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7 April 2022

Ms. D Thompson & Ms. K Jackson  
Prospect Point Road  
Patricks Island  
Grand Cayman

Dear Ms. Thompson and Ms. Jackson,

### **OES thematic visit to Montessori By The Sea School**

Following my visit to your school on 6 April 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 your 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 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, representatives from the Parents Guild and members of staff. We did not speak to students.

## **Context**

As we learn to manage community transmission and continue to support the school family, 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's 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:**

- Senior leaders and all staff held the safety and wellbeing of the students as a priority. The school had clear protocols with respect to the pandemic that were visibly understood by all stakeholders and followed faithfully.
- Students operated in a 'bubble' system when indoors and mask wearing and hand sanitizing was embedded practice. Social distancing was not always possible in smaller areas, for example the IT suite, but staff and students acted appropriately to minimise any risks.
- Students arrived at school at different points designated to their bubble, where they were met by members of staff. Protocols put in place before Covid included a 'kiss and go' system that ensured there was no congregating of parents within the school grounds.
- Students had their lunches in the classroom and then played outside in their bubbles. There was a clear schedule to ensure students had access to all outside areas throughout the week.
- The school had invested financially across the school due to Covid-19. They had placed automatic sanitizers outside the entrance to every class, placed additional hand sanitizers around the classes and installed touchless paper towel dispensers.
- HVAC air filtration and purification systems were installed in all classrooms, as well as HEPA filters in all AC units. Janitorial service was increased to two fulltime cleaners. All stakeholders were offered the opportunity to take lateral flow tests voluntarily, unless there was a case reported within their class. In this case, all staff and students took an LFT over the mandated period. The collection, collation and distribution of the LFTs was undertaken by the Office Manager and administration staff. This was originally perceived as time consuming, but had become a more efficient process.
- The school monitored attendance and set more stringent definitions as to absence in terms of accessing remote learning. Students who were in mandated isolation were only marked present if they were engaging in Level 2 Remote Learning Provision. The school reported overall average percentage as 89.5% since September 2022.
- Heads of programs reported that covering curriculum, when either staff or students were absent, had not been a significant problem throughout the pandemic. All classes had been covered or taught by appropriate staff and the school's remote learning protocol clearly explained what support students would receive in the event of Covid-related absences.
- Staff agreed that curriculum had been successfully covered, but that there had been a considerable increase in workload for all staff and this was proving a challenge in terms of fatigue.

- Heads of programs reported that there had been no learning loss due to Covid this academic year. Progress was rigorously monitored through a variety of strategies and students continued to progress as expected, if not better. Heads of programs accredited this to the learning packs that were sent out to students, individual staff follow-ups to students, the relative short periods of the absences and strong parental support.
- Leaders reported all staff had become extremely proficient at the use and delivery of remote learning and had been upskilled through a series of professional development sessions from both internal and external bodies.
- The school used Microsoft Teams as a communication tool between students and staff, and also used the See-Saw platform in lower elementary and Casa.
- Teachers had used additional applications throughout the pandemic including Transparent Classroom, IXL, Nearpod and Epic.
- Students' wellbeing was closely monitored by all staff, and staff employed additional social-emotional learning packages, including Zippy's Friends and Apple's Friends. These were in place before the onset of Covid-19 but had become more poignant, and served as a source of reassurance to some parents in respect to the stresses associated with the pandemic.
- The learning support teacher shared communication from parents stating their appreciation of the SEL programs within the school and the opportunities they were offering to discuss feelings, both Covid and non-Covid related, with their children.
- The learning support teacher shared a document she had sent to parents through the Crescent and Current publication regarding social and emotional learning and highlighting the issues associated with stressful situations.
- Staff felt supported by the administration with respect to their wellbeing through regular 'walk-throughs' and 'check-ins' and a weekly email that ensured staff were kept informed of the latest protocols and procedures.
- Some staff spoke of a supportive 'huge family feel' amongst themselves that had grown stronger through the pandemic.
- Middle leaders appreciated the flexibility and awareness of the co-principals with respect to accommodating staff's needs during the pandemic.
- Senior leaders reported they took care of each other's wellbeing and ensured they had someone to talk to if and when required.
- Senior leaders reported that communication between school and parents had always been a strength but that the pandemic had served to formalise certain elements such as the weekly 'Sea-mail' that contained a specific section on health and safety. Communication was predominately through email documents, with other channels including Teams, Transparent Classroom and Facebook. The Parents Guild highlighted the depth and speed of communication that school shared with parents on a regular basis.
- Senior leaders had ensured that staff continued to receive professional development throughout the pandemic including training in the use and delivery of technology associated with remote learning.
- Covid-19 had led senior leaders to make minor adaptations with respect to recruitment of new staff. Senior leaders had placed adverts on a greater number of platforms and earlier within the recruitment stage. The school reported no significant problems recruiting staff, although senior leaders did report, anecdotally, that some expats were less keen to leave their home nations to work abroad during the pandemic.
- Senior leaders reported that the School Improvement Plan was not put into effect as early as it would normally be in the academic cycle due to administrative time spent on Covid protocols, staff absences due to Covid and the necessity for staff to focus on the impact of Covid on families and in their classrooms. Issues were being addressed across the

school but the documental evidence was not as consistently completed as would normally be the case.

- Staff reported that they felt Covid restrictions and changes to drop-off and pick-up routines had led to a loss of face-to-face communications with parents. 'Quick' conversations and feed backs were difficult but e mails and phone calls were now more commonly used.
- The principals and senior leaders had a very strong vision of progress and protocols throughout the pandemic, and had analysed changes that may be usefully kept post-Covid.

### **'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:

- **Increased vigilance regarding hygiene and hand washing protocols** throughout the school to support the general health of all stakeholders.
- **The use of online applications**, to continue to offer virtual communications with parents.
- **Continued commitment to additional janitorial resource** to maintain high level of hygiene throughout the school.
- **Modified drop-off procedures** initially stemming from Covid-19 precautions proved to be beneficial to children over time, in that they increased independence and facilitated a quicker transition in the work morning.
- **Creating a 'birthday corner' in the weekly Sea-mail** to enhance connections with families.

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,



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

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Successful Schools  
and Achieving Students **2**  
Cayman Islands Government