



Cayman Islands Education

Thematic School Visit Report 2022

A qualitative analysis of schools during the coronavirus Omicron variant September 2021 to April 2022.

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Preface

“The COVID-19 pandemic and the recent Omicron variant wave have dramatically impacted societies in all sectors and at all levels. After near universal school closures in March 2020 that affected 1.6 billion learners and more than 100 million teachers and educators worldwide, countries around the world have developed health and safety protocols in an effort to safely keep schools open and protect students, teachers, and other educational staff from the transmission of COVID-19. However, since the emergence of the Omicron variant in December 2021, these protocols have been disrupted and are being re-evaluated as schools struggle to address a new set of challenges marked by staff shortages, threats to school safety and political battles over health measures.”

(UNESCO, 2022, COVID-19 School Health and Safety Protocols: Good Practices and Lessons Learnt to Respond to Omicron.)

Whilst the Cayman Islands fared well in comparison to many other countries of the world, the coronavirus Omicron variant brought new challenges to the islands. Due to the arrival of this new strain of coronavirus towards the end of 2021, amid fears of increased community transmission, with ministerial and wider stakeholder support, the OES took the decision to postpone ‘full inspections’ in favour of a lighter touch and less pressured ‘thematic visit’ to all schools.

34 schools across the Cayman Islands had a thematic visit. This gathered observational information from an in-person school visit, a desk-based analysis of school documents and a survey of parents, teachers, and students. The thematic visit focused upon the recent COVID-19 pandemic related issues in two key areas of school life:

- Performance standard 6: **Leading and managing our school and developing links with the community we serve.**
- Performance standard 5: **Keeping our students safe and always supported.**

This focus was to ensure that schools were still safe places to learn, and that the well-being of students and staff was being addressed. In addition, we wanted to know how schools were being led through the most recent pandemic.



Methodology

In all the schools visited during the thematic visits, various categories of staff were given the opportunity to comment on Performance Standards 6 and 5 in their school during the pandemic. Additionally, the views of students, staff and parents were polled via online surveys ahead of the thematic visit.

Unlike full inspections, thematic visits did not assign grade judgements to the schools. The goal of a thematic analysis was to identify themes, i.e., patterns in the data that were important or interesting, and use these themes to address the research or say something about an issue. This is much more than simply summarising the data; a good thematic analysis interprets and makes sense of it. (Clarke and Braun. 2013)

A qualitative analysis considered the school report thematic visit statements by inspectors. The number of times a comment or phrase was used to describe school activity was recorded. This was referred to as an 'occurrence' and the analysis looked at the most common occurrences in each of the themed areas. The 'tree maps' presented show the qualitative findings and the occurrence value is proportional to the size of the 'tree map' boxes.

This report also analysed the responses from surveys that went to parents, students and school staff. Survey questions were grouped into theme areas and the percentage of *'agree/disagree/neither agree nor disagree'* responses were calculated and attributed to the relevant theme. The full survey results are available online at <https://www.oes.gov.ky/resource>.

COVID-Keepers

Schools were asked to identify and report changes in practices due to the pandemic, that had worked so well, that they were now seriously considering continuing the practice after the pandemic. These practices were referred to as 'COVID-Keepers'.

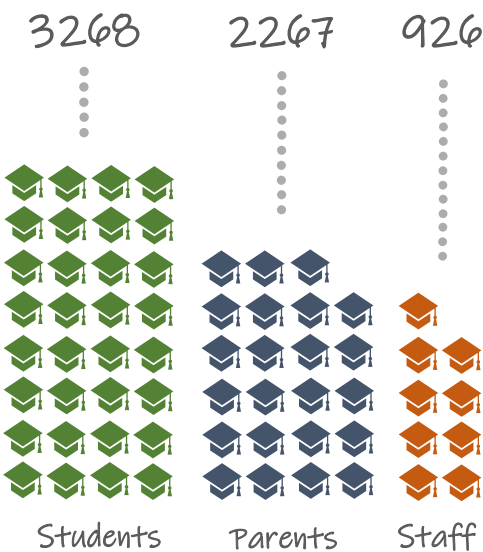


Context

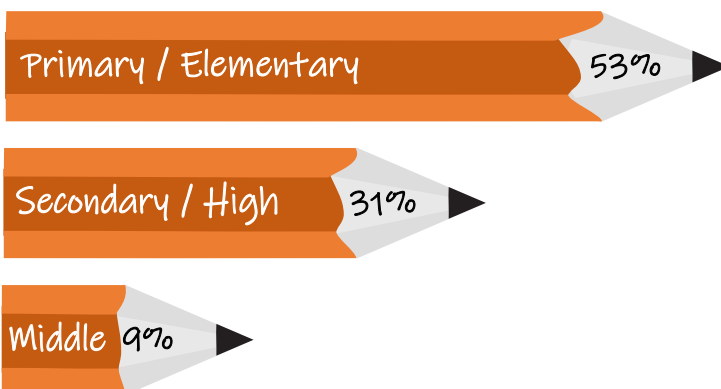
How many schools were visited?



How many took part in the survey?



Which phase of the school did teachers work at?



6. Leading and managing our school and developing our links with the community we serve

6.1 Leadership

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic tested the mettle, resilience and resolve of school leaders, teachers and students globally. Since the outbreak of the pandemic in the Cayman Islands in March 2020, school leaders had worked tirelessly to promote continuity of learning for all students in government and private schools delivering compulsory education. Consequently, school leaders had sought to evolve or adapt their management of the learning environment to mitigate the challenges to students’ learning presented by the pandemic and to create a safe and supportive environment for students and staff.

Table 1 shows the themes, relating to school leadership, that were most commonly referenced by school leaders and staff during the thematic visits.

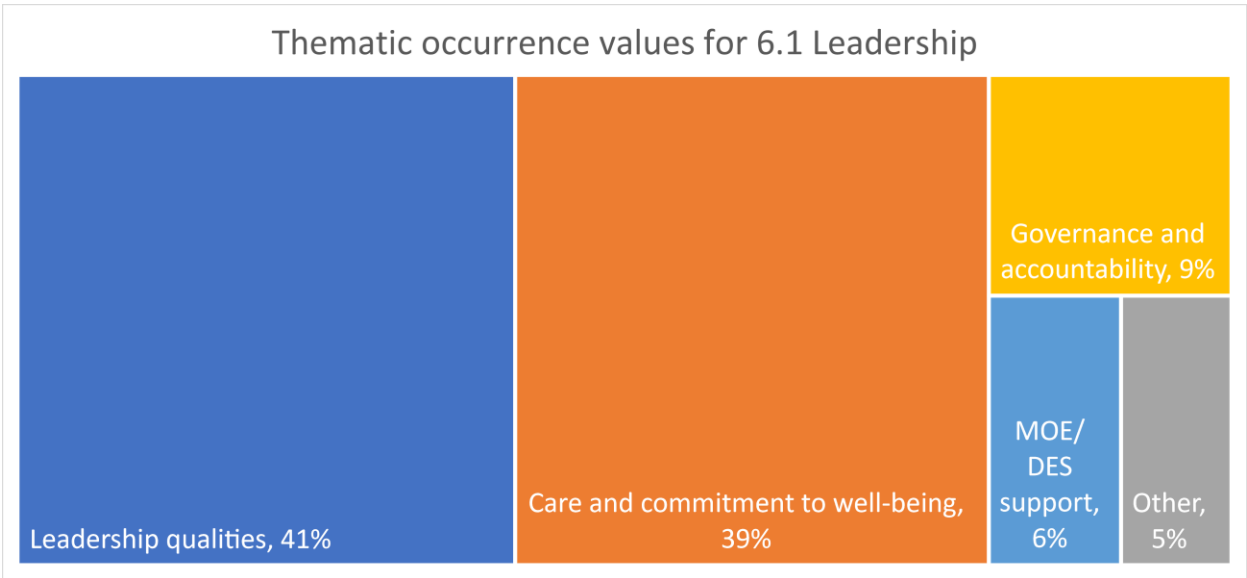


Table 1. Distribution of themes for 6.1 Leadership.

6.1.1 Leadership qualities

The Office of Education Standards’ Inspectors found that in discussions with school staff, the most commonly reported theme was leadership qualities (n=86). This theme was further broken down into four sub-themes (Figure 1); Professional competence; Setting direction; Focus upon standards; and Capacity to plan, anticipate and solve problems.

During the thematic visits, a number of teachers made highly positive comments about the professional competence demonstrated by school leaders during the pandemic. It was noteworthy, that across settings, staff expressed the view that most senior leaders had managed the changes brought on by the pandemic with a calm and measured approach. Notwithstanding this, there were instances where staff had complained about the quick pace at which changes were implemented and the ensuing costs to their own well-being.



Additionally, a few schools had experienced recent changes to headship. This impacted those schools' ability to respond appropriately and to quickly establish a team approach to the management of key challenges such as staffing during the pandemic. A number of senior leaders in a few government and private schools were recently appointed or in acting positions. Inspectors noted that where a distributed model of leadership was well-embedded in schools, this had promoted a partnership approach to managing the challenges to students' learning during the pandemic. In those schools where a distributed model of leadership was absent or underdeveloped, inspectors found that this impacted efficient team role allocation and an equitable distribution of responsibilities during the pandemic.

The thematic reports highlighted concerns by school leaders regarding the impact over time on teaching and learning given the levels of staff attrition during the pandemic. Furthermore, given the challenges to staff recruitment during the pandemic, there was increasing recognition of the need to focus upon the building of staff capacity and the mapping of progression pathways for classroom teachers and middle leaders as part of schools' succession planning strategies.

Although the impact of the pandemic upon individual schools in the Cayman Islands varied, the thematic reports reflected that for the most part, school leaders had maintained a clear focus upon standards. In the schools most impacted by the pandemic, senior leaders had sought to ensure that staff developed balanced teaching plans for continued curriculum progress and addressed any learning gaps. However, planning was variable both in practice and impact across settings.

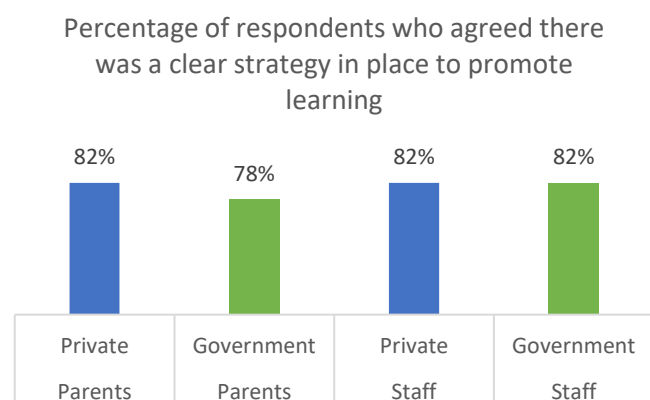


Figure 1. Staff and parent survey responses - Clear strategy.

Significantly, in response to the OES online survey most respondents agreed that there 'was a clear strategy in place to support students' learning'. Although, there was a small difference between the views of private and government school parents (Figure 1).

Notwithstanding, there were instances where some staff and senior leaders had expressed challenges promoting continuity for students while delivering blended learning.

Inspectors noted that in a number of settings, senior leaders had encouraged teachers to place particular emphasis upon cross curricular integration and differentiation to support continuity in learning and students' skill progression. Inspectors found that there was variation in this regard. Furthermore, in a number of schools, teachers had reported challenges in devising plans to meet the varied needs of students in face to face and online learning environments.

Inspectors noted that in a number of settings, senior leaders had encouraged teachers to

The policy and operational changes associated with managing the coronavirus pandemic at the national level had resulted in frequent changes at the school level. As a consequence, school leaders regularly had to recalibrate their management of the learning environment to ensure compliance with national guidelines while supporting continuity of learning for students. This meant managing communication with students, staff and parents regarding new guidelines, as well as developing and revising school policies and reporting practices as appropriate. Generally, staff and parents reported that school leaders had communicated clear expectations for learning, including online learning, during the pandemic. Overall,

the thematic reports reflected that senior leaders had provided a clear sense of direction during the pandemic and had implemented the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ministry of Health guidance with fidelity.

Senior leaders were generally responsive and agile in their management of the learning environment during the coronavirus pandemic. In many instances, they had to develop and implement innovative policies and procedures to manage the complexities associated with supporting students' well-being and continuity of learning. In a number of schools, staff reported that school leaders were forward thinking and had conducted in-depth risk analysis and COVID-19 scenario planning to mitigate the potential risks to learning.

In some schools, senior leaders had taken on the additional responsibilities of coordinating the logistics associated with lateral flow testing and reporting to allow staff to focus on teaching and learning activities. During the thematic visits, a number of teachers had made positive comments about the capacity of senior leaders to plan, anticipate and solve problems.

6.1.2 Care and commitment to well-being

This theme was the second most common (n=81) within school leadership and comprised four sub themes as outlined in Figure 2.

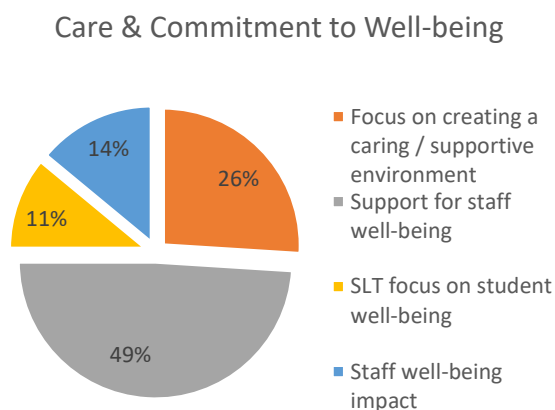


Figure 2. Sub-themes for Care and Commitment.

In several reports staff had described a 'family environment' in their school. In a number of schools, leaders had carefully coordinated arrangements to track, monitor and report on students' health, well-being and progress. However, the results of the surveys indicated a significant degree of variability between the responses for parents, teachers and students regarding well-being.

The thematic reports also indicated that school leaders had devised a range of strategies to support students with additional learning needs. These strategies had included multi-agency partnerships and input from service providers to ensure the delivery of appropriate interventions and support for students with additional learning needs. Nonetheless, the loss of specialist staff during the pandemic had at times adversely impacted support for students with additional learning needs.

Although school leaders had placed a focus upon staff well-being, a number of staff interviewed had reported feeling overwhelmed and fatigued due to the additional roles and responsibilities they undertook during the pandemic. Notwithstanding, many school leaders reported they had devised a

Mental health and emotional well-being had become a growing global concern during the coronavirus pandemic, not just for students but also staff. The thematic visit reports regularly documented examples of the increased focus that senior leaders had placed upon creating a caring and supportive environment, particularly the mental health and emotional well-being of students and staff. During the thematic visits, staff in a number of schools had reported that leaders had placed emphasis on promoting a supportive environment for students and

range of strategies to mitigate fatigue and burn out among staff. These included social events such as staff fairs, 'Coffee and Conversation Days', staff outings and dinners. Of note, one school had introduced a wellness allowance as part of the school's strategy to promote staff well-being during the pandemic. Not all private schools had updated their Human Resources Policy to appropriately reflect COVID-19 related sick pay arrangements.

Partnerships with external providers such as the Employee Assistance Programme were also used to support staff well-being. In a number of schools, staff had expressed appreciation for the support provided by senior leaders. For example, they had reported that a number of senior leaders, despite their administrative responsibilities, had provided regular cover for a number of classes. Other staff had expressed that throughout the pandemic senior leaders had promoted flexible arrangements to lessen the workload of teachers.

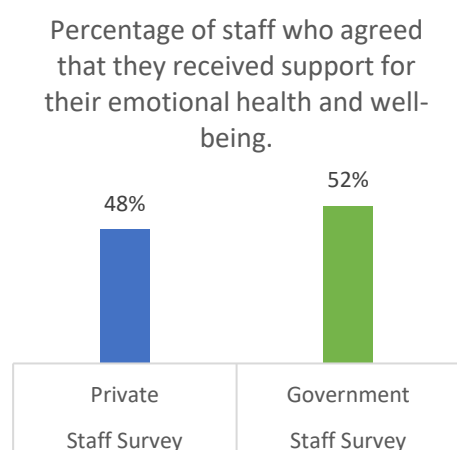


Figure 3. Staff survey response - support for mental health and well-being.

However, despite such efforts, a number of staff had expressed that they were exhausted, and a few had suggested that the current arrangements for staff cover were unsustainable in the long term. In a number of schools, staff had reported that their non-contact time had reduced or was non-existent. This was largely attributed to the increased supervision responsibilities associated with COVID-19 precautions such as the use of cover and year group bubble systems or staggered lunch breaks. Significantly, staff responses (Figure 3) to the OES online survey indicated that only 48% of those in private schools and 52% of government school staff agreed that they had received help for their emotional well-being during the pandemic.

Although in some schools a partnership approach to mental health and emotional well-being was evolving, there was variability in practice and impact. For example, a few schools had developed increased mental health resilience focus with maxims such as "come back stronger and better". There was, however, scope for the development of a coherent whole school mental health and well-being strategy that involved students, teachers, parents, service providers and community agencies. Given the number of issues relating to mental health and emotional well-being of staff and students that arose during the pandemic there was a clear imperative for further analysis and review.

6.1.3 Governance & accountability

The theme of governance and accountability was the third most common occurring theme. This theme was further divided into three sub themes (Figure 4). Throughout the pandemic, the Department of Education Services, the Ministry of Education and various Boards of Governors had provided a degree of oversight and guidance to schools. During the thematic visit, senior leaders in government schools reported that the Department of Education Services held them to account for

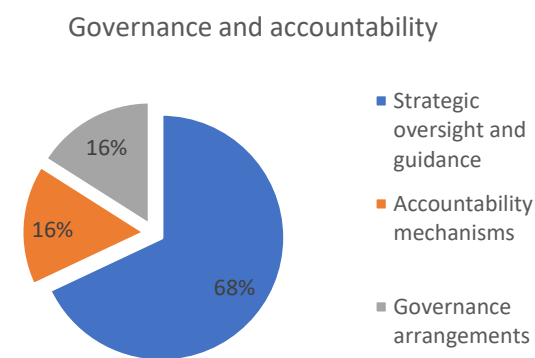


Figure 4. Distribution of sub-themes for governance & accountability.



standards and quality of safe provision through monthly reports and regular meetings. Similarly, inspectors noted that in those private schools where governance arrangements were robust, advisory boards held school leaders to account for the quality and safety of education. Although most Boards of Governors for private schools had continued quality assurance arrangements, these arrangements were adapted to meet the demands of the pandemic. For example, in many instances in-person board meetings were discontinued in favour of 'online' meetings. A number of school boards were proactive in delegating additional budgetary autonomy to school leaders regarding decisions of staffing and logistics. This was to better promote continued learning within the new COVID-19 environment. During the thematic visits, Inspectors noted variation in governance arrangements in private schools.

6.1.4 Support from the Ministry of Education/ Department of Education Services

Following the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic the Ministry of Education had developed guidance documents and policies including remote learning and scenario planning which were disseminated to government and private schools. Consequently, Inspectors noted some degree of consistency and expediency in the adoption of new policies and procedures around health and safety and the management of new learning environments.

The Department of Education Services' focus upon the development of professional learning communities had created opportunities for school leaders in government schools to build and extend professional networks. Some senior leaders in government schools highlighted the support and guidance provided by the Senior School Improvement Officers during the pandemic. For instance, with their support, several school leaders had begun to strengthen collaborative and useful partnerships with other schools.

Although the distribution of lateral flow kits to schools took time to develop efficiency and re-packaging by schools was widely reported as onerous, a number of leaders had expressed appreciation to personnel in both the MOE and DES for the supply and coordination of the lateral flow testing kits.

School leaders across private and public settings had indicated that there was some confusion regarding reporting on student attendance during the pandemic. They had requested greater clarity from the Ministry of Education and the Department of Education Services regarding specific attendance codes for students given the variance in isolation and quarantine arrangements and the frequent changes to those protocols. Additionally, in a few schools, staff had expressed concerns regarding the length of time it took the Department of Education Services to provide supply teachers to cover staff absences.

Notably, during the pandemic, the Cayman Islands Government had reinstated the financial grant to private schools. During the thematic visits, representatives of a number of Boards of Governors as well as leaders in private schools, had expressed appreciation to the CIG for the grant reinstatement. This was viewed as timely as many schools were faced with mounting expenses particularly to ensure health and sanitation protocols were consistent and robust.



6.2 Self-evaluation and improvement planning

The onset of the coronavirus pandemic meant that schools had to re-consider their self-evaluation and improvement planning within a new learning environment. Schools were moving between delivering face to face, remote, and even hybrid systems of learning that required ongoing evaluation and analysis.

Although senior leaders were aware of the need to monitor, evaluate and plan in response to the changing learning environment, their ability to do so varied. In many cases they were doing so highly effectively, but because some senior leaders were busy undertaking teaching-related tasks principals expressed that they did not always have the administrative time to maintain all relevant documents appropriately.

Table 2 shows the themes, relating to school self-evaluation and improvement planning, that were the most commonly referenced by school leaders and staff during the thematic visits.

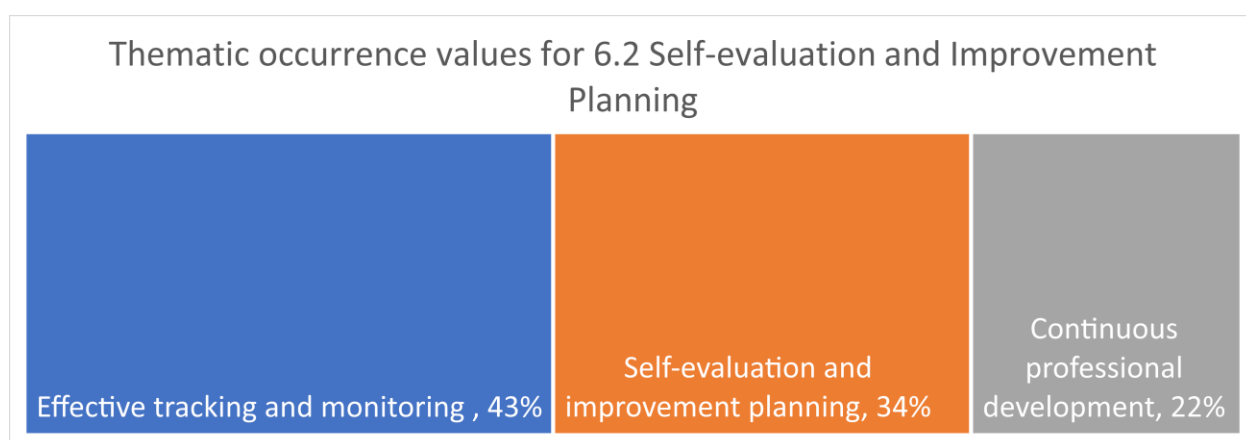


Table 2. Distribution of themes for 6.2 Self-evaluation and Improvement Planning.

6.2.1 Monitoring of progress and learning

The most common theme discussed by leaders was that of the effective monitoring of students' progress and learning during the pandemic (n=29). Schools reported positively, recognising the importance of ensuring senior leaders, heads of department and staff remained 'knowledgeable' of students' progress in core subjects. There were examples whereby heads of departments were developing teaching plans that continued curriculum progress while re-teaching to bridge any gaps. In some schools, student workbooks demonstrated that progress was being tracked and monitored by staff and senior leaders, although this was variable across schools and subjects. Fewer schools were allocating continuous professional development time to specific data analysis during the pandemic. In a few cases schools had involved specialist services, such as the Educational Psychologist, in tracking and monitoring students' well-being alongside academic progress.

Inspectors reported that learning loss was variable across the schools. Where schools had been successful in maintaining progress, this was often due to strategic planning and increased focus on learners' strengths and addressing new challenges. Where learning loss was evident, inspection comments

suggested this was attributed to the variability of moving in and out of isolation and remote learning, resulting in some schools and students being in a constant state of ‘catch-up’.

Some senior leaders had managed to continue with the practices of walk-throughs, work scrutiny and lesson observations, although the focus had often shifted to ensuring staff and students were able to access remote learning appropriately, and also that COVID-19 protocols were being adhered to in classes.

In fewer cases, inspectors commented that monitoring and tracking had been postponed due to COVID-19. There were examples of postponements of data collection and review as with the delay in CXC results adding pressure to the post-16 allocation of students for CIFE and UCCI (Dual Entry).

6.2.2 Self-evaluation (SEF), school improvement and other planning documentation (SIP)

Schools (n=23) were able to produce some documentation, but these were at very different stages of completion, often as a result of the variable impact of the virus upon individual schools. The most common element was the incomplete school improvement plan.

Inspectors noted that documentation was not as current as it would normally be at this time in the academic cycle, often caused by the need for leaders to cover for absent staff. In some cases, targets and issues within the SEF and SIP were being adequately addressed in the schools ‘on the ground’ but the written evidence was not yet available due to pandemic constraints.

Percentage of stakeholders that agree they were involved in the writing of the SEF			
	Private schools	Government schools	All schools
Staff	66%	73%	70%
Students	55%	56%	53%
Parents	51%	53%	51%

Table 3. Survey responses - SEF and SIP stakeholder involvement.

Inspectors further commented that a few schools had managed to involve all senior leaders in the writing of their SEF and SIP during the pandemic, although advisory boards or their equivalent were not always a part of the process. When asked if they felt included and involved in the writing of the school’s self-evaluation, surveys showed that staff felt more involved than students and parents (Table 3).

All stakeholders reported feeling marginally more involved in government schools than in their private counterparts.

6.2.3 Continuous professional development (CPD)

Throughout the pandemic, school leaders had continued to prioritise professional development for staff. In a number of schools, leaders reported that as part of their COVID-19 response strategy, they had placed appropriate focus upon relevant professional development for staff. While most school leaders indicated that professional development had continued during the pandemic, this was largely scaled towards addressing emerging issues from the pandemic.

A number of schools had ensured staff were upskilled in technological aspects by accessing professional development from external facilitators. It was more common that schools utilised their own expertise within the staff to train peers and colleagues. It was further commented that staff had produced a range of instructional videos that were devised to support staff, parents and students accessing and using the remote learning environment. Online training had been cited as particularly successful in some cases and would be maintained post-pandemic. Other schools had responded to the pandemic by making CPD highly individualised to each member of staff, citing cases of staff following individual online courses.



Exceptionally, one CPD coordinator had devised a system of matching the school's, staff and performance management needs to precisely individualised training.

In response to the OES online surveys, 72% and 67% respectively of staff in private and government schools reported that they had received appropriate training and resources to be able to effectively deliver teaching during the pandemic. Given the daily challenges to leadership and management during the pandemic, schools had not yet devised formal arrangements to fully evaluate the effectiveness of professional training conducted during the pandemic on standards and teachers' practice.



6.3 Links with parents and the community

Table 4 shows the themes relating to links with parents and the community, that were the most commonly referred to by inspectors, as a result of the thematic visit.

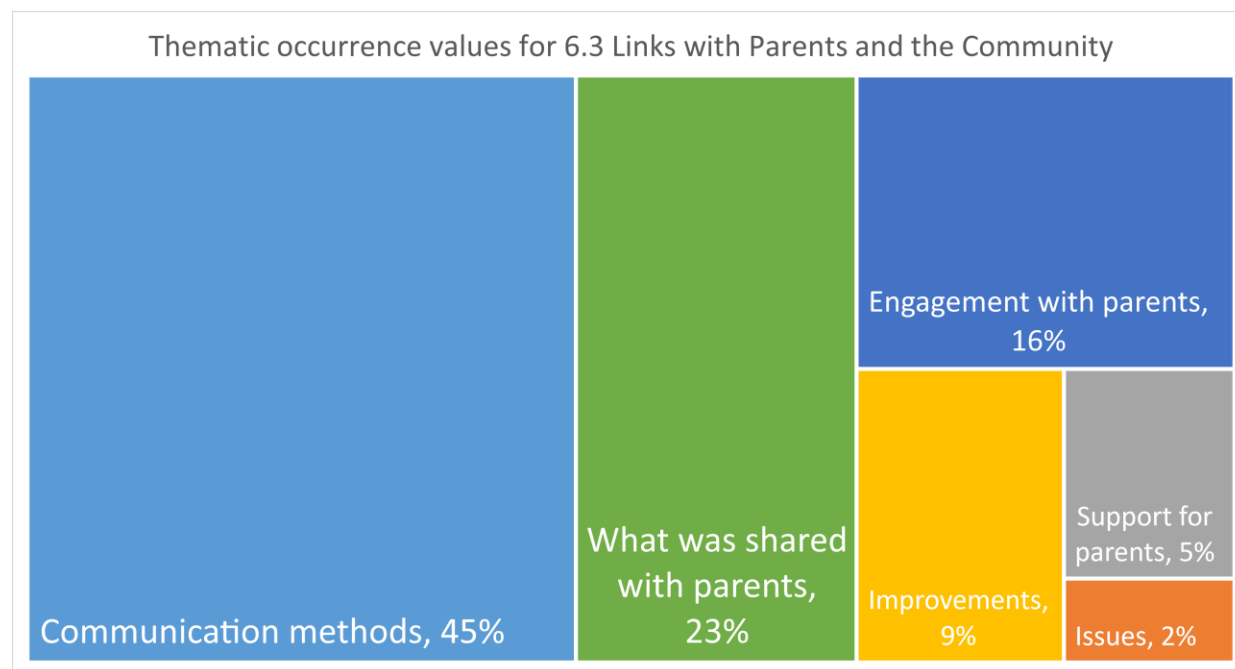


Table 4. Distribution of themes for 6.3 Links with parents & the community.

6.3.1 Engagement and support for parents

Schools continued to engage and support parents during the pandemic. Schools engaged with parents about both the learning of their children and the COVID-19 related issues (n=23). Inspectors noted that in a few cases (n=4) there were issues with a lack of parental engagement, or staff found it difficult to remotely support parents. Schools supported parents in a variety of areas from attendance issues, accessing online systems, parent IT skills, academic support for literacy and numeracy and the continued specialist support services.

6.3.2 What was shared with parents?

The most common area that schools shared with parents was found to be the issue regarding COVID-19 and Lateral Flow Testing (n=18). Despite the pandemic, school/parent communication continued to be about the sharing of student progress (n=12) and well-being (n=8). Other areas shared were online learning, mainly about the applications, transition to the next stage of education, the school's COVID-19 strategy and specialist support services.

6.3.3 Communication methods

A wide range of communication methods were reported to inspectors during the thematic visits (Table 5) with many individual schools using multiple methods. Face to face conversations gave way to other methods. School websites were not always kept up to date. Schools did keep a number of traditional methods of communication like email, telephone and newsletter but also used more digital methods such as WhatsApp or other social media. As schools had been preparing for the potential to utilise remote learning many had begun to communicate with parents via online learning platforms like 'Seesaw'. Regular inspector comments, supported by over 90% in parental and staff surveys, stated that parent evenings or conferences had positively moved online utilising applications like Zoom and Google Meet. There were informal and planned opportunities for reporting progress to parents including online parent conferences which had become an increasingly popular form of parent academic communication.

Communication methods used by schools	Occurrence (n=)
Online parent evenings	18
Email	17
Online learning platforms	15
WhatsApp	13
Newsletter	11
Phone calls	10
Social Media	3
Chats	2
Website	1

Table 5. Range of communication methods during COVID-19.

6.3.4 Improvement

Over half of the comments reported that there had been improvements with the engagement with parents as a result of the pandemic. Schools reported that the relationship quality had improved, some parent attendance had improved, and online parents' evenings had provided parental choice and flexibility for both parties.



6.4 Staffing and the learning environment

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a dramatic change in the learning environment as traditionally perceived and understood. The conventional ‘school-based’ environment was supplemented, and even temporarily replaced, by a new ‘remote learning environment’ with education being delivered and received through a range of digital formats. This remote learning environment looked different across the schools, with strategies including hybrid systems whereby schools delivered lessons through a blend of class-based and remote learning. Some schools had chosen to supplement delivery with additional work placed on online platforms, or by hard copies of work sent home to students not able to attend school. The strategies chosen by schools were dictated by several factors, including staff availability, student absence, hardware accessibility and connectivity of internet both at school and at home.

Table 6 shows the themes, relating to Staffing and the learning environment, that were the most commonly referenced by school leaders and staff during the thematic visits.

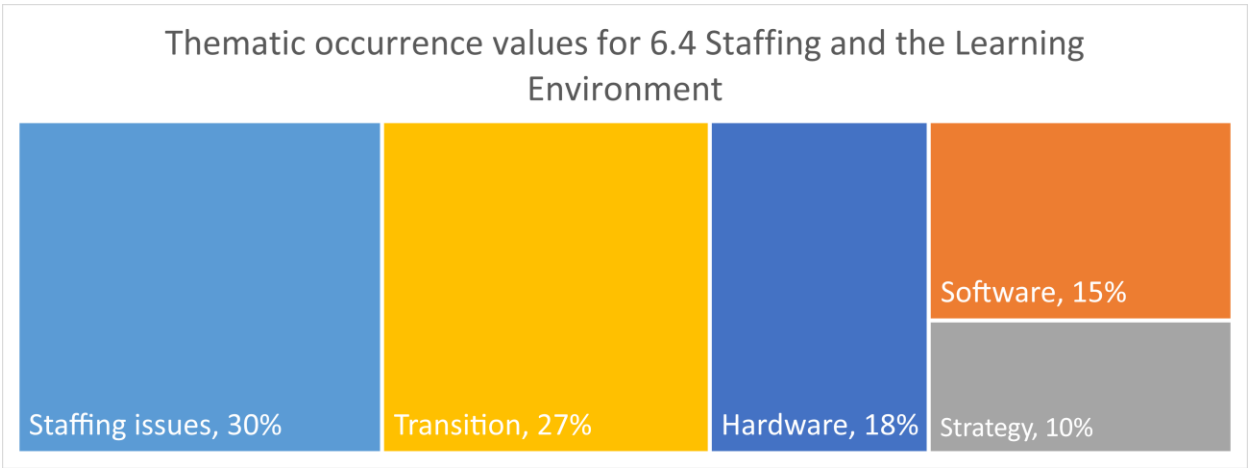


Table 6. Distribution of themes for 6.4 Staffing and the Learning Environment.

With respect to the changing learning environment enforced by the COVID-19 pandemic, inspectors’ comments were generally positive regarding the schools’ responses, although there were some notable exceptions.

6.4.1 Strategy

Inspectors highlighted that schools had used a range of strategies to deliver education within the remote learning environment, both synchronously (live) and asynchronously (not live). Many of the inspectors’ comments referred to the hybrid systems that were being delivered across the schools. Several schools found the hybrid version of delivery so successful that they mooted they would maintain the practice post-COVID. Some schools had uploaded resources onto shared platforms like Blackbaud, whilst other schools preferred to provide additional support in the form of paper-based resources. Schools employed differing strategies for learning, with several schools preferring to communicate with students on an individual ‘live’ basis, while the rest of the class accessed pre-recorded work.

Inspectors consistently commented upon schools’ commitment to supporting students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), although staffing constraints occasionally meant smaller SEND



and intervention groups could not always be accommodated (n=5). Some schools reported producing additional resources, in the form of paper-based and online SEN support.

6.4.2 Transition

Transition to a remote learning environment had been swift across the Cayman Islands and may have benefited from the initial lockdown and distance learning experience and analysis. The transition from 'traditional' to the new remote learning environment was significant, and inspectors found that, in general, schools had facilitated the process positively across many areas. (n=63). Figure 5 highlights the positive balance of comments with respect to how schools transitioned into a new learning environment, be it fully remote or hybrid. Some (n=10) comments referred to difficulties in initially setting up a remote learning environment and transitioning to it, with some schools still waiting on the procurement of additional equipment.

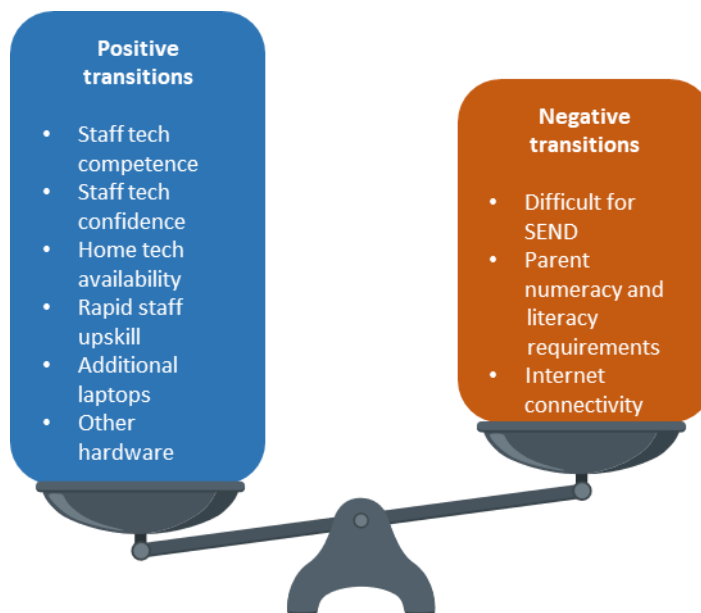


Figure 5. Transitioning to a more remote learning environment.

6.4.3 Hardware

In general hardware appeared in two forms, 1) Items/devices students used to access and participate in any remote learning environment, and 2) the infrastructure a school used to ensure all students were able to participate in a remote learning setting. Some schools reported having started implementing remote learning environments in various guises before any form of lockdown was imposed. In these cases, schools had started to use interactive communications with students via platforms such as 'Google Meet' or 'Zoom', with a number of students, particularly in the private schools, already having devices such as laptops or tablets.

Many comments referred to the government schools' appreciation of the free laptop scheme administered by the Ministry of Education, that had enabled so many students to access the remote learning environment, although several schools voiced the opinion that repairs and replacements took a long time to fulfil. Similar appreciation was expressed within the private sector, whereby the reinstatement of the private school financial grant had aided in the facilitation of the purchasing of hardware to support the remote learning environment.

During the pandemic, student access to remote learning was generally accepted as being a strength and inspectors did comment on specific aspects, such as gamification, as being of particular potential benefit. However, some connectivity issues both at school, and in student homes had sometimes hindered the effective delivery of, and access to, remote learning.

'I have the appropriate IT resources at home to do my lessons remotely, if needed'			
	Private Schools	Government Schools	All Schools
Agree	79%	85%	82%
Neither agree nor disagree	16%	11%	14%
Disagree	5%	4%	4%

Table 7. Student survey response - Appropriate IT resources at home.

Government schools reported a higher level of agreement that their students had the appropriate IT resources at home than private schools (Table 7). There was no discernible difference between the responses of parents of students (Table 8) at government and private schools as to whether the school had given them sufficient guidance to ensure they were able to support their child in remote learning. The survey showed 86% of parents overall felt supported by the school. Many inspectors' comments referred to an increase in staff confidence and competence in all technological aspects of moving towards a remote learning environment. A significant number of inspector comments referred to the benefits of ensuring all students had access to a digital device. 82% of students agreed that they had appropriate IT resources at home to access remote learning.

'The school has given me sufficient guidance to support my child's learning during the pandemic'			
	Private Schools	Government Schools	All Schools
Agree	87%	86%	86%
Disagree	13%	14%	14%

Table 8. Parent survey response - Sufficient guidance to support my child's learning.

Inspectors commented schools within the government sector had reported the free laptop scheme as having, 'changed the face of education'. Inspectors reported that, in government and private schools alike, access to digital devices had given students ownership of their own learning, increased their research skills as well as their generic technological skills. Devices were used both in and out of the classrooms and were constantly preparing them for any subsequent transition to some form of remote learning environment, be it fully remote or hybrid in nature. The laptops were reported as being integral in the support of remote learning and were producing 'accelerated digital literacy' amongst students.

Laptops had provided support to a range of diverse learners and had enabled continued curriculum coverage during the pandemic. Some schools were using IT staff to ensure all stakeholders were being constantly upskilled. Some staff reported that there was a need for an ongoing digital plan to ensure optimisation of learning opportunities in remote learning environments. They also recognised the value of giving teaching assistants laptops so they can continue to support all aspects of learning, including remote learning.

Some government schools experienced a number of teething problems. Inspectors noted difficulties in the pace of addressing maintenance issues, a need to upskill some stakeholders to ensure access to remote learning and also a requirement for more robust cases to protect the devices. Furthermore, several schools reported the need for the installation of firewalls, security software and the disabling of certain features in Microsoft Teams on students' devices to meet cybersafe requirements. Some IT staff in government schools reported that as the laptops were free, not all students looked after them as they would their own. Resulting in a disproportionate number of damages or losses, such as broken screens or



lost chargers. When discussing connectivity issues, there were a number of schools that had occasional problems with reliability and connection to the internet. Some schools had sought to upgrade their internet access and in a few reported cases, schools had supported families at home with 'MiFi' packages that enabled students to access remote learning.

6.4.4 Software

Variety of platforms and applications reported in use by schools			
100% Maths	Abeka	Action for Happiness	Aim Higher
Blooket	BlackBaud	Century/Nugget AI	Class Dojo
Collins Connect	Class Marker	Dr Frost Maths	Dropbox
E-Praise	Edshed	Embark	Epic
Everest	Facebook	FACTS	Freckle
Generation Genius	Geobra	Google Classroom	Google Docs
Google Meet	Hamilton Trust	IXL	Let's go learn
Live worksheets	Math Marathon	Mathletics	Maths Rocks
Microsoft Teams	Mixcraft	MyiMath	Nearpod
Oak Academy	Oxford Owl	Power Maths	Praxi
Purple Mash	Quizzizz	Read Theory	Read Works
Seesaw	Timetable Rockstars	Transparent Classroom	Weebly
WhatsApp	White Rose	Zoom	

Table 9. Platform and application list reported by schools.

Inspectors made numerous comments regarding the vast array of platforms and applications that had been used by schools to support their remote learning environments. The term applications covered a wide range of online tools, resources and systems; Learning Management Systems (LMS), Management Information Systems (MIS), communication tools, Virtual Learning Environments (VLE), classroom management tools, online storage, subject specific resources and gamification tools. (Table 9). The majority of comments regarding the use of platforms and applications were extremely positive. Inspectors noted that schools had started to rationalise and standardise the vast number of applications across their school. Some schools reported that online software for conferencing and external meetings with professionals had been so successful they cited the practice as a 'COVID-Keeper' that they would continue 'post pandemic'. Some government schools found issues with having the management of applications centrally organised.

6.4.5 Staffing issues

Throughout the thematic visits, inspectors commented upon the fluctuating fortunes of schools with respect to all aspects of staffing including recruitment, retention, restructuring and support from external agencies. Schools made every effort to cover all sessions with appropriate staff, although this was not always possible. Inspectors highlighted that some schools spoke candidly about the effects of the pandemic on staff availability and/or subsequent insufficient staff, that resulted in some sessions, typically small group SEND, or intervention group sessions not always being delivered.

It was normal practice for senior leaders, including Principals, to cover for absent colleagues in the classroom, although this often meant that other administrative tasks had to be sacrificed or postponed. Inspectors highlighted that effective covering for absent colleagues was often more difficult in smaller



schools. The smaller schools had fewer resources to draw upon and thus it was not unusual for these schools to report such a situation as being unsustainable.

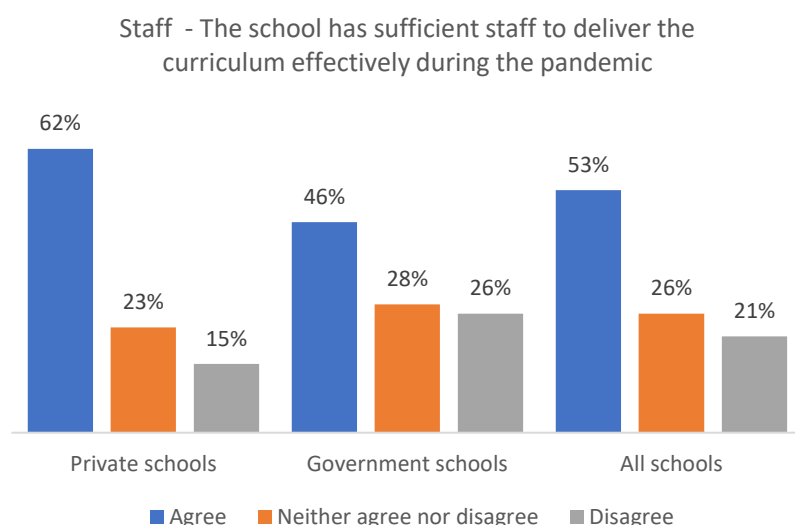


Figure 6. Staff survey response - The school has sufficient staff to deliver the curriculum effectively.

Whilst inspectors' comments generally reflected a positive trend with respect to schools responding to the changing learning environment, there were cases in which schools had struggled to deliver to the desired levels. Notably (Figure 6, in the staff surveys, only 53% of all responses felt schools had sufficient staff to cover the curriculum effectively, with 62% of private school staff feeling there were sufficient staff against only 46% of government school staff.

There was a considerable appreciation for the commitment, and quality of the delivery from all staff, including the teaching assistants, when they were required to step up and cover for absent teachers. A few inspector comments noted that a number of teaching assistants held qualified teacher status, and this supported the quality of delivery. Teaching assistants were routinely included in professional development events to ensure they were appropriately upskilled.

It was accepted practice in nearly all schools, that staff absent due to COVID-19 would deliver their lessons remotely if fit enough to do so. In a very few cases, inspectors commented that staff felt some form of moral duty to teach remotely even when they were clearly suffering with the virus. It was unclear if the 'moral obligation' had been initiated by senior leaders, or by the individual themselves.

Schools had foreseen potential issues with staff absence due to COVID-19 and many schools, particularly in the private sector, had hired additional staff to provide suitable cover. Schools had taken on supply staff on full-time contracts, additional executive officers and appointed some middle leaders. Private schools had looked to external agencies to appoint staff and they reported that access to speech therapists and educational psychologists remained possible throughout the pandemic. Some schools had their preferred 'go-to' supply staff, but others voiced concerns that there were insufficient supply teachers available to meet demands. Furthermore, inspectors commented that schools were requiring additional counselling support staff.

Some schools (n=15) reported that recruitment was ongoing, despite the pandemic while others were finding it more difficult to attract staff. Schools (n=6) reported difficulties associated with 'on-boarding' some staff and getting them fully established at school. Inspectors commented that nearly all schools had increased the number of security staff, and particularly cleaning staff to ensure that COVID-19 protocols were being adhered to and schools kept clean.

In a few schools, inspectors commented on an increase in enrolment. This was attributed to the pandemic in that families were less inclined to send young people abroad for education and preferred to remain on the Islands. Comments referred to schools' redeployment of other staff around the school until they were able to appoint new staff. In a few instances, government school staff raised concern regarding the time it took for DES to deploy supply staff.

Staff absence affected learning and delivery both in the school and remotely. When addressing the aspect of remote learning, some schools were reported as having comprehensive cover systems, which were tested, in one case, with as many as 22 teachers being absent at any one time. Nearly all inspectors commented on schools' staff being required to cover for COVID-19 related absences. It was noted that such cover was undertaken willingly and demonstrated considerable commitment. Inspectors found that staff were sometimes prepared to deliver remote learning from home, even when they felt unwell. Inspectors consistently highlighted the pressures and stresses that the pandemic had created in all schools. Staff's commitment and efforts were beyond question, but some school comments addressed the issue of staff exhaustion, fatigue and 'burn out'. Further insight from the staff survey responses raises additional concerns with only 65% of staff suggesting that they felt optimistic about the future and only 52% of government and 48% of private schools staff agreed that they had received support for their mental health and well-being. It was further noted that even in the schools where staff cover was not as significant as in their colleague's schools, long term sustainability of staff absence was a potential problem. Senior leaders, and governing bodies, readily acknowledged the need for additional resource to support covering staff.



5. Keeping our students safe and always supported

5.1 Health and safety

Table 10 shows which areas, relating to health and safety, were the most commonly referred to by inspectors, as a result of the thematic visits.

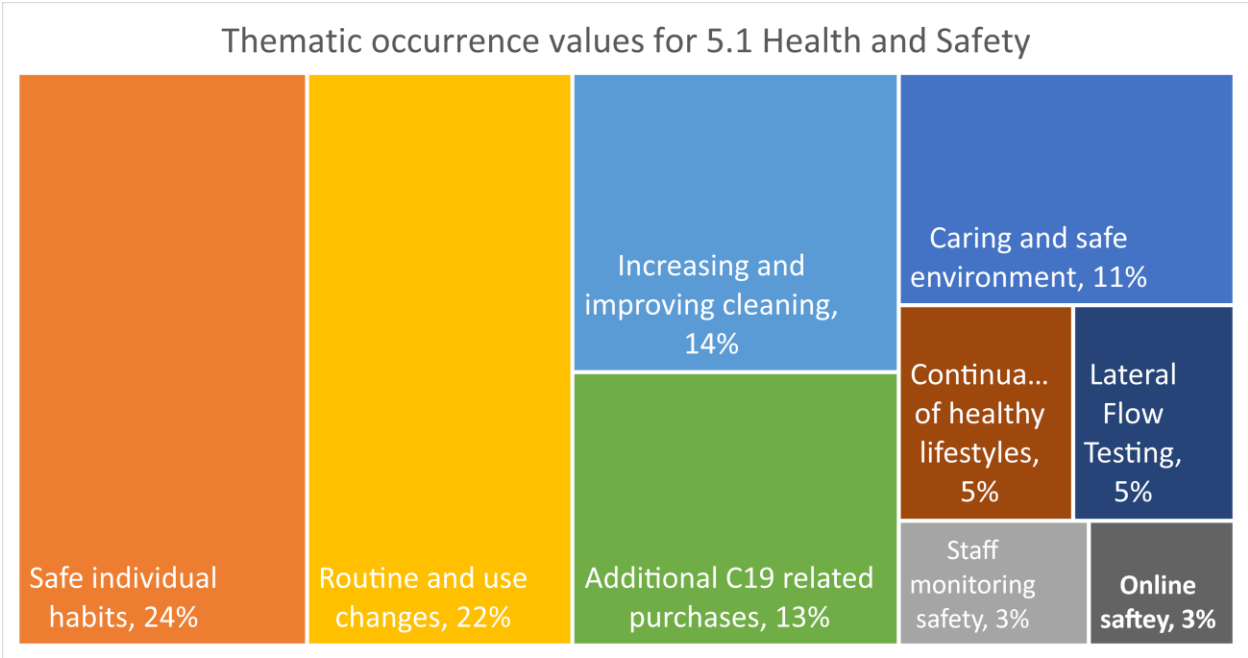


Table 10. Distribution of themes for 5.1 Health and Safety.

5.1.1 Safe and caring environment

In general, schools had created a safe and caring environment in which students' learning could continue even if at times this meant moving to a more online environment. All schools visited were found to be following the MOE COVID-19 guidelines and some (n=7) had gone further and produced key Health and Safety policies of their own. Bus transportation protocol was

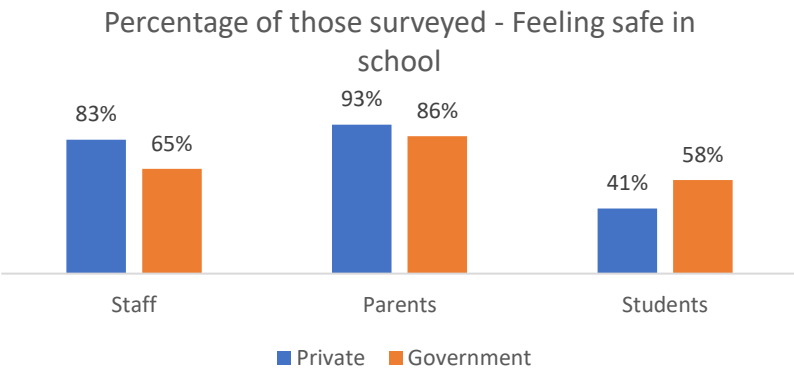


Figure 7. Survey response - Feeling safe in school.

also found to be in line with COVID-19 guidelines. However, survey responses suggested that not everyone always felt safe in these new school environments, further highlighting some differences between Private and Government school responses and between adults and students (Figure 7). In government schools fewer parents and staff surveyed reported school as safe or feeling safe in school. Conversely, in private schools fewer students surveyed reported feeling safe whilst in their school.



5.1.2 Safe individual COVID-19 habits

Students were active participants in creating a safe environment with the correct wearing of masks, cleaning of hands and observing the required social distancing. These three sub-themes are summarised in Table 11. Hands were regularly sanitised and/or washed particularly when entering the school or the classroom with some schools providing additional outside hand washing basins. This view was supported by student survey data that suggested 93% understood the COVID-19 safety requirements at their school. Although, on occasion this was not always adhered to by students with survey data showing that only 58% of students felt that ‘staff and students always followed the COVID-19 safety guidelines.’

Safe individual COVID-19 habits

	Embedded (n=)	Not fully embedded (n=)
<i>Mask wearing</i>	32	4
<i>Hand cleaning</i>	37	0
<i>Social distancing</i>	36	5

Table 11. Safe individual habits.

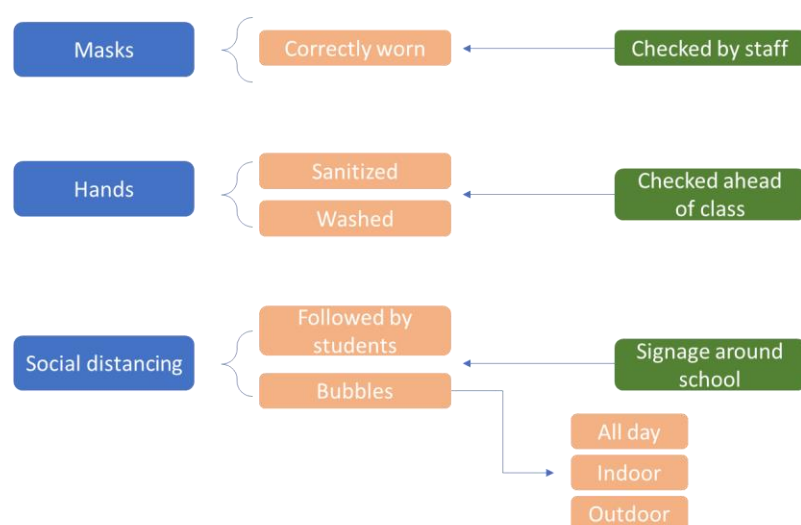


Figure 8. Monitoring of safe habits.

Social distancing was generally observed, with schools providing signs as a form of reminder for students when lined up. For instance, some schools marked places on the floor showing where to stand when waiting to go into class and in the school canteen, seating was often signposted where a person could safely sit keeping the required social distance. Additionally, some (n=13) operated a bubble system where students would stay in class/year groups, some schools did this all through the day (n=17) whilst others only did this for indoor activity or breaktime.

Staff also played their role in monitoring these newly created safe spaces and protocols. (Figure 8) Teachers checked mask wearing or the sanitising of hands ahead of lessons. Security staff were often found to be supportive, for instance, checking temperatures of students prior to entering the school.

5.1.3 Increasing and improving cleaning

The approach to keeping schools ‘COVID clean’ was to increase and bring in new types of cleaning. During the ‘thematic visits’ new terms like ‘static’, ‘deep’ and ‘fogging’ were regularly used when referring to more stringent COVID-19 health protocols for cleaning. School budgets increased to clean more regularly, to purchase more supplies and occasionally hire more cleaners. Sometimes the schools asked students and teachers to clean their desks after use (n=9).

Schools had daily cleaning routines with reference being made to specific high-touch points like doors and bathrooms, manipulatives used by younger children were washed in Milton Solution. Regular ‘fogging’ or



‘static’ cleaning was often scheduled for weekends or term breaks. Schools also provided deep cleaning after a positive COVID-19 case in the school ahead of students returning to classes.

5.1.4 Additional COVID-19 related purchases

One of the most common additional items purchased by all schools was that of the hand sanitiser dispensers which were strategically placed around the school site, normally at entrances to buildings and/or classrooms. A number of schools also provided individual hand sanitiser in classrooms. Almost all schools that had water fountains (n=10) had turned them off to limit the number of transmission points around the school. These were often replaced with other water dispensers like bottle filling stations or bottled water coolers. Some schools purchased outdoor hand wash basins with disposable paper towels whilst others upgraded HVAC systems with air purifiers and fresh air intakes (n=7). Schools also carried spare mask stocks to be used for student loss and breakage.

5.1.5 Routine and use changes

In order to meet the requirements of health and safety and to keep schools functioning as places of learning, a number of changes were made to school routines and the use of the spaces on site. Table 12 shows the 3 key areas that schools altered (bullets are in rank order).

N=32	N=18	N=21
Getting into and leaving school	The learning environment	Lunchtime and break
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bespoke entry and exit systems Designated pick and drop off points for parents One-way routes around the school Limiting parents and visitors onto the school site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater use of available outdoor space Socially distanced classrooms Individual student resources in classes Splitting of classes 50/50 return model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staggered meal times Eating in classrooms Eating outside when possible Takeaway meal system across the school

Table 12. Three key areas of school routine and use change.

In general, schools had planned to control students and parents entering and exiting the school in order to better manage social distancing. There had been efforts to utilise the outside space but not all schools had enough space and even those that did, did not always have enough shade for prolonged outside periods. In the classroom, students were separated at a desk, due to social distance guidelines. This restricted team and collaborative activity. Lunch was a challenging time for schools, particularly bigger schools. Staggering lunch times across the school with some phases starting lunch as early as 11:40 to remain in bubbles was a common occurrence for larger schools. Some school canteens provided a ‘grab and go’ or ‘takeaway’ system to help alleviate congestion and keep students safely distanced during meal times.

5.1.6 Lateral Flow Testing (LFT)

All stakeholders played an active role in Lateral Flow Testing. The Ministry of Education with the Department for Education Services managed the logistics of distributing LFT supplies to schools in the desired quantities. Schools suggested that although there were some early teething problems it worked well as time went on. However, LFT supplies were received by schools in bulk and required schools to then



repackage individual test kit items into complete kits for distribution. This role was undertaken by school administration staff or the nurse in most cases, and leaders reported that this was a significant and regular administrative task draining often already stretched human resources.

5.1.7 Continuation of healthy lifestyles

Despite the pandemic challenges such as the redeployment of the school nurse back to the Health Services Authority, a number of schools still managed to promote healthy lifestyles. A few schools remarked on the continued loss of inter-school sport, but many still provided intra-school activities. As schools adopted a more online or hybrid system of learning most staff and parents surveyed reported knowing how to recognise cyberbullying although, only 53% of students surveyed in both private and government schools stated that incidents of bullying, including cyberbullying were handled effectively.

Free meals in Government Schools

Students in most government schools had access to free school meals during the pandemic (breakfast, lunch and a snack). Some schools commented on the positive impact of these meals on students, including improved attendance, punctuality, and engagement in learning.



5.2 Support and guidance

As a result of COVID-19, students around the world were isolated from school, their friends, social and safety networks which now existed outside of their homes. A systematic review of the mental health impact of COVID-19 on children and college students by Elhararake (2022) found that,

“Due to this unexpected and forced transition, children and college students may not have adequate academic resources, social contact and support, or a learning-home environment, which may lead to a heightened sense of loneliness, distress, anger, and boredom—causing an increase in negative psychological outcomes. Mental health issues may also arise from the disease itself, such as grief from loss of lives, opportunities, and employment.”

Focusing on the health and well-being of children not only contributes to increased attendance and retention but is also essential for the child to be ready to learn, especially in the context of the coronavirus pandemic (UNICEF. 2022). Schools reported to inspectors that they continued to monitor academic progress and well-being of students and attempted to close learning gaps which were identified (n=11).

Table 13 shows which areas, relating to support and guidance, were the most commonly referred to by inspectors, as a result of the thematic visits.

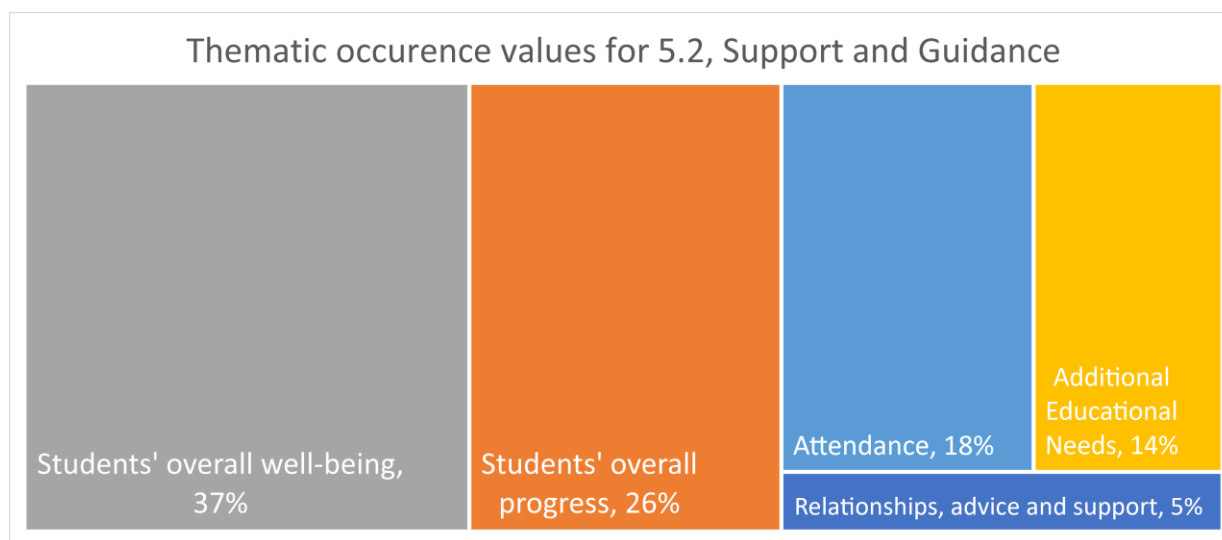


Table 13. Distribution of themes for 5.2 Support and Guidance.

5.2.1 Relationships, advice and support

Schools continued to place learning and well-being as a priority. Staff supervision ensured student safety whilst still providing those important opportunities for students to express themselves. In some cases, governing body and senior leadership collaboration resulted in the development of caring and compassionate places with student well-being at the heart. Moreover, those contracted staff members like security, gardeners and cleaners also played their part in the creation of the caring school environment. Behaviour policy was also utilised as an early warning system heading off negative behaviour before it became problematic.

The bubble systems were regularly reported as a tool for managing and keeping students safe. Such systems required staff members to stay with dedicated groups, often resulting in the loss of teacher free time. In some cases, supporting bubble and cover systems resulted in the redeployment of specialist staff to supervision duties during the day. A result of such redeployments created increased opportunities for interaction which reportedly improved some relationships. Recognising the need for improved and more secure relationships, some schools employed the looping system or vertical form system where tutors would stay with student groups as they transitioned through the grades. In some instances, however, teachers reported that there had been a slight “distancing” in some relationships. Some students also missed interacting with their peers who were separated due to grouping of the bubble system. One school reported that new transitioning students were not getting the preferred experience or introduction to school as a result of COVID-19.

5.2.2 Supporting students’ overall progress

The highly contagious Omicron variant was mentioned in the comments as a contributing factor to the increase in absences and potentially missed opportunities to learn. Although, various school phases reported minimal learning loss (n=27) and they suggested that academic progress was still being made. Many students had also missed considerable face to face school time compounded by a downward trend in attendance due to fears over community transmission. However, lost progress was not always evident and online provision was credited for some of the statements regarding continued academic progress (n=5). Inspectors noted that whilst there was evidence of student progress in the workbooks offered by schools, only 60% of government school staff reported when surveyed that, ‘students are making acceptable progress during the pandemic’. Some schools did suggest progress was negatively affected by the pandemic citing specific subject learning losses in mathematics.

Inspectors noted that some schools had difficulty monitoring progress. Schools reported that the pandemic had caused problems such as 1) The increased challenges monitoring progress across the different learning environments (i.e., face to face, online and hybrid), 2) the difficulties of always completing monitoring tools on time, 3) loss of administration time to upload data and, 4) data not being available at school-wide or cohort-wide levels.

Schools reported that a variety of strategies were employed to monitor and support students' progress and minimise learning loss. Table 14 outlines the main strategies reported by schools:

Strategies employed to fill gaps	Strategies employed to support progress	Progress and gap tools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding in-school business enterprises to combat opportunities lost • Response to Intervention • Timetabling additional sessions for core subjects • Additional programmes on weekends • Intensive Phonological Awareness • Nurture Groups • Lesson recall activities at the start of each lesson • Online engagement communication logs • "Catch-up Camp" during the summer months of 2021 • Verbal catch-up plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint planning among subject leads to promote cross curriculum linkages and consolidation of learning • Distribution of learning packs • Individual staff follow-up with students • Remedial activities deployed in individual subject areas • Homework club • Literacy programmes • Early morning classes • After-school clubs • In-class support • Tutoring sessions • Teachers' office hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Century Nugget • Transparent Classroom • Oxford Reading Criterion • Student performance data • National exams and assessments

Table 14. Main school strategies for overseeing student progress and monitoring learning loss.

5.2.3 Attendance

Attendance was inconsistent and tended to track with community transmission level rates. As a result, the impact upon schools varied from dramatic staff and student absence to little or no impact. With the use of varied learning platforms and management information systems, it was found that there were some difficulties with accurately collecting and interpreting attendance data. The MOE went some way to addressing this with a new set of attendance codes introduced for government schools during the second term of the 2021-2022 academic year. Schools were able to distinguish between students sick with COVID-19 symptoms and unable to take part in lessons, and those in quarantine but could comfortably attend remote lessons where offered. As a result of the term two attendance code changes and thus how schools defined attendance over the thematic visit period (term 1 and term 2), attendance data is less reliable.



Figure 10 shows the attendance percentages reported (n=17). All schools that shared procedures for following up on absent students had robust systems for doing so which included arrangements for online learning if the student was well enough to engage. This was especially important in order to monitor the students' health and welfare during increased COVID-19 absences. Schools employed a number of procedures to stay in touch with students such as emails, phone calls and home visits when following up on absences, one school even dropped off lunches to students' homes.

Some absences were caused by "fear of COVID". This term was used when students and their families were afraid to attend school for fear of contracting COVID-19 or transmitting the virus to vulnerable family members in the home. It was reported that work to integrate the students back into face to face lessons had been completed with varying degrees of success.

5.2.4 Additional educational needs

During the pandemic schools continued to produce Learning Support Plans and, in some instances, these now included strategies and support for staff which could be used during remote learning. Schools reported that staff devoted extra time to students with additional needs when working online. One school shared that private sector specialist service providers had moved online which increased safety and afforded greater efficiency. Supporting students with additional needs during the pandemic continued to be a collaborative effort by school staff and other stakeholders. As the learning environment moved towards more remote and online provision so did the specialist support services particularly in the cases where students found themselves in isolation or quarantine. SENCOs coordinated care and support for students with additional needs, ensuring extra support was available. SENCOs and specialist support service providers supported teaching staff to provide more effective service to students while engaging in the online environment. Some parents participated in the specialist service providers' online sessions with their children and joined meetings, regarding their child's progress and needs. Although, some schools commented on the value of persisting with face to face sessions for SEND students.

School attendance rates during COVID-19 (Omicron)

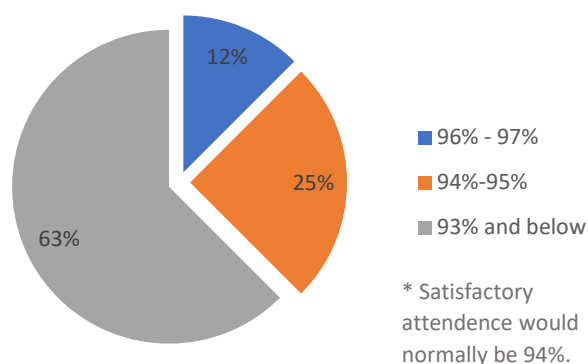
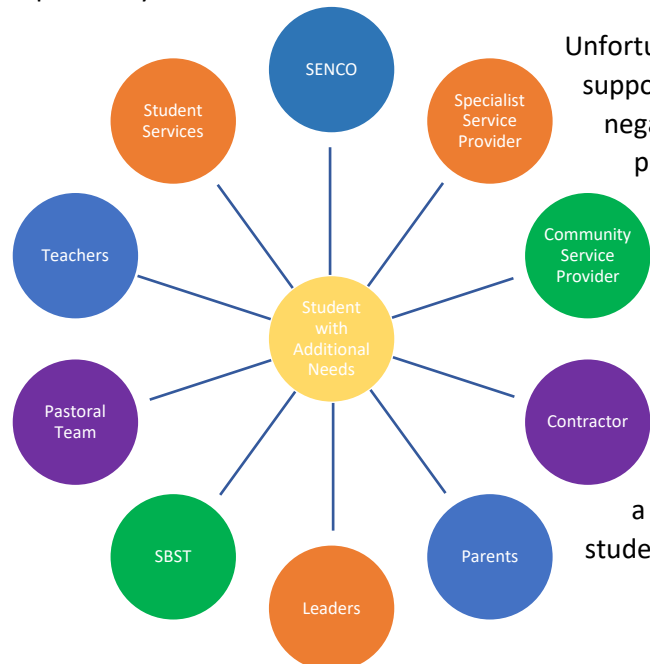


Figure 9. All school attendance rates.

Figure 11 illustrates the wide variety of stakeholders who supported students with additional needs as reported by schools.



Unfortunately, despite best efforts, some services and support for students with additional needs had been negatively impacted by staff absence during the pandemic. These absences negatively affected delivery of intervention groups with staff often reallocated to cover classes of other absent colleagues, thus making them unavailable for specialist services and intervention sessions. In addition, staff absence hampered the administration involved for students requiring additional needs support. For example, this affected the quality of record keeping resulting in a number of missing or incomplete reviews of students' interventions.

Figure 10. Stakeholders mentioned regarding additional needs support.

5.2.5 Students' overall well-being

School staff reported that COVID-19 had increased students' mental health needs (n=15) with some schools reporting an increase in student-reported anxiety. Most of these schools found that the pandemic had increased social-emotional needs of students resulting in an increase in referrals for mental health support services. All of which then impacted student behaviour, learning and staffing requirements. Counsellors and other pastoral staff members offered emotional support in classes and small groups, through Personal Social Health Education (PSHE) sessions and also individual and family sessions. Counsellors were also available for online sessions if a student or family member was in isolation.

Figure 11. Lists the range of services and activities reported to inspectors during the thematic visit.

Referrals to private service providers	Referrals to community providers	Arranging counselling by external service providers at no cost to students	Partnering with specialist service providers	The use of tools to ascertain needs (e.g. Pupil Attitude to Self and School (PASS) and School Risk Screening Scale)
UK Children's Mental Health Week	Apple's Friends	Zippy's Friends	Referrals to church resources	Offering online services when persons were in isolation
10 week mental health curriculum	Nurture Group	Psychosocial Support Services	Second Step	Wellness Warriors

Schools reported additional activities designed to support the well-being of students during the pandemic (Figure 12). Inspectors noted that schools planned outdoor physical activities and sports during the week which was found to help the students' well-being. Some schools continued field trips and extra-curricular activities and attempted to bring a sense of normality to the school days during the pandemic.

Several schools attempted to control the narrative of pandemic for their students by promoting open discussion regarding COVID-19. A few schools did this by using the process of LFT as a teaching tool to help younger students feel more comfortable with this new invasive process. Some schools erected displays with wellness information and designed projects and investigations for students to learn more about COVID-19 with the hope that this would support students emotionally. Weekly wellness days, mindfulness activities, social-emotional programmes, journaling, meditation opportunities, social stories, a calming area and prayer box were some of the activities that contributed to supporting mental health well-being. Senior leaders, including Senior School Improvement Officers, contributed towards student well-being by including this as a standing item in staff meetings and working with staff to better support students.

Inspectors commented that the mental health support services did not always meet the needs of all students. This was attributed to the increased need due to the pandemic compounded by staff absences. One school that only had access to mental health support online described it as an imperfect system and was further hampered by internet connection issues. One major concern for inspectors was the disparity of perception for mental health provision between students as users and adults as providers.

77% of staff surveyed agreed that they 'regularly check-in with students regarding their mental health during the pandemic.' However, this was not fully supported in the student survey responses. Only 44% of students agreed in the survey that 'adults in their school regularly check-in regarding their emotions' or that any support received had been useful. Whilst it was unclear as to why this was the case it does highlight a difference between the perception of services given and the perception of need for students.



COVID-Keepers

During the thematic visits schools were requested to consider the adaptations and changes made because of the pandemic. In doing so leaders were asked, what if any of these changes, did schools feel they wanted to keep. Figure 13 below shows the main themes suggested by schools that were to be considered as 'COVID-Keepers'.

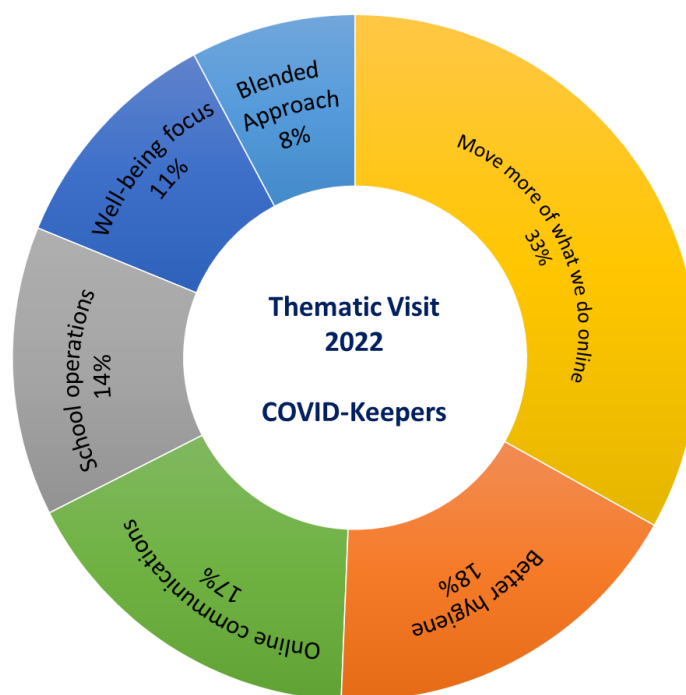


Figure 12. Distribution of themes for COVID-Keepers 2022

The main theme offered by school leaders was in regard to moving more of what they do 'online.' This theme included an increase in the number of training events that could be online rather than face to face, bringing in more flexibility for staff and the option to include other stakeholders in training. Most schools wanted to keep some of the new applications they had found that either increased the quality, added flexibility or improved the communication of learning for parents, teachers and students.

Leaders reported an increased awareness of personal hygiene by students which they wanted to ensure was kept post-pandemic. This referred to regular and rigorous handwashing that many suggested could positively impact future absence due to cold and flu. Schools also stated that janitorial cleaning routines had improved, particularly the sanitisation of high touch areas and bathrooms that would be continued going forward.

A key recurring issue was that of communication that generally moved online for most during the pandemic. Notably schools stated that moving parent evenings and conferences online utilising applications like 'Zoom' and 'Google Meet' had been a huge success offering greater flexibility for parents and teachers. Some schools noted that increasing their online presence to include 'virtual school events' like concerts, plays and productions was something to continue that left a lasting legacy of the student's work and potentially reached a wider section of the school community.



A number of schools were forced to make changes to the daily operation of the school resulting in two key areas that leaders suggested they would keep. The first was the management of entry and exit systems by all users and referred to staggered timings and specific locations for the drop off and pick up of students. This was designed for social distancing but had greatly eased congestion for some schools. Second and in a similar vein, the social distancing need for class and year group bubbles had been effective in improving behaviour and the management of students around the school. Some school leaders expressed an interest in continuing this for the behavioural management benefits.

In general schools had thought more about the spaces available to them with some reconsidering the future utilisation of additional outdoor spaces for teaching.






Over half of all schools reported the need to continue with the focus upon student well-being. Leaders suggested they wished to continue with 'wellness check-ins', to be concerned with the whole person and to be aware of mental health within their schools.

Finally, a number of school leaders wanted a more blended learning model of teaching and learning to persist post pandemic, although it was unclear how exactly this would work. Many stated that synchronous and asynchronous learning provided options and flexibility both in and out of school allowing learning to potentially continue even through absence.










Summary

Towards the end of 2021 amidst the looming new Omicron coronavirus variant full inspections were suspended in favour of less intrusive thematic school visits. In 2022, all 34 schools on the Cayman Islands took part in thematic visits. 61% of all school staff, 33% of all students and over 2,000 parents took part in the supporting surveys.

-  The general picture was one of tremendous resource, resilience and professional commitment across the sector that resulted in the young people of the Cayman Islands continuing to receive an education. The commitment to deliver a quality provision was to be celebrated but schools appreciated the additional workloads may not be sustainable.
-  Leaders and governing bodies were agile and responsive towards the changing requirements of the coronavirus pandemic. They remained professional in their approach throughout trying to maintain continuity of learning for all students although, this was very challenging at times. The CIG through the Ministry of Education and school leaders in general had learned from the previous lockdown and remote learning period. As such they were able to provide guidance for schools on how to remain safe places to learn and ensure the transition to a new learning environment was relatively swift and effective. Moreover, leadership and the school workforce had to remain flexible to meet the ever-changing requirements of the COVID-19 response.
-  Operational support through the Department of Education Services provided Lateral Flow Test logistics however, the method took time to get going and added considerable administrative pressure on some schools. In addition, government school students were provided with laptops to support their learning although, many students suffered from a lack of third-party maintenance support and thus lost the use of the laptop for extended periods of time for repairs. In addition, IT staff reported significant damages and losses relating to poor student care of the equipment.
-  Schools implemented the Ministry of Education guidelines and increased their facilities management budgets to ensure greater cleaning and additional COVID-19 related resources like hand sanitiser stations. Students in general followed the rules with good habits and staff monitored them ensuring learning could continue where possible. School procedures and routines were changed to support social distancing and reduce viral transmission. Most schools had to redesign their entry and exit systems.
-  In a bid to focus upon the continuation of learning for students, leaders in both government and private schools had created a 'staff cover' model that for some teachers and leaders was seen as unsustainable. A significant number of school staff suggest continuous covering for absent colleagues and the expectation of teaching whilst in isolation may have resulted in teachers reporting feeling exhausted or burnt-out. Moreover, this model of cover meant drawing upon all staff, even those specialist intervention staff, thus some specific SEN provision was lost during the pandemic. Furthermore, not all lessons covered were always with a subject specialist thus the usual standard of lessons was not always possible.

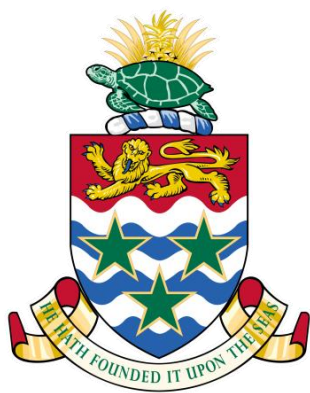


-  Staff in schools were expected to cover for absent colleagues and they did so willingly although the sporadic nature of the virus meant that some schools and teachers were hit harder as community transmission moved across the Cayman Islands. Teachers were also expected to teach from their home, if possible, in a commitment to continue the learning for students. However, at times, this was at some expense to their own well-being. The supply teacher system was overstretched with some schools reporting a shortage of staff or a lengthy wait for additional staff.
-  School leaders reported that academic progress was still being made although teachers were less confident and did suggest minimal losses in mathematics. Continued progress was attributed to the provision of online support or hybrid lessons particularly for those in isolation. The pressure of operating the cover teaching system for some, created additional challenges regarding the monitoring and administration of student assessment data.
-  In general schools had adopted a 'hybrid' system of learning which was a mixture of face to face and remote learning environments driven by the absence of both teachers and students. In addition, to covering other classes, teachers had to create new online resources. Globally 'hybrid' learning remains unproven, and schools found their own way to a large degree, learning from each other. Similarly, continuous professional development followed suit and moved online with staff sharing their experience and understanding with colleagues.
-  Student absence increased over the period of the pandemic compounded by the challenges of recording students absent from school but attending remotely. Guidance did come from the Department for Education Services in the form of additional attendance codes during term 2 nevertheless, the attendance data remains inaccurate.
-  Parental communication was reported as becoming more efficient as it moved online and some suggesting that communication had improved. Conferencing applications used for online teaching were used for parent/teacher meetings which also afforded greater flexibility and choice for parents. During the pandemic schools still communicated to parents about the academic progress of their children. In some government schools additional support for some parents included access to the internet from home and parental literacy programs to support their children.
-  Schools reported an increase in student anxiety and referrals for social-emotional support. A variety of activities and sessions aimed at mental health support were reported as being provided by schools. However, there was a disparity of the perception between the adult provision and the needs expressed by students reflected in the survey data.
-  As the impact of COVID differed across the sector, so did leaders' ability to maintain regular administrative tasks, with some senior leaders finding it difficult to update school evaluation forms or improvement plans. In some cases, it was reported that schools were continuing to complete tasks at school but there was insufficient administration time available to document them as normal. The past 12 months had seen a variety of challenges for continued education,



with schools creating a wide range of solutions for their particular issues. However, at the time of the visits, schools had not begun the process of review in order to facilitate any continuation of provisions or new sustainable practices.





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