



INFORMATION BRIEF

School leadership and management: Lessons from high performing secondary schools

What is school-based CPD?

Effective school leadership and management practices are essential in providing supervision and pedagogical support to teachers, improving teacher and pupil attendance, and building strong, safe, and inclusive school communities.

Whilst annual Secondary Grade Learning Assessments (SGLA) consistently report low learning outcomes, with the most recent showing only 7 and 12 per cent of JSS2 students are performing at grade level respectively in Maths and English, some schools perform better than expected. Clearly, school leadership is one important interconnected factor, together with safe and inclusive learning environments, parental support, the recruitment and deployment of qualified teachers and, effective teaching practice that contributes to improved pupil learning outcomes.

This is one of a series of four briefings drawn from research conducted by the UKAid-funded Leh Wi Lan programme, which recognise this complexity by casting a light on the activities of high performing schools in three districts to understand and share their good practice.

In terms of school leadership, one key finding of the study was that, in every better-performing school visited, the main driving factor contributing to quality learning was a strong leader and that all better-performing schools have engaged and supportive community members who take their role of supporting and challenging the school leadership very seriously.



Better performing schools

Meet regularly with Community Teacher Associations (CTAs). High performing schools, share responsibility for pupils' education with the community. Whilst the nature of contact varies from formal meetings to in-person visits from CTA members, this interaction also enables communities to positively influence what happens in school. A CTA member in one school studied said:

"Our frequent meetings with teachers and head of the school has brought a lot of changes in the school and one of the ways is teachers have stopped flogging and the use of vulgar language which was demoralising to students. Now we have seen teachers calling parents in the school explain the progress of their children and to me that is a very big change in the community."

62% of all secondary schools met with their CTA in the previous term¹.

High performing schools build strong relationships with CTAs.



Benefit from the moral and financial support of CTAs. In some areas, CTAs have been able to pay teachers and this has helped schools retain teaching staff. Communities unable to offer monetary support instead come together to offer gifts in kind, sacrificing their yields from subsistence farming, rent-free accommodation in the community, bags of rice, etc, in order to appreciate and motivate teachers who are not on the payroll. One school said:

“Upon the inception of the school, the CTA agreed to pay teachers a stipend out of our pockets which was a good move at the time to keep teachers in school. Then, with time, government started sending subsidies in the school and we agreed with the principal to use some of the subsidy to pay the stipend for the teachers who are not on payroll.”

Communicate effectively with parents. At one top performing school the CTA has set up a WhatsApp group. The group functions as a forum to encourage parents to monitor their school, channel complaints, disseminate information and report any issues to the CTA leadership to action on. This has resulted in parents feeling more vested and able to hold the leadership of their child’s school to account. One member proudly confirms the importance of shared monitoring and responsibility:

“My children are my biggest investment. They will look after me in my sunset days. I am 100% committed to ensuring they get a good education, so I am committed to monitoring their school and following up on any action.”

Engage effectively with external supervision staff. High performing schools see external supervision as a positive input to improve learning. This involves treating supervisors, inspectors and SSOs as trusted partners and has helped ensure that Lesson Plan Manuals (LPMs) are delivered effectively in classrooms and that teachers adopt the habit of reflecting on their pedagogical practice. One school credits SSOs with providing the operational impetus towards transitioning away from *“copy from the board, talk and chalk teaching methodology”*.

Methodology

This Briefing Paper explores key findings on school leadership from a qualitative deep dive study that highlights pockets of effective learning (‘positive deviance’) to consider what, if any, lessons can be replicated elsewhere to help other secondary schools make greater progress towards achieving their performance goals.

The study covered three districts of Western Rural, Kono and Karene targeting three schools in each area – two high performing schools and one average or low performing school, according to average pupil results in the May-June 2019 SGLAs.

The three-person research team included two Sierra Leonean researchers and spent three days in each school using key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs) and lesson/school observations to develop case studies. FGDs were carried out separately for boys and girls with the same set of eight pupils who had been randomly selected for the SGLA pupil test.

¹ SGLA III