

# The Road Traveled: Dubai's Journey towards Improving Private Education

A World Bank Review





MENA DEVELOPMENT REPORT

# The Road Traveled: Dubai's Journey towards Improving Private Education

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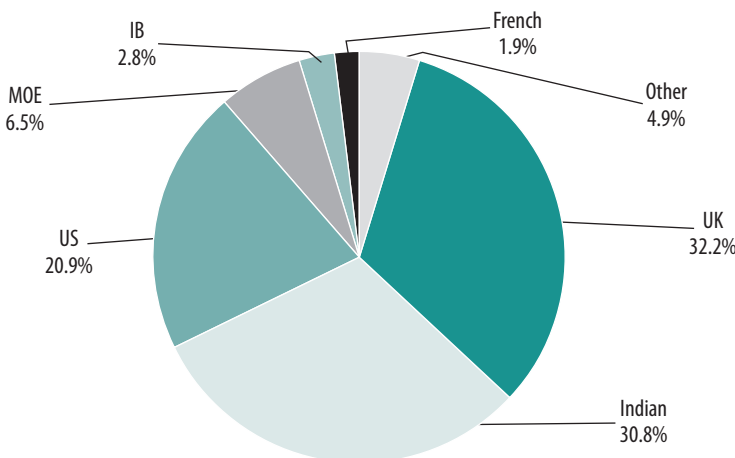


# Introduction

As Dubai has grown over the last two decades, the demand for private education has grown with it, a reflection of the number of expatriates settling in the city. Today, 88% of all students attend private schools. The surge in demand over this period had in fact been so significant that authorities, recognizing the need to establish a specific governmental entity to oversee the sector’s expansion, moved to create the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) in 2007.<sup>1</sup> Given the city-state’s unique context (in which a majority of the population are expatriates, not Emiratis), the immediate challenge for this new *public* institution was to identify an appropriate approach for regulating a *private* education sector. About that time, the *Road Not Traveled* (2008), the World Bank’s Education Flagship for the Middle East North Africa, was published. It put forward the hypothesis that education systems in the Region could be improved by promoting better governance, the idea being that effective

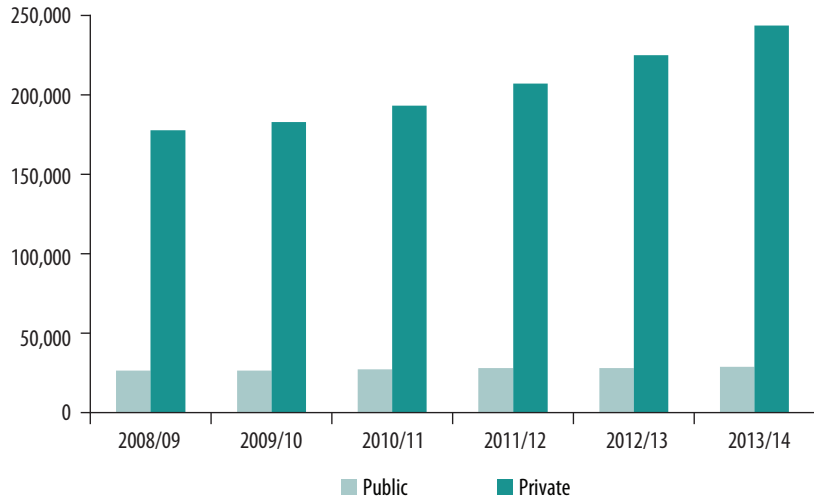
FIGURE 1

Students by Type of School 2013/14



Source: KHDA, March 2014.

FIGURE 2

**Growth of Public and Private Enrolment in Dubai (2008–2014)**

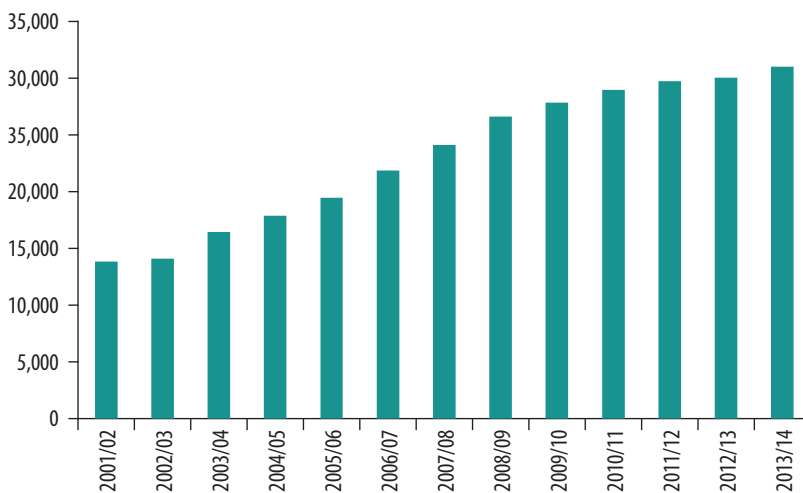
Source: Figures provided by KHDA March 2014.

and efficient national policies, programs and services require the improved interaction between government and constituents based on transparency, accountability and participation. It was the central tenets of this approach, dependent essentially on oversight rather than intervention, which appealed to the KHDA and so the policy framework from that report was adopted, adapted, and put into place in Dubai.

Now, some five years later, the KHDA has returned to the World Bank requesting a review of these governance initiatives. A World Bank team, working in close collaboration with counterparts in the KHDA, has now completed that review and their findings are presented in this report.

Today, Dubai's private school students (both Emiratis and non-Emiratis) are enrolled in 158 private schools offering a mix of 15 different curricula including for example the Indian, UK, US, UAE, International Baccalaureate, Pakistani, and others. The share of students in private education has been increasing steadily (fig.2)—a trend which is perhaps most surprising for Emirati students (fig.3)—and will likely continue to remain constant, as private school student numbers in Dubai are increasing at a long-term annual rate now estimated at between 7 and 8 per cent.<sup>2</sup> In the meantime, Dubai's participation in TIMSS and PIRLS 2011<sup>3</sup> showed that although student learning was higher than other participating MENA countries, it was below the international average in grades 4 and 8 in mathematics and science and in reading in grade 4. The results also showed that there was wide variation and disparity across schools offering

FIGURE 3

**Emiratis in Dubai Private Schools (2001–2014)**

Source: KHDA March 2014.

different curricula and between public and private schools. These results were similar, too, for PISA<sup>4</sup> scores for 15 year olds. Quality, in other words, could be improved in the sub-sector.

Ensuring that children in Dubai have access to high quality educational institutions and that they graduate with the knowledge and skills needed for their active participation in a high-value, knowledge-driven economy are two strategic impulses guiding the education initiatives of the KHDA in support of the Dubai Strategic Plan 2015.

The main objective of the present review is to understand what has motivated KHDA's policy initiatives, what principles have guided design, how they were operationalized, and how they function in real life situations today. In what follows, we look first at the broader context of the issue by giving a brief overview of (i) the growth of private sector education and (ii) the rise of public governance reform initiatives in the global education policy agenda. We then turn to the case of Dubai: we present the argument in *The Road Not Traveled* before reviewing how that policy framework was translated into its present institutional configuration in Dubai through the development of the institutions that came into being. We then reflect on the policy framework in operation, showing how the constituent components function together. We end by suggesting some options on potential ways forward that would further enhance the system.

## Endnotes

1. The Ministry of Education of the UAE remains in charge of the public provision of education.
2. Estimate from KHDA
3. TIMSS stands for *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study*. It is an internationally comparative assessment of student learning in mathematics and science for students around the world which provides data about trends in mathematics and science achievement over time. It is carried out every four years in Grades 4 and 8. PIRLS stands for *Progress of International Reading and Literacy Study* and is conducted every five years on Grade 4 students.
4. The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a triennial international survey which aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students. To date, students representing more than 70 economies have participated in the assessment.

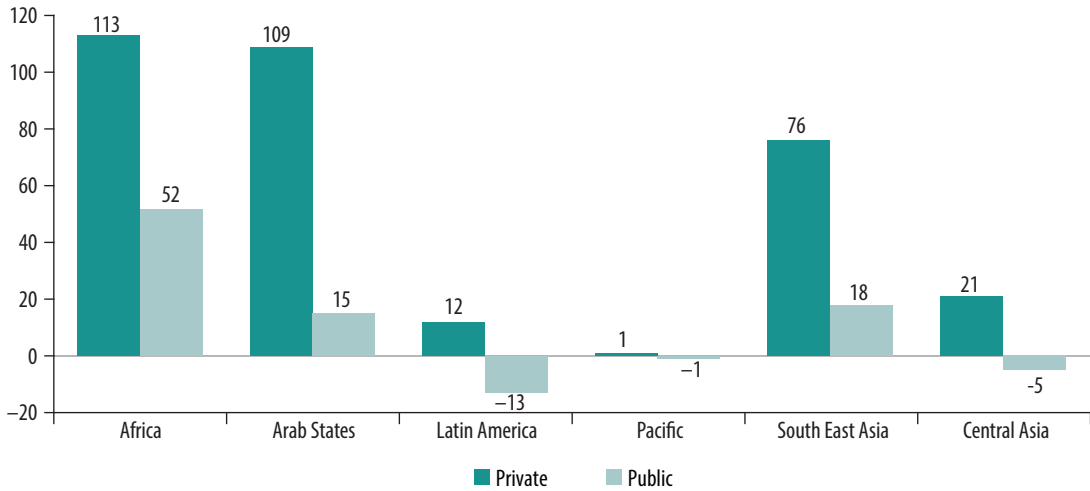
# The Broader Context: Private Education Sector Growth and Governance Reform

KHDA's governance initiatives for the private sector in Dubai lie, within a broader context, at the juncture of two recent trends: (i) the growth of private sector education in general and (ii) the rise of public governance reform initiatives in the global education policy agenda.

## The Growth of the Private Sector

Interest in the private provision of education has risen significantly in recent years for two reasons: first, the private education sector has been expanding rapidly in several markets, most notably in the Gulf, Africa and in South East Asia (Moujaes *et al.*, 2011; IFC, 2010); secondly, some public policy makers are turning their attention to the private education sector for the combination of efficiency and effectiveness perceived to be in operation there, principles that they hope to harness and exploit in the public sphere in what has sometimes been referred to as “new public management” (Mattei & Verhoest, 2010). This is particularly true of governance: the private sector is seen to be home to enviable mechanisms in terms of accountability, autonomy, incentives, and competition that could stand to be adopted and applied in the public realm. As the changes in public education policy and practice that reflect this transfer of knowledge are being studied, an area which remains much less researched however is the institutionalization of accountability measures in the private sector itself. This is why the case of Dubai's KHDA is so significant. It shows how authorities have established a public oversight and accountability framework for an education system which is nearly 90 percent private—a situation which is both unique and extreme—and yet without providing direct or indirect state funding or subsidization to it.

FIGURE 4

**Growth in Primary and Secondary Enrolments by Region, 1991–2003 (in percent)**

Source: Adapted from (IFC, 2010).

Recent studies have signaled the continuing growth of the private education sector. An IFC report (2010) explains that, in general, an overall rise in personal wealth has allowed families to seek alternatives to poor quality state education. In addition, in some cases, national governments lack the capacity to address increasing demand and so turn to the private sector for assistance, particularly in resource-poor countries. For these reasons, private enrolment in education has overtaken public enrolment in many regions globally, as Figure 4 demonstrates, with IFC estimates placing the private education sector market at over \$400bn.

Turning to the GCC more particularly, the substantial growth rates seen there are attributable to “a combination of demographic factors, a desire for higher quality, and GCC parents’ increased willingness to pay for education” (Moujaes *et al.*, 2011). With this in mind, the market offers substantial opportunities for new investment and consolidation, for new and existing players, providing that several challenges can be overcome: if some constraints are financial in nature, others, to do with “an immature operating environment characterized by a lack of transparency and consistency regarding regulations in the sector and a lack of information for parents regarding school quality,” (*ibid.*) have all inhibited the growth of the private school market thus far. Even if Dubai’s private sector differs markedly from other markets in the Region by virtue of its diversity, KHDA’s efforts are an interesting case study in this light because its governance structure addresses many of these regulatory concerns.

Generally speaking, the growth in the private sector is seen in two distinct market segments globally. It is ‘mushrooming’ in the developing world (Tooley and Dixon, 2005; Dixon, 2013), where the poor, contrary to all expectations, are turning to private schooling in response to the limited availability and poor-quality of state provision. Secondly, it is growing in major cities in middle- to high-income countries, in for instance Kuala Lumpur, Shanghai, and Doha, where it compliments or is even beginning to supplant public provision. To give just two examples of these phenomena: a recent DfID census (Härmä, 2011) of the education marketplace in the state of Lagos, Nigeria found 12,000 private schools, many unregistered, educating nearly 60 percent of all students. In Singapore, by contrast, a city-state recognized for the excellence of its public schools, the private sector is vibrant and continues to expand.<sup>1</sup> However dissimilar these markets, they share a common concern nonetheless: how should government recognize the substantial role that private providers play in education delivery and guide innovation, accountability, and quality in the sector?

Given this expansion, the World Bank has also turned its attention to the private sector. The Bank’s Education Sector Strategy 2020<sup>2</sup> entitled “*Learning for All*” places great emphasis, as its title suggests, on providing learning opportunities to all, which means those in formal and non-formal schooling in the public *and* private sector. As the Director of the Bank’s Education Network recently stated,

“If we ignore the wide range of formal and non-formal learning opportunities that exist in a country—most provided and financed by government but others provided and financed by non-state entities such as private individuals and enterprises, community and faith-based organizations—then we ignore classrooms where significant numbers of children and young people are enrolled.”<sup>3</sup>

As more and more education systems turn towards the private provision of education, it is important for the Bank to understand how these markets function and, more importantly, how to tackle the governance, regulatory and financial challenges that they are posing to the State. “If sensibly regulated and suitably encouraged, [private provision] can provide . . . a highly effective and efficient way of meeting educational goals” (Fielden and LaRoque, 2008).

Of interest in this regard is the World Bank’s **Systems Approach for Better Education Results** (SABER), an initiative to produce comparative data and knowledge on education policies and institutions, with the aim of helping countries systematically strengthen their education

systems. SABER evaluates the quality of education policies against evidence-based global standards, using new diagnostic tools and detailed policy data collected for the initiative.

A version of the SABER instrument has been developed to benchmark the private sector. Entitled **SABER-Engaging the Private Sector**,<sup>4</sup> it is built around the recognition that the non-state sector's involvement in the finance, provision, and governance of basic education services can take various forms. SABER-EPS expands knowledge of government policies, of operating environments, and of current types of engagement with the private sector in different countries, and it explores best practices for engaging the sector in delivering education services. The approach is based on global evidence of effective education service delivery (World Development Report 2004 (World Bank 2003); Patrinos *et al.*, 2009), which suggests that, to leverage their private-sector engagement in ways that most effectively promotes learning for all, countries should aim to achieve four key goals in their policy frameworks:

- Encourage innovation by providers. Schools are encouraged to tailor teaching, hiring, and other decision-making to meet the needs of all students.
- Promote diversity of supply. New schools offering a range of models are freely able to enter the market.
- Empower all parents. Parents are given access to accurate performance information, so they can use their voice and agency to demand high-quality services and better outcomes.
- Hold schools accountable. Policymakers hold all schools to account for the quality of services they provide.

## Governance Reform: International Experience

Programs aimed at making the public sector more effective often turn to initiatives related to governance reform because good governance is recognized as one of the essential, underlying conditions for effective and efficient national policies, programs, and services. Governance has been an explicit part of many governments' reform agenda since the latter part of the 1980's, though it is only more recently that explicit research and study has been conducted in this regard.

Service delivery or, rather, service delivery failure has become the focus of attention, if not the priority, for many developing and developed countries agendas. This is the case in education, as much as it is in other sectors (in the World Development Report 2004 (World Bank, 2003)), where these failures are seen most directly in poor student achievement



results (in relation to value for money), inequitable spending, funding leaks, teacher absence and loss of instructional time (Bruns *et al.*, 2011). It is indeed these shortcomings in the production of education goods and services by the state, which have led to an interest in the private sector.

The report *Making Schools Work: New Evidence on Accountability Reforms* (Bruns *et al.*, 2011) suggests, generally speaking, that four sets of strategies taken from the private sector have been employed over the last two decades to improve governance in public education systems. Briefly, these are:

- *Information for accountability* – policies that use the power of information to strengthen the ability of clients of education services (students and their parents) to hold providers accountable for results by offering them a better understanding of the system, *increased participation* and/or *voice* (see box **Beyond Informed Choice, Advice: the case of New Zealand**).
- *School-based management (SBM)* – policies that increase a school’s autonomy to make key decisions and control resources, often empowering parents to play a larger role. The use of SBM in high-income countries like Australia, the US, and the UK, reveals strong positive consequences after a certain period (Borman *et al.*, 2003).
- *Teacher incentives* – policies that aim to make teachers more accountable for results, either by making pay or tenure dependent on performance. An ongoing randomized study in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India, offers the most compelling case for such incentives (Muralidharan and Sundararaman, 2009).

## BOX 1

### **Beyond Informed Choice, Advice: the Case of New Zealand**

In New Zealand, public and private provision is subject to the same quality assurance procedures. While private schools are in general publically-funded (up to 30% of student costs), public schools operate with distinct autonomy, permitting them to operate in ways that exhibit similar characteristics as charter schools in the US. In this context, the State offers not only regulatory transparency, but also advice to parents to promote informed choice. The Education

Review Office provides assistance to families by helping them identify schools, refine the choice available to them through criteria linked to availability and need, and by explaining organizational factors and other necessary explanations about the differences in provision. It ensures that inspection reports remain publically available to all, which has led to their website being one of the most popular internet sites for parents in New Zealand (LaRocque, 2004).

- *Competition* – policies that foster a more competitive market for education, through for instance the use of vouchers or public-private partnerships, which provide stakeholders with greater *choice*.<sup>5</sup> The use of vouchers in the Netherlands is an excellent example.<sup>6</sup>

In some countries, these strategies were brought into the public sector from the private sector on the premise that they were *believed* to have worked effectively. When adopted for use, best practice suggests using impact evaluation to test for effectiveness. This is because only rigorous monitoring and evaluation allows researchers to determine the exact effect of these interventions, something which is leading to an ever-growing evidence base (see Bruns *et al.*, 2011). It should be kept in mind that what remains less understood, probably because it is a relatively new phenomenon, is governance in the private sector itself. This is the case of Dubai where governance practices employed in the public sphere like those above—perhaps once taken from the private—have been re-applied to the private.

Being both a right and a constitutionally mandated obligation in the public and private sectors alike, general education must be overseen by the State through regulation. In the case of the public sector, this involves ensuring that schools are safe, that teaching is of an acceptable quality, that facilities and materials are available, and so on. This is also just as much the case for the private sector, albeit with one important difference: while requiring these provisions, the State must also at the same time not discourage operators from investing in the sector. A fine balance must be found. The question at the heart of the matter is “what is a reasonable form of regulation for governments to adopt?” (Fielden and LaRoque, 2008). Best practices derived from international experience would suggest that regulation must do the following:

1. Provide a sound policy framework for the operation of the sector;
2. Introduce clear, objective, and streamlined criteria and processes for establishing and regulating private education institutions;
3. Allow for-profit schools to operate;
4. Allow private schools to set their own fees;
5. Provide incentives and support for private schools;
6. Provide parents and students with information to help them select quality private education providers;
7. Establish Quality Assurance frameworks;
8. Develop the capacity of government to implement policy and manage private providers.

**BOX 2****Certification Schemes for Market Signaling: the Case of Singapore**

Singapore's EduTrust is a certification scheme administered by the Council for Private Education for private education institutions. Though voluntary, it is one of the prerequisites that private education providers enrolling international students must meet in order to qualify for the issuance of student passes (visas), as stipulated by the city-state's Immigration and Checkpoints Authority. The scheme provides a

way for better institutions to signal that they have achieved high standards in key areas of management and the provision of educational services. An institution may be awarded one of three certifications demonstrating that they have fulfilled EduTrust requirements either minimally, satisfactorily or to an excellent degree. These certificates are valid for one, four, and four years, respectively (source: [www.cpe.gov.sg](http://www.cpe.gov.sg))

As we will see, the KHDA has met almost all these requirements in various and often interesting ways by advancing a unique form of public governance for the private education sector in Dubai.

**Endnotes**

1. See for instance [http://www.cpe.gov.sg/cpe/slot/u100/News%20and%20Events/Press%20release/2013/PE%20Conference%202013%20-%20Media%20Release,%20Factsheet%20and%20State%20of%20the%20Sector%20Slides%20\(9%20April%202013\).pdf](http://www.cpe.gov.sg/cpe/slot/u100/News%20and%20Events/Press%20release/2013/PE%20Conference%202013%20-%20Media%20Release,%20Factsheet%20and%20State%20of%20the%20Sector%20Slides%20(9%20April%202013).pdf)
2. See: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTENDEDUCATION/0,,contentMDK:22474207~menuPK:282402~pagePK:210058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:282386,00.html>
3. Elizabeth M. King, Keynote Speech at the Education World Forum, London, UK - January 21, 2014
4. Please see <http://saber.worldbank.org/index.cfm?indx=8&tb=12>
5. Needless to say, there are many private schools around the world where none of this is in place.
6. See [http://www.cfbt-sites.com/epsetoolkit/case\\_studies/case\\_studies\\_n-z/netherlands\\_market\\_contracted.aspx](http://www.cfbt-sites.com/epsetoolkit/case_studies/case_studies_n-z/netherlands_market_contracted.aspx)



## The Discussion of Public Accountability and Incentives in *The Road Not Traveled*

The hypothesis put forward in *The Road Not Traveled* is that the *engineering* approach adopted to develop school systems in the MENA region, which may have once been suited to the needs of the countries, is no longer effective in producing the kind of educational outcomes required today. Instead, what is needed is a greater focus on *incentives* and *public accountability* in order to promote behavioral changes in schools as organizations and among teachers, school head-masters, administrators and education authorities. Indeed, the more successful educational systems of the Region seem to exhibit a good mix of these.

If engineering approaches have helped to improve equitable access to education and to build national identity, with time they have shown their limits in ensuring that good quality education is provided to all children regardless of socioeconomic conditions, gender, ethnicity or beliefs. While MENA reform programs have exhibited modest shifts from engineering toward incentives and public accountability, the Flagship report contends that this change has not gone far enough.

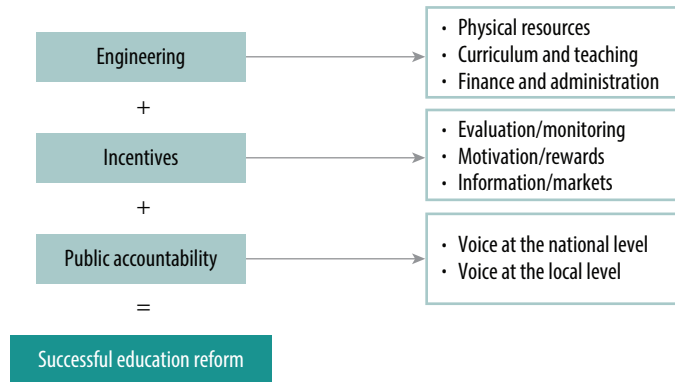
The proposal in the Flagship Report is that successful education reform requires better *engineering* of education, better *incentives*, and improved *public accountability*, as Figure 5 reveals. But what exactly do these terms, ‘engineering,’ ‘incentives,’ and ‘public accountability,’ mean in this context?

### Engineering

“The *engineering* of education is equivalent to viewing the provision of education like the production function of any firm” (World Bank, 2008). Simply put, a mix of *inputs*, like classrooms, teachers, textbooks, and so on are needed to create *outputs*, that is, educated students. In this view, it is

**FIGURE 5**

**The Analytical Framework from the *Road Not Traveled***



Source: World Bank, 2008, p.123.

the quantity, quality, and combination of these inputs that determines the outputs. While this model has its virtues—inputs are indeed necessary—inputs alone may not be sufficient. They may not account for instance for the motivation of the actors in that system.

### Incentives

Incentives are commonly used by individuals and organizations to promote behavioral change and to motivate performance improvement of service providers. The research literature reveals that different kinds of incentive programs have been experimented with in education, targeting student learning performance (Fryer, 2010), student drop out (Allen et al., 2011), family participation (in the form of Conditional Cash Transfers; Schultz, 2001), teacher performance (Lavy, 2007; Springer, 2009; Muralidharan & Sundararaman, 2009), teacher attendance (Banerjee et al., 2005) and school performance (Figlio and Lucas, 2004).

In the Flagship report, the discussion on incentives primarily revolves around the principal-agent dilemma where the principal (education authority) is interested on a particular outcome to be achieved through agents (schools) upon which it might have authority but regardless of this it has limited control of their final actions. The agents might not only have different objective functions but also they have an informational advantage of what happens inside the classrooms and schools (information rent). This dilemma can be tackled by designing implicit or explicit contracts with provisions to align the incentives of the agents with those of the principal.

## Accountability

The importance of public accountability for better delivery of education services is well established in the literature. The research is thorough, reaching back more than thirty years (see Kogan, 1986; Frymier, 1996; Lavy, 2002; Anderson, 2005; Muralidharan & Sundararaman, 2010; Duffo, 2010; Bruns et al. 2011).

Accountability essentially means that the interests, priorities and preferences of stakeholders should dictate the content, production and evolution of the education system; and that those responsible for these outcomes would suffer consequences if they are not delivered or will be rewarded if successful. *The Road Not Traveled* emphasizes different approaches (and their effectiveness) to achieve accountability—engineering (command and control), incentives (principal-agent) and public accountability. However, public accountability is a special term: on the one hand, the *Road Not Traveled* refers to a specific stakeholder—the parents and students; on the other, it refers to notion of choice, management oversight, or political pressure. Every education system must serve a variety of stakeholders that are not always aligned. This is usually the key problematic in any education system.

The potential for public accountability in the education sector is determined to a great extent by the overall governance environment existing within a country. There is growing consensus that establishing and maintaining an effective education governance system raises quality by establishing strategies to measure and hold individual and institutional stakeholders accountable for their performance and by defining the roles each stakeholder (i.e., students, teachers, parents, administrators, etc.) should play in that context.

Educators work adhering to one (or more) systems of accountability—though they may not realize it.<sup>1</sup> The *first* system demands compliance with statutes and regulations. Anchored in an industrial model of education, these systems consider that educators are accountable for adherence to rules and accountable to the bureaucracy. The *second* system is based upon adherence to professional norms. Although neither mandated nor required, the impact of widespread agreement on certain principles and practices can do much to elevate the education as a profession, as has been shown in many countries where teachers and school heads often become members of teaching associations or councils. Within this system, educators are accountable for adherence to standards and accountable to their peers. This is what Firestone<sup>2</sup> refers to as ‘professional accountability.’ The *third* accountability system is based upon results, with results defined in terms of student learning. The ‘No Child Left Behind’ requirements in the United States and the Australian National Education

*Transparency through access to information is an essential element in this form of accountability*

Performance Monitoring Task Force, the ‘league tables’ Ofsted reports in the UK, etc. are examples of results-based systems. In these systems educators are accountable for student learning and accountable to the general public. A *fourth* is based upon school choice where children or parents are customers who choose schools and can shop for the one that best reflects their preferences and capacity to pay (this is one form of ‘consumer accountability’). The discipline of market competition—or market accountability—induces schools and educators to be responsive to parent and student preferences. Transparency through access to information is an essential element in this form of accountability.

*The accountability of schools can no longer be just to a Ministry but must also be more directly to the public it serves—families and students.*

The ramification for the public systems in the MENA region is that the accountability of schools (and of principals and teachers within schools) can no longer be just to the Ministry but must also be more directly to the public—the families and students—it serves. In other words, accountability as the mere compliance with administrative regulations is not the way towards an education system where practitioners and administrators have the necessary incentives to respond to the needs and expectations of families and students.

The Flagship report proposes that the key aspects needed to make the education sector more accountable in the region will be: (i) by changing governance practices to include decentralization, school-based management, more autonomy; (ii) by strengthening service delivery through the development of professional standards for schools, teachers and the effective use of financial resources; and (iii) by establishing feedback systems to keep public authorities and users informed about results.

**TABLE 1**

**School Accountability Type**

		Bureaucratic	Professional	Result Based	Market
Accountability Holders	External	Local and regional authorities, central ministries, curriculum body, inspectorates and regulators	General teaching councils	Local, regional, central authorities, regulators, inspectorates and	Parents, civil society, students (as consumers)
	Internal	School governing bodies and school head (hierarchical)	Peers (horizontal accountability)	School governing bodies and school head	School head and owner
Accountable Actors		Teachers and school head	Teachers and school head	Teachers and school head	Teachers, school head and governing bodies (owner)
Content		National summative tests; teachers’ reports	Teaching assessment, planning	Summative tests	Summative tests and learning-employment goals
Mechanism		Inspectorate (curriculum body) reports, self-evaluation and learning outcomes	Conformity to codes of conduct and ethics	Test results	Inspectorate reports, evaluation forms, test results

Adapted from Mattei, 2012.



## Information as an Essential Element of Accountability

Information is, in itself, an important contribution to accountability, as the Flagship report suggests. Very often, stakeholders within an educational system are unaware of the very state of that system; they are ‘in the dark,’ as it were. However, by promoting a culture of evaluation, where the data on the quality of education systems, schools and student learning outcomes is made publicly available to all the interested stakeholders, the ‘lights can be turned on.’ Stakeholders who now understand where they stand within that system, can act upon this information and make better informed decisions. For this to happen, the Flagship report explains that Arab countries must build on their capacity to use student assessment information for quality improvement and equity-enhancing purposes because the assessment of learning leads eventually to improving learning.

## Voice

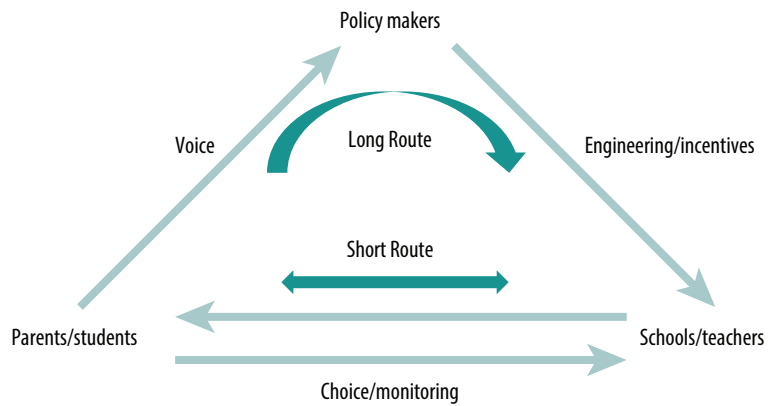
Another important idea presented in the *Road Not Traveled* within the context of public accountability is the premise that “if the majority of beneficiaries have a way of persuading policymakers to improve education policies, education outcomes will improve.” (p.121). This suggests that if better information about educational issues is made more readily available to stakeholders, this will lead to their greater understanding of these issues and will in turn encourage them to respond and act on that information. It should promote, in other words, greater voice.

This presupposes that stakeholders (1) do indeed understand the information provided to them, (2) are in a position to act upon it, (3) anticipate that their actions will in fact lead to some change, and (4) will participate in sufficient numbers to make an impact.

Three actors and three relationships are often cited in this discussion, as Figure 6 reveals. In this schema, what are called the ‘short’ and ‘long’ routes of accountability are identifiable (from the World Development Report 2004 (World Bank, 2003)). In the first, beneficiaries, that is, parents and/or students, will exercise their voice directly to the institution they are most closely in dealings with, in this case, a teacher, the school head, or perhaps the local school board, should one exist, expecting in return some form of response. Voice at this local level constitutes the short route of accountability. In the second, beneficiaries may turn to a higher level entity, a regional school board or the Ministry of Education for instance (policy makers) to have their voice heard, anticipating that this voice at a national level will in turn translate into changes eventually at their level. This constitutes the long route of accountability.

*Accountability is potentially greater in the private sector precisely because of some private sector schools’ sensitivity to market competition and responsiveness to voice.*

FIGURE 6

**The Short and Long Routes of Accountability**

Source: World Bank, 2008, p.122.

To what extent voice at a local or national level has a significant impact on the public sector is an altogether interesting question, fueled, in the MENA region, by the successes and failures of recent events. However, it has always been held that accountability is potentially greater in the private sector precisely because of some private sector schools' sensitivity to market competition and responsiveness to voice.

**Endnotes**

1. Anderson, 2005: see <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001409/140986e.pdf>
2. Macmillan Reference *Encyclopedia of Education*. Online. Accessed August 27, 2013.

# Steering Education towards Improved Quality

## Policy Context

Since the establishment of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 1971, Dubai has developed a distinct identity by creating a niche for itself, making its mark as the fastest growing Emirate in the UAE. Dubai was the first Emirate to develop strategic development plans aimed at offering high-quality infrastructure, an expatriate-friendly environment, minimal regulation, zero tax on personal and corporate income and low import duties. In 1985, Dubai developed its first free trade zone and this model was very successful in attracting manufacturing, warehousing, distribution and high-tech industries to the Emirate based on the availability of reasonably priced skilled labor, a business friendly corporate environment and advanced infrastructure. As a result, Dubai currently has one of the most diversified economies in the Arabian Gulf region and has developed itself into a center for tourism, banking and financial services, manufacturing, re-export, retailing and distribution. Since the 1990s Dubai has recognized that in order to prosper and grow, it needs to diversify its economy so as to replace the contribution made by the oil sector.

In the 1996–2000 Strategic Development Plan, human resource development was featured as one prerequisite essential to achieve sustainable economic and social development. The development focus shifted from an almost exclusive emphasis on the promotion of the industrial sector towards more attention to building human capital, to upgrading the workforce, and to increasing the participation of nationals in the labor market as the basis for developing a knowledge-based, skill intensive economy. In 2000, the free zone clusters were established to promote the development of knowledge industries and business growth and to attract more foreign private companies to the Emirate. This comprised ten interconnected business parks arranged under five industry clusters across the ICT, Media, Education (Knowledge), Sciences, and Manufacturing and Logistics sectors. The Knowledge Village (KV) was established in

*... more attention to building human capital, to upgrading the workforce, and to increasing the participation of nationals.*

2002 as part of the free zone 'concept' aimed at the development of a pool of qualified local talent.

As part of the implementation of the Dubai Strategic Plan 2010 (DSP-2010) the emerging development focus led to the establishment of the Dubai Education Council (DEC)<sup>1</sup> in 2005 chaired by the Director General of the Dubai Media and Technology Free Zone whose major objectives were to: (i) improve Dubai's educational sector to match international standards without compromising the UAE's cultural and ideological principles; (ii) promote both the building of a knowledge economy and the strengthening of social cohesion through policy steering, and (iii) to separate the role of the land 'provider' from the regulator and policy maker.

In 2006, as part of the Federal Ministry's efforts to improve UAE's education, the Minister of Education began decentralizing education<sup>2</sup> and transferred the full management of the Dubai Education Zone to the Dubai Education Council that, at the time, included the management of public schools and the regulation and oversight of the private education sector. The agreement was developed on the premise that decentralizing the management of education would provide greater flexibility and transparency in devising and executing short and medium term plans which would in turn contribute to improving not only efficiency and quality but also allow faster response to a changing environment, while at the same time maintaining a high level of cooperation and coordination with the Federal Ministry. In 2010 the responsibility related to public schools was returned to the Ministry of Education.

The trend initiated in DSP-2010 was reinforced with the formulation of DSP-2015 that underscored the vision of transforming Dubai into a hub of business excellence by enabling private sector led growth; promoting human capital excellence and preparing Dubai's workforce for a high value, knowledge based economy; enhancing organizational structures and accountability (measurable results) by means of moving from rules/regulations (inputs based systems) to accountability (outcomes based systems) for improved social services. It became apparent that in order to fulfill this vision Dubai not only needed to prepare its workforce but also needed to attract highly qualified professionals and that one condition to make this possible was having high quality education institutions.

One of the pre-conditions identified by the Dubai policy making group to move ahead with the implementation of the "Growth Strategy" was to improve the quality of private schools for Emirati students, especially as Emirati nationals represented a small percentage of UAE's population. Consequently, the national agenda encompassed a vision to focus on Emirati education and skills development in a way that could ultimately maximize their impact on the country. As a result of the perception that private schools offered better quality education, and because the instruction was

**BOX 3****Main Responsibilities of the Dubai Education Council**

- Make suggestions on suitable systems for improving education in the Emirate of Dubai by referring those suggestions to the Dubai Executive Council;
- Draw educational criteria for various education sectors in the Emirate and ensure the implementation of these criteria;
- Improve the role of educational institutions in such a way that would boost their participation in the future;
- Launch educational initiatives which would contribute to the improvement of competence and educational standard in the Emirate;
- Cooperate with the ministry of education and other concerned bodies in developing education and spread awareness on the importance of sustainable development of education.

often in English, the proportion of Emirati students enrolled in private schools has increased from 34% to 57% over the last 10 years. In 2013/14, there were 30,994 Emirati students in private schools, constituting 12.7 percent of the private school student population. That so many Emirati students enroll in private schools is not the result of any policy campaign but a result of the demand by parents for alternatives to public schooling which was seen as inferior to that offered by the private sector.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, a second important area of focus for policy makers in Dubai was to have the capacity in the Emirate to attract highly qualified professionals (indeed, a labor force) from abroad. It was envisioned that in order to achieve this goal Dubai would create the institutional and policy environment required to address the twin challenges of having an adequate number of education institutions needed to absorb the increasing demand for education that would result from the influx of qualified expatriates, while at the same time ensuring that the education provided by these institutions was of high quality thus making the Dubai education system attractive to them.

Consistent with this vision and to improve the quality of service delivery, the Government of Dubai adopted a new governance framework designed to separate service delivery from policy making.<sup>4</sup> This initiative led to the classification of government authorities and agencies, as presented below.

The mandate of the Dubai Education Council at the time was restricted to overseeing the education sector and so lacked the full authority

**FIGURE 7**

**Classification of Government Bodies**

Authority	Laws on planning policy Control over the implementation of plans and policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The administrative structure of the government of Dubai</li> <li>• Chaired by the Director-General (member of the Executive Board)</li> <li>• Funded by government budget</li> </ul>
Service Agency	Executive functions Provides government services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management Foundation (part of the structure of general government)</li> <li>• Chaired by an Executive Director</li> <li>• Funded by government budget in addition to service charges</li> </ul>
Trading Agency	The provision of government services in business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The administrative structure of the government of Dubai</li> <li>• Chaired by an Executive Director</li> <li>• Funded entirely from fees and service income</li> </ul>
Public Corporation	Business management for the government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A legally independent entity</li> <li>• Chaired by the Executive Director</li> <li>• Funded entirely by commercial operations</li> </ul>
Independent Agency	The follow-up and control of the government and other functions needed for independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A legally independent entity</li> <li>• Chaired by the Executive Director</li> <li>• Funded by government budget</li> </ul>

Source: Executive Council, Government of Dubai 2007.

to steer and regulate the sector as well as monitor results. This generated the need to establish an Authority with a broader mandate to stimulate and oversee the performance of education institutions.

When in 2006 the leadership of the Dubai Education Council set out to identify the existing contours of the Dubai educational landscape, it realized that the information required to put together a straightforward diagnostic of the sector was limited. This of course prevented it from fulfilling its critical mandate of steering public and private education institutions so as to make them responsive to the vision and challenges of DSP on the one hand and, on the other, prevented it from appropriately responding to requests from private schools to increase fees. To correct this situation a survey was sent to all education institutions operating in Dubai asking for some basic factual information such as number of teachers; students; transition rates; availability of teaching materials; infrastructure; and so on.

**The Establishment of the Knowledge and Human Development Authority**

The KHDA was established by Law No. (30) of 2006, by virtue of which it became a recognized public Authority having an independent legal

personality, enjoying financial and administrative independence, and maintaining the necessary legal capacity to carry out all acts and transactions necessary for fulfilling its objectives.

In order to support KHDA's roles and responsibilities, the Executive Council established the School Agency<sup>5</sup> within KHDA with the explicit mandate to develop the school sector by, among other functions, determining the targeted outcomes of the school system; supervising school teaching and monitoring performance to ensure the compliance with quality standards; improving the teaching profession and elevating the position of the teacher in society; granting governmental schools more authority and providing administrative support services.<sup>6</sup>

Later on, at the end of 2007, the Executive Council established the School Inspection System<sup>7</sup> known as the Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) with a mandate to monitor schools operating in Dubai. Based on what was already available in Dubai, policy makers involved in the formulation of education policies anticipated that families arriving or residing in Dubai would not only demand a curriculum that satisfied their expectations based on their familiarity with what was available in their country of origin but also the kind of quality commensurate to their own high level of professional qualifications. Key features defined by the policy makers and experts involved in the new monitoring system were that it should be flexible and nimble, and capable of responding to a wide-ranging set of needs and demands of families coming from many different cultures and nationalities. The final design of the new inspection system was thus shaped after consulting with local stakeholders, receiving advice from regional and international experts, and by visiting countries with working inspection systems such as the UK, Scotland, the Netherlands and New Zealand.

The main functions assigned to the DSIB in order to enable it to fulfill the above expectations were to: set standards for education quality including the indicators for measuring them; adopt a reporting system to measure and monitor school performance using those standards and to publish those reports; adopt the necessary practical measures to help upgrade low performing schools; conduct studies and analysis on education quality; etc.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, the KHDA Regulation and Compliance Commission (RCC)<sup>9</sup> was created with the single general objective of establishing and ensuring that the minimum expected standards for schools (in terms of infrastructure, safety, and so on) are in place before they issue Educational Service Permits for all institutes in Dubai. The RCC also handles the complex issue of establishing an incentive for schools through the fee framework mechanism: it permits schools to either increase their fees (with non-profit schools seeing profits or savings returned to the

*The Inspection Framework successfully captures all aspects of the rich diversity of Dubai's private schools.*

*...that drive for transparency is recognized as a central operating principle of KHDA today.*

school—rather than, say, going to an owner) and/or to expand their school in response to improvements in quality.

The intent of the DSIB was to promote transparency about the quality of schools in a system that was seen to be operating in the dark. There was seen to be a lack of information about the outcomes of the system as well as about the processes that produced those outcomes. With that aim in mind, the inspection framework was introduced as a means to an end, despite the challenges involved in doing so. The approach was in fact heavily criticized by the general community at first but the KHDA persevered nevertheless and now that drive for transparency is recognized as a central operating principle of KHDA today. What remains to be determined is the extent to which on the one hand transparency has indeed entered into the system and on the other is helping to steer schools to improved performance, as we will see below.

These developments were informed by KHDA's over-arching, three-pronged 'mantra' of quality, access and engagement—an approach and philosophy that was underscored when KHDA revisited its strategy<sup>10</sup> in 2009 and 2010 when greater focus was gained on these three aspects. Indeed, everything that KHDA does is related to improving quality and facilitating access through engagement with the community.

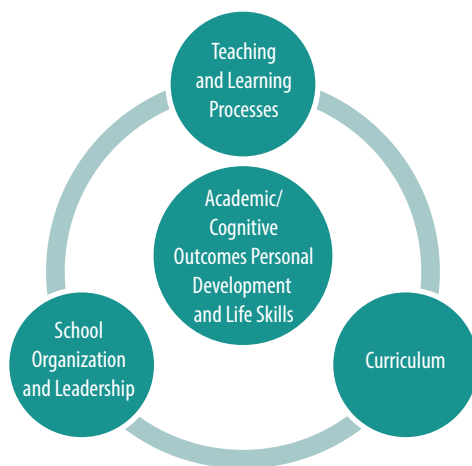
## Inspection Framework

The initial task required to accomplish the inspection mandate was setting up a range of quality standards in areas considered important for assessing the quality of services provided by schools. At the diagram below reveals, school effectiveness is assessed in term of students' academic and cognitive outcomes as well as the acquisition of life skills and personal development. In addition, the operation of the school as an organization is assessed along three main dimensions related to how the teaching and learning processes are managed at the classroom level; how the school is organized and managed; and the suitability and robustness of the curriculum.

It was decided that schools were to be inspected yearly by a school inspection team put together by DSIB from a pool of regionally, as well as internationally, experienced experts in similar endeavors. The first inspection of schools took place during the academic year 2008–2009. Three weeks before the visit of the team of inspectors, each school prepared and returned an electronic school self-evaluation report provided by DSIB.<sup>11</sup> The self-evaluation is then validated with information collected from parents and students using surveys; through interviews with teachers, school administrators and school personnel; and through direct



FIGURE 8

**DSIB Inspection Framework**

Source: Adapted from DSIB, 2013, p. 124.

classroom observation and review of students work and classifications. The information collected through all these sources is triangulated and collectively analyzed by each school inspection team.

The introduction of inspection was conceived by KHDA's policy makers as one of many policy instruments to incentivize schools and to make them accountable for the service that they provide. Within this framework, it was expected that open information would foster greater competition between education institutions to attract students and at the same time would act as a driver to improve service delivery and enhance education outcomes. The opportunity to be authorized to increase fees was also expected to act as an additional driver to improve school effectiveness and student performance.

In addition, other measures were introduced to complement these initial steps. These included: discussions with the investment community about the demand for schools; the approval of educational permits to open new schools; discussions to approve the appointment of school heads; the regulation of schools to ensure that a minimum quality was respected; discussions with school owners about the terms of the fee framework; and, opportunities for parents to respond to KHDA through surveys on aspects of schools as part of the inspection process, among others. In this way, the important main elements of the system were enhanced and enriched.

The '*What Works*' platform is further evidence of this drive to develop instruments to improve the whole system. As the box makes clear, it was

## BOX 4

**What Works – from Competition to Collaboration**

Several years after the introduction of inspection, a collaborative initiative suggested itself. Supported by both the DSIB and a group of school principals, it was called very simply *What Works*. This series of events brings educators from private schools in Dubai and education professionals together to share and reflect on their good practices, and to provide guidance and support to each other through structured events. *What Works* emphasizes the positive by sharing what good practice looks like in collaboration between schools. It is run by schools for schools with support from KHDA, based on the principle of appreciative inquiry that emphasizes the positive advantages of collaboration and knowledge sharing.

*What Works* has come about because of the inspection system. It dates back to September 2012 when during a meeting of twenty school heads at KHDA, several proposed the idea of educational conferences whose purpose would be to review good practices identified during the inspection process and to share them across schools. The initial group of four school heads has continued working together and become content advisors for the organization of these events. In 2012–13, more than 1,500 educators participated in the events.

**The Event**

A *What Works* event is a one-day conference organized around a specific theme. These are identified from topics emerging as important from the inspection process,

such as leadership, special needs education, school governance, Arabic and Islamic education, teaching science or math, etc. The first was a generic event after which the leadership group began working towards developing a more focused series of conferences to follow up.

Participants attend a series of plenary and breakout sessions where they listen to teachers and principals who have demonstrated excellence in a specific area of education and are given the opportunity to discuss with them different aspects of their experiences. In addition, schools which moved up their overall performance level on KHDA's annual inspection, showcase their journey in leading their school to a better performance level (from satisfactory to good for instance) and share the key lessons learned, energy and drive with colleagues who are on the same journey. The presentation style during these sessions varies from simple power point presentations by a head/teacher or by multiple teachers and sometimes parents, to simulations that can include students as well.

Key lessons learned through this practice can be summarized as follows:

***From competition to collaboration.*** Until recently, private schools were operating in silos, each working as an island due to the competitive nature of the relationship. People were skeptical that schools will actually work together because they have no common themes or interests, particularly

(continued on next page)

**BOX 4** (continued)**What Works – from Competition to Collaboration**

in such a commercial environment. *What Works* was able to break down boundaries and stimulate collaboration across schools in Dubai.

*Engaging in development; going beyond measurement.* *What Works* has helped to address the needs of low performing schools through informal interventions that are seen to have a greater impact in the ‘classroom’ going beyond the school inspection rating.

*Teachers teaching teachers:* For participating teachers *What Works* events present a

professional development opportunity of “*teachers teaching teachers*” using sound and trustworthy evidence coming from their teaching practices; *based on their local experience.*

*An intrinsic reward.* For many teachers *What Works* has become the first opportunity to present their professional work at a conference of fellow professionals, while they might be used to present to an audience of students and/or parents, getting through the barrier of presenting to professional educators has been for many a rewarding achievement.

conceived as a way of sharing good practices between schools and is now being recognized for its collaborative approach which is helping to break down perceptions of competition between the schools. KHDA fully sponsor the events (though the necessary funding is minimal). Guest speakers, presenters, and the venue are all provided without charge. KHDA has made a specific policy decision not to accept any commercial sponsorship, either from private school operators or education-related companies.<sup>12</sup>

From the perspective of the Dubai Strategic Plan it was assumed that the interaction of incentives and accountability provided by the inspection system would help bring the education sector on par with international standards and best practices and would therefore attract high skilled professionals (and their families). Inspection reports are the instruments that inform the school community with the expectation that parents in particular and the school community in general (including policy makers and government authorities) will use the information provided to make decisions about where to enroll their children, to monitor school performance and to push for improvement in those schools, if need be, and ultimately to make decisions about keeping or withdrawing their children from particular schools, should they be poorly performing. Thus, a strategic policy question to assess the effectiveness of inspection as a policy

*This report is also concerned with the range of incentive and accountability mechanisms, including regulatory oversight, investor discussions, the provision of voice for parents and information to them, put into play by KHDA.*

instrument is to determine whether poorly performing schools do indeed change practices and internal policies—if they attempt to improve—in response to accountability pressures set by parents, by policy makers and by education authorities including KHDA. But above and beyond just looking at the effectiveness of the inspection regime, this report is also concerned with the range of incentive and accountability mechanisms, including regulatory oversight, private education sector investor discussions, the provision of voice for parents and information to them, put into play by KHDA.

## Endnotes

1. The Dubai Education Council was established by Executive Council Decree No. (11) of 2005.
2. Ministerial Decree number 3/97 of 2006.
3. This is in part due to the language of instruction. English is the prevailing language in the labor market in Dubai, so families prefer that their children go to an English speaking school, at least from secondary education onwards.
4. Policy making and service delivery are de facto “separate” but a governance framework ensures consistency and alignment between the two.
5. The School Agency was established through the Executive Council Decision No. 11 of 2007.
6. See Article 5 of Executive Council Decision No. 11 of 2007.
7. The School Inspection System was established through the Executive Council Decision No. 38 of 2007 issued on 25 December 2007.
8. See Article 3 of Executive Council Decision No. 38 of 2007.
9. The Regulations and Compliance Commission has since been renamed the Regulations and Permits Commission.
10. It should be mentioned that the initial strategy was developed through extensive community consultation including YouGov surveys, though it was never publically released.
11. This is an electronic form that schools access via the internet.
12. While it is still too early to measure impact, there is much positive feedback from participants which is very encouraging. How this translates to actual improvements in student outcomes will be difficult to discern but, above and beyond this, what KHDA are attempting to put in place is a shift in thinking in the school ecosystem towards collaboration, networking and sharing good practice.

# Methodology for Reviewing the KHDA Policy Framework in Operation

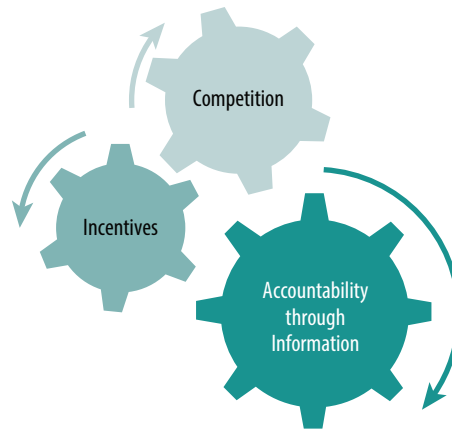
Given Dubai's unique political context, discussed earlier, it was decided that it would be best that policy makers only provide oversight of the highly privatized education landscape. This was attributable to the fact that traditional engineering solutions, like training teachers, modifying curricula, funding for school activities, consultancy services, were not available interventions for a *public* authority in a diverse *private* sector. Indeed, the KHDA refrained from these kinds of investments on principle. So, based on the policy framework provided by the World Bank report, the KHDA developed an approach whose objective was to promote greater accountability, incentives, and competition, which, when working together would help achieve the greater objective of fostering the development of a high performing private education sector.

Proof of the advantages of using of these kinds of strategies is still relatively limited in the literature (though the evidence base is admittedly growing).<sup>1</sup> So, in order to assess the KHDA approach, and reflect on its achievements as well as suggest possible areas for refinement, the research question addressed is whether these constituent components are functioning as anticipated: does greater accountability stemming from information being made more available, as well as explicit incentives introduced by KHDA, lead to a more competitive, high performing education system?

To confirm or challenge whether the assumptions in the underlying theories of change of each part of this approach are in fact correct, we looked at empirical evidence combing the data gathered from the responses by parents, teachers, school heads and owners to surveys undertaken in Dubai in October 2013.

The methodology we have employed is straightforward: a mixed methods approach using some quantitative and mostly qualitative data, both of which were collected and analyzed. First, though, to gain practical insights into the KHDA approach, we undertook a review of the literature on governance as well as the private education sector. In order to

FIGURE 9

**How the Constituents Elements Function Together**

Source: Authors.

appreciate to what extent the mechanisms outlined in the *Road Not Traveled* were in operation in Dubai, we designed a series of questionnaires for the four identifiably different stakeholders of the private education sector in Dubai: parents, teachers, school heads, and school owners. The objective of these questions was to explore the dimensions and influence of these mechanisms on the respective stakeholders. As a result, the questionnaires required the development of an appropriate range of questions including closed ('yes/no'), Likert-scale, and open-ended formats.

With assistance from the KHDA counterpart team on the ground, two teams from the World Bank (each with Arabic-speakers) visited 20 different private schools in Dubai<sup>2</sup> over the course of three weeks, including schools at the primary, middle, and high school level, of various curricula (Indian, US, English, etc.), at very different price-points in terms of fees, and with various ratings (Outstanding, Good, etc.). The interviews were usually held with randomly-chosen parents (seen alone or in groups up to 8 or so), with teachers usually seen in groups, and with one or more of the school heads. We saw only one or two school owners. In brief, this is an intentional sample which we believe is a good representation of the school network in the Emirate, though probably not fully acceptable in terms of statistical significance.

The responses to these questionnaires, when coded and compiled into databases, were then analyzed for correlations and trends. Our findings follow.

## Endnotes

1. See (Bruns et al., 2011) for examples.
2. Schools that participated included: Al Eman Private School, Al Ittihad Private School (Jumeirah), Al Rashid Al Saleh Private School, Apple International School, Deira International School, Dubai Arabian American Private School, Emirates International School (Meadows), GEMS Dubai American Academy, Greenfield Community School, His Highness Shaikh Rashid Al Maktoum Pakistani School, JSS International School, Jumeirah English Speaking School (JESS) Arabian Ranches, Lycee Georges Pompidou Primary School, Queen International School, School of Modern Skills, Sheffield Private School, the Indian High School, the Kindergarten Starters, and the Philippine School.





## Policy Framework Elements Reviewed

KHDA assures quality through various governance practices. For the licensing of new schools, it encourages the business community to invest in the private sector while respecting the standards for good quality schools. For those schools already in existence, it has developed a governance system whose seemingly simple approach belies its theoretical complexity. It is for this reason that this report remains focused, even at the risk of seeming reductive in our investigation, on the central elements of the framework suggested in the *Road Not Traveled* and considers accountability, incentives, and competition. As we shall discover, many aspects of the system are working as intended for the moment, even if our findings reveal that certain aspects of these interrelated mechanisms could sometimes be leveraged to greater advantage.

### Accountability

Private schools in Dubai ‘wear two hats’ in the sense that they have a mandate to follow a particular curriculum and at the same time also fall under the aegis of KHDA. There are various forms of accountability at play: some that arise by virtue of a school being of a certain curriculum; others that are promoted by KHDA. So, in some schools, there may be bureaucratic accountability but that will depend on whether the provision of education in that particular curriculum is predicated on rules and regulations that must be followed. However, in contrast, the KHDA by and large looks to encourage market accountability, the mechanics of which we develop below, as well as professional accountability (by for example encouraging schools to participate in the *What Works* events). Of course, it cannot be overlooked that within these two forms of accountability also lie some results-based accountability, as we shall see.

If findings about schools are made publicly available, will this transparency help drive reform through the response of concerned stakeholders? Our findings explore the series of assumptions that underlie this theory of action.

*What KHDA has done is introduce a new lexicon into the education market and a new focus on the importance of education quality, both of which did not exist before.*

*Make information available.* There is good evidence that KHDA has succeeded in this task. In comparison to the pre-inspection period, there is significantly more information readily available about the private sector. Not only has KHDA taken great pains to make all its reports available online or through its app, now third-party websites (such as *souqalmal* and *whichschooladvisor*) and relocation consultants are making use of that information as well. It can be relatively confusing for parents to find a school that suits the needs of their child, especially in a city that may be new to them if they have just arrived in Dubai, so information becomes paramount for informed choice.

In effect, what KHDA has done is introduce a new lexicon into the education market and a new focus on the importance of education quality, both of which did not exist before. Evidence for this is clearly evident in the media. As chapter 10 of the DSIB Annual Report for 2013 reveals, not only has the question of education quality in Dubai now become a topic for general public discussion but, more importantly, calls for improved quality are now heard too:

“Analysis of media articles concerning DSIB shows that both the Arabic and English media have found school inspection ratings to be a popular topic since 2008–09. Newspapers and local websites have published annual inspection ratings and hosted discussions on success stories and about schools that are making less progress than the rest. International media channels have also mentioned school inspections in Dubai and discussed them as an example of the remarkable educational reforms that are taking place in this region.

At first, because educators and parents in the UAE were unfamiliar with the idea of school inspections, the media voiced many critical views. Schools and parents regarded DSIB more as a controlling regime than a system for monitoring the quality of education. However, within a short space of time, headlines in the local media began to target improving school quality: “Time to improve education,” “Schools need to work harder,” “Addressing school failings,” “Parents’ voice,” “Hard lessons for our schools.”

Since then, school inspections have been accepted by the media as a system for assuring the quality of education, and ensuring that schools in Dubai provide all students with improved learning opportunities.” (DSIB, 2013)

*Information is used and so useful.* To what extent stakeholders use the information available to them is important. A recent article, “More than

Scores: An Analysis of How and Why Parents Choose Private Schools” (Kelly and Scafidi, 2013) reveals that parents, including low-income parents, desire to be informed education consumers and are willing and able to be informed and active education consumers on behalf of their children. This trend is observed in Dubai, although it differs in one nuanced way: while there is a growing interest in information about schools in general, an observation which was revealed in responses to our surveys, and from international assessments data (see box below), a sound understanding of that information seemed to depend on one particular condition: the rating of the school to which the stakeholder was connected. This was seen when stakeholders, after being asked if they were familiar with the most recent DSIB inspection report for their school, were probed on the relative strengths and weaknesses of their schools as related in those reports. Those connected to better-rated schools were more familiar with the details of the report than those from schools with poorer ratings, in general. There are surely several explanations for this.

More surprisingly, this was not only the case for parents but also for teachers and even principals. Our findings revealed that a majority of principals in well-rated schools knew the details of the report, compared to only a few of their counterparts in poorer rated schools. This is an important point about the leadership of schools: better leadership, meaning in this case better informed leadership, is directly related to change for the better. This is because effective “school principals can shape teacher’s professional development, define schools educational goals, ensure that instructional practice is directed towards achieving these goals, suggest modifications to improve teaching practices, and help solve problems that may arise within the classroom or among teachers.” (OECD, 2013). There is in Dubai a correlation between schools with good leadership and good ratings, a fact which is noted in the DSIB annual reports and which has become an important focus for KHDA in their discussions with principals and school owners.

Well-established schools report that the inspections mostly confirm what they already knew, thanks in great part to their own institutional awareness.<sup>1</sup> In these better rated schools, though the KHDA inspection was taken seriously, its influence was not perceived to be decisive. These schools revealed they could absorb the KHDA reports, reflect on, and learn from them in the context of their own solid frames of reference (their own quality assurance systems). They had in other words the capacity to use the information constructively. Indeed, this KHDA input contributes to a creative tension between the two systems which they know how to exploit and profit from.

On the other hand, for weaker schools, several challenges presented themselves. Unlike their better-rated counterparts, weaker schools seem

*Better leadership, meaning in this case better informed leadership, is directly related to change for the better.*

## BOX 5

### The Corroborating Power of International Assessments

As much as they are international assessments, TIMSS, PIRLS and PISA are also important diagnostic and planning tools as they collect a wealth of data that schools, teachers and education policymakers can use to improve provision.

Dubai participated in PISA in 2009 and 2012, in TIMSS in 2007 and 2011 and PIRLS in 2011. Following the most recent release of the results, KHDA commissioned studies of these assessments' findings. What is most convincingly revealed is the extent to which the PISA and TIMSS data corroborates from an international perspective, KHDA's 'local' perspective on Dubai.

KHDA provides each school with a report on how its students performed in international assessments, how they compared internationally, and with similar schools in Dubai, in addition to those interesting elements of the data that they might consider exploiting to improve quality.

The Dubai PISA 2012 report (Parkville, 2013) found that average achievement scores in the three areas of Mathematics, Reading and Science at age 15 were below the OECD scale average of 500, and yet Dubai's average scores remain nevertheless the highest in the region. Far more importantly, this report demonstrates that contextual indicators relating to teaching and

learning processes were found to be closely linked to inspection ratings. For instance, students in better rated schools were "more likely to report enjoyment of learning, high self-efficacy, continuous teacher support and openness to learning in general." This further underscores the importance of such a study as its data can be used by all stakeholders in the education process to understand, evaluate and improve.

The Parkville studies demonstrate the power of TIMSS in predicting overall school inspection ratings. "As the inspections handbook states, there is an almost universal consensus in the literature that an effective school will seek to secure the best possible academic or cognitive outcomes in addition to enabling students to thrive in terms of personal development" (p.58). Interestingly, advanced models including two data points in TIMSS over time prove to be almost perfectly in line with inspectors' professional views. The analysis of data from international assessments in conjunction with the findings of school inspections is just one important way in which KHDA works to improve education policymaking in Dubai. "This is true testament to the Authority's commitment to evidence-based policymaking in the ever-evolving Emirate".

to find it difficult to strike a balance between the demands placed on them by their national accreditation bodies and the KHDA inspection. They have difficulty complying in effect with these two mandates.<sup>2</sup> In addition, weaker schools do not always have the capacity to act on the information in the inspection reports—in one of two ways. First, some relate not

having the resources and the tools to improve, due to the limits placed on tuition fee increases and the salaries they must pay out to teachers. A parent's comment underscores this point: "KHDA publishes the [inspection] report, but the school may not have the resources or the tools to improve." Secondly, and even more problematically, weaker schools may not have the capacity to act upon the information provided<sup>3</sup> because they do not have the necessary conceptual understanding, in terms of pedagogy, institutional structure or management, leadership or other.<sup>4</sup> This came out when teacher and principals, after being asked if they understood what they needed to do to improve and how they would do it, were further probed. Many teachers responded positively, but it was apparent that they did not in fact know what was needed. In short, unlike better schools, these schools revealed that they could not absorb the KHDA reports in the context of their own frames of reference and, because of this, the KHDA input contributed not to a creative tension but rather a disruptive one from which they suffered, rather than profited.

*The rich get richer?* The sense is that while better schools are improving, because they have the capacity to do so, weaker schools are getting caught in a low equilibrium trap from which they don't have the means, either material or technical, to escape. A recent study by the Parkville Global Advisory group reinforces this point in another way. It demonstrates that between-school variation has grown from 2007 to represent 58% of all variation in student outcomes in 2011, while within-school variation has dropped. What this suggests is that "where students attend school matters more in 2011 than it did in 2007" (Parkville, 2012). Redressing this imbalance merits serious reflection.

Our findings reveal that stakeholders will use their 'voice' to drive change—another element of the theory of change. When information is pertinent, stakeholders will indeed use it to their advantage: parents will make better school choices for their children, and teachers and schools, when given feedback on how to improve, will act on that knowledge. There are nevertheless a few unanticipated consequences: in one case, reports suggested that some parents bypass schools and refer their questions directly to the KHDA, short-circuiting the usual communication channels, believing that their concern would receive more attention there. In another case, parents explained that the rating only counted to them when it dropped to 'unsatisfactory' because it was only then that this 'red flag' would be likely to incite them to move their children from the particular school in question. This is clearly not how the system is intended to work.

Earlier, we discussed the 'short' and 'long' routes of accountability: how, in public systems, families had two means of recourse *vis-à-vis* schools by either turning to the school or to their political representative

*...between-school variation has grown from 2007 to represent 58% of all variation in student outcomes in 2011, while within-school variation has dropped.*

*51% of students are now in good and outstanding schools, up from 30% in the first inspections.*

in order to seek accountability. In the unique context of Dubai, this relationship needs nuancing: while the short route of accountability between users and providers of private schooling remains intact (parents can seek redress directly with the school, in case of concerns), the long route is somewhat different. Given that residents pay no taxes and there are no elections in the city state, the political accountability usually found in public systems will not apply. That is not to say that the government of Dubai does not hold itself accountable to its citizenry. With the private education sector, KHDA must employ a different form of accountability: “Policymakers in a highly privatized education system such as that in Dubai are therefore faced with a different set of policy levers compared to those available to most education authorities around the world. Here, the education authority does not directly intervene in administering schooling inputs but instead maintains regulatory oversight with an emphasis on the enhancement of student outcomes” (Parkville, 2012). In other words, the long route of accountability is exerted by the KHDA through oversight primarily—that is, by keeping all stakeholders aware of the topography of the private education landscape.<sup>5</sup>

## Incentives

“That the effective use of resources hinges critically on the incentives faced by system actors is a core insight from economics” (Bruns *et al.*, 2011). While some researchers and policymakers favor incentive mechanisms at the teacher level, through for example merit- or performance-based pay, others prefer incentives at the school level because schools offer more opportunities for collaboration among teachers and school administration to generate value-added together (in what the French refer to as *‘l’effet établissement’* (the institutional effect). While the 2008 Flagship report advocates exploring teacher incentives as a way of promoting/changing an agent’s behavior, most probably because the discussion revolves around incentives mechanisms that could be effective for the public sector, in a system like Dubai’s dominated by the private sector the discussion of incentives at the school level (as agent) is more apt. In this context, those schools that are seen to offer better quality education to its students may be permitted to raise their fees more and to expand their school operations to provide additional capacity or open other branches.

The challenge for KHDA has been to find the appropriate mix of pecuniary and non-pecuniary incentives for all stakeholders (parents, teachers, schools) in the private school system in Dubai, such that that very mix will help drive reform. What the latest inspection report shows is that 51% of students are now in good and outstanding schools, up from 30%

in the first inspections,<sup>6</sup> and that steady improvement has occurred overall, as seen in the improvement of overall scores in TIMSS and PISA results. Part of the reason for this has to do with the incentive arrangements. Progress doesn't occur overnight but steady progress has been made, nudged on by the incentive system in place. Our findings also reflect this overall trend. The explicit incentives in the system, those related to the ability of better-rated schools to raise their fees, are functioning as expected, while other 'implicit' incentives such as teacher- and school-level motivation that derive from progress made in ratings, are also contributing to this movement.

## Explicit Incentives

The explicit incentive system acts in three interconnected areas: through the rating scale, the frequency of inspection, and the fee-increase mechanism.

Currently, the rating scale includes four levels: schools are rated as 'unsatisfactory', 'acceptable', 'good', and 'outstanding.' Over the five years the system has been in operation, there has been noticeable movement in school ratings—up and down the scale—constituting evidence of improving and at times declining quality in schools. While the system appears to function effectively, some slowdown in rating improvements has been observed in the last year or two,<sup>7</sup> probably for good reasons. Be that as it may, further reflection on the design of the scale may be worthwhile.

Currently, inspections occur annually. There are undoubtedly many good reasons for this: as the system was put into place, it was important to track progress of all schools on a punctual basis. Our findings however suggest that schools, regardless of the rating they receive, feel that yearly inspection is too frequent. The time required to prepare for it is too onerous, taking time away from teaching; further, schools explain that the impact of the changes that they put into place following the inspection recommendations, may take time to be seen, sometimes longer than one year. This is especially true given the high turnover of students and, for many schools, the teachers. Reflection should be given to alternate inspection schedules.

The fee increase mechanism functions as an incentive by allowing better rated schools to increase their fees in a predictable manner and/or by allowing school expansion. Our findings suggest that this mechanism serves an excellent incentive for those schools capable of improvement *on the verge of changing rating*. But there is some circularity in the fact that schools require funding to improve. Further, there is a sense that in some

occasional cases the incentive mechanism is working perversely.<sup>8</sup> At any rate, as with all aspects of a new mechanism, further nuancing will be possible in the years to come.

## Implicit Incentives

*Inspectors invited department heads to join them as they observed teachers in class. This is good practice.*

While the effectiveness of inspection *per se* is not the central focus of this report—we are of course interested in the full range of accountability, incentive and competition mechanisms at play—it is still important to consider several aspects of the inspection process for the potential they hold as part of an ‘implicit’ incentive mechanism.

Good inspection practices were noted by the Bank team from anecdotal evidence provided during the surveys and these should be generalized.<sup>9</sup> In some schools, for instance, inspectors invited department heads to join them as they observed teachers in class. This is good practice which forms the basis of sound knowledge sharing: once the department head has communicated with other staff members, it gives a clear understanding of what the inspectors are expecting in terms of good pedagogy. Then, after the observation, it is essential that inspectors spend time discussing what they observed with the teacher concerned. This promotes clear understanding and allows the teacher to explain what he or she is doing, why they adopted the particular instructional strategy observed, and where the class falls in the pedagogical sequence, and so on. In that way, the teacher does not feel their teaching has been seen out of context and, more importantly, establishes a positive relationship between the teacher and inspector of trust and understanding.

This incentivizing aspect of positive feedback, which is discussed in the literature, was evident in our findings. As one teacher comments after her in-class observation by an inspector: “It takes you out of your comfort zone, it raises the bar, which is motivating.” This is echoed by another teacher commenting on her experience at a *What Works* event, “It was motivating, I was given positive feedback.” In addition, if the teacher feels that they are contributing to the improvement of the school as a whole, then this too seems incentivizing. As another teacher mentions, “the upward curve the school is moving in makes it quite an exciting place to be.” Thus, there is an implicit incentive in improvement, which could be built upon. As we mentioned earlier, this sentiment is often frustrated if the teacher, teaching body, and the school as a whole feels they are not being recognized for their improvement. Apparent stagnation is clearly demotivating. Inasmuch as implicit incentives can drive reform, disincentives, such as a sense of lack of progress, must be recognized for their capacity to hinder reform. The very real possibility is that schools will no longer



feel compelled to improve, their commitment to the KHDA approach may wane, and the current movement in ratings, which reflects the progress made in school improvement in Dubai, may level off.

## Competition

The theory of change underlying this strategy rests on a central characteristic of the private sector—the power of market forces—to create a more competitive market for education. But does accountability from information being made more available, as well as explicit incentives, lead to a more competitive system?

School competition is a multi-faceted concept, affected by such factors as local school markets, school performance, affordability, and enrolment possibility and patterns. This is certainly the case in Dubai, where competition does indeed exist, a result of improved accountability and incentives. However, what our findings reveal is that some of these factors are at play confounding this theory of action.

First, the private school sector in Dubai does not seem in fact to be one market, but a series of parallel markets whose character is defined to a great extent by the independent nature of the curricula available. Now, if a parent were willing to move their child between curricula, then the private sector in Dubai would theoretically be a level playing field—but this is unlikely to be the case in practice. For most parents, jumping between curricula is not feasible: students need to remain in the curriculum they started in for a number of clear reasons. This is especially true of ‘niche’ curricula, like Japanese or German, in which only usually one school exists. Families would have to give up too much—in terms of language, pedagogy, culture, community, and seamless re-entry—to move their students from these schools.

Competition only really exists when there are enough schools within the same curricula, a fact which in effect only makes the UK, US, IB, Indian, and MoE schools open to competition. In addition, within these independent markets, competition may only really exist between schools (i) of the same rating (schools with higher ratings often have capacity constraints making them difficult to enter, practically speaking, and so excluding them to a great extent from the pool of competition), (ii) at the same price point in terms of fees (parents can only absorb certain costs), and (iii) providing they offer the necessary grade level. As a result, competition may operate on a limited scale even in these localized markets.

The second important assumption in this theory of change is that stakeholders—parents, teachers, and schools—can and do take advantage of competition. Let us consider these three groups in order.

*School competition is a multi-faceted concept.*

*Parents.* In Dubai, parents, sensitive to rankings between schools, are moving their children to better schools, especially when school ratings fall or remain disappointing. However, parents are also finding it difficult to move for several reasons. A relatively recent study (Figlio and Lucas, 2004) of the grades assigned to schools (A, B, C, D, Fail) and made public knowledge in the No Child Left Behind program in public schools in the US, has shown that parents react to these 'report cards' in several ways. In the short term, when faced with poorly graded schools, parents will move to a better school district if they can afford to. If they cannot, if they are stuck with the school in their catchment zone, they may become still more dissatisfied with the school, the authors suggest. While this study evaluates a program in the public system in the US, lessons from it clearly apply to the private system in Dubai. In a comparable reaction to those parents in the study, parents may move their children out of a private school in Dubai, if that school receives a poor grade from KHDA *provided that they can or are willing to do so*. This is because parents may face constraints in their choice to move their child to another school. Movement between private schools is possible in theory, but such a move may in fact be made difficult in practice by several factors.<sup>10</sup>

First, the high demand for place in Dubai schools creates a number of logistical challenges for parents attempting to move their children. If parents wish to move them at the beginning of a new school year, they may be confronted with waiting lists to get into schools and the usually non-refundable down payments needed to be on those lists, which may limit the number of schools parents will choose; further, there may be few openings in more desirable schools. If a parent wishes to move a child during the school year, this may be difficult to do too, as much depends on available space at the chosen school.

In addition, it is possible that parents may not want to change, even if they don't approve of the current school their child attends. Our findings reveal that in some cases, they may not be able to afford the change to another private school: it may be that the current school their children attend is the only one at that price-point. Or it may be that the school their children currently attend is in a 'niche' of another sort. It may be that it is the only one of its kind to offer a particular curriculum, language, or program of study. For example, an Iranian curriculum taught in Iranian, which allows students to return seamlessly to the Iranian school system in Iran. If that is the case, parents may be unwilling to move their children, despite the poor rating attributed to that school.

The issue of supply in Dubai is a case in point here. Parents, particularly minority groups, sometimes have few options and so cannot but accept the status quo. One school, whose rating continues to remain poor, still has hundreds on its waiting list, and parents say they are happy

with what they receive, educationally speaking, in relation to what they pay in low fees. In addition, parents communicated that there was a relationship of trust between them and ‘their’ schools in these communities, one that inspection could not change.

This important assumption—that parents choose schools with better performance—has also been questioned by recent PISA data (OECD, 2013). Parents in eleven OECD countries responded to questions about school preferences and choice. In nine of these countries, over 50% of parents reported that a safe school is a very important criterion when choosing a school, in four countries over 50% of parents reported that the school’s reputation is very important, while in contrast these same parents did not rank ‘high academic achievement of students’ as importantly. It was only in one country out of eleven, Korea, that more than 50% of parents felt that ‘high academic achievement’ was most important. What this seems to suggest is that rankings based on school quality may not drive parents’ decision in choosing schools as much as one would expect and so leveraging this mechanism to drive change in Dubai may not be entirely sufficient, at least not from this point of view.<sup>11</sup>

*Teachers.* Competition can have several possible effects on teachers. On the one hand, schools that can pay higher salaries or offer career advancement create a market force that causes teachers to move between schools. This was reported in several cases, and it is perhaps only natural. On the other hand, several teachers communicated to us that poor ratings had led to teachers being fired from schools where they worked, which may or may not be fair or productive.

*Schools.* In principle, the theory of change underlying school competition is the following: “On the premise that students and parents have adequate information and choose schools based on academic criteria or program quality, the competition for schools creates incentives for institutions to organize programs and teaching in ways that better meet diverse student requirements and interests, thus reducing the cost of failure and mismatches” (OECD, 2013). Our findings reveal two points about competition in Dubai that both differ and corroborate this. First, what we find is that disseminating information about schools in Dubai makes school heads/owners very cautious about their position in the education space in terms of their personal reputation and status (rather than paradoxically the school’s *per se*), but it may be that this still pushes them to improve their school. Secondly, true market forces are felt and do come into effect to drive schools to improve or close. KHDA does not close schools though it could in principle refuse them from being re-licensed; it aims instead to reveal the shortcomings of schools so that parents will not

*True market forces will come into effect and drive schools to improve or close.*

register their children there, thereby forcing the school to abandon its mandate and close.<sup>12</sup>

## Collaboration

That being said, it may not necessarily be competition that is helping schools to improve. Market forces put pressure on schools to improve, certainly, but that does not necessarily help them in the process of improvement. Rather, what does seem to help is the opposite of competition, collaboration, as our findings suggest. In the same way that teachers when surveyed respond that they feel that collaboration with other teachers is one of the most effective ways to learn how to become more effective teachers, school heads explain that it is collaboration with other schools that helps them improve as well. So for instance in one school, staff explained that it had learned much through collaboration with another school of the same curriculum—essentially a competitor within the pool of schools—and indeed attributed their improvement in rating to this relationship.

A characteristic of successful education reform, in countries such as Finland, Singapore, and Canada, is that the whole teaching profession is developed to the point where students encounter good teachers systematically. These high-performing systems attract and develop the professional capital of all their teachers, in all schools, day after day, by developing what Hargeaves and Fullan (2012) term 'professional capital,' which is the combination of human and social capital at work.<sup>13</sup> A simple but telling study (Leana, 2011) demonstrates the relationship between the two: in a sample of 130 elementary schools in New York City, the author found that while schools with high social capital showed positive achievement outcomes, those with strong social and human capital together did even better. More strikingly, teachers with low human capital who happened to be working in a school with higher social capital got better outcomes than those in schools with lower social capital. In other words, just being part of a school in which others are working effectively implicates teachers and engages them, drawing them up, so to speak.<sup>14</sup>

A similar study of school leaders (Pont, Nusche, and Moorman (2008)) demonstrates comparable findings. When school leaders lack sufficient expertise, the simplest types of co-operation, such as sharing managerial and administrative resources, helps to reduce their workload and minimize inefficiencies, while more advanced forms of collaboration, such as collective learning, can help to develop leadership skills and capacity.

A trend towards more collaboration in Dubai is emerging. At the inter-school level, the *What Works* events are a clear demonstration of this,

as is the growing intra-school collaboration revealed in the Parkville study showing that “compared to only 56% of principals in 2007, over 82% of [them] reported teacher peer reviews taking place in 2011” (Parkville, 2012, p. 36). This is a positive trend that deserves to be encouraged.

## Options for Moving Forward

Governance of the private education sector is a new and intriguing topic, one in its relative infancy which is nonetheless rapidly and persuasively developing. Keeping that in mind, what we hope to have put forward in this report are insights into the dynamics of the system. If, in addition, we have reflected on possible enhancements, it is because we know just how important continual improvement is to the KHDA. Education reform is not a destination but a process—and that, of course, is the road that KHDA is traveling.

In that spirit, in what follows, we wonder how the system currently in place could be further refined to promote quality. How can the existing mechanisms be further leveraged?

How, for example, could the KHDA focus on weaker schools? Schools at lower ratings (at ‘acceptable’ or ‘unsatisfactory’) really require reform strategies that are aligned and adapted to their level.<sup>15</sup> What our findings suggest is that a more systematic post-inspection follow-up could help. One way to do this would be to have inspection teams, after their initial observation of schools, devote a certain time to working with these schools’ leaders and teams to plan subsequent reform. We understand that KHDA sees itself only as an oversight body and that this would go against its principle of non-intervention, but the circumstances, we feel, justify it. Another possibility would be to set up a specific program under the aegis of *‘What Works’* to help these weak schools in particular.

Would modifying the frequency of inspection be possible? In line with the need to focus on weaker rated schools, the frequency of inspections could be altered to allow better rated schools to be inspected less frequently.<sup>16</sup> The rationale for this is straightforward: it would leave inspectors free to devote more time to weaker institutions. As of the last inspection report for 2013, twelve schools are rated as outstanding, fifty-one good, sixty-seven acceptable and thirteen unacceptable. That is to say that there are more weaker-rated schools than not (even if over the last few years, there has been much progress in this regard). One clear path the KHDA can take to improve the overall quality of private schools in Dubai is by turning attention to weaker schools. One clear option would be to have better rated schools collaborate with weaker schools (a possibility

that has already been discussed by school heads and contributors to the *What Works* events). This collaboration could take many forms from mentoring relationships, assisting with self-evaluation, professional development of teachers, and sharing of pedagogical practice.

Could the rating scale be nuanced to act as a greater incentive? This is suggested because many schools fall into the category of 'acceptable' and some remain in it for some time, even though they may have demonstrated improvement in various areas. However, that improvement is not captured in the general rating, which seems to count more importantly in public perception than the exact details of improvement. As a result, schools on the whole feel frustrated. It is a question of communicating that progress. Perhaps the rating could be complemented with a further qualification like 'acceptable and *improving*', or by placing more emphasis on the areas of improvement, rather than the overall rating, when the ratings are communicated. Options like this deserve reflection because they appear likely to be incentivizing and contribute to sustaining the momentum of reform in the system. That is critical.

Would encouraging job satisfaction and professional growth act as an incentive? Many different monetary and nonmonetary factors motivate individuals to become and remain teachers, ranging from base salaries, pensions, and benefits to the intrinsic satisfaction of helping a child to learn (Vegas 2005). In the context of Dubai, job satisfaction and professional growth are important incentives for teachers, which are yet to be fully developed as part of the existing mechanisms. Encouraging participation at the *What Works* events and expanding collaboration between schools through the mentoring relationships of school leaders and teachers, are two ways to promote this.

Finally, there are also questions of greater scope that suggest themselves, which would both interest and benefit other policy makers: How can equity be assured in the private sector marketplace? How can weaker schools be helped to improve? That is, how can schools with fewer resources, whether technical or material, be helped? How can KHDA's approach of essentially 'switching on the lights' be applied in other sub-sectors to influence ECD, TVET and Higher Education provision?

## Endnotes

1. Others explained that they may learn "one or two points from [the reports]." In one case, a school with a good rating explained that the DSIB inspection report was simply "KHDA's point of view on the school." Another explained that it could not agree with KHDA on several points of the inspection, suggesting that their own forms of institutional evaluation had to take precedence over that of the KHDA's. Finally, in another, the rating system was not

given the full credibility it perhaps deserved because the KHDA rating (of ‘good’) was at odds with the outstanding results achieved by its students—indeed they had, the school reported, the highest scores in final examinations in the world for that kind of school.

2. Comments, for instance, from one school are salient here: teachers explained how parents expected that young students should be obedient and quiet in contradiction to education research suggesting that students need to be active, the masters of their own learning. These schools recognize that they must ‘play the KHDA game’ but their true responsibility is to the standards set out in their own curriculum. As one parent explained, “my son is leaving Dubai soon for university. A DSIB rating won’t help him get in, but his [recognized] final exam will.”
3. A similar phenomenon was seen in a World Bank program in the Gambia where communities with weak-capacity did not profit as much from school-based management training as their stronger counterparts.
4. Schools that are rated as unsatisfactory are subject to follow-through inspections and so given extra guidance until they have met all the recommendations and are ready for a full inspection; acceptable schools are not.
5. In terms of the actors and relationships in Dubai’ particular form of private school accountability sphere of Dubai, an additional thought must be given to the school owner/investor who is often separate from the school operator. Their status requires still further sophistication from the policymaker (KHDA in this case) in as much as they need to manage this special relationship in two ways: by encouraging investment in the sector while ensuring that consumers (parents) are protected from fee hikes.
6. See page 25 of DSIB Annual Report for 2013
7. As noted in the DSIB Annual Report for 2013
8. This is when the board or owner of a school is pushing the school to get a higher rating simply for the fee increase in itself. Not only is this not the intended result—true improvements in quality are—it is leading to clashes between the educational vision of the school and its owners. While educators look to improve the school for better education results, the owners may have a completely different perspective on this incentive. So, to cite one example, in one school, the managing director who represents the owner but has no background in education sits in the school and deals with the school as a business, a situation which is in fact hindering the real work of the school, according to the interviewed educators there.
9. On the other hand, during the four day inspection process, many teachers were disappointed by inspectors ‘flitting in and out’ of classes, observing 10 minutes of the beginning, middle or end of the class, using what has been called the ‘snapshot’ approach. Some teachers are not observed, while others are observed repeatedly. While inspectors may feel this gives a clear indication of what teachers are capable of, it gives the impression to teachers that their instructional practice is being seen out of context. For those not observed, the feeling is one of ‘being left on the bench’ and not be able to participate in the ‘game.’
10. It would be instructive to further study which students have changed schools and why.
11. That said, it may be that competition works in other effective ways to drive change in teachers and schools

12. The KHDA, through the RCC, has overseen the closing of 12 schools.
13. Social capital is defined as 'the network of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively,' while human capital is defined as 'the skills, knowledge, and experience possessed by an individual or population, viewed in terms of their value or cost to an organization or country.'
14. Similarly, and somewhat unsurprisingly, (Sliwka, 2003) shows that networks of schools help to overcome the isolation experienced by educators in individual schools by providing opportunities for professional exchange, development, and enrichment.
15. This point is made in the McKinsey report *How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better* (2010) in which improvement strategies are given for schools at different levels of performance. In that report, "a unique 'intervention cluster' exists for each improvement journey." Further, a roadmap with clear mile markers for that journey is proposed. Hicks (2013) says as much when he cites two reviews of the Ofsted program to suggest that inspection is only one factor that contributes to school improvement: "There is growing evidence that the introduction of the inspection system, *together with post-inspection planning*, is making a contribution to school improvement" (our italics). Now, it should be pointed out that this kind of 'follow-through' inspection does exist for unsatisfactory schools: inspectors will monitor whether the school in question has improved in areas which were deemed unsatisfactory.
16. For example, outstanding schools might only be inspected every three years with surprise drop-ins in intervening years; good schools every two years with surprise drop-ins in intervening years; acceptable schools might be inspected every two years with yearly targets and one surprise drop in; and unsatisfactory schools inspected annually and given annual targets.



## Conclusion

The KHDA has put into place a system that is uniquely adapted to the private education landscape in Dubai. In a sector that includes fifteen distinct curricula, the design of the inspection framework is both generous enough to successfully capture all aspects of the rich diversity of the city-state's schools, and yet able at the same time to focus attention on the importance of improving education quality across all these kinds of schools. The KHDA approach is entirely transparent, openly accountable, and has strong stakeholder participation—all hallmarks of good governance. It has not only stirred public discussion about the importance of school quality but also more significantly created higher expectations among education consumers and providers.

After just five years in operation, 51% of students are now in good and outstanding schools, compared to 30% at inception, and steady improvement has been seen in overall student achievement in TIMSS and PISA results. There is nevertheless much to be done. Many schools still remain only 'acceptable' and so KHDA must continue to work to refine the system to help incite them to improve. How can KHDA do this? How can KHDA continue to enhance the accountability mechanisms and procedures in play?

Our findings reveal that the complex, interrelated elements of the KHDA approach, while working, could be leveraged to greater advantage. First, disseminating information on all aspects of the system has generally had the intended result of improving accountability: school ratings, in particular, one of the key elements in the KHDA approach, are useful when they focus attention on, and drive, improvements in quality; policymakers, however, cannot rely exclusively on these means alone because very real constraints, technical or material, may prevent certain schools from improving. Secondly, the incentive mechanism in place, where schools may increase their fees if they receive better ratings, might be nuanced: at the moment, it serves only as an incentive to those schools near the cut-off for a higher rating. This is why we suggest that other kinds of incentives might be explored. Finally, competition between schools has increased, which is in turn promoting some school

improvement, but incompletely: schools that have failed to progress over several years are expressing some discouragement with this aspect of the system.

The road KHDA is traveling is a very significant one because it is demonstrating how innovative governance designs can help a public institution steer an expanding private education sector towards quality improvements. In this respect, there are valuable lessons emerging from Dubai. KHDA's approach represents a new best practice, a solid model worth replicating in other private education markets. Governance reforms rank high on the development agenda of many countries, particularly in regard to service delivery in education, and so KHDA's undertaking stands as a significant venture for Dubai, the Region, indeed all countries interested in the governance of the private provision of education.

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