

WELLBEING *matters*

A guiding framework for the monitoring and improvement
of wellbeing in Dubai private schools



The title 'WELLBEING matters' is centered on a light blue background. 'WELLBEING' is in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font, while 'matters' is in a smaller, light blue, cursive font. There are three stylized, light orange and white clouds: one to the left of 'WELLBEING', one above 'matters', and one to the right of 'WELLBEING'. A dark blue silhouette of a hand is visible in the top right corner.

WELLBEING matters

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Introduction

As an international leader in wellbeing promotion, the United Arab Emirates holds its National Strategy for Wellbeing 2031 as a key driver of public policy and a significant enabler of the Centennial 2071 Vision. The strategy aims to build a flourishing nation; connected communities and thriving citizens, prioritising education as the key instrument for accelerating high-quality implementation and impact.

KHDA's long-standing commitment to the advancement of wellbeing began in 2007 with the launch of the Dubai Plan 2015, highlighting wellbeing as an essential enabler of social development and a key driver of strategic excellence. This commitment has been further strengthened through the progressive development of the Dubai Plan 2021 and, most recently, the Dubai Plan 2030, bringing wellbeing and education to the forefront of national priorities. Combined with the experience, impact and learning taken from the Covid-19 pandemic, this government commitment provides an urgent and essential mandate for proactive and systemic wellbeing advancement across Dubai private schools.

For many years, KHDA has worked with Dubai's private schools to promote and enable initiatives to raise awareness and support the wellbeing of students and staff. One particularly powerful initiative, developed in partnership with the South Australian Government, was the introduction of the Dubai Student Wellbeing Census.

Over the past five years, the Dubai Student Wellbeing Census has been an important enabler of student wellbeing across the private school sector. Involving more than 100,000 students annually, the Census is one of the world's largest and most culturally diverse complex data sets on student wellbeing. Customised school reports provide comprehensive and insightful information about the wellbeing of students in each school, informing focused improvement planning and the tracking of student wellbeing trajectories over time.





The purpose of 'Wellbeing Matters'

Wellbeing Matters builds on the legacy of the Dubai Student Wellbeing Census, providing a refreshed approach to wellbeing promotion and acting as a catalyst for wellbeing advancement across Dubai's private school sector.

As wellbeing becomes an essential part of school culture and pedagogy, this framework provides school leaders and educators with a common point of reference.

What is wellbeing?

The notion of wellbeing as a catalyst for human development is common in every socio-economic, education and cultural context. Internationally, wellbeing is recognised and prioritised as a pre-requisite for the future success of humanity.

OECD defines wellbeing as *'the psychological, cognitive, social and physical functioning and capabilities that students need to live a happy and fulfilling life.'*

With enhanced wellbeing, we naturally become more emotionally literate and creative. In this, we become more agile and develop an enhanced capacity for problem-solving. We also become more resilient when facing challenges and are more likely to employ a growth mindset and persevere. Quite simply, the dedicated pursuance of wellbeing is a fundamental feature of successful human development.

Wellbeing in education

Given that children and young people spend a sizable part of their daily lives in educational settings, schools are increasingly expected and tasked to fulfil two crucial and interwoven mandates. These are to nurture in students those capabilities that equip them with the appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills for them to thrive in adult life, whilst enabling them to enjoy themselves and foster personal wellbeing throughout their education experience.

Persuasive international evidence highlights the interdependent relationships between health, wellbeing, and academic achievement. This emphasises the importance of a whole-school approach to wellbeing advancement. Examples of improved educational outcomes associated with enhanced wellbeing and health include:

- improved levels of school engagement;
- more positive experiences through different education phases;
- decreased likelihood of students dropping out of education;
- improved mental health, higher levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy;
- and increased motivation and self-regulation.

The wellbeing of teachers and other staff members

The role of teachers and other staff members, with whom students spend much of their time, is essential to the work of school-based wellbeing advancement. With aspects such as teacher turnover and teacher confidence identified as barriers to this process, securing healthy, supportive, and empowering working conditions is a crucial enabler, which is a matter of importance for school governance and leadership.

In short, teacher wellbeing, and that of other staff members must be a core, strategic focus for school leaders in the quest for greater levels of student wellbeing. They must have an effective recruitment and retention policy, foster manageable workloads and implement positive and meaningful professional appraisal systems.

Dubai Future Foundation's Future Opportunities Report (2022) further emphasises the important role played by teachers throughout students' wellbeing journey. It predicts that future curricula will be adjusted as schools are repurposed as spaces dedicated to self-realisation and the promotion of wellbeing.

Wellbeing evaluation focus areas

The wellbeing evaluation focus areas take account of the multi-dimensional approach to wellbeing development. Informed through theoretical models, student wellbeing data, international research, and wellbeing frameworks globally, they guide the direction for the school's wellbeing journey and provide the focus for monitoring and evaluation.

1. LEADING AND PURSUING WELLBEING

a) Setting and pursuing a wellbeing vision - School culture is informed by a shared vision of wellbeing that influences policy, practice and provision. This vision is clearly communicated to an engaged school community.

b) Sustaining and embedding improvement - the school's evaluation, monitoring, and review systems inform the ongoing improvement of wellbeing provision.

c) Using data and information - using reliable information and data, leaders collaborate to design and implement provision that actively promotes wellbeing.

d) Creating an enabling environment - the management of routines, activities and resources informs the development of a wellbeing-focused environment.

2. LISTENING TO AND SUPPORTING STAKEHOLDERS

a) Caring for students - care, guidance, and support is provided by trained and trusted adults in the school to ensure students are safe and have access to wellbeing help.

b) Caring for staff - the school takes action to optimise the wellbeing of their staff.

c) Listening to each other - Feedback from stakeholders influences wellbeing provision.

3. ENABLING WELLBEING EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES

a) Wellbeing and the curriculum - the school uses a holistic approach to wellbeing development, including dedicated curricular programmes and the teaching of social and emotional skills.

b) Choosing safe and healthy lifestyles - students can make safe decisions, healthy choices and adopt healthy lifestyles.

c) Students' wellbeing experiences in schools -

i) external and internal information, including student and stakeholder surveys, show that students feel safe, valued, and engaged at school

ii) during the school day, students demonstrate their wellbeing through their behaviour, attitudes and engagement.

Wellbeing levels

Through collaborative exploration and investigation of each wellbeing evaluation focus area, the level of wellbeing in each school will be identified in accordance with the following terms and descriptors.

VERY HIGH	Provision to promote student wellbeing is exceptional. The wellbeing vision and direction are extremely clear and are realised in the daily work of the school. The school continues to extend its wellbeing-focused environment, refining it in insightful ways over time. The school's wellbeing communication and approach strongly engage students, staff and parents. Students' highly positive attitudes and attributes, seen through their engagement and motivation, are embedded features. Students are proactive in improving their own wellbeing and that of others.
HIGH	Provision to promote student wellbeing is well-established. The wellbeing vision and direction are generally clear. The school community applies a wellbeing-focused environment and its path to further improvement is recognised, understood and followed. The school's wellbeing communication and approach are well-developed and understood by students, staff and parents. Students are motivated and consistently demonstrate their wellbeing through positive attributes, attitudes and engagement with others and the curriculum. They have a strong understanding of their own wellbeing and consistently take action improve it further.
MODERATE	Provision to promote student wellbeing is developing. The wellbeing vision is clear, and the school community is preparing a wellbeing-focused environment which is beginning to be reflected in practice. Its path to further improvement is being planned, providing an increasing sense of direction. The school's wellbeing communication and approach are starting to be understood by students, staff and parents. Students generally demonstrate their wellbeing through positive behaviour, attitudes, and engagement with others. They are developing an improved understanding of their own wellbeing and how to improve this.
LOW	Provision to promote student wellbeing is not sufficient. The school community is exploring how to construct a wellbeing-focused environment. Its wellbeing vision, approach and communication may be emerging, and students may be becoming more aware of their own wellbeing. Ways to enable students to improve their wellbeing, and better demonstrate this in positive ways are an urgent improvement priority for the school.

Next steps

As we embark on the next phase of the wellbeing journey, we invite all stakeholders, and in particular school leaders to actively commit to wellbeing advancement, bringing every student's wellbeing to the heart of our school communities. Important next steps will include:

- Engaging with and listening to stakeholders about their wellbeing experiences and working collaboratively to find solutions and opportunities for further wellbeing enhancement.
- Collecting and carefully considering information and data about stakeholder wellbeing, and in particular that of students, so that school leaders can be sure that priorities for improvement are correctly identified, and development strategies target the most important enablers of success.
- Using the wellbeing evaluation focus areas and the associated self-evaluation form to explore the profile of wellbeing provision and outcomes within the school and generate the capacity to extend this further.
- Identifying, supporting and empowering key leaders and other community representatives to work collaboratively to monitor and improve wellbeing over time.

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