



Cayman Islands Government

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January 21, 2022

Mrs. Jeifrene Small and Mrs. Traci Bradley
Starfish Village/Village Montessori
94 Solaris Avenue
Camana Bay
Grand Cayman

Dear Mrs. Small and Mrs. Bradley

OES thematic visit to Starfish Village/Village Montessori

Following my visit to your school on January 19, 2022, I write on behalf of the Chief Inspector of the Office of Education Standards (OES) 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 the 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 1 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, we spoke to you, your leadership teams and staff. We did not speak to students.

Context

As we move towards learning to manage community transmission, the OES will undertake a 'thematic visit' program and will visit:

- A sample of 31 schools.
- Both government and private sector schools.

The information from this visit will feed into OES' national reporting so that the insights can be shared with the government and the education sector. We did not find any significant concerns. As such a thematic visit report would be published on our website available to parents and carers.

From this visit the inspector noted that:

- The Senior Leadership Team were dedicated to creating and maintaining a safe environment for the school community and the continuity of learning for all students.
- The school had remained open during the pandemic other than the period of Government mandated school closures and offered face-to-face provision and remote learning for students who may have been in quarantine/isolation. Attendance continued to be high, with a 95% average attendance to date.
- Student data, discussions with teachers and responses to surveys indicated that all groups of students continued to make progress through the pandemic.
- Prior use of a comprehensive information management system was used by the school which allowed for attendance records, generation of reports and individualised planning using the Montessori learning targets which were also mapped to the New Cayman Islands National Curriculum. Use of the platform had supported teachers when pivoting to online provision.
- The school used SeeSaw and Class Dojo as online learning and communication platforms.
- The Senior Leaders expressed concerns regarding the apparent lack of consideration for education and infrastructure regarding the formulation and implementation of some Covid-19 national initiatives, regulations and policies. An example of this was the Global Citizenship initiative where they did not feel availability of spaces in schools was considered.
- Health and safety were a priority, with hand sanitising, hand washing, mask wearing, use of student "bubbles", regular Lateral Flow Testing and healthy lifestyle choices being emphasised which resulted in compliance by staff and students. Senior Leaders and staff reported the acceptance and normalisation of these practices throughout the school community.
- Responses to surveys demonstrated that parents and staff felt that the school was a safe environment during the pandemic and that COVID-19 specific requirements were communicated clearly.
- To alleviate staff from additional cleaning responsibilities due to COVID-19, the Senior Leaders contracted additional janitorial services to regularly sanitise the school, including the variety of Montessori manipulatives, and "fog" the school at least one time per month. Staff expressed appreciation for this additional service.
- Students were empowered to express themselves and regularly planned Community Meetings gave the students a forum to share ideas, concerns and emotions.
- In order to continue to provide students with services they required while also keeping the school community safe during the pandemic, the school continued to allow specialist service providers, such as Speech and Language Therapists, into the school environment to provide services for students. Service providers also adhered to COVID-19 protocols.
- Social-Emotional Learning was a focus at the school. The Second Step social emotional learning curriculum had recently been added to the previous Social-Emotional Learning opportunities. Teachers and Senior Leaders reported that this has been integral in helping the students during the uncertainty of the pandemic, and noted that their data showed continued growth of the students in their social emotional development.
- Although solid practice relating to health and safety was observed, there was a need for the Senior Leadership Team to formalise some protocols and procedures to allow for continuity, awareness and ongoing review.

- Senior Leaders ensured that staff had discretion to exercise healthy boundaries regarding communication and interaction outside of school hours with parents. Responses to the parent survey showed that all parents felt staff responded effectively to their requests and staff reported that parents are respectful of boundaries.
- Responses to surveys and discussions with staff and Senior Leaders indicated that communication regarding health and safety and learning were exceptionally effective and timely.
- Staff shared that having the students separated in bubbles did not fit the ethos of the school, and therefore some accommodations were made to their regular practice such as using online platforms to have student meetings to allow for some interaction of the various groups and having parent readers read to classes in the garden from a safe distance.
- Staff expressed that they would have appreciated information on providers for mental health services which they could access when needed and also felt that it was important for more ready access to mental health information and services in the country.
- While the Senior Leadership Team was currently creating a written protocol regarding child safeguarding during remote learning, all staff reported they were aware of the expectations and procedure regarding safeguarding during remote learning.
- Staff continued to do professional development through the pandemic predominantly using online courses from a variety of Montessori organisations. For example, a staff member was completing a course on catering to students with special needs in the Montessori setting.
- Senior Leadership and staff reported that there was consistent Lateral Flow Testing within the school community. Parents communicated with the staff about their children's Lateral Flow Tests and also sent in picture of the Lateral Flow Test results.
- To alleviate hesitancy that some students initially expressed about taking Lateral Flow Tests, some staff encouraged students to investigate how the testing kits worked, to think about what other diseases such tests could be developed for to improve health care and to reflect on how health care could have been different in the past if similar tests existed.
- The input of the Special Education Needs Coordinator had been highlighted in supporting teachers to ensure the setting is inclusive, and that students with additional needs are catered for effectively. The school also had regular input from Inclusion Cayman and specialist service providers.
- Social Stories were developed to support students with information regarding pandemic related changes, such as wearing masks.
- The Senior Leadership Team reported that the school was strongly supported by an Education Strategy Officer and an Early Childhood Care and Education Officer within the Ministry of Education Services which resulted in ready access to a supply of Lateral Flow Tests, strong communication regarding changing policies and expectations and support in answering questions to assist the school to follow protocols and keep the students safe.
- It was reported that recruitment is increasingly difficult due to pandemic related issues as well finding suitably qualified Montessori staff who will relocate to a country with a high cost of living. The Senior Leaders now offer a larger discount for children of staff members as one way to help attract and retain staff.

'COVID Keepers'

The school shared a wide range of practices that had been put in place either as a direct or indirect consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The practices that the school would look to continue in a post-COVID "normal" situation include:

- **The increased use of online learning platforms** to extend learning and provide for another platform for homework, learning records and communication.
- **Additional contracted cleaning services** has been an advantage in helping ensure the school is as clean as possible to reduce transmission of illness, but also alleviates the work of the staff.

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,

Carol Bennett
Carol Bennett

Senior Inspector | Office of Education Standards
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