Supporting Student and Teacher Wellbeing with Technology

Wellbeing has become a hot topic across the globe, for teachers as well as students. It has been revealed by the Ministry of Education that about a quarter of all school pupils in the UAE are being bullied. In addition, results from the Adults@School Wellbeing Survey (of 20,000 school staff) revealed that 40% of participants were 'just getting by'.

Wellbeing should no longer be seen as an individual's issue but as a collective school duty. As Dr Abdulla Al Karam, Director-General of Dubai's Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), says: "Wellbeing of students is no longer optional but a right that schools must uphold". He also refers to wellbeing as "a human right" for pupils, teachers and parents.

Supporting students

The use of technology in schools provides students with new ways to connect, communicate and learn, so it's crucial that staff can support their wellbeing by ensuring a safe online environment, including combatting cyberbullying.

Although technology can never replace teachers''eyes and ears' within the school, it does support staff who can't be everywhere at once and help them keep abreast of constantly evolving risks. Armed with tools that oversee students' online activity, concerning trends and vulnerable students, they can hold assemblies or group sessions to tackle issues such as stress, depression and bullying etc. and provide support to those in need.

A new concept to supporting wellbeing is the use of contextual analysis. It uses variables such as the devices used, time of day, and websites visited (including previous alerts triggered) to create a numerical risk index, based on the context and history of a student's activities. This helps school staff to identify genuine concerns and prioritise accordingly.

Allowing students to report concerns they might have, is also key to encouraging wellbeing and pupil voice. This feature is especially useful for those who feel uncomfortable speaking directly to a staff member, as it allows them to share their problems and get help from staff without having to approach them in person. In addition, providing them with independent access to a tailored list of safeguarding resources can further support student empowerment.

When it comes to internet metering, sometimes it's best not to blanket ban everything, and instead use effective controls that can help monitor and educate students on positive digital behaviour.

Additionally, in the classroom, a student feedback mode is a great way for teachers to capture how students feel, their confidence in a topic and whether they need support – allowing teachers to take appropriate actions where needed. Using classroom management tools, teachers can also confidently teach children best practice on the use of social media (e.g. not sharing personal information, appropriate language, the ever-present risk of grooming and so on).

Where possible, schools should endeavour to engage parents in eSafety training to empower them with the knowledge and skills to support their children at home.

Supporting teachers

The ongoing census has revealed concerns over teacher workload, which is having a negative impact on their wellbeing. This is a universal issue and one schools must address if they are to continue to attract and employ great teachers.

Classroom technology is heavily embedded within education and, when used effectively, can make a real difference to both students and teachers in terms of saving time and boosting learning outcomes. But first, schools must ensure the technology they have is easy to use. It sounds simple, but so many teachers struggle to use technology effectively or simply lack confidence – which, in turn, causes them anxiety and stress. Schools can address this by, for example, using solutions that have graded user modes, making them more accessible – or, if the investment has already been made, create student digital leaders to help and support the teachers in their class.

Once the teacher is up and running, they can start to make the little gains that add up to a big win for teaching and learning in the classroom. For example, with the click of the mouse, they can push a specific website to every student's computer in the classroom, instead of wasting vital moments waiting for them all to get to the correct start point. Small time-saving measures such as this can soon add up!

Using online assessment tools that allow the teacher to design tests and examinations (including text, picture, audio and video questions) with minimum of effort, and monitor in real-time, progress and results achieved, will reduce manual workload and allow the teacher to instantaneously capture student understanding on a topic.