

Key Insight

FINDINGS ON SCHOOL LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOUR CHANGE FROM A 3-YEAR EDUCATION QUALITY PROGRAM

April 2026

Introduction

The Education Quality (EduQuality) program supports schools to strengthen leadership and improve learning environments. A key component of the program is the Pathways to Excellence guide, which supports school leaders in developing stronger systems across areas such as leadership, school management, teaching quality, safeguarding, and community engagement.

The **Pathways to Excellence** (P2E) guide supports the EduQuality three-year holistic school development program by equipping school leaders with the tools necessary to assess and improve their school's progress across 18 key domains. Ultimately, when school leaders commit to continued progress in these key areas, this will improve the learning outcomes for children who attend their schools. The P2E guide supports school leaders in improving three areas of school quality; school culture, school management, and teaching and learning – all of which combine to create a school environment that is most conducive to improving student learning outcomes.

This report presents key insights from the School Leader Survey, one of the program's key monitoring tools used to monitor changes in school leadership behaviour and practices during the schools' participation in the EduQuality program. The survey data was collected from a sample of EduQuality schools across Ghana, Uganda, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Tanzania, Zambia, and the Dominican Republic. School leaders from the participating schools were interviewed during Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 of their participation in the program, allowing for comparison of changes within the same schools over time.

The analysis focuses on understanding how schools develop across key dimensions of school quality, aligned with the three areas of the P2E Guide, school culture, school management, and teaching and learning:

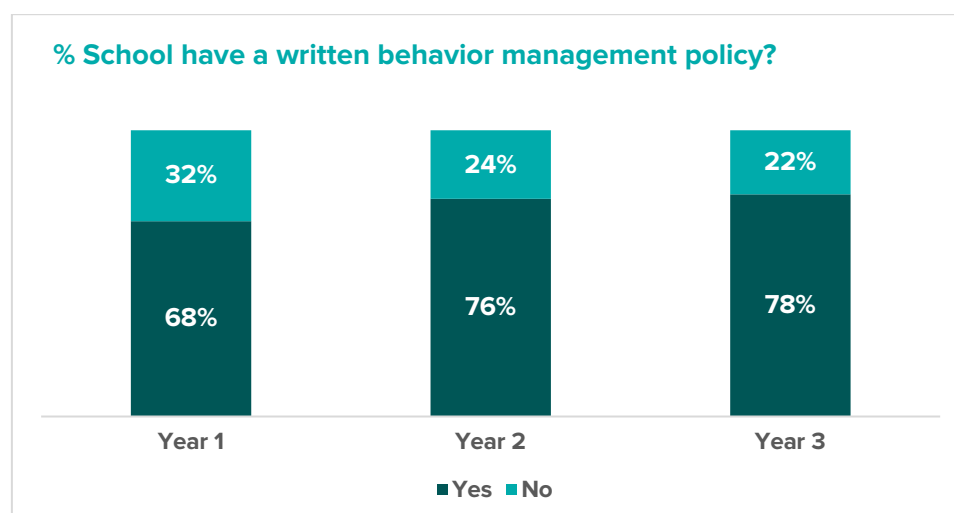
- ▶ School Culture: behaviour management and mission
- ▶ School Culture: Parent and community engagement
- ▶ School Management: Leadership growth and professionalism
- ▶ School Management: Safeguarding, child protection practices and inclusive education
- ▶ Teaching and Learning: Teaching quality and teacher support

Key Finding #1: In Year 3, 78% of schools had a written behaviour management policy, a noticeable increase up from 68% in Year 1.

School leaders are encouraged to develop their school culture by promoting strong school values and positive behaviour management strategies and codifying these through written policies and vision statements.

The percentage of schools having a written policy rose from **68% in Year 1 to 78% in Year 3**. This suggests that more schools are moving toward **formal, school-wide approaches to managing behaviour**, rather than relying on informal or ad hoc practices.

Approaches based on **guidance, counselling, and positive classroom environments** are also widely recognised as effective ways to manage behaviour. Meanwhile, the use of corporal punishment remains extremely low, around 1% across years, which reflects a gradual shift toward **preventive and supportive approaches to behaviour management**. This is clear through the notable increase in schools reporting a **written behaviour management policy**.

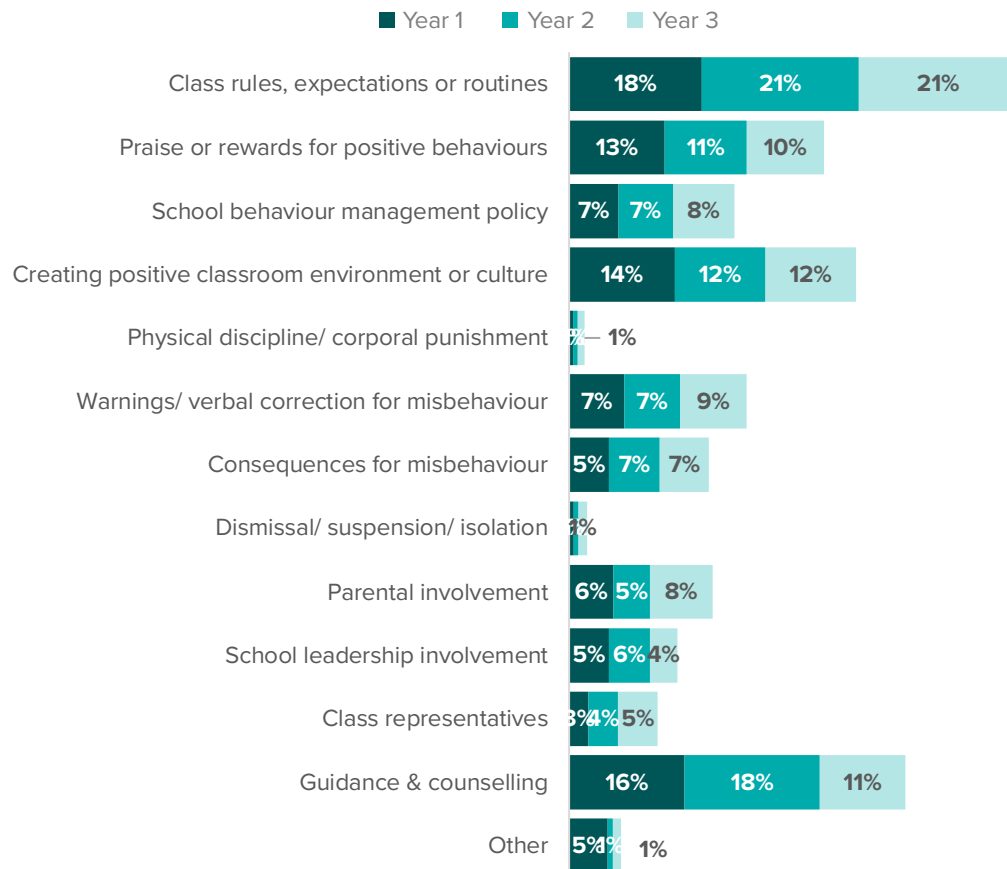


The survey responses suggest that schools' behaviour management is becoming more **structured and preventative**. School leaders increasingly prioritise approaches such as **clear classroom rules, implementation of behaviour policies, correcting misbehaviour, and parental involvement**.

Encouragingly, approaches such as **physical discipline and dismissal/suspension remain very low across all years**, while positive classroom environment remains steadily high, both of which are positive signs. Within the 100-point composite scoring that assesses school leadership behaviour (see Key Finding #9), lower reliance on these practices indicates a shift toward **more preventative, supportive, and child-centred behaviour management strategies**.

As shown in the graph below, school leaders consistently identify **clear classroom rules and routines** as their top behaviour strategy, increasing from **17.8% in Year 1 to 21.4% in Year 3**, reinforcing this move toward structured and proactive classroom management.

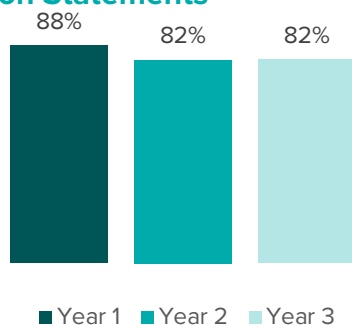
Behaviour management approaches school leaders want teachers to use in classrooms



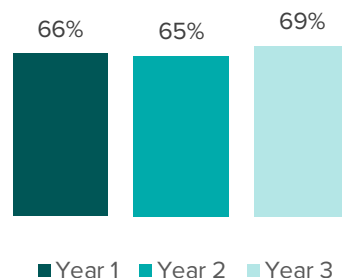
Most schools report having **written mission or vision statements**, although the proportion reporting a formal written statement declined slightly from **88% in Year 1 to 82.3% in Year 3**. At the same time, the proportion of schools displaying their mission visibly in the school increased slightly from **66% to 69%**.

The slight decline in the number of schools having a written mission and vision statement may reflect overreporting in the program's earlier years. As school leaders progress through the program, they may develop a clearer understanding of what constitutes a mission and vision statement and subsequently recognize that their school does not have one.

% Schools with written Mission & Vision Statements

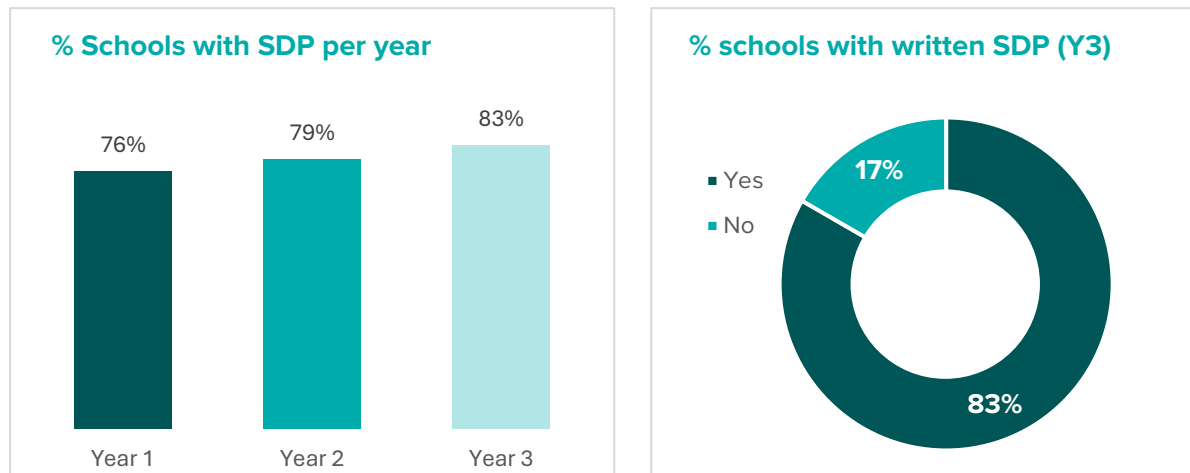


% Schools with Mission and Vision visibly displayed

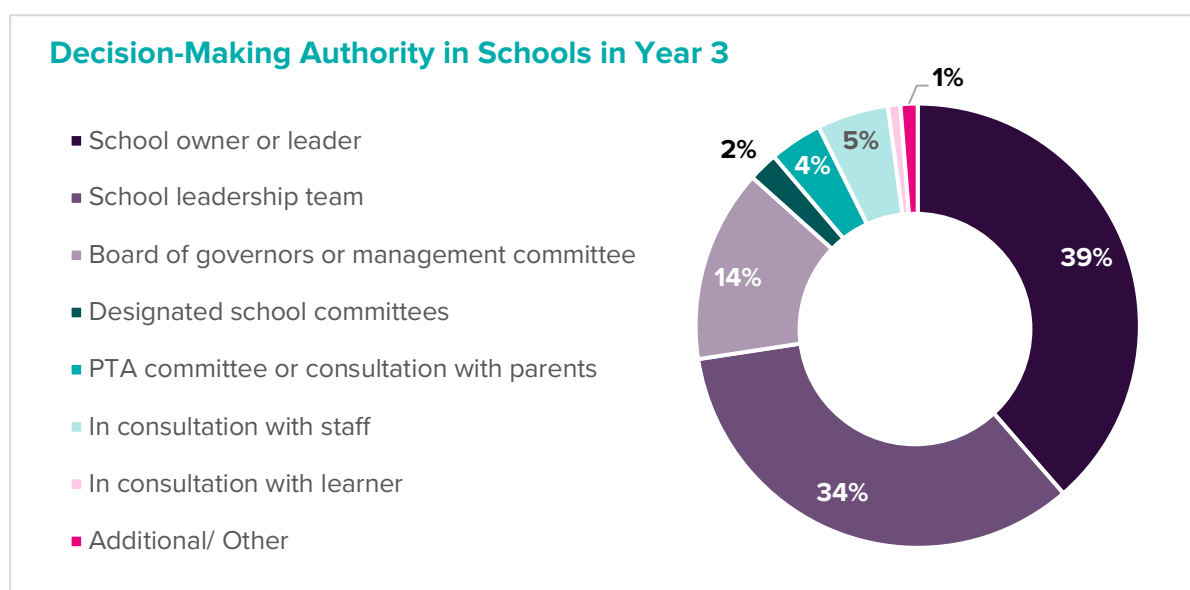


Key Finding #2: In Year 3, 83% of schools had a school development plan, up from 75% in Year 1.

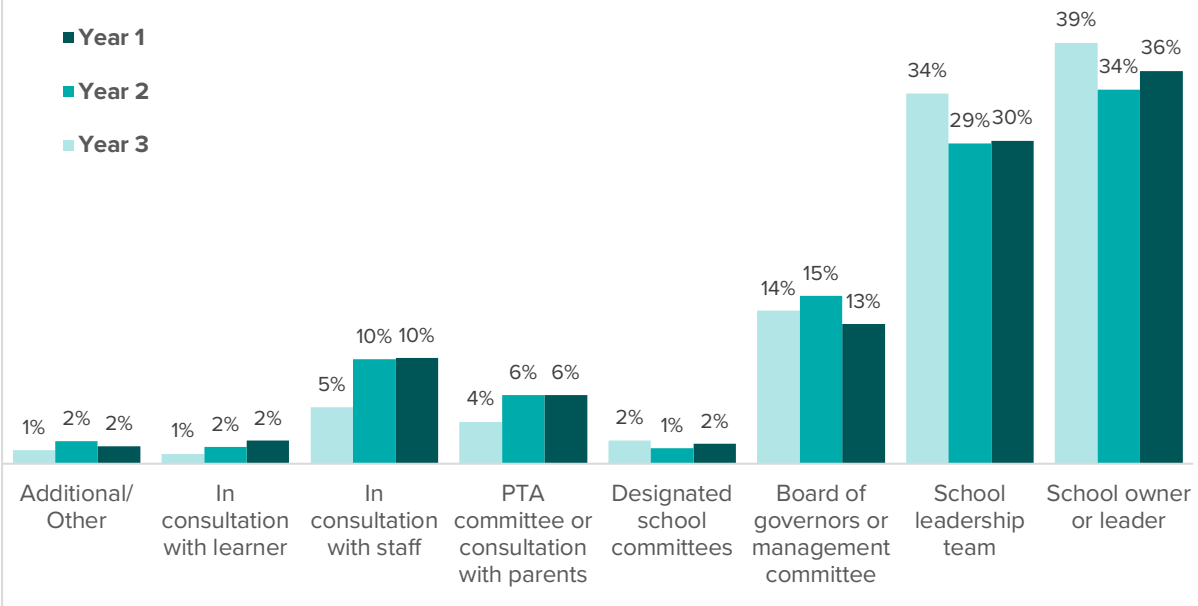
There are signs that leadership is becoming more structured, especially in planning. The proportion of schools reporting a **written strategic or development plan** increased from **75.8% in Year 1** to **79.4% in Year 2** and **83.3% in Year 3**. This suggests that schools are increasingly planning ahead rather than operating purely reactively.



Over the three years, little evidence was found of schools practicing shared governance or participatory decision-making. The share of responses indicating that important decisions are made **by the school owner, proprietor, or leader** rose from **36.0% in Year 1** to **38.6% in Year 3**. Decisions made **by the school leadership team** also rose, from **29.6% to 34.0%**. However, consultation with staff, parents, and learners appears to decline over time in the coded responses, suggesting that leadership has not become more participatory.



Decision-Making Authority in Schools (Year 1–3 Comparison)



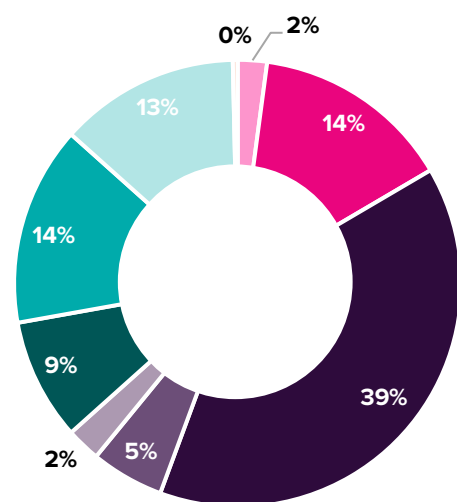
In terms of reporting structures, the data suggests a pattern of increased reporting to school owners over time, while reporting to governing boards remains low with only minimal variation (13% in Year 1, 15% in Year 2, and 14% in Year 3).

This should be interpreted with caution, as reporting arrangements may vary depending on school ownership structures, and responses may reflect how leaders perceive or report accountability rather than a clear shift in governance practices.

It is also important to note that responses to this question are limited, particularly in Year 3, where only around 50% of schools provided data.

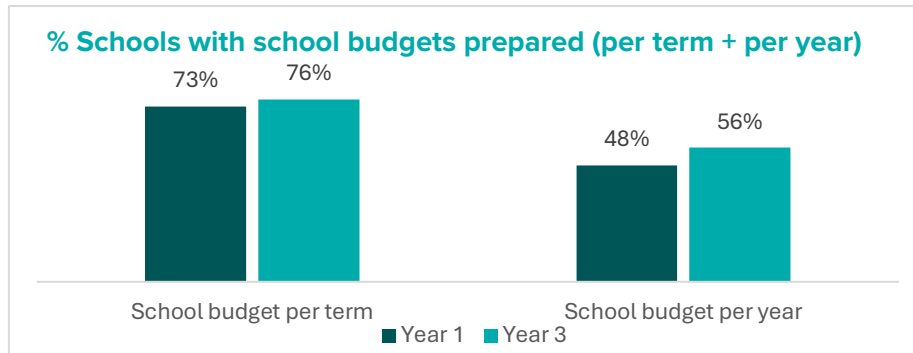
School Reporting Structures in Year 3

- I do not know
- No
- School leadership reports to the owner
- School leadership reports to governing board
- School leadership reports to another designated committee
- School leadership reports to staff
- School leadership reports to parents
- School leadership reports to an external body
- Additional/ Other [Coder - record specifics further]



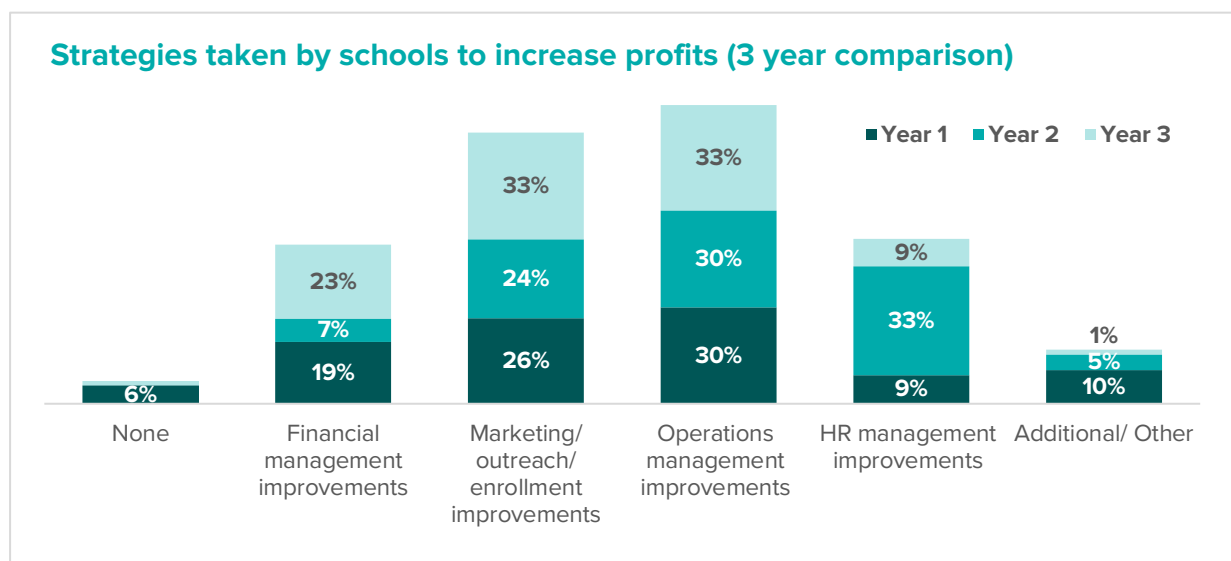
Key Finding #3: Financial planning is strengthening, with +8% more schools preparing annual budgets and +3% more preparing term budgets by Year 3.

Financial management is one of the clear success areas as more schools have reported making school budgets either per year or per term (or both). About 3% more schools prepared school budgets per term and 8% more schools reported preparing an annual budget compared with Year 1 of the EdQ program. This suggests that schools are becoming more likely to use structured financial planning, especially annual planning, which is important for sustainability and long-term school improvement.



Across the three-year journey, schools show a clear shift towards a more active approach to financial management. By Year 3, almost all schools report taking actions to increase income or reduce costs, with the proportion taking **no action** dropping from 6% in Year 1 to just 1% in Year 3. Schools are also increasingly using a **combination of strategies**, rather than relying on a single approach. By Year 3 schools are taking a variety of strategies to increase and diversify their revenue:

- ▶ **33%** of schools focus on operations management improvements such as adding new after-school programs for a fee, adding a canteen, increasing their bus service, buying supplies in bulk
- ▶ **33%** of schools focus on marketing, outreach, and enrolment growth (increasing revenue).
- ▶ **23%** of schools report financial management improvements such as chasing outstanding school fees, record keeping, etc.)

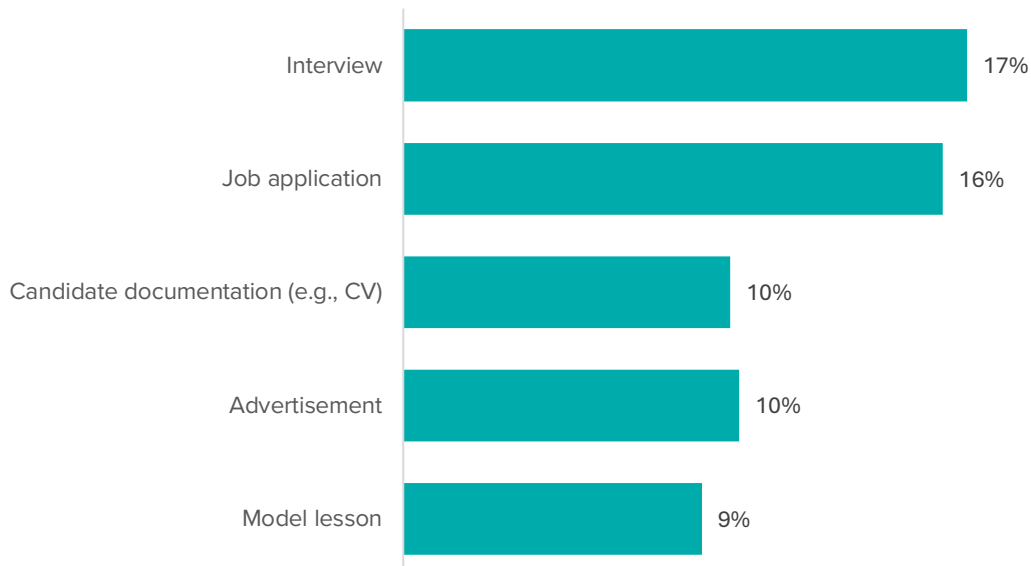


Key Finding #4: In Year 3, 86% of schools are conducting some form of reference or background check when hiring new teachers, compared to only 74% in Year 1.

The HR story is more mixed. Some recruitment practices appear to be becoming more formal. By Year 3, there is growth in the use of the following strategies when recruiting:

- ▶ Introducing job interviews as part of the recruitment process
- ▶ Allowing potential candidates to apply through a job application, requesting CVs and other supporting documentation
- ▶ Advertisement as a recruitment step
- ▶ Introducing a model lesson and interview during the recruitment process

Top 5 steps taken by schools during teacher recruitment process



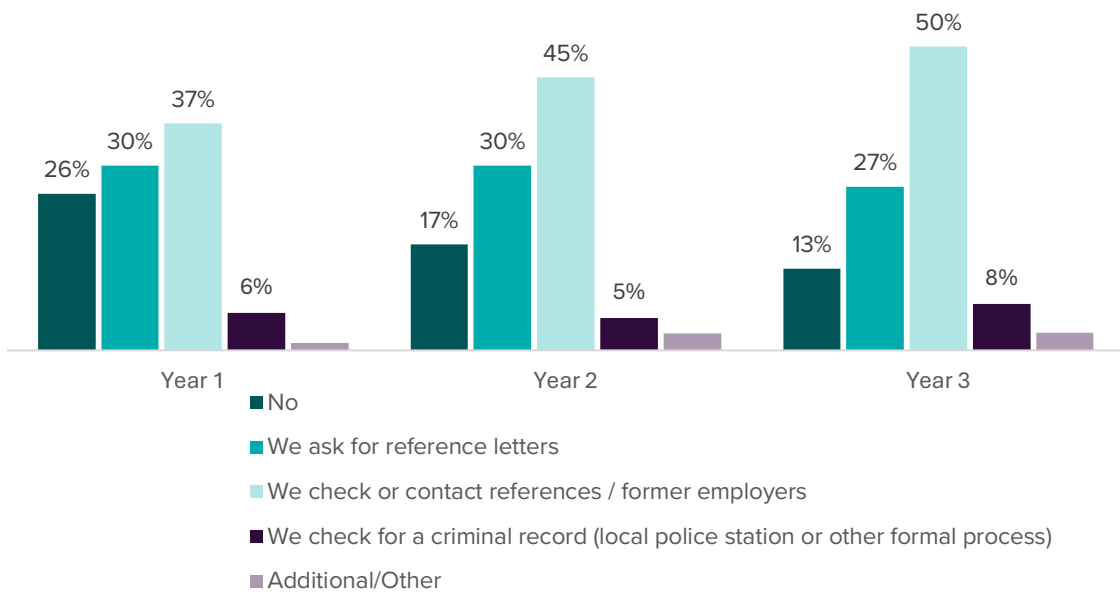
However, the proportion of schools reporting that they have a written employment contract or agreement with each school employee remains the same between Year 1 and Year 3. This suggests little overall progress in full employment formalisation.

Limited progress on contracts formalization could be due to a preference for informal arrangements, allowing flexibility for both schools and teachers. In some contexts, school leaders may avoid creating formal contracts due to taxes or administrative costs.

Data also suggests that schools use a mix of background checks such as reference letters, checking former employers, and in some cases criminal record checks.

In Year 3, 87% of respondents were using at least one method for reference checking (respondents could select multiple responses) compared to only 74% in Year 1.

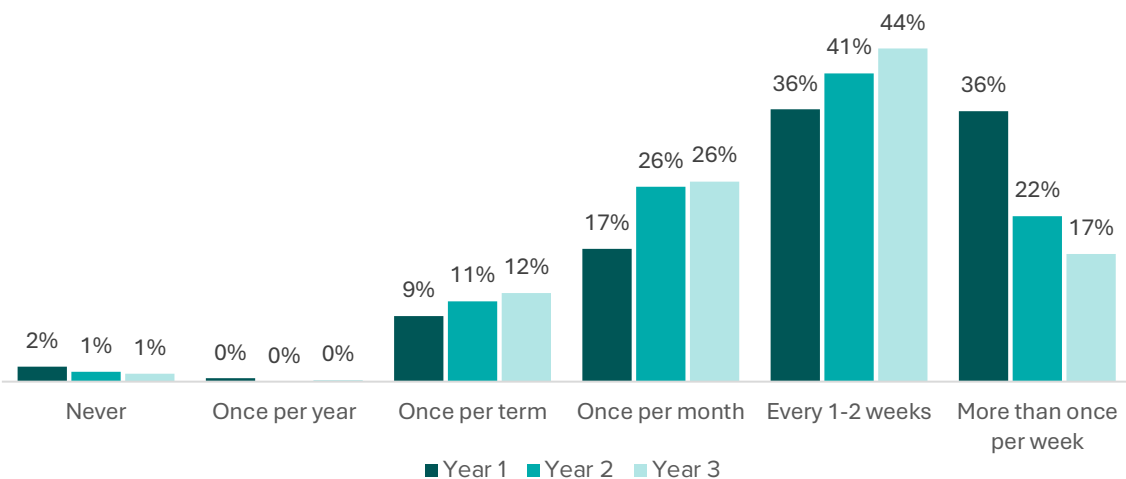
% Schools conducting reference checks while recruiting in Year 3



Key Finding #5: School leaders show commitment to observing teachers during lessons and delivering feedback. 70% of school leaders are observing teachers once per month or every 1–2 weeks.

In this area, data suggests that teaching quality is increasingly being actively supported by school leadership, rather than left to individual teachers alone. Teacher observation is becoming more regular, particularly at the monthly and fortnightly levels. There has been an increase in the number of schools observing teachers once per month and those who observe teachers delivering a lesson every 1–2 weeks. At the same time, the proportion of schools observing teachers more than once per week declined from 35.6% to 16.8%, which may suggest a shift toward more sustainable routines with higher quality feedback loops, rather than observations used for enforcement.

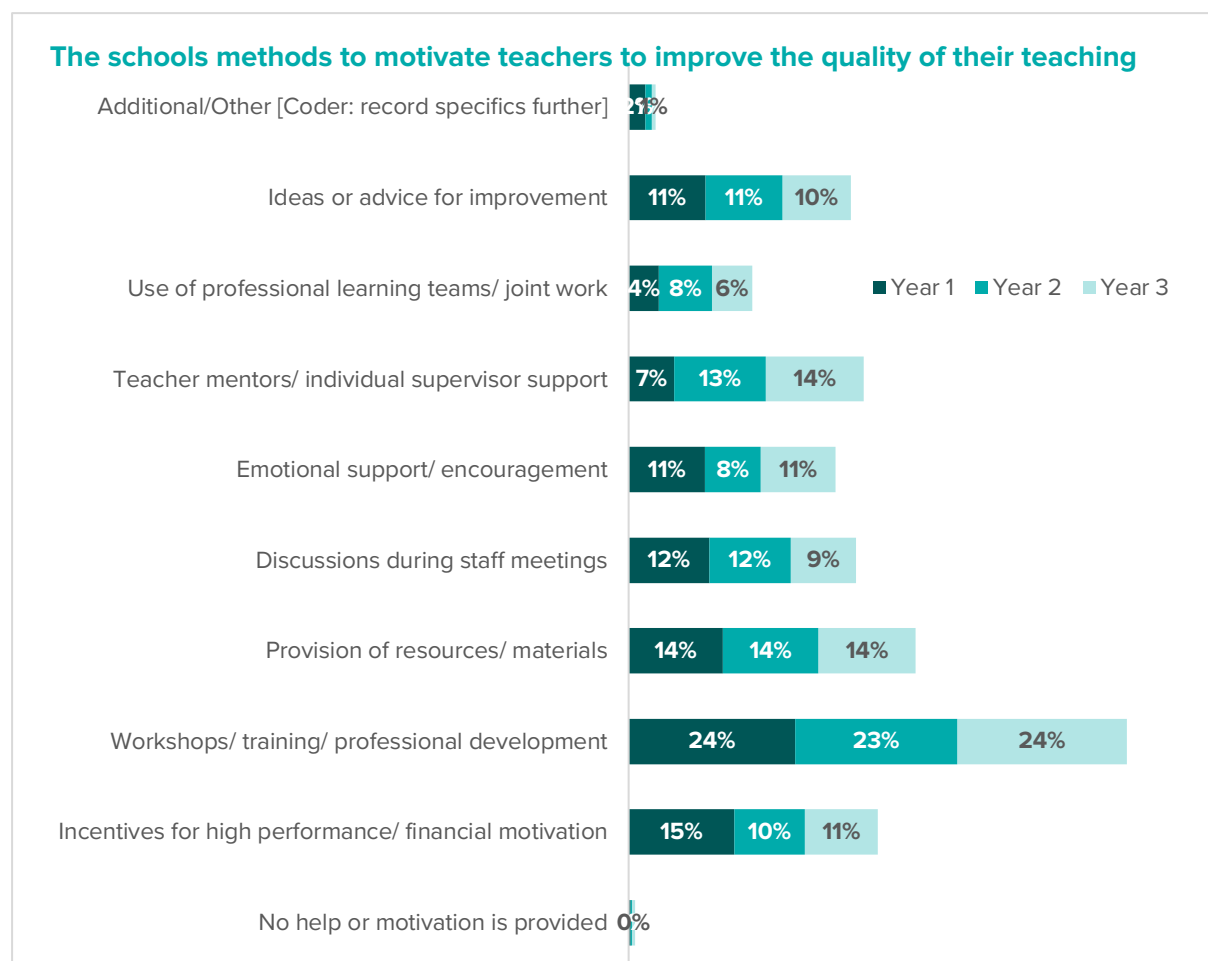
Teachers observed delivering their lessons in a classroom for Year 3



Teachers appear to be receiving a wider range of structured feedback from school leaders, including feedback on materials, classroom or behaviour management, teaching methods and lesson plans.

Schools also continue to prioritize teacher motivation through a variety of ways. One of the most notable changes is the increase in teacher mentors or individual supervisor support, rising from 6.6% in Year 1 to 14.2% in Year 3. This suggests more hands-on support for teacher growth.

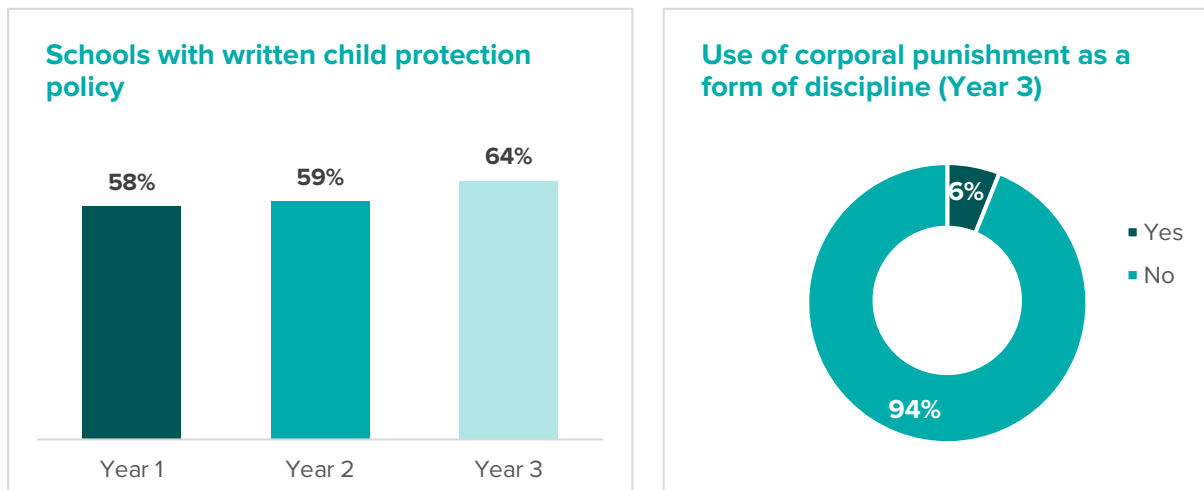
Furthermore, the proportion of schools providing staff with professional development support grew from 87.9% in Year 1 to 94.3% in Year 2 and then declined to 90.1% in Year 3. In response, the program will continue to emphasize the importance of professional development even when school leaders have limited time and focus on strategies for how to delegate responsibilities for teacher development to other staff members.



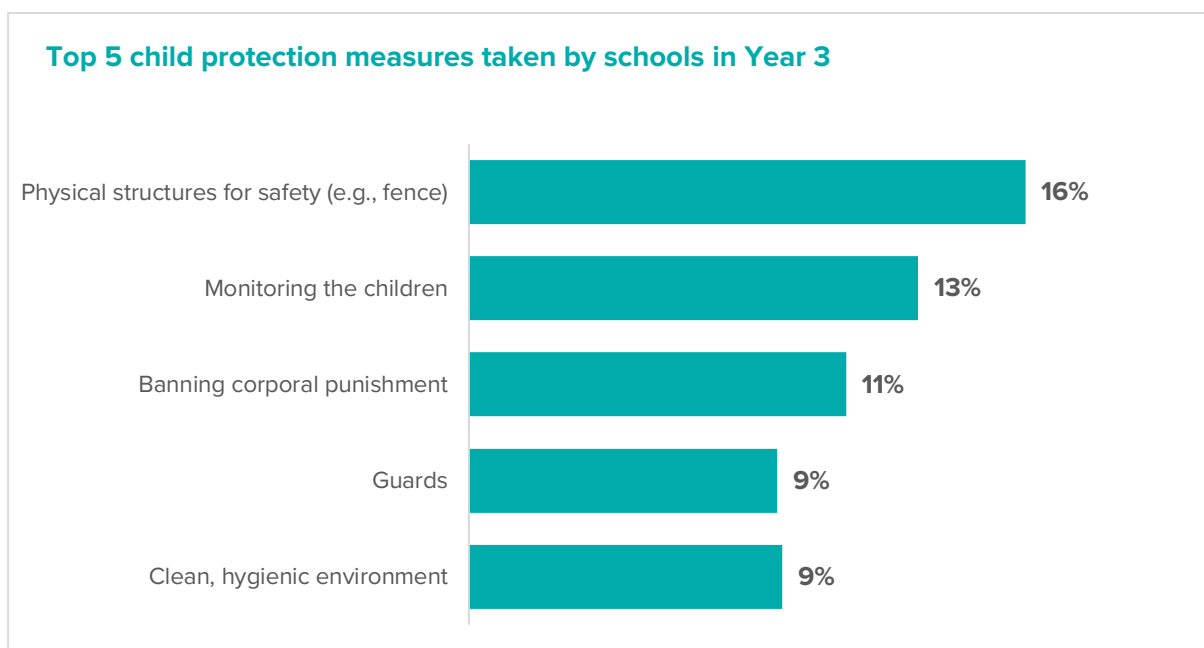
Key Finding #6: Over 64% of schools report having a written child protection policy or safety protocol in Year 3 compared to 58% of the schools in Year 1.

Overall, there has been evidence that schools are becoming more child-focused through stronger safeguarding systems and more practical inclusive support. Safeguarding improvement is demonstrated through system strengthening, while inclusion appears to be improving more through day-to-day practice than through formal policy.

There has been growth in the number of schools who have written child protection policies in Year 3 compared to when schools started the EdQ program. Over 64% of schools reported having a written child protection policy or safety protocol in Year 3, compared to 58% in Year 1. At the same time, the proportion of schools reporting that leaders or teachers **use physical or corporal punishment as a form of discipline** fell from **10% in Year 1 to 6% in Year 3**. This suggests that schools may be moving toward safer and less punitive approaches.



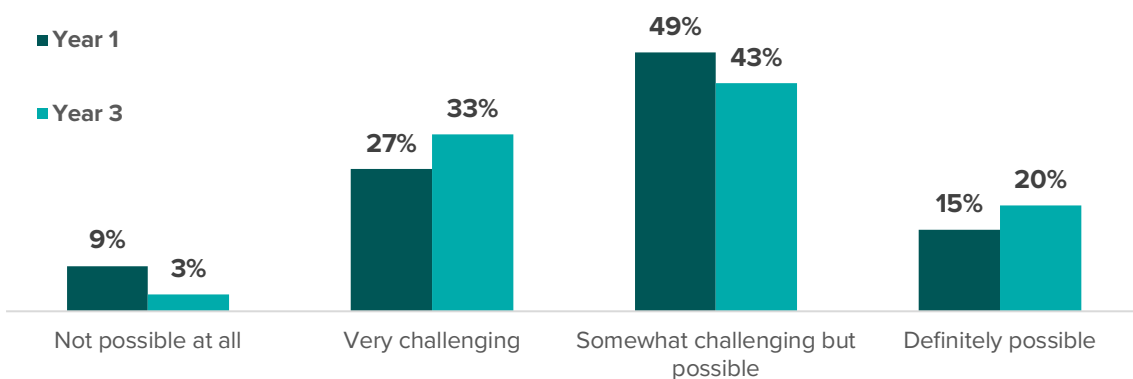
The responses on child protection measures also suggest stronger safeguarding awareness in practice. Across the years, schools frequently reported taking child protection measures including physical structures for safety, monitoring children, and banning corporal punishment. Some of these measures increased over time, especially physical safety structures and hygiene-related measures. Despite only 6% of schools reporting they use corporal punishment (above), 11% reported they had banned corporal punishment as an action taken, indicating that the percentage reporting they used corporal punishment may be underreported.



Key Finding #7: Inclusion systems are strengthening, with school leaders reporting that their school has a written inclusion policy increasing from 25% to 33%, showing growing formalisation of inclusive practices.

Leaders' commitment to inclusion appears strong in principle. **71.4% of the school leaders describe including children with special needs in their schools to be very important in Year 3.** Despite 20% of schools reporting that they can include SEND children in Year 3, the majority find it challenging to accommodate SEND children in their schools.

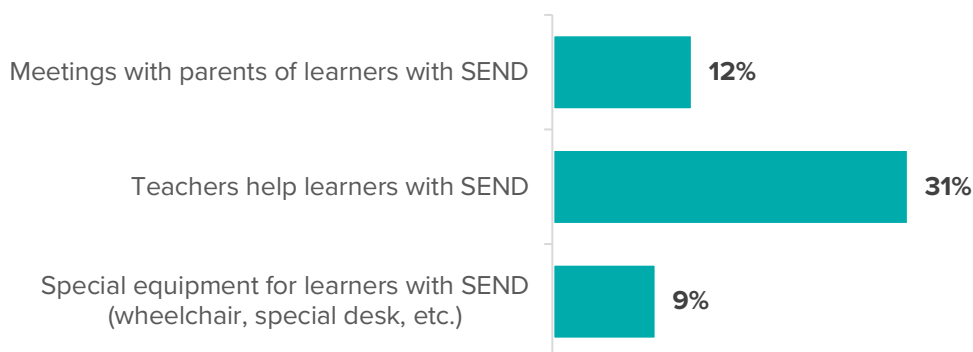
Perceived Challenges in Including Learners with SEND (Year 1 vs Year 3)



Formal inclusion systems, however, remain weaker than safeguarding systems. The proportion of schools with a **written inclusive education policy** increased from **25.3% in Year 1 to 32.7% in Year 3**. This is clear progress, but it still means that by Year 3 only around one-third of schools report a formal policy.

The practical support provided by schools to help learners with special needs or disabilities is strong even if policy adoption remains slower. The number of schools reporting **nothing** in place to support learners with special needs or disabilities fell from **27% in Year 1 to 20% in Year 3**.

Top 3 actions schools do to support SEND learners

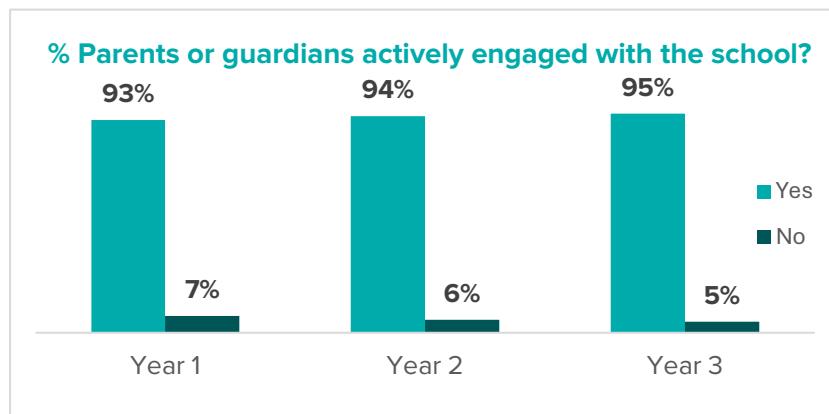


Key Finding #8: While parent engagement remains strong, there is room to strengthen formal PTA structures, with the proportion of schools reporting a PTA committee declining slightly from 79% in Year 1 to 76% in Year 3, despite continued engagement where PTAs exist.

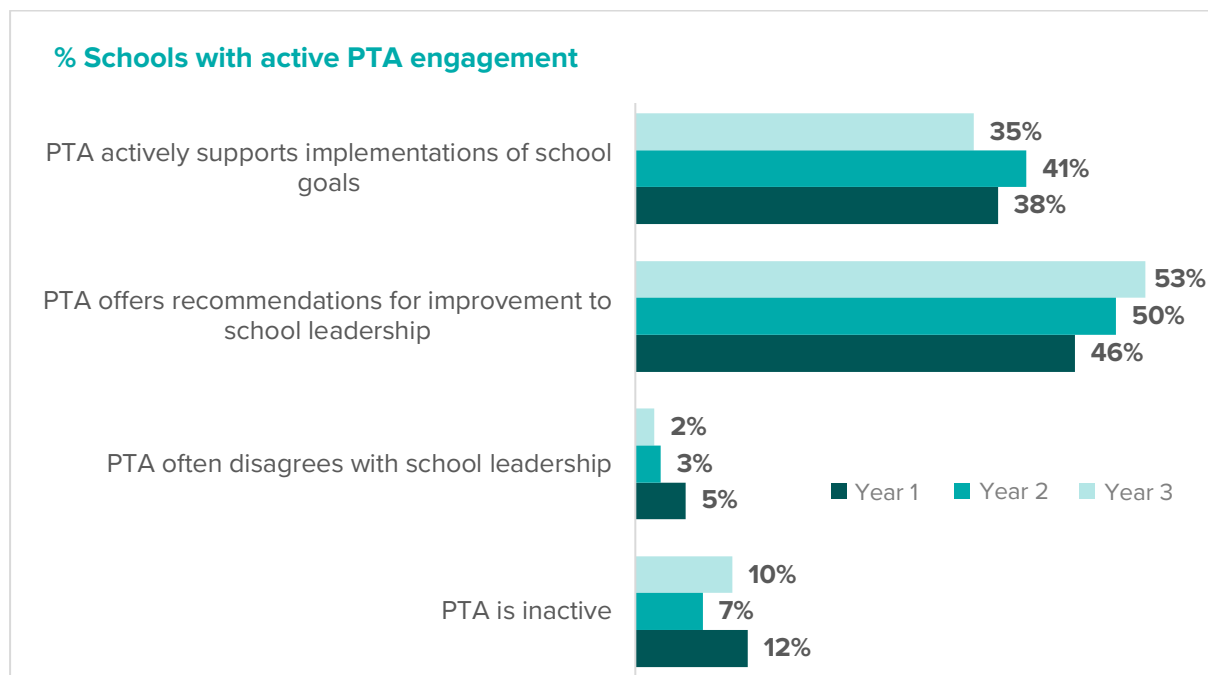
This is one of the strongest and most consistent areas in the analysis. Parent engagement is already high in Year 1 and remains high across all three years.

The proportion of schools reporting a high level of parent and guardian engagement remains high across the 3 years. This suggests that schools are maintaining and even increasing strong parent engagement over time.

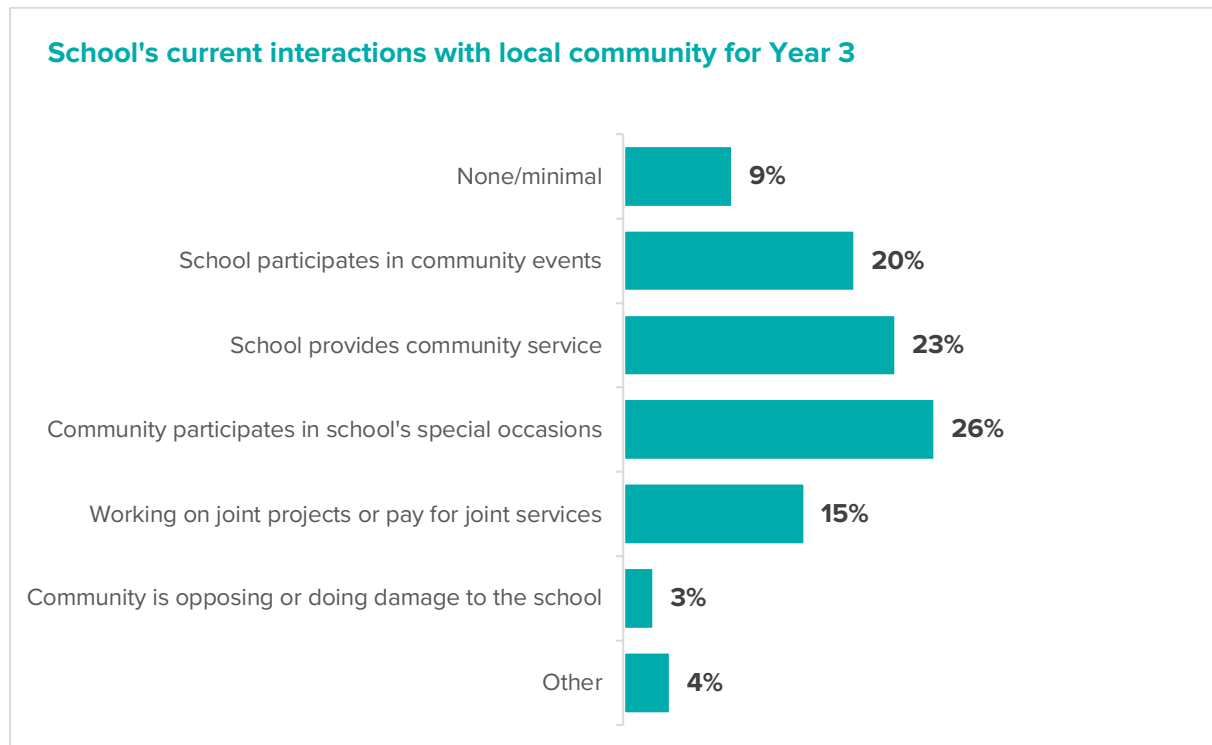
Formal PTA structures are slightly more mixed. The proportion of schools with a PTA committee was 79.1% in Year 1, 77.7% in Year 2, and 75.7% in Year 3. While this suggests a slight decline in formal PTA presence, the nature of PTA engagement remains constructive. Schools describing the PTA as offering recommendations for improvement to school leadership increased from 45.6% in Year 1 to 52.9% in Year 3. This suggests that even where formal committee presence is not growing, the PTA may still be playing an advisory role.



The slight decline in formal PTA presence could be because formal PTA committees may be less encouraged or supported by school leaders due to perceived costs or administrative effort associated with maintaining them.



Community engagement also appears to be becoming more practical. The proportion of schools reporting that the school and community work on joint projects or pay for joint services together increased from 8.5% in Year 1 to 15.3% in Year 3. At the same time, collaboration with other schools remains very high across the period, at 89.6% in Year 1, 92.9% in Year 2, and 90.6% in Year 3.



Key Finding #9: Based on a 100-point composite scoring of the school leadership survey tool, 62% of schools improved their scores between Year 1 and Year 3 of the program.

In order to quantitatively assess concrete improvements in school leadership skills, Opportunity International Edufinance developed a 100-point scoring index that analyses 21 survey questions and assigns a point value based on the response. The index captures key leadership practices across domains such as behaviour management, community engagement, child protection, staff development, governance, financial management, and teaching and learning. Each question is scored on a defined scale, with higher scores awarded for the presence, quality, and frequency of strong leadership knowledge and practice. For example, schools receive more points for having written documents (such as behaviour management and child protection policies, mission statements, or annual budgets).

Similarly, higher scores are awarded for responses that demonstrate greater depth of knowledge or practice. For example, more points are awarded if the respondent can name more examples of effective school governance, if more child protection measures are in place, or staff meetings are more frequent.

% Schools improved between the program years



Overall, **62% of schools improved their composite scores between Year 1 and Year 3**, indicating that the majority of schools strengthened their leadership practices over the program period. At the same time, a significant proportion of schools did not show measurable improvement in their scores. This does not necessarily mean that no progress occurred. As school leaders progress through the program, their understanding of what constitutes strong practice may deepen, which can lead to more critical self-assessment in later years. This suggests that the observed level of improvement may be **underestimated**, as schools become more aware of expectations and standards over time. Overall, the results indicate meaningful progress across the program, while also highlighting that changes in leadership behaviour and systems are not uniform and may take longer to be reflected consistently across all schools.

Conclusion

Across the three-year journey, the strongest signs of progress are seen in teaching quality support, safeguarding and behaviour systems, financial management, practical inclusion support, and parent and community engagement. These areas reflect improvements where schools have been able to adopt clear routines, systems, and leadership practices. At the same time, progress remains uneven across other areas as schools are still in need of support to strengthen long-term planning, sustainability and decision making. More broadly, areas continue to require deeper organisational change such as HR systems, governance, and formal inclusion policies.

Methodology

- **Purpose:** This analysis examines how schools evolve over time through the Education Quality program, focusing on changes in leadership behaviour, school systems, and learning environments.
- **Sampling:** The analysis follows a panel of 460 schools from Year 1 to Year 3, enabling direct comparison of changes within the same schools over time.
- **Data Collection:** Data was collected using the **School Leader Survey**, administered to school leaders across multiple countries (including Ghana, Uganda, Nigeria, DRC, Tanzania, Zambia, and the Dominican Republic) between 2020 and 2024. The survey

combines quantitative and perception-based questions on school practices and systems.

- **Data Limitations:** The sample reduces over time due to challenges in revisiting the same schools. Revisiting rates vary by country (notably in Kenya and Ghana)

