



# Leh Wi Lan Sierra Leone Secondary Grade Learning Assessment 2019



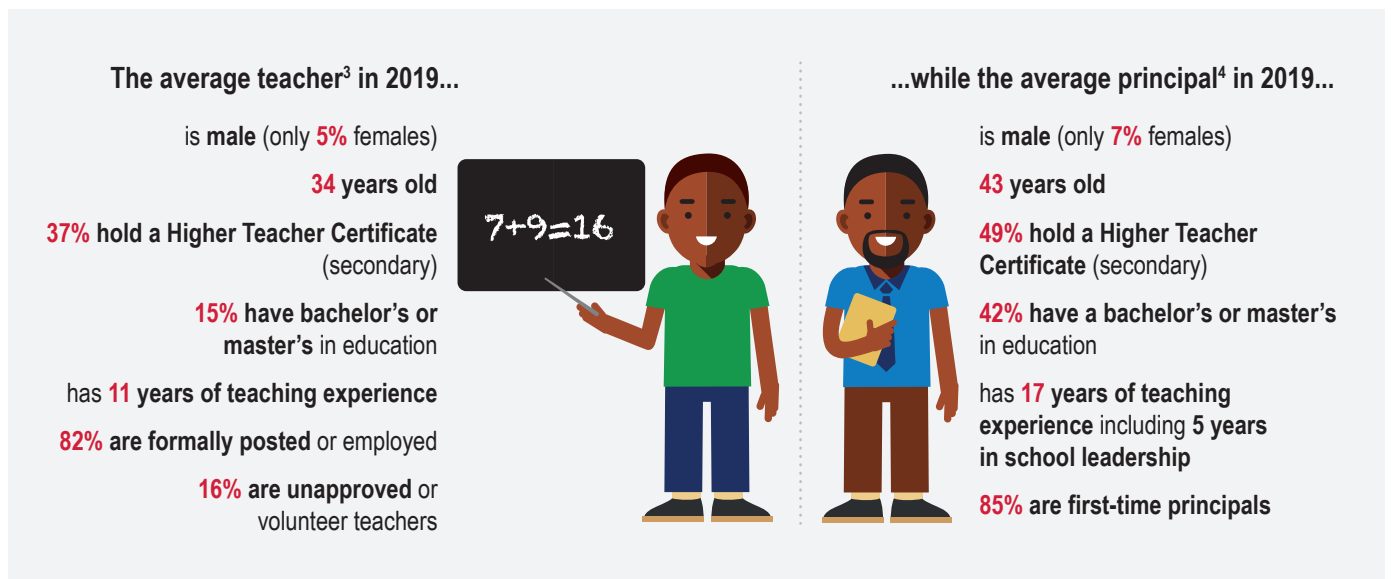
Briefing note 2: October 2019

## Teaching practices and school leadership and management in junior and senior secondary schools in Sierra Leone

*Leh Wi Lan* is a UKaid-funded programme that supports the Sierra Leone Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) in achieving sustained improvements in girls' education and secondary grade learning outcomes. At the school and classroom level, this has translated into the development and distribution of thousands of English and maths lesson plans, introduction of pupil handbooks, provision of teaching support through School Support Officers (SSO) visits, efforts to make schools safer, and targeted support to school leadership and management (SLM) for principals.

To understand and track changes in pupil learning, teaching practices, and schools' learning environment, *Leh Wi Lan* conducts an annual secondary grade learning assessment (SGLA) in JSS and SSS schools across the country. The SGLAs also support *Leh Wi Lan* with evidence-informed adaptations to its design and implementation strategies. The first SGLA I survey was conducted in 2017, with a follow-up SGLA II survey in 2018, and the latest SGLA III survey conducted in all 16 districts of Sierra Leone over May-June 2019. This note presents evidence on teaching and SLM practices in junior and senior secondary schools from the SGLA III survey.<sup>1, 2</sup>

### 1 What does the profile of an average Sierra Leonean teacher and principal look like



**The average Sierra Leonean teacher and principal is male, middle aged, reasonably experienced, more often certified with an HTC rather than a degree qualification, and formally employed.**

1 Please refer to SGLA III 2019 briefing note #1 which discusses pupil learning achievement among JSS2 and SSS2 pupils in English and maths.  
 2 In total, 705 JSS and SSS schools were sampled across all 16 districts in the country. The teacher and principal interviews were administered to 1,970 teachers and 619 principals respectively. To provide estimates of key indicators that are representative at national, regional and district levels, the observed values were analysed using survey weights.  
 3 The eligibility criteria for a teacher to be included in the sample was that they should be teaching English and/or maths in JSS or SSS levels and present in school on the day of the survey. Unless otherwise specified, this is the reference population for results in this section.  
 4 The term 'principals' is used to refer to the various heads of schools interviewed as part of the principal sample which comprised of 41 per cent principals, 38 per cent acting principals, 17 per cent assistant or vice principals and 1 per cent school proprietors.

The number of female teachers (5 per cent) and principals (7 per cent) remains very low across all three years of the SGLA. The Western region had the highest and Eastern region the lowest proportion of female teachers and principals in 2019. Unapproved JSS<sup>5</sup> and SSS<sup>6</sup> schools had a significantly higher proportion of female teachers and principals compared to approved schools. This is indicative of the schooling environment created, particularly for female pupils.

A marginally higher percentage of teachers (37 per cent) had the HTC (Secondary) qualification compared to previous rounds of this survey (33 per cent). Roughly 50 per cent of principals also now hold HTC (Secondary) compared to 41 per cent of principals in 2017. More principals also have graduate or higher degree qualifications compared to teachers: 42 per cent of principals reported having a bachelor's or master's degree in education compared to 15 per cent of teachers.

## 2 How much instructional time do pupils get from their teachers?

### 2.1 Contact hours

The SGLAs have consistently highlighted that pupils do not get enough time with their teachers in the classroom, more so in JSS than SSS.<sup>7</sup> The average teacher taught for slightly less than 12 hours in a standard week. This amounts to approximately two and a half hours of teaching per day (or less than half the standard school day).<sup>8</sup> This figure has been relatively constant over time: in SGLA I the average teacher was reported to teach for 12.7 hours per week, while the average was 12.4 hours in SGLA II.

Regional variation was somewhat less significant this year, with teachers in the Western province teaching up to 2 hours and 28 minutes per day, while the average teacher in the North had the lowest daily instructional time of 2 hours and 15 minutes.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.2 School and classroom absenteeism

In addition to teachers not teaching for a large part of the school day, instructional time in class is also affected by teacher absenteeism from school and classroom (even if they are in the school premises). The main reasons consistently reported for teachers' absence from school since the first SGLA have been own or family illness (according to teachers) and low levels of teacher salary and remuneration (according to principals).

Furthermore, even if teachers are present in school, classroom absenteeism is a significant problem. More than one in every three classrooms (36 per cent) having students but no teacher present during scheduled class hours.<sup>10</sup> This issue seems to have become worse since last year, where the corresponding figure from SGLA II was 26 per cent. This proportion was also found to be significantly higher (42 per cent) in the Southern province compared to other provinces in 2019.



The average teacher teaches for **two and a half hours per day**

This amounts to less than half the standard school day



More than **1 in 3** classes has **no teacher** during lesson time

5 Female principals at JSS (approved 1%, unapproved 10%); Female teachers at JSS (approved 4%, unapproved 6%).

6 Female principals at SSS (approved 1%, unapproved 7%); Female teachers at JSS (approved 0%, unapproved 3%).

7 The average SSS teacher reported over 13 hours in a week (2 hours 40 minutes per day) whereas this figure was a couple of hours lower at 11 hours per week (2 hours 15 minutes per day) for JSS teachers.

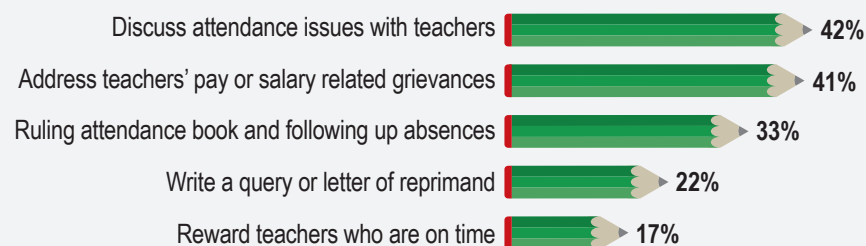
8 The average teacher taught for 2 hours and 22 minutes per day. This was calculated by asking teachers the number of periods they taught and the average length of a standard period. The length of the standard school day in secondary schools in Sierra Leone is approximately 5.5-6 hours (including breaks) in single shift schools and 5-5.5 hours in double shift.

9 In SGLA II, the difference was more pronounced with teachers in the South teaching up to 2 hours and 55 minutes per day, while their counterparts in the North West province taught for about 2 hours and 11 minutes. Similarly the Eastern province recorded highest daily instruction time (2 hours and 49 minutes) in SGLA I, while the West had the lowest time of 2 hours and 24 minutes in 2017. Interestingly the regions with the highest and lowest reported instructional times has changed each year.

10 A 'School Observation Instrument' was completed in each sample school whereby enumerators were asked to go around the school during teaching hours and, amongst other things, count the number of classes with students but no teachers present, and those with both students and teachers present.

Nonetheless, the SGLAs have found that principals are aware of teacher absenteeism issues, and each year, nearly all principals (over 90 per cent) reported taking some corrective measures in this regard. The most commonly cited response was to discuss the issue with the teachers. While in previous years this was followed by ruling the school attendance book at opening time or writing a query or letter of reprimand to the teacher, for the first time in SGLA III, nearly 41 per cent of principals reported addressing pay or salary related grievances of teachers. This has not been mentioned to any significant value previously. It will be interesting to explore further why and how principals feel newly empowered in this regard,<sup>11</sup> and whether there is any resulting change in teacher absenteeism trends in later years. The province-level results are very similar to national results, with little variation across provinces.

**Figure 1: Actions by principals in response to teacher absenteeism**

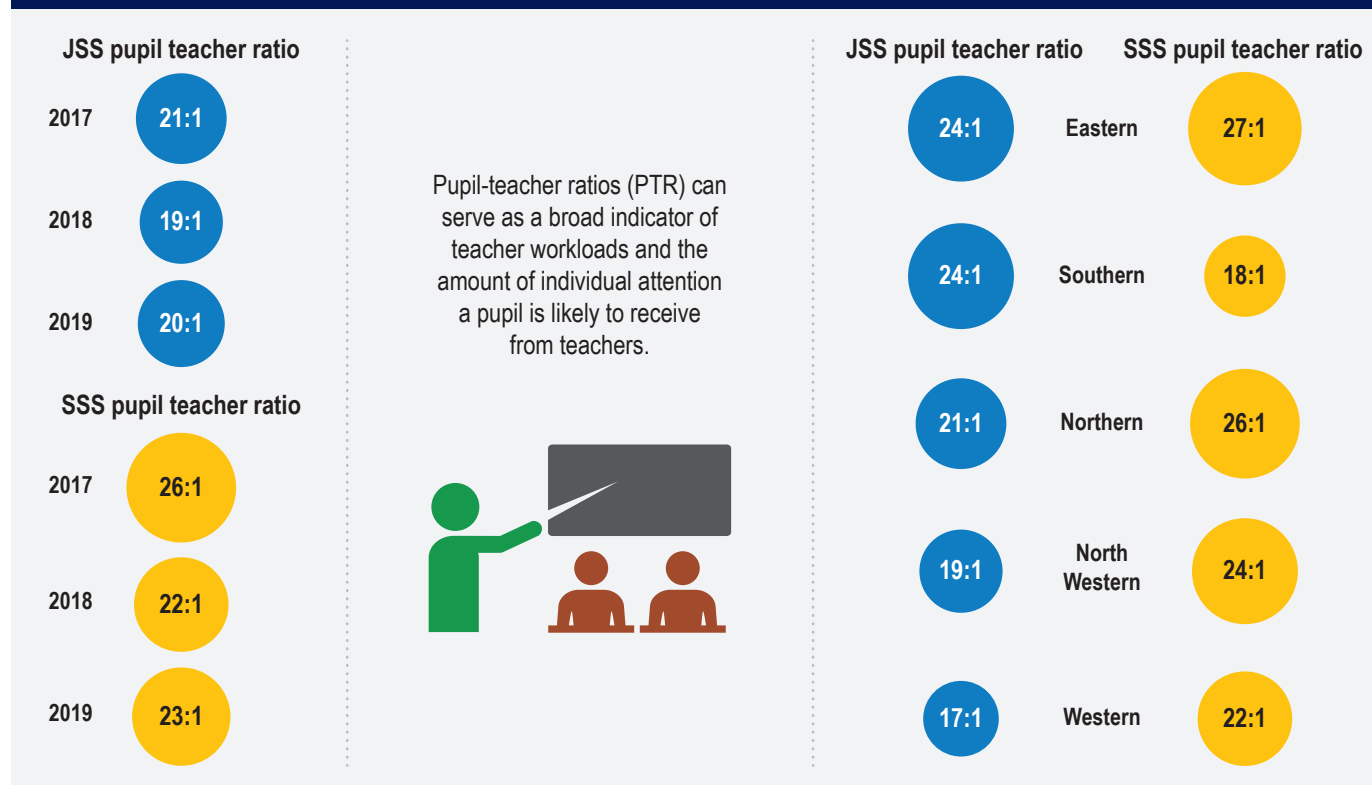


### 2.3 Pupil-teacher ratios (PTR)

All three rounds of SGLAs have found that the average class size in secondary schools in Sierra Leone is relatively small, and pupil-teacher ratios<sup>12</sup> are similar and manageable across JSS and SSS schools. This year (2019), the average PTR across secondary schools was 21:1, with 20 pupils to each teacher at JSS level and 23 pupils to each teacher at SSS. The corresponding figures on PTR from the SGLA I and II surveys were higher, but only marginally, as shown below.

In terms of regional variations in PTR, the national trend held at provincial level too, with JSS classes being relatively larger with higher average PTRs. Nonetheless, as the figure shows, there were significant variations particularly in the North and North Western regions.

**Figure 2: Pupil-teacher ratios at national and province levels**

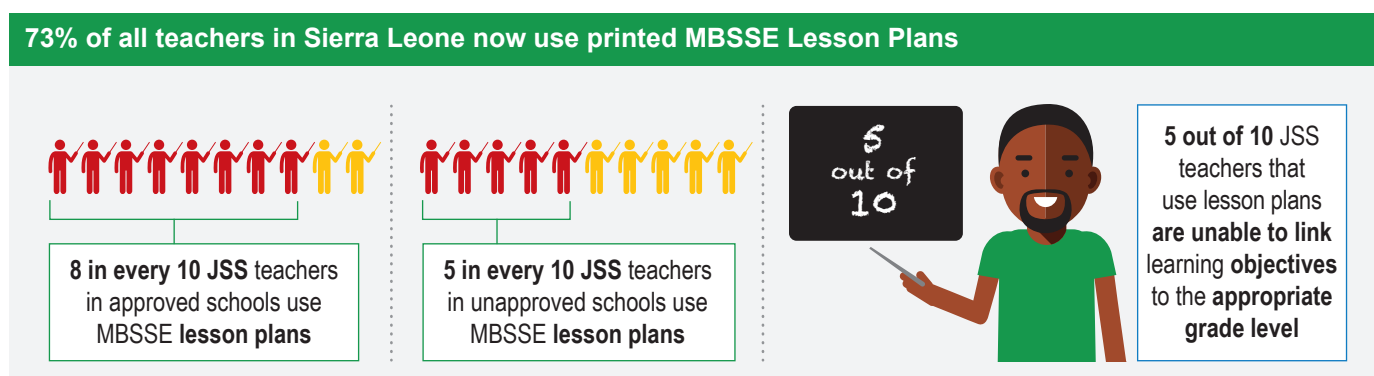


<sup>11</sup> For instance, this may be linked to a recent focus on strengthening SLM practices in schools, and/or more generally to wider education sector trends in Sierra Leone including the nationwide drive to approve and formalise more schools.

<sup>12</sup> The numerator is the total number of students enrolled in a given JSS or SSS school, whereas the denominator is the total number of teachers teaching in that school. Information on PTRs comes from the principal interviews, and is largely drawn from school registers.

### 3 How are MBSSE lesson plans being understood and used by teachers?

#### 3.1 Usage of lesson plans



A large proportion of JSS and SSS teachers reported the use of MBSSE lesson plans to plan and prepare for their lessons. For JSS, a trend can be established with 68 per cent of teachers reporting the use of printed lesson plans in SGLA I, rising sharply to 80 per cent in SGLA II and then dipping again slightly to 74 per cent this year in SGLA III. Unfortunately, it is difficult to establish the reasons for this drop within a quantitative survey. For SSS teachers, MBSSE lesson plans were introduced in the last quarter of 2018. Despite this, the current usage is high at 71 per cent. Reported usage of lesson plans was also markedly higher in approved schools (79 per cent for JSS teachers) compared to unapproved schools (47 per cent) which may link to how the lesson plans are being distributed.

If a teacher was not using lesson plans at all, this was usually because they had not received them yet or had not been trained on how to use them. In addition to lesson plans, textbooks and lesson notes have continued to be reported as important guides across the three rounds of SGLA. This year, for instance 48 per cent of teachers reported using textbooks to prepare while 32 per cent (a 10 percentage point decline from SGLA II) mentioned lesson notes. Approximately 5 per cent of teachers also reported using the newly introduced Pupil Handbooks to prepare for teaching.<sup>13</sup>

#### 3.2 Teachers' feedback on MBSSE lesson plans

The SGLAs consistently find that teachers continue to give positive feedback on MBSSE lesson plans, although there remain some concerns about content. Teachers in SGLA III considered lesson plans to be well structured and as helping pupils learn better. Furthermore, like in SGLA I and II, the vast majority of teachers this year thought lesson plan content was at the right level for their pupils. However, 21 per cent of teachers continued to be concerned that some content (especially examples used to explain concepts) did not relate well to the context and realities pupils were used to. This has been a recurrent concern since the first SGLA.

**Table 1: Teachers' feedback on MBSSE lesson plans**

Teachers who use MBSSE lesson plans who think...	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Lesson plan content relates well to pupils	13%	59%	21%	6%
Content is at the right level for pupils	35%	55%	8%	1%
Lesson plans move smoothly between topics	41%	50%	8%	1%
Pupils learn well with lesson plans	31%	63%	5%	1%

<sup>13</sup> Pupil Handbooks for JSS and SSS English and math have been introduced in December 2018 and are a resource primarily intended for the pupils to assist them in self-study, revision and practice.

Evidence from *Leh wi Lan's* Tangerine monitoring data suggests that even though a majority of teachers report the use of MBSSE lesson plans, teachers are not on track when following the lesson plans through the school year. Each term, teachers tend to fall behind and are unable to complete the syllabus for the term. In the new term, teachers skip to the lessons for that term regardless of where they were at the end of the previous term. This implies that lessons scheduled for the end of the previous term never get taught. SSS teachers were found to be lagging farther behind than JSS teachers. Teachers could be lagging behind due to a range of factors, including their low instructional time in class, limitations of own pedagogical skills and content knowledge, extra-curricular activities in school, among other reasons.















### 3.3 Teachers' understanding of lesson plan content

Nearly all teachers reported they understand the use and purpose of lesson plans to facilitate learning, however evidence on teachers' understanding of lesson plan content does not support this claim.<sup>14</sup> In practice, only 46 per cent of JSS teachers managed to correctly match learning objectives with the appropriate grade. This is a slight improvement on the 43 per cent figure reported in SGLA II, but it is still low.

JSS teachers in approved schools performed slightly better with 47 per cent getting this correct compared to 38 per cent of teachers in unapproved schools. There were also wide provincial variations, with less than a third of teachers (30 per cent) in the East matching the learning objectives correctly, compared to 54 per cent in the West and 53 per cent in the North. However, there are signs that teachers are getting more familiar with lesson plans with time. This year, 52 per cent of teachers managed to recall the names of all five standard parts of a typical lesson from the lesson plans compared to 35 per cent of teachers who got this correct in SGLA II.<sup>15</sup> This is corroborated by *Leh wi Lan's* own programme monitoring data (Tangerine) which shows that a majority of JSS teachers are actually employing all five parts during the lesson. Their use has also been improving from 51 per cent teachers using all five parts in October 2018 to 72 per cent in July 2019.

Teachers also reported to struggle with the application of lesson plan content in their classrooms. Over 60 per cent of JSS and SSS teachers said they struggled to fit all the prescribed activities in a lesson plan within the duration of a period.<sup>16</sup> This figure is similar to that in previous rounds of the survey, and is indicative of a further area for improvement in MBSSE lesson plans.

**Table 2: Teachers' ability to use MBSSE lesson plans**

Teachers who use MBSSE lesson plans who are able to...	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Understand how to use lesson plans	 41%	 57%	 1%	0%
Understand what pupils might learn	 29%	 70%	 2%	0%
Check if pupils are understanding content	 33%	 66%	 1%	 1%
Fit all activities into one period	 7%	 27%	 55%	 11%

14 To get a more objective assessment of teacher engagement with lesson plans and understanding of learning benchmarks, the SGLA II and III surveys asked JSS teachers to simply match a set of three English and/or math lesson plan learning objectives to the corresponding JSS grades (JSS 1-3). This exercise was not conducted with SSS teachers given SSS lesson plans were only distributed recently and SSS teachers may not have had enough time to engage and internalize their content by the time the SGLA III survey took place in May-June 2019.

15 JSS teachers were also asked to name the five standard parts of a lesson plan, in any order they wish: Opening; Introduction to the New Material ("I Do"); Guided Practice ("We Do"); Independent Practice ("You Do"); and Closing.

16 This could be driven by a range of factors, such as teachers' mastery of the subject material (especially if they lack subject specialism); or constrained lesson time (especially in shift schools); or the lesson plans indeed being more ambitious than what teachers can feasibly deliver within one period.

## 4 How do teachers deal with diverse learning needs in the classroom?

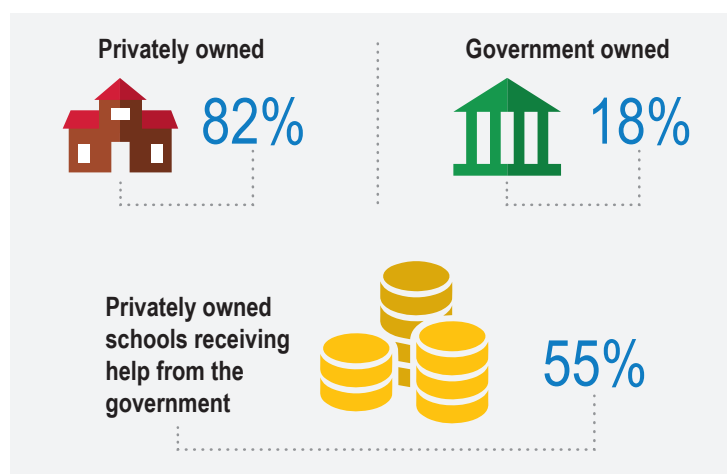
Similar to last year's results, over 90 per cent of teachers and principals in SGLA III said they had to manage at least some pupils in their classrooms and/or schools whose learning performance was weak. Actions taken by teachers to support such pupils included: encouraging the pupils to work harder, closer monitoring, speaking to the pupil about their issues, and offering extra tuition. It was rare for teachers to seek support from a senior member of staff on how to promote greater inclusivity in their classrooms. Nonetheless, at the wider school level, principals reported arranging extra tuition and speaking to the pupil or his/her parents to address issues with performance. For marginalised pupils (e.g. pupils from relatively lower-income families; or those with physical or intellectual disabilities), principals additionally emphasized the provision of financial assistance, with 41 per cent reporting they had provided monetary support and 35 per cent providing school materials for free. It was uncommon for teachers and principals to report punitive measures such as punishing or disciplining struggling pupils or moving them down a grade.

**Tangerine data suggests the use of teaching aids and positive language by JSS and SSS teachers increased from October 2018 to July 2019. Furthermore, more teachers in 2019 were creating an inclusive learning environment by organizing pupils in group, including all pupils in the lesson, and adopting the use of multiple assessment approaches.**

## School leadership and management

### 5 What is the ownership and approval status of schools?

Majority of the secondary schools surveyed during SGLA III were privately owned (82 per cent), while 18 per cent were government-owned. Privately owned schools were usually mission schools (36 per cent), or community schools (30 per cent). Previous rounds of the survey have found similar results. With regard to school financing, SGLA III found that 55 per cent of privately-owned schools currently receive some government assistance. This was much higher for JSS schools at 91 per cent, compared to 43 per cent of SSS receiving government assistance in terms of financial support, teachers or school materials. This year (2019), 80 per cent schools reported that their JSS section was approved by the MBSSE, while the approval status for SSS sections of non-government schools was slightly lower at 66 per cent. The most common reason reported for not having approval for JSS was that schools had an active application still pending decision from MBSSE, while most SSS sections had never put in an application for approval.



## 6 What leadership and management practices are used to support the learning environment?

### 6.1 The role of staff meetings

The SGLAs have consistently found that staff meetings are reported as an established practice in secondary schools in Sierra Leone. SGLA III also provides evidence that staff meetings are now increasingly focused on pedagogy and learning, and are not only limited to day-to-day school administration and attendance issues. This was a new trend first seen in SGLA II.<sup>17</sup> Exams, pupil performance and school planning and administration were other commonly reported topics. Two out of every three teachers also reported having smaller, formal one-on-one meetings with their principal or head of department where again teaching practices, school administration and pupil performance were amongst the main topics discussed.

### 6.2 Lesson observations

Most JSS and SSS schools continued to report active systems of internal lesson observations. As in SGLA II, this year teachers again reported an average of five lessons observed during the previous term (January to April 2019). The observers were usually the principal, acting/vice principal or head of department. 94 per cent of principals and 80 per cent of teachers confirmed that some form of feedback was also provided after the lesson observation, mostly in terms of one-on-one discussion with the concerned teacher. This is again very similar to SGLA II results. Province level results for 2019 are also very similar to the national-level findings.

### 6.3 External supervision

In addition to internal supervision through staff meetings and lesson observations, SGLA III further confirms the role of external supervisors, particularly SSOs, in visiting schools, observing lessons and supporting teaching practices. Nearly 90 per cent of principals reported at least one external supervision visit during the previous term, with an average of six visits between January and April 2019. The most frequent visitors were school support officers or SSOs (reported by over 80 per cent of both principals and teachers). This figure has been relatively stable since SGLA II. Nonetheless it shows that SSOs are formally adopting their roles and functions, having started from a mere 3 per cent of principals reporting SSO visits in SGLA I. MBSSE inspectors were the next most commonly mentioned visitors. There was some variation amongst provinces however, with SSO visits least frequently reported in the Western province (60 per cent), while 94 per cent of principals in the North-West reported that an SSO had visited. On the other hand, MBSSE inspectors were the most frequent external visitors in the Western province, and lowest in the North-West province.

The main purpose of supervision visits, as reported by school principals, was again primarily linked to learning and teacher development. Over two-thirds of teachers confirmed that external visitors had observed their lessons the previous term, with 82 per cent reporting the visitor had been an SSO. In SGLA I, external visitors had reportedly focused on more administrative functions, like checking teacher and pupil attendance and other school records.

**Figure 3: The top three reported purposes of external supervision visits**



## 7 What is being done to make schools safer?

SGLA III reported information on aspects of school safety for the first time.<sup>18</sup> Almost all principals (96 per cent) said they had taken at least some measure to make their school environment safer in the previous year. The most common action was to make the route to and from school safer for pupils, particularly girls; followed making school facilities (e.g. toilets, fencing the compound). A large number of schools also reportedly introduced better internal systems for handling school safety issues. It was slightly less common to provide training and discuss school safety topics with teachers. The figure below summarises key measures taken to make schools safer in JSS and SSS schools.

<sup>17</sup> It is difficult to fully capture the effectiveness of such practices within a quantitative survey and more qualitative inquiry will be helpful in this regard.

<sup>18</sup> Principals were asked what actions they had taken to make the school environment safer as part of the Principal interview.



## 8 How do schools interact with parents and rest of the community?

In line with previous rounds of the survey, SGLA III results affirmed that most secondary schools in Sierra Leone interacted with parents and the wider community through some form of parent-teacher or community-teacher associations (PTA/CTA). A higher proportion of schools (97 per cent) now report having a PTA/CTA compared to 87 per cent schools reporting such bodies in SGLA II. Nearly two-thirds of the PTA/CTAs were reported to be currently active, with 62 per cent having met at least once since the last term, i.e. between January and April 2019. Three in four heads of schools also reported having some type of school action- or school development plan this year. These were usually developed in consultation between the principal, teachers, PTA/CTA and school proprietor.

### Concluding remarks

Although average pupil-teacher ratios in secondary schools in Sierra Leone are actually quite manageable, perhaps due to teacher' school and classroom absenteeism and extra-curricular activities, pupils end up getting fairly reduced **instructional time** from their teachers who only teach for half of the official length of a school day and leave more than one in three classrooms unattended.

There has been rapid uptake of **MBSSE lesson plans** since their initial distribution. Although feedback is generally positive and there is early evidence that teachers' understanding of content and application is improving, the focus for SSOs and principals going forward should be on improving how teachers engage with and use these lesson plans in their actual classrooms. Similarly, lesson plan developers can revisit whether the quantity, presentation (especially examples used to explain concepts), and level at which lesson plan content is pitched is appropriate for the learning levels and context of the pupils (and teachers) they aim to support.

Evidence that SLM practices like staff meetings, lesson observations and supervisory visits now appear to focus more on **pedagogical support to teachers**. In particular, it provides school-level validation of the formal adoption of SSOs' roles and functions. Further quantitative and qualitative research is required to see whether, and how, these activities translate into better learning and inclusive education outcomes in the classroom.

### About the project and contact details

*Leh Wi Lan*/Sierra Leone Secondary Education Improvement Programme (SSEIP) is a five-year (2016-2021) UKaid-funded programme aimed at improving English and maths learning achievement in all secondary schools, especially for girls. This briefing note was produced under *Leh Wi Lan's* monitoring, evidence and research workstream as part of the annual secondary grade learning assessment. Any views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of UK Department for International Development, Sierra Leone Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, Mott MacDonald or Oxford Policy Management.

For more details please contact: **Diana Ofori-Owusu at +232 76803741**

**M**  
**M**  
**MOTT**  
**MACDONALD**

**Oxford Policy**  
**Management**