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## Race to better health

health ambassadors to maintain an active school health forum, strengthened the school's meal plans and hold health and fitness awareness programmes," says Joseph Ajish of the school's Physical Education department. A student's body mass index (BMI) is also assessed to determine who needs more attention.

The intervention is timely, as official data shows. The Dubai Health Authority's Schools and Educational Institutions Unit says 33 per cent of students from kindergarten to grade 12 across 176 private schools are either overweight or obese. Of these, 14-16 per cent are obese.

Those findings chime with World Health Organisation figures, which indicate that more than 36 per cent of UAE children are obese.

Besides monitoring students' BMI, some schools offer holistic solutions. Sharjah-based Aspam Indian International School integrates science and physical education into its curriculum to help students understand how nutrition, stamina building, rest and sleep, and an active lifestyle are connected to their performance on the field or nets. "Our physical education teachers integrate physical activities in a systematic manner and follow a calendar to ensure kids are part of the school's holistic development programme," says Prachi Goel, Board Member at the school.

Poonam Heryani, Head of Academics at Aspam says, "With a cohesive approach and added resources, our students get to eat better, are more active and achieve healthier weights." ■

# STUDENTS ON THE MOVE

- When a child changes school, he/she may become depressed. **GN Focus** finds out how kids can settle fast into a new school

BY CHIRANTI SENGUPTA  
Deputy Editor

Changing schools can be quite daunting for children, as they must cope with new routines, classmates, activities and teaching cultures. Not all children are capable of navigating these changes and some may need more time and special attention to adjust.

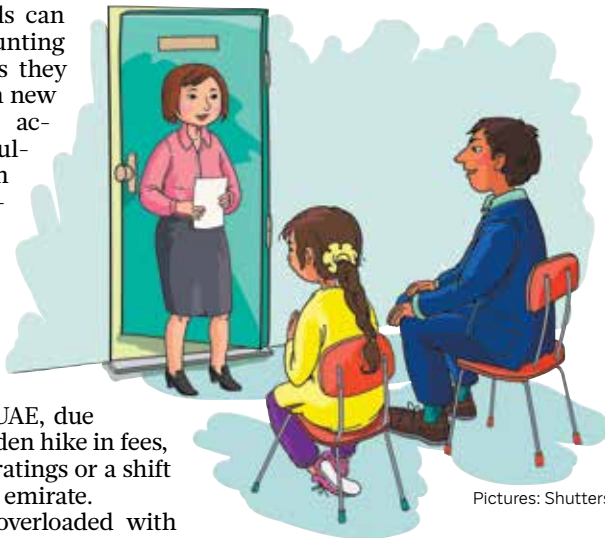
With its high population of expatriates, changing schools is fairly common in the UAE, due to factors such as a sudden hike in fees, a change in a school's ratings or a shift in residence to another emirate.

"My daughter was overloaded with homework when she was in Grade 1," says Indian mum of two, Sherine Jacob. "I had to come back from work and spend time with her to finish the homework, which became a bit stressful for me. We decided to switch her school last year as we wanted to give her a fresh start along with my son, who also started school then, in a less stressful environment."

For Dubai-based PR professional Suhans Pandit, the decision to send her son to a different school five years ago was more circumstantial than voluntary: A sudden change in school management forced the transfer. "I was not comfortable with the way the new management functioned," she says. "So I moved him to a more established Indian school in the city. While the move was not very difficult, it was quite stressful as it was not planned."

This student mobility, sometimes even midterm, has also been a matter of concern for educators as they often need to step up to help kids adjust to new environments and teaching styles.

"The school should ascertain the entry level of new students, including curriculum levels, skill sets, talents and learning styles, through diagnostic tests, apart from facilitating a transition plan for new students to cover gaps, if any, that is uncovered through the diagnostics," says Fatima Martin, Principal, GEMS New Millennium School.



Pictures: Shutterstock

"This includes using existing students as buddies for immediate support."

Easy adjustments help set the momentum for children's future progress and achievements, and parents can help with emotional support and a bit of planning.

"We involved our daughter as much as possible in everything. We kept talking to her about the change to build up her excitement," Jacob says.

Chitra Sharma, Principal, JSS Private School Dubai, says a smooth transition to a new school always involves communication between the child, school and parents. "This is in addition to the regular orientation process, school walks and informal interaction of the child with her new friends, teachers and supervisor before starting school."

The child's involvement and willingness to accept the change is also essential. A child who is compelled to change schools without knowing why can have a negative setback at an emotional, physical and developmental level, warns Bharti Jatti Varma, Clinical Hypnotherapist, Wellness Consultant and Corporate Trainer at Illuminations Well-being Centre, JLT. "These children, if not handled well, can develop behavioural issues, anxiety, fear and depression, to name a few," she says.

But a little love and attention can go a long way. ■

## EASE THE TRANSITION TO A NEW SCHOOL

**Bharti Jatti Varma** from Illuminations offers parents five tips to help kids adjust to a new school

1. Involve your child in the entire decision-making process. It is important to get their opinion and buy-in for the change.

2. Respect and help ease their feelings, emotions and perspective towards the entire process.

3. Try to build familiarity with the new school through common friends or activities that can help create an association with the unknown.

4. Open communication on an everyday basis to understand their struggles as they move into an unfamiliar zone.

5. A steady stream of praise can help build a sense of self-worth in children, subsequently helping them cope with the challenges that come with the change.

— C. S.



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