



**Cayman Islands Government**

**Office of Education Standards  
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February 3, 2022

Mrs. Kimberly Watler  
Principal  
Theoline McCoy Primary  
Bodden Town  
Grand Cayman

Dear Mrs. Watler,

**OES Thematic Visit to Theoline L. McCoy Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on February 2, 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 COVID-19 pandemic related issues in 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.

Over the next few months, the Office of Education Standards will conduct thematic visits in 31 government and private schools. Information from the thematic visits will inform the OES national reporting so that the key insights regarding health and safety, support and guidance as well as leadership can be shared with the government and the education sector.

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

Following the thematic visit to Theoline L. McCoy Primary, 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:**

- Student wellbeing had been the primary priority of senior leaders and staff. Throughout the pandemic, they had sought to create a caring and safe learning environment where students felt secure.
- Across the school, there was a strong emphasis upon good hygiene. The school grounds were litter free. Classrooms and bathrooms were cleaned periodically throughout the day. The school's cleaning regime was bolstered by additional cleaning staff contracted by the Department of Education Services.
- Health routines were beginning to be established but were not yet fully embedded. Almost all students wore masks and sanitised hands on entry to the school auditorium or classrooms. A minority had to be reminded to do so by staff.
- Due to inherent health risks, water coolers had been turned off and replaced with water dispensers in individual classrooms. This had resulted in more students taking reusable water bottles to school and refilling throughout the day. Nonetheless, there was a high usage of Styrofoam and plastic cups at breakfast and lunch times. Mindful of the environmental impact of this practice, senior leaders were considering ways of reducing this.
- Staff had capitalised on the availability of outdoor spaces to organise year group bubbles. Children in Reception, in particular, had regular planned opportunities for play and learn outdoors. At the time of the thematic visit, all students had ample play time outdoors. Cabanas and trees provided shade and there were plans to purchase sails to provide additional shade on outdoor play areas.
- During the pandemic, the school nurse was redeployed to shore up support at the Health Services Authority. Consequently, senior leaders were primarily responsible for coordinating the distribution of lateral flow testing kits, testing and reporting regimes and the dissemination of information.
- As a result of the increase in community transmission of Covid-19, attendance had been trending downwards since last school term now averaging 88 per cent; this was in sharp contrast to the rising trend pre-community transmission where attendance for the previous school year had averaged 95.1 per cent. During the thematic visit, there were 50 students out of school due to COVID -19 related issues. Likewise, seven staff members were absent.
- Nonetheless, senior leaders and staff spoke positively about the impact of free meals on students' attendance. Reportedly, improved attendance was particularly noticeable among students from vulnerable households. Staff also expressed how the provision of free meals to students had relieved them of the some of the burden of providing welfare support to some students.

- The special education needs coordinator expertly managed provision for students with special educational needs. The SEN team also comprised the counsellor and school inclusion specialist and other providers such as educational psychologist and occupational therapist. The SEN team regularly monitored students' progress and learning support plans were shared with staff, parents and providers to ensure a coordinated approach to students' development and wellbeing.
- The SEN team deployed a range of inclusive strategies to ensure targeted support for students with special educational needs. These included push-in and pull-out interventions. However, specialist support was impacted by staffing issues during the pandemic.
- Staff also advised that intervention models that utilised small learning support groups had been adversely impacted by the redeployment of teaching assistants to cover classes due to staff absences.
- Resources such as the Educational Psychology and Music Therapy (EMPT) Bulletin had provided useful information on cyber safety and anti-bullying. Staff from agencies such as the Alex Panton Foundation and the National Drug Council had facilitated online training and support for students and their families.
- Senior leaders and staff had placed a clear focus upon student and staff welfare. Of note, a poster board captioned "Our Thoughts and Prayers are with you" was located just outside the Reception class. This was used by students and staff to promote empathy, understanding and support as they posted get well wishes, encouragement and welcome back greetings for staff and students who had been ill due to covid-19. Notwithstanding, a significant minority of staff expressed the need for additional resources to support their own emotional wellbeing.
- During the visit, subject leads demonstrated keen awareness of issues related to curriculum coverage and learning loss and had devised appropriate strategies to address these. Staff had begun implementing catch up strategies to close curriculum gaps. For example, early morning mathematics lessons had commenced and afternoon booster lessons were being scheduled.
- Senior leaders reported that although attainment in key subjects was below international standards, early data review indicated a majority of students had continued to progress in their learning during the pandemic. Of note, staff highlighted the positive impact of Read write Inc. on students' reading fluency in key stage 1. Writing was an area for development across the school.
- Senior leaders also highlighted the challenges they faced being tasked with a wide range of additional duties. Thus, it had proven difficult for them to effectively fulfil some of their individual responsibilities.
- Staff also reported feeling overwhelmed with additional workload resulting from staff absence. Although staff who assumed acting responsibilities received a duty allowance, most expressed that they were feeling exhausted.
- Senior leaders spoke positively about the support and guidance provided by the senior school improvement officer (SSIO) during the pandemic. Through the agency of the SSIO, the principal had begun to strengthen collaborative partnerships with other schools.

Notably, the professional learning community was creating opportunities for school leaders to build and extend professional networks.

- During the pandemic, continuous professional development for staff had been delivered through a range of whole staff training in person and online. For example, the principal had facilitated sessions on the use of breakout rooms in Microsoft teams to enhance students' online learning experience and expand learning opportunities for all.
- Senior leaders fully understood the school's strengths and areas for development. The approach to school development planning was collaborative but was constrained by staff absences. There was scope for greater incorporation of student voice and parental engagement in self-evaluation and planning processes.
- Senior leaders expressed that the pandemic had strengthened the school's relationship with parents. School leaders had utilised a range of methods to provide information and guidance to parents. These included emails, phone calls, visits and online meetings. Senior leaders had also simplified government Covid-19 policies and guidelines for parents to ensure compliance with health requirements.
- In the parent survey, parents had made highly positive comments about the support and care offered to students by staff.
- Most parents indicated that their child had appropriate technological devices to engage in learning remotely. Staff reported improvement in student agency and motivation linked to students' ownership of digital devices.
- Due to internet connectivity issues at the school, of which the Department of Education Services was aware, students who were learning remotely engaged mainly in asynchronous learning. Senior staff also indicated that smart boards required modification to support synchronous learning.
- School leaders had plans in place for remote learning, however; there was the need for a comprehensive whole school digital plan to deliver blended and remote learning effectively.

### **'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:

- **Adjusted morning and afternoon routines for arrival and pickup.** Senior leaders expressed that implementing controlled access for arrival and departure had reduced incidence of poor behaviour and restricted parent traffic in the school. Staff, including the principal and deputy, were on hand to welcome students on arrival each day and this promoted a caring and nurturing ethos.
- **Year Group Bubbles.** Year group bubbles were maintained for break and lunch times. Staff reported that this too had led to a decrease in incidence of poor behaviour and had improved transitions and supervision.
- **Zones of Regulation.** During the pandemic, staff had placed increased focus upon zones of regulation to promote students' emotional resilience. Reportedly, the activities and resources around this had encouraged more students to articulate their feelings and use coping

strategies. As a consequence, a majority were using learned strategies to self-regulate and control their emotions.

- **Virtual classrooms.** Staff recognised the benefits of online platforms and resources in providing students with regular access to a wide range of content as well as increasing opportunities for parents to become more involved in their child's learning. Staff shared that prerecorded videos to support students' phonic knowledge were widely used throughout the pandemic.
- **Use of Social Stories.** The special education needs co-ordinator highlighted the benefits of using social stories to support and reassure students during the pandemic. Social stories were especially useful in helping younger children understand the reasons for social distancing and mask wearing. Staff extolled the benefits of using this tool in the future to support children to understand unfamiliar situations or to cope with adverse circumstances and promote emotional resilience.
- **Catch up strategies: afterschool booster sessions.** Senior leaders advised that booster sessions after school were being introduced to support students who had missed out on their learning due to illness or other reasons.
- **Virtual parent meetings.** Engagement and support for parents had continued throughout the pandemic. This included virtual parent meetings and workshops for parents. Although historically, parental engagement was low, increased attendance was noted during online events.

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 Director of Education Services, 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,

Althea Edwards-Boothe

**Senior Inspector** | Office of Education Standards  
Portfolio of the Civil Service

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