

Effective monitoring to improve the quality of teaching and learning in Freetown



In brief

- Effective monitoring of schools is essential to ensure they are safe environments for children and are delivering a minimum standard of education.
- Freetown City Council (FCC) has no school monitoring system in place; schools are not routinely supervised which is resulting in a lack of necessary oversight and accountability.
- The aim of this project is to collect data on schools' current adherence to a set of agreed minimum standards and current supervision experiences. The information collected will inform FCC and other stakeholders about the current conditions of its schools and support them taking appropriate and informed policy decisions.
- Findings corroborate that many schools do not meet many of the minimum standards and expectations, such as access to clean water, clean latrines, safeguarding training and protocols, respectful disciplining techniques, teachers in every classroom, use of textbooks and basic teaching techniques and availability of proper seats in classrooms for every student.
- On the other side, schools keep good records of student and staff attendance in their logbooks and also hold regular meetings with key stakeholders.
- These results show that the development and implementation of a sound and effective monitoring framework in schools could drastically improve the quality of teaching and learning in Freetown schools.

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Overview of the research

In Freetown, whilst all primary and junior secondary schools within the city are under the purview of Freetown City Council (FCC), there is no school monitoring system in place. Schools are not routinely supervised and are only rarely inspected, resulting in a lack of necessary oversight and accountability. The limited inspections are focused on basic administrative information only, not on information required to monitor how well schools are operating in order to drive change. The aim of this project is to support FCC's capacity to oversee and support schools within the city.

To inform the design and implementation of a monitoring framework, data was collected from all schools to gain knowledge about their current condition and whether they meet the agreed minimum standards.

Through a school leader survey and classroom observations, several questions were asked:

- Are teachers in schools?
- Are schools clean and safe?
- Do schools meet minimum standards of teaching, learning and safety?
- What are the current schools' supervision experiences?

Data was collected through a school survey administered to Principals and/or Head Teachers of 113 primary and junior secondary schools, mostly in Eastern Freetown. Survey questions ranged from student and teachers' numbers, adherence to minimum standards, and current supervision experiences.

Key findings

WASH, safeguarding and site safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 60% of schools do not have access to clean water nor keep their toilets clean.• 44% of schools confirmed they hold regular teacher trainings but there is no clear awareness on whether these practices are being implemented at schools due to the lack of supervision• 33% of schools admitted to using physical punishment to discipline students, indicating that this practice is deeply rooted and very common at schools.
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<p>Quality of teaching</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15% of the classrooms observed were found with no teacher in them, or with teachers not teaching (8%). • Students were found using textbooks in only 25% of the classrooms • 44% of school leaders reported to have overcrowded classrooms, with an average of 39 extra seats needed.
<p>Leadership and management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools were using logbooks regularly and most of them had updated registers. • Almost all schools reported to have a governing body (SMC, PTA) who meet at least once per term. However, not all schools take meeting notes and share them among participants
<p>Supervision experience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most schools are aware of the presence of supervisors but it is unclear who is the supervising authority. • 16% of primary schools have not received a supervisor visit in 2020.

Policy recommendations

- Child protection – a widespread problem that can be addressed through relatively low-cost strategies. Through constant and regular supervision in schools, these practices can be exposed more frequently, and respectful alternatives can be adopted. Supervisory authorities could deliver relevant trainings on alternative disciplining measures, develop a system to anonymise reporting for staff and students, and deliver low-cost awareness campaigns.
- Basics of teaching need to improve – having teachers in classrooms does not directly guarantee students learning. There are simple, high leverage strategies teachers can and should be doing, like checking for understanding and stating the learning objectives on the board at the beginning of the lesson. These strategies can be incorporated into teachers’ everyday techniques through training, supervision and by providing regular feedback to teachers.

- School leaders do admin work – but not much to drive quality. Changes in this ambit are important, inexpensive and straightforward. School leaders’ leadership is essential to make other positive changes happen, like improving teachers’ pedagogy techniques, motivation and keeping kids safe at school. Teacher and school staff need to be held accountable for not meeting standards and expectations, and it is school leaders’ responsibility to ensure their roles and responsibilities are understood and enforced. On-going training and support for staff is necessary to ensure they are continuously meeting standards and expectations. However, school leaders’ work on teachers and students’ safety is disrupted by the lack of enough teachers in schools to care for every classroom. The role of a school supervisor would help reduce some of the school leaders’ responsibilities, provide professional development training and support schools in addressing these challenges.
- Board governance happens but it could be more participatory. Although meetings happen every term with key stakeholders, not many of those meetings are recorded, nor is the information shared among participants and delivered to other audiences, i.e. other parents and communities.
- This data corroborates the need for the design and implementation of a monitoring system that enables FCC to monitor and improve the quality of education in its schools.