

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.

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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.¹ 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

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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.² 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 provided³ because they do not have the necessary conceptual understanding, in terms of pedagogy, institutional structure or management, leadership or other.⁴ 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

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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.⁵

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,⁶ 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,⁷ 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.⁸ 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰

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.¹¹

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.¹²

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.¹³ 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.¹⁴

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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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