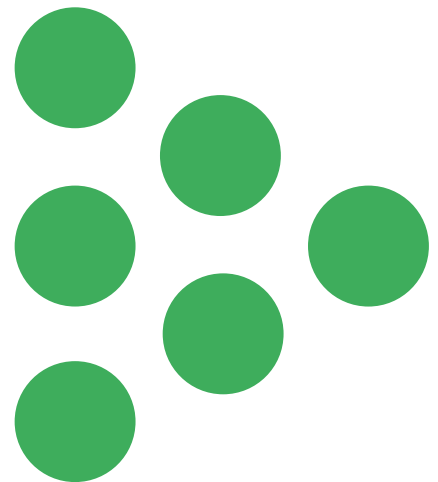## Learning Partnership for the PEAS-DES Inspect & Improve Programme

Sustainability Case Study Brief

August 2022

National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)

Sustainability Case Study Brief

Submitted in August 2022

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

BoG	Board of Governors
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DES	Directorate for Education Standards
I&I	Inspect and Improve project
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports, Uganda
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
PEAS	Promoting Equality in African Schools
SIP	School Improvement Plan
WMS	World Management Survey

Contents

1   Introduction

In 2021, Promoting Equality in African Schools (PEAS) commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) as the Learning Partner for the second phase of the Inspect and Improve Programme (I&I). I&I is a partnership between PEAS and the Ugandan Directorate of Education Standards (DES) which leverages DES' inspection approach with PEAS' school management expertise to support and empower school leaders to pursue school improvements.

The aim of the Learning Partnership is to generate evidence to support ongoing programme improvements as well as to generate learning to support further roll-out. As part of this, NFER is conducting two sets of qualitative studies that explore the most emerging issues in the delivery of I&I.

This brief focuses on exploring the sustained benefits of the I&I model. It examines whether changes to school management have had an impact on the quality of teaching and learning, student well-being and gender equity at the school level and the mechanisms for doing so. These insights feed into Research Questions (RQs) 2 and 4 of the Learning Partnership, respectively. We further generate recommendations for I&I and future programming on how to support the sustainability of these changes, in order to support RQ6.

Study	Research Questions
Research Questions	RQ2. What impact did the intervention have on the quality of teaching and learning, student wellbeing and gender equity in intervention schools?
	RQ4. How did the intervention demonstrate the observed impact and what worked (and did not work) to improve the quality of leadership and management in intervention schools?
	RQ6. How can DES effectively embed I&I elements into government guidelines and practices in order to implement the programme at a wider scale?

2 Study Design

For this study, we used semi-structured interviews to collect data. We designed two tools for three types of stakeholder: one for School Leaders - Head teachers and Deputy Head teachers; and one for Teachers and Board of Governor (BoG) representatives. The tools can be found in the Annex.

In consultation with our data collection partner, and PEAS, regarding geographic accessibility of sample schools, we conducted fieldwork in ten Phase 2 schools[1] in the Eastern and Rwenzori regions. In order to achieve as evenly distributed a sample as possible, we considered World Management Survey (WMS) score at baseline and selected five schools with a below-average WMS score and five with an above-average WMS score (at endline for Phase 1, and baseline for Phase 2 schools).

We included four Phase 1 schools to examine changes three years on from initial I&I engagement. In order to reach more schools overall and in consideration of travel costs, we interviewed Head teachers remotely. Since Phase 1 schools have already been studied, in consideration of any research fatigue of the school leaders and their staff, only Head teachers were interviewed. The final sample is presented below.

	# of schools	School leaders	Teachers	BoG representatives
Sample	14 schools	23 Head teachers and Deputy Head teachers: 14 Male and 5 Female	20 Teachers: 10 Male and 10 Female	10 BoG representatives: 8 Male and 2 Female

Limitations

The study is based on a sample of 14 schools only, further split between Phase 1 schools (4) and Phase 2 schools (10). This is in line with our plan to use purposively, convenience sampling but means that our sample does not include schools over a more widely dispersed area. It also limits the degree to which we can draw conclusions about the differences in impact across Phase 1 and Phase 2 schools.

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[1] We adapted our initial design in response to the field context. In one school, where we were unable to reach the Head teacher, we interviewed the Deputy Head teacher. To mitigate the rising costs of fieldwork, we reduced the Phase 2 sample from 12 to 10 schools and restricted fieldwork to two regions in order to support the clustering of schools.

As with the I&I pilot baseline and endline evaluations, our research design does not draw upon impact evaluation methods which allow us to attribute causality. While our pilot evaluation used a comparative case study approach to draw inferences about causal attribution, in the Learning Partnership, we instead use an exploratory approach which allows detailed learnings on the topics.

3 Findings

This study explored what works to promote sustainability in three key areas: quality of teaching and learning, student wellbeing and gender equity. These areas are a long-term focus of PEAS and DES, as reflected, for example, in stakeholder consultations held in the Inception phase of the Learning Partnership and in trainings delivered to school leaders.

Interviewees were asked which changes they had observed in the three areas since their school's engagement with I&I and how I&I had contributed to the changes. Across all interviews, Phase 1 and 2 respondents reported similar changes in all three areas.

The key findings from each area are presented separately to allow for a broad overview. The three areas, however, are highly interconnected, with an improvement in one gradually and positively impacting other parts of school life, as shown below.

3.1 What were the observed changes to Quality of Teaching and Learning?

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Teachers' improved preparation of lessons and use of learner-centred activities helped to increase teacher and student engagement

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In terms of the changes to quality of teaching and learning as a result of I&I, BoG respondents generally described a wide range of changes in the schools. These included for example, school infrastructure, recruitment of staff and student enrolment. All school leaders reported that I&I training had increased the planning of teaching and the use of varied pedagogical strategies. These changed practices were also noted by the majority of teachers. Most teachers reported writing a scheme of work at the start of the school year to plan coverage of the curriculum and write lesson plans. All teachers and school leaders observed changes to teaching style, with teachers deploying more learner-centred strategies, for example, class discussions, group work and project-based activities. Moreover, all respondents noted that teachers set more remedial lessons and continuous assessments, rather than solely relying on high-stakes exams, to monitor learning,

The majority of respondents noted that students were more involved in their own learning. Some school leaders, teachers and BoG representatives mentioned that student

absenteeism had decreased, as learners were generally more engaged in learning. The increased planning for teaching and the learner-centred activities, which are also required by the new curriculum that is currently in Senior 1 and 2 classes, had increased students' attention to their studies. Moreover, the respondents noted that this was especially important, since many students had not been studying during the Covid-19 school closures. As one school leader explained:

> *Now when this phase of opening schools came in again, because of the training, we had skills of managing the learners as they came back. That is why we have a big enrolment because we could handle them, talk to them, using the skills we acquired. Once the teaching is planned through lesson plans and schemes of work, of course the learners pick interest, and when they pick interest of course learning will take place. And even when learning is taking place and you are a serious teacher you get motivated when you see your students picking interest in you. (Head teacher)*

I&I training resulted in more frequent lesson observations. These are a Ministry of Education and Sports requirement, but teachers and school leaders conveyed that they are now conducted in a non-judgemental, supportive way, to help to improve and maintain good teaching.

3.2   What were the observed changes to Student Wellbeing?

Alternative discipline methods, along with an increase in psychosocial support, have reduced the 'gap' between teachers and students

A few teachers (3) and one BoG representative expressed that I&I's guidance on the cessation of corporal punishment and the introduction of alternative behaviour management methods, for example, litter picking, helped to improve cooperation between teachers and students. One respondent, when asked about the student experience at school, explained that teachers and students were working more closely together, without students fearing corporal punishments:

> *A lot has changed. One is because of that improved relationship between the teachers and the students, the gap that earlier existed between the two has been narrowed. There is a friendly relationship between the two in terms of learning and teaching. Also, the learners are showing a lot of hunger to explore more or to learn more than they used to. They can approach the teachers without fear and also because in the past we used to, although in isolated cases, some punishments were corporal. But now that one is being phased out. So I think it has also contributed to that good relationship. (Teacher).*

Two teachers explained that the I&I programme had prepared their schools to provide guidance and counselling to students and that this had contributed to better teacher-student relationships. Schools generally allocate responsibility for counselling to one senior male and one senior female teacher, although one BoG respondent said that they also have this role. This provision was perceived by all three types of stakeholder to be vital in the wake of Covid-19 school closures. An interviewee mentioned that counselling helped many students to face the additional challenges at home, which resulted from the pandemic:

> *You find the senior woman talking to girls and the senior man talking to boys and then we have also told them to follow up certain children individually to talk to them and counsel and guide, and we also encourage teachers to do psychosocial support to our children. You know, given the long period they face the challenges of COVID at home like broken families, death. They came back with so many problems psychologically. So in CPDs that we had prior to opening we talked to the teachers and then we continue to talk to them to pay very keen attention to the psychology of these children. (Teacher).*

3.3   What were the observed changes to Gender Equity?

Gender-sensitive teaching and wellbeing practices have positively impacted on girls' enrolment, attendance and confidence in school

Staff in around half of the schools reported that they had a greater awareness of gender-related issues, as a result of the gender sensitisation approaches in the I&I Programme. This included interviewee reports of a growing awareness around, for instance, girls' needs during menstruation for a private space in school, and that their schools were working on the provision of a suitable space. These staff also noted that the I&I training on gender-responsive teaching and wellbeing practices, for example, encouraging girls to answer questions in class and reinforcing girls' equal ability to that of boys, helped girls to be more comfortable and confident in class. Similarly, teachers and head teachers in around half of the schools observed that girls were taking on more leadership roles in class and participating more in extracurricular activities. Importantly, teachers and head teachers emphasised that gender-sensitive practices along with parental engagement, had helped to redress some of the effects of Covid-19 on girls, for instance, by female teachers' paying special attention to girls' attendance:

> *In fact, the number of girls had reduced especially during covid but now we are saying if a girl has a challenge, let her come and tell a teacher. There are even girls who are not paying money for feeding. The parents had married them off, so we have been calling the parents then we talk to them and the girl is brought back to school… we will make sure that girls are retained in school. Female teachers continue to talk to them so that we have many girls and at the end of it, the number of girls in the school changes, especially on the side of attendance. (Deputy Head teacher).*

3.4 What are the enablers and barriers for the sustainability of the observed changes?

In general, all interviewees thought that the observed changed practices, as described in the previous section, could be maintained. The school leaders explained that they had been well equipped through the I&I support with skills including target setting, writing a School Improvement Plan (SIP), data analysis and monitoring teaching to maintain the changes long term. The majority of respondents stressed, however, that various other support was needed due to myriad challenges. It is important to note that many of these challenges are systemic and outside of I&I control and include inadequate funding for school infrastructure and teaching materials, strikes due to low teacher pay, and resource shortages for the new curriculum.

This section will outline the key themes which emerged around the maintenance of the changes in all the three areas, in the long term.

....

Many of the observed improvements were enabled by a whole-school mindset change, which can be sustained, however, some teaching and learning practices require more external supervision

....

Phase 1 and 2 schools both reported similar factors which would help or hinder efforts to sustain the changes. A Phase 1 respondent, did however, provide some insight into the importance of embedding a set of common values in schools, but highlighted that some teaching and learning practices will need a continuity of attention to remain sustainable, to illustrate:

> *Once an institution picks on a culture, the culture remains. If the ways of handling discipline matters is taken on and is appreciated by the majority, that one becomes culture and it will continue. There are those factors that remain constant, once built, they remain part of the system and move on. The teaching and learning and the levels of preparation may not continue unless they are seriously enforced. So if there is any relaxation in what so ever, you will learn that the levels of preparation will not be continuous. (Head teacher)*

Head teachers are increasingly aware that teacher motivation is important and that this is necessary for the sustainability of good practices

There were generally positive attitudes towards new practices to improve progress in teaching and learning, student wellbeing and gender equity, suggesting that teachers were intrinsically motivated to continue these practices. Despite the positive changes, interviews revealed low teacher motivation as an important potential barrier to their sustainability. All three types of stakeholders (around a quarter of interviewees) across seven schools gave examples of how low pay, increased workload, in part due to the requirement to write daily lesson plans, and other contextual factors undermine teachers' motivation and work satisfaction. In parallel, one school leader expressed that implementation of the targets set in the SIP, for example, lesson observations for the improvement of teaching, was time-consuming in the face of other responsibilities. A school leader explained how workload and low compensation undermine teacher motivation:

> *Teacher motivation is low, all these things require a teacher to work extra hard, preparation during, before the lesson and even after the lesson. What is required of the teacher is high and what the teacher gains is low. We tire a lot to push these teachers to do all these things but you see that you yourself you're putting in a lot of effort to get the small thing that you want from the teacher just because when you go back to analyze you find that motivation is low. Now that even these things of industrial action have come in, we are even scared we don't know how we are going to do it. (Head teacher)*

There were a few examples of how school leaders' focus on teacher motivation and general wellbeing can support teachers in this challenging context. One school leader conveyed the value of the I&I training that enabled them to provide counselling for teachers on school reopening after Covid-19. One teacher reported that the administration and BoG ensure timely payment of salaries. Other teachers, however, simply wanted some recognition of their good performance and effort and asked whether I&I could enable this.

Peer collaboration and cascading of skills gained from I&I could help to sustain improvements by making both staff and students more able to support one another

Learning from, and working with, peers emerged as a productive aspect of school life and as a mechanism to support sustainability of changes in schools. When school leaders have received I&I support they have delegated responsibilities, for example, teacher supervision to be carried out between peers. This cascading of knowledge and skills and delegation of responsibility was noted as an important approach to sustainability:

> *For the quality of teaching, the administration and, the general administration the head teacher, the deputy and the DOS have put in modalities. They have assigned every role, you know that delegation of duty, so and so is responsible for this, for supervising this subject, for supervising this class, this one is responsible for this supervising so and so, like I supervise a teacher, who also supervises me. So knowing that self-responsibility and roles, I am sure it will be maintained. (Teacher).*

In a similar vein, some schools have worked on promoting senior students' role in supporting their peers, as one school leader conveyed, on student behaviour:

> *We have involved the learners to deal in their own matters, for example on the matters of discipline, the learners should first be able to look at the level of discipline and see if they can handle, then maybe if they cannot handle at prefect's level, or the counselor's level, then the thing moves up to staff such that the learner feels also empowered to guide a friend out of wrong. (Head teacher).*

Parental and wider community engagement is essential for continuity of improvements, but is an ongoing challenge due to socio-economic barriers

Around a third of all respondents were concerned that some parents and communities are less engaged, but all acknowledged that parents have, in some cases, abject financial constraints which impact on their ability to pay for school meals and fees. A midday meal for students was cited as a key basic need for student wellbeing and enables students to stay in school in the afternoon and to focus on lessons. A small number of school leaders have had some success with encouraging parents to pack food for lunch, where they cannot afford to pay. Teachers and head teachers also emphasised the importance of parental and community support to maintain the progress in access to school and in learning, particularly

in student wellbeing and gender equity. Embedding the value of learning and education in the community still remained a challenge:

> *In terms of gender, for instance, I can talk of one external factor, the community around us. Many of them are still struggling with education. They have not known very well the importance of education. The reason why we are having first of all a low enrollment, this community would be having many students, the reason for dropouts that we are having, especially the younger girls, is because of that perception of the community over the education. They have feelings that a girl aged 18 and above should be going for marriage other than coming to school. So those are some of the distractors in the community. (Deputy Head teacher).*

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

The following sections present conclusions against the Research Questions (RQs) 2,4 and 6.

RQ2. What impact did the intervention have on the quality of teaching and learning, student wellbeing and gender equity in intervention schools?

Interviewees in Phase 1 and Phase 2 schools gave similar responses. The responses suggest that school leaders' engagement in I&I has enabled changes in all three areas of focus. The changes are summarised below:

Area	Key observed changes
Quality of teaching and learning	• Increased planning of teaching and use of varied pedagogical strategies to include learner-centred strategies for learners of all abilities. • Use of continuous assessment, rather than end of term high-stakes tests. • Lesson observations are now non-judgemental and supportive, rather than fault finding. • Increased teacher engagement and student interest in learning
Student wellbeing	• Cessation, or less commonly, discouragement of corporal punishment and the introduction of alternative behaviour management methods • An introduction to, or in some schools, an increase in guidance and counselling • Improved teacher-student relationships.
Gender equity	• Increase in gender-responsive teaching and wellbeing practice Reinforcing girls' equal ability to that of boys • Encouraging pregnant girls to return to school • Girls be more comfortable and confident in class and across school.

These changes were commonly reported across the sampled schools, suggesting that there is generalisability to schools with a similar profile, when scaling I&I.

RQ4. How did the intervention demonstrate the observed impact and what worked (and did not work) to improve the quality of leadership and management in intervention schools?

RQ6. How can DES effectively embed I&I elements into government guidelines and practices in order to implement the programme at a wider scale?

Intervention schools engaged with a variety of different types I&I support training in target setting, writing a SIP and gender sensitisation, which respondents associated with the gradual improvements which they had observed.

The foundations for improved school practices are in place, however, the sustainability of the changes relies on their institutionalisation, both within schools and at the system-level. Against a backdrop of challenges which are largely around school funding, the key drivers for sustainability of the observed changes which emerged were:

- A mindset which is open to fostering new practices which benefit learners
- Head teachers' awareness of the need to motivate staff and their ongoing support to the staff
- Peer collaboration and support.

Parental and community engagement is key to the maintenance of basic needs, in particular, school meals. It is also a crucial ingredient of students' wellbeing and readiness to learn, but many respondents cited the lack of parental and community support and value of education as an important, ongoing challenge.

4.2   Recommendations

Our research points to several recommendations for the I&I programme on how to support the sustainability of progress across the three focus areas of quality teaching and learning, student wellbeing and gender equity. We list them in order of priority, for ongoing Phase 2 and/or 3 implementation.

I&I should continue to invest in targeted parental and community outreach. Schools' engagement with parents and the local community is monitored by the I&I inspection tool as part of school leaders' accountability loops; some schools are already making successful efforts in this area, as evidenced by positive inspection scores. Other schools, which continue to experience challenges, could benefit from I&I support in this area. I&I could enable some shared learnings between school leaders that have successfully worked with parents and communities towards general student wellbeing.

There are ongoing pressures for teachers, therefore, school staff wellbeing and motivation should remain a priority for I&I. School leaders received advice on how to help teachers reintegrate into school after Covid-19, but teachers continue to face challenges, including low pay. Teachers acknowledge that planning for teaching is essential and there is buy-in for writing schemes of work, but some interviewees reported that teachers are generally reluctant to write a lesson plan for every lesson as this, along with planning for learner-centred activities and supporting students' wellbeing, increases workload. Head teachers can also face a lot of pressure and so should also be considered. I&I should continue to support leaders and guide them on what constitutes a sensible workload.

I&I should continue to support school leaders with training that can be cascaded to teachers, as part of teachers' Continued Professional Development. In particular, I&I should encourage school leaders to share their learnings on how to motivate and support adolescents (boys and girls) and supporting girls, for example, on issues of return to school after pregnancy or early marriage, and menstruation. Teachers can also share their learnings

within their schools and this would also help to mitigate against uncertainties in school, for example teacher shortages due to strikes or staff transfers as more staff will be trained. Virtual training, as provided to school leaders during school closures may be a preferred pathway, against a background of funding challenges.

I&I should enable Phase 1 schools to cascade their learning to Phase 2 schools and Phase 1 schools have been engaged with I&I since 2019. Although they reported similar observations to Phase 2 schools, they have had more experience implementing these changes. As a result, they can share their practices and lessons learned to guide similar schools on what to expect after a longer period on the I&I programme and how to best ensure sustainability of the changes. For example, writing daily lesson plans was mentioned as something which some teachers are reluctant to do in Phase 1 schools, so this could be a focus for support in Phase 2 schools. However, schools' engagement in additional activities should be balanced against the concerns around higher workload, which were reported throughout the study.

School leaders may not all be aware that I&I will continue to support and supervise schools, so I&I should reassure them of this. I&I should also reinforce to school leaders that part of I&I programme design is that government will take on practices in the long-term and continue with this support and supervision models across all schools, even when PEAS is not directly involved. This will help school leaders to continue embedding good practices in their schools through external supervision and support.

Annexes

Tools: Interview guides

Interview guide: Headteachers	**Headteacher Interview Guide_Susta**
Interview guide: Teachers and BOG representatives	**BOG_Teachers Interview Guide_Susta**

Evidence for excellence in education