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March 11, 2022

Dr. O'Neil Duncan
Walker's Road
George Town
Grand Cayman

Dear Dr. Duncan,

OES thematic visit to Cayman Academy

Following my visit to your school on March 9, 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.

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, I spoke to you, the Chair of the School Board (i.e. Board of Governors), 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. I 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 Leaders and Counselling and Pastoral Staff had worked together to create a caring and compassionate school environment for staff and students. Staff expressed that the school community felt like family.

- Almost all students and staff wore masks correctly. Students and staff used the mounted hand sanitiser dispensers prior to entering classrooms. Students also had individual hand sanitisers and there were disinfecting wipes in each room. Hand washing was also emphasised.
- Students remained in class “bubble” groups throughout the day. This safety precaution almost completely eliminated teachers’ non-contact time and contributed to their additional work duties during the pandemic. Despite this they stated that this challenging period would end and they were willing to work together to ensure the students were kept safe.
- During the day students and teachers cleaned desks and other surfaces in the classrooms and the high touch surfaces and bathrooms were sanitised by janitorial staff on an ongoing basis.
- During the first term of the 2021 academic year, the school had split classes to allow for physical distancing at the height of community transmission. However, some classes were crowded now that most students had returned to school.
- The Counselling and Pastoral Team provided regular class, group, family and individual sessions. Students and parents also had online access to the Counselling and Pastoral Team if needed.
- The School Board included an elected Education Director who was the liaison between the school, the Board and a supervisor within the Atlantic Caribbean Union. The Director represented the school’s needs regarding resources and tools to support teaching and learning during the pandemic.
- The school had implemented online learning quite early in the pandemic. A staff member who had attended training on Microsoft Teams trained other staff members, parents and students on the use of Teams to allow for ease of use. Although some staff reported that online learning was initially difficult, they said it had become easier with support and practice.
- During the pandemic the school had updated infrastructure to ensure internet access and efficient speed for the use of multiple devices. There was also an investment in programmes such as Collins Connect and Skills which helped support teaching and learning and record keeping.
- Students who were in isolation engaged in live lessons using Microsoft Teams. Staff used technology during classes and expressed that they were able to provide students more timely feedback, as well as include videos or voice notes which could support students’ learning. This also helped ensure seamless transition to remote learning if necessary.
- While the school did not provide devices for students, they arranged the importation of devices at a more affordable cost. Payment plans were also extended to parents who required assistance. This initiative helped to ensure all students were able to access devices.
- Programmes were being installed on student devices to block inappropriate sites. Some chat features had also been disabled to limit the opportunities for cyberbullying and inappropriate communication.
- The Counselling and Pastoral Team had conducted sessions with parents to give them information regarding internet safety for their children and how to monitor their online use.
- To support the students’ social-emotional development and well-being during the pandemic, the Guidance Curriculum was used by the Counselling and Pastoral Team. The school also used the Integrated Faith and Learning approach which helped the students to tap into their emotions and spirituality during all lessons.
- Staff reported that data showed students continued to make progress during the pandemic and that some children thrived in the online learning environment.
- It was stated that critical thinking skills seem to have been affected as students relied more on internet searches for answers rather than thinking of solutions. Staff had now begun to implement strategies to counter this to ensure students’ critical thinking skills developed.

- The Counselling and Pastoral Team organised celebrations and observances throughout the year and also conducted online Vesper Services for families which were well attended. Almost all stakeholders spoke highly of the Counselling and Pastoral Staff and their initiatives to support student and staff well-being.
- All staff had opportunities to seek counsel from the school's Counselling and Pastoral Team or the resources within the Adventist Church. The Counselling and Pastoral Team also reported that staff had insurance coverage which would allow them to access private mental health care if desired.
- If students and families had needs beyond the remit of the school's support system, they were referred to community or church resources or given information regarding private service providers.
- Communication with parents was often through the online programme "QuickSchools", email, WhatsApp groups and chats and via telephone calls. The newsletter "The Little Informer" was also regularly sent to parents which contained information regarding COVID-19 protocols.
- Staff who were in isolation but well enough to teach did so using Microsoft Teams. Other staff members and Senior Leaders supervised the students in the classrooms of the absent teacher.
- Staff who had contracted COVID-19 expressed that they were well supported by Senior Leaders, the Counselling and Pastoral Team and colleagues. Staff support included grocery and medication deliveries, monetary support and emotional support. Staff who returned after isolation received a basket which contained items such as foods which would help boost their immune system.
- Staff reported that they felt supported by Senior Leaders. While there were additional demands placed on them during the pandemic, they felt as though they were supported to take time off if they needed it for rest or for their own mental health.
- The canteen served only vegetarian meals. During the pandemic, meal times were staggered and some classes had their meals delivered to them while others collected them from the canteen. Primary students ate their lunch in their classrooms while the high school students ate in the canteen in small numbers.
- Regular outdoor time was scheduled throughout the day for all students, including playtime during break and lunch, PE lessons and planned outdoor learning and devotional activities. Outdoor time contributed to the physical and emotional well-being of the students.
- Devotions were held each morning and teachers were able to connect with their students during this time. Any evident concerns which were detected were then referred on to the Counselling and Pastoral Team.
- At present, attendance rate was approximately 97%, which included students who engaged online.
- Signage was erected school wide informing persons of COVID-19 safety protocols.
- The school had a contracted nurse who recorded COVID-19 positive results and helped to manage the ordering of LFT kits and the medical care of students.

‘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 **use of technology** for teaching and learning, record keeping and communication.
- **Online spiritual programmes** such as devotions and Vesper Services as this allowed for increased access.
- **Sensitivity to and support of students’ emotional development and needs** as the school aimed to address the “whole person” which in turn, they felt, would positively impact academics. This would include further implementation of programmes by the Counselling and Pastoral Team, and ongoing development of Growth Mindset and Integrated Faith and Learning programmes.

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 School Board, 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

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

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Cayman Islands Government