Leh Wi Lan
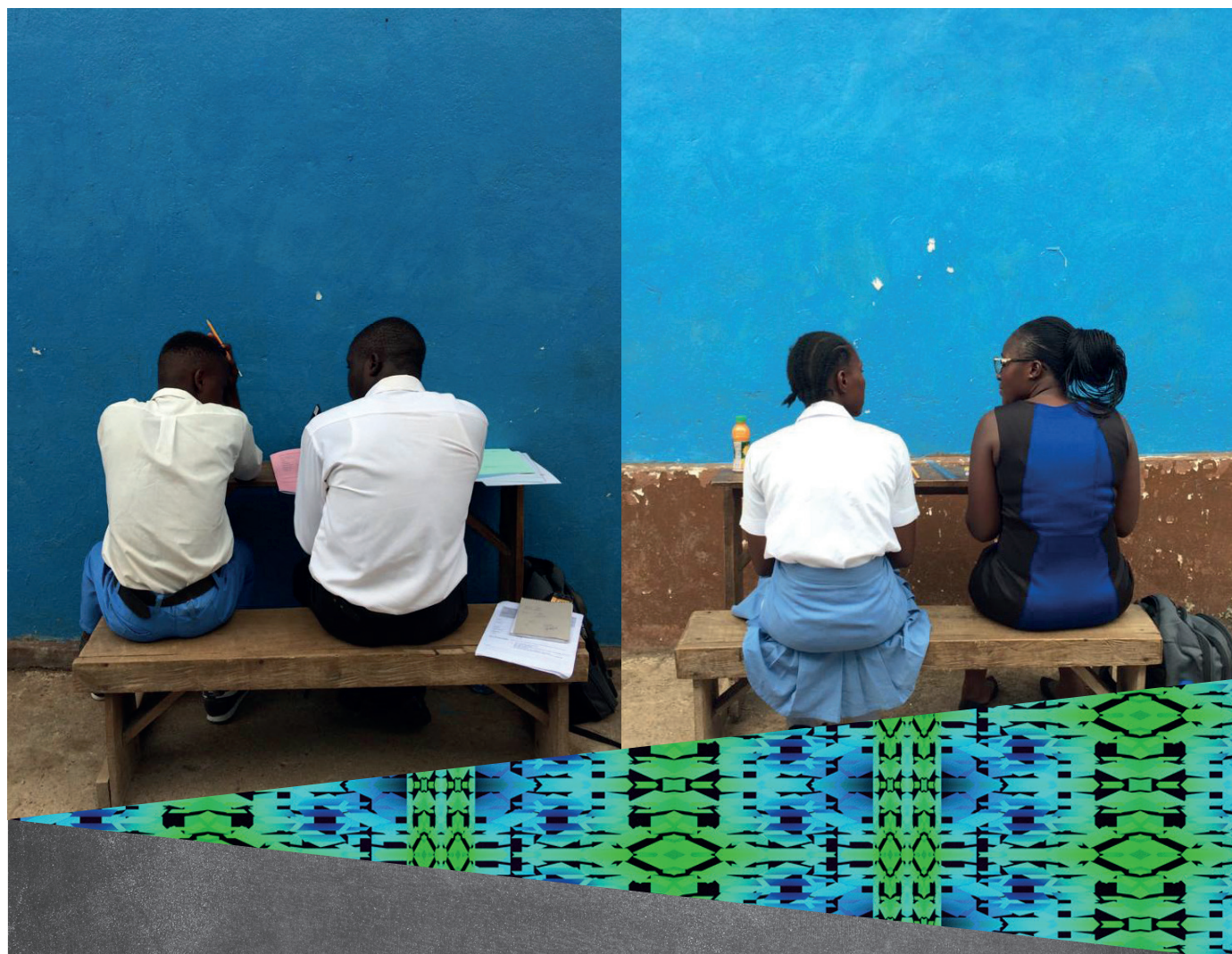# Sierra Leone Secondary Grade Learning Assessment 2019

Sierra Leone Secondary Grade Learning Assessment 2019

Technical Report – December 2019

Acknowledgements

The design and analysis of this survey went through several consultation and validation workshops to solicit feedback and guidance from secondary school English and maths teachers on draft assessment items and contextualise them to life in Sierra Leone; to develop benchmarks and performance bands with curriculum and assessment specialists; and to iteratively validate preliminary findings. Gratitude is due to all who participated in these workshops. Special thanks also to the numerous English and maths teachers from across the country who participated in the review of assessment items – their lively discussions helped enhance the quality of the assessment manifold.

Preface: Message from the Minister's desk

Education is of paramount importance for Sierra Leone's development. It is the most important sector for this administration. It is the cornerstone of the Sierra Leone National Development Plan 2019-2023.

On the 20th of August 2018, Sierra Leone saw a historic moment with the launch of the Free Quality School Education Programme (FQSE) by H.E. Rtd. Brigadier Julius Maada Bio. The past year has seen significant strides in ensuring all Sierra Leonean children have equal access to free quality school education. FQSE has led to more schools and teachers getting approved; improved learning environment through distribution of teaching and learning materials; review of service conditions for teachers; and measures against examination malpractice. Furthermore, by focussing on 'quality' in the FQSE, this ambitious programme is aiming to go beyond simply filling classrooms through increased enrolment.

Ultimately, the FQSE will succeed if children in all parts of Sierra Leone are learning useful skills, whether they are girls, boys, poor or rich. Our hopes as a nation can only be achieved with a well-educated citizenry with the skills and competencies needed for Sierra Leone to grow.

This document, Sierra Leone Secondary Grade Learning Assessment 2019, is a landmark document in secondary education in Sierra Leone. Once again, following the baseline assessment in 2017 and follow-up in 2018, we have an assessment of what pupils in junior secondary and senior secondary schools across the country can do in English and mathematics; before they attempt the Basic Education Certificate Examination and the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination.

Further, we are able to state what pupils in our schools know and the areas in which improvements should be made. Not many countries have this kind of rich and robust data on secondary grade learning outcomes. This document is a key step on that quest for the 'Q' in FQSE. It also gives us pointers on the effectiveness of the new lesson plans, pupil handbooks and school support officers that we recently rolled out in secondary schools across the country.

While there are successes to celebrate, there are also deep challenges that my officials in the Ministry are working round the clock to address. But all of us as Sierra Leoneans have a role to play in addressing these challenges: as community members, teachers, principals, parents and students. We owe it to our children! Addressing these challenges will help our children learn better and do well in public exams, and eventually contribute to nation-building

I do thank the United Kingdom Department for International Development for their support with the Secondary Grade Learning Assessment, and look forward to further fruitful collaboration.

This is a unique moment in the history of Education in Sierra Leone.

Dr David Moinina Sengeh
Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education

Executive summary

The Free Quality School Education Programme

On the 20th of August 2019, Sierra Leone marked the first anniversary of the launch of the Free Quality School Education Programme (FQSE). The past year has seen significant strides made in ensuring all Sierra Leonean children regardless of their physical, intellectual and socio-economic conditions have equal access to free quality school education. In practice, FQSE has led to more schools and teachers getting approval status; efforts to improve learning environment through distribution of teaching and learning materials; better school and classroom infrastructure; review of service conditions for teachers; and measures against examination malpractice. Furthermore, by focussing on 'quality' in the FQSE, this ambitious programme is aiming to go beyond simply filling classrooms through increased enrolment. It aims to gear Sierra Leonean schools towards delivering sustained learning for all pupils. Ultimately, the FQSEP will succeed if children in all parts of Sierra Leone are learning useful skills, whether they are girls, boys, poor or rich. In 2017, the first Secondary Grade Learning Assessment (SGLA) measured English and mathematics skills of JSS2 and SSS2 students in Sierra Leonean schools. The results showed that most pupils only show very basic English and maths skills, even though they have completed eight (JSS2) to 11 (SSS2) years of formal education and have passed various exams like the NPSE and BECE. This is possible because the exams mostly test memory and rote-learning but the SGLA tests application and skills. Girls, poorer pupils and pupils in remote schools tended to do worse. The second Secondary Grade Learning Assessment was conducted in 2018 to follow up on this annual tracking of learning levels. This survey showed similar results to the midline 2018 survey, with a drop in english scores, but to a lesser extent than the drop in maths scores. The plan is to track these learning levels annually for progress, and the third SGLA contributes to this effort.

About the third Secondary Grade Learning Assessment (SGLA)

The third SGLA (2019) was carried out in all 16 districts of Sierra Leone in the months of May and June 2019. Its objective is to provide MBSSE and other education sector stakeholders with robust nationally-, regionally- and district-level representative data on the status of learning and teaching in secondary grades, and track these annually for progress.

The learning assessment survey's design contained the following components:

- **Learning assessments** for JSS2 and SSS2 grades, in English and maths, administered to 5,400 pupils;

- **Teacher's questionnaire**, including topics like usage of lesson plans, administered to 1969 teachers;

- **Principal's questionnaire** administered to 704 principals, covering topics like provision of supportive supervision for teachers; and

- **A school observation instrument** covering topics like general school administration and presence of teachers in classrooms.

This survey constitutes the third round of the learning assessment surveys and covers a range of indicators on pupil learning levels, teaching and supervision practices, girls' safety in school, and the schooling experience of pupils with disabilities. Specifically, this third SGLA report seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What are Sierra Leone's secondary grade pupils learning? How do their learning outcomes compare with results from the first SGLA in 2017 and the second SGLA in 2018?

- What are some of the conditions under which teaching and learning takes place in secondary schools?

- What classroom practices are being used by junior and senior secondary teachers?

- What are some of the school management and leadership practices employed by secondary school principals in Sierra Leone?

The purpose of this technical report is to present a comprehensive analysis of the data collected by the SGLA 2019 survey in order to provide as much detail on what is working well, and where there are areas for improvement in teaching and learning. This would, hopefully, support MBSSE and partners in developing policy responses.

More on Leh Wi Learn and the SGLA journey so far

- Overview of the role of Leh Wi Learn within Sierra Leone's education sector: Section 1.2 and 1.3.

- About the SLGA and the journey so far: Section 1.4.

Pupil learning outcomes in junior and senior secondary school grades

About the learning assessment design

The SGLA focuses on pupils' learning outcomes in JSS2 and SSS2 and is designed with reference to the curriculum in these grades. Some of the test questions are also referenced to primary grades 4-6 curriculum. The SGLA questions are referenced to the curriculum, but do not focus on curriculum content coverage per se. Rather, the focus is on assessing knowledge and skills linked to the curriculum acquired by pupils in these grades and their ability to apply these skills in "real life" both within and outside school.

Tests were administered on a one-on-one basis by enumerators to individual pupils. Each test comprised of around 40 questions covering both English language and maths, along with some background questions like pupil's age, main language spoken at home, use of pupil handbooks, household assets, and use of pupil handbooks.

SGLA performance bands

Analysis of learning outcomes was based on grade-appropriate performance bands developed by the SGLA team with JSS and SSS curriculum specialists in English language and maths. Skills tested in the assessment are grouped into five categories or performance bands. These range from band "primary grade level" (basic skills, like naming some common objects in English like "hat" or "computer") up to skills expected from a pupil in SSS1 grade (relatively advanced skills that require inference and reasoning). To achieve a grade-appropriate performance band or level means that pupils in the particular band are more likely than not to be able to demonstrate the skills expected from a pupil in that particular grade.

The SGLA III reiterates findings from last year's survey and the baseline survey: pupil learning levels in secondary grades are generally low. There is a wide gulf between pupils' actual skills and competencies as demonstrated in this survey vis-à-vis national curriculum expectations for their grades. Moreover, results this year suggest a drop in maths scores. English scores have also declined slightly when compared to 2018, but to a lesser extent than in maths.

More on the SGLA design and performance bands

- About the learning assessment: Section 2.1.

- Overview of performance bands in English and maths: Section 2.2.

Pupil learning outcomes in English

Results shows that around 60 per cent of JSS2 pupils and just over 40 per cent of SSS2 pupils are able to demonstrate English language skills expected from a primary-grade pupil, but very unlikely to demonstrate skills expected from any higher grades than primary level. In other words, these JSS2 and SSS2 pupils have fallen behind curriculum expectations by around two and five years respectively. Around 10 per cent of JSS2 pupils showed English language skills as expected from a JSS2 pupil and a small percentage (2 per cent) showed skills exceeding expectations. Though a larger proportion of SSS2 pupils (versus JSS2 pupils) appear in the higher performance bands, ultimately a majority of these pupils have fallen behind by up to four years – they are operating somewhere between JSS1 and SSS1. Almost no SSS2 pupil is able to show skills expected at the end of SSS1 in the SGLA tests.

Pupil learning outcomes in Maths

Results show that almost 70 per cent of JSS2 pupils and 60 per cent of SSS2 pupils are able to demonstrate maths skills expected at primary-grade level but not any higher skills. They have fallen behind by two and five years respectively. Only 3 per cent of JSS2 pupils show maths skills as expected from a JSS2 pupil and a small percentage (less than 1 per cent) showed skills exceeding expectations. Once again, though a larger proportion of SSS2 pupils (versus JSS2 pupils) appear in the higher performance bands, ultimately almost half of these SSS2 pupils have fallen behind by up to four years. In the SGLA test, only 1 per cent SSS2 pupils are able to show skills expected at the end of JSS3 and none show SSS1 level maths skills.

Shifts in pupil performance since SGLA II

There is a statistically significant drop in maths scores between 2018 and 2019. This is true for both JSS2 and SSS2, but differences are larger for SSS2. For English, there is a smaller drop in results (although still statistically significant), with more pupils showing only up to P6 level skills. A drop in English performance was also observed between SGLA I in 2017 and SGLA II in 2018. While significant shifts are not expected within a single year and long-term trends cannot be inferred from just three years' data, the real drop in maths and English scores needs to be thoroughly understood and further rounds of SGLA will confirm if this drop continues. This report will consider how changes in the schooling system as a whole may be contributing to these declining learning levels.

Differences in learning outcomes by pupil background

Across both grades, pupils from the richest household perform significantly better than pupils from the poorest 20 per cent of households. Similarly, in both subjects and across both grades, there appears to be a statistically significant negative relationship between test scores and remoteness (measured by the distance of the school from the district capital or headquarter town). Boys' generally scored higher than girls across both grades and subjects and this gap appears to widen as pupils move to higher grades from JSS2 to SSS2.

More on the pupil learning outcomes in English and maths
• Overview of learning outcomes in English and maths: Section 2.3.
• Overview of learning outcomes by pupil background: Section 2.4.

Teaching practices in secondary schools

The SGLA III survey presents evidence on the current state of classroom practices in junior and senior secondary schools in Sierra Leone on a sample of teachers.

Quantity of instructional time and teacher absenteeism

Teachers, on average, taught for 12 of the 25-30 prescribed school hours in a standard week, which amounts to approximately 2.5 hours of teaching per day (or less than half of the standard school day). These results are consistent with SGLA I and II findings. Moreover, during the school observations, one in three (33 per cent) classes had pupils in them but no teachers.

According to teachers, the main reason for being absent from school was own or family illness; however, principals seemed to link teachers' absence from school to low levels of teacher salary and remuneration. The other common reason for teachers' absenteeism was social or religious obligations requiring them to be away from school. Explaining their own absence from schools, principals particularly spoke of attending meetings or events outside of school, as well as own or family health issues. Nearly all principals reported taking some corrective measures against teacher absenteeism. The most commonly cited action was to discuss the issue with teachers, ruling attendance (time) book at opening time and following up absences.

Pupil-teacher ratios

SGLA II found that PTR is relatively small and manageable, and similar across JS and SS schools. On average, there are 20 pupils to each teacher in JSS schools and 23 pupils to each teacher in SSS schools. The corresponding figures on PTR from SGLA II survey were lower but only slightly, with 19 and 22 pupils per teacher in JSS and SSS respectively. However, this average PTR figure hides the wide range of PTRs found across secondary schools: in this SGLA, the lowest PTR was 2:1 and the highest was 350:1.

Use of MBSSE lesson plans

Almost all secondary school teachers used some form of teaching guide to help plan and prepare for their teaching, with a substantial proportion of teachers reporting the use of MBSSE lesson plans. In SGLA III the proportion of teachers making use of MBSSE lesson plans is slightly lower than what it was in 2018 (73 per cent in 2019, against a figure of 80 per cent overall in 2018). Other important teaching guides were textbooks and lesson notes.

A vast majority of teachers had positive feedback on MBSSE lesson plans and their ability to use them. They considered the lesson plans to be well structured and helpful for pupils to learn better. Teachers can generally understand the use and purpose of lesson plans to facilitate learning. However, it appears that teachers might be facing difficulties on two fronts.

- They seem to be struggling to incorporate all the prescribed activities in the lesson plans within the duration of one period.

- Teachers also appear to be concerned that some of the lesson plan content (especially examples used to explain concepts) do not relate well to the context and lived reality that pupils are familiar with.

These results are consistent with findings from SGLA II. Both these issues are potential areas for consideration and further revision for lesson plan developers.

Teachers' understanding of lesson plan content

In SGLA III, a short assessment of teachers' own understanding of the lesson plan content was included. Teachers were asked to match grade-specific learning objectives, picked directly from the lesson plans, to their corresponding JSS grades, as a quick test to assess their understanding of the lesson plan content. Only 46 per cent teachers could correctly match learning objectives to the appropriate JSS grades. 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. Only 52 per cent of teachers could correctly name all five parts of the lesson plan.

More on teaching practices, teaching aids and teaching guides including MBSSE lesson plans

- Overview of teaching hours, absenteeism and pupil-teacher ratios: Section 3.1.

- About teaching guides and MBSSE lesson plans, including teachers' feedback on their use and functionality: Section 3.2.

- Teachers' understanding of lesson plan content: Section 3.3.

Provision of supportive supervision and pedagogical support

This survey explores the typical school environment, and management and leadership practices being employed in secondary schools to understand the supervision and pedagogical support provided to teachers by principals and external supervisors.

Staff and formal one-on-one meetings

Staff meetings appear to be well-established in the secondary school system in Sierra Leone, with almost all teachers and principals reporting they have had staff meetings in the previous term. Responses suggest staff meetings largely deal with day-to-day school issues and administration, but also increasingly focusing on pedagogy and learning. According to principals, the most common topics of discussion during these staff meetings were teacher absenteeism, school administration and teaching practices/pedagogy. Staff meetings are complemented by formal one-on-one meetings with their principal or head of department.

Lesson observations

Similarly, schools continued to have fairly regular systems of internal lesson observations, which may have a role in the development of teaching in schools. Teachers reported an average of five lessons observed during the previous term (January to April 2019). The observers were usually the principal or head of department. 94 per cent of principals and 86 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.

External supervision

The role of external supervisors, particularly SSOs, in visiting schools, observing lessons and discussing advice on lesson plans and teaching methods was also apparent in SGLA III. Nearly all principals reported at least one external supervision visit during the previous term, with an average of six visits between January and April 2019. SSOs were now the most frequently reported visitors (reported by 80 per cent of principals), which is similar to results from SGLA II. This may serve as initial school-level validation of the formal adoption of SSOs' roles and functions. MBSSE inspectors, school supervisors, and representatives from NGOs/missions were other common visitors in schools. Principals' also suggested that supervision visits had taken more of a teacher development focus in SGLA II and SGLA III (in SGLA I, visits were primarily to check teacher and pupil attendance and other school records). Over 80 per cent of teachers in turn confirmed that external visitors had observed their lessons the previous term, with 89 per cent reporting the visitor had been an SSO.

In addition, nearly all JSS and SSS schools have parent-teacher or community-teacher associations (PTA/CTA). The majority of these bodies are active, having met at least once in the previous term.

More on school leadership and provision of supportive supervision and pedagogical support

- About staff and one-on-one meetings: Section 4.2.

- Overview of lesson observations practices within schools: Section 4.3.

- Overview of external supervision practices in schools: Section 4.4.

Girls' safety in school

Physical safety in and on the way to school

More than 90 per cent of teachers reported that girls overall felt safe in school. However, less than 40 per cent reported that their school was well-fenced (to deter strangers from entering), and a third of respondents reported that female pupils were subject to harassment on the way to and from school. Only 13 per cent of teachers felt that girls' toilets were far enough from the main school building such that female pupils did not feel safe using them, whilst more than half the teachers, believed that girls had a tendency of absenting themselves from school during menstruation. Female teachers are far more likely to report that female pupils face more risk on the way to school, and are far less likely to report that female students stay absent from school during menstruation.

Sexual harassment

From the results of SGLA III, it appears that teachers, the vast majority of whom are male, systematically underestimate or under-report the incidence of sexual harassment in their schools. This is in line with findings from SGLA I and II. Indeed, less than 5 per cent of teachers reported that girls in their school were subject to sexual harassment by male pupils or that girls experienced sexual harassment by male school staff – girls themselves reported a much higher incidence. Similarly, the incidence of sex-for-grades also seems to largely underestimated by teachers in secondary schools. However, female teachers are far less likely to under-report the incidences of sexual harassment in their schools.

More on girls' safety in schools

- Overview of girls' physical safety in and on the way to school: Section 5.1.

- About sexual harassment in schools: Section 5.2.

Schooling experience of pupils with special needs

The SGLA III pupil interview included questions on whether pupils had any difficulty in seeing, hearing, remembering, communicating, walking or taking care of themselves. For the purpose of this analysis, all pupils answering yes to any of those questions are considered as having some form of special need. Around 36 per cent of pupils interviewed for SGLA III reported some form of special need with varying extents and degrees.

Background of pupils with special needs

The most prevalent difficulty was remembering, followed by difficulties in walking. Difficulty in hearing and communicating was relatively less common, which possibly indicates that these are among the more severe barriers to access and learning, and hence school-aged children with hearing or communication problems are either in special schools or out of school altogether.

Provision of infrastructural and teaching support

Around 60 per cent of the teachers reported that there was no provision of ramps, railings or any other infrastructural arrangements at their schools. Similarly, just over half of teachers said there was no special support such as counselling provided to pupils with special needs, nor was there a system for providing additional teaching outside regular classes. Almost all the teachers did however report that they adapted their pedagogies to make the lesson delivery more accessible to pupils with special needs, even though the effectiveness of these techniques is not captured in this survey. These results show a slight improvement from 2018, where fewer teachers reported provision of ramps, special support or adjusted teaching methodologies for pupils with difficulties.

Attitude and behaviour towards pupils with special needs

Almost three quarters of the teachers sampled for this survey agreed that harassment of pupils with difficulties was discouraged in their school. Around 15 per cent of teachers reported that teaching or non-teaching staff in schools discriminated in favour or against pupils with special needs (for example, by grading them graciously or by not allowing them to participate). When asked whether non-disabled pupils interact freely with pupils with special needs, around 64 per cent of teachers said they do.

Learning outcomes of pupils with special needs

We compared learning outcomes of pupils who reported having difficulties in hearing, seeing, communicating, remembering, walking or taking care of themselves, with those of pupils that did not report any difficulty.

Difficulties in walking and hearing is significantly correlated with performance of pupils in both English and maths. For English, a significantly larger proportion of pupils reporting hearing difficulties do not reach a level of knowledge above primary grade. Similarly, for maths, we find that the pupils who have difficulty in hearing are more likely to be in lower bands than the distribution of pupils with no difficulties in hearing. Difficulty walking was also significantly correlated with pupils' performance. For both English and maths, a larger fraction of pupils with difficulties in walking fall in the performance band corresponding to primary grade level, and fewer pupils reach JSS1 and JSS2 knowledge.

> **More on schooling experience and learning performance of pupils with special needs**
>
> - Background of pupils with special needs: Section 6.1.
> - Overview of infrastructure and teaching support in schools: Section 6.2.
> - Overview of attitudes and behaviours towards pupils with special needs: Section 6.3.
> - Overview of learning outcomes of pupils with special needs: Section 6.4.

Pupil handbooks

For the first time, SGLA III measured uptake and response to pupil handbooks which were recently distributed to Sierra Leonean government-owned and government-assisted schools. Alongside other self-study learning materials like textbooks or teacher's notes, the pupil's handbook is being used by 68 per cent of all pupils sampled. The current barriers in distributing these handbooks to more pupils include: private schools not being targeted to receive these handbooks, teachers withholding the handbooks and parents not signing the undertaking to look after the handbooks (or pay a fine). In SGLA III, pupils that reported to using the handbooks were only marginally performing better than those that did not report using them.

Pupil's perceptions of the handbook

Pupil's perception of the handbooks are that they are useful to their overall learning. In general, pupils feel encouraged by their teachers to use the handbooks, and pupils understand how the handbooks relate to the classroom lessons. However, some pupils find the handbooks easy to use while others find them difficult. Students with special needs and female students are more likely to find the handbooks more difficult to use. This last point captures the overall insight that while the books are used widely, they are used best by learners who already use other self-study learning material and by those not falling as behind in class as their peers.

More on pupil handbooks

- Pupil's perceptions of handbooks: Section 7.1.

- The targeted group of students: Section 7.2.

- Learning outcomes of pupils using pupil handbooks: 7.3.

Longlist of recommendations and next steps

The findings of SGLA III, as well as those of SGLA I and SGLA II, call for urgent action to ensure that secondary education in Sierra Leone caters to the diverse learning needs of all pupils, irrespective of gender, family background or remoteness of school location. MBSSE has already identified this all-important need to focus on learning – measured by tracking progress annually through the SGLA and WASSCE results – as one of its three overarching targets in the new Education Sector Plan (2018-2020). However, to realise this vital goal, a concerted effort is required from all education sector actors and stakeholder, under the stewardship of MBSSE.

To actively support MBSSE in realising this goal, based on the results discussed in this report, below is a longlist of initial ideas for recommendations for MBSSE's consideration:

- Align curriculum content with pupils' learning levels;

- Focus on teachers' skills, knowledge and attendance;

- Move from superficial process compliance to actually promoting learning;

- Learn from success stories;

- Urgently address issues of sexual harassment and girls' safety in schools;

- Give pupils from poorer backgrounds a fair shot at success;

- Improve schooling experience for pupils with special needs; and

- Improve lesson plans based on teachers' feedback and content knowledge.

The final section of this report discusses each of these in detail. In terms of next steps, it is hoped that a few, if not all, of the actions will be implemented and tested for effectiveness before the next learning assessment in 2020.

Contents

Boxes, figures and tables

Abbreviations

BECE	Basic Education Certificate Examination
CAPI	Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing
DFID	UK Department of International Development
ELA	Education/Language Arts
EGMA	Early Grade Mathematics Assessment
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESA	Education Sector Analysis
ESP	Education Sector Plan
GATE	UNICEF – Girl's Access to Education Programme
ICF	World Health Organisation's International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health
JSS	Junior Secondary School
MBSSE	Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education
N	Number of observations
NPSE	National Primary School Examination
OPM	Oxford Policy Management
P	Primary grade (e.g. primary grade 2 or P2)
PDIA	Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation
PGLA	Primary Grade Learning Assessment
PTA/CTA	Parent-teacher or Community-teacher Associations
PTR	Pupil-Teacher Ratio
SGD	Sustainable Development Goals
SGLA	Secondary Grade Learning Assessment
SSEIP	Sierra Leone Secondary Education Improvement Programme
SSS	Senior Secondary School
TSC	Teaching Service Commission
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASSCE	West African Secondary School Certificate Examination
WGDS	Washington Group on Disability Statistics
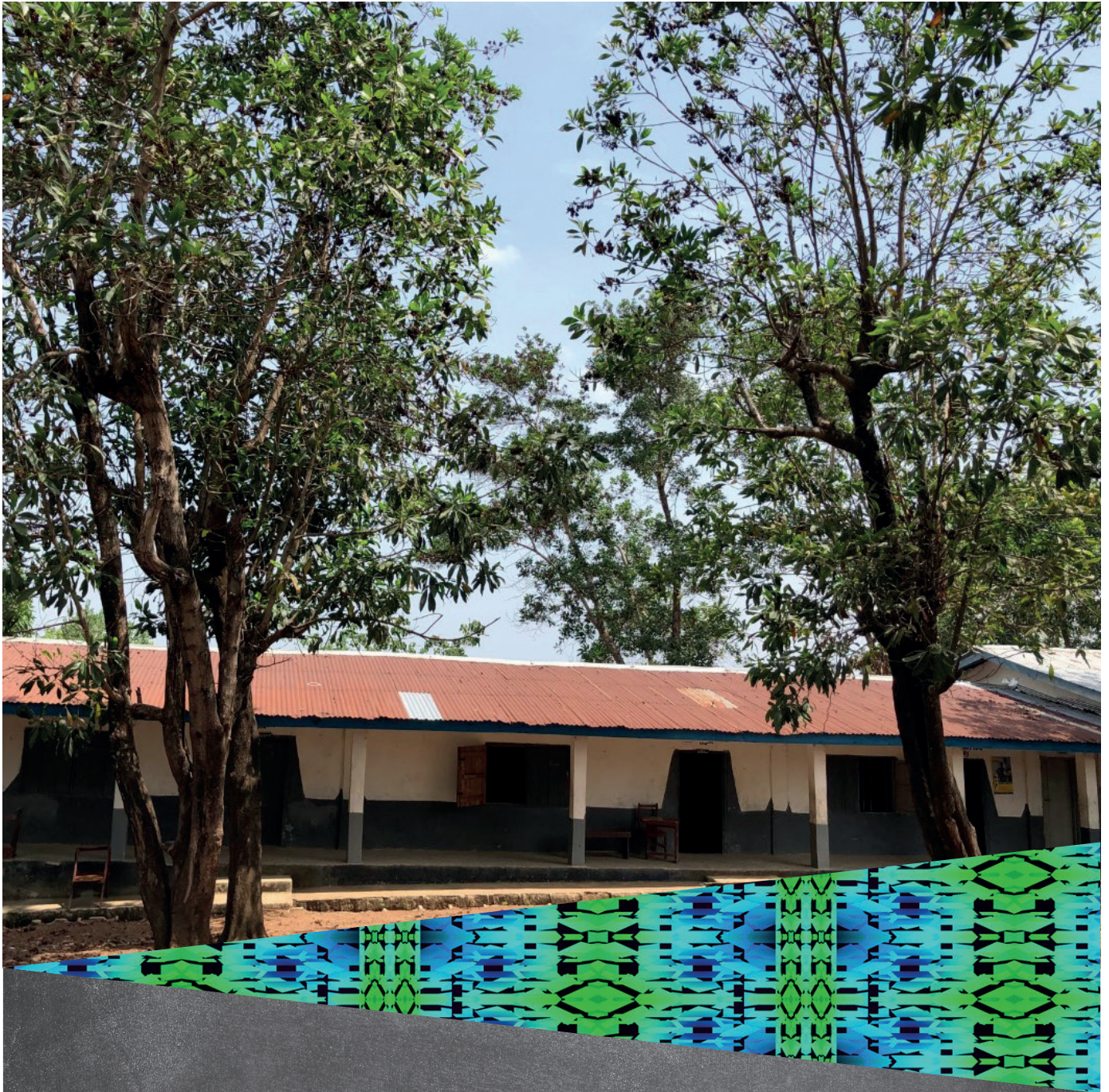
1 Introduction

1   Introduction

> " Education is the bedrock of every society. Development of education as a cutting-edge catalyst is at the heart of the development agenda of the government. As the government seeks to develop human capital and improve academic performance, access to quality free education has become the flagship programme for the government. The aim is to further ensure that education is modernized and made relevant to the development needs of Sierra Leonean society. "
>
> Sierra Leone's Medium-Term National Development Plan 2019-2023 Education for Development; a New direction for improving People's Lives through Education, Inclusive Growth and Building a Resilient Economy pg. 38.

1.1   The Free Quality School Education Programme

> " Education is an investment for human and economic development. It is a strong pillar for the nation's industries and also the foundation of moral regeneration and revival of its people. Without quality education, a nation cannot get the needed manpower for socio-economic advancement and an enlightened citizenry. This is why, it is argued that the quality of a nation's education determines the level of its national development. "
>
> Keynote address by His Excellency President Julius Maada Bio on the theme:
> "Education for Development" at the launch of the Free Quality School Education Programme.

On the 20th of August 2019, Sierra Leone marked the first anniversary of the Free Quality School Education Programme (FQSE). The past year has seen significant strides in ensuring all Sierra Leonean children have equal access to free quality school education. FQSE has led to more schools and teachers getting approved; improved learning environment through distribution of teaching and learning materials; better school and classroom infrastructure; review of service conditions for teachers; and measures against examination malpractice. Furthermore, by focussing on 'quality' in the FQSE, this ambitious programme is aiming to go beyond simply filling classrooms through increased enrolment. Ultimately, the FQSEP will succeed if children in all parts of Sierra Leone are learning useful skills, whether they are girls, boys, poor or rich.

The Secondary Grade Learning Assessments (SGLAs) play a pivotal role in informing MBSSE, districts and schools on the quality of teaching and learning in Sierra Leone. In 2017 and 2018, SGLAs measured English and mathematics skills of JSS2 and SSS2 students in Sierra Leonean schools. The results showed that most pupils only show basic primary-level English and maths skills despite completing eight (JSS2) to 11 (SSS2) years of formal education and passing various exams like the NPSE and BECE. Girls, poorer pupils and those in remote schools tended to do worse. One explanation for why schools are not improving is that enrolment is increasing rapidly: on average, JSS were enrolling 10 per cent more students in 2017 compared to 2015, and SSS 30 per cent more students. Some schools may struggle to cope with the additional students while maintaining or improving quality. The launch of a free universal basic education programme like FQSE will push enrolment numbers up, with many newly enrolled pupils being first-generation learners, from disadvantaged families, who need closer attention from teachers in order to learn and thrive. This is in addition to historical shocks borne by these pupils back in 2014-15 (when they were at a formative stage of primary education) due to Ebola. These contextual factors should be borne in mind when reading the results discussed below.[1]

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[1] Interested readers can access the baseline and midline SGLA reports on http://www.education.gov.sl/. MBSSE (2017). Sierra Leone Secondary Grade Learning Assessment (SGLA) Technical Report. New England, Freetown: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. MBSSE (2018). Sierra Leone Secondary Grade Learning Assessment (SGLA) Technical Report. New England, Freetown: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

1.2　About the Leh wi Lan programme

Leh wi Lan, formerly called the Sierra Leone Secondary Education Improvement Programme (SSEIP), aims to help the government of Sierra Leone address some of these challenges in secondary education. It is a five-year (2016-2021) UKaid-funded programme aimed at supporting Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) to achieve sustained improvements in girls' education and secondary grade learning outcomes. Leh wi Lan provides support to learning conditions, MBSSE and district capacity to plan, monitor, and manage service delivery, and capacity for monitoring, learning and research.

Underpinning Leh wi Lan's model is investment in addressing the problem of lack of data on the current state of learning achievement, teaching practices and school environment, what is working, and why. Through its monitoring, research and learning work stream, Leh wi Lan will:

• Inform MBSSE strategy, planning and policy development and ensure these are data-driven and informed by evidence;

• Improve understanding of learning outcomes at junior and senior secondary levels in Maths and English, with data and evidence used for prioritisation of actions to improve teaching and learning;

• Develop long-lasting capacity at national and district levels to deliver strong monitoring, research and evidence in line with MBSSE's strategy and priorities;

• Identify existing pockets of best practice across districts, by establishing a system of sharing learning across the education system as a basis for performance improvements; and

• Establish a monitoring system to ascertain the effectiveness of Leh wi Lan's activities and provide a foundation for programme learning, improvement and adaptation.

1.3　The Secondary Grade Learning Assessments

In close collaboration with MBSSE, Leh wi Lan designed and implemented the third annual secondary grade learning assessment (SGLA). It was carried out in all five regions and 16 districts of Sierra Leone in the months of May and June 2019. Similar to SGLA I (2017) and SGLA II (2018), the objective of SGLA III is to provide MBSSE and other education sector stakeholders with robust nationally-, regionally- and district-level representative data on the status of learning and teaching in secondary grades, and track these annually for progress.

The learning assessment survey's design contained the following components:

• **Pupil learning assessments** for JSS2 and SSS2 grades, in English and maths, administered to 5,400 pupils;

• **Teacher's questionnaire**, including topics like usage of MBSSE lesson plans, administered to 1,969 teachers;

• **Principal's questionnaire** administered to 704 principals, covering topics like provision of supportive supervision for teachers; and

• **A school observation instrument**, covering topics like school administration and operations.

This 2019 survey constitutes the third round of the learning assessment surveys and covers a range of indicators on pupil learning levels, teaching and supervision practices, girls' safety in school, and the schooling experience of pupils with disabilities. Specifically, this third SGLA report seeks to answer the following research questions:

- **What are Sierra Leone's secondary grade pupils learning?** What are the English and maths skills typically demonstrated by JSS2 and SSS2 pupils in 2019? How do these differ from the 2017 and 2018 results? Are these skills in line with what they should have acquired by these grades, according to the national curriculum? Are pupils able to apply these skills to practical, real world problems? Are there still major differences in pupils' skills by gender and other background characteristics?

- **What are some of the conditions under which teaching and learning takes place in secondary schools?** How have these changed since 2017 and 2018, if at all? What are the pupil-teacher ratios (PTRs)? Do pupils, especially girls, feel physically safe in school and on the way to/from school? What is the schooling experience of pupils with self-reported disability?

- **What classroom practices are being used by junior and senior secondary teachers?** What is the approximate number of instructional hours delivered by the average teacher? Is teacher-absenteeism an issue and what are some of its drivers? What corrective measures are commonly taken against it? Are more teachers using the MBSSE lesson plans in 2019 than in 2018 and if not, why? What is teachers' feedback on MBSSE lesson plans?

- **What are some of the school management and leadership practices employed by secondary school principals in Sierra Leone?** Are they providing supportive supervision and pedagogical support to teachers, and how? How are they dealing with issues like teacher and pupil attendance? Are schools adequately supported by external supervision from, say, school inspectors?

1.4   The SGLA journey so far

Looking back at the SGLA III timeline, there were three distinct phases in the journey so far:

- **Phase I:** Developing the methodological design for the learning assessment and overall survey, including revisions to SGLA II instruments and planning for a sample size of 704 schools (vs. 400 in SGLA I and 700 in SGLA II) (January-April 2019);

- **Phase II:** Operational planning and implementation of fieldwork (April-June 2019); and

- **Phase III:** Analysis and communication of results (July-December 2019)

As shown in the figure below, phase I started in January with consultations between MBSSE and the SGLA technical team, covering the objectives and some revisions to design features of the learning assessment such as sample size, procuring information on new region and districts. Some instruments were revised while a new instrument (school observation tool) was developed. In March, consultations continued between the SGLA technical team and MBSSE on the detailed design parameters of the learning assessment. Assessment booklets were submitted to MBSSE for review. The final assessment and survey design, including budget and communication timelines, were locked-in in April.

Phase II saw development of the fieldwork model; budgeting and logistical planning; securing school access permissions from MBSSE; recruitment and training of regional survey coordinators, supervisors and data collectors; and field-testing and piloting in Western Urban, Western Rural, Makeni, and Port Loko. Fieldwork started on 15 May, ending on 27 June.

Phase III followed in July with data cleaning and preliminary analysis of pupil learning data by the SGLA technical team. A curriculum-alignment workshop with MBSSE and assessment/curriculum specialists in Freetown was conducted, to assign every question in the pupil assessment to a specific grade from primary to SSS. At this point, further consultations between the technical team and MBSSE were carried out to understand how the results should be presented and communicated to enhance their use and usefulness within MBSSE. The Leh wi Lan output-5 coordinator provided more up-to-date methodological and procedural updates to senior MBSSE officials, including cross-learning between the SGLA and the ongoing primary grade learning assessment (PGLA). Detailed analysis and report-writing by the SGLA technical team continued in August during which preliminary results were made available to the senior leadership at MBSSE.

In October, MBSSE convened a meeting between Leh wi Lan and the ministry's Targets, Benchmarks and Standards (TBS) commit chaired by the minister – here, the SGLA technical team presented top-level key results in a validation workshop. To enhance practical use of the SGLA results at all levels, preliminary findings were also presented in separate sessions to the Leh wi Lan programme team, Teaching Service Commission (TSC), Conference of School Principals, DFID, District Directors of Education (DDE), TSC and FQSE district coordinators.

It was agreed that the SGLA technical team would complete the detailed analysis and report-writing and submit a draft report, along with a longlist of recommendations, to MBSSE in December. MBSSE would then consider these proposed recommendations and work together with the SGLA technical team to arrive at a shortlist of prioritised actions, assigning responsible owners for each and indicative timelines for achieving them. This technical report has been written with the objective of facilitating such a prioritisation and recommendations workshop to be convened by MBSSE.

Figure 1: SGLA 2019 timeline for design, fieldwork, analysis, report writing and communication
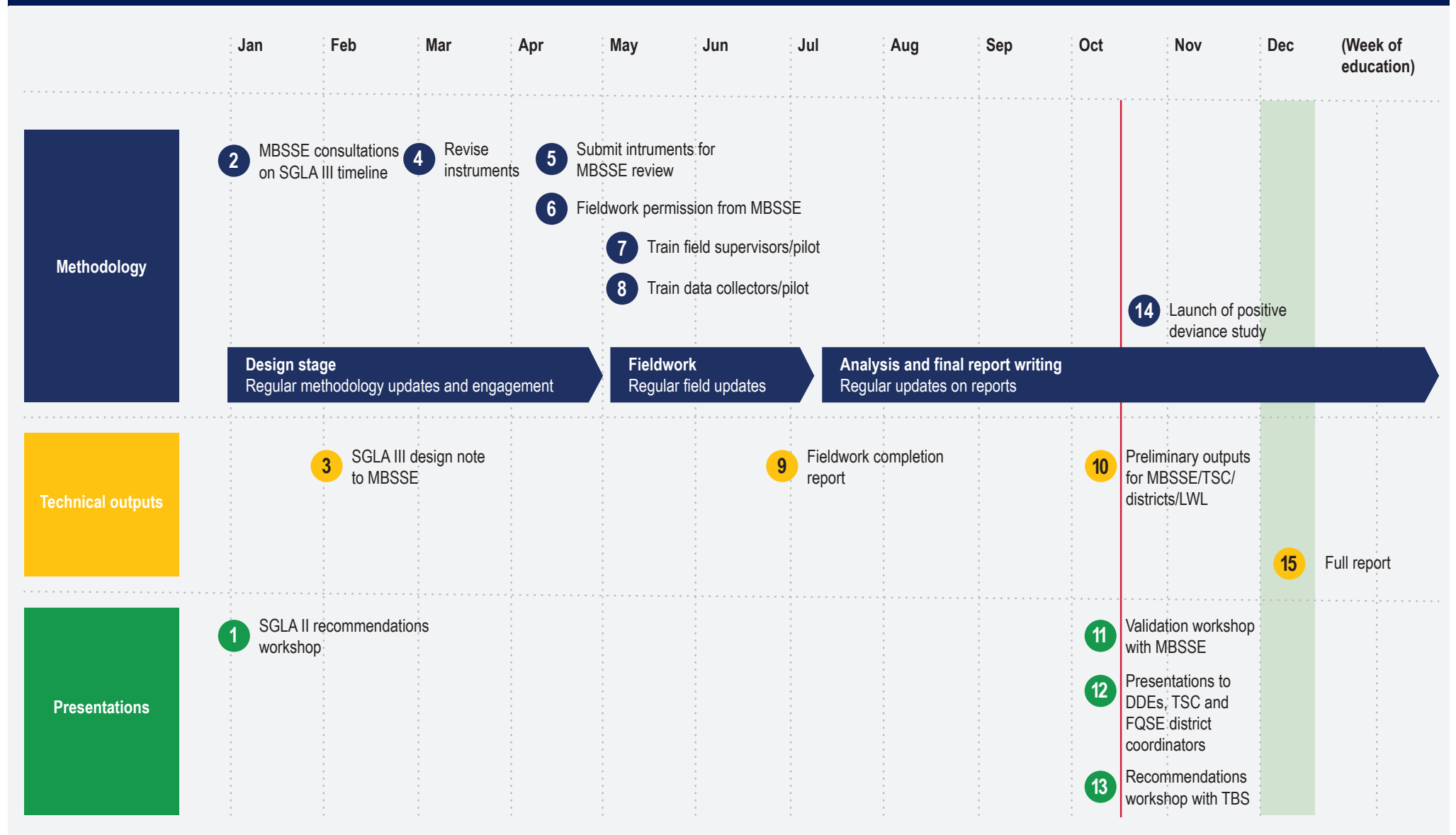
1.5 Why is Fatamata not learning?

Before delving into the results from the third round of the SGLA, it is important to understand what pupils who sat through the SGLA in 2019 went through during their years of schooling, when they were in their early years and primary school and when they entered secondary school. The figure below traces back the story of Fatamata, a JSS2 pupil who sat through the SGLA this year, to when she started primary school in 2012.

Figure 2: Fatamata's story

2012 **P1**

2013 **P2**

EGRA: Fatamata cannot read a single word of English.

2014 **P3**

Fatamata returns to school on an **accelerated curriculum**.

Ebola outbreak: Schools shut down for more than 10 months.

Lessons given out through **a radio**.

2016 **P5**

2015 **P4**

2017 **P6**

Launch of **Leh wi Learn**

Launch of FQSE: Many more pupils enrolling into schools.

Fatamata attempted the **SGLA**

2018 **JSS1**

2019 **JSS2**

What's next for Fatamata?

In 2012, Fatamata was a six-year-old girl who had **just started primary school**.

As Fatamata progressed through primary school, she attempted the Early Grade Reading Assessment conducted in 2014,[2] which showed that **she could not read even a single word** in a short and simple passage of English.

When Fatamata was focused on catching up on her reading skills, Sierra Leone was **struck by Ebola** and schools across the country were **shut down for more than ten months**.

Fatamata continued to receive some lessons through the radio ('school of the airwaves'). Since Fatamata was already struggling before the Ebola outbreak, she **struggled to keep up with the lessons taught through the radio**.

When Fatamata finally returned to school in May 2015, she was put on an 'accelerated curriculum' to allow her to **quickly catch up with all the content that she had missed when school was closed**. This was through an "accelerated curriculum" when Fatamata, and millions like her, **should have been given remediation not acceleration**. However, she struggled to keep up with the curriculum which continues to this day.

When Fatamata was in P6 in 2017, **Leh wi Lan was launched** and 2018 marked the beginning of FQSEP.

Between 2012 and 2017, enrolment in JSS increased by 3 per cent per annum, putting **immense pressure on classrooms and teachers**, most of whom were volunteer teachers.

With the introduction of FQSEP, enrolment is expected to increase further. This dramatic increase in enrolment has resulted in there being many more pupils in Fatamata's class making the classroom learning environment **extremely challenging and not conducive to learning**.

These contextual factors should be borne in mind when reading the results that are discussed next.

2   The EGRA in 2014 showed that 87 per cent of pupils in P2 could not read a single word in a short passage of English.

2 Pupil learning outcomes in junior and senior secondary grades

2 Pupil learning outcomes in junior and senior secondary grades

This section presents answers to the following research questions:

Box 1: Key research questions on secondary grade learning outcomes in SGLA III

- What are the English and maths skills typically demonstrated by JSS2 and SSS2 pupils in 2019? Are these skills in line with what they should have acquired by these grades, according to the national curriculum?

- Are there any major differences in pupils' skills learning levels compared to 2018?

- Are there major differences in pupils' skills by gender and other background characteristics?

Source: Secondary Grade Learning Assessment survey (May-June 2019), pupil learning assessment.

Before discussing pupil learning results, a summary of pupils' background characteristics is presented below, to provide context to the learning outcome results.

Box 2: Background characteristics of pupils

- The average age of pupils in JSS2 and SSS2, at the end of the 2018-2019 academic year, is 15 and 18 years respectively.

- In JSS2, 36% of the pupils were age-appropriate for their grade (13-14 years old) while 58% were overage (i.e. older than 14 years). There was a similar pattern of overage pupils in SSS2 (36% age-appropriate, i.e. 16-17 years; 58% overage).

- Pupils reported the main language they speak at home as Krio in the West; Krio, Mende and Krio in the East; Krio and Temne in the North and North West; and Krio and Mende in South.

Source: Secondary Grade Learning Assessment survey (May-June 2019), pupil learning assessment.

2.1 About the learning assessment

5,400 JSS2 and SSS2 pupils tested on English and maths.

One-on-one test administration: each pupil is tested individually by a data collector using a handheld computer device.

Approximately 45 minutes per pupil.

40 questions per test covering both English and maths.

Included background questions on pupils' age, language spoken at home, assets at home, and use of pupil handbooks.
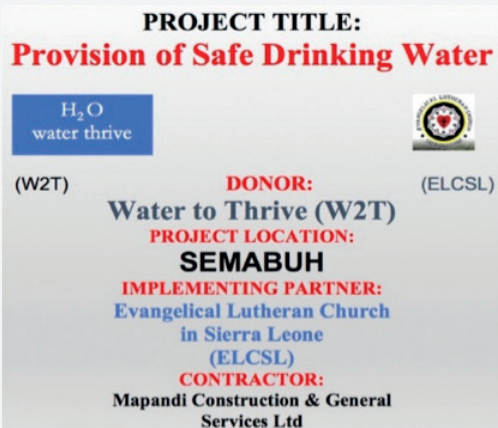
In SGLA III, each pupil was administered a test of around 40 questions covering both English language and maths, along with some background questions like pupil's age, main language spoken at home and household assets. The test took approximately 45 minutes per pupil, and was administered on a one-on-one basis by enumerators to individual pupils.

The SGLA tests focus on pupils' learning outcomes in JSS2 and SSS2, and are designed with reference to the national curriculum in these grades. Some of the test questions are also referenced to the primary grades 4 to 6 curriculum.[1] While the test is referenced to the national curriculum in P4-6, JSS and SSS grades, it does not focus on curriculum content coverage per se, which is already the focus of the examination system. In other words, the SGLA tests are not tests of content recall based on prescribed texts for BECE or WASSCE, say Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice. The SGLA tests instead focus on knowledge and skills acquired by pupils in these grades and their "real life" applicability.

The SGLA tests contained questions that pupils are expected to encounter and comprehend in their daily lives – both within and outside school. These include questions on prose, poetry, lists, tables, graphs, advertisements and webpages. In other words, the SGLA tests are balanced to assess both school-based knowledge and everyday English language and maths skills.

Below are two examples – the first one from an English language item from the SGLA III, which tests pupils' application of English comprehension skills through texts they are expected to encounter in everyday life. Rather than providing an extract from a text in the prescribed curriculum, this question assesses comprehension skills by providing visual and textual information through an extract of non-continuous text (billboard) about a development project. It requires pupils to locate and extract explicitly stated information (such as title of the project) and infer meaning from simple short continuous and non-continuous texts. While a seemingly unconventional question at first glance, this question ultimately tests a common skill – reading comprehension – which pupils will be required to demonstrate in school, work and life.

Box 3: Example of English language assessment question which tests pupils' ability to comprehend non-continuous texts from everyday life

PROJECT TITLE:
Provision of Safe Drinking Water

H₂O water thrive (W2T)

DONOR: (ELCSL)
Water to Thrive (W2T)
PROJECT LOCATION:
SEMABUH
IMPLEMENTING PARTNER:
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sierra Leone (ELCSL)
CONTRACTOR:
Mapandi Construction & General Services Ltd

There are often billboards for construction projects in villages in Sierra Leone. These show the name of the project, where the money for the project comes from, the name of the village, the organisation managing the project and the local business doing the actual work.

Look at this example in the photograph. Use it to answer the next six questions.

Where is the project?

A. Project Location
B. Contractor
C. Semabuh
D. ELCSL

What is the name of the project?

A. Semabuh
B. Water to Thrive
C. Evangelical Lutheran Church
D. Provision of Safe Drinking Water

Source: Secondary Grade Learning Assessment.

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1   Inclusion of questions from P4-6 curriculum was seen as necessary to avoid "floor effects" in the test – this arises when a large proportion of pupils taking an assessment find most questions in the test too difficult, resulting in a large proportion of pupils scoring near the bottom of the scale, also referred to as "clumping near zero".

This second example below shows a more familiar maths question, which seems more common to how questions are presented in school textbooks and examinations. The examples below provide illustrations of items that aligned more closely with school-based maths skills.

Box 4: Example of school-based maths assessment items	

Multiply
 	
        437
      x 74
    —————
 	
   —————
	What is 2/3 + 1/4?
	
	 A. 2/12
	 B. 3/7
	 C. 3/4
	 D. 11/12

Source: Secondary Grade Learning Assessment.	

2.2   Developing grade-appropriate performance bands in English and Maths

The process of aligning the learning assessment questions with curriculum expectations at various primary and secondary grades was carried out by a panel of experienced Sierra Leonean English and maths teachers, principals, examiners, curriculum specialists, and lesson plans developers. It was facilitated through technical assistance from the Leh wi Lan programme, under the auspices of the MBSSE Executive Secretary (Basic Education).

This curriculum alignment workshop helped refine notions of the links between skills required by each test question and their direct or foundational presence in the national curriculum. The attending experts took each SGLA test question and discussed and debated the most important skills being tested by each question and its placement in the national curriculum, ranging from below P6, P6, JSS1, JSS2, JSS3 and SSS1. The experts provided a grade level allocation for each question in the SGLA III test.

Their discussions were supported with data on the occurrence of key terms in the learning outcomes stated in teachers' lesson plans in English/Language Arts (ELA) and maths at primary, Junior (JSS) and Senior Secondary school (SSS) level.[2] These plans provide a comprehensive perspective on the intended school curriculum in Sierra Leone. Each lesson plan specified a learning outcome, which can be taken as an indication of the learning objectives for different school grades. Topics and objectives at lower levels are often foundational for related topics at higher levels. On the basis of these lesson plans, the national curriculum experts grouped skills tested in the assessment into six categories or performance bands. These reflect learning outcomes expected by pupils in various school grades, from primary grade to SSS1.

The English performance bands are shown in the table below. In the analysis and reporting, pupils are sorted into these five performance bands, each described by a set of skills appropriate for the specified grade in English language. This gives insights into the distribution of skills that pupils possess, and can help identify relative strengths and areas for development. Additionally, it indicates differences in learning outcomes, if any, between groups of pupils (boys and girls, poorer and richer, urban and rural).

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2   From primary to JSS3 level there are 1137 ELA and 1265 mathematics plans, and at SS1 to SS2 levels, there are 88 English and 138 mathematics lesson plans.

Table 1: Grade-appropriate performance bands for English assessment	
Performance band label	**Band descriptor** The typical pupil in this band shows the skills for lower bands and also:
Primary grade level	Names some common objects and understands a simple English sentence. Locates and extracts explicitly stated information and infers meaning from simple short continuous and non-continuous texts.
JSS1	Locates and extracts immediate and overall meaning and information from 1-6 sentences of continuous or short non-continuous texts; understands the immediate impact on meaning of quantifier words (e.g. some, most, all, only).
JSS2	Interprets and infers overall meaning of short continuous and non-continuous text; relates two sets of information; applies basic grammar conventions and uses names of grammatical elements correctly.
JSS3	Identifies meaning and locates and extracts information from various sources such as short continuous (2-3 paragraphs) and non-continuous texts including pictures and tables using, where necessary, inductive reasoning and lower-level inferences to reach an overall understanding; infers the meaning of unfamiliar words from their context; uses technical language for the function of a word in a sentence.
SSS1	Extracts information from non-continuous text and applies inductive reasoning; understands the impact on contextual meaning of quantifiers such as some, all, only.

As with English, maths skills tested in the assessment were also grouped into broad categories or performance bands with band 1 linked to basic skills (e.g. complete simple arithmetic tasks) and band 6 linked to more demanding skills expected at JSS3 grade, like understanding the concepts of fractions, decimals and percentages. The maths performance bands are shown in the table below.[3]

Table 2: Grade-appropriate performance bands for Maths assessment	
Performance band label	**Band descriptor** The typical pupil in this band shows the skills for lower bands and also:
Primary grade level	May complete simple arithmetic tasks successfully. Extracts values shown in a barplot and visualises changes shown graphically, recalls and applies learned procedures for addition and subtraction of numbers set out in column form, calculates an increase of 15% in a price, recalls basic shapes and applies to real objects.
JSS1	Recalls and applies learned procedures for procedures such as HCF of 2-digit numbers; extracts numerical information from text and barplots to make simple comparisons; applies conventions of place value; represents information in a text as a simple number sentence.
JSS2	Extracts information from textual and visual representations to apply a one or two step procedure using simple arithmetic, comparisons, estimations and approximations; applies addition operations on clock time; recalls and applies learned procedures for multiplication, addition and subtraction of multiple-digit numbers set out in column form.
JSS3	Extracts information from textual and visual representations to develop and apply a multi-step procedure using simple arithmetic, estimations and approximations; understands the concepts of fractions, decimals and percentages and applies basic operations to these correctly and appropriately; understands the basic properties of simple geometric figures.

3   Note that no student fell in the SSS1 performance band for maths and as such this is not described in the band descriptors.

The table below provides examples of questions falling in each performance band.

Table 3: Performance bands and example questions from English and maths tests		
Performance band label	**Example of SGLA English question**	**Example of SGLA math question**
Primary grade level	**Circle the word which best matches the picture.** **A.** Gather **B.** Greeting **C.** Grating **D.** Guide	 **The shape of the red oil drum is best described as a:** **A.** Rectangular box **B.** Cylinder **C.** Sphere **D.** Cube
JSS1	**Read the passage about barbers (provided below, Extract 1) and answer the next three questions.** People feel safe in the hairdresser's shop because: **A.** The barber has a knife in his hand. **B.** They can escape from family crises. **C.** Their hair has been cut and they look good. **D.** Sitting back and unwinding helps them to feel secure	 **Look at the figure above. The shape of the blocks used for the walls is best described as:** **A.** Circular **B.** Square **C.** Triangular **D.** Rectangular

Table 3: Performance bands and example questions from English and maths tests (continued)		
Performance band label	**Example of SGLA English question**	**Example of SGLA math question**
JSS2	**Read the passage about barbers (provided below, Extract 1) and answer the next three questions.** Barbers act as counsellors for their clients by: **A.** helping them with their career choices. **B.** taking scissors to their heads. **C.** listening to their problems. **D.** solving family crises.	 **Look at the figure above. The window space could be filled with blocks instead. About how many blocks would be needed?** **A.** 12 **C.** 18 **B.** 16 **D.** 21
JSS3	**Circle the word or phrase closest in meaning to the underlined word.** Did you see the lion <u>pounce</u> on her prey in the film? **A.** Attack **B.** Play **C.** Spring **D.** Stumble	**The figure below represents a rectangular garden bed 8 metres long and 3 metres wide. Answer the next two questions about this garden bed.** What is the perimeter of the garden bed? **A.** 8m **C.** 22m **B.** 11m **D.** 24m
SSS1	**Use the information in the passage below (provided below, Extract 2) about building a health centre in the village of Yiben and the pictures to answer the next four questions** The passage tells us that the roof was on "before the wet season set in". The best phrase to replace "before the wet season set in" is: **A.** "before the floods started". **B.** "before there was any rain". **C.** "before it rained every day". **D.** "before there was rain most days".	

Example of text which pupils were asked to interpret

Extract 1: "Most people in Freetown will tell you that they have a trusted barber who they visit on a regular basis. Geoffrey, a tour guide, said: "Appearance is very important in Sierra Leone, people want to make sure their hair looks good." Barbers also take on the role of counsellors, listening to clients agonise over their love lives or confide in them about family crises. The barber shop provides a safe space for people to sit back and unwind – after all, it's important to feel relaxed as someone takes a knife to your chin or a pair of scissors to your head. "

Extract 2: "In mid-February 2016 the builder, Farner Kamara, and his community workforce began constructing the clinic with a great sense of urgency. As planned, the zincalume roof was on by the end of March, before the wet season set in, and plastering completed in July. By the start of September 2016, the building was finished with concrete floors, drainage, doors, windows and paint. It is a secure, national-standard building that is immediately recognisable as a health facility. It is the talk of two chiefdoms and, along with their school, the pride of the community."

2.3   Results: Pupil learning outcomes in English and Maths

This section addresses the questions: What are the current levels of learning of JSS2 and SSS2 pupils in English and Maths? What are the English and Maths skills typically demonstrated by pupils in these grades? To examine this, pupils were sorted into the six grade-specific performance bands or levels discussed above. To achieve a performance band or level means that pupils in the particular band are more likely than not to be able to demonstrate the skills linked to that particular grade (as per the national curriculum) but are very likely to struggle with skills demanded by the curriculum in any higher grade.

The SGLA III reiterates findings from last year's survey: pupil learning levels in secondary grades are generally low. There is a wide gulf between pupils' actual skills and competencies compared to national curriculum expectations. Moreover, results this year suggest a small but real drop in Maths scores. English scores have also declined when compared to 2018, but to a lesser extent than Maths scores.

For English, as shown below, 57 per cent of JSS2 pupils and 46 per cent of SSS2 pupils are able to demonstrate English language skills expected from a pupil in primary grade, i.e. P6 or below, but very unlikely to demonstrate skills expected from any higher grades than P6. In other words, these JSS2 and SSS2 pupils have fallen behind curriculum expectations by two and five grades respectively. Around 12 per cent of JSS2 pupils showed English language skills as expected from a JSS2 pupil and a small percentage (3 per cent) showed skills exceeding expectations. Though a larger proportion of SSS2 pupils (versus JSS2 pupils) appear in the higher performance bands, ultimately a majority of these pupils have fallen behind by up to four grades – they are operating somewhere between JSS1 and SSS1. Almost no SSS2 pupil is able to show skills expected at the end of SSS1 in the SGLA.

Figure 3: Distribution of JSS2 and SSS2 pupils across English grade-level performance bands

JSS2 pupils		English performance bands	SSS2 pupils	
2 grades ahead	**0%**	SSS1	1 grade behind	**0%**
1 grade ahead	**3%**	JSS3	2 grades behind	**5%**
At grade	**12%**	JSS2	3 grades behind	**17%**
1 grade behind	**28%**	JSS1	4 grades behind	**32%**
2 grades behind	**52%**	P6	5 grades behind	**42%**
> 2 grades behind	**5%**	Below P6	> 5 grades behind	**4%**
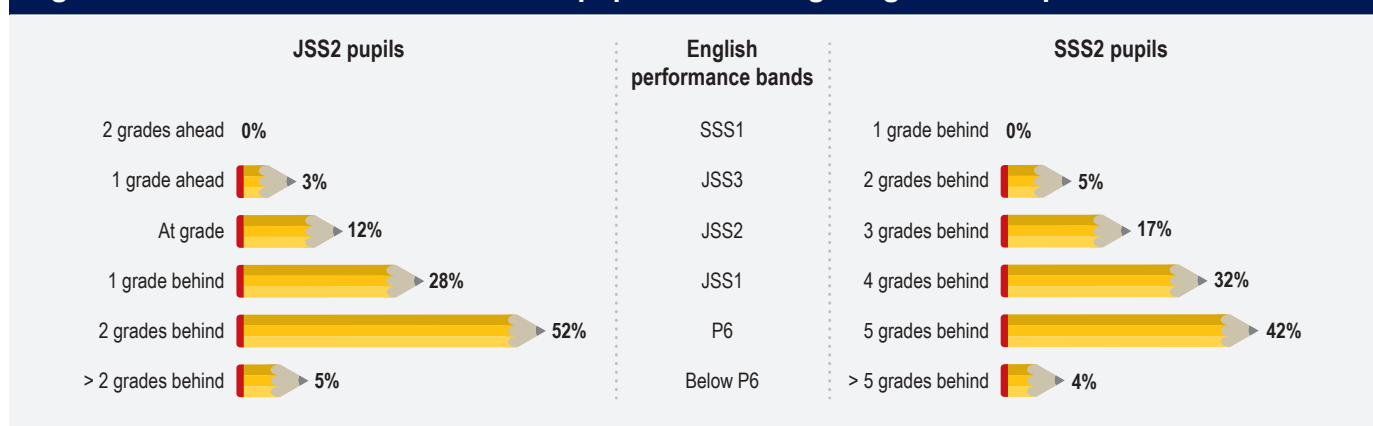
Even more pupils are falling behind in maths. As shown below, 72 per cent of JSS2 pupils and 60 per cent of SSS2 pupils are able to demonstrate maths skills expected at primary grade level, i.e. P6 or below, having fallen behind by two and five grades respectively. There is thus a higher proportion of pupils in the lowest bands in maths compared to English. Only 3 per cent of JSS2 pupils show maths skills as expected from a JSS2 pupil and none showed skills exceeding expectations. Once again, though a larger proportion of SSS2 pupils (versus JSS2 pupils) appear in the higher performance bands, ultimately more than half of these SSS2 pupils have fallen behind by up to four years. In the SGLA test, only 1 per cent of SSS2 pupils are able to show skills expected at the end of JSS3 and none show maths skills at SSS1 level.

Figure 4: Distribution of JSS2 and SSS2 pupils across maths grade-level performance bands

JSS2 pupils		Maths performance bands	SSS2 pupils	
2 grades ahead	**0%**	SSS1	1 grade behind	**0%**
1 grade ahead	**0%**	JSS3	2 grades behind	**1%**
At grade	**3%**	JSS2	3 grades behind	**5%**
1 grade behind	**25%**	JSS1	4 grades behind	**33%**
2 grades behind	**57%**	P6	5 grades behind	**50%**
> 2 grades behind	**15%**	Below P6	> 5 grades behind	**10%**
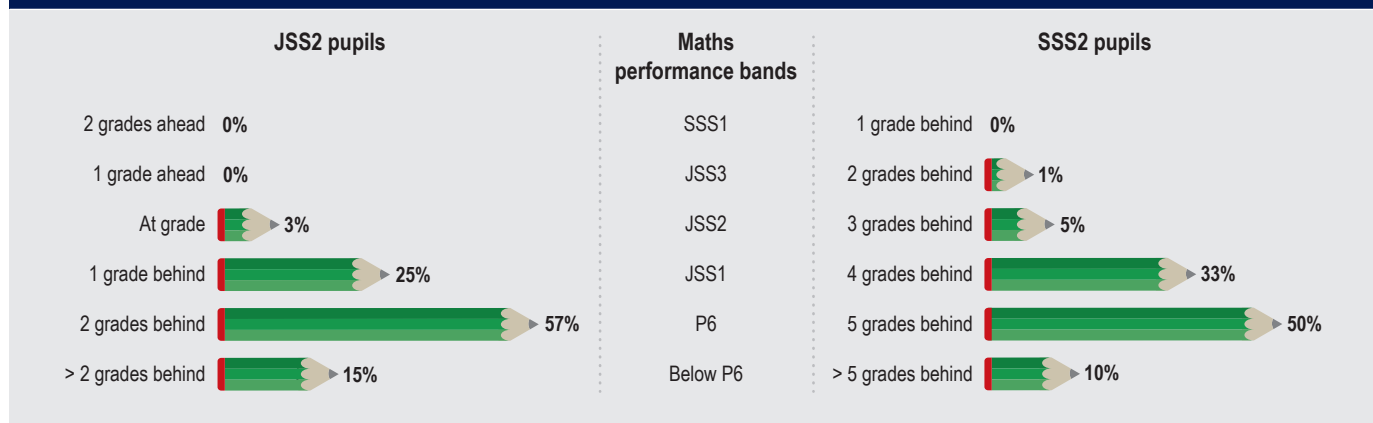
2.3.1 How does pupil learning vary across provinces and districts?

There are significant regional differences in pupils' performance – pupils in the Western region score significantly higher than the national average. For instance, in JSS2 English, Kono and Western Urban districts both have higher proportions of JSS2 pupils performing "at grade" compared to the national average of 14 per cent. Western province tends to have less pupils in the P6 or below band and more in the bands associated with higher grades; this is true for both subjects, but differences are less pronounced in maths.

Figure 5: Regional disparities in pupils' performance (JSS2 English)

Percentage of pupils in each performance band

	P6 or below	JSS1	JSS2 or above
Sierra Leone	58%	28%	14%
North Western	58%	28%	14%
Western	49%	31%	20%
Southern	61%	27%	12%
Northern	61%	27%	12%
Eastern	61%	27%	12%

Legend: ■ P6 or below   ■ JSS1   ■ JSS2 or above
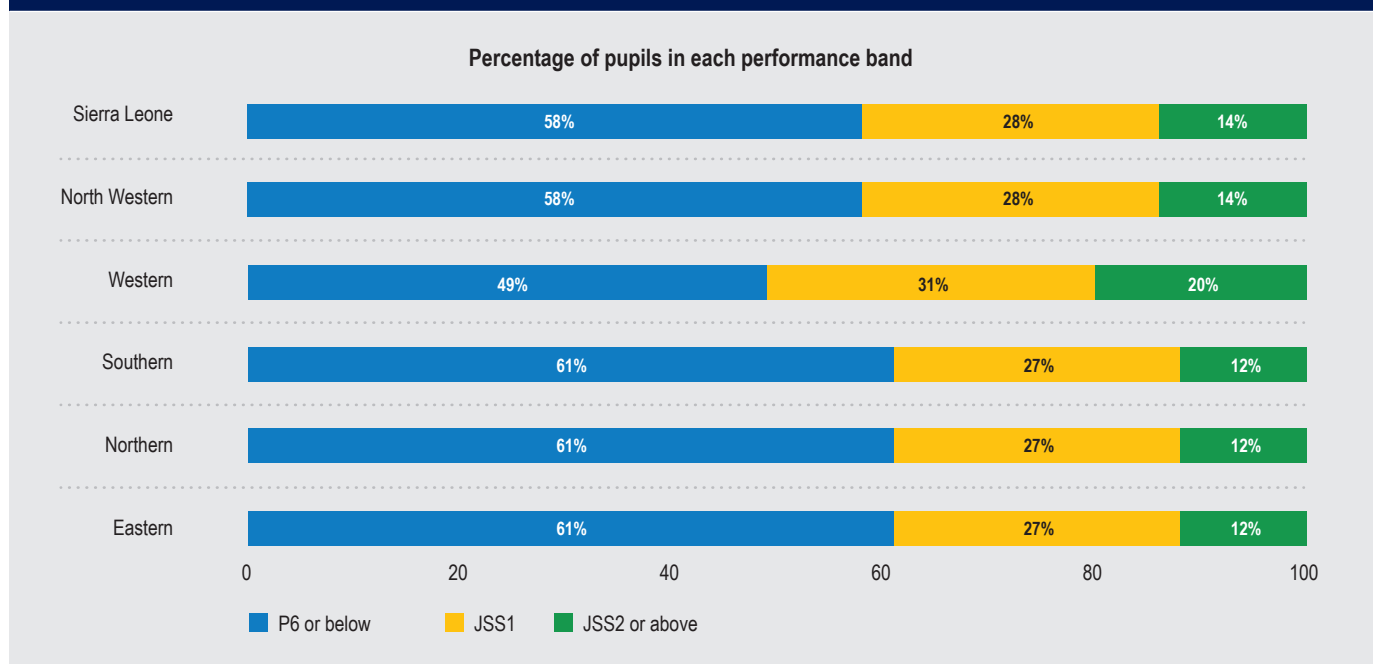
The larger sample of 700 schools in the 2019 SGLA gives us the opportunity to examine district level pupil performance more closely than was possible at the baseline last year. In the discussion below, for brevity, we only focus on JSS2 pupils. In particular we ask: What is the average JSS2 performance in English and maths, by district? Which are "best" and "worst" performing districts?

The two figures below give us the percentage of JSS2 pupils who demonstrated English and maths skills in line with the competencies expected of JSS2 pupils (or above) in the national curriculum. The rest of the pupils are below JSS2 level, including a vast majority (55-60%) are at primary grade level, i.e. two or more years behind. As we can see in the two figures below, JSS2 pupils writing the Leh wi Lan learning assessment from Kono, Western Urban and Western Rural showed stronger performance than other districts. Kono, Western Urban and Western Rural are above the Sierra Leone national average in both subjects. In the same figures, we can also see that Kenema, Falaba, Pujehun and Karene are among the districts that are falling behind.

Figure 6: District disparities in pupil performance (JSS2 English and maths)

English: JSS2 pupils at grade level or above (%)

District	%
Western Urban	21%
Western Rural	19%
Kono	15%
Sierra Leone	14%
Kambia	14%
Bonthe	13%
Moyamba	13%
Bombali	13%
Kailahun	13%
Port Loko	13%
Koinadugu	13%
Bo	12%
Kenema	10%
Tonkolili	10%
Falaba	10%
Pujehun	9%
Karene	7%

Maths: JSS2 pupils at grade level or above (%)

District	%
Western Urban	5%
Western Rural	4%
Bo	3%
Sierra Leone	3%
Moyamba	2%
Kambia	2%
Kailahun	2%
Kono	2%
Bonthe	2%
Port Loko	2%
Koinadugu	2%
Kenema	2%
Bombali	2%
Falaba	1%
Karene	1%
Tonkolili	1%
Pujehun	1%

2.3.2 How does pupil learning vary by gender?

Across both grades, on average boys perform better in these tests than girls. This gap is small in JSS2, but appears to widen as girls move from JSS2 to SSS2. Girls are more likely to have skills limited to those expected at primary grade level, i.e. P6 or below, but struggled with skills demanded from higher grades. Compared to boys, significantly fewer girls reach JSS1-level knowledge or above, neither for English nor maths. In other words, for both English and math, significantly more girls from JSS2 grade fall within the first performance band, and significantly more boys than girls perform at JSS1 level. An even starker difference is seen for SSS2 pupils, where 51 per cent of girls are performing at a primary grade level, as compared to 39 per cent of boys. These results are very similar to gender differences seen in the second SGLA last year.

Figure 7: Gender disparities in pupil performance
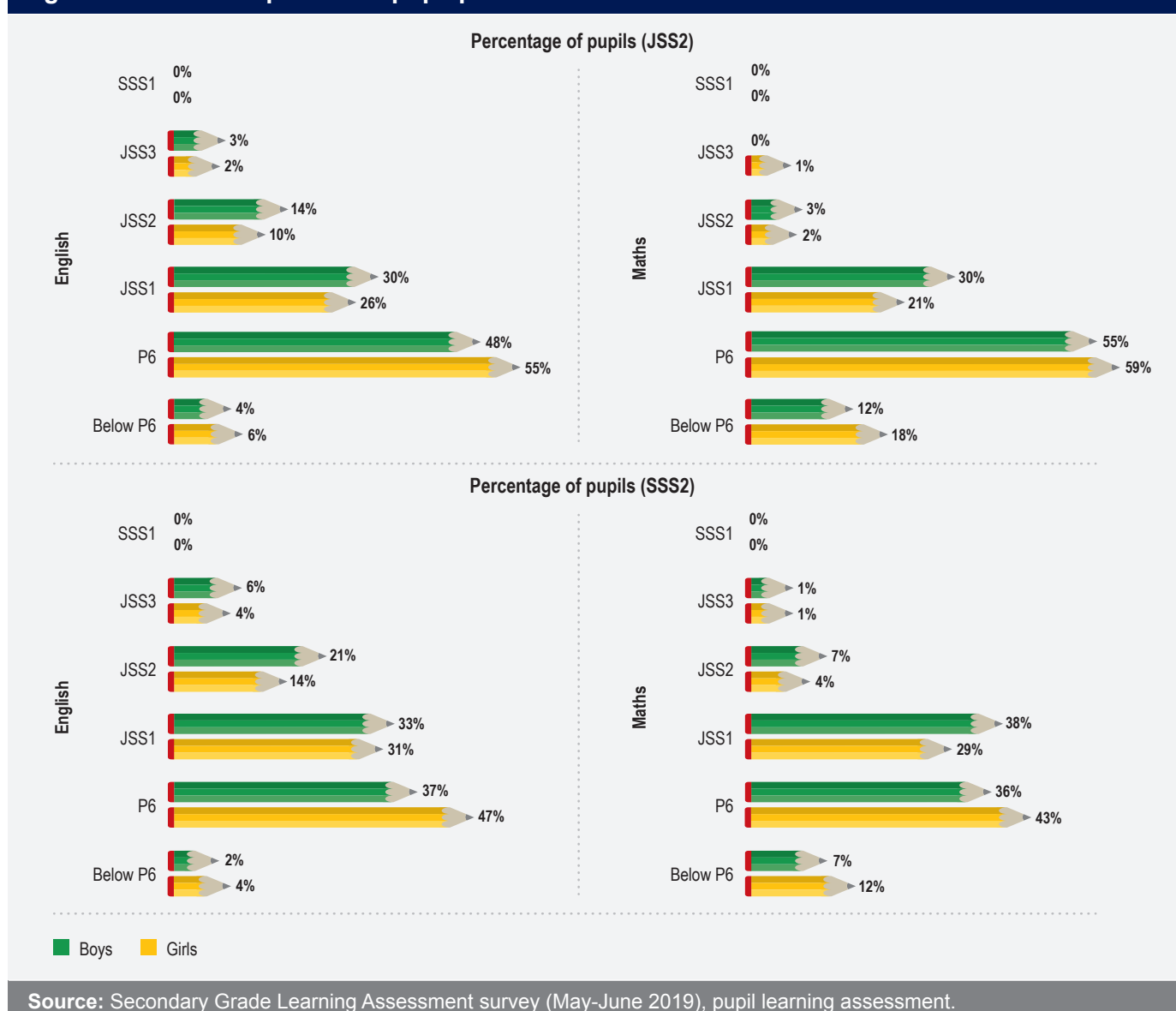
Source: Secondary Grade Learning Assessment survey (May-June 2019), pupil learning assessment.

It is also interesting to note that gender-based differences in pupils' performance exist in all provinces. Differences between boys and girls are also larger at SSS grade than at JSS grade for both subjects and across provinces. The Western province has the smallest gender gap in performance.

Once again, we exploit the large SGLA III sample size to examine gender gaps in each district. For brevity, we again focus on JSS2 pupils only, and ask: In which districts do we find the largest difference in average performance between boys and girls? Which districts have the widest "gender gap" in JSS2 pupil performance?

The two figures below give us the percentage of JSS2 boys and girls, separately for each district, who demonstrated English and maths skills in line with the competencies expected of JSS2 pupils (or above) in the national curriculum. The gender story across districts is complex, and varies substantially across the country. The main noteworthy points are:

- The gender gap in JSS2 is clear and pronounced in almost all districts.

- However, in some districts, girls do better than boys (e.g. Moyamba for English; Kono, Western Urban, Bonthe, Pujehun for maths).

- Some districts show large gender gaps with girls performing much worse than boys (e.g. Kenema, Kambia, Koinadugu and Karene).

- Not shown here but from wider SGLA results discussed above, we know that the average performance of girls across the country gets much worse than boys as they move to higher grades (i.e. to SSS2).

Figure 8: Gender disparities in JSS2 pupil performance, by district

English: JSS2 pupils performing at grade level or above (%)

District	Boys	Girls
Western Urban	24%	18%
Western Rural	22%	17%
Moyamba	10%	16%
Kono	17%	12%
Sierra Leone	17%	12%
Bonthe	15%	12%
Bombali	15%	11%
Bo	14%	10%
Port Loko	16%	9%
Tonkolili	11%	9%
Kailahun	17%	8%
Koinadugu	17%	8%
Kambia	19%	8%
Puhehun	10%	8%
Falaba	11%	7%
Kenema	16%	6%
Karene	9%	6%

Maths: JSS2 pupils performing at grade level or above (%)

District	Boys	Girls
Western Urban	4%	6%
Western Rural	5%	3%
Sierra leone	3%	3%
Kono	2%	2%
Moyamba	3%	2%
Bo	4%	2%
Bonthe	2%	2%
Tonkolili	1%	2%
Port Loko	3%	1%
Bombali	2%	1%
Pujehun	1%	1%
Karene	2%	1%
Kailahun	3%	1%
Koinadugu	3%	1%
Falaba	2%	0%
Kambia	4%	0%
Kenema	4%	0%

■ Boys ■ Girls

Source: Secondary Grade Learning Assessment survey (May-June 2019), pupil learning assessment.

There could be a number of factors driving this difference. As we see in later chapters, results from this survey in all three years have shown that female teachers constitute a very small percentage of the teaching workforce in secondary grades; and girls reported various instances of harassment while commuting to or from school; school toilets being unsafe and far from the main school building; absence during menstruation; sex-for-grades and sexual harassment by staff and male students.

2.3.3 What is the relationship between pupils' test scores and family background?

Pupils' own family background is one of the biggest determinants of their learning level. Across both grades, pupils from the richest households (i.e. top 20 per cent pupils based on a household asset index) perform significantly better than pupils from the poorest 20 per cent of households.

In what follows, we compare the performance of pupils in the first quintile of the household asset index (poorest) to performance of pupils in the highest quintile (richest). For the purpose of this analysis, the middle three quintiles are not considered. Comparing pupil performance by household wealth shows that a significantly larger percentage of pupils from less advantaged households only reach skills that are expected at P6 level or below for English, in both JSS and SSS grade, compared to their counterpart from more advantaged backgrounds; a similar picture holds for math as well. Moving up the grade-appropriate band scale, we find less pupils from disadvantaged household and more pupils from the richest families populating the performance bands for both math and English, with stark wealth-based differences between rich and poor pupils for top bands in math. Similar to what was observed for gender-based differences, disparities in learning between richest and poorest pupils appear to be larger at SSS grade. For English, the learning level between richest and poorest is already wide in JSS2. However, for maths, the gap between richest and poorest seems to widen over time, with much larger disparities for SSS2 pupils.

Figure 9: Disparities in pupil performance by household wealth

Percentage of JSS2 pupils in each performance band

English

	Richest	Poorest
SSS1	0%	0%
JSS3	4%	1%
JSS2	14%	9%
JSS1	30%	25%
P6	48%	57%
Below P6	3%	8%

Maths

	Richest	Poorest
SSS1	0%	0%
JSS3	1%	0%
JSS2	3%	2%
JSS1	29%	21%
P6	55%	57%
Below P6	12%	19%

Percentage of SSS2 pupils in each performance band

English

	Richest	Poorest
SSS1	1%	0%
JSS3	8%	2%
JSS2	20%	10%
JSS1	32%	30%
P6	37%	53%
Below P6	2%	6%

Maths

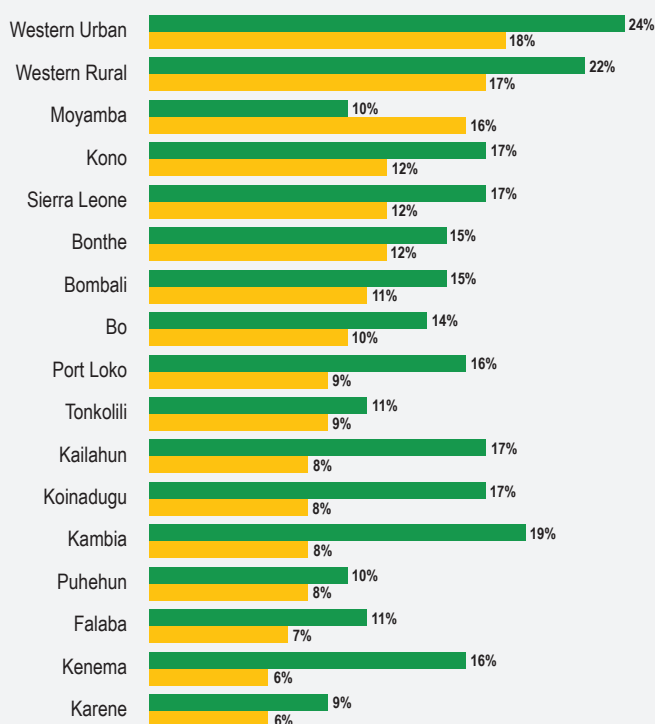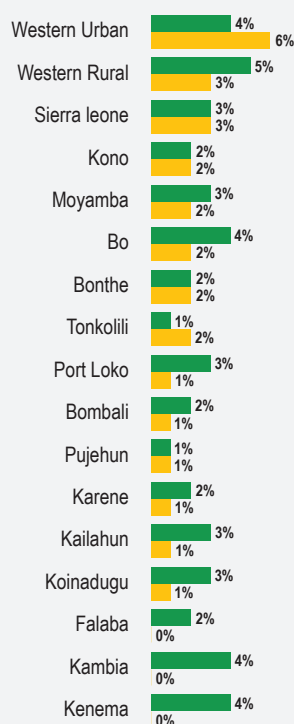|	Richest	Poorest
SSS1	0%	0%
JSS3	2%	0%
JSS2	8%	2%
JSS1	36%	24%
P6	46%	59%
Below P6	7%	15%

■ Richest   ■ Poorest

Source: Secondary Grade Learning Assessment survey (May-June 2019), pupil learning assessment.

As for gender-based differences, the magnitude of differences in pupils performance by household wealth varies across provinces. Interestingly, for both math and English, across JSS and SSS grade, no significant differences exist in the Eastern province between the richest and poorest pupils. The North-Western and Northern provinces also display no wealth-based differences in English and math respectively.

2.3.4 Can remoteness of school location predict pupil learning?

In both English and maths, there is a significant negative relationship between remoteness of school and pupils' performance. In other words, pupils' learning levels drop as we travel away from schools that are located near the district headquarter town, towards more remote schools. Pupils from remote schools, across both JSS2 and SSS2 grades, are more likely to feature in the lower performance bands (P6 or below). This result is consistent with baseline findings from 2017 and midline findings from 2018..

A number of factors could contribute to this relationship. For instance, this survey provides indicative evidence that schools farther away from district headquarter towns are generally not as well-managed as those near the district headquarter towns. The remoter schools are significantly worse in terms of their learning environment and overall school management indices. In terms of administration and planning, schools near district capitals are the strongest.

2.4   Comparing results across years

When comparing results for SGLA III with SGLA II, we notice a significant drop in performance for maths in 2019 compared to 2018. Indeed, we find a larger fraction of pupils falling within bands J1 and below for maths in the 2019 midline than in the 2018 midline, and consequently less pupils in the higher bands (J2 and above). This is true across both JSS2 and SSS2 grade, but differences in performance over time are larger for JSS2 pupils. For English, the picture differs for JSS2 and SSS2 pupils. For SSS2, we see a worsening of performance as more pupils fail to reach P6 or J1 knowledge levels in 2019 than in 2018. However, for JSS2, we see a relatively stable performance across the years. Across both English and maths, performance differences over time are larger at JSS2 grade than SSS2.

Figure 10: Comparing pupil performance across years
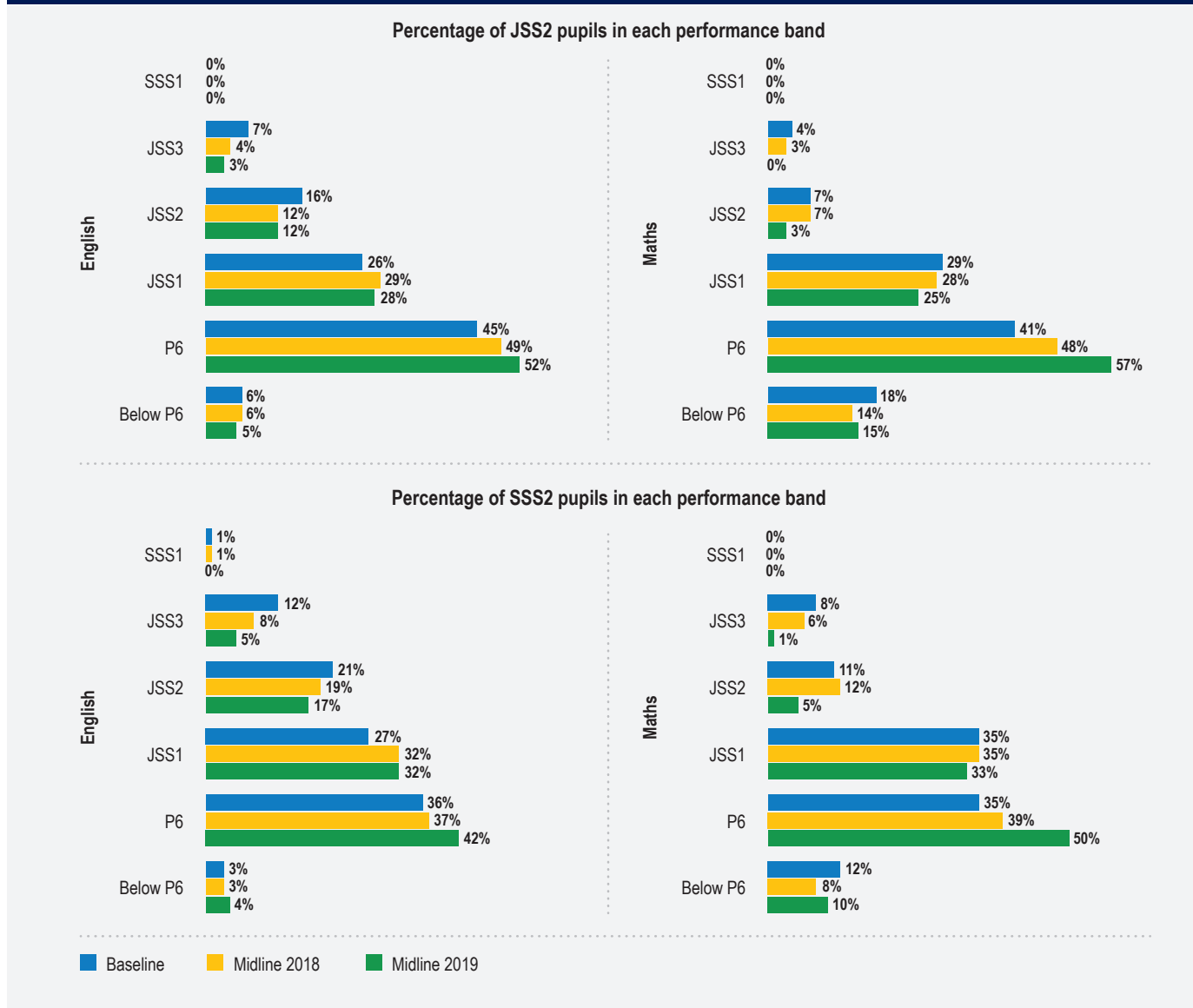
Source: Secondary Grade Learning Assessment survey (May-June 2017, 2018 and 2019), pupil learning assessment.

It is useful to provide examples of questions on which pupils performed significantly worse in 2019 than they did in 2018. For English, the examples provided refer to questions testing pupils' ability to extract and use information from a table and knowledge of basic grammar rules. For math, the examples report questions on the use of addition and multiplication. The full text of the questions is reported below, together with graphs showing the percentage of pupils who answered correctly, in JSS and SSS grade and for 2018 and 2019 separately.

Comparing results across SGLA II and III for specific English questions

Item 1:

According to its Facebook page, when is Jobsearch's next free training session? Write your answer here.

_____

Item 2:

Where do you go to get your free training? Write your answer here.

_____

Item 3:

What do you do if you want to take part in this training?

A. Call: +232 44 669199

B. Email: training@jobsearchsl.com

C. Email: training@jobsearchinsierraleone.com

D. Use the comment option under the light bulb

Comparing results across SGLA II and III for specific maths questions

The barplot shows the prices of some foods in June and December. For eggs, the price is the cost of one egg. For the other foods, the prices are the cost of one kilogram (kg) in Leones.

Use information in this barplot to answer the first question, fill in the blanks in the following three sentences and answer two questions.

Item 1:

The price of _____was about the same in both June and December.

Item 2:

_____are the only food that was more expensive in December.

Item 3:

A kilogram of_____is the food with the biggest change in price.
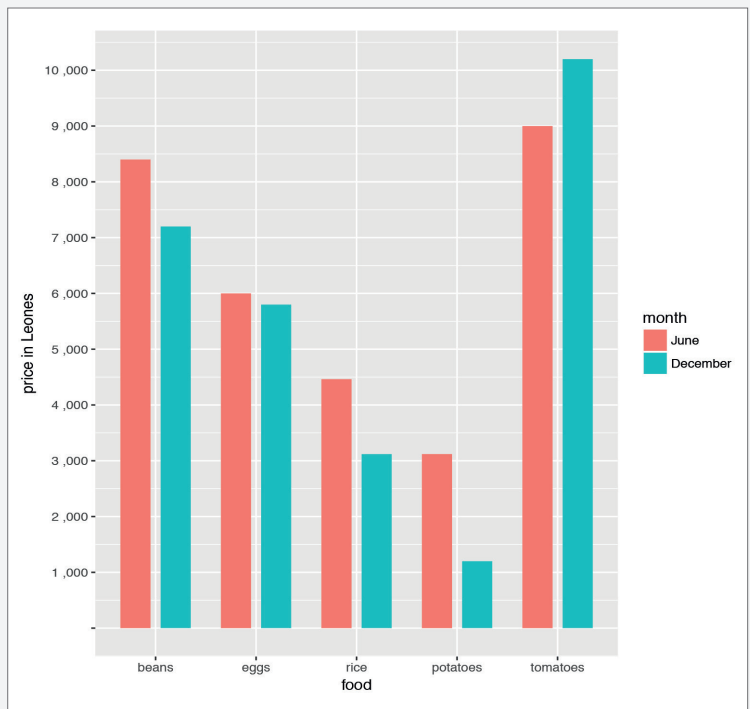
Figure 11: Notable differences in JSS2 pupil performance for specific questions
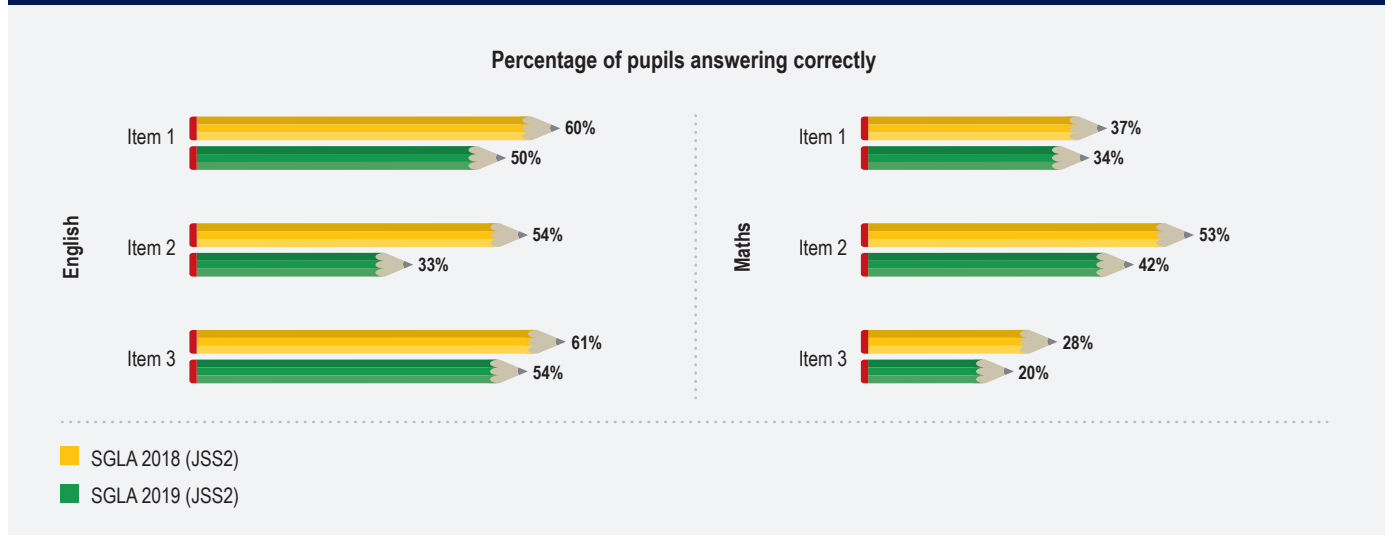
Percentage of pupils answering correctly

English

Item 1: 60% / 50%
Item 2: 54% / 33%
Item 3: 61% / 54%

Maths

Item 1: 37% / 34%
Item 2: 53% / 42%
Item 3: 28% / 20%

- SGLA 2018 (JSS2)
- SGLA 2019 (JSS2)

Source: Secondary Grade Learning Assessment survey (May-June 2018 and 2019), pupil learning assessment.

Figure 12: Notable differences in SSS2 pupil performance for specific questions
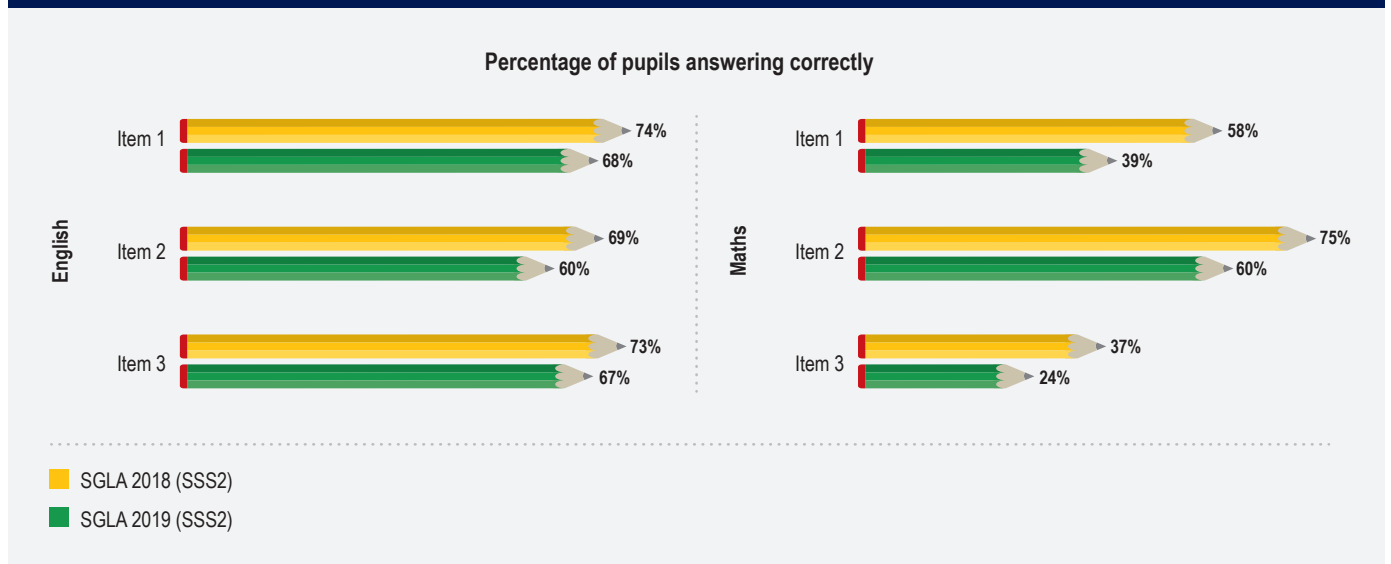
Percentage of pupils answering correctly

English

Item 1: 74% / 68%
Item 2: 69% / 60%
Item 3: 73% / 67%

Maths

Item 1: 58% / 39%
Item 2: 75% / 60%
Item 3: 37% / 24%

- SGLA 2018 (SSS2)
- SGLA 2019 (SSS2)

Source: Secondary Grade Learning Assessment survey (May-June 2018 and 2019), pupil learning assessment.
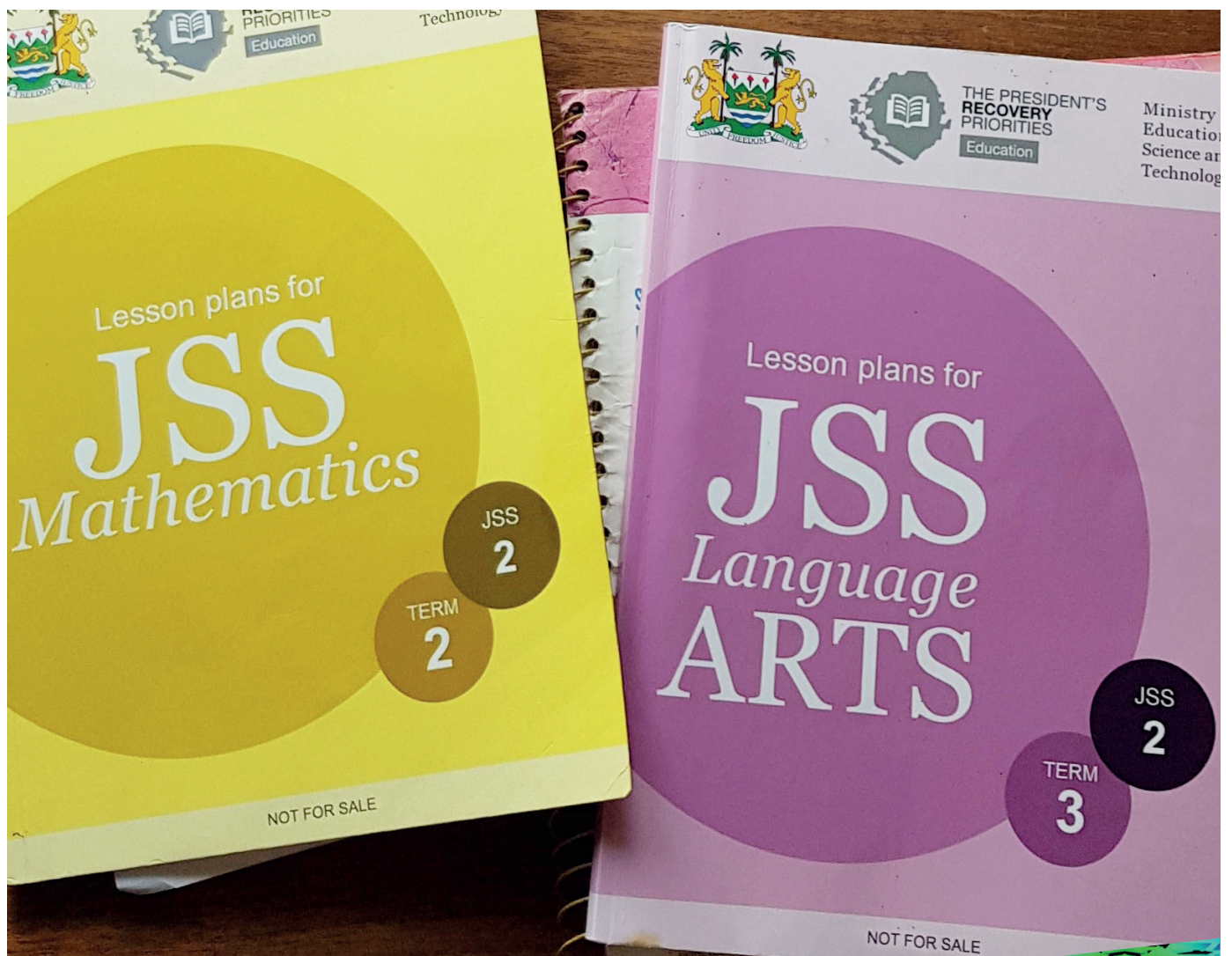
3 Teaching practices in secondary schools

3 Teaching practices in secondary schools

This section presents evidence on the current state of classroom practices in junior and secondary schools in Sierra Leone on a sample of 1,969 teachers.[1] Before discussing the results in detail, some background information on teachers is presented in the box below, to help contextualize the findings.

Box 5: Background characteristics of JSS teachers in SGLA III

- **Only 5 per cent of sampled JSS and SSS teachers are female (slightly higher than SGLA II).** The western region has a significantly higher proportion of female JSS and SSS teachers at nearly 7 per cent. This is significantly larger (*) than other provinces. The eastern, northern, and north-western regions rank the lowest, where female teachers constitute around 3 per cent of the sampled JSS and SSS teachers.

- **Just over a third (37 per cent) of teachers have the Higher Teacher Certificate, HTC, (secondary) qualification (higher than SGLA II).** There is regional variation: northern region (49 per cent) while eastern region (31 per cent).

- **The average age of teachers is 33.8 years**, against the same figure from SGLA II.

- **Average teaching experience is 10.5 years**, against 9.5 years in SGLA II. Southern region has the most experienced teachers while there is no significant difference in teacher experience among the other regions except for the northern region where the average teaching experience is of 9.3 years.

3.1 Quantity of instructional time and pupil-teacher ratios

3.1.1 Teaching hours

Teachers sampled across all rounds of the survey, on average, taught for just about 12 hours in a standard week. The number of hours taught per week amounts to approximately two and a half hours of teaching per day (or less than half the standard school day).[2]

SSS teachers were found to spend more time teaching per day than their JSS counterparts (roughly 25 minutes more per day). The average SSS teacher reported that they taught for about 13 hours in a week (2 hours 40 minutes per day) whereas this figure was a couple of hours lower at 11 hours a week (2 hours 14 minutes per day) for JSS teachers. Results from SGLA II were slightly higher with SSS teachers teaching 14 hours per week and JSS teachers teaching 12 hours per week.

3.1.2 Teacher absenteeism from school

According to teachers sampled for SGLA III, the main reason for being absent from school was own or family illness, with 68 per cent (67% in SGLA II) of teachers reporting this. However, principals linked teachers' absence from school to low levels of teacher salary and remuneration (65 per cent of principals mentioned this in SGLA III compared to 51% in SGLA II).[3] This could be due to poor motivation because of low remuneration, but the underlying mechanism connecting low remuneration to teacher absenteeism is difficult to fully disentangle in a quantitative survey. The other common reason for teachers' absenteeism was social or religious obligations requiring them to be away from school, with 16 per cent of teachers reporting this in SGLA III, similar to SGLA II.

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1 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.
2 The average teacher taught for 2 hours and 40 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.
3 Based on a sample of 704 heads of schools interviewed in the SGLA 2019.

Explaining their own absence from schools – be it authorised or unauthorised absence – principals particularly spoke of attending meetings or events outside of school (55 per cent of principals) as well as own or family health issues (30 per cent). These results are roughly the same as in SGLA II.

Nearly all principals from SGLA III (94 per cent) reported taking some corrective measures against teacher absenteeism. The most commonly cited action in SGLA III was to discuss the issue with teachers (42 per cent), followed by principals who reported the ruling attendance book at opening time and following up absences (33 per cent). These results are slightly lower than in SLGA II, where 53 per cent of principals reported discussing the issue with teachers and 33 per cent reported to ruling the attendance book at the opening time. In SGLA II, 44 percent of principals also wrote letters or queries of warning or reprimand. However, only 22 per cent of principals reported this in SGLA III. In SGLA III, 41 per cent of principals also reported addressing pay/salary related grievances. The province-level results are very similar to national results, with little variation across provinces: vast majority of principles reported taking action against teacher absenteeism, with the three most-commonly cited reasons being the same as reported at the national level.

Figure 13: Corrective measures taken by principals against teacher absenteeism

Measure	Percentage
Discuss attendance issues with teachers	42%
Address teachers' pay or salary related grievances	41%
Ruling attendance book and following up absences	33%
Write a query or letter of reprimand	22%
Reward teachers who are on time	17%
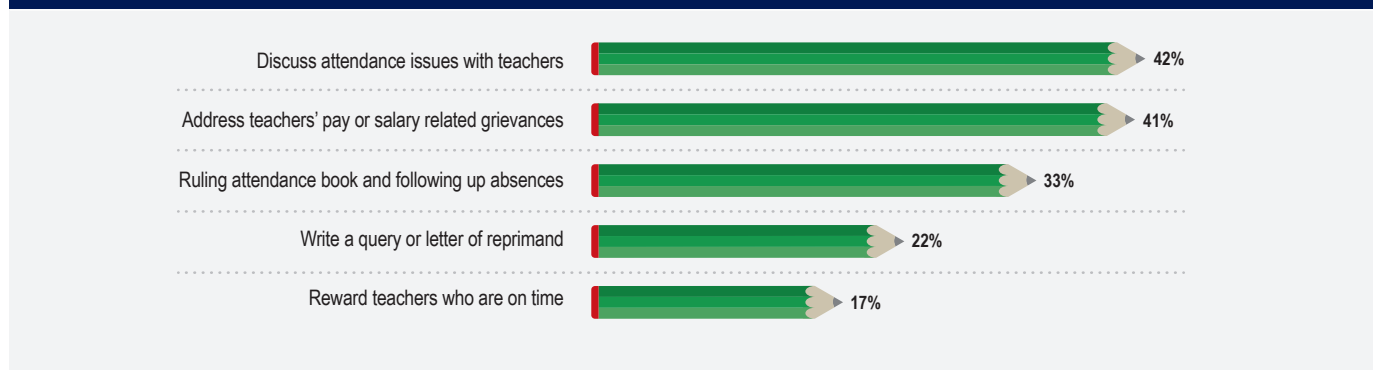
3.1.3 Pupil-teacher ratio

Pupil-teacher ratio (PTR)[4] serves as a broad indicator of teacher workload and the amount of individual attention a pupil is likely to receive from teachers. The numerator is the total number of pupils enrolled in a given JS or SS school, whereas the denominator is the total number of teachers teaching in that school. Schools that have both JSS and SSS sections are counted separately in each grade category, with the appropriate sampling weight. Information on PTRs comes from the principal interviews and is largely drawn from school registers.

SGLA III found that average PTR is relatively small and manageable, and similar across JS and SS schools. These figures are reported in the graph below. On average, there are 20 pupils to each teacher in JS schools and 23 pupils to each teacher in SSS schools. The corresponding figures on PTR from the SGLA II survey were lower but only slightly, with 19 and 22 pupils per teacher in JS and SS schools respectively. These results should be interpreted with caution as, on the whole, the PTR may seem manageable but there was a wide range of PTRs found across secondary schools in the country: the lowest PTR found was 2:1 while the highest was 350:1.

Province-level PTRs are also shown in the figure below. PTRs are higher in SS schools relative to JS schools in the eastern, northern, western and north-western provinces. JS schools in the eastern, northern, southern provinces have relatively higher PTRs compared to the national average of 20:1.

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4 The average PTR counts teachers teaching both JSS and SSS grades once; while the PTR at JSS (SSS) counts all the teachers who teach in JSS-sampled schools (SSS-sampled schools), even if they also teach at the other levels. Information on numbers of teachers and pupil enrolment was collected as part of the principal interviews.

Figure 14: Pupil-teacher ratios at national and province levels

JSS pupil teacher ratio

Year	Ratio
2017	21:1
2018	19:1
2019	20:1

SSS pupil teacher ratio

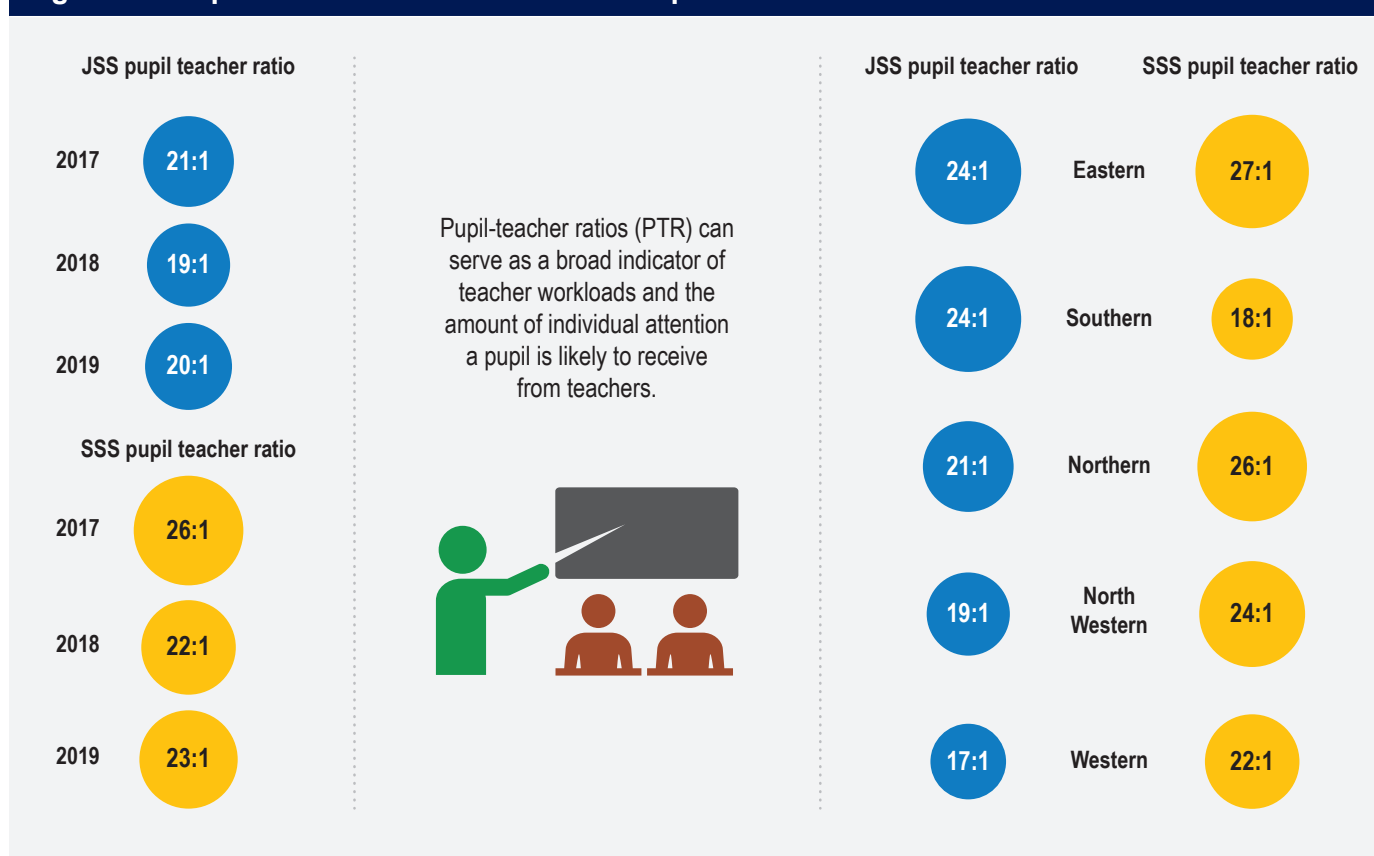| Year	Ratio
2017	26:1
2018	22:1
2019	23:1

Pupil-teacher ratios (PTR) can serve as a broad indicator of teacher workloads and the amount of individual attention a pupil is likely to receive from teachers.

Province	JSS pupil teacher ratio	SSS pupil teacher ratio
Eastern	24:1	27:1
Southern	24:1	18:1
Northern	21:1	26:1
North Western	19:1	24:1
Western	17:1	22:1

3.2 Use of MBSSE lesson plans

The SGLA also interviewed teachers about teaching guides used to help plan and prepare for their lessons. In April 2017, MBSSE distributed lesson plans in Language Arts and maths amongst 40,000 primary and JSS teachers across Sierra Leone to support delivery of high-quality classroom instruction. In this regard, the timing of the second and third SGLA surveys provide an interesting opportunity to capture trends in usage and get initial feedback from teachers on the structure, content and usefulness of lesson plans. SGLA III allows us to assess whether use of lesson plans has been further consolidated among teachers, as well as gather teachers' feedback the lesson plans.

In what follows we present results from the teacher interviews from SGLA III. Comparisons with outcomes from the teacher interview in SGLA I and SGLA II are also reported, where relevant.

Almost all secondary school teachers used some form of teaching guide to plan and prepare for their lessons, with a substantial proportion of teachers (73 per cent) reporting the use of MBSSE lesson plans for this purpose. This is 7 percentage points lower than last year, where 80 per cent teachers had reported using the lesson plans. All provinces had a similar percentage of teachers using MBSSE lesson plans to the national average except for the western province where only 55 percent of teachers used lesson plans. Other important teaching guides continue to remain textbooks (48 per cent) and lesson notes (around 32 per cent, a 14 percentage point decline from SGLA II).

Figure 15: Common teaching guides used by teachers

	MBSSE lesson plans	Textbooks	Lesson notes	Teaching syllabus
Midline 2018	80%	50%	46%	10%
Midline 2019	73%	48%	32%	8%
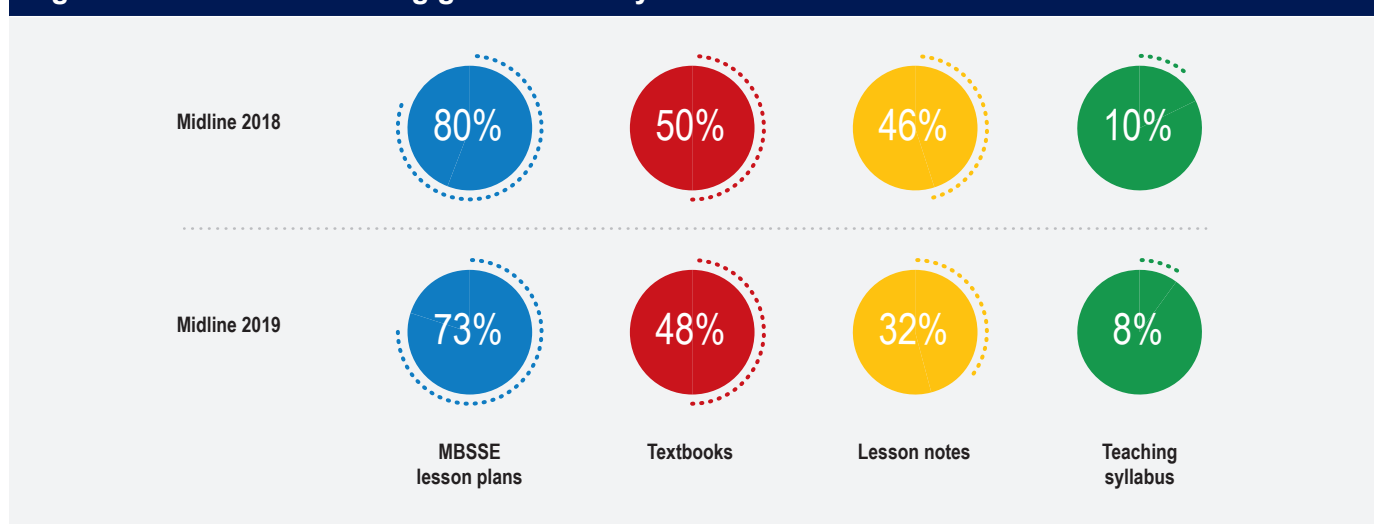
At the province level, some variation is observed in the different forms of teaching guides used. In the western province, the most commonly cited teaching guide is textbooks (57 per cent of teachers). For all other provinces, MBSSE lesson plans are the most commonly cited guide (77 per cent or above in the 4 provinces).

Figure 16: Common teaching guides used by teachers, by province

Legend: MBSSE lesson plans, Text books, Lesson notes, Teaching syllabus
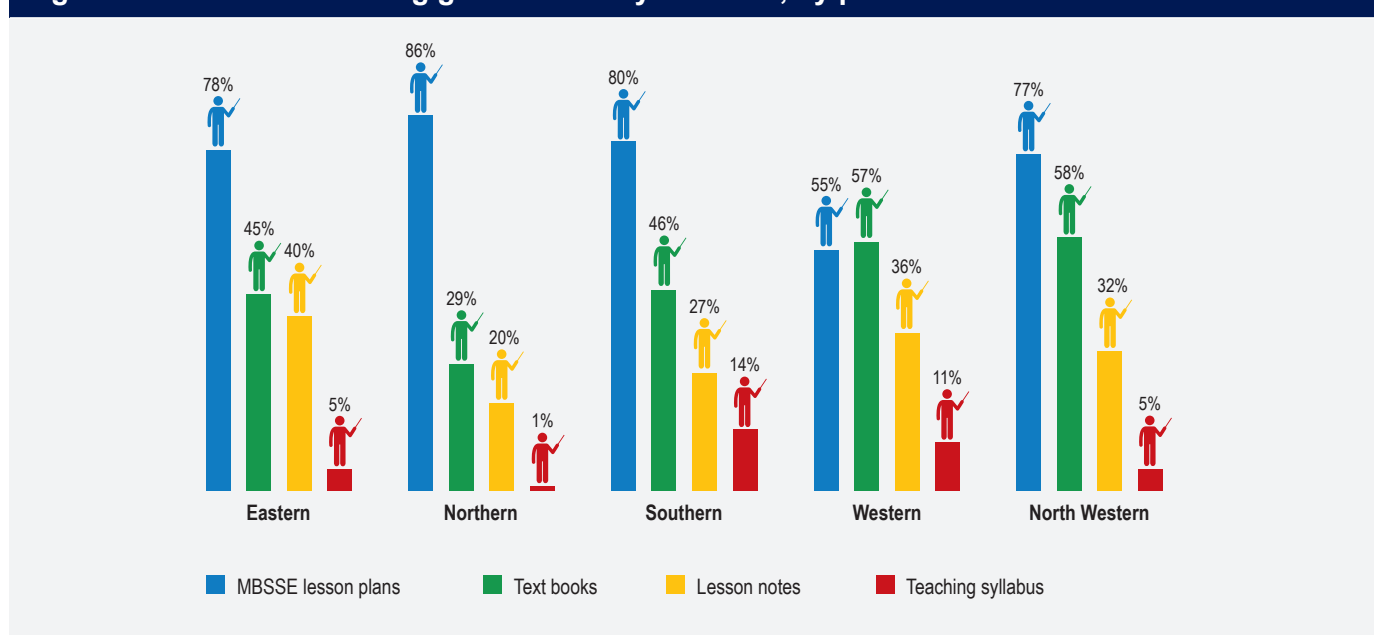
Teachers who reported using MBSSE lesson plans were further asked to share feedback on the lesson plans, and how they were able to use them in their teaching.[5] Similar to the SGLA II survey, teachers were read out 23 different statements related to these themes and asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each one. Statements were clustered around:

- Appropriateness of the length of lesson plans;

- Structure and ease of use;

5 This part of the survey was only administered to a teacher if she indicated that they taught English and/or maths to at least one grade of JSS, since at the time of SGLA III, MBSSE Lesson Plans were only widely prevalent at the JSS level and only for two subjects i.e. Language Art and maths. Consequently, of the total 1,969 teachers, the sub-sample of teachers that answered questions about their use of teaching guides was 1,103 teachers.

- Appropriateness of the level of difficulty of content;

- How lesson plan content and examples related to pupils; and

- How pupils' learning and understanding could be assessed through lesson plans.

As per teachers' own self-reported responses, they can generally understand the use and purpose of lesson plans to facilitate learning. However, they struggle to incorporate all the prescribed activities in the lesson plans within the duration of one period. This could be driven by a range of factors, such as teachers' own 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.

When asked if they felt they understood how to use the lesson plans, almost 98 per cent of teachers reported that they agreed with the statement. A similar pictured emerged when teachers were asked if they understood what pupils might learn when using the lesson plan, with 99 per cent agreeing with the statement. Nearly all teachers (99 per cent) reported that they could assess whether pupils were understanding the content of the lesson plans. However, more than 60 per cent of respondents also reported that they struggled to fit all activities in the lesson plans into one period. This figure is similar to that in SGLA II and is still indicative of a potential area for improvement for the lesson plans.

The table below summarises teachers' responses from SGLA III on how they are able to use lesson plans.

Figure 17: 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%
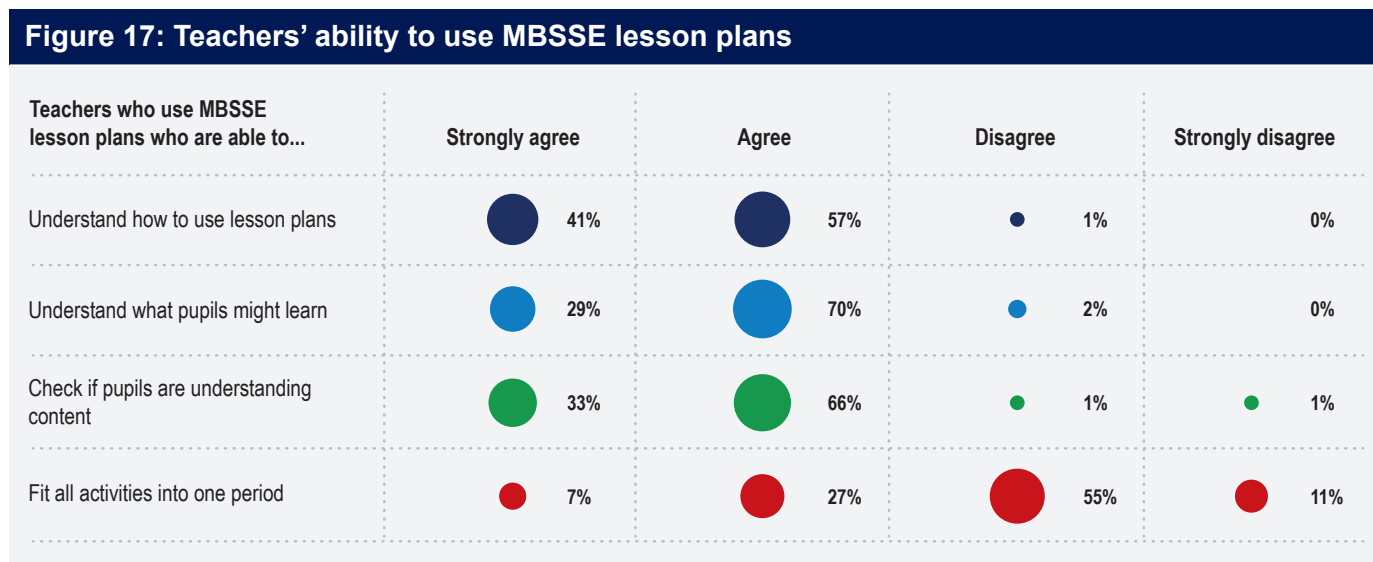
Teachers also gave positive feedbacks on the design of the lesson plans. They considered the lesson plans to be well-structured, and their content to relate well to pupils. About 91 per cent of teachers felt the lesson plans moved smoothly between topics, making them easy to understand. A similar majority (94 per cent) also said that they felt the lesson plans helped their pupils learn well. Consistently since SGLA I, vast majority of teachers (91 per cent) said the content of the lesson plans was not at the right level for their pupils. However, a third of the teachers also 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. These findings are summarised in the table below.

Figure 18: 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%

When interpreting the figures from these tables, it is worth remembering that results may be affected by a social desirability bias, whereby teachers may have felt compelled to answer questions in a way that is seen favorably by others. Readers are therefore encouraged to interpret these results as an indicative assessment of lesson plans uptake and use.

JSS teachers teaching English and/or Maths who reported not using MBSSE lesson plans were also asked about the main reasons for not doing so. A large majority reported not having received the lesson plans and/or not having received training (98 and 14 per cent respectively).

3.3 Teachers' understanding of lesson plan content

In SGLA II and III, a short assessment of teachers' own understanding of the lesson plan content was conducted. They were asked two questions:

• Teachers asked to match grade-specific learning objectives, picked directly from the lesson plans, to their corresponding JSS grades, as a quick test to assess their understanding of the lesson plan content. For this section of the interview, teachers were given three flash cards with learning objectives for each subject (English and math), which they had to match with the corresponding JSS grade from 1 to 3. They could not assign more than one objective to a single grade. Only 45 per cent teachers could correctly match learning objectives to the appropriate JSS grades. This is opposed to 40% in SGLA II.

• Teachers were asked to the 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. Only 52 per cent of teachers could correctly name all five parts of the lesson plan in SGLA III compared to 35 per cent in SGLA II.

As the above discussion has shown, it is encouraging to note a vast majority of teachers are reporting the use of and giving positive feedback on JSS lesson plans. However, what is concerning is that – based on a mini assessment – it is clear that teachers' own understanding of the lesson plan content is fairly weak. Further distribution, teacher training and support, and coverage of other subjects and SSS grades should be pursued. This survey could be complemented by qualitative inquiry into the effectiveness of lesson plan usage. In addition, potential problem areas identified by teachers, such as length of modules and relevance of content to local contexts should be considered by lesson plan developers for further revision and improvement.

4 School leadership and management

4   School leadership and management

What are some of the school management and leadership practices being employed by secondary school principals in Sierra Leone? Are they providing supportive supervision and pedagogical support to teachers, and how? How are they dealing with issues like teacher and pupil attendance? Are classrooms and schools inclusive to pupils from diverse learning needs? Are schools adequately supported by external supervision from, say, school inspectors? Are these results different from the findings from the 2018 surveys? In this section we attempt to answer these questions.

Before discussing the results in detail, some background information on principals sampled in SGLA III[1] is presented in the box below to help contextualise the findings, and a comparison is given with the results from SGLA II.

Box 6: Background characteristics of JSS and SSS principals and school ownership

A total of 704 heads of schools were interviewed, which consisted of 270 principals, 142 assistant or vice principals, 269 acting principals, 1 proprietor and 22 heads of schools whose position could not be classified as any of the above (e.g. senior teachers or school finance officers).

- Less than 10 per cent of all heads of schools interviewed are female, across SGLA II and III. The figure is at 10 percent for both the western and north-western provinces and much lower for the eastern, northern, and southern with figures of 2, 5, and 7 per cent respectively.

- The typical head of school was 43 years old (same as SGLA II). Variation in principal age and experience is small across provinces. Only the southern province stands out as having the highest average age.

- On average, they had 17 years of experience in teaching profession (18 years in SGLA II).

  – Had 5 years of experience in heading any school (6 in SGLA II).

  – Had 4 years of experience in heading the current school (5 in SGLA II).

  – 85 per cent of them were heading a school for the first time, same as in SGLA II.

- 49 per cent had Higher Teacher Certificate (Secondary), compared to 50 per cent from SGLA II.

- 36 per cent had a B.Ed./BA (Ed)/BSc. (Ed) or equivalent Bachelor degree in education, compared to 30 per cent from SGLA II.

- 6 percent had a M.Ed./MA(Ed) or equivalent Master or MPhil/PhD in education, against 10 per cent from SGLA II. The western province had the highest proportion of such teachers at 13 per cent while all other provinces had lower than 5 percent.

- 18 per cent of all secondary schools from SGLA II are government-owned, while the rest are privately owned. 55 per cent of these privately-owned schools receive government assistance. 36 per cent of private schools are mission schools.

- 80 per cent of schools had the JSS section approved by MBSSE while 66 per cent had the SSS section approved. The most common reason reported for no approval was that they had applied in the past but had not been approved for JSS and having never applied for SSS.

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1   The term 'principals' is used to refer to all the types of heads of schools. In some schools where both JSS and SSS wings had been sampled, the head was common across both wings and hence interviewed only once covering all JSS and SSS questions. Hence, the total number of respondents for the principal interview is less than the total number of schools in the survey.

4.1 School inclusiveness

Are classrooms and schools inclusive to pupils from diverse learning needs? In SGLA III, teachers and principals were asked about school inclusiveness, and whether they had any pupils in their class that were who were particularly struggling with their studies relative to other pupils (for whatever reason). Almost all (97 per cent) of teachers reported having at least one weak pupil who struggled with lessons in their class during the previous term. This was substantiated by principals, 92 per cent of whom reported having weak pupils in their school. Reports from both principals and teachers are similar to those from SGLA II.

When asked about actions taken to support weak pupils, 98 per cent of teachers reported taking at least some action. The most cited forms of support were encouraging the pupil to work harder (66 per cent of teachers reported taking this action), monitoring the pupil closely (38 per cent, compared to 42 per cent in SGLA II) and discussing the problem s/he is facing (33 per cent, compared to 42 per cent in SGLA II). Only around 1 per cent of teachers reported seeking support from a senior member of staff. Principals were also asked about actions to support weak pupils: 39 per cent of the respondents said they encouraged pupils to work harder, 37 per cent (compared to 48 per cent in SGLA II) reported talking to the pupil's parents and 69 per cent reported offering extra tuition, compared to 46 per cent in SGLA II. This information is summarised in the figures below.

Figure 19: Actions taken by teachers to support 'weak' pupils

22%	66%	33%	38%
of teachers talk to the student's parents	of teachers encourage the student to work harder	of teachers ask the student what problem thay are facing	of teachers monitor the student more closely
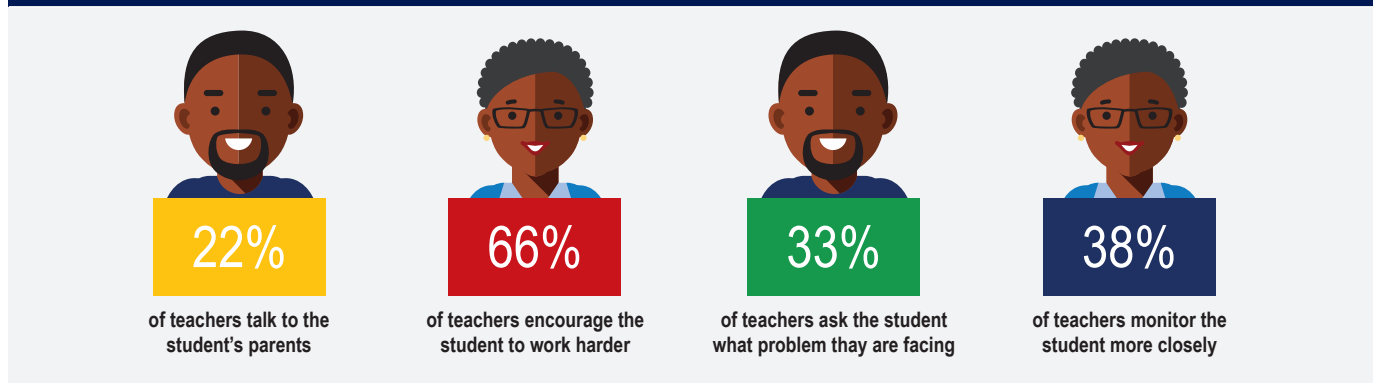
Further, 77 per cent (compared to 73 per cent in SGLA II) of principals also reported having 'marginalised' pupils in their school (e.g. pupils from low-income families, relatively to their peers; pupils with physical or intellectual disabilities). Principals were also asked about actions taken to support marginalized pupils. The most common forms of support reported by heads of schools were providing monitory support (41 per cent), providing school materials (35 per cent), encouraging the pupil to work harder (38 per cent), talking to the student's parents (30 per cent), and asking the pupil about the problems they are facing (17 per cent).

Figure 20: Actions taken by principals to support marginalised pupils

41%	35%	30%	38%
of principals provide monetary support	of principals provide school materials for free	of principals talk to student's parents	of principals encourage the student to work harder
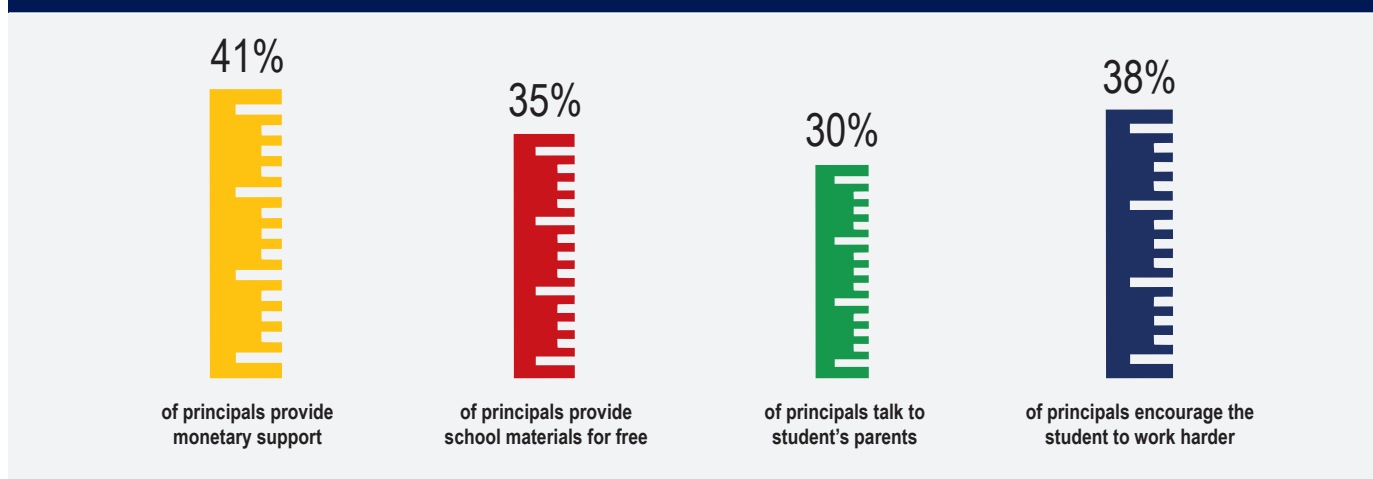
4.2   Staff meetings and formal one-on-one meetings

Staff meetings appear to be common in secondary schools in Sierra Leone, with approximately 96 (94 in SGLA II) per cent of teachers and 99 (96 in SGLA II) per cent of principals reporting that they have had staff meetings in the previous term (January to April 2019). An average teacher attended two such meetings in the second term[2] and an average principal conducted three (2 in SGLA II) such meetings in the same period: this translates roughly into one staff meeting a month on average and is consistent with the results from the SGLA II.

It is difficult to fully capture the effectiveness of these meetings within a quantitative survey like the SGLA. However, responses suggest staff meetings largely deal with day-to-day school issues and administration, but also increasingly focus on pedagogy and learning. According to principals, the most common topics of discussion during these staff meetings were teacher absenteeism, school administration and teaching practices/pedagogy. Only 5 per cent of principals reported that their school did not maintain any meeting notes. More than half of the respondents (59 per cent; 56 in SGLA II) reported meeting notes are usually maintained but were not available at the time of the interview, whilst close to 38 per cent of principals were able to show the meeting notes which is roughly the same as SGLA II.[3]

4.3   Lesson observations

Lesson observations can be a useful tool for measuring and improving teachers' pedagogical effectiveness in a classroom. Effective lesson observations can potentially serve several purposes, including:

- Describing the current status of pedagogical practice and identifying issues;

- Investigating instructional inequities by gender, socio-economic status, race/ethnicity of pupils; and

- Improving current teaching practices, especially if observations are followed up by detailed and constructive feedback to teachers.

Results from SGLA III suggest that most junior and senior secondary schools in Sierra Leone have active systems of internal lesson observations, with an average teacher being observed approximately once a week – results being consistent with findings from previous rounds of SGLA. A large majority of principals (87 per cent) reported that they had conducted lesson observations during the previous term. This was substantiated by teachers – a majority of them (74 per cent in SGLA III, compared to 69 per cent in SGLA II) said their lessons had been observed in the previous term. Lesson observations were usually conducted by the principal, vice principal or acting principal.[4] Teachers in SGLA II reported an average of 5 lessons observed during the term, same as in SGLA II.[5]

It is difficult to comment on the number of lesson observations per term because there is no established national guideline for the required number of observations within a given time period. The results, however, suggest that lesson observations are a regular practice, and more than two-thirds of principals reported keeping a schedule of lesson observations – although only 10 per cent of principals were able to show one compared to 14 per cent in SGLA II. Keeping notes or records of lesson observations is less common, with only 13 per cent of principals reporting doing so.

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2   This figure is lower than the actual average number of staff meetings per term, because answers to the question on number of meetings per term were top-coded at 15.

3   A majority of secondary school teachers also have formal one-on-one meetings with their principal or head of department: 76 per cent of teachers reported having such meetings in the previous term, at an average of two meetings over the term. This figure is lower than the actual average number of one-to-one meetings per term, because answers to the question on number of meetings per term were top-coded at 15.

4   Teachers sampled in SGLA 2019 reported that most of these observations were conducted by principals (57 per cent), heads of department (30 per cent) and acting principals (16 per cent).

5   This figure is lower than the actual average number of lesson observations per term, because answers to the question on number of lesson observations were top-coded at 15.

The principal and teacher interviews from SGLA III included questions on lesson observation feedback, to provide some insights into the effectiveness of these observations. Nearly 94 per cent of principals reported that some form of feedback is provided after lesson observations compared to 93 per cent in SGLA II. This was substantiated by teachers, 86 per cent of which reported receiving some feedback on lesson observations compared to 80 per cent in SGLA II. The most common type of feedback, as reported by principals, is a one-on-one discussion with the teacher, with 86 per cent of principals reporting this action being taken in their school. Other types of common feedback on lesson observations are presented in the figure below.

Figure 21: Feedback on lesson observations

Percentage of principals who give feedback

86%	16%	14%	13%
One-on-one meeting with the teacher	Group meeting with thobserver	Meeting of observer with principal or other senior members	Keep notes for records
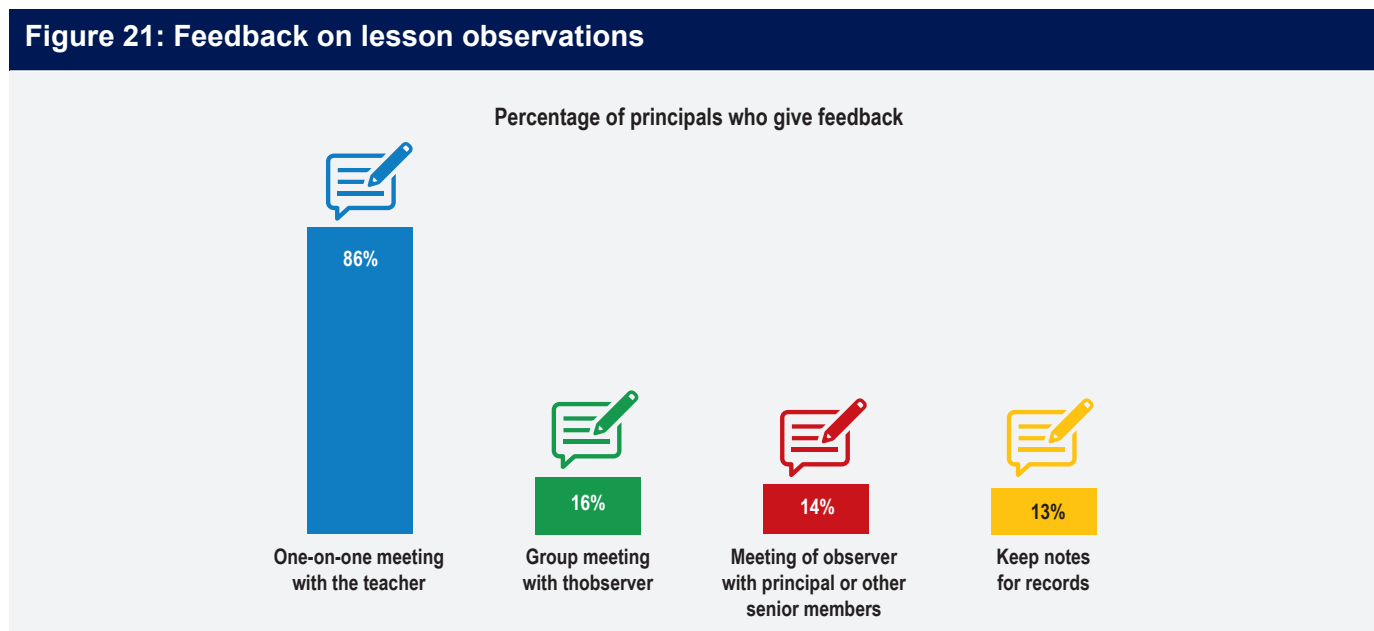
At the province level, results are very similar to the national-level findings. Upwards of 90 per cent principals across all provinces claim that some form of feedback from lesson observations is provided except for the western province where this was at 87 per cent. Furthermore, the most commonly cited feedback in all provinces is to discuss with teachers one-on-one. In the western province, discussing the observations with a senior member/principal is also fairly common with 18 per cent of principals reporting doing so.

Evidence on the extent of teacher absenteeism is provided during school observations, when data collectors were asked to go around the school and count the number of classes with pupils but no teachers. In SGLA II, 26 per cent of classrooms were unattended, i.e. they had pupils in them but no teachers and this is at 36 per cent in SGLA III.

4.4   External supervision

In addition to internal supervision through staff meetings and lesson observations, external supervisor visits are also conducted by various actors across JSS and SSS schools in Sierra Leone. A vast majority of principals (89 per cent) reported at least one external supervision visit during the previous term (January to April 2019) compared to 86 per cent in SGLA II and on average six supervision visits over the same term. The most frequent external supervision visits were by school support officers or SSOs (reported by 80 per cent of principals in SGLA II but 79 per cent in SGLA II). This is followed by MBSSE inspectors (41 per cent, compared to 49 per cent in SGLA II), school supervisors (26 per cent) and representatives from NGOs/missionary bodies (17 per cent).

Figure 22: External supervision visits: frequency and purpose

External observers

Percentage of principals

- 80
- 70
- 60
- 50
- 40
- 30
- 20
- 10
- 0

41% 26% 17% 80%

2019

- ■ MBSSE Inspector
- ■ School Supervisor
- ■ NGO/Mission
- ■ School Support Officers (SSO)

Purpose of visits

Percentage of principals

- 80
- 70
- 60
- 50
- 40
- 30
- 20
- 10
- 0

73% 39% 29% 52% 44%

2019

- ■ Observing lessons
- ■ Checking teacher attendance
- ■ Checking other school records
- ■ Advise on/discuss lesson plans/notes
- ■ Advise on/discuss teaching methods

The main purpose of supervision visits, as reported by school principals sampled in SGLA III, was to observe lessons (73 per cent of principals, same as SGLA II), check teachers' and pupils' attendance (39 and 24 per cent respectively), and check other school records (29 per cent). 52 per cent also visited to advise on and discuss lesson plans/notes and 44 per cent to discuss and advise on lesson notes. The lesson observations by external supervisors were in addition to the ones reported by the internal observations by principals themselves as mentioned in the previous section.

At the province level, the proportion of principals citing external visits during the previous term is as high as 97 per cent in the north western province and 98 per cent in the eastern province and as low as 80 per cent in the southern province. Of the external visits that have taken place, school support officers are the least frequent visitors in the western province (54 per cent) relative to other provinces, with the southern province citing highest frequency of SSO visits (95 per cent of principals). On the other hand, MBSSE inspectors were the most frequent external visitors in the southern province (48 per cent) and lowest in the north-west province (32 per cent).

Most secondary schools in Sierra Leone had some type of school action- or school development plan (SAP/SDP) and interacted with parents and the wider community through some form of parent-teacher or community-teacher associations (PTA/CTA). Consistent with SGLA II findings, a large proportion of these bodies (97 per cent) continue to remain active compared to 87 per cent in SGAL II. 62 per cent met at least once since the last term, i.e. between January and April 2019.

Schools with PTA/CTA

97%

PTA/CTA met in previous (2nd) term

62%
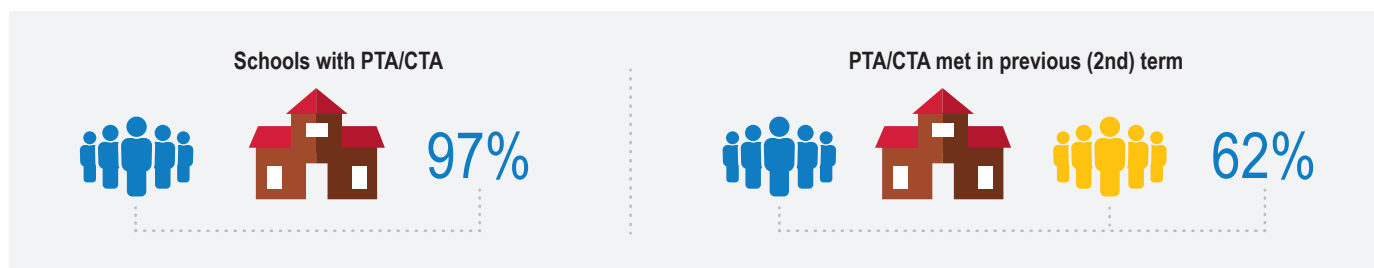
4.5   School safety

For the first time in the SGLA, principals were asked whether they had taken action to improve the safety of students and staff in schools. 96 per cent of principals said that they had taken measures to improve school safety. This was reportedly the highest in the southern province at 99 per cent and the lowest in the western province at 95 per cent.

Among the principals that reported taking action to improve school safety, 60% of principals reported making the route to and from school safer for girls. This was the most common response in the southern province where 74% of principals reported doing so. Only 42 per cent of principals reported this in the north western province. 55 per cent of principals reported to improving school facilities as a school safety measure. This was the most common response in the southern province at 60 per cent and the least common in the western province at 50 per cent. 38 per cent of principals reported to introducing systems for handling reported school safety issues. This was the highest in the north western province at 48 per cent and the lowest in the eastern province at 32 per cent. Other common responses also included training on and discussing school safety with 26 per cent of principals reported doing so and 14 per cent of principals set up systems for the reporting of school safety issues.
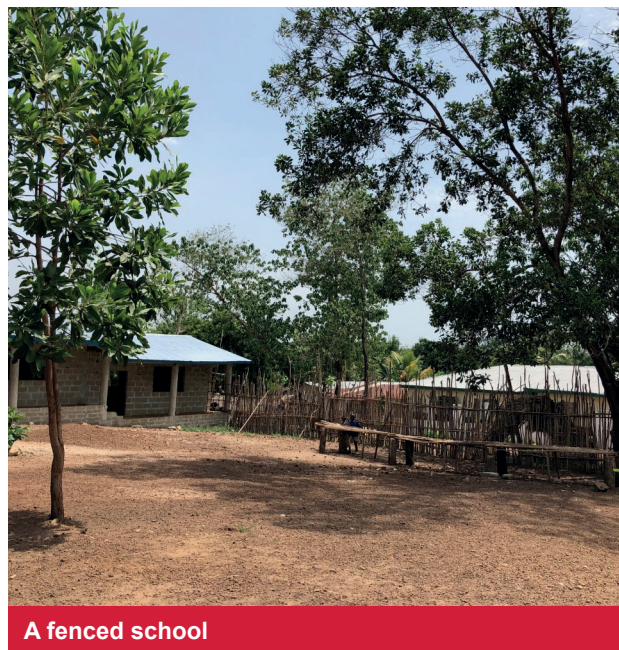
A fenced school
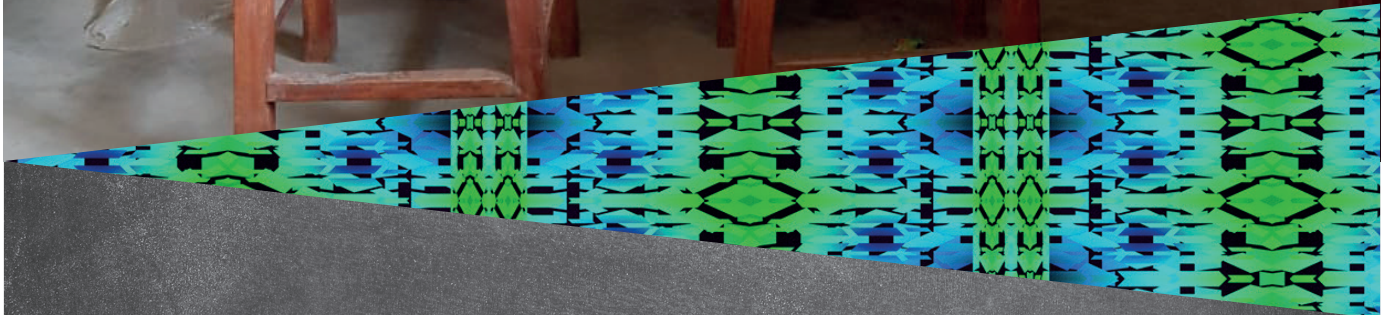
5 Girls' safety in school

5 Girls' safety in school

Elimination of gender disparities in access to and completion of schooling is key to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of inclusive education for all. In Sierra Leone, although gender parity was achieved at the primary level in 2011, substantial gaps remain at higher levels of education and the probability of enrolment – which is equal for boys and girls up to approximately age 13 – declines for female pupils in higher grades (World Bank, 2014). Given societal norms for early marriage and heightened concerns for physical safety of girls – exacerbated by socioeconomic and geographic characteristics – ensuring that the school environment is such that girls do not feel vulnerable or threatened is of paramount importance.

The SGLA survey asked the sampled teachers a range of questions on girls' safety in school, in order to address the following research questions:

Box 7: Key research questions: girls' safety in school[1]
• Do female pupils **feel a general sense of physical safety in the school environment** and on the way to/from school? • Do female pupils **feel safe visiting the school toilet**? Do they absent themselves from school while menstruating? • What is the incidence of **sexual harassment faced by female pupils from teachers and male pupils**, including instances of insults and "sex-for-grades"? • Are there **mechanisms available to female pupils for reporting harassment**?
Source: Secondary Grade Learning Assessment survey (May-June 2019), teacher questionnaire.

5.1 Physical safety in and on the way to school

The results on physical safety of girls are very similar to those reported by teachers in SGLA II. Teachers were asked if female pupils felt safe in the school and if they risked harassment on their way to and from the school. A significant majority of teachers (93 per cent) reported that girls overall felt safe in school. However, only 38 per cent of the teachers reported that their school was well-fenced such that strangers could not enter the school, and more than a third (32 per cent) of respondents reported that female pupils were subject to harassment while travelling to and from school. Teachers were also asked if school toilets were far from the main building with girls fearing going there alone, and if girls absent themselves from school due to fear of using the toilets during menstruation. Only 10 per cent of teachers felt that girls' toilets were far enough from the main school building such that female pupils did not feel safe using them, whilst more than half the teachers, i.e. 47 per cent, believed that girls had a tendency of absenting themselves from school during menstruation.

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1 Given that questions discussed as part of this module were often quite sensitive in nature and it was not always possible to have a female enumerator interview girls, in SGLA II and SGLAIII we did not administer these questions to female pupils themselves, only to their teachers. Enumerators were instructed to be particularly mindful of respecting gender relations when administering this set of questions in the teacher interviews. They were instructed to not express any views or judgements, nor provide any explanation of what each question meant. Hence, although it was not possible to eliminate the risk of respondents feeling uncomfortable to talk about girls' safety, the risk was mitigated to the extent possible.

The figure below summarises this information.

Figure 23: Girls' safety: physical safety and toilet facilities in schools (reported by teachers)

Percentage of teachers who reported on girls' safety in school

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Girls feel safe in this school	44%	49%	6%	1%
Schools well fenced	20%	18%	38%	24%
Harassment to and from school	5%	27%	51%	17%
Absent during menstruation	9%	38%	44%	9%
WASH facilities far from main building	4%	6%	64%	26%

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

10% of teachers said school toilets **were too far from main school building** for girls to **feel safe**

47% of teachers said **inadequate toilet facilities** meant girls **missed school during menstruation**

32% of teachers reported girls **experienced harassment** on the way **to and from school**

5.2 Sexual harassment

From the results across the three years of SGLA surveys, it appears that teachers, the vast majority of whom are male, systematically underestimate or under-report the incidence of sexual harassment in their schools. Indeed, only 6 per cent of teachers (compared to 20 per cent girls in SGLA I) reported that girls in their school were subject to sexual harassment by male pupils, and only 3 per cent teachers (compared to 15 per cent girls in SGLA I) reported that girls experienced sexual harassment by male school staff. When asked about sex-for-grade, only 4 per cent of teachers (compared to 20 per cent girls in SGLA I) agreed to the statement that some male teachers in their school ask female pupils for sexual favours. However, mechanisms appear to exist whereby female pupils can report instances of sexual harassment in most schools, with the majority of teachers (77 per cent) agreeing this was the case. However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms is not known. These results are summarised in the graph below.

Province-level results on sexual harassment are very similar to the national results, with little variation between provinces. However, in the southern province, teachers consistently report female students feeling less safe in school.

Figure 24: Sexual harassment by school staff and male pupils

Percentage of teachers (SGLA 2019)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Sexual harassment by boys (teachers)	47%	47%	5%	1%
Sexual harassment by staff (teachers)	54%	43%	3%	0%
Sex for grades (teachers)	52%	44%	4%	0%
Can report incidents (teachers)	8%	15%	55%	22%

■ Strongly disagree   ■ Disagree   ■ Agree   ■ Strongly agree
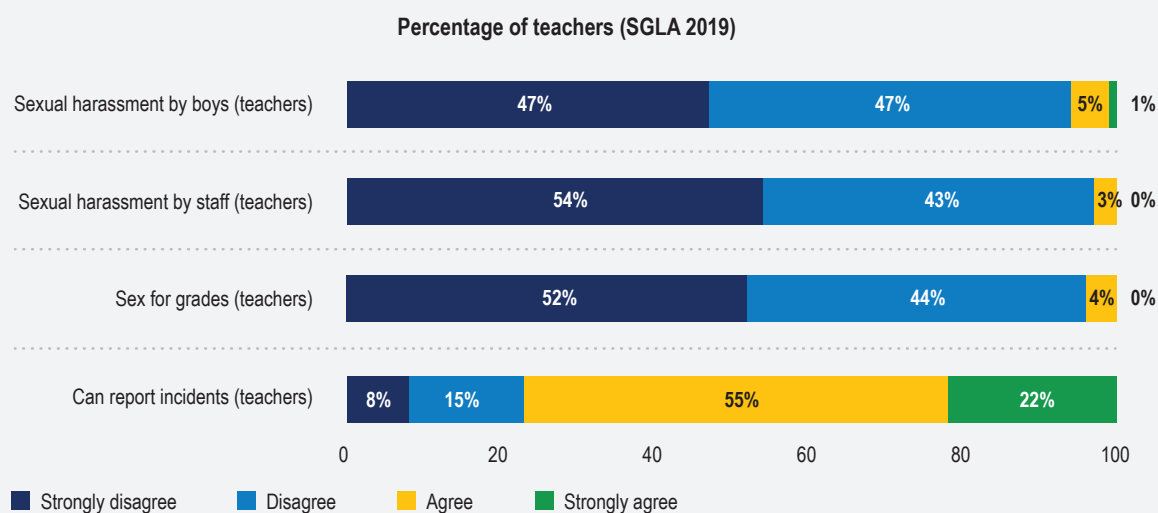
14%
of female pupils said **girls were subject to sexual harassment** from **other staff members**

18%
of female pupils agreed **some male teachers** asked girls for **sexual favours in return for good grades**

Box 8: Female teachers are far more likely to align with students in reporting of harassment and girl's

As mentioned previously in this report, there are a small minority of teachers who are female. In some districts, none of the teachers are female. The few female teachers who are present all report greater concern over girl's safety than their male teacher counterparts. For example:

- **49% of female teachers** agree that some female students risk harassment on their way to or from school, as compared to 31% of male teachers.

- **19% of female teachers** agree that female students are sexually harassed by male students, as compared to 5% of male teachers.

- **10% of female teachers** agree that female students are sexually harassed by male teachers, as compared to only 3% of male teachers.

These higher rates of concern over girl's safety are closer to the figures reported by female students themselves (seen in figure 23 and 24 above).

6 Schooling experience of pupils with special needs

6 Schooling experience of pupils with special needs

Pupils with special needs face multiple forms of discrimination, which leads to their exclusion from society and school. Attitudes towards children with special needs, as well as a lack of resources to accommodate them, compound the challenges they face in accessing education and performing well in school. Schooling that is sensitive to the needs of pupils with special needs, therefore, involves not only ensuring that schools are well-equipped with the necessary physical infrastructure, but also that teachers adopt teaching pedagogies and practices that integrate pupils with disabilities in the learning process. The attitudes of teachers, non-teaching staff and fellow pupils play an integral part of this process.

This section presents results from a sub-sample of 2,000 pupils with some form of special needs, across all the 704 schools included in SGLA III. The box below explains further.

Box 9: Pupils with special needs in the SGLA: definition and limitations

Definition and types of special needs

To incorporate various forms of special needs, a broad definition was used alongside a list of possible disabilities to guide the selection of pupils. In the SGLA, special needs was broadly defined as referring to any physical, mental or learning impairment that affected the full and effective participation of a pupil in learning. The special needs classifications were based on a typology of 'functioning' provided by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics, using the World Health Organisation's International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) as a conceptual framework (Washington Group, 2017). These included six core functional domains: seeing, hearing, walking, cognition, self-care, and communication. Each question has four response categories, which are read after each question:

- No, no difficulty;
- Yes, some difficulty;
- Yes, a lot of difficulty; and
- Cannot do it at all.

Constructing a sub-sample of pupils with special needs

Unlike SGLA I where a purposive sample of 200 pupils with one or more physical or intellectual special needs were identified by teachers for a short test, SGLA II and SGLA III do not conduct any separate purposive sample for pupils with special needs. Instead, all eight pupils in a school who were (randomly) selected for the assessment were administered the short Washington Group disability questionnaire (short-version). Among these pupils, those who reported having 'some difficulty', 'a lot of difficulty' or 'cannot do at all' were classified as 'pupils with special needs' for the purposes of the SGLA III analysis. This amounted in a sub-sample of over 2,000 pupils.

Limitations of results presented in this section

Findings presented in this section have limitations due to the definitional complexities with the term 'special needs, i.e. what it means and translates to in different languages and contexts. As there was no medical cross-examination as part of the SGLA to confirm the special needs, the results and findings rely entirely on self-reported responses by pupils on their special needs status. There is indicative and anecdotal evidence from field staff of pupils identifying themselves as having special needs in anticipation of receiving material or non-material support, e.g. a pair of reading glasses. These concerns limit our ability to robustly infer from these results and certainly not beyond the current sub-sample, as indeed children with the most severe needs are likely to be out of school. This, being a school survey, could not reach them to understand their barriers to accessing education.

Source: SGLA team.

6.1 Background of pupils with special needs

Around 36 per cent of all the sampled pupils in SGLA III (i.e. 1,967 in total, out of 5,418 pupils) reported having some form of difficulty in hearing, seeing, remembering, self-care, walking or communicating. More precisely:

- **Remembering:** 18 per cent of all sampled pupils reported having some or a lot of difficulty in remembering.

- **Walking:** Just over a tenth of all sampled pupils (12 per cent) reported having difficulty walking. While difficulty in walking should not indicate difficulty in learning per se, it could inhibit a pupil's full and effective participation in schooling, especially in a school without appropriate physical infrastructure (e.g. ramps and railings).

- **Seeing:** 8 per cent of the sampled pupils reported having some form of difficulty seeing.

- **Hearing and communicating:** Difficulty in hearing and communicating was relatively less common among the sampled pupils, with 4 per cent of pupils reporting difficulties in hearing and communicating each. This possibly indicates that these are among the more severe barriers to access and learning, and hence school-aged children with hearing or communication problems are either in special schools or out of school altogether.

- **Self-care:** 1 per cent pupils reported some difficulty with self-care (i.e. washing, bathing, wearing clothes).

Province level disaggregation of disability statistics appears to be similar to that observed at the national level.

Figure 25: Types and extents of special needs

Percentage of pupils with special needs in the SGLA III sample (N=2000)

Walking: No difficulty 88%, Some difficulty 11%, A lot of difficulty 1%
Self care: No difficulty 99%, Some difficulty 1%
Remembering: No difficulty 82%, Some difficulty 17%, A lot of difficulty 1%
Seeing: No difficulty 92%, Some difficulty 8%
Communicating: No difficulty 96%, Some difficulty 4%
Hearing: No difficulty 96%, Some difficulty 4%

Legend: ■ No difficulty ■ Some difficulty ■ A lot of difficulty

6.2 Provision of infrastructural and teaching support

Questions on school environment and support for pupils with special needs were part of the teacher questionnaire in SGLA III. These included noting if there was infrastructure such as ramps and toilets for disabled access, if there were specially designated staff to support pupils with special needs, if teachers used inclusive teaching methods and, when required, if the school had extra classes outside of school hours for pupils with special needs. Additionally, teachers were asked about any discriminatory attitudes by teaching and non-teaching staff (biased in favour or against), and behaviour of fellow pupils.

More than half of the teachers (61 per cent) reported that there was no provision of ramps, railings or any other infrastructural arrangements at their schools. Even if a school is single-storied, this could still pose a mobility challenge in accessing certain parts of the school which are raised above the ground. Similarly, 54 per cent of teachers reported no special support such as counselling provided to pupils with special needs. Teachers were also asked if those with physical or learning difficulties were given additional teaching outside regular classes. A majority of them (55 per cent) reported this was not the case. Teachers were also interviewed about their use of adaptive teaching methods (e.g. using large font for visual disability) to integrate pupils with special needs into the learning process. The vast majority of them (92 per cent) self-reported that they did adapt their pedagogies to make the lesson delivery more accessible to pupils with special needs, even though the extent and effectiveness of these techniques is not captured in this survey. When asked whether teachers in their school ever met with parents or other community members to talk about challenges for pupils with a special need, 79 per cent of teachers reported this was the case, and 87 per cent of them also reported the last such meeting happened during the current school year.

The vast majority of teachers said their school did not provide a **special physical infrastructure** or any other special support (e.g. counselling, help with lessons outside class hours).
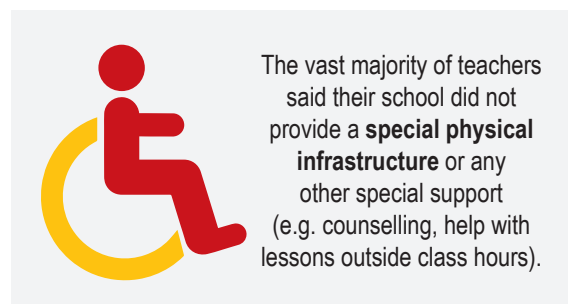
These results show some difference to those presented in SGLA II. A larger proportion of teachers in 2019 report that their schools have adequate infrastructure to support pupils with special needs (39 per cent), than in 2018 (27 per cent). More teachers in 2019 also report special support and teaching support outside of class hours for pupils with special needs, than teachers reported in 2018. A summary of the main results from SGLA III is reported in the figure below.

Figure 26: Physical infrastructure and pedagogical support for pupils with special needs

Percentage of teachers who reported infrastructure/pedagogy support for pupils with special needs

Category	Yes	No
Infrastructure (ramps, railings, etc.)	39%	61%
Special support (e.g. counselling)	46%	54%
Teachibg support outside class hours	45%	55%
Adaptive teaching methods (e.g. large fonts)	92%	8%
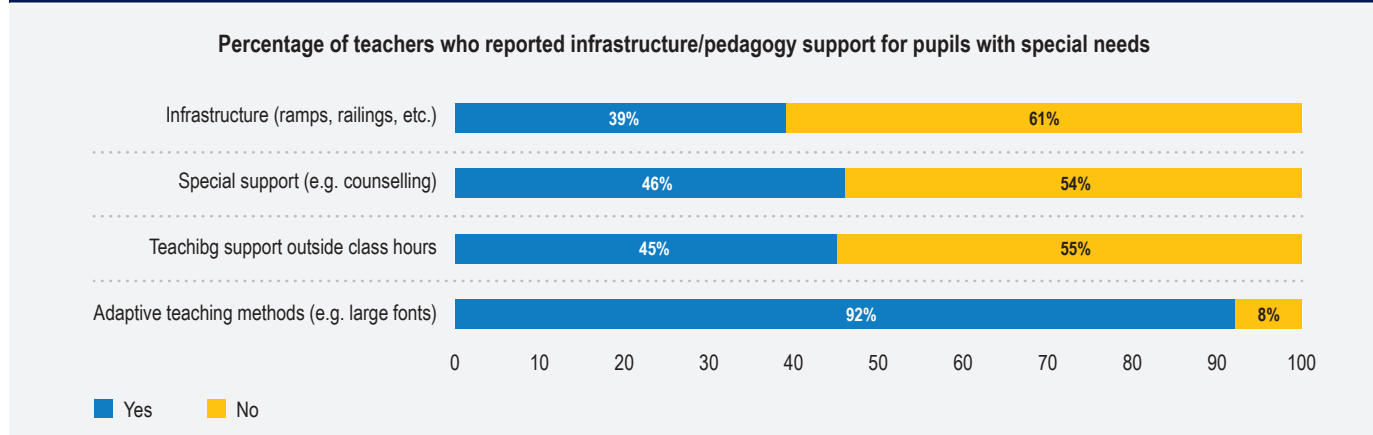
6.3 Attitude and behaviour towards pupils with special needs

The UNESCO Global Monitoring Report 2015 highlights the low literacy and high dropout rates among pupils with special needs, often due to stigma, isolation and discrimination in the classroom or wider school environment (UNESCO, 2015). About 68 per cent of the teachers sampled for this survey agreed that harassment of pupils with special needs was discouraged in their school. When questioned if the teaching or non-teaching staff discriminated in favour or against pupils with special needs, for example, by grading them graciously or by not allowing them to participate, around 14 and 12 per cent of teachers respectively reported this was the case. We also consider the attitudes of other pupils towards pupils with special needs. Specifically, when asked whether other pupils interact freely with pupils with special needs, around 64 per cent of teachers said they do. As part of the teacher interview, respondents were also asked whether they thought teachers at their school knew how to teach pupils with physical or learning special needs and 88 per cent of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement. Furthermore, 76 per cent of teachers also reported there were people in their school they could turn to for advice, in case they had difficulties teaching pupils with special needs.

6.4   Learning outcomes of pupils with special needs

This section compares learning outcomes of pupils with special needs in from SGLA III with pupils that did not report any difficulty.

Difficulties in hearing bears a significant negative correlation with pupils' performance in the learning assessment, both English and maths. We find that distribution of pupils with hearing difficulties is more centered in the lower bands (i.e. primary level) than pupils with no hearing difficulties.

Difficulty with walking is also negatively correlated with pupils' performance. For both English and maths, a larger fraction of pupils with difficulties in remembering fall in the performance band corresponding to primary-grade level knowledge, whereas significantly less pupils reach JSS1 and JSS2 knowledge. The graphs below show these results for the performance of pupils in English and maths. The only other similar significant correlations between the types of disabilities captured in the SGLA III and pupil performance in the test is with pupils who have difficulty with self-care, but this is a comparatively small group of students.

Figure 27: Learning outcomes of pupils with hearing and walking difficulties (both grades combined)

Source: Secondary Grade Learning Assessment survey (May-June 2019), pupil learning assessment.
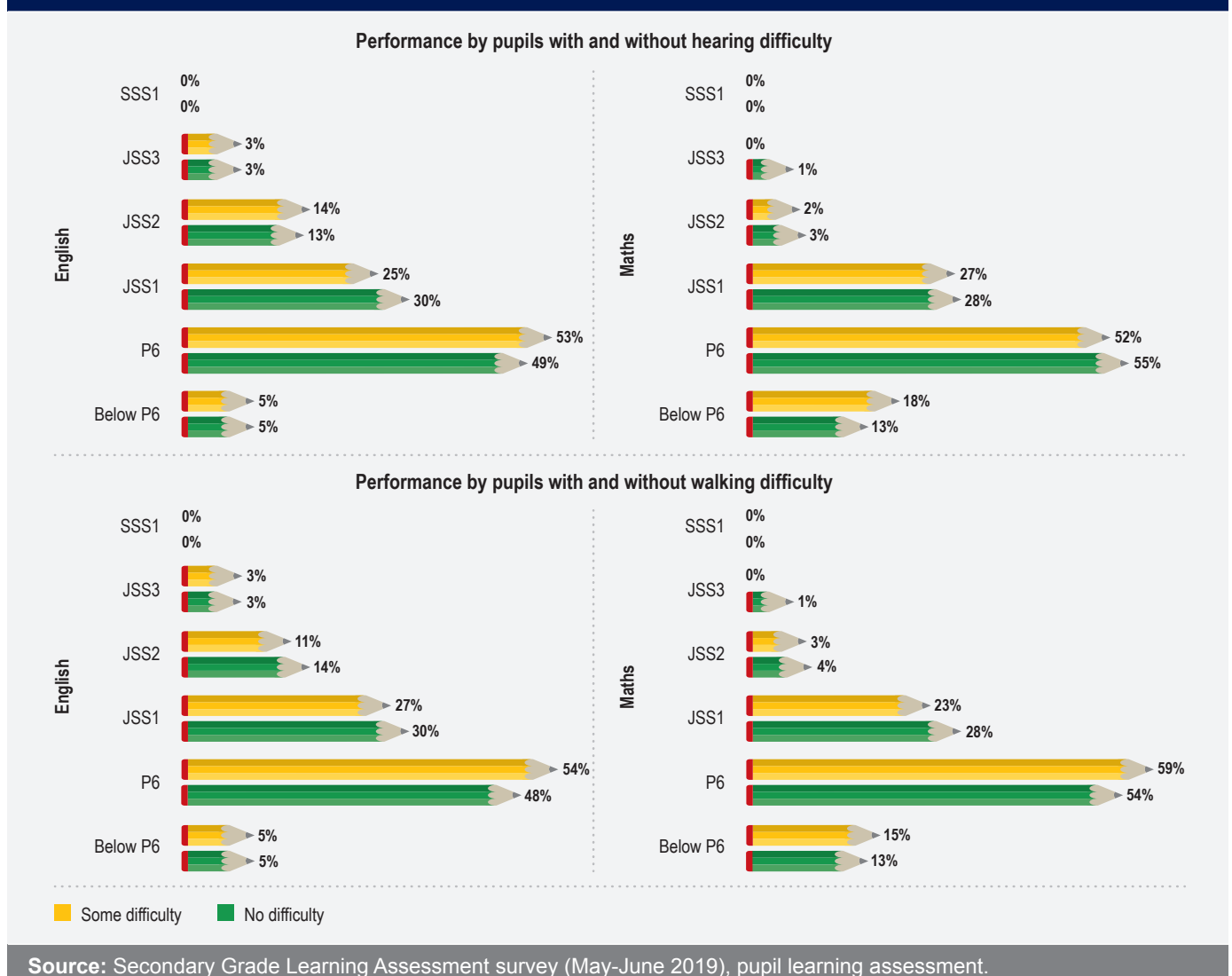
These results provide a useful snapshot of learning levels but have clear limitations that are discussed above. Be it pertaining to definitional challenges and identification of 'special needs' among pupils, need-signalling among pupils, or the fact that any inference beyond the specific group of pupils interviewed and assessed for this survey is not recommended. While reference has been made between learning outcome results of the purposively sampled pupils with hearing and walking difficulties with results of pupils without these difficulties, simple like-for-like comparison is neither possible nor recommended. A more qualitative study of the learning barriers and challenges faced by pupils with special needs is recommended in future rounds of the SGLA.
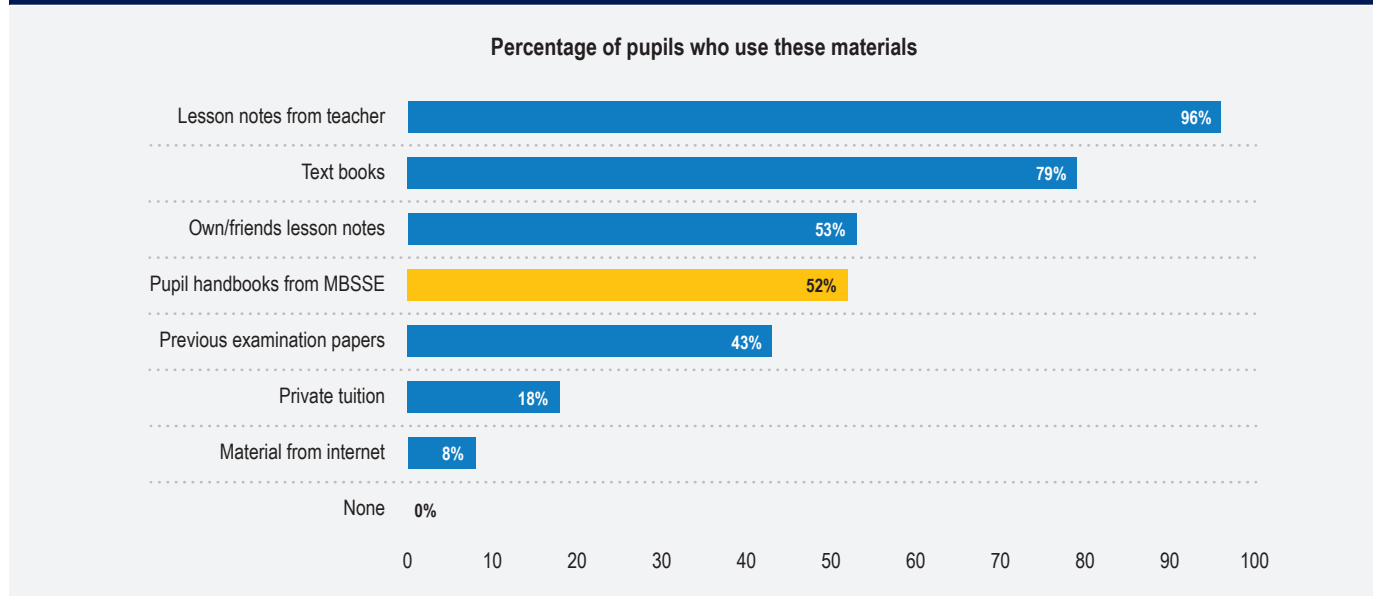
7 Pupil handbooks

7   Pupil handbooks

SGLA III is well-timed to present an initial picture of the uptake of these materials, as the pupil handbooks were introduced in government-owned and -assisted secondary schools across Sierra Leone in December 2018. These provide textual accompaniment to lessons in the classroom. The pupil handbooks contain overviews of content taught in class and exercises for pupils to complete.

Almost all pupils use some sort of self-study material such as their teacher's notes, their own notes or the pupil's handbook. While the most popular resource are notes from the teacher, with 95 per cent of pupils using these, 64 per cent of JSS pupils and 47 per cent of SSS pupils report using the recently provided pupil's handbook.

Figure 28: Self-study materials used by JSS and SSS pupils

Percentage of pupils who use these materials

Material	Percentage
Lesson notes from teacher	96%
Text books	79%
Own/friends lesson notes	53%
Pupil handbooks from MBSSE	52%
Previous examination papers	43%
Private tuition	18%
Material from internet	8%
None	0%

There are three main reasons behind the limited uptake and usage of these pupil handbooks. Primarily, many students in private, unassisted schools are unable to use these handbooks because the handbooks are distributed only to government-owned and government-assisted schools. This is not to say that all government-owned or government-assisted schools ended up receiving the books, as 38 per cent of pupils in government-assisted schools report not using the handbooks. Additionally, 11 per cent of pupils who do not use the pupil handbooks report that this is due to their teachers or principals keeping these handbooks rather than distributing them to the pupils. Finally, parents of pupils are unable or unwilling to sign the terms and conditions which allow for the release of the handbooks. Each of these reasons highlight a barrier to distribution at different points along the process.

Pupil handbooks stored in the principal's office

Driven by some of these barriers, usage of the handbook differs substantially across provinces and across schools, as displayed in the figure below.

Figure 29: Usage of pupil handbooks (by province)

Percentage of pupils who use handbooks
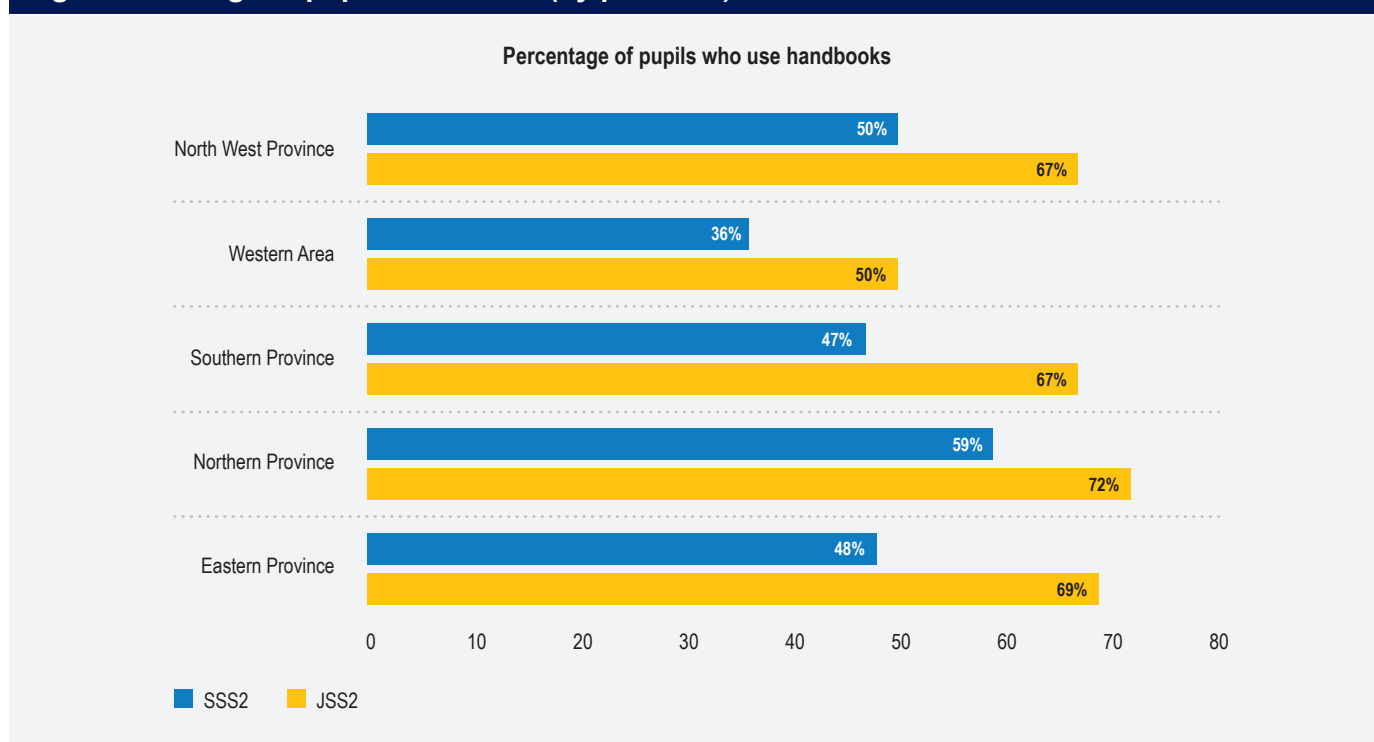
7.1   Pupil's perceptions of the handbook

Pupils who reported using the pupil handbooks were asked to share feedback on their experience of the handbooks. Pupils were read out statements related to the usability of the handbooks and asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each one. Statements were clustered around:

• Appropriateness of pupil handbooks;

• Structure and ease of use;

• Appropriateness of the level of difficulty of content;

• How handbook content and examples relate to pupil's lives; and

• Whether teachers and parents are encouraging the use of pupil handbooks.

Overall, pupils report that they find the handbooks helpful. Around 91 per cent of pupils say that they do use them to prepare for exams and assessments, but still need to rely on other resources. This is helped by most students noting that their teachers encourage the use of the handbooks and regularly check that the exercises have been completed. Most pupils are taught how to use the handbook, although there is some difference in the level of support which students receive on an ongoing basis. It is useful to note that these are perceptions self-reported by pupils themselves. Thus, the answers may contain some social desirability bias to answer in accordance to what they expect the interviewer wants to hear, which would bias results towards answering positively when questioned on the pupil handbooks.

Figure 30: Pupil's perceptions on the usefulness of handbooks

Pupils find that the handbooks are...	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Helpful for understanding classroom lessons better	35%	53%	8%	3%
Useful for understanding difficult concepts	36%	52%	9%	3%
Useful as a resource that can be used without other self-study materials	18%	32%	40%	11%
Good preparation tools for exams and assessments	37%	54%	6%	3%
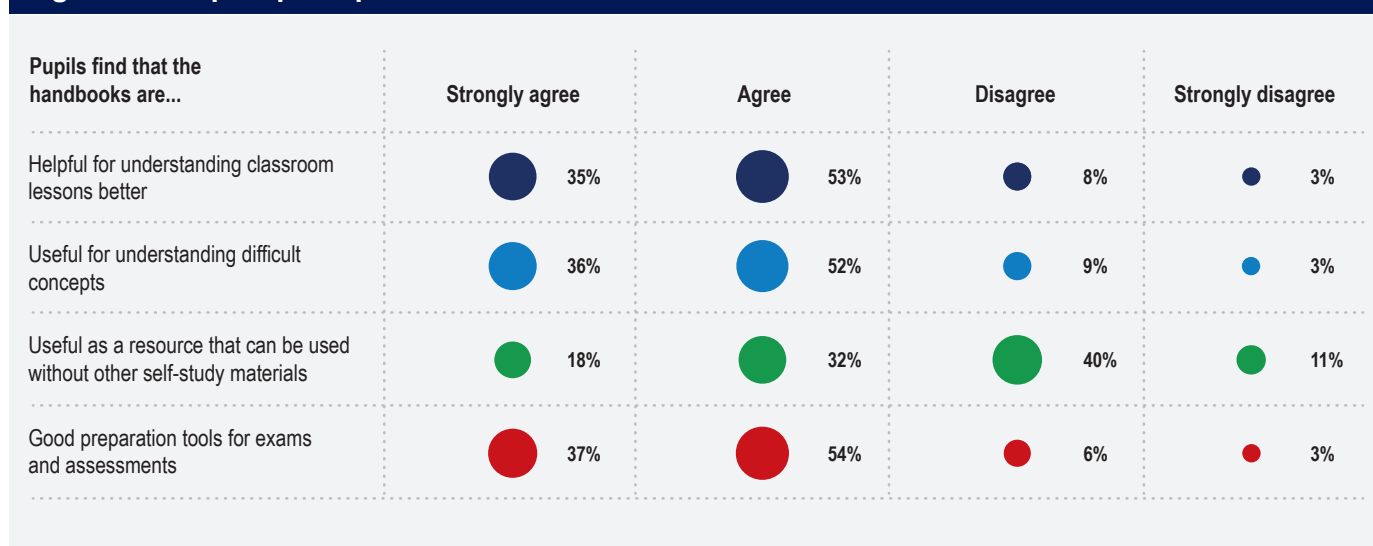
There is less agreement over questions about whether the pupil handbook is easy to understand and whether the content is at an appropriate difficulty level. As is shown on the figure below, 51 per cent of pupils find the handbooks easy to use. This is made easier when the handbooks are used in conjunction with another resource, with the majority of students finding the handbooks easy to follow alongside the textbook or their teacher's notes.

Figure 31: Pupil's perceptions on the usability of handbooks

| Pupils find that the handbooks are...	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Easy to use	11%	40%	28%	21%
Not too time consuming	8%	25%	46%	21%
Easy to follow alongside the textbook and teacher's notes	35%	54%	9%	2%
Clear in stating what the pupil is meant to learn from each lesson	28%	61%	8%	3%
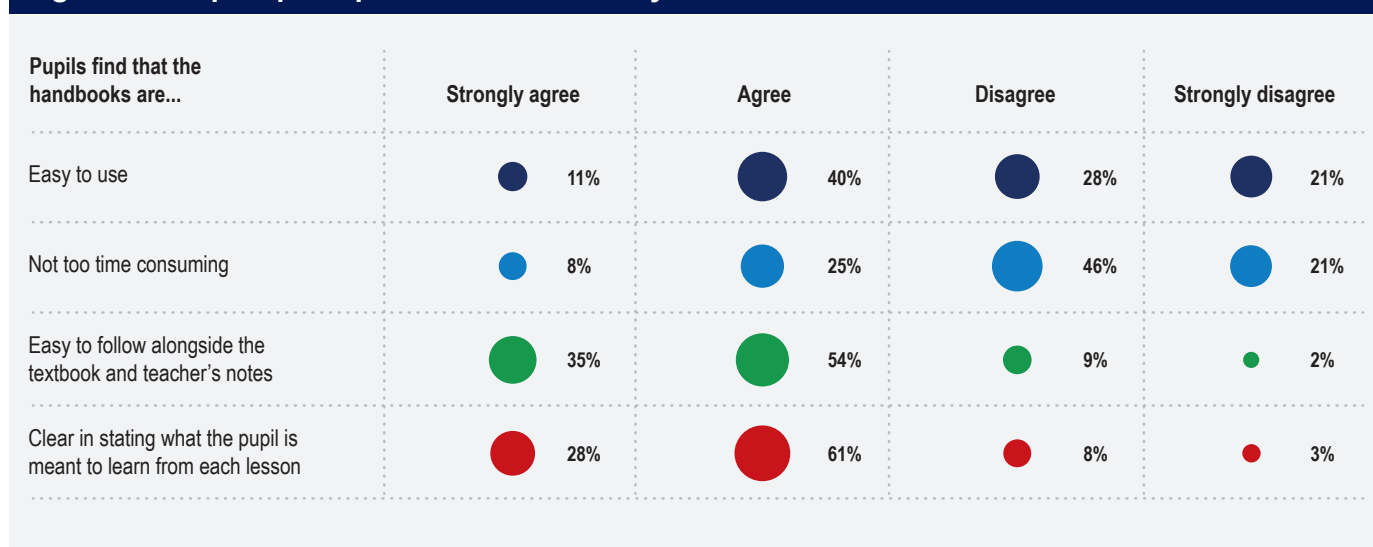
7.2 The targeted group of students

As mentioned, all students in government and government-assisted schools are targeted to receive the handbooks. However, the above information on pupil's perceptions of the handbook enables an understanding of the kind of students who end up using the handbook to enhance their studies. Pupils with special needs find the handbooks more difficult to use than pupils who report not having any special needs.[1] Female pupils find the handbooks more difficult to use than male pupils.[2] Pupils from schools which are more remote (further from district centres) also find the handbooks more difficult than pupils in less remote schools. Unsurprisingly, these findings point to the insight that the handbooks are more difficult to use for pupils who are already identified as falling behind. Confirming this assertion is the result that students who use textbooks are more likely to find using the handbook easier to use. Thus, the pupil handbook can be thought of as a resource that is being used widely, by those who receive it, but is most advantageous to those pupils who are not already struggling to keep up with the rest of their class.

7.3 Learning outcomes of pupils using pupil handbooks

This section compares learning outcomes of pupils that use pupil handbooks with those that did not report using them.

Pupils that self-reported the use of MBSSE Pupils Handbooks were only marginally performing better than those did not report doing so as shown in the figure below. However, these results should be interpreted with care as only a short period of time had elapsed between the distribution of the handbooks (December 2018) and SGLA III (May-June 2019). There will be more to say on the performance of pupils using the handbooks during the next round of the SGLA in May-June 2020.

Figure 32: JSS english performance by usage of pupil handbooks

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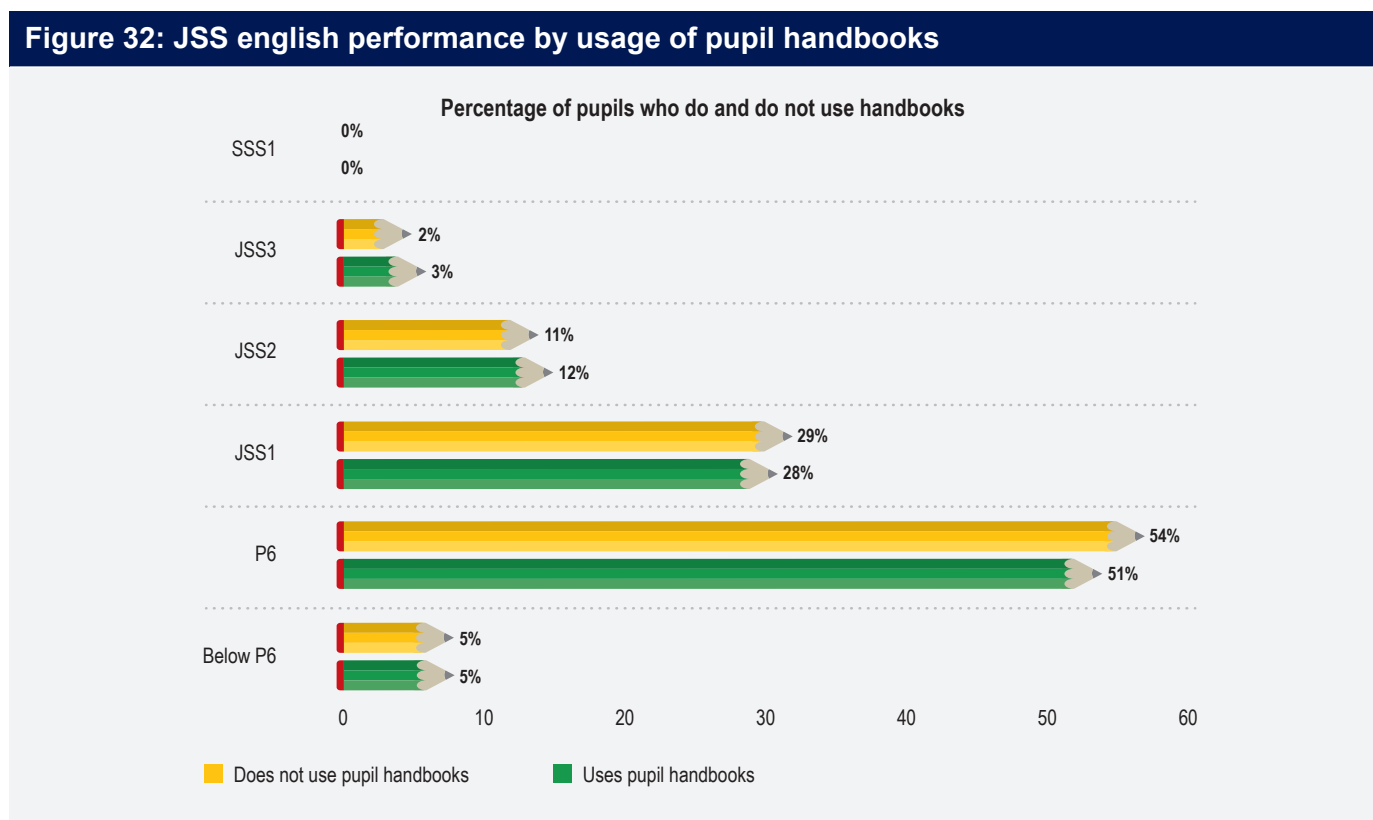
1   This result is significant at the 1% significance level.
2   This result is also significant at the 1% significance level.
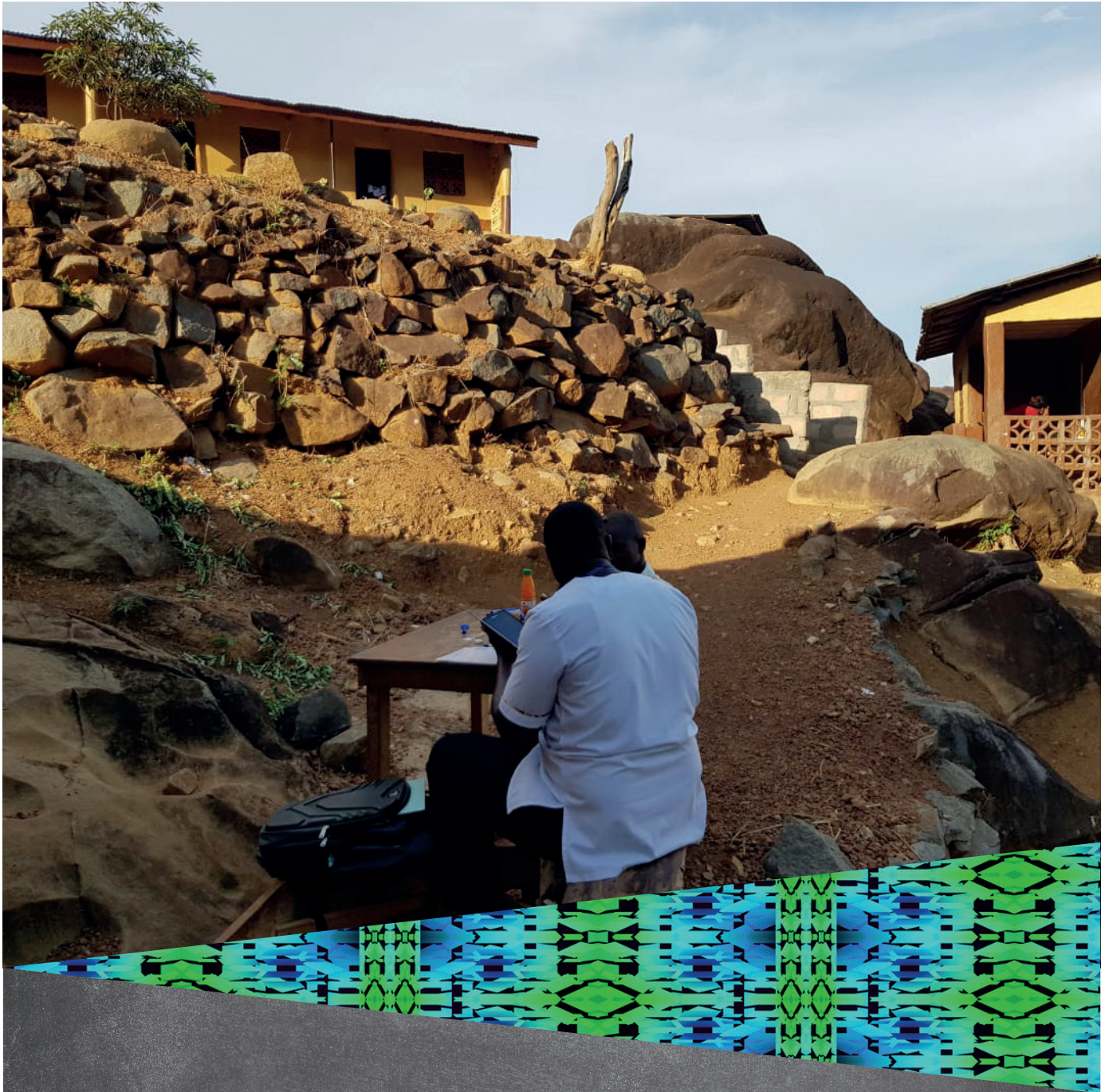
8 Longlist of recommendations and next steps

8 Longlist of recommendations and next steps

> " Learning outcomes won't change unless education systems take learning seriously and use learning as a guide and metric….Lack of measurement makes it hard to know where things are, where they are going, and what actions are making any difference…The first step to improving system-wide learning is to put in place good metrics for monitoring whether programs and policies are delivering learning. "
>
> World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise, pg. 16; World Bank, 2017

8.1 Concluding remarks

This third round of the SGLA offers robust evidence on what JSS2 and SSS2 students in Sierra Leonean schools know and can do in English and Mathematics, and how these have changed, if at all, over the past year. One of the primary objectives of this report is to provide MBSSE and other education sector stakeholders with robust nationally- and district-level representative data on the status of learning, teaching and school management in the secondary schools of Sierra Leone, and track these annually for progress. Together with complementary evidence on teaching practices, this third year of the SGLA generates evidence-based recommendations for how to start addressing teaching and learning challenges in secondary schools. This section draws the report to a close by proposing some initial recommendations, in the form of a longlist – to be discussed within MBSSE and the Leh wi Lan team – and, as was done with SGLA I and II, a proposed process for moving from a longlist of recommendations to a shortlist of actions.

The main overarching observation from all three rounds of SGLAs is that secondary grade learning outcomes in Sierra Leone are poor. Large proportions of pupils do not demonstrate more than basic English and maths skills despite completing eight (JSS2) to 11 (SSS2) years of formal education and passing the NPSE and BECE. In fact, this year in SGLA III, there is a significant drop in maths and a small drop in English language – we thoroughly need to understand why. Starting with a weak foundation in JSS, pupils are understandably unable to capitalise on previous knowledge and therefore progression in learning from JSS to SSS grades is minimal. They are very unlikely to keep pace with the advanced demands of the JSS and SSS curriculum or perform well in BECE and WASSCE exams, which take place at the end of JSS3 and SS3 respectively. The system is particularly not delivering 'learning for all', especially girls, poorer pupils and those in remote schools.

This calls for urgent action to ensure the system caters to diverse learning needs of all pupils, irrespective of gender, family background or location. Through the initiation of the Free Quality School Education Programme (FQSEP), the MBSSE has already identified the urgent need to focus on the 'Q' of FQSE, i.e. quality education and learning – measured by tracking progress annually through the SGLA and WASSCE results – as one of its three overarching targets in the new Education Sector Plan (2018-2020) (MEST, 2017a, pg.7).[1] However, to realise this all-important goal, a concerted effort is required from all education sector actors and stakeholders, under the stewardship of MBSSE.

Partners like Leh wi Lan are providing active support to MBSSE in realising this goal, and this SGLA is one such initiative to ensure MBSSE's policies and programmes are evidence-based and backed by data. Based on the results discussed in this report, below is a longlist of recommendations for MBSSE's consideration.

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1   The other two overarching targets are: "tangible improvement in education service delivery" and "improved systems integrity" by reducing exam malpractice.

Fatamata is in JSS2 but has skills no more than a primary grade pupil. What can be done?

70% of JSS2 and **50%** of SSS2 students are at P6 level. There is a **wide gap** between curriculum expectations and **actual skills** of pupils.

Her school **has been visited** by SSOs, but inspector/supervisor visits are **few and infrequent**.
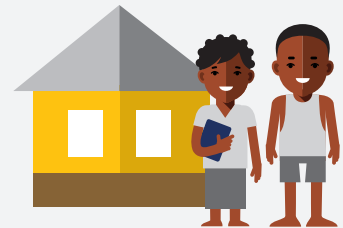
Girls, poorer pupils and those from rural schools **perform worse**.

Fatamata's **principal is struggling** with school admin and planning.

She **faces sexual harassment in school**, and while travelling between school and home.

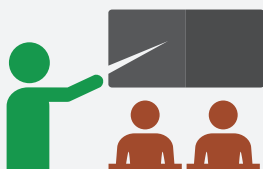Her teachers are now **using lesson plans** but they are not able to complete all the lessons.

2.5

Fatamata's teachers teach for at most **2.5 hours per day** and they are often **not in class**.

8.2   Longlist of recommendations

Align curriculum content with pupils' learning levels

As was recommended following SGLA I and II, this third year's SGLA results once again make amply clear that important reforms in the secondary grade curriculum are highly necessary. Results suggest that a large proportion of pupils in both grades are struggling to keep pace and respond to the ambitious demands of the curriculum.

The MBSSE is already piloting remediation teaching methods for JSS1 pupils, to ensure they are armed with the foundational literacy and numeracy skills, and previous years' SGLA results are being used to inform this pilot. This is encouraging indeed. One of the entry points for MBSSE and partners is to understand how to better align secondary grade curriculum content with pupils' learning levels – could the curriculum meet pupils at their current level and gradually bring them up to where the system expects them to operate? Could non-standard approaches to learning, such as remediation, be brought to bear on the challenge at hand? These approaches either shift the curricular pace down a notch to better coincide with pupils' learning potential (as is usually the case with tracking or training teachers in remedial pedagogy), or accelerate the pace of pupil learning, usually through more targeted attention or tutoring, such that pupils can better keep up with curricular pace (Banerjee, Cole, Duflo, & Linden, 2005; Duflo, 2011).

Research has shown that two countries with exactly the same potential learning could have massively divergent learning outcomes, just because of a gap between curricular and actual pace – the country which goes faster has much lower cumulative learning (Pritchett & Beatty, 2014). In other words, and quite paradoxically, learning could go faster if curricula and teachers were to slow down. Slowing down the curriculum to coincide with students' current level might seem like a failure but it would help the system re-orient teaching and learning away from what happens for a small group of able pupils towards the typical pupil who is now better equipped to move ahead.

Just because remediation has worked in India or Kenya does not guarantee automatic success in Sierra Leone but these approaches would be worth MBSSE's consideration. If Sierra Leone decides to go down this route, some concrete action points would be to, first, assess the degree of gap between curricular content and pupils' learning levels and understand the flexibility currently afforded to teachers and principals to re-orient teaching at the right level and adjust pace. This would also require a serious consideration of the current examination and assessment system in secondary grades. Should we continue to rely largely on the BECE and WASSCE as a measure of academic success in secondary grades? Is the pressure to pass these seemingly all-important exams leading to "teaching to the test", exam malpractices and rote-learning? Do we need a more gradual and continuous system of classroom-based formative assessments to help pupils up the learning trajectory? Based on this initial diagnosis, a framework and operational plan for remediation would need to be designed.

Focus on teachers' skills, knowledge and attendance

This report has discussed a number of key results pertaining to teachers: how much time they spend on classroom instruction, what keeps them away from school, what teaching aids they use in class, how principals manage teacher absenteeism, and what supervision and pedagogical support teachers receive. Specifically, for quantity of instructional time, these results suggest that teachers are not teaching for a considerable proportion of their time in school, and instructional time in class is being further affected by disruptions, seemingly linked to low pupil attendance but possibly also due to teachers' own school absenteeism. Additionally, in SGLA III, we have evidence of one in three classrooms with pupils being left attended due to teacher absenteeism – a huge drain on school resources and learning time.

These are important results, and seem to suggest that urgent structural changes to teacher management is necessary. Nevertheless, they trigger more questions for further research than actions for immediate implementation. This quantitative learning assessment survey had highlighted important teacher management issues. However, unpacking teacher management issues – especially when it comes to teacher motivation – is beyond its scope. Before embarking on any change, it would be important to systematically diagnose, preferably through some rapid action-research, what is currently not working well for effective teacher management, specifically (but not limited to):

- **Are teachers' subject knowledge and pedagogical skills** adequate for the demands of a typical JSS or SSS classroom? Is the current pre-service training meeting these needs? What constraints do they face in the classroom for effective delivery of quality instruction? Can any of this be remediated through in-service training? How can principals and school support officers (SSOs) provide necessary scaffolding to a struggling teacher?

- **What drives teachers' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation** in Sierra Leone? To what extent is it determined by reward and remuneration, location of posting and allowances, career progression, satisfaction from pupils' good performance, and other factors?

- **Are teachers willing to be deployed to remote schools?** Pupils in remote schools are performing less well than those in less remote schools. Does this have anything to do with the management and motivation of teachers in these schools? What concrete actions can encourage talented teachers to work in disadvantaged schools?

- **How can school leadership and management be enhanced for better teacher management?** How can community actors (parents, elders and local influential figures) also be brought into the arena and encouraged to contribute towards possible solutions?

Based on what emerges from this enquiry, MBSSE – together with the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) and other partners – should consider an action plan for getting teacher management right as this is critical to overcoming the hurdle of slow learning.

Move from superficial process-compliance to actually promoting learning

From the evidence presented in the sections above, and verified across three years of the SGLA surveys, the typical secondary school in Sierra Leone feels like a case of looking like a good school without actually delivering much learning.[2] Schools are implementing lots of 'best practice' processes – they seem to have manageable PTR, use of teaching aids and lesson plans, lots of lesson observations and staff meetings, external supervision and CTA/PTA activity but ultimately poor learning outcomes. MBSSE and partners need to understand why this is the case – are schools and their administrations, intentionally or unintentionally, being incentivised to gain legitimacy and internal/external support through process compliance alone, whereby they are rewarded for "looking like" good schools rather than actually promoting learning? We need to explore if this is the case and, if so, how best to break this "camouflage", move away from mere process compliance, and reorient schools to put learning at the front-and-centre of all incentives, actions and behaviour.

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2   This is often termed as 'isomorphic mimicry'. 'Isomorphism' and 'isomorphic mimicry' are terms from evolutionary biology, popular since the 19th century, which refer to different organisms evolving to look similar without actually being related. In particular, isomorphic mimicry is the process by which one organism mimics another to gain an evolutionary advantage. Lately the term has caught on in the area of education, courtesy of Lant Pritchett, and is used to refer to fundamentally dysfunctional education systems that look like well-performing systems. Such dysfunctional systems pretend to conduct teaching and learning like the kind that goes on in functional education systems, but without their core underlying functionalities and therefore do not actually deliver much learning.

Learn from 'success stories'

The SGLA III affords us an opportunity to drill down on district-level results and understand how system performance varies from district to district. The learning assessment results indicate the distribution of pupil abilities in both subjects is fairly diverse: i.e. there is a small proportion of pupils who seem to know the curriculum and able to correctly answer the more demanding questions, while vast proportions who at best demonstrate the elementary skills expected in primary grades. The first step in unpacking what distinguishes these two groups of pupils has been done in this report by looking at some of the background characteristics of pupils (e.g. gender, family's assets, province, district, remoteness of school) to understand the average profiles of pupils who are performing well and those for whom the education system is not delivering much learning. A few notable patterns emerge, e.g. Kono district performing better than the national average, and in some cases better than Western Urban district too. However, most of these results are for the typical or large sub-populations of pupils and schools, not individual units of analysis.

MBSSE and partners should therefore consider exploring possibilities to learn from pockets of effective learning already present in Sierra Leone ("positive deviance"). A starting point would be to see what characterises districts and schools where pupils are scoring well in the SGLA – are any of these replicable in a disadvantaged district or school? Are the teachers and principals doing anything different, which helps their pupils succeed? Are there lessons to be learnt from these pockets of learning that can be taken as lessons for other schools in the system? Are there cases of schools where pupils are performing well despite being in a remote location or where most pupils are from a disadvantaged background – can we learn anything from such schools? A deep-dive study to answer these questions is already underway by the Leh wi Lan team at the time of writing this report.

Urgently address issues of sexual harassment and girls' safety in schools

The girls' safety results presented in all three years of the SGLA have made the first step in providing empirical evidence for what it is like being a female pupil in a secondary school in Sierra Leone, and the picture is truly disturbing.

Not only do girls score less than boys do in the learning assessment, but when in school, they are subject to lack of physical safety and sexual harassment. A sizeable proportion of female students are facing harassment while travelling between school and home, and while in school being sexually harassed by male pupils and teachers, including being asked for sexual favours by teachers in return for grades. One might ask – what have toilets got to do with girls' education? We find that lack of adequate toilet facilities near the main building of the school means that girls feel unsafe using them and absent themselves from school during menstruation.

What is worse is that teachers – who are mostly male and supposed to be guardians of pupils while they are in school – systematically underestimate the prevalence of the problem. This possibly prevents them from recognising the extent of the problem as experienced by female pupils first hand, but also prevents them from contributing to solutions at the school and community level. While mechanisms exist for lodging complaints, their effectiveness is not known.

Paradoxically, however, a majority of girls say they "feel safe in school" which probably reflects the relative incidence and extent of harassment they encounter outside school in the community. But the fact that lack of girls' safety in schools is very common and seen in many developing country school systems (Levy, 2017) and, therefore, not unique to Sierra Leone shouldn't hold us back from acknowledging the problem and trying to address it. No doubt, these challenges have deep-set social roots but it is worth considering ways to start addressing this issue, namely by:

- **Sensitising teachers (especially male teachers) and male pupils to become part of the solution** – ensure they appreciate the extent and seriousness of the problem, its consequences on school and society, their role in the problem, and what they could individually do to prevent incidents of harassment.

- **Ensuring effective accountability mechanisms exist** such that when a girl or someone else lodges a complaint, they can do so without fear of retribution and appropriate action is taken. Garner support from the CTA/PTA to make these mechanisms more effective.

- **Consider more female participation in the teaching workforce** – While clearly easier said than done, there is ample evidence which suggests female teachers make an positive impact on girls' enrolment, attendance and achievement in school (UNESCO, 2006).

Give pupils from poorer backgrounds a fair shot at success

The SGLA results in all three rounds show that pupils from poorer backgrounds – irrespective of grade and subject – performed significantly worse than those from more well-off backgrounds. In fact, this year we see that even when new learning materials like pupil handbooks are distributed, poorer pupils struggle to use them. There is a clear need to understand why this is the case and what is holding back poorer pupils. Experiential evidence from Sierra Leone and other developing countries can give us some leads along the lines of differences in parental education, level of support at home, access to more and better education resources at home and school, the resource levels of schools poorer pupils go to, access to private tuitions outside school, aspirations and whether the environment that helps them achieve their goals. However, we need to understand these constraints further especially, for instance, the constraints poorer pupils experience at home and school; including the direct and indirect costs of schooling; the rationale between their education decisions; the opportunity cost of attending school and learning versus wage-earning options in the labour markets; and what teachers and school management can do to ensure these pupils don't fall through the cracks of the system. This is especially important for the success of the FQSE and we need to utilise the positive momentum as a result of the launch of this programme. Armed with this knowledge, MBSSE – through the FQSE – should consider trying out different support systems for poorer students and test if these approaches are delivering more learning for poorer students.

Improve schooling experience for pupils with disabilities

Despite its methodological limitations in sampling pupils with disabilities, the SGLAs provide indicative evidence of what is it like to be a pupil with disability in a secondary school in Sierra Leone. While specialised infrastructure (e.g. ramp, railings) and other support (e.g. counselling) seems lacking, teachers are reportedly doing what they can in classrooms to adapt pedagogy to the special needs of these pupils. Attitudes of other pupils towards those with disabilities is also a concern. Overall, this indicates that we need to do more research to better understand the issue at hand before arriving at any concrete solution.

Improve lesson plans based on teachers' feedback and content knowledge

One of the clearer action points that has emerged from the feedback provided by teachers who are currently using the MBSSE lesson plans is remarkably consistent across all three years of the SGLA. While it is encouraging to see the enhanced of lesson plan usage – 70 per cent of teacher are using the lesson plans – it is worth noting that a substantial proportion of teachers have also said they struggle to fit in all the material and activities of the lesson plans within the time allotted for one period, and that the content of some of the lessons, as given in the lesson plans, is sometimes removed from the immediate context and lived realities of pupils. It is therefore proposed that lesson plan developers consider this feedback from users for future revision and improvement. Further, SSOs should also consider supporting teachers effectively use the lesson plans, especially avoid treating these lesson plans as scripts and instead use them as guidance material. Finally, Leh wi Lan needs to consider the initial evidence provided by SGLA III that teachers are probably themselves struggling to understand the content of the lesson plans, and need stronger and more intensive scaffolding, mentoring and support from SSOs and principals.

8.3   Recommendations for next year's SGLA

This annual SGLA is expected to be repeated again in May-June 2020 with comparable performance bands and indicators to track any progress vis-à-vis 2017, 2018 and 2019. It is proposed that the following reflections from the three SGLAs be incorporated into the planning and implementation of the fourth SGLA.

Transfer technical know-how from the SGLA team to MBSSE

The SGLAs can only be successful in achieving their objective of supporting evidence-based education policy and planning if the Leh wi Lan team successfully transfer the technical know-how and methodology for its design and implementation to colleagues within MBSSE, so that an annual or biennial SGLA can continue smoothly even after Leh wi Lan comes to an end in 2021. This is not an impossible feat but will be possible only if the MBSSE are very much in the driving seat and are closely involved in all aspects of SGLA from design to conclusion, progressively phasing out the role of the external SGLA team in the detailed implementation of the SGLA. In this regard, detailed discussion on the establishment of a National Assessment Unit has been conducted between the SGLA team and senior MBSSE officials. The SGLA technical team urgently needs to identify and continue engaging relevant colleagues within MBSSE in all aspects of the SGLA towards the longer-term goal of establishing MBSSE's own assessment unit which owns and carries out the SGLAs with minimal advisory support from external experts.

Share lessons with early/primary-grade learning assessment team

Through the design and implementation of all three rounds of the SGLAs, the technical team has acquired significant expertise in rapid deployment of learning assessments at a national level, data analysis and reporting. It would be beneficial to share any cross-learning with the early/primary grade learning assessment team, which is also walking on the same path with its assessments in early and primary grades. Conversations are ongoing between the two teams to ensure learning, reflection and approaches are harmonised across the two learning assessments.

Undertake complementary qualitative studies

Throughout this report, several quantitative results were discussed whereby it was felt that, while these findings are useful, more information is required before moving to concrete recommendations, especially qualitative research in the areas of teacher management, learning from "success stories" in the system. Specific qualitative research questions should be identified and undertaken as complementary deep-dives. One such deep-dive study to identify positive deviance, i.e. pockets of (relative) effective learning in secondary schools is already planned and being undertaken by the Leh wi Lan team at the time of writing this report.

8.4   Prioritisation of concrete actions: easier said than done

Measurement of learning shortfalls does not provide automatic clear guidance on how to remedy them. The actual process of moving from raw descriptive data to a longlist of recommendations to then a shortlist of prioritised actions is naturally complex – both technically and politically. It requires weighing and making delicate trade-offs. While partners like Leh wi Lan can actively support this, MBSSE will ultimately have to lead the prioritisation process, form coalitions with other sector partners and own these concrete action points.

Appropriateness of strategies and entry points will vary from one region and district to the next. Therefore, MBSSE and other national actors are best suited to identify these entry points because they have the most fine-grained understanding of what is practically, financially and politically feasible within their context. In line with this, the goal of this synthesis is not to advocate for the adoption of specific policies, but rather to provide a menu of possible recommendations for consideration, all backed by high-quality evidence and analysis that a) demonstrate that there are problems within the system and helps to convince key decision makers to focus their attention on these issues; and b) offers useful ideas and analysis to inform the development of strategies to address these problems.

This approach highlights the importance of context and argues for iterative approaches in devising responses to complex problems. It also appreciates the highly complex and inter-connected ways in which education systems move from inputs to actually delivering learning – all the while balancing the incentives of millions of actors in the system and various distractors which could disrupt the production of learning.

Bearing in mind these inter-connected complications and complexities, as next steps, it is proposed that the longlist of recommendations, as outlined above and any other ideas that might emerge, be assessed and discussed in a brainstorming workshop with MBSSE and Leh wi Lan/SGLA team. The intended outcome of this workshop would be to discuss and assess the feasibility of each 'longlisted' recommendation and develop a shortlist of prioritised, feasible actions that can be reasonably taken forward to address challenges. It would be necessary to assess resource requirements for each of the shortlisted actions, build coalitions among actors, and assign responsible owners for shortlisted actions. It is hoped that a few, if not all, of the shortlisted actions would then be implemented and tested for effectiveness.

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REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE

MINISTRY OF BASIC AND SENIOR SECONDARY EDUCATION

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