# Education

YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO UAE SCHOOLS AND NURSERIES

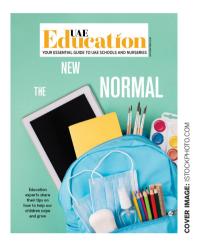
NEW

NORMAL THE Education experts share their tips on how to help our children cope and blossom



# WELCOME

#### to the autumn term



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asks, laptops and hand-sanitisers at the ready, back to school look certainly looks and feels different this year. The past six months have seen teachers, students and parents adapting to new ways of teaching and learning (with many of us wishing we'd taken out shares in Zoom). Now, five months since they closed, the schools are finally reopening their doors to students once again. As the landscape for the 'new normal' was devised, there has been significant debate on the best safety procedures and learning formats to adopt moving forward, resulting in a government directive that schools must continue to offer remote learning along with traditional lessons, giving rise to - the 2020 turn of phrase - 'blended learning'. And while many parents are rejoicing at their children going back to school, others are opting to harness the benefits of technology within the safety of their home. Whichever option you're choosing, this issue we're focusing on ways to ease our kids into the new year. Local education experts share their advice for teaching confidence (p.18) and reducing anxiety (p.14) in students. And for those still looking for the perfect school, there's our guide to making the right choice (p.28). However back to school looks for you this year, we wish you a safe and happy term.

The UAE Education Team

Hot Media



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# SCHOOL REPORT

News and views from the frontlines of education



## **SAFE-TREE FIRST**

Ethical gift brand, One Good Thing, has partnered with Emirates Environmental Group and Goumbook to supply eco-conscious masks for students. Along with providing safety precautions, the aim is to educate young people on their environmental impact, as each time a school purchases a certain number of masks, one indigenous ghaf tree will be planted on their grounds. Since April they have sold over 5000 face covers, Co-founder of One Good Thing, Bridgett Lau, said, "Like

so many, our business has changed considerably over the past couple of months. A conversation with a local tailor, a radio interview and partnerships with local designers have, with our customer's help, enabled us to make an impact and give back in the place we call home."

Tatian Antonelli Abeela, Founder and Managing Director at Goumbook spoke about the ghaf tree, "This tree is a great survivor! Fierce temperatures, searing winds and high rates of water loss, it tolerates

them all. Just as the ghaf is resilient, we need to show strength and give hope during these challenging times, and what better way to do it than to plant ghaf trees!"

The child-friendly face coverings are made out of double-layered, breathable cotton in plain colours, and have space to insert a surgical mask if necessary. Plus, they come with a velcro neck strap and name tag which should avoid them ending up in lost property.

one-goodthing.com

#### NEW SCHOOL ON OUR RADAR

Bright Learners Private School – Dubai's newest American school – has opened this month in Al Rashidiya. It will offer students a US Common Core Standards curriculum taught by US teachers in combination with the UAE National Curriculum for Arabic and Islamic Studies. The newly remodelled campus will serve students from prekindergarten through to grade four, with plans to expand to grade 12, while school fees range from Dhs22,750 to Dhs27,750 per year.

brightlearners.ae





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#### THE SHOW MUST GO ON

Sharjah Performing Arts Academy (SPAA) made history during the pandemic by putting on a spectacular digital performace at the end of the school year.

Enrolled in September 2019, gifted students from the UAE, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Morocco, Iraq and Egypt embarked on intensive, practice-based drama training. However, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the final term of studies required adjusting to home-based, e-learning. This reshaping of teaching did not stop the students from putting on an epic production showcasing their work. The planned sell-out end-of-year performance was instead, livestreamed via Zoom to a smaller, mute and invisible audience. The students wrote, directed, oversaw visual and audio special effects and of course, starred in the live performance, proving that "imagination, creativity and collaboration can happen in any given context", as explained by Executive Director of SPAA, Professor Peter Barlow.





# **ZOOMING IN ON** DISTANCE LEARNING

Distance learning took over the previous semesters at schools across the UAE and the world, but how did the experience vary from student to teacher, to parent?

n March 22 this year, the UAE's Ministry of Education introduced distance learning across the country. Suddenly, students were pulled from the comfort of their classrooms and confined to their own homes. Littles ones had to adapt to selfstructured learning, and teachers had to master delivering lessons digitally - practically overnight.

And then were the parents. Working from home with limited outdoor access during the National Sterilisation Programme, the work-life balance became more of a swinging pendulum than steady scales.

So, what was it really like for all those impacted? And after the initial apprehension, has the experience of distance learning left us with anything? Here's a little insight from a student, teacher and parent about how the experience was for them.

There has certainly been benefits throughout this strange situation'



#### The Teacher



Zoe Woolley, Headmistress at Foremarke School Dubai Of course the news was daunting. We'd need to deliver lessons live

for so many families with different schedules in formats that didn't require immediate teacher support. Not every home situation is the same, so being appreciative of different settings was important. We had to cover all the same academic objectives with our usual educational model thrown up in the air.

Yet I went into online learning with an open mind, and soon saw this experience as a chance to push the boundaries and be innovative. Being an Apple Distinguished School – one of only 535 schools worldwide that have been chosen by the tech giant as a centre of excellence due to shared visions learning with technology – we were in a strong position. I was confident we could transition with relative ease. Changing that mindset was definitely important.

Yes there were challenges, but as we all settled into the new norm routines were established. Those initial concerns were erased, and we all enjoyed the sense of community spirit. It was so wonderful to see the students embrace new ideas and methods, and the way they adapted so easily was a true reflection of their resilience — and I'm sure all the teachers in every school discovered they have skill sets that they never even knew existed!

There has certainly been benefits throughout this strange situation, and lessons learnt that we hope to carry forward.

Through distance learning, our parents were able to have more of an insight into the school day, and this had such a positive impact and enhanced the home-school connection. Going forward, we will continue to look for ways to keep the classrooms open to the wider community.

#### The Student



Samira Banat,
Journalism &
Communication
Student at Middlesex
University Dubai
Since my university
schedule already only

required me to attend ten hours of class, two days a week, there was a lot of uncertainty attached to the idea of learning from even more of a distance. My initial reaction was concern; I was worried I would fall into a mental and physical rut due to the lack of movement and daily planning. This tied with the idea of being confined in close quarters with my entire family for what could have been weeks or months... Well, I wasn't a huge fan of the idea.

I am a creature of habit, and I thrive with meticulous planning and routine – complete distance learning was all so new. But I have to admit, I was enticed by the comfort of lie-ins and pyjama-fuelled calls – even if poor WiFi and little-brother-interrupted video seminars added to my anxiety.

But soon enough I adapted to the new routine. I set my alarm nice and early and made an effort to look presentable. I learned that it was just as important to maintain a sense of normalcy and uphold a line between work and rest. And without other students to bounce off of, I became much more in touch with my strengths and weaknesses, and which areas of my studies I could focus on more.

Even though this experience was an opportunity to reconnect with myself in all aspects of my life, I would not want this particular method of learning to be incorporated in my future studies. I thrive on in-real-life interactions and I find being away from my professors and classmates difficult. However, safety currently takes the front seat, and at least now I feel better prepared to create my own routine and manage my work-life balance.





#### The Parent



Victoria Thatcher, mum of two and Owner & Managing Director at HOT Media

I'll be honest, I was really worried

about how we would manage. My husband and I run a business, and when distance learning was first introduced, we were still office-based, meaning the kids were largely unsupervised. But the girls were looking forward to it!

The reality was a lot better than expected and I think that was largely down to the school. NAS Dubai really stepped up to the challenge and provided a really high quality and variety of classes.

My eldest (11) is very organised. She's a real planner, so she loved doing classes in her own time. She embraced the technology as a way to 'My youngest achieved academically but struggled without the social aspect of school'

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communicate with her classmates, but without supervision, things could easily run off course. My youngest (eight) definitely achieved what she needed academically but struggled without the social aspect of school. She's very artistic and is easily distracted – I can't count the number of times I checked on her to

find her playing with our cats rather than doing PE class.... Eventually she got stuck in, and the experience taught both of them a lot about responsibility.

Through distance learning, we also spent more time together as a family and getting involved in their schoolwork was really interesting. Both girls surprised me with their technological competence, and even side-gigged as my IT support while I was working from home!

Overall, I was really impressed with how the teachers rose to the challenge; we previously underestimated the amount of preparation that goes into lesson planning. My hope going forward is that the girls continue with the tech skills they picked up during this period; homework set up should be easier at least. It's always good to be reminded of the fact that we can adapt to any situation needed, too.



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# HOW TO HELP WHEN YOUR CHILD IS ANXIOUS

The number of children who are feeling anxious is on the rise – and that was before they were faced with the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19 and the instability it brings. So how can we help our children cope? Dr Robert Chandler, DClinPsy, clinical psychologist at The LightHouse Arabia, shares his strategies

ncreasingly common, anxiety in younger children can present itself in myriad ways - everything from head and stomach aches, through to irritability and anger. As such, it can be mistaken for something else, and the real problem left untreated. "Parents may find that their child's sleep is being impacted, they may be irritable, or they aren't keen to engage in the activities they once enjoyed," says Dr Robert Chandler, clinical psychologist at The LightHouse Arabia. "Younger children may complain of feeling physically unwell and report tummy aches. Parents may notice that their children are clingy and find it difficult to separate. Aggression or violent outbursts can be a sign of anxiety, as often what underlies and drives the anger is in fact anxiety."

How, then, as parents, can we diagnose anxiety in our children? "Firstly, it is important to remember that some anxiety is normal and in fact helpful for young people," states Dr Chandler.

"Diagnosing an 'anxiety disorder' consists of two parts; firstly, the amount and type of symptoms a child is showing, but crucially, the impact these symptoms have on day-to-day life. For example, it is normal for children to worry from time-to-time about what others might think of them, or about an upcoming exam. When these worries occupy a great deal of the child's time and energy and prevent them from participating





in the things they enjoy, we would consider this excessive anxiety."

As Dr Chandler suggests, the sources of anxiety can be obvious in older children – exams, friendships, to name but two – but they are less discernible in the young. "In younger children, sources of anxiety typically include separation; that is, difficulty being away from a parent or primary care giver. Younger children rely on their parents to provide them with security, predictability and containment, and so being separated can be understandably distressing.

"If there is animosity in the family home between parents, or one parent is struggling with their own emotional or physical health, younger children can pick up on this and worry, because their sense of emotional security is under threat. In these situations, parents might find that children present with behavioural issues, including aggression, because they do not have the ability to put their thoughts into words, and so anxiety is expressed through obvious and overt behaviour.

"Typically, around the ages of 11 to 12, young people are in a period of transition; physically, socially and emotionally. The focus of anxiety often shifts towards social factors and the young person's place within social circles outside of the family. As young people progress through their teenage years, anxiety commonly manifests in the form of body-image issues, the feeling that the young person is not as good as their peers (low self-esteem), navigating social relationships, or exam stress. Clinically, we see increasing numbers of young people in their teenage years express anxiety about their futures, most commonly in terms of obtaining high grades and jobs, and climate change."

It's the latter that poses a very real problem, says Dr Chandler. Research indicates one in five children aged eight to 16 have nightmares about

## When worries occupy a great deal of the child's time and energy and prevent them from participating in the things they enjoy, we would consider this excessive anxiety'

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the state of the world, a fact only amplified by the threat of the global pandemic and climate change.

"Around the age of 11 or 12, young people develop the cognitive abilities to think abstractly and imagine different futures. Parents may find that their children are spending long periods of time focussing on and speaking about climate change.

"Often with anxiety, the actual threat is nowhere near as threatening as it is perceived to be. Climate change is different; it is a very threatening, life changing prospect for young people, and their concerns are well founded. The threat is real.

"Parents should give time to allow their children to express their concerns about climate change; validate their emotions and tell them it is ok to feel worried. If anxiety about climate change can be channelled into driving small changes, this can help; encourage the young person as part of the family to ensure that recycling is done and take steps to reduce carbon footprints. Parents can model taking the car and flights less often. If young people see their parents are environmentally active, but also able to use their contained anxiety to drive eco-responsible behaviours, this is likely to help contain the anxiety. If symptoms persist, parents should consider seeking professional support.

A lot of school-aged children will have experienced extra stress during the COVID-19 outbreak – what can we do to help them cope with the 'new normal'? Especially if they are worried about things like coming into contact with others, falling ill, or having a family member fall ill?

"Children of all ages, but especially younger children, learn from their parents; I'd encourage parents to try to model composure and calmness, as well sensible (but not excessive) precautions for keeping safe, such as regular hand washing. If parents do have their own excessive anxieties, I'd encourage parents to find ways to manage this, because it can be overwhelming for young people to see their parents in highly anxious states.

"When treating anxiety, we often talk about and write down the costs and benefits of excessive anxiety; what is the excessive anxiety costing you (not seeing friends; spending long periods of time worrying about the health of others), versus the benefits of being anxious to this extent (to which they are often very few benefits). Helping young people to think of the bigger picture in this way can be helpful.

"I'd encourage parents to avoid giving the message that loved ones will not get sick in the future, tempting as this is, especially with younger children. Instead, parents should acknowledge that people do get sick from time-to-time, whilst highlighting the coping resources and resilience of the family. Drawing from historical examples can be helpful; 'remember when grandma got sick – what did we do as a family to cope and to get through?'"

If we believe that our child is anxious and are eager to seek support, their school should be the first stop. "Reach out to the school and the child's teacher; ask them if they have been noticing the same patterns," suggests Dr Chandler. "A phone call or meeting with the school can help to consider different ways to support across the home and school environment. Schools will differ in terms of what they offer to provide support, so making contact to find out in the first instance is vitally important."

As parents, there is also plenty we can do to support the school's efforts. "Parents can make space and time to allow their children to discuss their worries. Validating their concerns, empathising and taking a compassionate stance towards the young person is essential. Try and avoid rushing in too quickly with 'problem solving' strategies to combat the anxiety, although this is something that will need to come later. If in doubt, seek support from a specialist clinic.

"At a more general level, parents should try and ensure their children are eating well, taking regular exercise, are well engaged with clubs and hobbies, and sleeping well. These basics really go a long way in helping young people to feel emotionally healthier."

If all efforts fail to help the child cope and their anxiety is impacting on the day-to-day lives of the whole family, then "it is important to seek professional support," states Dr Chandler. "Research shows that early intervention is key, as the longer anxiety goes untreated, it becomes engrained."



Basics like eating well and taking regular exercise really go a long way in helping young people to feel emotionally healthier'

# THE CONFIDENCE CLINIC

As children develop, their confidence levels play an increasingly important role. Confidence helps them overcome challenging situations, build friendships and resilience, and display the courage needed to succeed in what's an ever-changing environment.

Here, we ask three education experts for their tips on how, as parents, we can tackle confidence-sapping scenarios common to schooling in the UAE

#### The Expert

Nicola Peacock Assistant Principal - Secondary Horizon International School

A few of my child's best friends left Dubai over the summer and he's feeling down about it. How can I lift his spirits and develop the confidence needed to forge new friendships? [NP] We know, as parents and educators, that children can be overwhelmed by their emotions at times. Feeling down is a natural response to the inevitably of change. What is crucial is that we give children the support they need in managing and understanding those emotions.

A great starting point is to set time aside to actively discuss emotions – not just when our kids are feeling down but as part of a daily practice. Validating their emotions gives our children the confidence to talk to us about how they are feeling. Telling them that they shouldn't be feeling a particular way is telling them that some emotions are 'bad', and we want to avoid that. A great resource for this is the work of Dr. Marc Brackett at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. He has devised a fabulous set of resources that can be used to help us talk positively about all emotions and to recognise, understand and label our emotions to help us better respond.

Another way we can support our children in developing new friendships is to make sure that they have a very real sense of who they are. Understanding their own value system – what they think is important to them – gives them

a firm basis to seek out new friends who will be good for them. Talking as a family about values and why we hold certain values at the centre of our family's life gives children a firm foundation from which to go out into the world. Actively encouraging our children to live their values by consciously taking actions that reflect those values is hugely beneficial in developing their confidence.

Making – and keeping – new friends is difficult. A key skill valued by all friends is the ability to be listened to. Working with our children on developing that skill will set them up brilliantly for being a great friend. Modelling active listening when we are talking to them is a great starting point; letting them finish their point before jumping in, nodding and maintaining eye contact, briefly summarising what they have said to show we heard it, and asking open questions about what interests them are all features of active listening we can develop with our children.

Supporting our children as they cope with change and make those new friends is one of the tough things we do as parents – we want to jump in and do it for them. Letting your child do the hard work will also develop their confidence and sense of security, so that they can cope with these things, not just for the immediate period but throughout their lives.



My kids are sitting their exams this year and are worried about getting the grades they want. How can they develop more confidence in their abilities and not crack under the pressure?

[NP] What I've said previously about recognising and managing emotions and understanding our values can also be applied to this situation. In addition, we can work with our children on developing and sustaining a mindset which allows them to understand that effort and persistence pay off: it is not all about innate abilities. Carol Dweck's work on Growth Mindset is crucial for this. She helps us to see that if we can develop the mindset of "I cannot do this...yet' it can help us to keep going when we are faced with challenges that might make us feel like giving up. Talking with our children about alternative strategies they can use when they feel like giving up is a good way of supporting them; they may be able to contact a teacher, work through a problem with a peer, do some research or look to mum or dad to talk something through with. We all have a tendency to 'hit a wall' at times and think we just can't do something – helping our children get over that wall without doing things for them gives them very real learning opportunities.

Ensuring that our children have got themselves organised is another way we can support them to feel calmer and more confident. Developing a realistic schedule that balances academic, social and family commitments helps provide a framework to avoid any one thing feeling overwhelming. Prioritising areas where we are less confident is often not something young people do; they leave it until last because they know it will be hard. Helping them to see that tackling the difficult stuff first will, in the long run, make things easier is a tough ask. But working with them on identifying



### 'Talking with our children about alternative strategies they can use when they feel like giving up is a good way of supporting them'

those areas, figuring out who and what can help, and making a start on it can be a real confidence booster as they begin to make progress on those problem areas.

Active learning and revision is also essential. Re-reading notes is not an effective strategy - as we read we recognise the topic and think we know it. Using a range of revision strategies - mind maps; recording and later listening to notes; writing out questions and getting family members to ask them; colour-coding and revision cards/diagrams, are some of many ways in which our children should be encouraged to revise. I am sure teachers will have provided lessons on effective revision and learning strategies, but there are lots of additional resources for this online, too.

Wellbeing generally is very important as children prepare for

exams. If our physical and emotional needs are not being met, there is no chance that we can effectively attend to lessons and learning. Ensuring that our children are eating well, exercising, sleeping adequately and avoiding excessive screen time are all essential tools in helping them to cope with inevitable feelings of anxiety at this time. Practising some form of meditation or mindfulness can also be really helpful. This may feel unnatural for someone who has never done it, but even a few minutes of focused breathing every couple of hours can help to re-focus our minds and bring a sense of calm. There are some great apps that can support with this: Buddifhy is a free app that is easy to navigate, while Calm and Headspace require a subscription but have a fabulous set of extended resources in addition to the meditations.



#### The Expert

Adrianna Joy Chestnut Principal Bright Learners Private School

We've just moved to Dubai from abroad and my kids are having a confidence wobble about starting a new school, in a new country. What strategies could help them?

[AC] Going back to school after these unprecedented times of pandemic and quarantine will likely be difficult for some students. There are so many emotional ups and downs at the start of school as kids learn some of life's lessons about self-discovery, self-esteem, self-confidence and friendship. The first day of school brings about a range of emotions and feelings from, "I am so excited to go back to school!" to, "I am afraid to go to school." As parents and educators, there will be students whose excitement we feed off as they can't wait to go back, while there will be others where the dread they feel will make our hearts ache. No matter where the students are on the spectrum of excitement, parents and schools must work together to boost and maintain confidence in returning to school.

For parents, letting go again, after having young ones so close for so many months, can be hard, too. It's difficult knowing we can't be on hand to guide our children through every tricky step, make them feel secure, or reassure them that everything will be okay, whatever happens. This is where your partners in education, their teachers, reassure you that they will be there to guide your children.

The key to instilling confidence in our students is communication. Talk to your students in an encouraging way about how you know they'll do great this year. Couple this conversation with a plan to ensure they succeed. This plan could include homework schedule, learning



## Parents and schools must work together to boost and maintain confidence in returning to school'

incentives, and ways to help them manage their studies and stress. As partners in education, parents and teachers alike have to reassure students that we will do all we can to help them succeed.

My child's class has been reshuffled this year and she's nervous about mixing with new classmates - what can I suggest to help her?

[AC] When the first day in your child's new class finally arrives, assure them that there will be many new faces and new opportunities to make new friends. As they prepare for the day, ensure they don't forget to accessorise their look with a smile. Encourage them to say hello to a student who looks a bit anxious, or to introduce themselves to some of their peers in their classroom. Let your child know that there might be other students who are new or looking to make friends, just like them. Encourage them as they go on this new adventure and support them along the way.

#### The Expert

Jackie Greenwood Head of Counselling Fairgreen International School

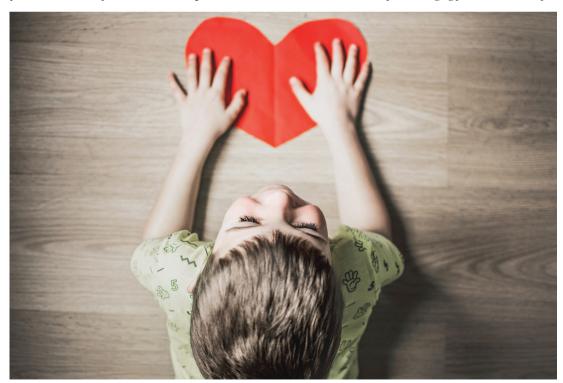
I had to remove my children from their school during the last academic term and they are starting somewhere new for the 2020-2021 academic year. They're feeling unsettled about it - how can I help? [JG] In this situation, children need to be able to explore their feelings and be heard about what their worries and concerns are. Often children do not have control over the changes that happen in their lives, so it is important that parents can hear and be present to what their child needs to voice. Once we have listened, we can work together with our child at problem solving, or reflecting on how they have coped with change before. Keeping a positive outlook is important, so that

## Encouraging your child to be a risk taker is important, and to reassure them that many people feel anxious'

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if any difficulties arise the school and parents will help support the child transition as smoothly as possible. It is also worth remembering that many children may be faced with a move to a new school or country, and having that shared experience can help build friendships at times of uncertainty. My child has always been shy about speaking up at school and gets really embarrassed if asked to speak out loud – how can I help boost his confidence for delivering oral presentations to class?

[JG] Public speaking and building confidence takes practice, even for adults. Encouraging your child to be a risk taker is important, and to reassure them that many people can feel worried or anxious in this situation, but the more they do it the easier it gets. Practicing speaking at home can really help, or even in front of a few friends. Helping your child learn some calming techniques to help reduce their anxiety can also really help, so speak to your school's counsellor to help with some tips in managing performance anxiety.



# IMPROVING ARABIC LESSONS

How schools across the Emirates have taken heed of a government directive to progress students' Arabic language comprehension

he last few years have seen a conscious drive by the government to improve the quality of Arabic lessons in schools.

Learning the Arabic language is compulsory for every child from Grade 1 to Grade 9 who attends school in the UAE. The amount of time dedicated to learning the language is stipulated by the Ministry of Education and varies depending on a child's age and nationality. Schools in the UAE are expected to teach Arabic to native speakers from Year 2 (Grade 1) to Year 13 (Grade 12), and to teach it as a second language to non-Arabic natives from Year 2 (Grade 1) to Year 10 (Grade 9).

Seven years ago, The Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Knowledge Foundation (MBRF) set up the Bil Arabi initiative in order to preserve and promote the language. The aim of the initiative was to modernise the way Arabic was being taught in the hope of improving the overall quality of students' speaking and writing abilities. Reflecting on the positive impact it has had, Noura Al Kaabi, the Minister of Culture and Knowledge Development, told The National that the efforts of the government were making progress, commenting that, "The UAE will work hard to promote the status of the Arabic Language among other living languages of the world."

To get an insight into how schools have





been continually improving their Arabic studies, we spoke to three international schools across the UAE. In a bid for continual improvement, each school outlines their objectives for both native Arabic speakers and foreign language students.

#### At Victoria International School

(VES) in Sharjah they have an "Arabic for Arabs programme for those who are registered in school with a passport from one of the 22 countries belonging to the Arab league," explains Dean Pyrah, the school's Principal/CEO. For these native speakers the goal is for "the students to develop the four skills of the language: listening, reading, writing and speaking."

At **Repton Abu Dhabi**, native Arabic speakers are taught, "to use the language in depth for analysis, criticism, evaluation and creating bigger ideas," says Safaa El-Zeftawy, the school's certified NeuroLanguage coach and head of Arabic B.

While at **GEMS** schools they place value on, "teaching literature and grammatical structures" in addition to communication, explains Mary Saad, GEMS' senior manager of Arabic and Islamic improvement.

For non-native speakers, the teaching style has a broader focus, emphasising a deeper cultural understanding. At VES, as well as teaching, speaking, and writing skills, their goal for second language students is for them to "develop a greater awareness of the culture of Arabic-speaking communities." Similarly, at Repton Abu Dhabi, along with language they set out to "teach a greater awareness of the culture of Arabic-speaking communities and countries."

At GEMS schools, by the end of Year 10 – the last compulsory year for non-native speakers to study Arabic – "they should be able to confidently express their views and thoughts about different issues – social, environmental, personal, etc. – with



## The focus with non-native speakers is on fluency. We focus on encouraging students to express themselves, even if they make grammatical mistakes'

clear reasoning and arguments."

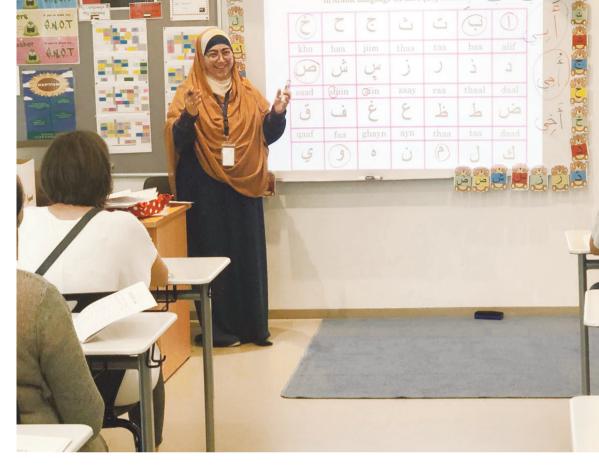
Widely considered a difficult language for non-native speakers to learn, recent years have seen schools taking an active role in improving their teaching methods. "The focus with non-native Arabic speakers is on fluency," says Saad, "We focus on encouraging students to express themselves, even if they make grammatical mistakes,".

At Repton Abu Dhabi, the methods evolve with age, but there's a large focus on using a "diversity of educational material and using activities that combine focus and depth, along with creating opportunities to discover and develop talent," says Pyrah.

In a further move away from rigid rote learning, the development of online resources has had a positive impact on teaching throughout the last few years. Last year, global

education company Pearson launched bilArabi in local UK and US curriculum schools. "If you modernise the way Arabic is taught, you inject energy into it," said the senior author at bilArab, Dr Hanada Taha Thomure. Schools have since taken heed of modern educational resources, "We use electronic Arabic platforms like 'I Read Arabic' for native speakers and 'I Start Arabic' for non-native speakers, and we also created a competition to encourage students to listen and read more Arabic literature," says El-Zeftawy of Repton Abu Dhabi. At VES, new "learning software's have enabled students to have a greater deal of independent learning," suggests Pyrah.

Not only have schools changed the way they teach in class, there's also been a noticeable move towards greater one-to-one support. At VES, that sees senior students "support



younger students at lunch time to complete their Arabic homework or support with reading," enthuses Pyrah. Children who attend Repton Abu Dhabi are continually evaluated with progress checks and, "depending on the diagnosis for a student's needs, we offer support on groups or support to the student on a 1:1 basis," highlights El-Zeftawy.

Another way international schools are seeking to improve the quality of their Arabic output is through engaging non-native speaking parents. At Repton Abu Dhabi, for example, an after-school program for students' parents is offered twice a week to improve their Arabic language skills. "These parent courses have seen a strengthening bond between the Arabic department and the parents, which has instilled a passion for the language in their

children," says El-Zeftawy. Some GEMS schools also offer sessions for parents, while others provide resources with translations for homework help. VES, meanwhile, believes parental engagement is, "the key for a student's success. We had a very good success with Arabic classes offered to non-Arabic speaker parents," says Pyrah.

While setting a clear directive for the continual improvement of teaching the Arabic language, H.E. bin Huwaireb, speaking at the MBRF's seventh bilArabi ceremony earlier this year, said that the initiative has been a success thus far.

"In the upcoming editions the Foundation strives to consolidate its presence with all members of Arab and non-Arab families, and to find innovative ways to help individuals learn the language."









re-primary curricula start at age three (your child's age is calculated as his/her age on the 31 July for Indian, Pakistani and Japanese curriculum schools or 31 December for other curricula) in the UAE, while compulsory education begins from Grade 1 (approximately age six, depending on your child's birth date and the curriculum they will study).

Dubai is booming. There are currently over 200 private schools in Dubai (the vast majority of which have been inspected) offering 17 different curricula, according to the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), which regulates schools in the emirate. Over 90 percent of Dubai students study in private schools. As a result, places are hard to come by in the most sought-after schools and can be a challenge to find at short notice in some year groups, particularly the Foundation and Reception ages, between four and six.

Meanwhile, in Abu Dhabi, private schools operate across three regions – Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, and Al Dhafra – catering to around 200,000 students. The Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK) is responsible for managing, guiding, adopting and implementing various educational development strategies and initiatives in the region, with its Irtiqa'a inspection system measuring quality and supporting improvements so that all schools in the capital adhere to international standards.

Your child's school placement may be organised through the company you work for, but if not, it's wise to shortlist several schools so you have options should you not gain a place at your top choice. Be sure to research the assessment and admission criteria for the schools you shortlist, as well as the requirements for fees and payment schedules.

# PARENT-SCHOOL CONTRACT

Upon enrolling in a school, you will be required to sign a Parent-School contract at the start of the school year, which ensures that both schools and parents are aware of their duties and responsibilities towards each other and towards their children. The terms and conditions stipulated in the contract will also be a reference for dispute resolution.

However, if your child is continuing at the same school, you will not be required to sign the Parent-School contract annually. Your contract with the school will continue to remain valid while your child is enrolled at the same school. A new contract shall be issued and signed by the parent only if your child's school is changed.







#### **EARLY YEARS**

Currently, more than 120 early childhood education centres are registered in Dubai, according to KHDA. Here, the authority highlights factors to consider when selecting a nursery:

## Curriculum and approach to learning

What kind of curriculum or learning approach does the centre follow? Whatever the approach, there should be clear learning and development outcomes for your child along with mechanisms for the teacher to report on your child's progress on a regular basis. Depending on your first language, you will want to ask about the languages used in the centre. For example, will your child be given the opportunity to interact with adults speaking good Arabic and good English? Check that the daily programme will provide your child with different experiences within a clear routine and that the centre is committed to the importance of play for your child to learn. Some centres also enhance their curriculum with in-house programmes or visits by outside organisations.

#### Quality of provision

It is important to inquire about and, if possible, observe the teaching and learning. In general, are the teachers friendly, caring and qualified to provide care and nurturing for your child and do they make you feel welcome in the centre and answer your questions openly and fully? Ask about the nationality and qualifications of the staff and about the staff-to-child ratio – how many children will be under the care of each adult?

#### The environment

The Ministry of Social Affairs sets out a number of safety regulations, which early childhood education centres must follow. In addition, it is a good idea to ask about the presence of a centre nurse, the number of staff who are qualified in first aid and the safety and security measures taken by the centre. Ask about the measures taken to ensure a clean environment and to prevent cross-contamination. You will also want to check that there are secure procedures to stop unauthorised people entering the building and for the drop-off and pick-up of children by authorised adults only.

#### STARTING SCHOOL

With compulsory education starting from Grade 1, the academic year runs from September to June, except for Indian, Pakistani and Japanese curriculum schools, which run from April to March. There is an accepted age range for each school grade/year and your chosen school should be able to give you information about this. Here are the factors to consider when choosing a school:

#### Curriculum

The curriculum is much more than the textbooks or examinations – it refers to everything the school teaches, including subjects and activities inside and outside the classroom. These include extra-curricular activities, school trips, and visitors to the school. Different curricula also adopt different approaches to learning.

All curricula lead to public examinations and qualifications. These will be important considerations in your choice of curriculum for your child – you may need to think about the requirements of any future application to university or further education, either in the UAE or abroad. In addition, if you are coming from abroad, your selection of a curriculum may depend upon your country of origin as you may want your child to integrate back into your home country's education system at some time in the future.

#### SCHOOL INSPECTIONS IN DUBAI

The Dubai School Inspection Bureau (DSIB) of KHDA provides comprehensive information on the standard of private school education in Dubai, which helps to inform improvement planning at school and policy level. This is achieved through a number of approaches, including annual school inspections, parents meetings and focus groups, teachers, parents and students surveys. The inspection results, which are released in February or March for Indian and Pakistani schools and in April for all other schools, is based on a six-level scale, as follows:

**OUTSTANDING** – quality of performance substantially exceeds the expectation of the UAE;

**VERY GOOD** – quality of performance exceeds the expectation of the UAE;

**GOOD** – quality of performance meets the expectation of the UAE;

ACCEPTABLE – quality of performance meets the minimum level of quality required in the UAE:

**WEAK** – quality of performance is below the expectation in the UAE;

**VERY WEAK** – quality of performance is significantly below the expectation in the UAE.

Inspectors assess quality of education at a variety of levels so the rankings are a great resource to use when considering schools.



#### **Quality of education**

The learning outcomes and performance of schools will be important to you in making your decision. The Dubai School Inspections Bureau's (DSIB's) annual inspection reports allow you to look at these and other aspects of schools in detail (visit khda.gov.ae for individual inspection reports).

#### School environment

Your child will be spending a lot of time in school and all aspects of the school have an impact on your child's social development and personality. As part of the decision-making process, try to arrange a tour of the school, talk with

administrators, teachers and students and see the school in action. Areas you should talk about include how the school is structured, whether classes are mixed and/or whether classes are streamed for ability, how transport is arranged, and the arrangements for lunch and breaks. You can also find out the school policies on examinations, assessment, discipline, dealing with bullying, communications with parents, and technology integration, to name just a few.

For more information on choosing and enrolling in education in Dubai, visit khda.gov.ae and for more details on education in Abu Dhabi, visit adek. abudhabi.ae

#### SCHOOL INSPECTIONS IN ABU DHABI

Irtiqa'a inspection system of ADEK employs a team that includes specialists with expertise in the school's given curriculum or curricula. Inspections in private and government schools in Abu Dhabi take place once within a two-year cycle, using the six-level scale, with Band A including levels Good to Outstanding; Band B covering Acceptable; and B and C including Weak and Very Weak ratings.

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تـحــت رعــايــة ســــــو الـــشــيـــخ حـــــدان بـــن مــحــــهـــد دبـــي Under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai



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