

Cap on school fee hike likely: official

Following a 2008 ministry decree, tuition cost increase may be limited to a maximum of 20% over three years

- By Faisal Masudi, Staff Reporter
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Ras Al Khaimah: School fee hikes - haunting UAE parents over the past decade or so - may soon be cut short to a maximum of a 20 per cent total over three years, a top official hinted.

Some schools have been increasing fees by 10 per cent each year, said Dr Mariam Al Ali, Director of Private Schools Supervision and Control Office, Ministry of Education (MoE). She made the comment at the Education Reform in the GCC conference at the Hilton hotel in response to an Emirati parent in the audience who said the nation's private school system is "a business, not education".

Upcoming rules

Dr Mariam said: "There was a ministry decree in 2008 — 20 per cent fee cap within three years... We've received requests from some schools for a 40-50 per cent increase. Parents can't pay that."

She hinted that upcoming fee rules might be "going back to that [2008 decree]", at the sidelines of the event organised by The Gulf Comparative Education Society.

This may come as another blow to schools seeking higher fees recently. In Dubai, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) has asked Asian schools to freeze charges for the 2010-2011 academic year.

Under the current KHDA policy, private schools can raise fees only between seven and 15 per cent per year, depending on their inspection and performance results.

The KHDA's hike ban led to warnings from the UAE's biggest private school group - GEMS Education - that it may have to close a couple of schools in the next few years if official fee caps are not lifted or revised upwards.

In a letter to the KHDA, the education giant had reiterated that its commitment to 'quality' education cannot continue, especially at the older Indian schools, without permission for "fee restructuring".

"It's imperative that KHDA/MoE finalise a solution to the problems of this nature or they challenge the very existence of these schools that have served the community for over four decades.

"In the current circumstances, a number of our schools have been driven to breaking point and we at GEMS can no longer commit to maintaining our own internal and KHDA quality standards," the letter said.

Ralph Tabberer, Chief of Schools, GEMS, said: "I think there are lots of tough questions like fees. Many are expecting solutions and the ministry is strongly collaborating with providers of education - private, not-for-profit, or state - to review government regulation. The students' best interests are the focus of discussions - and this we [as GEMS] do already."

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