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DATA MUST SPEAK

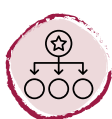
## Schools Inspiring Change: Research on the practices and behaviours of positive deviant schools in Zambia

### Executive Summary

Education plays a pivotal role in Zambia’s vision of achieving prosperity as a middle-income nation by 2030. The Government is committed to delivering high-quality, relevant education and lifelong skills for all children. Despite progress in reading and mathematics scores, learning outcomes in Zambia remain low. Regional disparities within the country persist in primary school completion rates, with girls facing a higher likelihood of dropping out before reaching senior secondary levels. The 2017–2021 Education and Skills Sector Plan underscores the Government’s focus on enhancing learning outcomes by addressing gaps in education quality, accessibility, equity and efficiency. In this context, the Ministry of Education (MoE) is leveraging an innovative research partnership with UNICEF to identify and scale local solutions already improving learning in Zambian primary schools.

The Data Must Speak (DMS) research initiative aims to explore solutions to such challenges. It strives to identify behaviours and practices that allow some schools, referred to as 'positive deviant' schools, to outperform others despite operating in similar contexts, and to scale these practices. This report presents the local behaviours and practices found in positive deviant schools in Zambia, with the aim of helping to inform future education policy. This mixed-methods research has been co-created and co-implemented with MoE since 2021.

## Key findings on the behaviours and practices of positive deviant schools:



### School leadership and management

- Head teachers dedicate more time and resources to supporting teachers' instructional practice.
- Schools strategically allocate teachers while considering more crucial grade levels.
- Head teachers have systems in place to monitor and promote teacher and student attendance.
- Senior staff ensure open and transparent communication with teachers and families.



### Pedagogical practices

- Teachers balance instructional time between teacher-directed instruction and practice-based learning.
- Teachers and head teachers dedicate more time and resources to ensure all students are learning, particularly those falling behind.
- Teachers demonstrate greater confidence in lesson preparation and subject-matter knowledge.



### School climate

- Senior staff facilitate multiple channels for students to express their opinions on school-related matters.
- Schools have strong systems in place for monitoring and responding to issues of violence.



### Community engagement

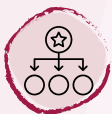
- Schools empower the Parent-Teacher Committee (PTC) to play an active role in school decision-making and promoting the value of education in the broader community.
- Schools collaborate frequently with families through accessible channels.
- Schools engage members of the broader community to support vulnerable learners.



### Decentralized administration

- Schools curate targeted support from the District Education Office (DEO) specific to their needs.
- Schools expand their collaboration with the DEO to involve members of the broader community.

## Policy recommendations:



### School leadership and management

- Promote more strategic allocation of teachers within schools, prioritizing early grades and exam grades, and explore effective teacher allocation mechanisms through further research.
- Support head teachers and their schools to develop systems for managing and promoting teacher attendance and effective use of instructional time.
- Ensure schools have systems in place to manage and promote student attendance.
- Support schools to improve transparent communication on school-related issues, including on budget and resource management, among school staff and with families.



### Pedagogical practices

- Encourage and support teachers to balance teacher-led instruction and student-centred practice in the classroom.
- Reduce pressure on teachers to maintain the pace of curriculum (e.g., through adjustments in curriculum, instructional time or other classroom practices) over ensuring that every student is learning.
- Develop and standardize out-of-classroom support and remedial learning programmes for struggling students in all schools.



### **School climate**

- Promote healthy teacher-student relationships by enhancing student consultation channels and supporting teachers to foster more positive learning environments.
- Support schools to develop standardized approaches, in collaboration with community actors, to monitor and address issues of school safety and physical violence.
- Further explore mechanisms and incentives that may influence teacher motivation.



### **Community engagement**

- Strengthen capacity of the PTC to act as an intermediary between school and the community on the importance of education.
- Support schools to restructure traditional channels of communication with families to make them more accessible and less burdensome on families' time and resources.



### **Decentralized administration**

- Enable DEOs to offer a more specialized menu of supports that are targeted to schools' and teachers' specific needs.
- Encourage and support DEOs to better embed other members of the school community, such as the PTC, into their engagements with schools.

Stage 4 of the DMS research will deepen these recommendations by identifying levers for scaling practices and behaviours of positive deviant schools to more schools in Zambia together with the Zambian MoE.