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4th April 2022

Director Jim Urquhart
Cayman International School
95 Minerva Drive
Grand Cayman

Dear Director Urquhart,

OES Thematic Visit to Cayman International School

Following our visit to your school on 30th March 2022, we write on behalf of the Office of Education Standards to confirm the findings. We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the time you made available to discuss how the school's leadership team is managing and leading the school during the Covid-19 pandemic 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.

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 and your leadership teams and a section of your staff.

Context

As we learn to manage community transmission and continue to support the school family, the OES will undertake thematic visits to 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. We did not find any significant concerns. As such a thematic visit report will be published on our website available to parents and other stakeholders.

From this visit the inspector noted that:

- The Board of Management and senior leaders had a clear strategy in place to promote continuity of learning for students. Throughout the pandemic, the school has remained open.
- The Board of Management expressed appreciation to the Cayman Islands Government for its response to and management of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Director also commended the Ministry of Education for maintaining regular communication with the school throughout the pandemic.
- The Board of Management held school leaders to account for the quality of education provision through regular reporting and meetings during the pandemic. In a meeting with the OES inspectors, the Board representative expressed strong confidence in the leadership of the school.
- Leadership had created a safe place for students to continue to learn through the pandemic. The school board had made available sufficient funds for a number of increases across the school, for instance, additional security staff and more in-depth cleaning had been provided.
- Cleaning staff, during instructional time, had been increased to four cleaners, teachers had materials and cleaned student desks and 'electro-static' cleaning was employed each day. The number of evening clearing staff was also increased by four people for further cleaning and in the event of a positive case reported in a class, said classroom received additional deep cleaning and additional electro-static cleaning.
- Lateral flow testing kits procurement and distribution was reported as smooth. Although less kits were now being requested by parents the senior leadership was still recommending regular testing for students.
- The facilities management team reported the school site now had around 100 hand sanitiser dispensers and all students were required to sanitise their hands upon entry to classes with younger children having this done by the class teacher. Although, high touch point water fountains were still connected and in use during the thematic visit.
- To manage social distancing more effectively the school deployed a staggered approach to break-times and lunch. Break-time was further staggered by grade which leaders reported had allowed for a greater opportunity to engage in social and emotional feedback for students.
- The majority of students in elementary regularly adhered to the mask wearing rules although, this was less consistent in the high school and not always challenged by the staff. Approximately 70 parents had informed the school that their child was exempt from wearing a mask. The school administration provided additional masks for losses and breakage during the school day.
- The school is an open campus and thus affords many options to go outside which lessen the impact of social distancing and mask wearing. However, managing entry and exit was sometimes problematic hence the increase in security. The representative from the Board of Governors and School Director reported that conversations with their landlords regarding a fence had been ongoing. The facilities management team stated current planning had the fence beginning during the next school break.
- Entry and exit arrangements had been staggered across the school with multiple drop-off and pick-up points. However, parents did not always observe safe practices even parking across yellow lines and in a disabled bay.
- The school provided a range of pastoral and learning supports. The pastoral team reported that there was a strong emphasis upon the care of students during the pandemic. The team of school counsellors demonstrated ongoing commitment to student care as well as a shared responsibility for students' wellbeing.

- Most students who responded to the OES online survey indicated that they were confident that if they asked for help, they would receive the help that they needed. However, only a majority agreed that they had received useful support for their emotional needs during the pandemic.
- The pastoral team reported an increase in the number of outside counselling referrals at the high school phase during the pandemic. This they noted may be attributable to an increasing openness to discuss mental and emotional health since the pandemic. Staff agreed that the pandemic had led to normalising conversations about mental health and noted how this was creating useful avenues for change.
- Beneficial relationships with external providers such as speech therapists had ensured uninterrupted provision of services to students with additional learning needs throughout the pandemic. Furthermore, senior leaders had instituted additional layers of protection such as requiring providers and visitors to the school to be vaccinated or to present negative Covid-19 test results.
- Individual education plans were in place for students. Through monthly School Support Team (SST) meetings, the counsellors diligently coordinated support for students with additional learning needs. Regular conferences were held with parents. Additionally, zoom meetings were facilitated at the request of parents for joint meeting with service providers.
- Staff reported that since the pandemic, a raft of wellness initiatives were implemented to provide regular opportunities for students to discuss emotional wellbeing and to build their emotional resilience. These included “Lunch Bunch”, (a six-week rotation lunch conversations and activities with an emotional wellness emphasis), 1-5 scale check ins and social emotional learning activities such as mood meters among others.
- A teacher spoke positively of the partnership with Youth Ambassadors for Mental Health and how that work was supporting student advocates in mental health training.
- School leaders and staff carefully tracked students’ attendance during the pandemic and over time had developed attendance codes to reflect student absence due to illness with Covid-19 or isolation and quarantine requirements.
- The counsellors shared examples of school initiatives to promote staff wellbeing. For example, a Health and Wellness Committee had been established and had surveyed staff on activities to promote emotional wellbeing. Staff had participated in “Just Because” these were short courses such as pottery, cooking and yoga etc. to promote wellbeing. Some classes were facilitated by staff with expertise in particular areas and others were facilitated online. Staff had also benefitted from a six-month subscription to a meditation site.
- School leaders also indicated that there were plans to implement a staff “Wellness” allowance in the new school year as part of the school’s drive to further promote staff emotional wellbeing. A travel allowance for staff had also been implemented.
- Remote learning arrangements for students who were ill with Covid-19 included the collection of resources by parents and the posting of homework weekly using Google Docs. Some teachers facilitated lessons using Google Meet.
- Learning Leaders reported minimal learning loss among those students who were ill due to Covid-19 or who were unable to attend face-to face classes due to isolation or quarantine requirements. Strategies such as tutoring sessions and office hours were in place to support students who had missed out on learning.
- Despite the limitations of the pandemic the school had continued to monitor the academic progress of students completing the IB diploma examinations and both the 2021 and 2022 MAP

assessments. Learning Leaders also reported that most students had continued to progress in their learning during the pandemic.

- Throughout the pandemic, the school had maintained regular communication with parents. Weekly parent letters kept parents informed of school events and changes to activities. Additionally, parent engagement was maintained through the continued hosting of celebrations of learning and these were now done at grade level. To ensure these events were conducted safely, they were moved outdoors and attendance was restricted to parents.
- A majority of parents in their survey responses indicated that the school has regular communication with them regarding their child's well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Community learning sessions were also facilitated for parents to support them in identifying and supporting students who may experience challenges due to the pandemic.
- The counselling staff reported that the school had maintained productive partnerships with agencies such as Inclusion Cayman, EIP and Theraplay and there were planned professional development opportunities with these agencies.
- Staff reported that the pandemic had restricted external field trips and participation in a number of outside sporting activities. Nonetheless, staff had utilised the school's learning environment to organise activities such as walks through the mangroves. Additionally, intra-school sports activities had continued.
- Staff stated that school leaders had created a caring environment for both students and staff and that they felt supported and appreciated.
- The school reported that they had updated the staff HR policy to fully reflect Covid-19 related sick pay. The school director reported the school had taken steps to employ substitute teachers which eased the burden of teachers having to cover for absent colleagues.
- The school had a number of excellent facilities that had been deployed to emotionally and physically support students through COVID-19. For instance, leadership had utilised continued intra-school sport and physical activity to support mental health. During break-time and after school students engaged in a variety of sports and activities. The modern school design particularly the high school space afforded a seamless move from class, group to individual learning spaces ensuring social distancing was consistently adhered to.
- The school had utilised their range of outdoor spaces to ensure a sense of normality throughout the pandemic for instance, indoor concerts had been turned into 'Concerts in the Park'
- The school had been able to recruit a new High School Principal and a new Assistant Principal but the school board and senior leaders raised the increased difficulties due to COVID-19 and the high cost of living in the Cayman Islands that was seen as prohibitive for potential new staff.
- The school reported having had a limited impact from COVID-19 but still had utilised online applications to support students learning, like Seesaw and Google classroom, that ensured learning could continue during enforced quarantine or absence. Furthermore, technology such as Zoom had been rolled out to include parents' evenings that had created an increase in parental attendance and engagement.
- Staff reported that they were able to continue their professional development through the sharing of ideas and virtual events. Some staff had attended the Jane Goodall 'Hopecast', online workshops with local occupational therapists, the Early Childhood Care and Education Unit and continued with their International Baccalaureate mandatory training. Other staff had been able to complete courses; for instance, the Kevin Bartlett Guided Reading course. Furthermore, leadership had provided release time to allow staff to work with him gaining additional experience.

'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:

- **Online Parent Conferences.** Senior leaders and staff reported increased parental participation in online parent conferences due to the flexibility and convenience afforded by this medium. Throughout the pandemic, online conferences had proven to be an increasingly useful avenue to discuss students' progress and wellbeing.
- **Increased utilisation of outdoor space.** The pandemic restrictions had caused school leaders to focus on more innovative use of the school's outdoor space. For example, grade level learning celebrations were hosted outdoors during the pandemic. School leaders were increasingly examining other novel use of the outdoor space to further promote students' learning and wellbeing.
- **Social Emotional Wellness.** The school will continue the focus upon students' emotional wellbeing through initiatives such as "Lunch Bunch", morning wellness check ins and wellness surveys.

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,



Nicholas Sherriff
Chief Inspector



Althea Edwards-Boothe
Senior Inspector

Office of Education Standards
Portfolio of the Civil Service

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Successful Schools
and Achieving Students **2**

Cayman Islands Government