حكومة دبي
GOVERNMENT OF DUBAI

هيئة المعرفة والتنمية البشرية
KNOWLEDGE & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

A Guide for the Appointment of a Principal in a Private School in Dubai 2015-2016

EXPO 2020 إكسبو
دبي، الإمارات العربية المتحدة
DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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Foreword:

The Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) maintains a very close and dynamic relationship with private schools. Leaders of these schools are true and genuine partners who play a major role in improving the quality of education in Dubai for all children and students. Principals, and other individuals with key responsibilities, are the decision-makers who oversee and are accountable for students' achievements, curriculum development, staff recruitment and development, students' assessments, students' safety and support, and communications across the school community. They must be able to manage innovation transformation and education reform.

Educational researchers have long established that principals play a key role in school improvement. Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) has confirmed the importance of the leader's role in school improvement by establishing a clear correlation between the quality of school leadership and the school's overall performance rating. It is therefore imperative that school leaders have the appropriate personal attributes, academic qualifications, professional experience, and leadership skills and qualities. This is to ensure the highest standards of education provision in schools which continuously improve students' outcomes.

Mohammed Ahmad Darwish
Chief of Regulations and Permits Commission

Introduction:

In 2014, His Highness Sheikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum set forth the National Agenda as a set of steering guidelines for the implementation of the UAE vision for 2021. The UAE National Agenda has two main objectives regarding the UAE ranking in international assessments in 2021:

To be among the 20 highest performing countries in PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment)

To be among the 15 highest performing countries in TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study).

Therefore, it is imperative that leaders of private schools in Dubai, particularly the principals, strengthen their partnerships with the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) and adopt the expectations of the National Agenda in order to ensure the necessary developments in their schools.

The appointment process for private school principals, detailed in this document, has been revised based on the strong correlation between the capacity of the school leaders and the quality of its overall performance, as established by the findings of the Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB). The appointment process has also been revised to ensure school leaders understand and have the capacity to achieve the National Agenda targets. In addition to the general expectations, KHDA will evaluate the intended principal's knowledge of these international assessments and how to integrate the expectations in the school's curriculum and its delivery, namely teaching.

Definition of principal:

For the purpose of this guide, KHDA defines the principal as the person designated by the owners of the school to act on their behalf in the leadership and management of the school. The principal has the primary responsibility for the quality of education, the health and safety of children and students, and the administrative, financial and operational aspects of leading and managing the school.

The principal is the school's representative during school inspections and is the person accountable for the school performance and standards. The principal reports directly to the owners and might hold one of the following titles:

Director, Superintendent, Head Teacher, Principal, Headmaster, or CEO.

General Guidelines:

- All private schools must have an appointed principal with responsibilities for educational, administrative, financial, and operational matters.
- A principal's appointment at a private school is legally valid only after KHDA's appointment letter has been issued.
- School owners can only inform parents once they obtain the appointment letter from KHDA.
- Only after receiving the appointment letter from KHDA should school owners proceed with issuing an immigration card and signing a legally valid contract with the principal.
- An appointed principal of a private school is the only authorised person to act on behalf of the school's owners and governing/ advisory board.
- A principal transferring from one existing school to another in the Emirate of Dubai must undergo the same process.

Roles and responsibilities of a principal:

The primary responsibilities of an appointed principal at a private school are to:

1. Oversee and ensure the school's commitment to quality education and its continued improvement, with a main focus on students' outcomes.
2. Ensure the implementation of the school's stated curriculum and related assessment and certification requirements in all phases.
3. Ensure that the school is meeting the needs of all students, and groups of students, and must ensure students with special educational needs make at least good progress in all aspects of their education and development.
4. Ensure that all Emirati students are making at least good progress in all aspects of their education and development.
5. Ensure that the school is compliant with KHDA regulations and requirements.
6. Promote Arabic language and the Emirati heritage as part of the school culture and curriculum.
7. Recruit and appoint qualified staff, including vice principal(s) and section/department heads, according to rigorous standards in line with the demands set by KHDA and other related government agencies.
8. Implement rigorous policies and procedures and oversee provision to ensure students' health and safety at all times.
9. Oversee and ensure all school records are updated, accurate and available to KHDA upon request.
10. Implement and adhere to current and future regulations issued by KHDA and relevant authorities.
11. Ensure the vision and mission stated in the KHDA approved academic plan for a new school are implemented.

Qualifications and Experience Requirements:

Before submitting an application for a principal's appointment, school owners should ensure that the candidate meets the following requirements:

a. Relevant and appropriate teaching experience and preferably holds teaching qualifications;

b. Experience of no less than three cumulative years in educational leadership in the same or similar curriculum schools, where the candidate has held such positions as vice principal, head of section(s), or head of department, if the candidate has not been a principal before;

c. For a first time principal candidate and for a candidate newly recruited to Dubai, an advanced (post-graduate) university degree/diploma/qualification in educational matters (or the equivalent thereof), or evidence he/she is working towards obtaining such a degree from a recognised institution.

Rationale for conducting interviews:

To support continuous improvements in schools, KHDA is a partner in the recruitment process of principals for private schools in Dubai. KHDA aims to validate the candidate's capacity and professional experience through:

- Reviewing the candidate's qualifications and experience requirements;
- Evaluating the candidate's attitudes towards improving the quality of education in Dubai;
- Assessing whether the candidate can establish a vision and set strategic direction for the school;
- Evaluating the candidate's ability to lead the different phases of the school to establish consistency and continuity in the quality of provision;
- Ensuring that the candidate applying to lead an existing school is well aware of the quality of educational provision at the school and the recommendations from the DSIB Inspection Report, and thus is able to move the school forward;
- Ensuring that the candidate applying to lead a new school is fully aware of the contents of the KHDA approved academic plan for that school and is able to implement the intended vision and mission;
- Validating the candidate's sensitivity to Dubai's cosmopolitan nature, Emirati culture and traditions and the cultural diversity of the school's student population.

Appointment Process:

1. It is the responsibility of the school owners to ensure that the candidate:

    a. Is fully knowledgeable about the KHDA principal appointment process and the fact that his/ her appointment is pending KHDA's approval;

    b. Is fully competent, of good conduct, and should not have been sentenced for a felony or misdemeanor;

    c. Is suitably qualified;

    d. Has relevant experience in the school curriculum;

    e. Has been recruited from outside Dubai (for a new school).

2. School owners should submit to KHDA an application for a principal's appointment with all required documents. These include:

    a. Official letter from the school owners detailing the reasons for choosing this particular candidate to lead the school;

    b. Curriculum vitae or resume, including two references;

    c. Copy of attested qualifications;

    d. Copy of experience certificate (if applicable);

    e. Valid passport copy/visa.

3. KHDA will conduct administrative checks.

4. An interview will be scheduled with the candidate upon the receipt of all the documents.

5. If the candidate is approved, KHDA will issue a letter of appointment for a duration of three academic years. The candidate's tenure will be reviewed at the end of the specified period.

6. If the candidate is not found suitable, written feedback of the interview outcome will be communicated to the owners within 15 working days.

Summary of the appointment process steps:

Step	Time Required
1. Owners submit a principal appointment request and the required documents to KHDA.	15 working days
2. Documents are reviewed and the candidate is interviewed at KHDA.	
3. KHDA communicates decision to school owners and the principal appointment letter (if approved/ probated) is issued.	

Deadlines for submitting applications for a principal's appointment:

New schools:

Owners of new schools should submit an application for an appointment of a school principal well in advance of the school opening date, thus ensuring that a suitable KHDA- approved principal is appointed at least six months prior to the opening of the school. Hence, an application for a new school principal will be received no later than February 1st for the schools starting in September, and no later than September 1st for the schools starting in April of the following year.

Existing schools:

Schools should not operate without a principal.

- Unless it is an emergency situation and/or unforeseen circumstances connected with the overall well-being of the students and the school, the contract of a school principal should not be terminated during the academic year. If due to unusual circumstances the contract is terminated mid-year, the owners should appoint a replacement or an acting principal before the actual principal leaves the school.

- In an emergency situation, where the principal is no longer in post, school owners should immediately inform KHDA that the position of principal is vacant. The name of the acting principal should be also communicated at the same time, along with the expected duration of the appointment.

- An acting principal should not hold the post for more than three months and the school is obliged to appoint a new KHDA-approved principal within this time frame.

- In case school owners choose to appoint a new principal at their school, an application for a new candidate should be submitted three months prior to the start of the new academic year. Hence, applications will be received no later than June 1st for schools starting in September, and no later than January 1st for schools starting in April. Schools cannot begin the academic year without a principal and hence schools must ensure that the new principal has the necessary KHDA approvals prior to the start of the new academic year.

Summary of the deadlines for submitting applications:

For schools starting in September	Apply for principal appointment
New School	February 1
Existing School	June 1
For schools starting in April	**Apply for principal appointment**
New School	September 1
Existing School	January 1

Application review outcomes:

1. **Approved:** School owners will receive a formal letter from KHDA specifying the exact dates for the start and end of the three year appointment. This appointment letter can be registered with the relevant authorities and used to finalise the contract with the candidate.

2. **Not approved:** School owners will receive a formal letter with the outcome of the review process. Owners should then present a new candidate who will fulfill KHDA requirements.

3. **Probation:** School owners will receive an appointment letter specifying a one year probation period. The letter will explain the area or areas of focus the candidate needs to improve upon. The candidate will be required to sit for a second interview at the end of the probation period during which specific areas of focus will be explored further.

At its discretion, KHDA may ask for a detailed school improvement/ action plan to be submitted by the appointed candidate during a specific timeframe.