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February 25, 2022

Ms. Janet Durksen  
Crewe Road  
George Town  
Grand Cayman

Dear Ms. Durksen,

### **OES thematic visit to First Baptist Christian School**

Following my visit to your school on February 23, 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 Ministry Team (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 School Ministry Team (i.e. Board of Governors), Senior Leadership and staff had worked together to create a caring ethos throughout the school where the well-being of students and staff was a priority.

- Students and staff wore masks, hand sanitised and observed social distancing as they moved around the school. Students were separated into “bubbles” and remained in these throughout the day.
- Students and teachers cleaned desks and other surfaces in the classrooms during the day, the high touch surfaces were sanitised by a cleaner in the middle of the day and then the school was thoroughly cleaned each evening by contracted janitors and “fogged” each evening to further ensure cleanliness.
- The school now had a variety of drop-off and pick-up points for parents to avoid congestion. Students in Grades 6 and 7 went directly to the gym in the morning, while Grades 3-5 went to their classrooms. The younger students played outdoors until school started.
- In the early phases of community transmission of COVID-19, in consultation with Public Health, the school extended their mid-term break to remain closed for a period of two weeks. This helped to slow the spread at the school and since then the school had remained open. Attendance is currently at 93.77%.
- There were meetings of accountability and support between the Chair of the School Ministry Team and the Principal, as well as the Senior Leadership Team and each teacher at least once per month.
- The Chair of the School Ministry Team expressed that the Team had attempted to ensure the Principal had the freedom to make decisions to support the staff during this time. For example, the Principal had hired additional staff to help cover duties during the school day.
- In order to support staff absence due to COVID, an additional teacher was added to the staff as well as substitute teachers from an external agency being contracted, as required, to cover lessons. Teachers reported that they felt the school was improving regarding having adequate staff to cover the curriculum in challenging times.
- Due to COVID-19, additional duties had been added. As such, specialist teachers were put into the duty rotation. One specialist teacher reported that although it was more strenuous to now have duties, it had helped with the relationship with the students as they now had further interaction outside of their weekly specialist classes.
- The school had a social-emotional programme which was implemented in all classes. There were surveys for the school community regarding emotional well-being which Senior Leaders analysed and subsequent actions supported classes during the pandemic.
- Staff reported that they received timely updates from the Principal regarding changes in COVID regulations. They in turn discussed the new changes with their classes to prepare them for what these could mean for them and their families.
- Teachers in Grades 3-7 used a Microsoft Teams feature which enabled student self-reflection using ‘emojis’ to track student emotions each day. Students in Kindergarten to Grade 2 used Post-Its of different colours to share how they felt. All teachers attended to the students’ immediate emotional needs and analysed the information during the week to support the student and the class as needed.
- Programmes were used to identify learning gaps which may have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Response To Intervention (RTI) was then used to support students identified as requiring assistance. Senior Leaders shared that data showed students were making progress and staff reported that they felt the RTI was having a positive impact.
- Heads of Departments reported that new programmes which were recently purchased and implemented had made planning much easier for staff, thus lessening some of the demands on them.
- The emotional well-being of the school community was always considered when putting protocols in place regarding safety. For example, Senior Leaders noticed the emotional toll on the younger students and their parents when parents could not enter the gate. Parents are now permitted to walk their children to the classroom door while wearing masks.

- Online platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Seesaw were used to facilitate remote learning. A staff member was sent overseas for professional development in using Microsoft Teams and disseminated this information to staff members and students to help ensure the school community could transition easily to remote learning if needed.
- Gamification, such as Freckle and Blooket, was being used at the school to support learning and engagement. Heads of Departments reported that gamification has improved the depth of learning and allowed for differentiation for various groups of learners.
- Parents were provided with information for private service providers in the event that their child required counselling. Specialist service providers contracted by individual families worked in collaboration with teachers to support the students to achieve set goals.
- All staff had opportunities to seek counsel from their individual churches. The school had recently changed insurance providers and the Senior Leaders shared that they were in the process of investigating coverage for mental health providers.
- The Heads of Departments shared that the reporting requirements had been reduced to help lessen the workload while continuing to keep parents informed. The reports for the first and last quarters were full reports for all subjects, followed by Parent Teacher Conferences. Only progress on the core subjects was reported in the second and third quarters.
- Students in Grades 3-7, who were in isolation, could access live lessons through Microsoft Teams for the core subjects while younger students used Zoom. All students used online platforms to access assignments which could be used from a variety of locations. Staff also compiled work packets for students who were in isolation when needed.
- The school had purchased laptops for students from Grades 3-7. Responses to surveys indicated that all students had appropriate technology for remote learning. Staff planned the use of technology into lessons to support the needs of diverse learners as well as to help ensure students could transition easily to remote learning if needed during the pandemic.
- Field trips were discontinued during the pandemic, but students were accessing locations virtually, and visitors to share on certain topics were invited into the school once COVID-19 safety precautions were followed.
- Staff had recently completed training in Child Safeguarding and all staff were versed in ways they could detect if a student was not safe or was having a difficult time with their mental health while in isolation. Students were also able to use the message features on the online platforms to communicate needs with teachers.
- The school had “Wellness Wednesdays” as part of their promotion of healthy lifestyles, including mental health and physical well-being. A variety of activities were planned for Wellness Wednesdays, including parents sometimes organising healthy smoothies and treats to be delivered to the teachers. This has helped teachers feel appreciated and supported.
- There was a staff WhatsApp group where teachers communicated with each other and organised support for those in need. For example, when colleagues were in isolation the other staff would arrange “meal trains” to provide food for the colleague and their family.
- Responses to the surveys and conversations with Senior Leaders and staff indicated that communication with parents was effective and consistent. The school continued to share information through their newsletter, which also included pertinent COVID-19 information, as well as through email, telephone and online meetings with parents to discuss progress.

### **‘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 **online learning platforms** to support independent learning, ICT skills and comfort with learning platforms and devices.
- **Safety measures** relating to hand sanitising as it is anticipated this will reduce the spread of common illness such as colds and flus.
- The option of **online meetings** for parents to allow for more convenient access to meetings.
- **Online reflection** for students to set goals, reflect on what could be better and see their progress. This also provides an outlet for emotional well-being.
- **Online professional development** which makes training more accessible and easier to be aligned with individual training needs.
- **Staggered recess/bubble groups** as this has helped lessen behaviour problems and conflict.

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 Ministry Team, 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  
Portfolio of the Civil Service

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Successful Schools  
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Cayman Islands Government