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Inspection frameworks and educational outcomes: A Cross-Emirate Analysis of KHDA, ADEK, SPEA, and MOE private inclusive education schools

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Abstract
Research Objective: The study aims to examine private school inspection outcomes across the United Arab Emirates (UAE) during the 2023-2025 inspection cycles, focusing on four principal education regulators: the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) in Dubai, the Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK) in Abu Dhabi, the Sharjah Private Education Authority (SPEA), and the Ministry of Education (MOE) governing Ajman and Ras Al Khaimah. The research seeks to assess the comparative effectiveness of these regulatory frameworks in promoting quality assurance, leadership development, inclusion practices, and teacher licensing compliance across the nation's private school sector.
Background: Private education in the UAE reflects diverse demographic and regulatory contexts, shaped by distinct regional priorities. Using a mixed-methods design, the study integrates quantitative inspection data with qualitative contextual analysis to evaluate school quality and leadership outcomes. Across 227 KHDA-regulated schools in Dubai, 10.13% were rated *Outstanding*, 21.15% *Very Good*, and 37.44% *Good*, indicating that nearly 69% perform at or above the *Good* level. In Abu Dhabi, among 219 ADEK-inspected schools, 5.94% were *Outstanding*, 23.29% *Very Good*, and 42.47% *Good*, representing over 71% achieving *Good* or higher ratings. In contrast, Sharjah's 121 schools demonstrated stability with 65.29% rated *Good* and 11.57% *Very Good* but no *Outstanding* schools. The MOE-governed regions lag significantly; Ajman reported 79.49% *Acceptable* schools, while Ras Al Khaimah exhibited similar patterns, with the majority rated *Acceptable* or *Good* and no *Outstanding* institutions.
Results: The analysis revealed a clear quality gradient, with Dubai and Abu Dhabi leading educational performance through robust governance, accountability mechanisms, and high teacher licensing compliance (87.8% and 89.5%, respectively). Sharjah maintained moderate compliance (83.3%), whereas MOE regions trailed at 82.9%. Leadership ratings followed similar patterns: Dubai recorded 11% *Outstanding* and 25% *Very Good* schools, while MOE jurisdictions reflected weaker governance, with only 4% *Outstanding* and 13% *Very Good* institutions. Inclusion outcomes demonstrated that Dubai achieved 31% *Outstanding and Very Good* schools, compared to the Northern Emirates, where 31% were rated *Acceptable* and 9% *Weak and Very Weak*. Demographically, Dubai displayed the most international composition 25% Indian, 25% Other Arab, 21% Filipino and Others, 10% Western, and 12% Emirati while Sharjah and the MOE regions exhibited South Asian dominance (30% and 28% Indian students, respectively).
Conclusion: The findings confirm that the UAE has established a strong national baseline of *Good* quality education supported by rigorous inspection systems and professional standards. Nonetheless, regional inequities persist, with excellence concentrated in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, while Sharjah and MOE-regulated regions remain constrained by limited leadership capacity, inconsistent inclusion practices, and lower teacher licensing compliance. The study recommends targeted capacity-building, leadership enhancement, and data-driven policy reforms to reduce disparities and promote an equitable, inclusive, and globally competitive education system across all emirates.

Keywords: UAE education system, school inspection frameworks, KHDA, ADEK, SPEA, MOE, student inclusion, wellbeing, leadership, inclusion, diversity, demographic trends, teacher qualifications, private schooling, etc.

Introduction

The pursuit of educational excellence remains a strategic priority in the United Arab Emirates' national development agenda. Over recent years, the UAE has developed a dynamic and tightly monitored private education sector that mirrors its unique demographic makeup, with expatriate students representing most enrolments. Oversight of educational quality is distributed among four primary regulatory bodies: The Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) in Dubai, the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK), the Sharjah Private Education Authority (SPEA), and the federal

Ministry of Education (MOE), which is responsible for schools in the Northern Emirates. Although each entity employs its own distinct inspection methodology, all adhere to national standards and align broadly with globally recognized educational benchmarks.

This research examines private school inspection results under these authorities across the 2023 to 2025 academic years. The evaluation focuses on six foundational dimensions: academic performance, student personal and social growth, innovation capabilities, instructional quality and assessment practices, curriculum effectiveness, and the provision of care, support, and leadership. These are further enhanced by cross-cutting themes including inclusive education, teacher qualification standards, and curriculum variety, all integral to the UAE's overarching quality assurance framework.

The primary objective of this study is to deliver a data-driven comparative assessment of school inspection results across different emirates. It aims to shed light not only on the statistical distribution of school ratings, but also on the deeper implications for leadership effectiveness, student wellbeing, and inclusive practices. By analysing both the achievements and challenges highlighted in inspection outcomes, the study provides a nuanced understanding of how regulatory philosophies, population characteristics, and institutional leadership influence educational quality throughout the UAE.

Historical Development and Literature Review of the UAE Private Education Sector

The trajectory of private education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is closely tied to the nation's broader socio-economic evolution, population dynamics, and ambitions for global integration. What began as modest, community-led initiatives has transformed into a robust, multi-curriculum educational framework central to the UAE's vision for a knowledge-driven economy.

Foundations and Pre-Federation Context (Pre-1971)

Prior to the UAE's establishment in 1971, formal education was minimal and predominantly rooted in religious instruction. Traditional *kuttabs* served as the main form of learning, emphasizing Quranic memorization, literacy, and numeracy, often sustained through community efforts or religious endowments. Modern schooling began emerging under foreign influences, particularly from Egypt, Kuwait, and the British colonial administration. These influences led to the founding of secular schools in cities like Sharjah and Dubai during the 1950s and 60s (Ridge, 2014) [13]. At this stage, private education was limited and largely informal, catering mainly to expatriate communities especially Indian and Pakistani families involved in regional trade.

Post-Federation Expansion and Demographic Impact (1971-1990)

Following the UAE's unification, education became a top government priority. The state directed significant investment toward expanding public education infrastructure, including schools, curriculum development, and teacher training (MOE, 2010) [11]. However, the rapid influx of expatriates driven by oil-fuelled economic growth intensified demand for private schools offering international curricula. During this period, private education primarily served the expatriate population, with schools adopting various curricula such as British (UK), Indian (CBSE and ICSE), American, Pakistani, and Filipino systems. Oversight remained centralized under the Federal Ministry of Education, with limited distinction between the public and private sectors (Gallagher, 2019) [5].

Market Liberalization and Regulatory Reform (1990-2010)

The decades spanning the 1990s to early 2010s saw a marked shift toward privatization in education. With urbanization and a growing expatriate community, small, community-led schools evolved into large-scale, investor-backed institutions, particularly in Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

Key regulatory developments during this era included:

- **2005:** Formation of the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) later renamed the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK) in 2017.
- **2006:** Establishment of the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) in Dubai to regulate and improve private education standards.
- **2018:** Launch of the Sharjah Private Education Authority (SPEA), indicating a move toward decentralized governance models.

These entities implemented school inspections, rating systems, and performance benchmarks aligned with international frameworks such as the UK's Ofsted and OECD indicators (KHDA, 2020).

Contemporary Regulation and Innovation (2010-Present)

In recent years, the private education system in the UAE has undergone extensive reforms centred around data-driven evaluation and international benchmarking. Key initiatives include:

- The introduction of standardized inspection protocols across KHDA, ADEK, and SPEA.
- The 2017 Inclusive Education Framework by the Ministry of Education, ensuring access and equity for students of all backgrounds and abilities.
- Enhanced focus on wellbeing, leadership, innovation, and stakeholder engagement in revised evaluation criteria (ADEK, 2023; KHDA, 2024).

As of 2023, nearly three-quarters of students across the UAE are enrolled in private schools, with that figure surpassing 90% in Dubai and Abu Dhabi (UNESCO, 2023). These institutions collectively offer more than 17 international curricula, positioning the UAE as one of the most diverse education systems globally. Regulators have also integrated metrics related to innovation capacity, digital preparedness, and community feedback into school assessments (SPEA, 2023).

Role of private education in national development strategies

Private schooling is a key pillar in long-term national frameworks such as UAE Vision 2021, Centennial 2071, and Vision 2031. These strategies emphasize the role of education in national progress, positioning private schools not merely as service providers, but as strategic collaborators in creating an inclusive, globally competitive educational environment (UAE Cabinet, 2021) [28].

The evolution of the private education sector from religious and informal origins to a high-performing, internationally benchmarked system reflects the UAE's proactive and adaptive policy environment. Today, reforms are focused not only on compliance and quality assurance but also on promoting innovation, capacity-building, and inclusive excellence, affirming private education's central role in the UAE's future educational landscape.

Research Methodology

Component	Description
Research Design	• Comparative and descriptive research design combining cross-sectional quantitative analysis with interpretive qualitative evaluation.
Total Sample Size	• 621+ private schools across the UAE, governed by four key regulatory bodies (KHDA, ADEK, SPEA, MOE).
Sampling Approach	• Full census approach-all schools with available inspection data were included. Schools were stratified by emirate and assigned regulatory authority.
Data Sources	• Secondary data extracted from official inspection reports, regulator websites, school performance rating tables, and public publications.
Data Type	• Mixed-methods approach utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data.
Quantitative Analysis	• Calculated percentages of schools in each rating category (e.g., Outstanding, Very Good, etc.). • Ratings verified against total school counts per regulator.
Qualitative Analysis	• Thematic review of non-numerical data focusing on inclusion, student wellbeing, curriculum options, and leadership practices.
Key Evaluation Themes	• Student achievement • Teaching & learning quality • Innovation skills • Leadership & management • Wellbeing and inclusion
Rating Framework	• Standardized Six-point scale used across all regulators: Outstanding, Very Good, Good, Acceptable, Weak and Very Weak.
Triangulation Strategy	• Validation conducted through comparison across regulator sources to ensure consistency and accuracy.
Ethical Considerations	• All data used were publicly accessible; no private or personally identifiable information was included.
Limitations	• Potential variability in inspection criteria and timing across emirates; mitigated through standardization and cross-regulator comparison.

Data Tabulation, Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Private Schools Student Nationalities Distribution 2023–25

Regulator	Emirati	Indian	Pakistani	Other Arabs	Western	Filipino & Others
KHDA (Dubai)	12%	25%	7%	25%	10%	21%
ADEK (Abu Dhabi)	25%	20%	6%	28%	7%	14%
SPEA (Sharjah)	18%	30%	8%	26%	5%	13%
MOE (Northern Emirates)	20%	28%	10%	27%	4%	11%

The student nationality distribution across private schools in the UAE underscores the country's educational multiculturalism, with notable differences across the four key educational authorities.

Dubai's KHDA-regulated schools display a markedly international student body. Indian and Other Arab students each make up 25% of enrolments, highlighting their equal prominence. Emiratis represent a minority at 12%, while Western expatriates and students from the Philippines and other countries constitute 10% and 21% respectively. This demographic pattern aligns with Dubai's globalized identity, where expatriate communities significantly outnumber local nationals.

Abu Dhabi's ADEK-regulated schools, in contrast, feature stronger Emirati participation, with nationals forming 25% of the student population the highest proportion among all regulators. Other Arab students lead at 28%, followed by Indians at 20%. Western students (7%) and those classified under Filipino & Others (14%) represent a smaller share, pointing to a more balanced demographic mix with greater local influence than in Dubai.

Sharjah, under SPEA, is characterized by a dominant South Asian presence, with Indian students forming 30% the highest rate across all emirates. Other Arabs and Emiratis make up 26% and 18%, respectively. Pakistani students comprise 8%, while Western (5%) and Filipino & Others (13%) trail behind. This distribution reflects Sharjah's appeal among South Asian families, particularly from India and Pakistan.

The Ministry of Education (MOE), overseeing schools in the Northern Emirates, reveals a slightly different mix. Indian students lead at 28%, closely followed by Other Arabs (27%) and Emiratis (20%). Pakistani students account for 10%, with the lowest Western representation (4%) among all regions. The Filipino & Others category accounts for 11%. This region reflects a broader regional and South Asian orientation, with limited Western enrolment.

The demographic trends across the UAE's private education landscape reflect diverse socio-economic realities: Dubai remains the most globally diverse with strong Western expatriate enrolment; Abu Dhabi emphasizes local representation within a balanced expat mix; Sharjah leans toward South Asian dominance, particularly Indian students;

and the Northern Emirates blend Arab and South Asian populations with minimal Western presence. These variations play a key role in shaping school cultures, curriculum offerings, and the broader educational environment in each emirate.

Table 2: Teaching Staff (Licensed vs Non-Licensed)-2023-25

Regulator	Total Teaching Staff	Licensed Teachers	Non-Licensed Teachers
KHDA (Dubai)	100%	87.8%	12.2%
ADEK (Abu Dhabi)	100%	89.5%	10.5%
SPEA (Sharjah)	100%	83.3%	16.7%
MOE (Northern Emirates)	100%	82.9%	17.1%

The landscape of teacher licensing in UAE private schools reflects both encouraging advancements and notable disparities in meeting national qualification standards across different regulatory bodies.

Abu Dhabi, under ADEK, leads the way with the highest licensing compliance, boasting 89.5% of teachers fully licensed and only 10.5% remaining non-licensed. This high level of adherence highlights the emirate's rigorous quality assurance mechanisms and its firm commitment to upholding professional teaching standards, setting a benchmark for the rest of the country.

Dubai, overseen by KHDA, follows closely, with 87.8% of educators licensed. The emirate's strong regulatory framework and emphasis on accreditation contribute to this high compliance, signalling effective governance and a priority on educational excellence through qualified teaching personnel.

Sharjah, regulated by SPEA, presents a mixed picture. While most teachers are licensed (83.3%), a considerable 16.7% still lack official certification. This suggests that although significant strides have been made, the emirate is still navigating transitional hurdles in fully aligning its teaching workforce with national licensing standards.

The Northern Emirates, governed by the Ministry of Education (MOE), face the most significant challenges. With 82.9% of teachers licensed and 17.1% yet to meet licensing requirements, the data points to persistent structural barriers in teacher qualification, including recruitment limitations, professional development gaps, and enforcement issues in regulatory compliance.

The Abu Dhabi and Dubai demonstrate strong regulatory enforcement and high teacher readiness, Sharjah and especially the Northern Emirates reveal ongoing gaps that must be addressed. Targeted strategies focusing on enhanced teacher training, streamlined recruitment, and stricter regulatory monitoring will be essential to ensure consistent educational quality across all emirates ultimately influencing student success and the national education agenda.

Table 3: Leadership & Management (2023-25)

Regulator	Outstanding	Very Good	Good	Acceptable	Weak / Very Weak
KHDA (Dubai)	11%	25%	46%	15%	3%
ADEK (Abu Dhabi)	8%	23%	45%	20%	4%
SPEA (Sharjah)	7%	18%	52%	19%	4%
MOE (Northern Emirates)	4%	13%	50%	28%	6%

The evaluation of leadership and management quality across UAE private schools reveals distinct patterns among the four regulatory authorities, with Dubai (KHDA) continuing to set the national standard, while the Northern Emirates (MOE) face persistent challenges.

Dubai's KHDA-regulated schools demonstrate the strongest outcomes, with 11% of schools rated Outstanding and 25% marked as Very Good. Nearly half (46%) are categorized as Good, while only 15% fall under Acceptable and a mere 3% under Weak or Very Weak. These results underscore Dubai's effective governance ecosystem, driven by strong accountability mechanisms, strategic leadership development, and a clear emphasis on educational excellence.

Abu Dhabi, regulated by ADEK, also performs well, with 8% of schools achieving Outstanding and 23% attaining Very Good ratings, supported by 45% rated as Good. However, a higher proportion (20%) in the Acceptable category and 4% in Weak/Very Weak suggests variability in leadership consistency and institutional quality, pointing to a need for more equitable support across schools.

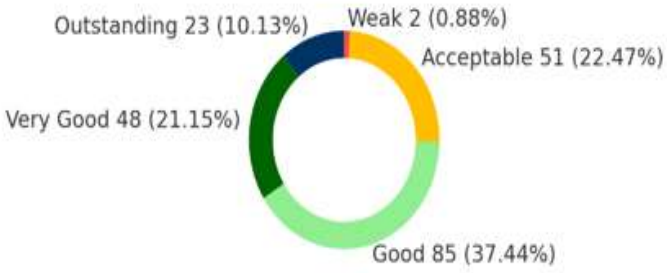
Sharjah's SPEA-supervised schools reflect a slightly different pattern, with 7% Outstanding and 18% Very Good, but a notable 52% classified as Good, the highest among the emirates. This indicates a stable and functional leadership base, though a comparatively smaller share of top-rated institutions suggests fewer schools are pushing the boundaries of innovation and systemic leadership excellence.

The Northern Emirates (MOE) present the greatest concerns, with only 4% of schools reaching Outstanding and 13% labelled Very Good. While 50% are considered Good, a significant 28% fall into the Acceptable range, and 6% into Weak/Very Weak, revealing gaps in leadership capability, professional development access, and institutional accountability.

In conclusion, the leadership and management landscape reveals a clear quality gradient with Dubai leading in both performance and consistency, followed by Abu Dhabi's relatively strong but uneven results. Sharjah holds steady at the mid-range, while the Northern Emirates require urgent, targeted interventions. Advancing leadership standards across all emirates will depend on sustained professional development, enhanced school inspection processes, and capacity-building initiatives especially in underperforming regions to ensure equity in educational leadership quality nationwide.

Dubai (KHDA) Private Schools Ratings 2023-25

Judgement	No. of Schools	% of Schools
Outstanding	23	10.13
Very Good	48	21.15
Good	85	37.44
Acceptable	51	22.47
Weak	2	0.88
Total	**227**	**100.0**



The recent inspection outcomes for Dubai's KHDA-regulated private schools (2023-25) reflect a commendable level of institutional performance, yet they also signal areas for targeted improvement.

Out of a total of 227 evaluated schools, a significant portion 37.44% (85 schools) earned a "Good" rating, representing the dominant performance category. This suggests a strong foundational standard of education, governance, and student outcomes across many institutions.

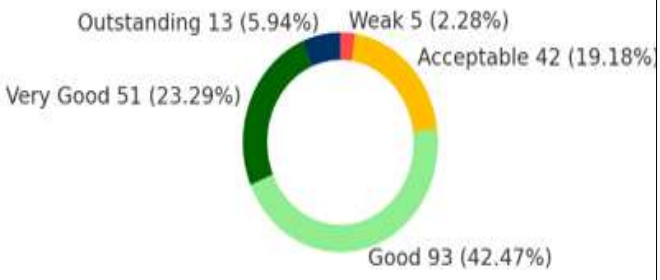
Encouragingly, 21.15% (48 schools) were categorized as "Very Good", indicating consistent progress toward higher benchmarks of quality, innovation, and leadership. Meanwhile, 10.13% (23 schools) achieved the coveted "Outstanding" rating, showcasing a subset of schools that exemplify best-in-class practices in academic delivery, strategic leadership, and stakeholder engagement.

However, not all schools are performing at optimal levels. 22.47% (51 schools) were marked as merely "Acceptable", suggesting these institutions meet basic regulatory expectations but fall short in areas critical to long-term educational excellence. Furthermore, a minimal yet concerning 0.88% (2 schools) were rated as "Weak", highlighting isolated cases of underperformance that require urgent intervention.

The data illustrates Dubai's overall strong performance trajectory, underpinned by a significant number of schools operating at Good to Outstanding levels. Nevertheless, the presence of Acceptable and Weak institutions underscores the need for continued quality assurance efforts, differentiated school improvement plans, and sustained capacity-building to elevate lower-performing schools to the standards exemplified by the top tier.

Abu Dhabi (ADEK) Private Schools Ratings 2023-25

Judgement	No. of Schools	% of Schools
Outstanding	13	5.94
Very Good	51	23.29
Good	93	42.47
Acceptable	42	19.18
Weak	5	2.28
Total	**219**	**100.0**



The performance evaluation of private schools regulated by ADEK (Abu Dhabi) for the 2023-25 cycles illustrate a generally positive landscape, though disparities remain across quality tiers.

Among the 219 assessed schools, the majority 42.47% (93 schools) earned a "Good" rating, indicating that nearly half of Abu Dhabi's private education sector operates with sound governance, academic quality, and student achievement standards.

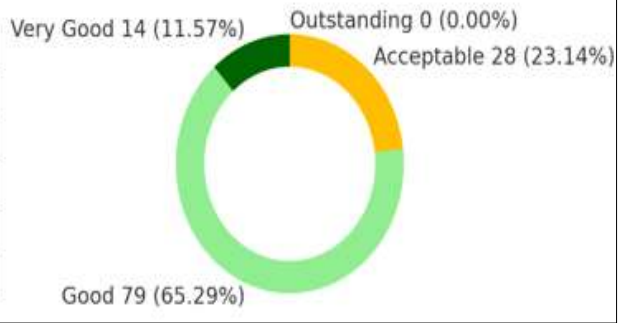
Significantly, 23.29% (51 schools) achieved the "Very Good" benchmark, reflecting a substantial segment of institutions that are consistently exceeding expectations and demonstrating commendable performance in leadership, teaching quality, and student outcomes. Meanwhile, a smaller proportion 5.94% (13 schools) reached the "Outstanding" level, representing the high-performing vanguard of ADEK's private school ecosystem.

On the other hand, 19.18% (42 schools) were rated "Acceptable", signalling the presence of schools meeting the most basic educational standards, yet lacking the capacity or consistency to progress further without targeted support. Additionally, 2.28% (5 schools) were categorized as "Weak", highlighting a few institutions facing significant challenges in delivering quality education and in need of immediate intervention. The ADEK school ratings underscore Abu Dhabi's commitment to quality assurance and progressive educational development. While most schools operate at Good to Very Good levels, the relatively

low proportion of Outstanding schools and the presence of Weak-rated institutions suggest room for enhancement in leadership capability, innovation, and system-wide support. Targeted development programs and continued monitoring will be key to shifting more schools into the upper performance tiers.

Sharjah (SPEA) Private Schools Ratings 2023-25

Judgement	No. of Schools	% of Schools
Outstanding	0	0.0
Very Good	14	11.57
Good	79	65.29
Acceptable	28	23.14
Total	**121**	**100.0**



The most recent evaluation of private schools under SPEA (Sharjah Private Education Authority) for the 2023-25 cycles present a picture of broad consistency at mid-tier performance levels, while also exposing clear limitations in high-performing school presence.

Among the 121 schools reviewed, a substantial 65.29% (79 schools) were rated as "Good", indicating a strong baseline of competence in curriculum delivery, governance, and operational quality. This majority reflects institutional stability and adherence to regulatory expectations, suggesting that most schools maintain sound academic environments.

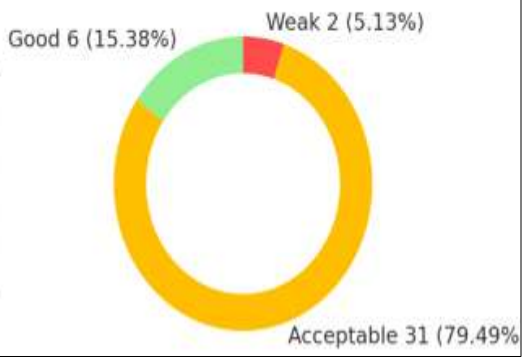
However, only 11.57% (14 schools) achieved a "Very Good" rating, and none were rated as "Outstanding." The absence of top-tier schools in this cycle is a notable concern, as it signals a gap in excellence, innovation, and leadership capacity compared to other emirates such as Dubai or Abu Dhabi.

Additionally, 23.14% (28 schools) were classified as "Acceptable", denoting institutions that meet minimum standards but require significant improvements in instructional quality, strategic planning, and professional development to progress into higher performance bands.

In essence, while Sharjah demonstrates relative consistency with a significant majority of schools rated "Good" the complete absence of "Outstanding" institutions and the low share of "Very Good" schools highlight a need for systemic advancement. Moving forward, targeted leadership training, school improvement frameworks, and performance-driven incentives could help elevate Sharjah's private education landscape into the upper echelons of national quality benchmarks.

Ajman (MOE) Private Schools Ratings 2023-25

Judgement	No. of Schools	% of Schools
Good	6	15.38
Acceptable	31	79.49
Weak	2	5.13
Total	**39**	**100.0**



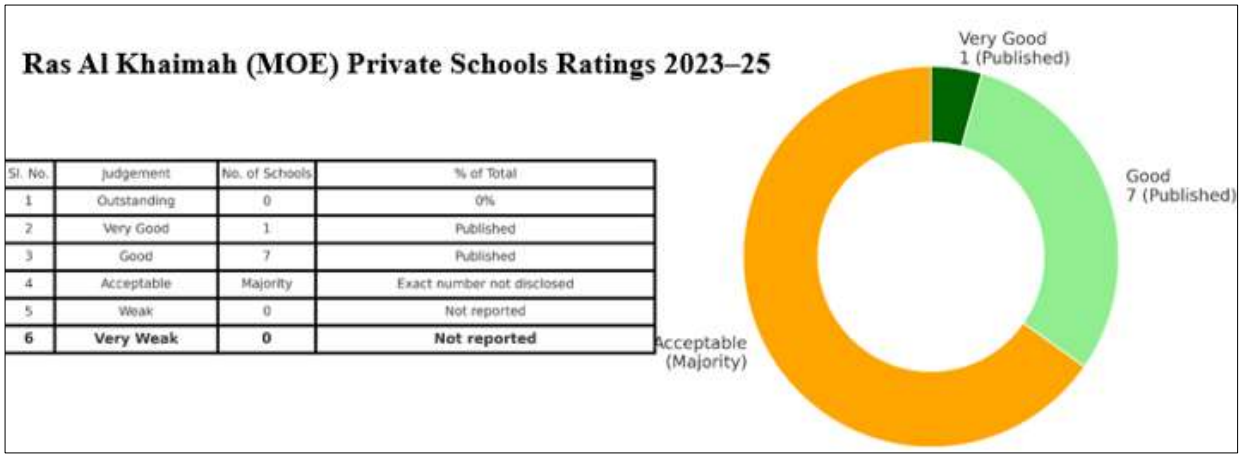
The latest performance evaluation of Ajman's private schools, regulated by the UAE Ministry of Education (MOE) for the 2023-25 cycles, reveals a sector in need of significant development, with a dominant concentration of schools operating at only foundational quality levels.

Out of 39 private schools assessed, a striking 79.49% (31 schools) received a rating of "Acceptable," indicating that the vast majority meet only the basic expectations of educational delivery, leadership, and resource utilization. While such schools are compliant with minimum standards, this rating reflects limited evidence of strong instructional practices, innovation, or impact-driven leadership.

Only 15.38% (6 schools) were rated as "Good," pointing to a very small segment demonstrating consistently solid performance in key areas such as teaching quality, student outcomes, and school governance. This limited representation at the "Good" level underscores the need for more widespread support systems and quality assurance interventions.

Furthermore, 5.13% (2 schools) were rated as "Weak," representing a small but notable proportion of institutions requiring urgent corrective action to address deficiencies in management effectiveness, learning environments, and regulatory compliance.

Overall, the data highlights a significant performance gap in Ajman's private school sector, with a heavy skew toward Acceptable ratings and minimal representation in the higher quality bands. To elevate the overall standard of education, strategic capacity building, leadership development, and focused school improvement planning will be essential. Emphasis must also be placed on continuous professional development and strengthening inspection feedback mechanisms to drive systemic quality uplift.



The school performance data for Ras Al Khaimah's private education sector, as evaluated by the UAE Ministry of Education (MOE) for the 2023-25 period, offers only partial transparency but reveals an education system largely concentrated within the Acceptable to Good performance band.

Out of the schools assessed, only limited ratings have been officially published. Specifically, 7 schools were rated "Good" and 1 school achieved a "Very Good" rating, indicating a small group of schools demonstrating reliable quality in teaching practices, student progress, and operational leadership.

Importantly, no schools were reported in either the "Outstanding," "Weak," or "Very Weak" categories, suggesting either the absence of extreme performance outliers or lack of data disclosure in these segments. The evaluation notes that the majority of schools fall under the "Acceptable" category, though exact figures remain unpublished. This implies that while schools are generally meeting the minimum quality standards, only a handful have moved beyond this baseline to demonstrate elevated performance.

The absence of any "Outstanding" institutions, paired with the dominance of Acceptable ratings, points to a relatively modest quality profile for the emirate's private school sector. The scarcity of high-achieving schools highlights the need for enhanced quality assurance efforts, leadership development, and sustained instructional improvement to create pathways for excellence.

In conclusion, while Ras Al Khaimah's private schools appear to avoid critical underperformance, the overall distribution suggests a system largely operating within functional but unspectacular parameters. Strategic investments in teacher training, performance monitoring, and curriculum innovation will be essential to lift schools from compliance to excellence.

Table 4: UAE School Inclusion Ratings (2023-25 Academic Years)

Regulator	Outstanding	Very Good	Good	Acceptable	Weak / Very Weak
KHDA (Dubai)	7%	24%	50%	17%	3%
ADEK (Abu Dhabi)	5%	20%	44%	24%	8%
SPEA (Sharjah)	3%	15%	48%	28%	5%
MOE (Northern Emirates)	2%	10%	48%	31%	9%

The latest school inclusion ratings across the UAE's private education sector for the 2023-25 academic cycles reveal notable variations in how well schools across different emirates are integrating inclusive practices and supporting students of determination.

Dubai (KHDA) leads in fostering inclusive education, with 7% of schools rated as "Outstanding" and 24% as "Very Good" the highest among all regulators. Additionally, half of KHDA-regulated schools (50%) are rated "Good," indicating that the vast majority meet or exceed expectations in implementing inclusive policies and practices. Only 17% fall into the "Acceptable" range, and a minimal 3% are considered Weak or Very Weak, showing a strong overall commitment to inclusive learning environments.

Abu Dhabi (ADEK) also demonstrates commendable progress, with 5% of schools ranked Outstanding and 20% Very Good. While 44% fall under the "Good" category, a noticeable 24% are still rated as Acceptable, and 8% fall into the Weak/Very Weak bracket, a higher percentage than Dubai. This suggests areas of inconsistency, particularly in ensuring equitable implementation across all private institutions.

Sharjah (SPEA) reflects a more mixed performance. Only 3% of schools achieved Outstanding inclusion status, and 15% received a Very Good rating. 48% are marked as "Good," suggesting a decent base-level commitment to inclusion, though 28% are still Acceptable, and 5% Weak or Very Weak. These figures indicate that while inclusion is

present, there's significant room for deepening both policy implementation and professional development training.

The Northern Emirates (MOE-regulated) show the greatest challenges in inclusive education. With just 2% of schools achieving Outstanding, and only 10% rated Very Good, the region has 48% of schools rated Good, but also the highest proportion of Acceptable (31%) and Weak/Very Weak (9%) ratings across all regulators. This reflects systemic gaps in both inclusion infrastructure and consistency of support for students requiring additional learning needs.

In conclusion, Dubai stands out as the national leader in inclusive education, with a majority of schools performing at Good or above. Abu Dhabi and Sharjah show moderate success but require targeted improvements, especially in underperforming schools. The Northern Emirates, however, face the most pressing challenges, necessitating urgent policy alignment, enhanced teacher training, and improved monitoring to bridge the inclusion quality gap.

Discussion

The inspection outcomes for private schools across the United Arab Emirates (UAE) during the 2023-2025 cycle reveal a distinctly stratified educational landscape shaped by regulatory practices, leadership efficacy, demographic influences, and structural capacity. The comparative data from KHDA (Dubai), ADEK (Abu Dhabi), SPEA (Sharjah), and MOE (Northern Emirates) regulators highlight a nuanced interplay between quality assurance mechanisms and the realities of implementation across diverse contexts.

Overall, School Quality and Performance Trends

The school performance ratings underscore Dubai (KHDA) and Abu Dhabi (ADEK) as national front-runners in achieving high educational standards. Among 227 KHDA-inspected schools, 10.13% were rated Outstanding, and 21.15% Very Good, with 37.44% classified as Good. This dominant concentration at the top tiers reflects the strength of KHDA's strategic inspection framework and emphasis on leadership accountability.

In Abu Dhabi, a similar pattern emerges. Out of 219 schools, 5.94% achieved Outstanding, and 23.29% Very Good, while 42.47% were rated Good. The presence of only 2.28% Weak schools suggests that ADEK's system ensures a solid educational baseline with room to expand its elite tier.

Conversely, Sharjah (SPEA) reveals a plateau in school progression. Among 121 schools, 65.29% were rated Good, and only 11.57% attained Very Good, with no schools achieving Outstanding status. While this indicates systemic stability and wide adherence to minimum quality expectations, it also reflects a lack of upward mobility, with insufficient advancement into higher-performing categories.

The Northern Emirates, particularly Ajman and Ras Al Khaimah (MOE-regulated), show the most pronounced challenges. In Ajman, 79.49% of schools were rated Acceptable, and only 15.38% Good, with 5.13% Weak. RAK's published data indicates a majority of schools at the Acceptable level, with only 1 Very Good and 7 Good schools. No schools in either emirate reached the Outstanding category, confirming a limited systemic capacity to cultivate high-performing institutions.

Leadership and Management Quality

Leadership and governance continue to be decisive factors influencing school performance. The KHDA system in Dubai demonstrates the most robust outcomes, with 11% of schools rated Outstanding and 25% Very Good, underlining the emirate's strategic investment in leadership development and performance-based accountability. Only 3% of schools fell into Weak or Very Weak, reflecting a strong leadership culture.

Abu Dhabi (ADEK) follows with 8% Outstanding and 23% Very Good, though 20% Acceptable and 4% Weak/Very Weak suggest inconsistency in school leadership effectiveness, particularly in lower-tier schools.

Sharjah (SPEA) maintains a 52% share of Good-rated schools, the highest among all regulators, indicating stability in middle-performing leadership. However, only 7% achieved Outstanding, and 18% Very Good, reinforcing concerns regarding limited innovation and strategic foresight.

The MOE-regulated Northern Emirates remain the weakest in leadership outcomes. Only 4% of schools were rated Outstanding, with 13% Very Good, while 28% were Acceptable and 6% Weak/Very Weak, the highest negative performance nationally. These figures signal structural limitations in leadership pipelines, governance oversight, and inspection-driven improvement efforts.

Inclusion Ratings and Equity Practices

Inclusion ratings reflect the systemic commitment to supporting students of determination and fostering equitable school environments. Once again, Dubai leads, with 7% of schools rated Outstanding, 24% Very Good, and 50% Good, while only 3% were Weak/Very Weak, showcasing a highly inclusive school ecosystem with specialized programs and support mechanisms.

Abu Dhabi also performs strongly, with 5% Outstanding and 20% Very Good, though 8% of schools remain in the Weak/Very Weak category, revealing uneven implementation of inclusive policies.

Sharjah's inclusion profile is more mixed: 3% Outstanding, 15% Very Good, and 48% Good, but a notable 28% Acceptable and 5% Weak/Very Weak, emphasizing the need for more consistent policy enforcement and inclusive teacher training.

The Northern Emirates again reveal systemic challenges, with only 2% Outstanding, 10% Very Good, and a troubling 9% Weak/Very Weak the highest in the country. This points to significant equity gaps, limited resource allocation for inclusion, and insufficient capacity to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Teacher Licensing and Workforce Standards

Teacher qualification rates are a reliable proxy for instructional quality and regulatory compliance. Abu Dhabi leads the UAE, with 89.5% of teachers fully licensed, closely followed by Dubai at 87.8%. These high licensing rates reflect stringent regulatory monitoring and investment in teacher professionalism.

Sharjah reports 83.3% compliance, while the Northern Emirates trail with only 82.9% licensed teachers, leaving 17.1% of the teaching workforce unlicensed. This disparity is compounded by recruitment challenges, insufficient

training pathways, and limited oversight in underperforming regions. Without targeted interventions in licensing enforcement and professional development, these gaps are likely to persist.

Demographic Distribution and Contextual Influence

Demographic patterns across the emirates offer critical context for interpreting school performance. Dubai's private schools host a highly international student population, with 25% Indian, 25% Other Arab, 21% Filipino and Others, 10% Western expatriates, and only 12% Emiratis. This cosmopolitan environment has likely contributed to diverse curricula offerings and globalized teaching standards.

Abu Dhabi exhibits a more balanced demographic, with 28% Other Arab, 25% Emirati, 20% Indian, and 14% Filipino & Others, allowing schools to develop programs that reflect both local heritage and international aspirations.

Sharjah has the highest concentration of Indian students (30%), followed by Other Arabs (26%) and Emiratis (18%), aligning with its strong South Asian expatriate base. The dominance of one demographic segment may shape the types of curricula adopted and influence school leadership hiring practices.

In the Northern Emirates, the demographic profile is similarly dominated by South Asian (28% Indian, 10% Pakistani) and Arab populations (27% Other Arab, 20% Emirati), but with only 4% Western expatriates the lowest nationally. This reflects more regionalized school environments, often with fewer resources and reduced international exposure.

Summary

This comprehensive study analysing private school inspection outcomes across the UAE from 2023 to 2025 offers critical insights into the varying levels of educational quality across four key regulatory authorities KHDA (Dubai), ADEK (Abu Dhabi), SPEA (Sharjah), and MOE (Northern Emirates). The findings reflect a commendable national commitment to quality assurance, with approximately three-quarters of private schools rated "Good" or better. However, the distribution of excellence remains uneven, revealing geographically concentrated strengths and structural disparities that require strategic redress.

Key Findings

- Dubai and Abu Dhabi remain at the forefront of school quality in the UAE. More than one-third of schools in these emirates have been rated Outstanding or Very Good, reflecting mature regulatory systems, strong leadership, and a culture of continuous institutional improvement. These regions have cultivated high-performing educational ecosystems through rigorous inspection frameworks, professional capacity-building, and curriculum innovation.
- Sharjah presents a stable yet stagnant profile, with the majority of schools rated "Good" (65.29%). While this indicates consistent delivery of foundational education, the lack of movement into top-tier performance (no schools rated Outstanding) highlights limited systemic dynamism and underscores the need for targeted advancement strategies.
- Ajman and Ras Al Khaimah, both under the Ministry of Education (MOE), remain the most challenged regions. School performance in these emirates is heavily concentrated in the Acceptable category, with negligible representation in higher quality bands. The absence of any Outstanding institutions points to entrenched issues related to leadership capability, teacher qualification, and regulatory enforcement.

Thematic Insights

- **Leadership and Governance:** Dubai and Abu Dhabi exhibit superior outcomes, with high percentages of schools excelling in leadership and strategic management. In contrast, MOE regions reveal deficits in school-level accountability, vision, and instructional leadership.
- **Inclusion:** Dubai leads in inclusive education with high ratings in Outstanding and Very Good categories, while the Northern Emirates register the highest share of Weak and Acceptable ratings, indicating unequal access to support structures for students of determination.
- **Teacher Licensing:** Teacher qualification compliance is highest in ADEK (89.5%) and KHDA (87.8%) jurisdictions. Meanwhile, Sharjah and MOE regions continue to struggle, with compliance dropping below 83%, indicating structural barriers in teacher recruitment, training, and certification processes
- **Student Demographics:** Dubai's diverse expatriate population fosters a globalized learning environment, while Abu Dhabi maintains a more balanced local and Arab profile. Sharjah and the Northern Emirates remain dominated by South Asian and Arab student populations, shaping the curricular preferences and cultural landscape of schools in those areas.

Conclusion

The 2023-2025 UAE private school inspection cycles highlight the presence of a stratified educational system, where regional performance is closely tied to governance quality, regulatory maturity, and institutional capacity.

Dubai and Abu Dhabi continue to serve as exemplars of educational excellence, demonstrating strong leadership, effective school governance, and curriculum innovation. Their sustained success reflects the strength of their regulatory ecosystems, which have embedded a culture of accountability, continuous improvement, and professional development across schools.

In contrast, Sharjah exhibits operational consistency, with the majority of schools performing at the "Good" level. However, the lack of progression into higher performance tiers points to a systemic plateau, where stability has not yet translated into innovation or excellence.

The most significant concerns emerge in Ajman, Ras Al Khaimah, and other MOE-regulated regions, where schools are predominantly rated "Acceptable." These regions face a confluence of systemic challenges, including lower teacher licensing compliance, underdeveloped leadership structures, and limited capacity for inclusive education. The absence of schools rated Outstanding in these areas further highlights the urgency for targeted intervention.

Bridging these regional disparities requires a shift from compliance-driven oversight to transformation-oriented

reform. Educational policies must prioritize capacity-building, equity, and innovation, ensuring that all schools, regardless of their location, are equipped to deliver high-quality, inclusive, and future-focused learning experiences. Only through data-informed strategies and sustained investment in human capital and institutional leadership can the UAE realize its vision of equitable excellence across its entire private education sector.

Final Reflection

The UAE has successfully established a strong educational foundations and quality practices, but outstanding performance remains concentrated in select regions. Closing this gap requires deliberate, equity-centered reforms that move beyond meeting minimum standards. Every student across all emirates should benefit from a system that champions inclusivity, innovation, and excellence.

Recommendations

- **Targeted Capacity-Building for MOE Schools:** Develop tailored professional development and school improvement programs for Ajman and Ras Al Khaimah, focusing on leadership, teaching quality, and curriculum enrichment. This should aim to move schools beyond Acceptable into Good and Very Good categories.
- **Strengthening Inclusion and Wellbeing Frameworks:** Scale up resources and training for inclusion across all emirates, particularly the Northern Emirates, to address the higher proportions of Acceptable and Weak ratings in inclusive education. Introduce mandatory inclusion coordinators and monitoring systems. Establish centralized registers for all schools to register their students of determination and those who are gifted and talented for national data collection for future educational reforms, policy development and creating appropriate provisions for these student groups across the emirates under a centralized executive council.
- **Leadership Development Programs:** Establish UAE-wide leadership academies to equip school leaders with advanced skills in governance, innovation, and accountability. A focus on Sharjah and MOE regions would help raise schools from Good to Very Good and Outstanding.
- **Enhancing teacher licensing and professional standards:** Mandate accelerated teacher licensing across all emirates, particularly targeting Sharjah and the Northern Emirates where compliance is lowest. Introduce incentives (salary increments, career progression) for licensed teachers to attract and retain high-quality staff.
- **Equity-focused inspection reforms:** Adapt inspection frameworks for MOE schools to emphasize developmental support rather than compliance. Introduce school improvement grants and mentorship partnerships with high-performing Dubai and Abu Dhabi schools to reduce geographic disparities in quality.

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