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Cayman Islands Government

14 January 2022

Mrs. Bernice Scott
Principal
Grace Christian Academy
21 Crescent Close
West Bay
Grand Cayman

Dear Mrs. Scott,

OES Thematic Visit to Grace Christian Academy

Following my visit to your school on 12 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 happened in your school regarding leadership and wellbeing since September 2021.

During the visit, I conducted interviews with you, your leadership team and other staff, and the Board of Governors. I also reviewed samples of students' work and other key documentation and conducted learning walks. 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 Grace Christian Academy, 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:

- The principal, senior leaders and staff had placed a high premium upon the health and safety of students and had devised effective arrangements to track and monitor their health and well-being. Overall, senior leaders and staff had placed a strong focus upon creating a supportive and inclusive school community.
- The senior leaders and staff had implemented the Covid-19 Guidance issued by the Ministry of Education with fidelity. The Ministry of Education had also supplied the school with lateral flow test kits. Although noting there was scope for greater involvement, senior leaders spoke positively about the support received from the Ministry of Education.
- Staff and students consistently followed the school's Covid-19 requirements such as wearing masks and frequent handwashing/ sanitising.
- All staff appropriately monitored students' attendance at face to face and remote learning sessions. On the day of the thematic visit, student attendance was 98 per cent. Attendance for the first school term had averaged 89 per cent, which was lower than historic attendance pre-Covid-19.
- There were clear referral pathways with effective communication and recordkeeping in place.
- Wellness checks among staff and students as well as other mental health initiatives supported their emotional wellbeing. Teachers also utilised social-emotional learning strategies to support students' well-being and to promote their engagement in lessons. An example of this was the use of growth mind-set journaling. Students in Elementary were using the experiences of celebrated individuals who had coped effectively with challenges to promote the development of their own emotional resilience during the pandemic and beyond.
- There were examples of effective practice in the provision for students with SEND. Senior leaders were proactive in anticipating the increased learning and emotional needs of students with SEND during the continuing Covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, Cayman ABA was contracted to provide weekly training for learning support assistants to further promote inclusive practices.
- Senior leaders had ensured that teachers reviewed and adapted schemes of work to a blended learning format to promote continuity of learning in both face to face and distance learning contexts. During the thematic visit, a few students had joined classes remotely.

A majority of staff had planned appropriate activities and study guides in preparation for future work and these were uploaded to google classrooms.

- Following the first lockdown, staff had devised strategies to identify and address gaps in students' learning. For example, another session of mathematics was added to the timetable for classes at the high school phase, and a homework club was established to promote students' progress in mathematics.
- As part of their Covid-19 response strategy, senior leaders had aligned professional development to the actual and anticipated impact of the pandemic on students' learning. Consequently, there was increased focus upon the identification of learners' strengths and weaknesses, data interpretation and application to lesson planning to promote improved student outcomes. Staff reported that majority of students were making acceptable or better progress in key subjects.
- The Principal had a strong professional relationship with staff. There was a culture of supporting teachers to reflect upon their practice and encouraging collaborative practices. Among staff and students, motivation and high levels of teamwork were evident. Despite having to take on additional roles and responsibilities due to Covid-related staff absences, most staff spoke positively about the support and collaboration demonstrated by colleagues.
- Peer observations were discontinued due to Covid-19 related concerns, however, senior leaders had continued to monitor the quality of teaching and learning through lesson observations, walk throughs and work scrutiny and provided feedback to staff. There was variability in the extent and quality of evaluation of teaching and learning.
- The Principal had maintained a visible presence in the school and that provided support and motivation to staff as well as students.
- Senior leaders and staff had reported increased challenges tracking and monitoring students' progress in different learning environments. Nonetheless, senior leaders kept parents informed about their child's progress through a range of informal and planned opportunities. Parent conferences were facilitated both face to face and online. Work scrutiny indicated that most teachers regularly marked students' work. There was scope to provide more written developmental feedback particularly in the high school phase of the school so students knew what they were doing well and what they needed to do to improve.
- The school's website, an important means of communication with key constituents in the school community, was under-utilised. This should be addressed to further improve communication and provide easy access to a range of resources by all during the pandemic.
- Although a minority of staff had reported that students sometimes faced internet connectivity issues on their end, staff and parents indicated that all students had access to appropriate digital devices to support their learning. Additionally, expectations for digital learning were clearly communicated to students and parents. As the pandemic lingered, more teachers demonstrated confidence utilising different types of information technology applications.
- Following the first wave of the pandemic, the school board had made the strategic decision to invest in comprehensive and costly upgrades to the school's ICT infrastructure and had

also purchased additional smart boards. As a consequence, staff were able to deliver the curriculum face to face and or remotely as required.

- The Principal reported that one of the main challenges facing the school at this time was the shortage of qualified staff. Staffing issues were compounded by resignations, illnesses as well as quarantine and isolation requirements. The recent resignation of the Deputy Principal and Special Education Needs Coordinator had placed additional strain on the Principal and staff. The Principal and the school board had tried to mitigate staffing woes by hiring part-time and substitute teachers. However, there were concerns regarding the impact over time on teaching and learning given the levels of staff attrition during the pandemic.
- Distributed leadership was evolving, but was not yet optimal. There was the need to review and formalise the school's management structure to promote strategic focus upon priorities and assure a manageable workload for staff.
- The Principal indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic had presented financial challenges for the school and expressed that the reinstatement of the financial grant to private schools by the government was a welcomed reprieve.
- Despite financial challenges, the school board had ensured that students' needs were being met by expanding and improving the infrastructure and facilities. For example, a new early years centre was recently completed and a new classroom block and SEND resource classroom were under construction. It was anticipated that this expansion will improve students' curricular experience during the pandemic and the future.
- Although the school board had made good progress in actioning key infrastructure priorities, there was scope to further improve strategic planning by ensuring that all development priorities are fully integrated with the goals in school's self-evaluation and school improvement plan.

'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:

- **Continued use of the outdoor environment for lessons** to promote students' learning in engaging and motivating contexts. For example, staff reported that a group of students had discovered a chicken's nest in the outdoor play area and were able to observe the eggs until they were hatched. This had consolidated their learning about the life cycle in a real life context.
- **Continued focus on healthy lifestyles.** The pandemic had increased students' knowledge and understanding of the importance of lifestyle choices - water, rest, nutrition and exercise- to good health. As a consequence, staff reported that more students brought nutritious lunches from home and most also opted to drink water instead of juices. Most students also demonstrated greater care of their environment.
- **Gamification of learning** to motivate students and promote engagement in their learning. In lessons, teachers used resources such as videos, Quizlet and Kahoot to engage students in low stakes quizzes to reinforce and consolidate their learning. On the day of

thematic visit, students had participated enthusiastically in a quick-fire quiz on Kahoot during a science lesson.

- **Flipped learning:** staff regularly prepared study materials beforehand and uploaded these to google class rooms so students can access these materials. Staff, such as the science teacher, emailed study guides to parents so they knew what students were learning and how to support them in their learning.
- **Choice of medium for parent conferences to discuss students' progress.** Parents had the choice of attending conferences face to face or online. Staff reported that most parents appreciated the flexibility and convenience offered by online parent conferences. As a result, online conferences were generally well attended.
- **Blended learning.** Staff will continue to use a mix of face to face and distance learning modalities so students have regular opportunities to practice their digital competency skills. At present, "Remote Wednesdays" allowed high school students to learn remotely from home on Wednesdays.
- **Phase/Year Group Bubbles:** The school's recent expansion allowed for separate designated play and lunch areas for students in different phases. This supported improved movement opportunities for students and satisfied distancing requirements as students engaged in mask breaks outdoors. These arrangements also ensured adequate supervision of students.

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 Chair of the Board of Governors, 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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