaggregation to inform action. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, this could help promote – and at the same time, would benefit from – a stronger research culture and further technical capacity in KHDA. Nevertheless, KHDA could also partner with relevant and capable organisations with expertise in the field to undertake this operation.
- **Organising a communication campaign to promote the survey:** given the issues faced with the Dubai Adults@Schools Wellbeing Survey, KHDA should plan a communication campaign from the onset of the project to promote participation and trust in the survey. Stakeholders' participation in the survey's development will likely help in this regard, but further steps will also be required, including potentially some of the points raised above.

In either case, KHDA should prioritise:

- **Undertaking an in-depth analysis of the evidence available:** as will be discussed in Chapter 5, KHDA and the Dubai Schools Inspections Bureau (DSIB) could make more effective use of existing data collection tools, such as the Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey, TALIS and the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), to identify and monitor system-, sector- and school-level issues, patters and trends. In the case of teacher-related data, it is important for current collection, analysis and reporting to enable a more disaggregated perspective of the sectors' performance.

Policy Objective 4.2. Fostering and supporting a professionalised teaching workforce

One of the key features of high-performing education systems is the existence of a highly professionalised teaching workforce. An important dimension of professionalism, in teaching as in other jobs that require specialised knowledge and skills, is giving teachers a leading role in defining policies related to their practice, development and career. This implies the existence of fora – such as teacher professional bodies and networks – where teachers can collectively reflect upon and shape such policies and practices. For teachers, participation in such fora can create a sense of ownership of their work, identity around knowledge and skills and agency and responsibility for the profession's development (Guerriero, 2017[28]).

This can support teachers' job satisfaction and status (Ingersoll and Collins, 2018[29]), which are key dimensions of their well-being. International evidence has also shown that the successful implementation of key policies, such as the one recommended in Policy Objective 4.1, depends on the engagement and support provided by teaching bodies (OECD, 2019[3]).

Since the mid-2010s, KHDA's efforts to strengthen collaboration across Dubai's private school sector have led to the development of informal professional networks of teachers. In addition, quantitative and qualitative evidence points to a strong collaborative culture among teachers within schools. However, the types of collaboration that are common fail to promote a sense of professional agency and identity that supports teachers' well-being and high-quality teaching. This section argues that a key step in supporting teachers will be to professionalise their role further and to strengthen their collaborative networks.

Opportunities

KHDA has developed multiple initiatives to elevate the status of teachers

Through social media campaigns and other initiatives, KHDA has helped raise awareness of and appreciation for the important role that teachers play in Dubai's education system (see Box 4.3). The fact that KHDA's initiatives are organised in collaboration with other key stakeholders, such as parents and KHDA Director General, Dr. Abdulla Al Karam, reveals the widespread support for teachers. Moreover, these programmes have helped establish important bonds between teachers and different actors, which have helped foster a sense of a community. While causality cannot be established, it is possible that these campaigns have fostered teachers' sense of worth. As discussed above, the share of Dubai's teachers that report feeling valued in society is much higher than in OECD countries. Given how important it is for teachers to feel appreciated, KHDA may try to find mechanisms to promote and expand these initiatives to reach more teachers.

Box 4.3. KHDA initiatives to promote the status and role of teachers

Teachers of Dubai

A social media campaign – on Facebook – captures and disseminates the life stories of both Emirati and expatriate teachers to strengthen the educational community and raise awareness of the profession. To date more than 500 teachers have taken part in these initiatives. An interesting facet is that the programme is led by the "Moms of Dubai", a small network of students' mothers in close collaboration with KHDA.

Teach Together

Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the KHDA Director would accompany a teacher for a full working day once a year. Bringing together the highest educational authority in Dubai's private education system and teachers has promoted a sense of trust and recognition among teachers.

Living Arabic

This is an initiative that sprang from Arabic teachers who met in a What Works event to promote the use of the Arabic Language. More than being a space for sharing ideas, Living Arabic aimed to raise the status of the Arabic teacher, who tends to receive lower pay and less social recognition. Although popular, the project was discontinued. The lack of financial support to participating schools is believed

to have contributed to the initiative's interruption. Nevertheless, it stands as an interesting example of a bottom-up initiative as well as a move towards the professionalisation of the teaching career.

Source: (KHDA, 2020[30]), *Background report*.

Teachers participate in inter-school professional networks, although the majority is informal

Over half of teachers in Dubai's private schools (59%) participate in professional networks (Table 4.1). Stakeholder interviews suggest that inter-school teacher collaboration is particularly common within large networks, such as SABIS or GEMS, and across schools following similar curricula (e.g. the International Baccalaureate or the British curricula) or targeting a similar population group (e.g. German speakers). For the most part, these networks have emerged organically from common challenges and interests, and participation remains informal.

KHDA's initiatives to foster collaboration across Dubai's private schools (see Box 3.6 in Chapter 3) have mainly targeted schools as the principal target of intervention, although teachers have also been beneficiaries of these initiatives. This has had a number of positive effects in the sector. First, by bringing together teachers from very different backgrounds, curricula and pedagogical approaches, KHDA's initiatives have helped break some of the silos and clusters that had emerged. Second, the programmes have provided teachers and other stakeholders from disadvantaged or more isolated institutions with access to professional networks, which many previously lacked. With schools moving to distance or hybrid education models because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the value of these networks for teachers has heightened. What Works X events have not only helped keep teachers connected and supported throughout this period, but have also focused on many issues related to teachers' well-being (e.g. balancing workloads).

However, stakeholder interviews suggest that, with the exception of What Works, teachers are not always familiar with or active in KHDA's collaborative initiatives. A number of potential explanations were raised for this, including programmes' requirements and teachers' busy schedules. The fact that programmes rarely focus on teachers' needs and contexts may also be an explanation. On the other hand, nothing indicates that low participation is due to a lack of interest from teachers – quite the contrary. The emergence of the Living Arabic initiative – a bottom-up initiative by Arabic teachers in Dubai – illustrates teachers' growing appetite for opportunities to network and connect with others (see Box 4.3). Given the benefits of professional networking for teachers' professional development and well-being, the challenge for KHDA will be to encourage teachers' sustained participation in these types of programmes and to ensure they make the most of these opportunities.

Teachers in Dubai's schools report high levels of peer collaboration

There is a strong culture of collaboration within Dubai's private schools. As shown in the results of Table 4.1, a high share of teachers engage in professional collaboration on a regular basis. For example, over half of teachers in Dubai report engaging in exchanges and conversations with colleagues at least once a month. These activities can support co-ordination and strengthen social bonds within a school. This is likely possible because of a strong sense of trust within schools. TALIS 2018 data show that 91% of lower secondary teachers in Dubai believe they can rely in their colleagues (OECD average: 87%).

Still, teachers in Dubai are less likely to take part in more systematic and prescribed forms of collaboration, such as teaching jointly or observing other teachers' classes that exist in other high-performing systems, such as Shanghai (China) (Box 4.4). This is a missed opportunity for the sector, given that it is the deeper forms of teacher collaboration, such as team teaching, that promote the establishment of professional

learning communities (OECD, 2016[31]) and that have a more significant impact on teachers' job satisfaction, self-efficacy and retention (Mostafa and Pál, 2018[32]; OECD, 2020[20]).

While the benefits of collaborative cultures in schools are widely recognised, there is still limited knowledge regarding the policy frameworks that best support them. Top-down attempts to impose professional collaboration may be counter-productive. Compulsory time requirements can overcrowd staff schedules and in turn inhibit teacher-led collaboration and innovation. On the other hand, relying exclusively on stakeholders' agency, without providing supports in the form of dedicated time, evidence-based protocols and policy environments that encourage collaboration, feedback and innovation risks leaving many teachers behind (OECD, 2019[3]).

Box 4.4. Inter-school professional collaboration in Shanghai (China)

In Shanghai, the school structure allows teachers to collaborate on a daily basis as a part of their continuous professional learning. The system allows this to happen by limiting the teaching time to 12 hours per week to leave room for collaborative time. During this time, teachers are involved in observing other teachers' lessons or taking up mentorship duties for new or struggling teachers. A key part of Shanghai's collaborative professional development is the sharing of best practices among teachers.

The Empowered Management Program in Shanghai allows for further inter-school collaboration aimed at supporting and improving low-performing schools. Under the programme, partnerships between high-performing and low-performing schools are set up for a period of two years. Teachers and school leaders from both the schools work together closely, including visits across schools, discussing effective practices, observing classrooms and providing constructive feedback. The support given from partner schools also focusses on building research skills among teachers to help schools develop as learning organisations.

Source: (Jensen and Farmer, 2013[33]), *School Turnaround in Shanghai: The Empowered-Management Program Approach to Improving School Performance*, https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2013/05/14/63144/school-turnaround-inshanghai (accessed 15 April 2021).

Areas of improvement

Encouraging, supporting and collaborating with teacher initiatives can promote the development and leadership of teaching professional organisations

An important feature of highly professionalised teaching workforces is the existence of formal and informal collective bodies at the national and/or subnational levels, which have the legitimacy, autonomy and responsibility to exercise a degree of self-regulation and to actively shape their work and its conditions (OECD, 2019[3]). In Dubai and the UAE, there are few inter-school teaching professional bodies, and those that exist are relatively different from those present in most OECD and high-performing countries in structure, membership and focus. The most notable example is that of the Teacher Socials, a grass-roots network established in 2016 by a group of expatriate teachers from the public and private school sectors. Teacher Socials allows teachers to connect through online platforms, including Facebook and more recently an app. Membership is informal, and teachers do not need to register officially or pay a fee. The network has predominantly focused on supporting teachers' social connections and well-being, by organising events, offering discounts on products and services and disseminating tips and articles on how teachers can enhance their quality of life. The resources on offer are relatively general and not specifically related to or targeted at teaching or teachers.

The Teacher Socials is still some steps away from being a teaching professional organisation as those observed in OECD and other high-performing countries and are rarely invited to take part in policy debates at the sector or national level. However, they have been progressively taking on a more active role, articulating teachers' collective needs and advocating for change (Rizvi, 2020[34]). For example, Teacher Socials members have raised the need for stronger sector and system-level accountability over teachers' working conditions (see Policy Objective 4.3). An important step to promote the professionalisation of teaching in the Emirate will be for KHDA to develop closer links with the Teacher Socials, as well as with other teaching professional bodies (e.g. Teacher for All).

Fostering teachers' engagement can strengthen the legitimacy and effectiveness of education policy

Over the years, KHDA has developed a number of mechanisms to engage with the wider community. Social media and other digital platforms and tools have been expertly used to communicate with the public. KHDA has also set up – more or less formalised – groups, such as the KHDA Well-being Reference Group and the KHDA "Moms of Dubai". Through these networks, KHDA is able to consult the perspectives of key stakeholders (e.g. parents) on planned activities or initiatives underway. For example, the KHDA Well-being Reference Group has been closely involved in the adaptation of the DSWC to the Dubai context. While teachers can take part in these groups, at present, few do, and there are no specific groups targeted at teachers.

Moreover, at the school level, teachers are rarely consulted by the school leadership/management. For example, most school boards include representatives of the main school actors, including principals and students, but few invite teachers. School principals are often expected to raise issues on behalf of teachers. Having teachers' voice filtered by the school administration is not only inadequate to capture teachers' needs and concerns, but could also ultimately hinder teachers' sense of professional agency. There is, therefore, scope for ensuring more effective teacher engagement, as well as wider representation of teachers at the sector and school levels.

Potential next steps

Strengthen teachers' professional identity and agency

Why this is needed

Developing a sense of professional identify has benefits in terms of teachers' cognitive, subjective, and social well-being. In addition, it can support higher-quality teaching. Teachers' professional identity, as in other professions like medicine and law, can be strengthened and supported through organisations, both formal and informal.

Moreover, these organisations provide a vehicle for teachers to influence policies that affect them. Effective stakeholder consultation and engagement can ensure that key needs and concerns are considered in the policy design and implementation, which, in turn, can raise the effectiveness of interventions (Viennet and Pont, 2017[35]).

Offering opportunities for open dialogue and co-construction of policies and practices that relate to their working conditions and professional agenda can also help strengthen the status of the profession as a whole. This is particularly relevant given that a significant proportion of teachers in Dubai are expatriate and many come from countries with a tradition of and expectation for active engagement and public debates.

Considerations

Given Dubai's diversified school system and highly mobile teacher workforce, teachers will need even greater support to connect and build the types of relationships that foster a professional identity and agency. KHDA could support these efforts by:

- **Developing stable and formal linkages with the teaching workforce:** KHDA would benefit from establishing more stable and formalised connections with Teacher Socials and other relevant professional networks, as well as with the teaching workforce more broadly. This can take different forms such as:
  a. Establishing one or multiple KHDA Reference Group(s) on Teacher Well-being, with a representative sample of teachers (i.e. different curricula, background, socio-economic profile).
  b. Organising periodic meetings (e.g. once a month) with the KHDA Reference Group(s) as well as with existing professional organisations to update and discuss the latest policy developments affecting the educational sector and teachers, in particular.
- **Involving teacher organisations and representatives in policy discussions that impact the teaching workforce.** For example, KHDA could request their input to the development and implementation of Dubai's well-being in schools policy framework (see Chapter 3), the strategy of teachers' well-being (Policy Objective 4.1) and the school guidelines to foster and improve teachers' working conditions (Policy Objective 4.3).
- **Advocating for the establishment of an Emirate-wide body that includes teacher representatives from the public and private sectors**. If this consideration is taken forward, this body should also be involved in policy discussions.
- **Providing teacher-led organisations with platforms to facilitate their collaboration.** The What Works events might be leveraged for this purpose (see next section).
- **Encouraging schools to engage teachers in decision-making**. Similar to the concept of well-being champions that KHDA has disseminated across the sector, KHDA could encourage schools to develop **well-being committees** made up of staff, teacher and student representatives. Committee participants would be elected by their peers on a regular basis (see Chapter 3). In addition, KHDA could encourage schools to invite teacher representatives to join school boards.

Support peer learning, collaboration and networking among teachers within and across schools

Why this is needed

There is an emerging culture of teacher collaboration within and across schools in Dubai's private sector. Looking ahead, there is scope for *expanding* existing programmes to allow more teachers to take part in these activities, and to make them more *effective* at strengthening teachers' professional development and well-being. Reinforcing peer collaboration among teachers can also support professional identity and agency, thereby reinforcing the activities proposed in the previous section.

Considerations

KHDA should consider:

- **Mapping the offer for professional learning and collaboration opportunities, as well as identifying teachers' needs and barriers to participation**: KHDA could identify and categorise the current offer of professional learning opportunities and teacher networks. Information should be collected on suppliers (if applicable), target audience, fees, provision mode, content focus, frequency, teachers' participation rates and profile. In parallel, KHDA could conduct surveys to

identify teachers' needs for or challenges with regards to professional learning and collaboration. Alternatively, items could be included in the Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey. Based on this exercise and in collaboration with external partners, KHDA could identify and address gaps and issues, in terms of content and format (see some suggestions below).

- **Supporting peer learning, collaboration and networking within and across schools:** Teachers require support to collaborate with peers. From schools' perspective, this may mean providing additional time for those that engage in collaborative learning activities and/or financial compensation for those who lead these programmes.

  KHDA can also support teacher-led or school-led efforts by:

  - **Revisiting UAE teacher professional standards to ensure that they promote (or at least do not hinder) well-being and professional collaboration.** This step could be taken at the same time as stakeholders revise UAE's teacher standards to ensure they support the different dimensions of teachers' well-being (see potential next steps under Policy Objective 4.3).
  - **Investing in platforms for professional exchange.** KHDA could consider organising What Works events targeted specifically at teachers or creating a spin-off What Works event for teachers. Regardless of the approach, it will be important that KHDA consult with teacher organisations and representatives on the topics, formats and speakers. Engaging teachers in the development of these programmes could be even more beneficial to support teachers' sense of agency.
  - **Developing schemes whereby participation in What Works events or similar programmes count as credits for teachers' professional learning requirements** (if applicable).

Policy Objective 4.3. Improving teachers' working conditions to support their well-being

Dubai's private schools offer, for the most part, clear career paths, attractive salaries and benefits to teachers. This is important in a context where nearly all teachers are expatriates. In addition, as discussed in previous chapters, an increasing number of schools have set up programmes to support students' and staff's well-being. Nevertheless, evidence collected by the OECD review team suggests that school-level practices may be negatively affecting teachers' well-being. Pressure from schools' management and parents, heavy workloads, as well as uncertain contractual conditions have left many teachers feeling stressed and anxious, and a significant share report wanting to leave the school in which they work. While rare, there are also cases of more severe malpractices as documented by interviewees. These issues – many of which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic – can have significant detrimental effects on teachers' quality of life and on teaching. In the medium to long run, this could damage the attractiveness of the Emirate for expatriates.

Efforts are therefore needed to improve and regulate teachers' working conditions, as a way to strengthen teachers' well-being and ensure the sustainability of Dubai's education system. The next steps for KHDA will be to collaborate with other government institutions, teacher representatives, existing teacher professional organisations and Dubai's private schools to support decent working conditions across the sector.

Opportunities

Appealing working conditions attract highly-qualified teachers to Dubai

Given the relatively limited pool of local teachers, private schools in Dubai are heavily reliant on expatriate teachers. In order to encourage highly-qualified individuals to relocate to Dubai – often from another continent – schools have made efforts to offer attractive contractual packages. Since the cost of living in Dubai is high, contracts often include additional benefits, such as accommodation (e.g. housing allowance or shared accommodation with other teachers), flights (yearly air ticket), health insurance and visa assistance. Over time, these endowments have come to be considered the minimum benefit package for teachers. While uncommon, there have been cases of schools using these benefits to manipulate teachers once in the job, for example, by delaying or holding them (Rizvi, 2020[34]). These tactics[6] can generate more stress and anxiety in teachers, in particular for incoming teachers who may be unfamiliar with the system.

Limited data prevent an in-depth analysis of teachers' salaries, either across the sector or relative to international benchmarks. However, evidence suggests that teacher salaries and endowments vary significantly across the sector, with teachers in certain schools – mainly those following Western curricula – earning considerably more than their peers in Indian schools, for example. Nevertheless, a clearer understanding of salary in relation to well-being is needed.

Existing labour regulations can help ensure decent working conditions for all

Teachers' working conditions in Dubai's private sector are regulated by UAE labour regulations[7]. However, in a review from 2015-16, the International Labour Organization (ILO) identified a number of shortcomings and gaps in the UAE's labour market inspection system and normative framework (ILO, n.d.[36]; n.d.[37]). While these issues are not exclusive to the education sector, they can put teachers – as well as other staff members – at risk of unlawful practices. Incoming teachers may be particularly vulnerable to this. As discussed above, they may be unfamiliar with the system and more specifically, with their rights, existing support systems and reporting mechanisms. With smaller networks, incoming teachers may feel less supported or have no one to turn to for advice. The establishment of a modern labour market inspection system will be key to ensuring decent working conditions and health and safety standards at workplaces across all schools in the sector.

Schools have put more emphasis on staff's well-being in recent years

KHDA's efforts to raise awareness on well-being more generally (see Chapters 2 and 3) but also, increasingly, teacher's and staff's well-being more specifically, are yielding encouraging results. A growing number of private schools has introduced measures such as awareness raising campaigns (e.g. Well-being Wednesdays), information sessions, and/or in-school activities (e.g. mindfulness programmes) to help members of the school community develop the knowledge and tools required to live healthy and fulfilling lifestyles. While more reliable data would be required to assess their take-up and effectiveness, stakeholder interviews suggest that teachers tend to appreciate these initiatives. However, the fact that these initiatives rarely target teachers can pose obstacles for their participation. For example, activities may take part during the school day – i.e. teachers' working hours – preventing them from joining. Teachers are also frequently expected to organise and conduct initiatives, which might put further pressure on their workload.

Clear expectations for teachers' career progression can lessen teachers' anxiety and support their motivation

Teacher standards set common definitions, goals and expectations for teachers. Internationally and in the UAE, teacher standards guide the development and revision of initial teacher education and training programmes, performance appraisal systems, licensing processes and professional learning opportunities (Guerriero, 2017[28]). Teacher standards ensure a shared language around expectations for teachers and teacher practices, which is particularly relevant for education systems such as Dubai's private school sector, with a heterogeneous teacher workforce (OECD, 2020[38]).

Standards are also an enabling condition for teacher well-being. Research has found that workers can experience stress when the work demands placed on them do not match their support at work, knowledge, skills or ability to cope at work (Kyriacou, 2001[7]). Therefore, clear expectations concerning the knowledge, experience and skills that teachers require at each stage of their careers and ensuring that teachers are adequately prepared to take on these roles can ease and prevent anxiety, stress or feelings of inadequacy among teachers.

Areas for improvement

Promoting a more balanced teaching workload can support teachers' well-being

Self-reported data from TALIS show that, on average, teachers work 41 hours per week, which compares to 38 hours across OECD countries. However, according to national reports, many school disregard the contractual number of hours, leading in some cases to teachers working over 70 hours per week[8] (Rizvi, 2020[39]). Tighter regulation and monitoring will be important to identify such practices and curtail them. This is particularly urgent given anecdotal evidence that these types of issues have become more common after the start of the COVID-19 crisis.

Evidence suggests that the way teachers use their time could also be reviewed to strengthen their well-being. At present, teachers in Dubai's private schools spend a considerable amount of time teaching in the classroom. As a result, many teachers find it quite challenging to find the time to devote to the preparation of lessons. Insufficient time to plan classes not only impacts the quality of classes, but also the time available for teachers to recover, which can exacerbate teachers' work-related stress, long-term motivation and efficacy (Boeskens and Nusche, 2021[40]). In addition, many teachers complain about having to take care of administrative tasks, which many believe could be better served by administrative or support staff. TALIS data show that teachers in Dubai spend more time in general administrative work (3.6 hours) than the OECD average (2.6 hours). Administrative overload is frequently cited as a source of frustration among teachers and one of the factors reducing the attractiveness of their profession (OECD, 2019[41]). Dealing with parents' request is also time-consuming, and at times prevents teachers from focusing on students. This is a common issue in other high-performing systems. According to a recent report by Ofsted, England's (United Kingdom) evaluation agency, open and frequent communication between parents and staff, coupled with an instant response culture, have added to teacher's workload (Ofsted, 2019[42]). The COVID-19 pandemic is believed to have made this considerably worse. Box 4.5 discusses how England (United Kingdom) and Estonia were able to balance the workload of teachers. The next section will discuss some options private schools can take to address this challenge.

Box 4.5. Reducing teacher workload in England (United Kingdom) and Estonia

England (United Kingdom)

In 2014, the Department for Education launched the Workload Challenge to tackle the volume of teachers' workload and to support quality education. The online consultation collected suggestions and feedback on unnecessary and unproductive workload. Its main sources, as identified by respondents, were data management, lesson planning and ineffective marking. Three independent review groups were formed to address these burdensome tasks and investigate practical and sustainable solutions that would not have a negative impact on student outcomes. Their reports were published in March 2016. The Department for Education has also undertaken a range of actions to tackle workload. This includes the publication, in March 2018, of practical tools and resources to help schools review and reduce workload, publishing examples from schools about what they have done to reduce workload, establishing the Workload Advisory Group to tackle excessive data burdens in schools and, in November 2018, publishing the Department for Education's report and a response that accepted all the recommendations. The Department for Education has also undertaken robust research to understand working hours and perceptions of workload, with reports published in February 2017 and October 2019. The findings from the Teacher Workload Survey 2019 suggest there has been a reduction between 2016 and 2019 in reported working hours of five hours a week for teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders. Following the 2014 Workload Challenge, while respondents reported spending similar amounts of time teaching, they reported spending less time on non-teaching activities, with reductions concentrated in the Department for Education's areas of focus.

Estonia

In 2013, teacher employment in Estonia was reformed based on the Working Time of Educational Staff Act. The reform marked a shift from a teaching load system – in which staff contracts only specified teaching hours – to a workload system that specifies the total number of working hours and defines the full range of tasks that teachers are expected to perform. The reform implicitly acknowledged 290 annual hours spent on non-teaching activities in pre-primary education, 921 in primary and lower secondary education and 972 in upper secondary education, yielding a total annual workload of 1 610 statutory working hours in pre-primary education and 1 540 hours in primary to upper secondary education (corresponding to 35 weekly hours). These overall working hours are below the OECD average, as were the teaching hours specified by the old system. Given that the new regulations no longer specify teaching hours, the distribution of teachers' overall workload across individual teaching and non-teaching tasks is at the discretion of the school management. In some cases, school leaders' decisions on the use of teachers' time are subject to political agreements at the municipal level or with a school's teacher council.

Source: (Santiago et al., 2016[43]), *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Estonia 2016*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264251731-en; (Gov.uk, 2021[44]) *Reducing school workload,* https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/reducing-school-workload (accessed 15 April 2021).

Contractual arrangements can hinder teachers' well-being and efforts to build and sustain a high-quality teaching workforce

Most teachers in Dubai are employed on fixed-term contracts, often running no more than a year (Gallagher, 2019[45]). While renewable contracts provide the opportunity to periodically reassess and acknowledge teachers' performance, uncertainty about employment opportunities can be a significant source of stress for teachers, in particular given that their residency status is often tied to their job contracts.

Short-term contract also signals that there are limited opportunities for career-long trajectories in Dubai, leading many teachers to see their positions as a stepping stone to a more stable and long-term career elsewhere. According to a study conducted with expatriate teachers in Abu Dhabi, many feel they are "fix(ing) a temporary problem" (Ibrahim and Al-Taneiji, 2019[46]). Fact-finding interviews confirmed this belief is also shared by many in Dubai: many teachers revealed feeling like "expendable inputs". This perception can be detrimental to teachers' self-confidence and professional identity. In addition to posing an issue for teachers' well-being, these challenges can hinder efforts to build a sustainable, long-term, high-quality education system in the Emirate (Gallagher, 2019[45]).

Managing the pressure to perform can be stressful for teachers

Teachers in Dubai are fully committed to the UAE's and the Emirate's vision for the future. They have not only embraced the country's high aspirations, but also play an important role in supporting the system achieve its goals. Depending on the circumstances, working under pressure can motivate individuals. In fact, a recent TALIS-PISA study revealed that some of the most successful schools are the ones where teachers report the highest levels of stress (OECD, 2021[47]).

However, it can be challenging to strike the optimal equilibrium between incentive and stress. At the system or sector level, this depends on finding the balance between external accountability and promoting stakeholders' internal motivation. Systems that, like Dubai, the United Kingdom and the United States, have placed strong emphasis on external test scores as a measure of student, teacher and school success have tended to see increased stress and well-being concerns among teachers (see Chapters 1 and 5 on how this impacts students). According to TALIS 2018 data, for 49% of teachers in Dubai's private system "being held for students' achievement" was considered a source of stress. This compares to 44% of teachers in OECD countries.

In interviews, stakeholders revealed a number of concerns. First, the time and energy teachers spend on the annual inspection process, in addition to their regular tasks, can add to their stress levels. Second, the fact that the inspection results carry high stakes for schools is said to create a high-pressure atmosphere in schools, in particular right before and during the days inspections are carried out, and this affects teachers. Third, and perhaps more concerning, schools' inspection results can sometimes have a direct impact on teachers. In certain cases, when schools are not awarded the right to a fee increase (linked to high ratings in the school inspection), teachers' salaries are frozen or even cut, and their contracts' renewal delayed or even terminated. This puts enormous pressure on individual teachers.

Keeping up with constant reform and changing priorities can create anxiety and stress

Over the years, Dubai's private education system and schools have proven to be flexible and innovative, attentive to emerging needs and opportunities. Keeping up with this demanding pace can, however, become a source of stress for teachers in Dubai, as observed in TALIS results (see Figure 4.3). The need to familiarise oneself and accommodate to changes (e.g. introduction of new strategies and plans, and the revoking of previous programmes) can be time-consuming and frustrating, in particular when changes are perceived to be too frequent, unnecessary, burdensome or confusing. For example, in interviews, many teachers reported being anxious about the UAE's new teacher licensing system. First, there seems to be considerable misunderstanding among teachers about the requirements and consequences of the process. An OECD review of Abu Dhabi's education system revealed that while teachers in public schools were provided clear guidelines while preparing for the licensure exams, their colleagues in private schools received little information on what to expect from the test (OECD, 2019[48]). The same pattern might be taking place in Dubai as well. Other issues have been reported, including the feeling of either unpreparedness or overqualification, technical difficulties to register online, and fear the embarrassment if they do not pass the test (Gallagher, 2019[45]).

The flexibility of the UAE's licensing system to have a grace period for in-service teachers and validate the certification of selected countries speaks to the willingness of the system to reduce the burden of these requirements on teachers. Still, more could be done to ensure that teachers have adequate information about its objectives, rollout and impact. It is crucial that the introduction of performance management tools, take place in a constructive and fair manner, and is responsive to teachers' legitimate concerns.

Potential next steps

Strengthen teachers' well-being by supporting better working conditions across the sector

Why this is needed

As stipulated in *Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers* (UNESCO/ILO, 1966[49]), decent working conditions for teachers are crucial to promote effective learning, as well as teachers' professional and personal development. Ensuring decent working conditions is also critical for Dubai's private school sector to maintain its attractiveness to expatriate teachers in the Emirate and abroad, and to sustain its improvement trajectory.

Despite growing recognition of the importance of teachers' well-being and an increasing number of programmes targeted at supporting teachers in Dubai's private education sector, working conditions remain highly variable across schools. As the private sector regulator, KHDA can help advocate for teachers' well-being and collaborate with key stakeholders to ensure high-quality working conditions for all.

Considerations

KHDA should consider undertaking the following actions:

- **Drawing on KHDA's compliance visits to monitor teachers' working conditions and well-being**: schools' compliance with regulations, including workforce conditions, could be monitored during schools' compliance visit. This would require collaboration between KHDA and Dubai's Labour Department. DSIB's evaluation visit, on the other hand, could focus on the quality of processes and relationships and how they impact teachers (e.g. how the school and school community engage with teachers, and how teachers engage with each other).

  The United Kingdom's Ofsted has recently integrated staff well-being as part of their Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2019[42]). Similar steps could be taken as part of the process of revising the UAE School Inspection Framework (see Chapter 3). Leveraging KHDA's regulatory arm can send a strong message that teachers' well-being is a system-wide commitment.

  In the future, Dubai Adults@School Wellbeing Survey and TALIS data could also be used by KHDA and DSIB to identify schools and sub-sectors where teacher well-being might be at risk and require more regular and/or intense monitoring and follow-up.
- **Collecting data on the causes of teacher turnover/attrition**: KHDA should conduct research on the factors driving teacher attrition to inform the development of responses at the system and school levels. Two possible approaches should be considered:
  a. **Developing an exit survey that schools carry out when teachers leave their post or the country**. The results should be collected by KHDA data and research team (see Chapter 5) and analysed. This information could help KHDA understand the main reasons for teacher turnover/attrition.
  b. **Partnering with professional teacher organisations, such as Teacher Socials, to have a clearer understanding of the main issues affecting the well-being of teachers.**

- **Fostering conditions that promote teachers retention across the Dubai system:** KHDA could initiate a discussion with the relevant stakeholders in the education sector to encourage teachers' retention.
  a. **KHDA could partner with other UAE and Dubai government bodies to**:
     i. Revise UAE's teacher standards to ensure they support the different dimensions of teachers' well-being. Given that this might be a lengthy process, KHDA could consider, as a first step, developing its own supplement to teacher standards. Later, when revising the UAE's national teacher standards, Dubai's supplement could be used as the basis for KHDA's dialogue with other federal authorities.
     ii. Incorporate elements of teacher and staff well-being in the new UAE School Inspection Framework (see Chapter 3).
     iii. Promote teachers' contractual stability, by advocating for minimum time period requirements for work contracts for teachers (e.g. six months).
     iv. Advocate for expatriate teachers that have passed the licensing process and their probation period to be given the right to access teacher residency status/visas, which are longer-term and not linked to schools or their family member's contractual status.
  b. **Drafting school guidelines to foster and improve teachers' working conditions**: In partnership with other relevant educational and government stakeholders, KHDA can develop a guide/platform that:
     i. Clearly delineates the responsibilities of schools and providers towards teachers and teachers' rights.
     ii. Offers evidence-based advice on best school practices and interventions on different issues related to teachers' well-being (e.g. the development of contracts, ensuring balanced workloads, how to encourage appropriate teacher-parent interactions, and how to develop positive working environments).

     The KHDA data and research team could support these efforts (see Chapter 5). For example, KHDA may develop a workload reduction toolkit to help schools navigate through the areas. The toolkit consists of a mechanism of self-diagnosis and action to tackle the workload of teachers. The United Kingdom has an excellent model for this toolkit.
  c. Partnering with the private sector and professional organisations to develop a support network for teachers' mental health issues: although many schools have sought to provide support to teachers who are burnt out, stressed or depressed, a more systematic approach might be needed. A notable example is that of the United Kingdom's Education Support.
- **Offering relevant and timely information to teachers through an online platform on key matters related to their well-being and jobs** (e.g. local legislation, contact points, school inspection, licensing). Involving teacher professional organisation and teacher representatives can help KHDA scope the most important information teachers require.

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Notes

[1] Unless stated otherwise, TALIS data on teachers will refer to lower secondary teachers henceforth.

[2] An OECD average is estimated based on the arithmetic average of lower secondary teacher data across the 31 OECD countries and economies participating in TALIS. In the case of principals, an OECD average is estimated based on the arithmetic average across 30 OECD countries and economies in TALIS. More information is available at: www.oecd.org/education/talis.

[3] The reason why teachers over the age of 51 are not included in this calculation is to discard individuals who might be nearing retirement age.

[4] The Emirate of Abu Dhabi has participated in TALIS since 2013.

[5] The Dubai Adults@Schools Wellbeing Survey was translated into Arabic, and a handful of additional questions (e.g. around sleep, wellbeing literacy, working hours and student-teacher relationships) were included in the original questionnaire.

[6] Actions such as these are unlawful in the UAE, and can be reported to the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (MOHRE).

[7] This includes: Federal Law No. 24 dated 7 November 1981; Federal Law No. 15 dated 15 December 1985; Federal Law No. 12 dated 27 October 1986; Federal Law No. 14 dated 17 October 1999; as well as multiple measures, decrees and resolutions. (Viennet and Pont, 2017[35])

[8] According to the UAE Labour Law, the maximum number of hours is 48 hours per week or 8 hours per day.

5 Supporting student well-being in Dubai's private schools

The Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) is a strong advocate for student well-being, raising awareness of its importance, introducing data collection tools and encouraging stakeholder collaboration platforms. School-level initiatives have also been introduced across the sector. The goal now is to ensure that policies and practices have a more significant impact in supporting students' well-being. This chapter will examine how KHDA can facilitate improvements by leveraging the evidence at hand, complementing a whole-school approach to well-being with targeted actions aimed at priority issues, and empowering students.

Introduction

In the last decade, the Emirate of Dubai has placed well-being front and centre in its vision for the future, inspiring innovative Emirate- and nation-wide initiatives (see Chapter 2). Behind such efforts lie a widespread recognition of the importance of individuals' well-being for strengthening the fabric of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) society, retaining the Emirate's attractiveness to expatriates, and supporting high levels of productivity. Guided by Emirate- and nation-wide development strategies, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) has helped introduce and translate this vision into Dubai's private education sector.

Since 2015, KHDA has become a strong advocate for student well-being, raising awareness of its importance, introducing data collection tools and encouraging stakeholder collaboration platforms. Following KHDA's lead, school-level initiatives have been developed across the sector, with a focus on encouraging healthy lifestyles and enhancing students' well-being (KHDA, 2020[1]).

Despite considerable progress, quantitative and qualitative evidence suggests that many students in Dubai still struggle on a physical, social and emotional level in and outside of school. As will be explored later in this chapter, some of the main concerns relate to bullying, poor lifestyle habits and schoolwork-related anxiety. Moreover, the data and stakeholder interviews suggest that some student groups are particularly vulnerable to these issues, notably Emirati boys (OECD, 2019[2]).

The challenge now is to ensure that policies and practices have a more significant impact in tackling these and other important well-being challenges. This chapter will examine how KHDA can facilitate these improvements. Policy Objective 5.1 discusses how the evidence at hand can be leveraged for research purposes and more strategic policy making that can ultimately support students' quality of life. Policy Objective 5.2 argues that a more targeted approach is required to address priority issues and support at-risk student groups, which may be otherwise overlooked by broad initiatives. Finally, Policy Objective 5.3 explores the issue of student empowerment, as a way in which to equip children with the skills and knowledge to make informed decisions about their own health and well-being, and to enable them to become agents of change.

The research on student well-being

This section presents a brief overview of the research on student well-being, including the definition and analytical framework that will be used in this chapter, and key findings from the literature on the factors associated with well-being.

Definition and analytical framework

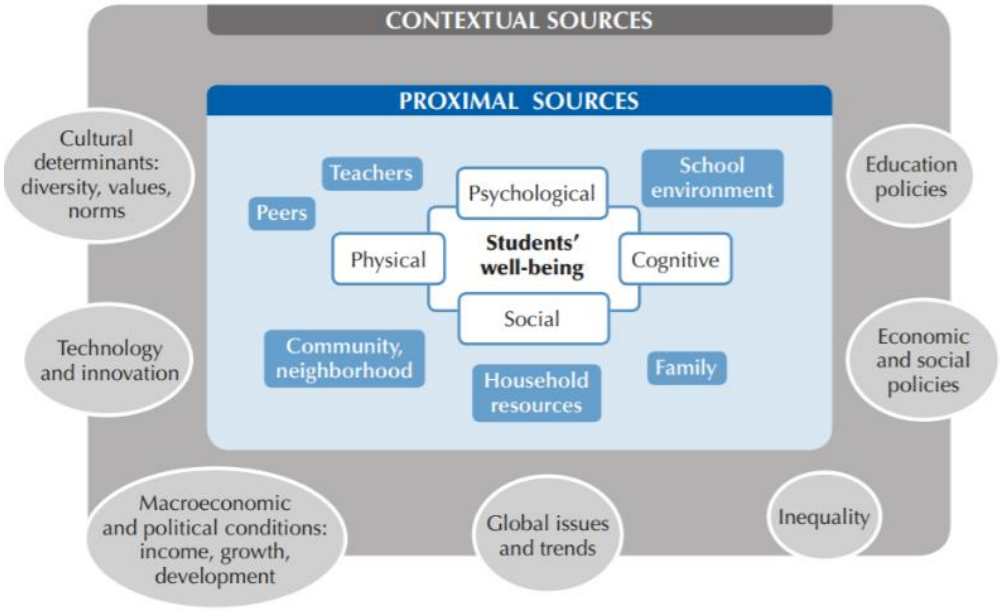
The OECD defines students' well-being as the psychological, cognitive, social and physical functioning and capabilities that students need to live a happy and fulfilling life (OECD, 2017[3]). This definition combines a "children's rights approach" that emphasises the right of all children to have a happy life, with a "development approach" that underscores the importance of students developing skills and knowledge to improve their well-being in the present and in the future (Ben-Arieh et al., 2013[4])). According to this definition, student well-being encompasses the following dimensions (see Figure 5.1):

- The **psychological** dimension: this refers to students' sense of purpose in life, self-awareness, affective states, emotional strength and mental health.
- The **social** dimension: this includes students' relationships with their family, their peers and their teachers, as well as students' feelings about their social life in and outside of school.

- The **cognitive** dimension: this comprises students' proficiency in using academic knowledge to solve problems alone or in collaboration with others, and high-order reasoning skills (e.g. critical thinking).
- The **physical** dimension: this includes students' physical health and the adoption of a healthy lifestyle.

These dimensions are interrelated, meaning that students need to flourish in all these different areas to be able to develop and thrive. Traditionally, schools have focused primarily on the cognitive dimension of student well-being, often crowding out a focus on the other dimensions. Policymakers have an important role in helping counter-act this tendency to ensure a more holistic approach to student well-being (see Policy Objective 5.3).

Figure 5.1. Dimensions and sources of students' well-being, OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2015



Source: (OECD, 2017[3]), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume III): Students' Well-Being*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264273856-en.

As observed in Figure 5.1, the different dimensions of student well-being interact within a **broader context** (e.g. home environment, the macroeconomic conditions, social policies and global issues). This has important implications for policy making, as this means that it is not enough to focus on individuals' attributes; well-being policies and practices also have to act on and/or take into consideration the other factors that impact students (e.g. societal norms). For example, efforts to change individuals' attitudes to health have often called for broad policies that use multi-faceted and complementary measures (e.g. advertising campaigns, building appropriate venues for sport and physical activity, regulatory policies on the food industry, and subsidies). Moreover, in terms of research and analysis, this implies that cross-country comparisons must be undertaken with careful consideration of different contextual factors. In light of this, Chapter 1 identified and discussed some of the distinctive features of Dubai's socio-economic context that need to be accounted for when examining the state of student well-being in the sector, as well as existing policies and practices.

Key findings from the literature

A large body of research documents the importance of student well-being. Evidence shows that children who thrive across the different dimensions of well-being are more likely to perform better academically, be more motivated in school and report higher life satisfaction (OECD, 2019[5]) (Felez-Nobrega et al., 2017[6]) (Gutman and Vorhaus, 2012[7]). From a government perspective, strong well-being can help strengthen the fabric of society, support higher levels of productivity and reduce the costs associated with poor health and anti-social behaviours (Maughan, Collishaw and Stringaris, 2013[8]) (OECD, 2017[3]).

Research shows that mental and physical health issues that develop during childhood and adolescence – such as depression and obesity – often carry into adulthood (Collishaw, 2015[9]), and so do many health-promoting (or undermining) behaviours. This highlights the importance of strengthening students' physical and mental health and encouraging healthy lifestyle behaviours from an early stage (Burns and Gottschalk, 2020[10]).

This section will provide an overview of some of main trends and factors associated with student well-being. For a full review, please refer to the OECD reports *Educating 21st Century Children: Emotional Well-being in the Digital Age* (Burns and Gottschalk, 2019[11]) and *Education in the Digital Age: Healthy and Happy Children* (Burns and Gottschalk, 2020[10]).

Factors associated with student well-being

In addition to gender and age, research has identified some key factors associated with children's well-being, which include their:

- **Home environment:** evidence suggests that children thrive in caring families, where they feel safe and happy, and receive support to learn about themselves and their social, cultural and physical environments. Conversely, family disruptions, distress and conflicts can have a negative impact on child development and well-being (Burns and Gottschalk, 2020[10]), including later in life (Carlson and Corcoran, 2001[12]).
- **School environment:** research reveals that a positive school climate can promote students' academic achievement, well-being and self-esteem (Hoge, Smit and Hanson, 1990[13]; Angus, MacNeil and Busch, 2009[14]; Way, Reddy and Rhodes, 2007[15]). Schools with safe, respectful and caring learning environments also protect students from engaging in maladaptive behaviours, such as truancy, smoking, drinking, using drugs, and other deviant and risky behaviours (Catalano et al., 2009[16]; Gase et al., 2017[17]; La Russo, Romer and Selman, 2008[18]). Two important elements of students' experience in school include their:
  - **Relationship with teachers:** the literature suggests that students who have good relationships with their teachers tend to be happier, and those who perceive high levels of teacher support tend to handle stress better at school (Malecki and Demaray, 2006[19]; Goldman et al., 2016[20]). Positive teacher-student relationships are also associated with better emotion regulation and positive peer relationships (Goldman et al., 2016[20]). There is some indication that strong teacher-student attachment is associated with lower levels of delinquency (Bergin and Bergin, 2009[21]).
  - **Relationships with peers**: research shows peer relations can affect children in terms of their cognitive, social, emotional, behavioural and developmental outcomes (Hay, 2005[22]; Haynie and Osgood, 2005[23]; Hinde et al., 1985[24]; Ost, 2010[25]; Reitz et al., 2014[26]).
- **Socio-economic context:** the social and economic conditions of a country, community or household can also play a role in children's well-being by affecting individual families and their overall financial resources and concerns about the future (Ottová-Jordan et al., 2015[27]).

Typically, interventions carried out by education stakeholders – including schools – focus on students' home and school environments, which they can influence directly or indirectly. For example, to address students' nutrition and eating habits, education systems often rely on changes to school meals. Tackling the socio-economic context is possible, but often beyond schools' or education stakeholders' reach. Given the importance of students' socio-economic context, comprehensive and multi-sectoral approaches are crucial to strengthening students' well-being in and outside schools. Keeping with the previous example, a concerted effort between education stakeholders, media regulators, the food industry and health authorities would be necessary to effectively support students' nutrition and eating habits. This partnership could, for instance, help protect children from junk food marketing and ensure all children have access to nutritious, affordable food choices.

Well-being trends among children

Data collated by the OECD, the World Health Organization and other research reveal that in most high-performing education systems some well-being trends and health behaviours are improving. For example, rates of accidental child mortality, alcohol and tobacco consumption and bullying are becoming less prevalent[1]. Other trends however paint a less promising picture. Obesity rates are increasing, and physical activity is decreasing on average (Aston, 2018[28]). Diseases like cardiovascular disease and type II diabetes, generally thought of as diseases of adulthood, are now being diagnosed in children as young as 2 years old. Evidence suggests that there has been a significant increase in the number of children and adolescents reporting symptoms of mental health problems and psychiatric disorders over the past few decades (Costello, Copeland and Angold, 2011[29]; Olfson et al., 2014[30]; Burns and Gottschalk, 2019[11]). These trends are also evident in Dubai, though with a couple of notable differences, which will be discussed in the next section.

Student well-being in Dubai

An analysis of well-being policies and practices in Dubai's private sector first needs to examine the main issues related to student well-being in the sector, or in other words, the challenges that policies and practices need to act upon. This type of analysis, if undertaken regularly and systematically (see Policy Objective 5.1), can inform the development of targeted approaches and responses to specific issues (Policy Objective 5.2). See Table 1.1 in Chapter 1 for a discussion on the methodology and main data sources used for this purpose.

The state of students' well-being in Dubai

Quantitative and qualitative evidence offer an overview – albeit incomplete – of the state of students' well-being in Dubai, how it differs across nationalities, gender and age groups, and patterns. Overall, self-reported data suggest high rates of life satisfaction on average. Results from PISA 2018 show that over a quarter of 15-year-old students (27%) in Dubai can be classified as very satisfied with life (OECD average: 33%). Evidence from the 2020 Dubai Student Well-being Census (DSWC) reveals that around 50%% of students in Grades 6-12 reported high levels of happiness, and, in line with this, an absence of sadness.

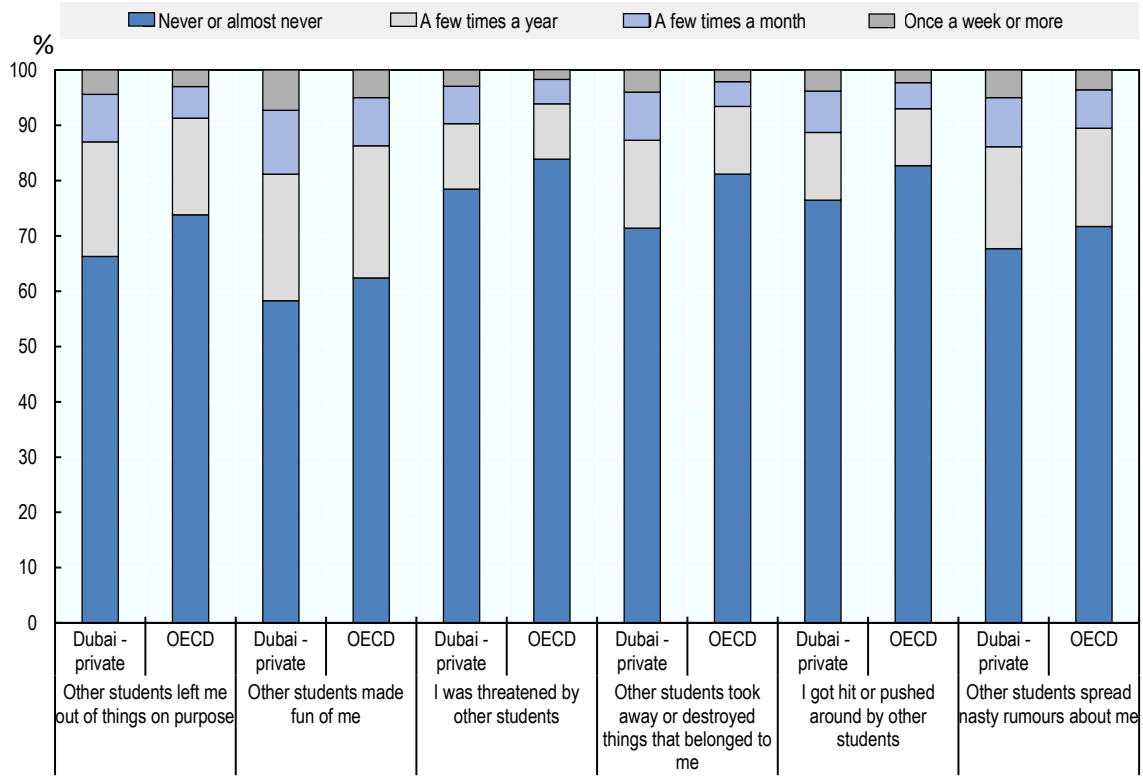
However, the evidence suggests that students often face certain issues in and outside school:

- **Bullying is relatively common and damaging:** DSWC 2020 reveals that only between 65%-80% of students in Grades 6-12 had not been exposed to bullying in the previous year (KHDA, 2021[31]). Data suggest that boys are more likely to be victims of physical or verbal bullying. PISA 2018 data confirm such findings (see Figure 5.2) and reveal that physical abuse appears more common than in other countries: around 9% of students reported having been hit or been pushed around by other students at least a few times a month, compared to 7% in OECD countries. PISA data also suggest

that overall exposure to bullying is more prevalent among Emiratis and boys (KHDA, 2021[31]). High rates of bullying are concerning because the evidence shows that children who bully or are bullied are more likely to have depressive and anxiety symptoms, low self-esteem, feel lonely, and lose interest in activities. These adverse effects can persist into adulthood (Choi, 2018[32]). DSWC data have, however, revealed some reason for cautious celebration: the share of boys reporting exposure to physical bullying had been declining over the years, with a significant drop in 2020. Further monitoring will be needed to check whether the return to in-person instruction will bring back bullying acts. An in-depth analysis could also help identify the main factors behind this trend.

Figure 5.2. Frequency of exposure to bullying, PISA 2018

During the past 12 months, percentage of 15-year-old students who reported where the following occurred



Source: (OECD, 2019[2]), *PISA 2018 Database*, https://oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database (accessed 15 June 2021).

StatLink https://stat.link/71vkxz

- **Poor habits and lifestyles can put students' health at risk:** data from DSWC 2020 suggest that 47% of Dubai students do not get a good night's sleep (KHDA, 2021[33]). Nearly one-third of students in the Emirate fail to attain recommended levels of fruit and vegetable consumption (i.e. eating fruits and vegetables at least five times a week) (KHDA, 2019[34]). PISA 2018 data suggest that only a small share of 15-year-olds attain optimal levels of physical activity – the WHO advocates for 60 minutes per day of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (e.g. brisk walking, playing basketball or football, bike riding etc.) for children. Table 5.1 shows that girls are less likely to take up regular moderate or vigorous physical activity outside of school. This is all the more concerning because around 9% of 15 year-old students do not attend weekly physical education classes (OECD, 2015[35]). There is an abundance of literature demonstrating the harm of physical

inactivity, unhealthy eating habits and inadequate sleep for children's physical and emotional well-being as well as their cognitive development (see (Burns and Gottschalk, 2020[10])).

Table 5.1. Frequency of participation in physical activity, by gender, PISA 2018

Percentage of 15 year-old students who report engaging in moderate or vigorous physical activity outside of school, Dubai private sector

	Moderate		Vigorous	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
0 days	13.8	10.0	27.2	11.0
1 day	15.3	10.6	21.3	13.3
2 days	16.0	13.1	17.9	15.4
3 days	14.4	11.5	12.3	14.7
4 days	8.6	11.5	7.9	10.9
5 days	11.0	12.6	6.0	12.5
6 days	3.8	5.7	2.3	5.9
7 days	17.2	25.1	5.2	16.3

Note: Physical activities, such as walking and cycling can be considered moderate if they raise a person's heart rate and the person breaks into a sweat. Activities such as hiking, jogging, or playing tennis or football are considered vigorous if breathing becomes difficult and fast, and the heart rate increases rapidly

Source: (OECD, 2019[2]), *PISA 2018 Database*, https://oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database (accessed 15 April 2021).

- **Some students report weak social connections at school:** according to data from DSWC 2020, 62-68% of Grade 6-12 students feel highly connected to adults at school, and 57-64% feel they are in caring and respectful school environments (KHDA, 2021[31]). These figures have increased remarkably since the start of the pandemic, suggesting that efforts by schools and teachers to support students have been highly appreciated. However, less than half of students felt they could communicate about their well-being (KHDA, 2021[33]). According to PISA 2018 data, around a quarter of students disagree with the statement "I make friends easily" and a similar share report feeling like an outsider in school (Table 5.2). In almost all respects, Emirati students and boys seem to have weaker engagement with school. This is concerning because students' sense of belonging can have an important impact on their learning outcomes and life satisfaction. PISA 2018 results reveal that students[2] who feel like an outsider at school score on average 30 points lower in reading, and were over three times as likely to report that they are not satisfied with their life[3].

Table 5.2. Students' sense of belonging in school, by gender and nationality, PISA 2018

Percentage of 15-year-old students who disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements, Dubai's private sector

		I feel like an outsider (or left out of things) at school.	I make friends easily at school.	I feel like I belong at school.	I feel awkward and out of place in my school.	Other students seem to like me.
Gender	Female	75.8	23.5	26.4	78.2	15.0
	Male	74.2	22.5	30.0	72.0	21.5
Nationality	Emirati	61.2	27.5	35.9	66.5	23.7
	Expat	75.5	22.2	26.8	76.7	17.2
Dubai – private sector (average)		75.0	20.8	23.9	80.8	22.0
OECD average		80.5	24.9	29.2	80.1	19.2

Source: (OECD, 2019[2]), *PISA 2018 Database*, https://oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database (accessed 15 June 2021).

- **Schoolwork-related anxiety:** anecdotal evidence from the OECD fact-finding interviews suggests that students are under significant pressure from their parents to obtain high grades and perform well in school and in exams (see Chapter 1). This translates into high levels of stress and anxiety. Data from PISA 2015[4] on students' schoolwork-related anxiety indicate that Dubai students report higher anxiety levels than peers in OECD countries (Box 5.3). Moreover, similarly to what is observed in most OECD countries, girls are significantly more likely to experience schoolwork-related anxiety.

Table 5.3. Schoolwork-related anxiety, PISA 2015

Results based on students' self-reports

	Index of schoolwork-related anxiety		Gender difference in the index of schoolwork-related anxiety (B-G)	
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.
Australia	0.19	(0.01)	-0.52	(0.02)
B-S-J-G (China)	0.23	(0.01)	-0.13	(0.03)
Canada	0.17	(0.01)	-0.57	(0.03)
Dubai	0.21	(0.01)	-0.26	(0.03)
England (United Kingdom)	0.25	(0.02)	-0.55	(0.03)
Estonia	-0.22	(0.01)	-0.46	(0.03)
Ireland	0.15	(0.02)	-0.41	(0.03)
Korea	0.10	(0.01)	-0.22	(0.03)
Netherlands	-0.54	(0.02)	-0.36	(0.02)
Northern Ireland (United Kingdom)	0.25	(0.03)	-0.47	(0.04)
OECD average	0.01	(0.00)	-0.44	(0.00)
Scotland (United Kingdom)	0.29	(0.02)	-0.64	(0.03)
Singapore	0.23	(0.01)	-0.13	(0.03)
United Arab Emirates	0.20	(0.01)	-0.24	(0.02)
Wales (United Kingdom)	0.23	(0.02)	-0.63	(0.03)

Note: Data refer to the Dubai average, including students from the public and private sectors.
Source: (OECD, 2017[3]), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume III): Students' Well-Being*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264273856-en.

Policy Objective 5.1. Strengthening evidence-based and data-driven policy making to support student well-being

High-performing education systems tend to regard reliable evidence and systematic analysis as key mechanisms that underpin strategic policy making and help drive improvements. As part of its journey to support well-being policies and practices in Dubai's private sector, KHDA has introduced a range of sophisticated instruments that collect data on students' – and teachers' (see Chapter 4) – psychological, social, cognitive and physical states. The challenge now is to make fuller use of this data to support students' holistic development. In KHDA, this is a matter of developing the technical skills and research culture that encourage and support a more systematic, data-led and evidence-informed approach to policy development and regulation. In schools, this will mean supporting school leadership and school staff to understand the information and offering evidence-based guidance on how it can be used to action change (discussed in Chapter 3). While this section focuses on students, many of the points and considerations raised are also applicable to other stakeholders.

Opportunities

KHDA has formed a rich evidence base on students' well-being

KHDA has made important efforts to collect and monitor information on students' cognitive, psychological, social, and physical well-being in recent years. The DSWC, which was introduced in 2017, is one of the most noteworthy of KHDA's initiatives in this area. The DSWC is an annual survey conducted for all students in Grades 6-12, which covers many areas of interest, including students' sense of belonging, habits, and satisfaction levels. Student identification means that results from DSWC can be used to track students and student cohorts over the years (see Box 3.5 in Chapter 3). The DSWC is conducted in collaboration with the South Australian Government (SAG), which is responsible for designing the survey, cleaning and analysing the data and producing system- and school-level reports and dashboards. The survey methodology appears to follow best international methodological practice (OECD, 2013[36]) and has consistently had high student response rates. Over the years, KHDA and SAG have worked together to adapt the instrument, which is based on a survey originally conducted in South Australia, to Dubai's local context. For example, the questionnaire captures information on students' nationality and is offered in three different languages. This is particularly important given the specificities of Dubai's student population and socio-economic circumstances (see Chapter 1).

Other instruments also allow KHDA to collect evidence on students' well-being, including results from the school inspection and ad-hoc surveys sent out to education stakeholders (e.g. one-off survey conducted in 2020). Dubai's participation in international student assessments, including PISA, means that the Emirate also has internationally comparable data on the topic, enabling benchmarking and offering a perspective on the association between well-being and learning outcomes. The Emirate's potential participation in the OECD Survey of Social and Emotional Skills could contribute to expanding this database further with information on the social and emotional skills of school children of 10 and 15 years of age and how these relate to academic performance and well-being.

Through its different data collection instruments, KHDA has built one of the largest multicultural datasets on student well-being in the world, similar to those of world-class education systems in rigour and quality, such as the Netherlands and regions of Australia. However, at present, there are no sector-level efforts to gather objective data on specific dimensions of students' well-being, in particular on their physical health, or to undertake relevant triangulation of the existing data (e.g. teachers' and parental perspective), which could provide stakeholders with a more comprehensive perspective on the issue.

KHDA is developing in-house technical expertise in research and analysis

There is growing data, analysis and research capacity within KHDA. This includes, for example, the KHDA data and research team, responsible for conceiving and overseeing dozens of research projects. The DSWC team, which manages the implementation of the student survey, also plays a role in the analysis and dissemination of the survey's findings. For example, the team is responsible for repackaging the system-level report KHDA receives from SAG into more user-friendly products (e.g. brief reports and infographics) that are shared with different stakeholders.

Stakeholder interviews also suggest that KHDA is increasingly drawing on the data collected to inform their policies and practices. For example, KHDA's awareness-raising campaigns aimed at encouraging better sleeping habits are based on evidence from DSWC that a good night's sleep was positively associated with students' well-being in Dubai.

Areas for improvement

KHDA's research, analytical and data collection capacity could be further strengthened

Within the organisation, at the time of the OECD fact-finding mission, there were only six-eight individuals working in the data and research and the DSWC teams, most of whom are spread across multiple teams/projects. The number of staff devoted to research, analysis and data collection is inadequate relative to the complexity and scope of the work and not in keeping with international staffing numbers. Most of the research work is commissioned to external research institutes, consultancies or researchers. While this is a deliberate – and legitimate – approach, it poses some challenges to the organisation that need to be carefully managed.

Stakeholder interviews revealed that there is inadequate expertise in key areas of education research, including psychometrics, econometrics, and statistics. A wide range of in-house technical skills can support KHDA's ability to guide and supervise external experts' work, in particular more technically complex projects such as the DSWC. More importantly, it can support the organisation to make fuller use of the evidence collected for policy-making purposes. Most education systems with a mature data culture develop teams focused exclusively on data collection, analysis and research, which include sufficient staff with relevant technical skills and knowledge.

Moreover, perhaps because KHDA's priority has been mainly on regulatory mechanisms and data collection (see Chapter 2), less emphasis has been placed on research and/or analysis. As a result, there does not yet seem to be a strategic direction for the research being conducted by the data and research team. Projects are carried out on a mostly ad-hoc basis. While a certain degree of flexibility is important, a more sustained approach could be beneficial to foster improvement in the sector.

The wealth of well-being data could help identify and monitor issues and at-risk school types or student groups

With the exception of the DSWC summary reports and infographics, evidence suggests that KHDA conducts limited analysis of its well-being data. This is a significant missed opportunity for the organisation and the sector. As observed in the Student well-being in Dubai section above, the results from the surveys can be used to identify, monitor and track improvements, as well as specific well-being concerns and at-risk groups (e.g. bullying among boys). With adequate statistical and methodological skills and tools, more sophisticated analysis can also be carried out. For example, longitudinal data from the DSWC can be used to establish causal inferences and reveal the impact of the COVID-9 pandemic on student well-being. As will be discussed in Policy Objective 5.2, this type of analysis can be instrumental in policy making.

KHDA could leverage data collection tools more effectively in policy design, implementation and evaluation

Given that schools and school networks have primary responsibility for student well-being in Dubai's private sector, there is a common understanding that they are the main users of the DSWC data (see Box 3.5 in Chapter 3). However, the potential of data collection tools and their results to support KHDA remains less acknowledged. As a result, evidence gathered by the OECD review team suggests that, at present the data collection tools and their results remain under-utilised by KHDA for its own activities and planning. This is a significant missed opportunity.

Internationally, data collection tools play a key role in the education policy cycle by informing the appraisal of policies before they are fully designed or implemented, as well as the monitoring and evaluation of policies during and after full roll-out (Golden, 2020[37]). By gathering and analysing the evidence, policymakers are able to make the necessary adjustments that strengthen the impact and effectiveness of policies and practices. Successful interventions – at the sector or school level - can be identified, analysed and disseminated more widely. In the case of Dubai, for example, the DSWC could be adapted to investigate in greater depth areas that are of interest to KHDA. The information collected could help support the identification or development of targeted and evidence-based interventions (see Policy Objective 5.2).

Expanding access to the data can support its effective use

Other than an overview of system-level results of the DSWC, summarised in brief infographics and short videos disseminated online, little student well-being data are made available to the general public and the research community. In part, this reflects KHDA's understandably cautious approach to disseminating DSWC school-level results, mindful that this information might be misused by the press or investors. However, there are many ways in which to process the data and report results to avoid such risks (for example of Australia's MySchool platform). While the OECD review team was told that initial discussions are being carried out within the organisation about making the DSWC database publicly available, it is still unclear whether – and if so, when – this would take place, and what type of information would be released. For the time being, schools are free – and encouraged – to make their own results available with staff and the school community. However, many schools do not. Limited access and transparency can make it very difficult for stakeholders, including teachers and other school staff who often are not able to see the school-level reports (see Chapters 3 and 4, to use the data effectively, or to exchange views about the issues at work.

There is limited local expertise and reliable information sources stakeholders can draw on

The UAE and Dubai's research community is small in comparison to what is typically found in OECD countries, such as Estonia, Ireland or the United Kingdom. This is in part because most local higher education institutions focus predominantly on teaching rather than on research activities (Gallagher, 2019[38]). Given limited local capacity, KHDA relies heavily on foreign expertise. While international institutes and consultants can bring useful knowledge, they usually lack local insights and are often unable to provide support on a daily basis that is critical for the successful implementation of initiatives.

In addition, the field of student well-being is still maturing in Dubai and worldwide. This is not only true of academia but also of policymaking. With limited reliable information available on effective interventions, education stakeholders – including school leaders, teachers, parents and others – are more likely to fall for unproven claims. This is particularly likely when schools' capacity to interpret and use data is limited, which is the case in many of Dubai's private schools (see Chapter 3). To add to this, market competition can put significant pressure on private schools to display their efforts to support student well-being (see Chapter 1), which can lead them to adopting ineffective or dubious tools and/or programmes.

In this context, KHDA could play an important "clearing house" role, to help distil and present evidence from educational research to stakeholders in an easily accessible way, and to identify and disseminate high-quality products and service providers, as well as relevant and effective interventions (see some examples in Table 5.4).

Table 5.4. Distilling evidence effectively: knowledge brokerage organisations and institutions

Country	Organisation	Description
United Kingdom	Educational Endowment Foundation	The Educational Endowment Foundation (EEF), part of the UK Government "What Works" initiative network of evidence centres, is a research charity focused on building and utilising evidence to improve equity in education. The foundation conducts its own research and extracts information to present as toolkits, which summarise evidence from various research studies in dashboard style, showcasing the comparative cost, evidence strength and measured impact on a visual scale for a large range of policy reform options and initiatives. The aim of the toolkits is to allow for policymakers and other users to get a quick overview of the strength of evidence supporting a particular course of action, and identify low cost high impact policy solutions.
Denmark	Danish Clearinghouse for Educational Research	Established in 2006, the Danish Clearinghouse for Educational Research was one of the first education research clearinghouses to be established. The clearinghouse does not itself conduct research studies, but analyses and attempts to identify meaningful lessons from educational research covering all levels of education, from early childhood to higher education. It produces systematic research mappings (which aim to compile the relevant research for a particular policy area) and systematic research reviews (which compile, analyse and synthesise the relevant evidence to tackle a specific research question). The review process takes a systematic and structured approach to identifying, mapping and collating the body of research available, in order to assist the policymaker when considering education policy issues.
Norway	Norwegian Knowledge Centre for Education	The Norwegian Knowledge Centre for Education was created in 2004 to gather and summarise the results of Norwegian and international evidence on education in a more accessible manner through the creation of an evidence database. The centre conducts systematic evidence reviews and analyses, as well as "state of the field" reviews which summarise major international developments in a given educational field since the beginning of the century. Through its web portal, the centre publishes summary "overviews" of its research, which also explicitly state who the research is primarily aimed at (policymakers, practitioners etc.).
Switzerland	Swiss Coordination Centre for Research in Education	The Swiss Coordination Centre for Research in Education (SCCRE) is an institution under the auspices of the Swiss federal government and the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK). The centre promotes the exchange of information and research results between all stakeholders in the education system. A key ongoing function is to document and summarise education research projects and summarise and add the results and knowledge as an entry to a web-based database, which is available to the public.
Intergovernmental or international organisations	Evidence Informed Policy and Practice in Education in Europe (EIPEE)	A project funded by the European Commission which explored the links between research and decision making in education policy across Europe, with a view to developing mechanisms for knowledge brokerage and acting as a capacity-building exercise for utilising research in education systems. Through a survey of countries on their activities and mechanisms for linking research, the project found that the majority of activities were linked to communicating the results of research, with a much smaller focus on the use of research by policymakers later on.
	World Bank's "Evidence to policy" notes	A series of notes issued monthly by the World Bank that highlight the results of evaluations of many social initiatives supported by the World Bank, including education reforms. The notes aim to disseminate nontechnical reviews of the growing number of robust evaluations of innovation.

Source: (Golden, 2020[37]), *Education policy evaluation: Surveying the OECD landscape*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9f127490-en.

The KHDA Chatter blog, developed in 2018, was a step in the right direction. The website hosts short briefs on key education research and topics (e.g. inclusive learning) as well as case studies from local schools (although many are no supported with impact evidence). Due to a lack of resources, KHDA chatter is currently inactive. More recently, KHDA developed the New Days New Ways portal, which offers links to apps, websites, services and other resources, targeted at specific issues (e.g. tech tools, 'edutainment', well-being) and specific audiences (e.g. educators, parents and students), is another notable initiative. While the platform may be helpful for some stakeholders (see Chapter 3), there are few suggestions directed at students on well-being. Moreover, not all of the recommendations come with sufficient guidance on how and in which context resources can be used, or seem to have been adequately curated or

scrutinised, in particular in light of Dubai's specificities. Strengthening KHDA's in-house research and technical skills would ensure that they are able to take on these tasks effectively.

Potential next steps

Strengthen KHDA's research culture and capacity to support evidence-based policymaking

Why this is needed

At present, KHDA is missing an important opportunity to leverage the data it collects on student well-being to inform policies and practices in Dubai's private sector. By mining the data available, KHDA would be able to identify, monitor and communicate the key well-being concerns and how they may differ across the sector. As will be discussed in Policy Objective 5.2., this is key to ensure a more targeted approach to addressing priority issues. Strengthening the organisation's research and analysis capacity would be key to ensuring that KHDA is able to undertake relevant and sophisticated data analysis and other types of research.

Mobilising the evidence available and in-house technical capacity throughout the policy cycle – before, during and after a policy is implemented – would enable KHDA to develop a more evidence-led approach to policymaking, which can, in turn, support more effective and impactful interventions.

This could have other important advantages for the organisation and the sector as a whole. With stronger technical expertise and more in-house capacity, KHDA would be in a better position to discuss technical issues with external partners assess the quality of what is being proposed/delivered by external experts, and ensure it is context-appropriate. KHDA would also be better able to act as a clearinghouse for the private school sector, conducting and summarising relevant research, identifying, mapping and disseminating effective practices and resources. This can ensure that stakeholders invest their limited time and resources on what is proven to work (see Chapter 3).

Considerations

KHDA should consider the following actions:

- **Establishing larger in-house technical capacity**. This would involve expanding the KHDA data and research team, incorporating statisticians and psychometricians with the skills necessary to conduct and oversee research projects and large scale surveys, pilot and evaluate interventions, appraise the costs, benefits and risks of actual and planned policy initiatives, etc. If possible, staff should be dedicated exclusively to research and analysis activities.
- **Partnering with research centres and experts.** Given COVID-19 pressures on KHDA's budget, consideration should also be given to alternative ways of expanding the organisation's research and technical capacity, including by reallocating KHDA staff in other projects to the data and research team or developing secondment programmes with external partner organisations through which secondees with relevant skills would be sent to work in KHDA over a specific period of time or KHDA staff would be sent to work in external organisations to develop specific competencies. However, it important to note that in-house capacity will be critical for KHDA to make the most of these partnerships, and to be able to guide and oversee partners' work.
- **Elevating the role of research and analysis within the organisation.** It will be key for KHDA that the data and research team be more closely engaged in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies and initiatives. This will enable KHDA to pursue policy objectives in an evidence-based fashion.
- **Identifying and agreeing on KHDA's main research priorities**. This can be carried out through an organisation-wide consultation and discussions with key stakeholders. The main research

priorities should be communicated to the entire organisation. This should inform and be informed by an in-depth analysis of the evidence available (see below).

- **Developing a planned and sustained approach to research and data analysis,** based on KHDA's main research priorities. The data and research team could establish a calendar, outlining different topics to be explored in more depth (e.g. impact of students' socio-economic background or schoolwork-related anxiety), and identifying which projects can and should be undertaken in-house and where external support would be required and preferable.
- **Carrying out an in-depth analysis of the evidence available.** The quantitative and qualitative evidence available should be analysed to identify and monitor system-, sector- and school-level emerging issues, patterns and trends, as well as relevant correlations between different dimensions of well-being. As evidence is collected, KHDA should consider undertaking continuous and in-depth analysis of the information similar to what it does with data from international student assessments. This can be carried out by KHDA or in collaboration with external partners (e.g. universities in the UAE).

  KHDA's main research priorities should steer the analysis that is carried out. For example, if KHDA opts to focus on positive learning environments, the data and research team would draw on the available data and literature to investigate elements that support or hinder the development of conducive and positive learning environments, their potential associations with well-being and learning outcomes, how this may differ across the system and population groups, etc.
- **Considering adaptations to the DSWC and other data collection tools to ensure KHDA and schools have access to the data needed to make improvements (see Chapter 3).** Following on the steps above and in collaboration with school stakeholders, KHDA's data and research team should:
  - Identify overlaps in the data collection tools, including the DSWC, the school-developed surveys, Pupil Attitudes to Self and School surveys (PASS) and other student well-being measures used by schools.
  - Identify data gaps. Inviting a wide range of school-level stakeholders to provide input to the design and data collection phase can help ensure that the data being collected is useful and actionable.

  This could help inform revisions to the DSWC, including with regards to the questionnaire and the survey's frequency. For example, this may mean collecting more detailed data on specific topics (e.g. schoolwork-related anxiety) or population groups of interest (e.g. Emirati boys).

  KHDA might also consider:
  - working with partners to gather more objective data on students' physical well-being.
  - participating in the next round of the OECD Study on Social and Emotional Skills.
  - undertaking the PISA 2022 parent questionnaire.

  Changes could potentially bring important efficiencies by enabling schools to discontinue or to space out their own school-level surveys, thereby allowing them to focus on using the data they receive and/or collect.
- **Sharing findings from the data analysis and research activities with schools and other stakeholders in the community.** This could imply, for example, developing a public annual system-level report that summarises the results from the DSWC and other surveys. This would enable greater transparency in the system and strengthen awareness around important issues.

  In parallel, KHDA should keep encouraging schools to share DSWC data with their staff and community.
- **Using, for example, the KHDA Chatter website or the New Days New Ways portal as a clearinghouse/knowledge brokerage platform**. The existing platforms have significant potential

to support stakeholders in developing effective interventions in well-being and beyond. Similar to what was done in the KHDA Chatter, this will require directing stakeholders to rigorous and evidence-based resources and tools, and offering guidance on when and how to use these. KHDA might consider highlighting examples of interventions that have proven to address commonly identified well-being concerns. The DSWC and other data collection tools can be useful in this endeavour.

This platform can also collate international and national educational research in a way that is useful and accessible to the general public, following, for example, the UK's EEF toolkits. Box 5.2 is another example of the type of useful summary stakeholders may benefit from. Given stakeholders' different needs and expertise, articles and resources can be labelled for easier access.

This exercise can be undertaken by KHDA or by a separate autonomous or semi-autonomous agency in collaboration with UAE universities, research centres and independent consultants.

Developing a tailored brokerage platform for Dubai's private schools (rather than re-directing users to an existing platform) has some advantages. First, it can ensure that the resources and articles are context-appropriate and relevant for the sector's needs (see Policy Objective 5.2). Second, it can help strengthen research knowledge and capacity in KHDA and Dubai. However, should KHDA opt to direct users to an existing clearinghouse platform, it will be key that KHDA select the platform carefully to ensure that the material on offer is rigorous, relevant and objective. Table 5.4 offers some suggestions. Policy Objective 5.2. Developing a more targeted approach to address priority issues and support at-risk population groups

At present, student well-being initiatives in Dubai's private school sector tend to be relatively broad in scope and target a wide audience. While there is considerable evidence supporting a whole-school approach to well-being (see Chapter 3), relying exclusively on these types of initiatives may not be enough to address some key challenges, such as mental health disorders, and to reach some specific at-risk population groups, such as bullying victims or perpetrators. For this reason, comprehensive well-being policies can and should be complemented by more targeted initiatives focused on key issues and at-risk student populations.

A more focused approach could be advantageous for KHDA and the sector in two key ways. Firstly, by concentrating efforts on the relevant student populations and/or priority issues, interventions can be more impactful. Secondly, targeted interventions can also offer significant cost efficiencies, because resources are allocated according to the identified needs. This is particularly relevant in light of fiscal and spending constraints resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and economic recession (see Chapter 1).

Greater visibility on the state of student well-being in Dubai's private sector (following Policy Objective 5.1) will enable KHDA and other stakeholders to identify the sector's and/or individual school's main priorities, and agree on the steps needed to address these.

Opportunities

KHDA and the UAE government promote a holistic vision of well-being

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the UAE and Dubai governments promote a comprehensive vision of student well-being, which encompasses students' physical health, civic engagement, national values, social connections and emotional resilience, among others. This largely aligns with the OECD's own definition of student well-being, discussed earlier in this chapter, and those of other high-performing education systems, including Ireland, Singapore and Wales (United Kingdom) (see Box 5.1).

A comprehensive understanding of well-being can support a holistic approach to policymaking, in which different stakeholders work collaboratively to enhance the many and interconnected dimensions of well-being. There are indications that different Dubai agencies work closely on some issues. For example, the

Dubai Health Authority and KHDA have collaborated on multiple occasions, more recently to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus as schools in Dubai re-opened.

While Gallagher (2019[38]) suggested a functional approach to well-being exists in the Emirate, arguing that "by focusing on the well-being of students and improving students' feelings about themselves and their schools, [students] will in turn achieve a higher level of academic performance", in interviews with the OECD review team, Dubai and the UAE leadership did not approach students' well-being from such a perspective. Instead, all stakeholders reported valuing students' well-being for its own sake.

Box 5.1. Definitions of student well-being – Ireland, Singapore and Wales (United Kingdom)

Ireland

Well-being is present when a person realises their potential, is resilient in dealing with the normal stresses of their life, takes care of their physical well-being and has a sense of purpose, connection and belonging to a wider community. It is a fluid way of being and needs nurturing throughout life.

Singapore

Total well-being goes beyond weight and fitness to encompass the physical, mental and social health of students.

Wales (United Kingdom)

Well-being is an integral part of learning and is associated not only with children's basic needs for safety and security, food and shelter, warmth and affection, but also with how at ease children are with themselves and their surroundings. It is now recognised that well-being is essential to becoming an effective learner.

Source: (Department of Education and Skills, 2019[39]), *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice - 2018-2023*, https://assets.gov.ie/24725/07cc07626f6a426eb6eab4c523fb2ee2.pdf (accessed 15 April 2021); (Ministry of Education of Singapore, n.d.[40]), *Holistic Health Framework*, https://www.moe.gov.sg/programmes/holistic-health-framework (accessed 15 April 2021); (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008[41]), *Personal and Social Development, Well-being and Cultural Diversity*, https://hwb.gov.wales/api/storage/6b693169-0407-4a33-bbd9-8c5e452dae9d/personal-and-social-development-well-being-and-cultural-diversity.pdf (accessed 15 April 2021).

There is widespread awareness of student well-being among different stakeholder groups in Dubai.

In interviews with the OECD review team, interviewees revealed a sophisticated level of understanding of the different dimensions, factors and implications of student well-being. This suggests that the federal and Emirate-level governments have been successful in disseminating the concept of well-being and highlighting its importance, in particular among school leaders and administrators (see Chapter 3).

Schools have also played a key role is raising stakeholders' awareness. School-led activities, such as Wellness Wednesdays and Mindfulness Mondays and their active engagement in wider campaigns, such as the Dubai 30x30 Fitness Challenge or the UAE Bullying Prevention Week have been instrumental in introducing the topic of well-being into students' and parents daily lives (see Table 2.1 in Chapter 2). As was the case across the world, the COVID-19 crisis is also seen to have elevated the importance of well-being in the Emirate.

Areas for improvement

Support strategic policymaking by clearly identifying well-being issues

In interviews with the OECD review team, members of Dubai's leadership or other policymakers avoided identifying Dubai's main well-being concerns with respect to students. Government documents and programme strategies also rarely pinpoint specific issues related to students' well-being, with the exception of bullying and physical inactivity. There seems to be a few reasons for this.

- KHDA has adopted a strengths-based system approach, also known as an "appreciative inquiry" approach (see Box 2.1 in Chapter 2). In practice, this means that stakeholders often refrain from identifying specific well-being concerns (e.g. eating disorders) or at-risk student groups, and instead prefer to emphasise successes or what is working well. See Box 5.2 on the drawbacks of positive education, which also discusses how this approach could be damaging.
- KHDA is mindful that a "one size fits all" approach to well-being cannot and should not be imposed in Dubai's private sector. According to stakeholders in KHDA, the cultural values, experiences and challenges students face in school and at home differ so significantly across the sector that it would be practically pointless to look for or discuss common issues. While there is indeed considerable variation across the system, an analysis of the data and qualitative evidence points to some sector-wide issues, including school-related anxiety and bullying, as well as some specific at-risk populations, including Emirati boys.
- Limited analysis and dissemination of the data (see Policy Objective 5.1) means that KHDA has not yet been able to identify or communicate system-wide priority issues. Given that much of the information is not publicly available and the research community in the Emirate is small, this task has not been carried out by anyone else.

While KHDA's choices are legitimate and internally coherent, they can create significant risks at the sector- and school-levels, which, in the long run, can limit the effectiveness and coherence of Dubai's well-being policies and practices and, ultimately, hinder students' well-being. The first potential risk is that without commonly identified priorities, stakeholders may be more likely to invest their precious time and effort in initiatives that, while potentially relevant, do not tackle the most urgent or important issues facing the sector and/or the school, such as the ones mentioned above. Stakeholder interviews revealed that this may already be the case in some schools in Dubai. This is especially concerning at a time when resources are particularly limited. Second, the inconsistency in the use of terminology that emerges from this situation can hinder communication and measurement efforts. This can, in turn, limit collaboration, accountability and transparency in the system.

Box 5.2. Drawbacks from the positive education approach that require consideration

While positive education (described in more detail in Box 2.1 in Chapter 2) - which is one example of a strengths-based system approach - has many beneficial features, including the recognition of schools' role in developing well-rounded individuals, there are a number of risks that may emerge and need to be mitigated, including:

- Research indicates that positive interventions often overlook those who need it the most (Wong, 2017[42]). Schools and other stakeholders have to ensure that students in particularly difficult or vulnerable positions are being taken care of and receiving the support they need, including access to personalised treatment from relevant specialists.
- There is evidence that some types of positive interventions could be harmful for individuals with underlying conditions (e.g. depression) (Wong, 2017[42]). It is, therefore, important that

stakeholders be mindful of the risks associated with the interventions they are planning on rolling out before implementation, and aware that the risks might be different for different students (e.g. those with mental health conditions). The brokerage platform the OECD proposed could offer this type of information to stakeholders.

- A focus on positive emotions and characteristics, which overlooks and avoids issues and distresses, is not only "far too narrow to be descriptive of the entire range of human experiences" (Wong, 2017[42]) but can also have important implications. For example, this could create an environment in which stakeholders feel uncomfortable speaking up about issues and struggles. Research actually suggests that exposing children to risks can help build their resilience and prepare them for future challenges they will encounter later in life (Burns and Gottschalk, 2020[10]), and that individuals who accept negative thoughts and emotions tend to have better psychological health (Ford et al., 2018[43]).
- There is evidence that cultural values and beliefs influence what constitutes good life and optimal functioning (Haidt, 2005[44]) (Leong and Wong, 2003[45]) (Lopez et al., 2003[46]) (Snyder and Lopez, 2002[47]). When speaking about positive psychology – from which positive education emerged – Wong (2013[48]) said that "positive psychology may be more culture-bound … because what is positive requires a priori value judgements based on social norms and cultural context". What follows from this is that it can be very challenging to replicate findings from positive psychology. In practice, this means that what research has suggested works in one context or with a certain group of individuals rarely works elsewhere or with other individuals. For example, on average across OECD countries, students who present a growth mindset have better academic achievement than their peers with a fixed mindset. However, in East Asian countries, growth mindset was not as strongly associated with academic performance as in most OECD countries. While on average across OECD countries, students with a growth mindset score 32 points higher in reading, the numbers are less impressive for Japan (22-point gain), Korea (17 points) and Macao (China) with only 15-points gain in Chinese Taipei, after accounting for the socio-economic profile of students and schools. Growth mindset and reading performance were unrelated in Hong Kong (China), and even negatively associated in B-S-J-Z (China)[5] (OECD, 2021[49]).
- Given Dubai's diverse school sector and student population, this limitation needs to be taken into account when developing and implementing positive education interventions. The brokerage platform proposed can also provide this type of information and guidance.
- In developing and implementing positive interventions, stakeholders might – due to a lack of understanding and/or instructions – overemphasise a warm and even indulgent approach to children. Research shows however that combining responsiveness – in the form of warmth, love and responsiveness – and clear and reasonable rules and demands can actually be particularly beneficial for children's development (Ulferts, 2020[50]), whereas permissiveness (e.g. warm but indulgent parents, who rarely set or enforce rules) is associated with lower academic outcomes. While findings vary, some studies suggest that this type of approach is linked to more delinquent behaviours. This points to the need for interventions and stakeholders to strike the right balance between demand and responsiveness.

At the school level, many well-being policies remain issue-focused

While a holistic approach is also adopted by several private schools in Dubai, in particular those following UK or International Baccalaureate curricula, in others there is a tendency to narrow the concept of well-being to one or two of its multiple dimensions (e.g. physical health). While a narrower focus or tailored approach to well-being can help promote improvements in areas that matter to the school community, it can also create risks that need to be carefully managed. First, it may lead schools to overlook key concerns and aspects of student well-being (e.g. psychological well-being) when developing and implementing

interventions. Second, it may also encourage an instrumentalist view of well-being. In interviews, school-level stakeholders, including students, repeatedly highlighted the cognitive dimension of well-being or emphasised the impact of strong well-being on academic achievement. Building a common – and comprehensive – vision of well-being, as suggested in Chapter 3, will be key to help mitigate this risk.

Breaking stigmas can help strengthen students' well-being

In interviews with the OECD review team, stakeholders preferred not to identify Dubai's key well-being concerns or at-risk student populations. While this is understandable, in particular to avoid generalisations or prejudices, this type of inhibition could unintentionally create or strengthen stigmas around issues or student groups. Students may not feel comfortable reaching out for help in these circumstances. Breaking stigmas, as many OECD countries have attempted to do (see Box 5.3), can be difficult but will be key to strengthen student well-being for all in Dubai.

Box 5.3. How countries have worked to break taboos around mental illness

Stigma, lack of awareness and other social and cultural norms around mental illness during childhood and adolescence can lead to treatment not beginning until later in life. In fact, they have been described as "having worse consequences than the conditions themselves". This is concerning given that studies suggest that adult mental health disorders mostly originate during childhood or adolescence.

Developing awareness around the issue is crucial. One example comes from the Flemish Community of Belgium, which developed national awareness campaigns called Rode Neuzen Dag and Te Gek!? ("it's ok that you fall occasionally…") to discuss mental health issues and challenge the stigma. Some education ministries have also integrated discussions around mental health in the curriculum to increase awareness, as in Scotland's (United Kingdom) Curriculum for Excellence.

In addition, there is a need for building capacity among school stakeholders to identify mental health challenges and support children in and out of the classroom. This requires close collaboration with health care authorities in the planning and implementation processes of intervention policies in order to ensure a comprehensive and coherent response.

Source: (Burns and Gottschalk, 2019[11]), *Educating 21st Century Children: Emotional Well-being in the Digital Age*, https://doi.org/10.1787/b7f33425-en.

Potential next steps

Identify and communicate well-being priorities for the sector

Why this is needed

Identifying a select number of well-being issues, which are considered particularly important or urgent for the sector, can support more strategic policymaking. This should not detract from a holistic vision and approach to well-being (see Chapter 3) but integrate and complement it.

With a greater understanding of the main areas or audiences of need, KHDA will be better positioned to develop and implement fit-for-purpose and targeted policies. This has the potential to raise the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of undertaken measures. In addition, with clearer targets, KHDA will also be better able to monitor and measure programmes' impact, which can enable improvements and support greater accountability.

By communicating the main well-being priorities to others in the sector, KHDA will also provide much-needed guidance to schools and school-level stakeholders. As discussed above, with clearer aims, stakeholders will be able to focus their efforts and resources in key areas or groups. This has the potential to raise the impact of interventions, and support cost-efficiencies in the system.

Considerations

KHDA should consider:

- **Carrying out a series of discussions to agree on a select number of priorities for the sector for the short-, medium- and long-term.** For this purpose, KHDA should consider convening key sector stakeholders (e.g. school leaders, teacher representatives, a select number of school well-being committees).This discussion should be informed by – and, later, feed into – qualitative and quantitative research carried out by KHDA and external partners (see Policy Objective 5.1). In addition to sector-wide issues, this exercise could also look into significant concerns that impact specific population groups (e.g. Emirati boys) or sub-sectors.
- **Communicating key well-being priorities** to the Dubai private sector community. For example KHDA might insert a special focus on its priority issue/groups in its annual well-being report (see Policy Objective 5.1). KHDA might also consider developing an awareness-raising campaign (e.g. on bullying among boys).
- **Mapping existing initiatives in relation to the priorities to identify overlaps and gaps.** This analysis can inform policy adjustments and development.

Policy Objective 5.3. Empowering students

In recent decades, child rights and empowerment have made their way onto policy agendas around the world. Education systems and schools can play a key role in this endeavour. First, by developing the competencies students require to become responsible and informed individuals who are able to make decisions for the good of themselves and their communities. Second, by offering some of the first opportunities for them to actively participate in societal conversations and to engage in decision making (Burns and Gottschalk, 2020[10]).

Once again, Dubai's private education sector has been ahead of the curve in many respects. Students' voice – directly captured and disseminated by the DSWC – have been the backbone of Dubai's well-being policies and practices. While this is still a relatively new phenomenon, there are some examples of well-being initiatives being led or co-led by students. Multiple initiatives at the school and sector levels aim to raise students' awareness, build their knowledge and encourage healthy habits.

Despite these efforts, more could be done to empower students and ensure their engagement with the well-being agenda. At present, opportunities for children to contribute to decision making remain rare, in particular at the school level. Despite limited evidence on students' health literacy, data suggest that a large share of Dubai's student population still engages in poor sleeping and dietary habits, and have inadequate physical activity levels. The COVID-19 pandemic has also placed a huge toll on children's physical, mental and social conditions.

This section looks at some of the steps KHDA could take to enhance children's quality of life. First, ensuring students develop strong well-being and health literacy – i.e. the knowledge and competences that enable them to make the best choices to meet the demands of health in today's society – can help support their well-being in the immediate and long-term. Second, engaging students in decision making in a more deliberate and inclusive manner can not only empower them, but ensure that initiatives are more impactful. Students will be key partners in the next steps of KHDA's and Dubai's well-being journey.

Opportunities

Widespread efforts to give students a voice and promising initiatives to engage them in decision making

There are several initiatives at the UAE and Emirate-level to give students a voice on well-being issues. The most remarkable is the DSWC, which has given young people "the opportunity to tell adults about how they think and feel about their wellbeing". This is considered important to give schools "more accurate information about the prevalence, importance or impact of issues" and to offer students "the opportunity (…) to actively participate in decision making" (KHDA, 2018[51]). In addition, many schools report conducting their own surveys (see Policy Objective 5.1) and developing student councils. According to stakeholder interviews, these resources can be very useful to identify and monitor issues among the student population.

In recent years, some opportunities for students to take on a more active role have also emerged. A noteworthy example is that of the "Dubai Student Wellbeing Summit – Being Well and Doing Well: Empowering Ourselves and Others to Flourish", which brought together over 300 students from over 150 schools. Held for the first time in 2019, the Summit was organised by a committee made up of students and KHDA staff. The Summit gave an opportunity for students to lead the conversation on student well-being. While the Summit has not been held since – because of the COVID-19 pandemic the summit that was scheduled to occur in 2020 was cancelled – it inspired the development of six initiatives, which are being led by students within their own school contexts.

Most private schools cover well-being and health as part of their curricula

Education is an important space in which children can learn about their own health and well-being, as well as that of others in the community (Burns and Gottschalk, 2020[10]). High-performing education systems use a number of avenues to do this (see Table 5.5). Curricular methods are a common way of educating children to develop healthy habits and improve wellness. In Dubai, schools often incorporate health studies (e.g. the Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education curriculum subject in the British Curriculum) and/or learning about healthy habits as part of Physical Education courses into their curriculum.

Table 5.5. Learning about health and healthy behaviours

21st Century Children Policy Questionnaire

Country	Curriculum/policy	Goals
Australia	Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education	Acquire movement skills and learn how the body moves, and develop positive attitudes towards physical activity, and learn to appreciate outdoor recreation and sport.
Czech Republic	Health 2020	Increase health literacy in the population and in vulnerable groups including through provision of online programmes for good nutrition and obesity prevention, dissemination of good practices within communities, acquisition of good health knowledge in education.
Finland	Health Education	Focus on multidisciplinary knowledge base to develop health literacy and foster respect for human life and dignity in compliance with human rights. Health education includes topics related to health, well-being and safety, and focuses on building knowledge, skills, self-awareness and ethical responsibility for health.
Ireland	Get Active Ireland! Framework	Recognise the need for effective delivery of physical health literacy programmes to equip children with the skills and confidence for lifelong participation in physical recreation and sport.
Latvia	Skola 2030	Change health attitudes and behaviours in schools, with an update to the physical health curriculum to help students develop a deeper understanding of how to develop a healthy lifestyle and promote healthy environments within their families and communities.
Mexico	Curriculum	Explore health within different disciplines, for example in the following subjects: Knowledge

		of the Environment, Natural Sciences and Technology, Biology and Chemistry, Civic and Ethics. Promote an active and healthy lifestyle through Physical Education, including knowledge about and care for the body as well as practicing physical activities.
Prince Edward Island (Canada)	Prince Edward Island Curriculum: Health and Physical Education	Renew and integrate intermediate health and physical education curriculum, including content on sexual health, to include content on some challenges faced by students today.
Turkey	Physical education and sports competencies	Promote basic health values, such as appropriate hygiene and self-care, as well as developing plans to protect oneself from physical and mental health risks.

Source: (Burns and Gottschalk, 2020[10]), *Education in the Digital Age: Healthy and Happy Children*, https://doi.org/10.1787/1209166a-en.

As is common in many OECD countries, several private schools also attempt to develop specific attitudes, values, and social and emotional skills (e.g. self-awareness) as part of a specific course or as an inter-disciplinary component of the curriculum. Moreover, since the 2017/18 academic year, schools are required to implement the UAE Moral Education Curriculum (see Box 5.4), which covers key pillars of social and psychological well-being, including tolerance, resilience and civic duty.

While it is beyond the scope of this review to assess the implementation and impact of curricula in Dubai's private sector, the widespread focus on character building is encouraging for the well-being agenda. Raising students to become responsible and engaged adults can help enhance their quality of life in the long-term as well as strengthen the Emirate's social fabric.

Box 5.4. UAE Moral Education Curriculum

The Moral Education programme is a comprehensively structured curriculum, for character and civic education, which is designed to support the fulfilment of the UAE National Vision to build a sustainable society. The objectives of the Moral Education Program are to preserve and engrain the nation's long-standing and unique traditions, heritage, culture, values and moralities; promote character building to develop the next generation of role models and leaders; and promote tolerance in line with the UAE's broadened vision of building a sustainable society, grounded in the happiness, wellness and social well-being of its people.

The programme is organised into four pillars:

1. Character and Morality
2. Individual and Community
3. Civic Studies
4. Cultural Studies

The Curriculum is designed to be taught for 45 to 60 minutes per week to all Grade 1 to Grade 12 students in the UAE across all public and private schools. In the Individual and Community pillar, for example, students learn about moral issues confronting the individual in a variety of social contexts and in the Cultural Studies pillar, for example, students learn about the history and heritage of the UAE, including the customs, artefacts and traditions that make it unique. In addition, the curriculum goes beyond the basic teaching of morals and values and extends also into the practical knowledge, topics and learning deemed essential to be successful young adults in an increasingly interconnected world.

Moral education in Dubai

In this second year of implementation of the UAE Moral Education Programme, thematic inspections were carried out in 37 schools. The schools were selected from different overall inspection quality levels,

and across the range of Dubai curricula. These inspections focused mainly on student outcomes, specifically in the areas of: character and morality, citizenship, and cultural awareness. They also looked at leadership, and aspects of provision: curriculum, teaching and assessment.

Almost all schools inspected met the basic requirements for moral education. In the highest performing schools the curriculum was skilfully mapped and aligned with student well-being, often with a combination of discrete lessons and integrated into other subjects. In those schools, lessons were focused on students' understanding of concepts and application of moral values in everyday life. Teachers used the moral education textbooks, supplemented with additional materials and rich discussions.

However, in almost all schools, assessment was an area in need of considerable further development. Teachers were chosen based on their availability, so often they lacked the necessary attributes to ensure high-quality implementation

In the lower-performing schools, moral values were not always evident, attitudes to school were poor, and behaviour towards peers and teachers was often disrespectful. Students did not know or care about environmental and other global social issues. They often had only superficial knowledge about the UAE, and, while they were aware of their home country and culture, they knew little about other world cultures.

Source: (UAE Crown Prince Court, n.d.[52]), *Moral Education Webpage*, https://moraleducation.ae/ (accessed 15 June 2021); (DSIB, 2019[53]), *Dubai School Inspection Bureau - Inspection Key Findings 2018-2019*.

School-level initiatives have helped create an environment and culture that supports students' well-being

Internationally, healthy habits (e.g. a balanced diet) are commonly promoted, learned and reinforced in and by schools and classrooms. For example, Scotland (United Kingdom) has updated regulations and guidelines on nutritional requirements in schools, and improved food provision and food education to encourage more healthy food choices (Burns and Gottschalk, 2020[10]).

This approach is also common among Dubai's private schools. Most have introduced and/or joined wider initiatives to promote healthy habits and well-being, such as the Dubai Fitness Challenge 30x30 or regular mindfulness sessions. Many of the initiatives in place have engaged children's parents and families, which research suggests can have positive effects on students (Burns and Gottschalk, 2020[10]).

However, it is unclear whether these campaigns are sustained all year round, which would be key to helping children build healthy habits. Moreover, while seemingly popular among interviewees, there is limited evidence available on these interventions. This means it is not possible to monitor participation levels across age groups, gender and socio-economic background or over time. Collecting and analysing data on interventions to inform their design and implementation could ultimately strengthen its impact. For example, given low levels of physical activity among girls in the Emirate, it would be beneficial to learn whether – and if so, which – fitness campaigns are succeeding in engaging girls. The information collected could be used to target the communication of the campaigns or even the design of the initiative (e.g. adjustments to the offer of physical activities).

Areas for improvement

Elevating students' voice through more effective engagement

Surveys can offer valuable channels for students to express how they feel. However, multiple choice questionnaires, such as those used in the DSWC and many school-developed surveys, are unable to

capture the whole picture of students' well-being. With these types of surveys, students cannot raise other issues, or go into more depth when discussing topics that may be relevant to them.

Policymakers and school staff who are responsible for these questionnaires may often be unaware of important dimensions of students' daily lives and developments that might impact their well-being. In the past, KHDA has undertaken focus group discussion to collect students' insights into the cultural differences that exist between student groups (e.g. Indian and Emirati contexts), and used these insights to update the DSWC questionnaire. These efforts are laudable and could be expanded or, in the case of schools, taken up. Engaging students in the development of these surveys more broadly could ensure their relevance.

In addition, even though the DSWC response rate is very high, a considerable number of students does not take part in the survey. At present, it is unclear who is not taking part in the survey and what their reasons for this may be. It is important that *all* students be encouraged to speak up. The feedback of those who may be struggling in their academic or personal lives or feel disconnected with school can be particularly valuable for policymakers and school staff to develop fit-for-purpose interventions.

Moreover, while students' voice is considered important to help identify issues, reports suggest that it is relatively uncommon for students to contribute to developing solutions. For example, students are rarely involved in the interpretation of the DSWC data or in policy development at the school and sector-level. This can not only limit the effectiveness of initiatives, but also contribute to students feeling disempowered and undervalued. The Welsh experience might be relevant for Dubai as it considers ways in which to encourage young people to participate more actively in policy debate and decision making at the school and system levels (see Box 5.5).

Box 5.5. Youth engagement in Wales (United Kingdom)

In-school participation – school councils, and student voice in learning

School councils became law in 2005 as a result of a Welsh Government decision to embed the principles from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). According to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales (United Kingdom), Estyn (2016[54]), the purpose of a school council is to make sure that pupil voice is well represented as a school develops and implements new policies and identifies priorities for improvement. School councils provide pupils with opportunities to discuss matters related to their school and make representations to the governing body and the head teacher. A school council can also propose and take forward initiatives and projects on behalf of their peers and be involved in strategic planning and processes such as the school development plan, governing body meetings and staff appointments. The school council must be elected democratically and meet at least six times a year.

However, recognising that just having a school council doesn't automatically result in effective levels of pupil participation, the Welsh Government has developed some accompanying resources to support schools and school-level actors in this endeavour:

- National Assembly for Wales – School Council Pack
- Estyn – case studies in pupil voice
- Pupil participation: a best practice guide (2016), which includes a checklist
- Children and young people's national participation standards (2007 and 2016)
- Supplementary guidance: listening to learners on inspection (2019)

Box 5.8 discusses some of the main challenges related to ensuring effective student engagement and presents some successful practices.

Meaningful and purposeful pupil participation has also become a strong feature of the new Welsh curriculum. In order to encourage more child-initiated and child-centred learning, schools are expected to plan and structure the curriculum and learning environment so as to enable students to be actively involved in what and how they learn.

Community and nation-wide participation – The Welsh Youth Parliament

The Welsh Youth Parliament (WYP) was established in 2018 to provide youth in Wales (United Kingdom) with a national platform to raise and debate issues that are important to them. 60 parliament members are elected for a 2-year mandate. Youth representatives are aged 11-18 and represent diverse groups of young people.

Emotional and Mental Health Support

In February 2019, the Welsh Youth Parliament Members (WYPMs) met in the *Senedd* (the Welsh Parliament) to decide which issues the WYP would prioritise for the next two years. Almost 2 000 young people took part in a survey which asked them for their views on what the WYP should prioritise. The second most popular theme selected by young people in that survey was Emotional and Mental Health Support – it was chosen by the WYP as one of its three priority issues.

WYPMs decided to organise into committees, to speak with other young people, adults, and professionals in order to investigate the issues prioritised. The Welsh Youth Parliament's Emotional and Mental Health Support Committee met regularly to design a consultation, considering work previously done in this area, especially that of the *Senedd*'s Children, Young People and Education Committee.

Efforts focused on gathering a real-life picture of the current state of emotional and mental health support for children and young people in Wales. To get a full picture, the WYP also engaged with parents, carers, education and healthcare professionals to get their views on the current information and support provision in Wales. Over 1 600 people responded to WYP surveys, one of which was aimed at children and young people aged 11-25, the other was aimed at adults including parents, carers, education, and health professionals. The WYP also held online consultation sessions as part of Welsh Youth Parliament Week in July 2020, with young people from across Wales to understand their views and experiences.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the WYP:

- Produced vlogs to share information and activities to help young people to be able to keep a positive mental state during this period;
- Signposted support services and resources;
- Discussed experiences of living with the pandemic with the First Minister of Wales; and
- Supported the Children's Commissioner for Wales' 'Coronavirus and Me' consultation, which saw over 23 000 young people respond.

Source: (Welsh Youth Parliament, 2020[55]), *Let's talk about mental health*, https://youthparliament.senedd.wales/media/h4wdvpzl/emhs-report-eng.pdf (accessed 15 June 2021), (Welsh Youth Parliament, n.d.[56]), *Welsh Youth Parliament - Official Website*, https://youthparliament.senedd.wales/ (accessed 15 June 2021); (Estyn, 2019[57]), *Having a voice, having a choice: effective pupil participation*, https://www.estyn.gov.wales/blog/having-voice-having-choice-effective-pupil-participation (accessed 15 June 2021); (Estyn, 2017[58]), *Active and experiential learning - effective foundation phase practice in delivering literacy and numeracy in Year 1 and Year 2*, https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2020-07/Estyn%2520Active%2520and%2520experiential%2520learning_E_Accessible_1.pdf (accessed 15 June 2021); (Estyn, 2016[54]), *Pupil participation: a best practice guide*, https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2020-07/Pupil%2520participation_0.pdf (accessed 15 June 2021).

Data on students' health literacy could inform policymaking

Current data collection tools do not capture students' health literacy levels (see Box 5.6 for the full definition). Given the wide diversity of curricula and how much the focus on well-being differs across schools in Dubai (see Chapters 1 and 3), it is unclear whether all students are able to develop the necessary skills, knowledge and competences to make informed decisions about their own health and well-being. This is an important blind spot for Dubai. Addressing this can provide KHDA and schools with useful information to develop appropriate policy responses.

Box 5.6. The importance of learning about health and developing health literacy

Health literacy refers to both competence and knowledge of individuals to meet the demands of health in today's society (Sørensen et al., 2021[59]). It requires a combination of cognitive, social and critical analysis skills, incorporating reading, listening analysis and decision making (OECD, 2019[60]). One key issue associated with low health literacy is that it can exacerbate existing socio-economic inequalities (Moreira, 2018[61]), while on the other hand being highly health-literate empowers individuals to take control over their own health decisions and to understand how different lifestyle habits can help or hinder their health (OECD, 2019[60]).

Despite the importance of having the personal tools, knowledge and competences to make informed decisions about one's health, rates of health literacy tend to be quite low. For example PISA 2015 data highlight that across OECD countries, only 20% of 15-year-old students surveyed reported they could easily understand a newspaper report on a health issue, interpret the scientific information provided on

the labelling of food items, or describe the role of antibiotics in the treatment of disease. Low health literacy in adults has been associated with lower income, self-reported poor health, lower rates of exercise and a high body mass index (HLS-EU Consortium, 2012[62]). Effective health literacy education starts early, from compulsory schooling, and extends throughout the person's lifespan (Abrams, Klass and Dreyer, 2009[63]).

Improving health literacy can be done through updating national curricula, establishing sustainable sources of funding, capitalising on key partnerships between education and health sectors and through measuring the levels of health literacy in young people (WInkelman et al., 2016[64]). There are currently a number of instruments measuring health literacy in adolescents and children. However, due to differing definitions of health literacy and lack of standardisation, these instruments often measure different things, and comparing health literacy in different samples is challenging (Okan et al., 2018[65]). Governments and researchers should work towards a streamlined approach and common agreement among what it is we are measuring and focusing on when talking about health literacy.

Source: (Burns and Gottschalk, 2020[10]), *Education in the Digital Age: Healthy and Happy Children,* https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/1209166a-en.

Revising policies and practices can help signal that students' well-being is a priority for the sector

While well-being policies and practices are widespread in Dubai's private sector, fact-finding interviews suggest that they have often been introduced as an add-on to schools' existing activities (see Chapter 3). For example, many schools opt to include measures targeted at raising students' well-being (e.g. sports) as part of the schools' extra-curricular activities. As a result, many students are unable or unwilling to participate in these activities regularly, struggling to balance these on top of their heavy academic workload. For these interventions to be more effective, schools and school networks will need to embed these more deeply into their regular activities and ethos as part of a whole-school approach to well-being (see Chapter 3). This may mean, for example, re-prioritising the curriculum and school day to give other activities sufficient time and adequate prominence.

It will be equally important to identify and address policies that may undermine students' well-being or send different signals of what matters. As discussed earlier, an overemphasis on students' academic achievement can not only contribute to students' stress and anxiety levels, but also contrasts with Dubai's well-being agenda. A number of reforms in Singapore, as well as in other countries in East Asia, have aimed at reducing the emphasis on standardised tests and, instead, instilling a "passion for learning" in students (UNESCO, 2016[66]) (see Box 5.7). Shifting the focus to students' happiness and well-being need not result in any lowering of learning outcomes. The key is building in students the curiosity to learn, the resilience to persist in the face of challenges and the value of effort.

Box 5.7. Measures taken to support students' well-being in Singapore

Recognising the high level of stress that Singaporean students face at school, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has taken a number of measures to support student well-being. For instance, the MoE has sought to reduce unhealthy competition by no longer releasing the names of top performing students in the Primary School-Leaving Examination, no longer grading the performance of secondary schools based on student performance in exams, and by reducing awards to education institutions based on academic achievement. In-school recognition was revised to include non-academic achievements and thereby encourage students to become more well-rounded and active.

Other notable reforms have also been introduced, including cutting back on syllabi content to leave space for deeper learning and application, and reviewing examinations and assessment methods to reduce reliance on rote learning and encourage independent learning and experimentation. As part of these efforts, the MoE has also reduced school-based assessments. For example, in 2019, all weighted assessments and examinations for Primary Grades 1 and 2 students were removed, and there would not be any overall grade. The Ministry also plans to remove mid-year examinations of Primary Grades 3 and 5, as well as Secondary Grades 1 and 3 between 2019 and 2021. The freed-up time is meant to allow students to adjust more comfortably to increasing academic demands as they progress to high levels of learning.

The Holistic Health Framework (HHF) introduced by the MoE encourages schools to purposefully integrate programs and processes to support students' physical, mental, and social health. Other than developing programs for students, the HHF emphasises supportive school culture, relevant curricula, and close partnerships with stakeholders to support student well-being. Socio-emotional learning is a compulsory part of the national school curriculum.

At the same time, the MoE has been focusing on holistic education and, in 2014, it launched the 21st Century Competencies framework to guide the development of students holistically. More recently, the Ministry's discourse has been placing greater emphasis on the concept of "joy of learning", which supports student well-being and achievement concomitantly. It is also seen as a key element of lifelong learning.

Evaluation

Evaluating the impact of policies and practices is a challenging endeavour in any circumstance, but even more so when attempting to measure the combined effects of multiple measures on a wide group of individuals and on multiple fronts. For this reason, this publication does not presume to offer empirical evidence of the overall impact of these measures. (Ng, 2020[67]), however, suggested that "the education paradigm has been shifting" in Singapore thanks to these efforts. He argues that this is mostly due to the Singapore government's broader focus on student well-being (as a dimension of holistic education), rather than on student well-being more narrowly. This is an important consideration for Dubai and KHDA as they move forward in their well-being journey.

Source: (UNESCO, 2016[66]), *Happy schools! A framework for learner well-being in the Asia-Pacific*, https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000244140 (accessed 15 June 2021); (Ng, 2020[67]), *The Paradoxes of Student Well-being in Singapore*, https://doi.org/10.1177%2F2096531120935127.

Potential next steps

Empower students' voice in well-being matters

Why this is needed

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) underlines the importance and expectation of children as actors in their own right concerning matters that affect them, suggesting that adults should engage in dialogue and respond to the views of children when making decisions concerning them (Burns and Gottschalk, 2019[11]).

Engaging students and connecting their voice to conversations with families, teachers and schools can also support policy development by enabling policymakers and schools to obtain accurate information on the prevalence and importance of certain issues; raise awareness; assess the relevance of certain programmes and practices before rolling them out; adjust interventions based on student feedback to best meet their needs; and build traction for these initiatives to take root.

Moreover, inviting children and adolescents to participate in policy discussions and decision making is critical to empowering students, encouraging them to take charge of shaping their schooling and future lives, and fostering a stronger sense of responsibility to others (Wong, Zimmerman and Parker, 2010[68]).

However, it can be difficult to engage students effectively and, despite efforts, Dubai has not yet found the perfect recipe. While some stakeholders lack the adequate skills, knowledge and tools to involve students meaningfully, others may remain unaware of its value. KHDA can address both issues.

Considerations

KHDA might consider:

- **Encouraging and advising schools on how to empower and engage students effectively**: this could include the following actions:
  a. Drawing on SAG's and local expertise, develop guidance on the best strategies for schools to share DSWC results with students. This can be developed as a how-to guide and be accompanied by an evaluation rubric. SAG and/or other experts may also be invited to develop and provide training to school leaders. Local schools that are considered good models – according to the requirements established in the evaluation rubric – could be asked to share their experience with others in What Works X events. Their case studies could also be made available on the clearinghouse platform proposed under Policy Objective 5.1.
  b. Encouraging schools to engage students in decision making. The following options can be considered:
     i. Encouraging schools to develop well-being committees made up of staff, teacher and student representatives. Committee participants would be elected by their peers on a regular basis (see Chapter 3).
     ii. Encouraging and/or mandating that all schools develop student councils. Box 5.8 discusses some of the pitfalls commonly associated with this approach, and offers some guidance on how to make it work.
     iii. Encouraging and/or requiring that school governing bodies include student representatives.
  c. Providing schools and school actors with information and guidelines outlining the most effective strategies to engage and empower students, and risks that need to be mitigated. Guidelines would summarise evidence from international and national research and highlight relevant experience from other education systems. Box 5.5 is an example of the type of information and resources that could be offered to schools.

The clearinghouse platform proposed in Policy Objective 5.1 can be leveraged for this purpose.

The information collected during schools inspections carried out by the Dubai Schools Inspections Bureau (DSIB) can be leveraged to identify outstanding case studies in Dubai's private sector that can be disseminated more broadly. KHDA's data and research team could be made responsible for developing these resources, in partnership with DSIB and other relevant stakeholders.

Box 5.8. Promoting youth voice at school – challenges and how to make it work

Requiring all schools to have a school council is not enough to make student participation an effective part of a school's work.

Pitfalls

A 2002 report by the National Foundation for Educational Research found that only two-fifths of children thought school councils were an effective way of listening to their ideas. Numerous articles and reports, for example "Having a Say at School", a 2010 report produced by the University of Edinburgh, have identified the most common pitfalls that can be obstacles to effective pupil participation. These include:

- the council being dominated by adults: teachers setting the agenda and controlling the discussion
- discussion only focusing on aspects such as the canteen and the toilets
- the council having no budget or say over spending
- only a very small number of learners being involved
- the council not being able to communicate effectively with the rest of the student body
- the pupils and staff involved having little or no training to undertake their role.

How to make it work

In 2019, School Councils UK published a summary of research carried out for the Children's Commissioner in schools with excellent student voice practice. Estyn also published a report in 2016: Pupil participation: a best practice guide.

Key factors that can encourage effective pupil participation include:

- **Vision and ethos:** make it a central part of the school's vision and have a clear strategy for promoting participation and for building good relationships.
- **Inclusion:** make it clear that everyone should be involved.
- **Breadth:** ensure that there's a wide range of opportunities for pupils to participate, not just those on the school council.
- **Making it real:** help pupils to learn that they don't always get what they want, but make sure they feel that their voice is heard in real-life decisions that affect their lives.
- **Focus on learning:** never forget that toilets and canteens can have a significant impact on pupils' well-being, but they should also have a say in what and how they learn.
- **Resources:** ensure that staff and pupils have the time, resources and training to allow them to develop the necessary skills and knowledge.
- **Communication:** make sure everyone in the school community knows what's happening.

Source: (Estyn, 2019[57]), *Having a voice, having a choice: effective pupil participation*, https://www.estyn.gov.wales/blog/having-voice-having-choice-effective-pupil-participation (accessed 15 June 2021).

- **Optimising communication channels with students to strengthen their engagement:** developing a trusting and constructive relationship with the school community will require sustained efforts. The following actions can set KHDA up for success:
  - Following the KHDA Well-being Reference Group and the KHDA Mums, KHDA should create multiple KHDA Student Reference Groups. KHDA Reference Groups should include students from different nationalities, socio-economic backgrounds, gender, ages, regions and curricula,

as well as high- and low-achieving students. KHDA may consider having a reference group exclusively for Emirati students.

- Consideration could be given to the establishment of an elected student body/council, similar to the Welsh Youth Parliament (see Box 5.5), in the long run. This body could have subcommittees that look at well-being or other issues.
- Engage the KHDA Student Reference Groups and student body/council in policy development and evaluation, including notably in:
  i. the development of the vision for well-being in schools (Chapter 3).
  ii. regular Student Summits. Topics can be selected through online polls to encourage greater involvement.
  iii. the DSWC.
- KHDA should partner with schools to build these activities into students' schoolwork or schedules (e.g. as school credit) so their participation in these activities can become more manageable and is fully recognised, regularly take stock of the approach being used to engage students, and make modifications as needed.
- Investigate participation in DSWC to understand which students/student groups are not taking part in the survey, or avoid responding to most questions. Based on this information, develop communication and dissemination strategies targeted specifically at these students.

Step 4.4. Assess students' well-being and health literacy to inform policies and practices

Why this is needed

While KHDA has compiled extensive data on students' habits and well-being concerns in Dubai's private sector, there is limited evidence on student's well-being and health literacy. This information can help KHDA, as well as schools and teachers, understand what gaps in students' skills and knowledge need to be addressed in the classroom or through school-level or Emirate-level campaigns. Early interventions to educate children can be more effective and cost-efficient than addressing issues at a later stage.

Considerations

The following steps deserve consideration:

- **Adopt a definition of well-being and health literacy and agree on its multiple dimensions.** KHDA should consider partnering with other relevant authorities, notably the Dubai Health Authority (DHA), to take this exercise forward. If considered appropriate, this could be undertaken as a national effort, with the support of the Ministry of Health and Prevention, the Ministry of Education, and others.
- **Collecting and disseminating data on students' well-being and health literacy.**
  a. Drawing on the UAE's definition of health literacy, KHDA and its collaborators would identify what information is required for policymaking and for schools.
  b. KHDA and collaborators would compare the types of surveys/tools that exist in the Emirate and elsewhere, assessing their advantages and disadvantages. If an existing survey/tool is considered adequate, KHDA should work with partners to adapt it to the local context and needs before implementing it in Dubai. Otherwise, a tailored tool could be developed in-house and/or in partnership with UAE universities and research centres.
  c. Once the information has been collected and thoroughly analysed by the KHDA data and research teams, deliberations should be made about what information should be provided to

schools and the general public and in which format. Utmost care should be taken to protect students' identity.

d. In parallel, the DSIB school inspection process could also be leveraged for this purpose. Future school inspections could focus, for example, on physical education and personal and social education courses (or similar).

e. Evidence from the surveys should be used to inform KHDA's policies. For example, information and awareness-raising campaigns can be carried out to address students' knowledge gaps.

- **Providing tools and resources to schools to support students' well-being and health literacy.** The brokerage platform can be leveraged for this purpose.

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Notes

[1] Rates of cyber-bullying, however, remain relatively steady (Burns and Gottschalk, 2019[11]).

[2] Author's calculations for the private sector in Dubai.

[3] This refers to a comparison between students who strongly agree and who strongly disagree with the statement: ""Thinking about your school: I feel like an outsider (or left out of things) at school".

[4] PISA 2018 did not collect information on students' schoolwork related anxiety.

[5] Acronym refers to four provinces/municipalities of China that participated in the PISA 2018 study – Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang (B-S-J-Z).

OECD Review of Well-being Policies and Practices in Dubai's Private School Sector

In recent years, the Emirate of Dubai has been placing a stronger emphasis on people's well-being with the aim of making Dubai "an inclusive and cohesive society (…) that is the preferred place to live, work and visit and a pivotal hub in the global economy". Within the education sector, KHDA and private schools have introduced a number of initiatives to help raise awareness, measure and support students' and staff's well-being. Given the central role education and educators have in fostering and supporting empowered, healthy and happy communities, these interventions hold great potential.

This report analyses the well-being policies and practices that KHDA and schools have implemented in Dubai's private school sector. In order to fulfil this objective, the OECD has taken a holistic picture view of well-being in education, which is discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 looks at Dubai's private schools as a whole, focusing on the school leadership and other key school staff. Chapter 4 focuses on teachers and their well-being, an issue that has been relatively overlooked until recently. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses student well-being and empowerment.

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