



Zeina Khlisha, 8, Jena Tawq, 8, and Kieren Vezela, 7, who are students at Arcadia Preparatory School in Dubai, are delighted they do not have to carry so many books. Reem Mohammed / The National

Dubai school eases students' burden with more tech and fewer books

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DUBAI // The sight of youngsters hauling enormous, overloaded backpacks to class each day is a thing of the past at one Dubai school after it decided to ease the daily burden by moving resources online.

From textbooks to PE kits and lunch boxes, pupils often have bags filled to the brim with equipment for lessons.

But, instead of piles of books, pupils at Arcadia Preparatory School in Jumeirah Village Triangle now carry a single iPad with all the information they need for lessons pre-loaded.

"We had parents tell us that their children were carrying a lot of books in their bags all day," said Kephren Sherry, deputy principal.

"Some were carrying more than one bag and when you consider they may also have their PE kits and lunch, then they can get pretty heavy.

"Carrying so much can have potential health issues on young children."

According to the American Academy of Paediatrics, a pupil's backpack should never weigh more than 10 to 20 per cent of the child's body weight and should be worn over both shoulders to avoid muscle strain.

The school decided that all textbooks would stay in class, with everything else the pupils needed stored on tablets.

"All our textbooks remain in school, so now children need to carry only exercise books along with snacks and water," said Ms Sherry.

"We also have homework sessions in school, which further reduces the need for books to be taken home."

The school is part of the Apple Distinguished Initiative, meaning it uses the company's products in class.

"Children have an iPad and the resources they need can be accessed through that," Ms Sherry said.

The school, which opened its doors in August, has 200 pupils aged between 3 and 9, although numbers will increase in coming years with the addition of a secondary school.

"It will be a challenge to adapt this system for older pupils because there will be three times as many books as the primary schoolchildren, but we're confident we can do it," she said.

The policy on carrying fewer books was popular with pupils.

"It makes things much easier for us," said 8-year-old Jema Tawq, from Canada.

"I still carry three to four books but it's fewer than at schools I was at before.

"It makes a big difference because I don't get tired carrying such a heavy bag and most of the stuff I need is on my iPad."

Kieren Vezela, 7, from the United Kingdom, hoped other schools would follow suit.

"Some friends of mine in other schools have to carry loads more books than me and they always say it's too heavy for them," Kieren said.

For Zeina Khlisa, 8, from Egypt, the change means she has more energy for her lessons.

"Before I was carrying three big books and the bag was a bit too heavy for me," Zeina said.

"But now it's much lighter and the lessons are a lot more fun."

Nine-year-old Joshua Thiga Heabon Smith, from Kenya, used to carry 15 books with him at all times at his previous school.

"Here it's one or two depending on which subject I have that day," Joshua said.

"I really like this system because I'm not always worried about making sure I haven't forgotten to bring a book to school that I need."

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