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**Cayman Islands Government**

27 January 2022

Mrs. Sharon Campbell-Danvers  
Principal  
George Town Primary School  
Grand Cayman

Dear Mrs. Campbell-Danvers,

### **OES Thematic Visit to George Town Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 26 January 2022, I write on behalf of the Chief Inspector of the Office of Education Standards to confirm the findings. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the time you made available to discuss how the school has prepared for and reacted to the recent pandemic related issues in regard to two key areas of provision:

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

Following the publication of Ministry of Education guidelines and the constraints of COVID-19 the OES devised this one day thematic visit to reduce the pressure on the school.

OES visits to schools during this Spring Term are not inspections. We are not giving graded judgements. We did not undertake the usual range of inspection activities and were not always able to gather all sources of evidence, such as visits to lessons. The content of this letter gives an overview of our discussions about what has happened in your school regarding leadership and wellbeing since September 2021.

During the visit, I conducted interviews with you, the deputy principal and other members of the leadership team, staff, and the senior school improvement officer. I did not interview students and parents. However, prior to the visit, parents, staff and students had completed online surveys which polled their views on aspects of the school's provision.

### **Context**

As we learn to manage community transmission and continue to support the schools, the OES will undertake a 'thematic visit' programme and will visit:

- A sample of 31 government and private schools.
- The information from this visit will feed into OES's national reporting so that the insights can be shared with the government and the education sector.

Following the thematic visit to George Town Primary School, I did not find any significant concerns. The summary of the thematic visit will be published on the OES website available to parents and other stakeholders.

**From this visit the inspector noted that:**

- Senior leaders and staff had placed an appropriate focus upon supporting students' wellbeing and progress throughout the pandemic. Overall, there was a well-focused and coordinated approach to student welfare.
- The care, commitment and responsiveness demonstrated by senior leaders and staff in meeting the needs of parents and students during the recent wave of community transmission of COVID-19 was highly commended by parents. The results of the parent survey indicated that parents highly valued the work of the school in promoting students' wellbeing and continuity of learning for all during the pandemic.
- There were well-embedded health routines evident throughout the school. Strategies for promoting healthy lifestyles were a strong feature of the work of the school. For example, there were strategically placed signs throughout to remind students to wash or sanitise hands regularly, to wear masks and to practice social distancing. Additionally, regular opportunities for outdoor play were encouraged including at the start of school.
- Senior leaders reported that the school consistently tracked students' wellbeing and provided targeted support to vulnerable students during the lockdown and beyond. During the lockdown; supported by the ministry of education, local businesses and Feed our Future; the staff had provided meals and groceries to vulnerable students and their families.
- Senior leaders and staff highlighted the early impact of free meals provided by the government on students' overall attendance, punctuality and engagement in learning.
- Throughout the pandemic, there were appropriate procedures in place to monitor students' attendance. Senior leaders consistently analysed students' attendance patterns. As a consequence, senior leaders and staff had identified and supported students with poor or irregular attendance. For example, senior leaders and staff made telephone calls or conducted home visits for students not attending regularly including those who did not regularly attend classes online.
- Although a majority of staff reported challenges supporting students with special educational needs in the online learning environment, staff had continued to monitor the progress of students against their learning support plan targets and had involved parents and other providers appropriately in these reviews.
- Information on students with special educational needs was made available to staff as necessary and staff informed the special education needs coordinator and counsellor of particular challenges to secure their support and follow-up. Of note, small group support for students with SEND as well as Read write Inc. interventions were negatively impacted by staff absence or redeployment. Senior leaders strongly advocated for additional teaching assistants to better support students with additional learning needs to progress in their learning.

- A range of resources including the pastoral team of the special educational needs co-ordinator, school inclusion specialist and counsellor supported the emotional health and wellbeing of students. Additionally, online resources such as centrevention provided students with timely and regular access to resources to promote their emotional wellbeing. Wellness check-ins at the start of classes and zones of emotional regulation also promoted students' emotional wellbeing.
- Activities such as dress down days, mental health days and staff concerts online were employed to boost staff emotional wellness. Nonetheless, staff expressed concerns for their own emotional health given the physical and mental demands associated with working in the pandemic including being tasked with multiple roles and additional responsibilities.
- Staff expressed the need for a national parent association to alleviate staff of some of the responsibilities associated with supporting parents and families during a pandemic or other adverse circumstances.
- Staff reported that despite challenges with attendance and curriculum coverage, a majority of students continued to make acceptable progress in their learning. This was, in part, due to the range of online literacy and numeracy resources which gamified learning for students. This had led to increased engagement in their learning.
- George Town Primary was the first school to go into lockdown following the initial wave of community transmission of Covid-19 in September 2021. Despite planning for remote learning, the suddenness and magnitude of the lock down did not allow a seamless transition to online learning. Senior leaders and staff had to tweak and refine the school's remote readiness plan during the lockdown. Senior leaders were candid about the challenges they had experienced, but also highlighted the commitment of staff and the support received from the Department of Education Services in resolving early hiccups.
- Throughout the pandemic, there had been a consistent focus upon accountability for the continuity of learning. The Department of Education Services held school leaders to account for standards and quality of provision through monthly reports and regular meetings. Staff also reported that the principal and deputy principal regularly observed online classes and facilitated small group meetings to hold teachers accountable for standards of teaching and learning.
- A minority of staff expressed concern regarding the completion of multiple reporting documents which added to their work load. Senior leaders had advised that the recent use of google documents was one way of reducing paperwork and were committed to finding ways to make reporting more efficient.
- Both principal and deputy principal had maintained a highly visible presence around the school. Their hands on approach kept them on the pulse of daily activities. Consequently, areas requiring improvement were addressed swiftly.
- Continuing professional development for staff was facilitated online. Senior leaders had conducted surveys to determine the needs of staff in facilitating online learning. Of note, the existing expertise of staff was utilised to upskill their peers in various digital competencies. Staff had also engaged in team teaching online to support their peers. There was scope for senior leaders to place increased focus upon the development of digital competencies and links to teacher practice and student learning.
- There was a strong sense of community in the school and the demands associated with teaching in a pandemic had ensured a critical focus upon building the strengths and

competencies of the staff. The strong middle leadership tier in the school evidenced the senior leaders' commitment to a distributed approach to leadership.

- Throughout the pandemic, senior leaders had demonstrated a culture of reflection and continuing improvement. As part of their self-evaluation process, senior leaders and staff had devised strategies for raising attainment and attendance. There was also an appropriate focus upon literacy and numeracy. Of note, senior leaders had recently submitted a grant proposal to secure additional resources to fund their "Charge Up and Level Up for Reading" initiative. They were proud to report on the success of that application.
- The successful working relationship between the senior leaders, staff and parents was an important strength of the school.
- Communication between the school and parents during the pandemic was effective and transparent. In addition to notices posted in Class Dojo, meetings, devotions and seminars were facilitated online to keep parents informed and supported throughout the pandemic.
- In response to the parent questionnaire, almost all parents indicated that their child had appropriate information technology resources to support remote learning. Staff spoke positively about the early impact of laptops provided to each student on learning such as engagement in and responsibility for their learning. Students in Reception and a few new students had not yet received their digital devices.
- Senior leaders expressed appreciation for the timely support provided by the Department of Education Services (DES), including the Information Technology Department. For example, the DES had swiftly actioned the school's request for additional modems for needy families and the IT department supported students and families in resolving hardware and software issues. There was scope for the further development of a comprehensive school digital plan that would include replacement laptops and a more coordinated approach to resolving software and hardware issues.
- During the pandemic, senior leaders and staff had actively demonstrated commitment to providing a safe and effective online learning environment for all students and staff. Key policies related to the care and protection of students online had been developed and were being implemented. These included codes of behaviour for online learning and cyber-safety information. Additionally, expectations regarding online learning were communicated to teachers.
- Throughout the school there was a strong ethos of team work and collaboration. Nonetheless, a majority of staff reported feeling overwhelmed and burnt out due to additional workload as a result of staff absences associated with illness and quarantine and isolation requirements.
- While staff were clearly invested in the education of their students and willingly accepted redeployment and additional duties, current arrangements for staff cover may prove unsustainable over time.

### **'COVID Keepers'**

The staff shared examples of strategies and innovations that they had implemented either as a direct or indirect consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and which they planned to retain post COVID-19. These included:

- **Blended learning.** Staff spoke highly about the benefits of blending online and face to face teaching to create more effective and worthwhile learning experiences for students. Reportedly, a majority of students were demonstrating greater independence and engagement in their learning as consequence of using various online platforms and

resources. Students' increasing competence in their digital skills had also led to improved confidence in their learning.

- **Incentivised and Gamified Learning:** Online learning had created increased opportunities for students to compete with their peers locally and internationally. The deputy principal reported that last year students had participated in an international "Mathletics" competition. She was quite proud that George Town Primary had the singular honour of being the only government school on the island to participate. That competition had created momentum among students and generated a renewed interest in numeracy. For example, across year groups, students were participating in mathematics competitions on line and earning tokens to build avatars.
- **Online parent workshops.** Previously, staff had regularly conducted "Parent Tool Box" workshops for parents in partnership with external agencies and providers. Staff reported greater attendance and participation from parents in the online seminars conducted during the pandemic.
- **Designated entry and exit for groups of students.** Due to the requirement for social distancing during the pandemic, senior leaders had organised multiple points of entry and exit at arrival and dismissal for groups of students. This supported behaviour management and ensured transitions were smooth and well managed.
- **Virtual staff and parent meetings:** The convenience and flexibility afforded by online meetings had increased participation in staff meetings, whole school assemblies and parent meetings.

Thank you again for contributing to this important national work. The views and experiences you have shared will help inform future policy.

I am copying this letter to the Chief Officer for the Ministry of Education and the Chair of the Education Council. This letter will be published on the Office of Education Standards website.

Yours sincerely

*A. Edwards-Boothe*

Althea Edwards-Boothe

Senior Inspector | Office of Education Standards  
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