

THE SESS REPORT



Is Our Senior School System Unjust by Design?

Facts and figures for just education transformation in Kenya and beyond!

3rd Senior School Survey Report | 2026



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Foreword



As we count down the last four years to 2030, it is time to reflect—look at the hard facts and ask ourselves the hard questions. Only absolute honesty with ourselves will save us and the world from hurtling down the slippery slope of building humanity's future on unjust foundations!

Over 32 years ago, equity and inclusion became part of the global agenda, seeking to transform systems—particularly education systems that were designed for a few but expected to serve all. Much has happened since then. The Education for All agenda, followed by the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, was designed to concretise this ambition and provide a framework for its effective pursuit by countries across the world. The SDG agenda, in particular, was meticulously designed, complete with timelines, regional and national commitments, and peer-review mechanisms to strengthen accountability for its implementation.

Years have passed, but significant work remains ahead of us. Some argue that the world was too ambitious when it set the targets for 2030. In Kenya, a similar conversation is emerging around whether the targets set under the country's own Vision 2030 were overly ambitious. These debates notwithstanding, the reality facing our world today is starker than ever before. People, especially young people, are increasingly conscious of the systems that shape our world. They understand how these systems work and recognise the almost invisible forces embedded in our ways of life that predetermine the destinies of many people, irrespective of their own efforts.

As Kenya approaches 2030, the commitment to equity and inclusion in education demands renewed attention to the realities facing learners, teachers, parents and schools. More than three decades after equity and inclusion became central to the global education agenda, significant inequalities persist. The question before us is therefore not simply whether we have expanded access to education, but whether the education systems we have built provide every learner with a fair opportunity to participate, learn, and succeed.

The 2026 Senior School Survey report comes at a particularly important moment in Kenya's education journey. It is the third Senior School Survey undertaken by Usawa Agenda and the first published after the first cohort of Competency-Based Education (CBE) learners joined Senior School. The report therefore provides timely evidence on the preparedness and capacity of senior schools to support this transition and on the conditions under which learners are expected to pursue their education.

The findings are both instructive and concerning. The survey reveals persistent inequalities across school categories, with Cluster One schools generally better resourced than Cluster Four and special schools. These differences are evident in learning infrastructure, laboratories, libraries, ICT resources, staffing, safety measures, health services, and learner support. The continued concentration of resources in better-resourced schools raises important questions about whether the re-categorisation of schools has sufficiently addressed the structural inequalities that have long characterised Kenya's education system.

The survey also brings into sharp focus the barriers that continue to keep learners from fully participating in education. Inability to pay school fees is reported as the leading reason for learner absenteeism, while the cost of school uniforms remains a significant financial burden for many families. For learners with special needs, the challenges are even more pronounced, including shortages of specialised personnel, inadequate government funding, high costs of learning materials, and limited numbers of teachers trained in Special Needs Education.

These findings remind us that educational inequality is not merely a question of examination results. It is embedded in the conditions under which learners enter school, the resources available to them, the

support they receive, and the opportunities they have to develop their abilities. The evidence presented in this report therefore invites us to look beyond individual learner effort and interrogate the structures and systems that shape educational outcomes.

The report also demonstrates that expanding access alone will not be sufficient to achieve education justice. Kenya must address the unequal distribution of resources and strengthen the capacity of schools that serve the largest numbers of learners and those facing the greatest disadvantages. This requires deliberate investment in infrastructure, teachers, ICT, health and safety, psychosocial support, and other essential services.

The evidence generated by the 2026 Senior School Survey provides an important basis for this conversation. It should inform policy, planning, resource allocation, and accountability at national, county, community, and school levels. Most importantly, it should prompt us to ask whether the systems we are building are capable of delivering the promise of a just education for every child.

As we count down to 2030, we cannot afford to ignore the evidence or postpone the difficult decisions required to address persistent inequalities. The future of education—and the future of the children who depend on it—requires honest reflection, just systems, and decisive action.

I commend the Usawa Agenda team, the research assistants, school principals, government institutions, partners, and all others who contributed to the production of this report. I hope that its findings will stimulate constructive debate and, more importantly, accelerate the systemic changes necessary to build a just education system in which every learner can thrive.



Emmanuel Manyasa, PhD

Executive Director, Usawa Agenda

Acknowledgement



The completion of this report brings to fruition the dedicated efforts of a wide range of people—founders, board members, development partners, staff, volunteers, consultants, and government and non-government partners. We acknowledge everyone who offered their time, expertise, and resources to support the successful implementation of the 2025 Senior School Survey (SESS) in Kenya. Our sincere apologies in advance to those whom we may not be able to mention by name. Your respective contributions are highly valued. The following individuals and groups, however, stand out for their diverse and invaluable contributions to the 2025 survey:

- **The Usawa Agenda Founders**, Dr. Martin Ogola and Dr. Everline Wanzala—thank you for your steadfast vision and stewardship.
- **The Usawa Agenda Board Members**: Dr. Henry Kilonzo (Chairman), Prof. Gituro Wainaina, Mr. Naman Owuor, Ms. Florence Syevuo, Dr. Wilson Wasike, Mrs. Esther Wairimu, and Ms. Ashina Mtsumi—your commitment, guidance, and sacrifice are truly extraordinary.
- **The Usawa Agenda Secretariat**: Emmanuel

Manyasa, Zachary Kwena, Celina Mutie, Stephene Maende, Lucky Nzioki, Carol Onsomu, Robin Toskin, Claudia Lagat, Boaz Ochi, Cycus Barasa, Brenda Onyango, Esther Gad, David Lutta, Catherine Peter, Faith Atieno, Wilson Shiroya, Habil Ondiek, Edwin Kibet, Fred Ogachi, Vivian Akinyi, and Whitney Abonyo—keep going!

- **The Usawa Agenda Consultants**: Peter Courtney, James Ciera, William Odidi, and John Macharia—thank you for your invaluable expertise and support.
- **The 68 research assistants** who sacrificed their time and comfort to travel to every corner of the country to ensure that we reached all the selected schools—we deeply appreciate your dedication and commitment.
- **The 1,194 school principals** who welcomed us into their schools to conduct the surveys—we cannot thank you enough for your sacrifice, cooperation, and support for this work.
- **We sincerely thank the leadership of the Ministry of Education**, led by the Principal Secretary for the State Department for Basic Education, the Directorates of Secondary

Education and Quality Assurance and Standards, as well as the County Directors of Education, for their continued support of Usawa Agenda research activities.

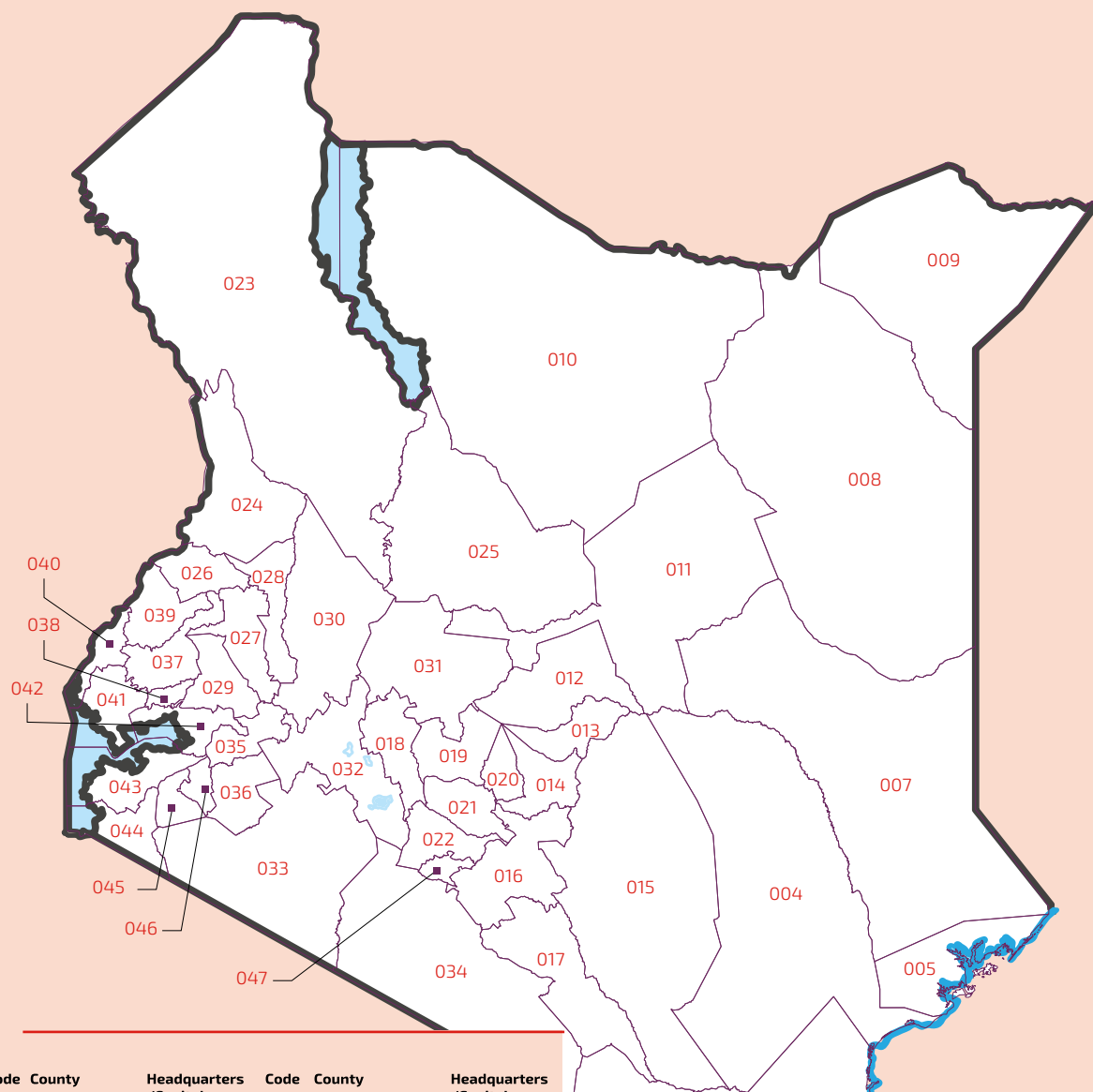
- **We thank National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI)** for its support in ensuring the timely authorisation of the survey.
- To **the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) team**, led by James Ng'ang'a and Benjamin Avusevwa, thank you for your invaluable support in sampling the schools and setting up CSPro, which we deployed for data collection.
- **We thank the 47 County Commissioners**, at whose offices we made our first stops in each

county. In some cases, their support, including assistance with security arrangements, was essential for us to proceed with the survey. You all came through for us.

- **We thank the leadership of the Kenya Secondary School Heads Association (KESSHA), and the Teachers Service Commission (TSC)** for their role in supporting the production and sharing of this evidence.

To all those whose names we could not list here, please accept our heartfelt gratitude and know that we could not have done this without you. We are inspired by all those who steadfastly work to secure the future of our children and our country through education—a future that can only be built upon the foundation of a just education, for which we continue to strive.

Map of Kenya



Code	County	Headquarters /Capital	Code	County	Headquarters /Capital
001	Mombasa	Mombasa	025	Samburu	Maralal
002	Kwale	Kwale	026	Trans-Nzoia	Kitale
003	Kilifi	Kilifi	027	Uasin Gishu	Eldoret
004	Tana River	Hola	028	Elgeyo-Marakwet	Iten
005	Lamu	Lamu	029	Nandi	Kapsabet
006	Taita-Taveta	Mwatate	030	Baringo	Kabarnet
007	Garissa	Garissa	031	Laikipia	Rumuruti
008	Wajir	Wajir	032	Nakuru	Nakuru
009	Mandera	Mandera	033	Narok	Narok
010	Marsabit	Marsabit	034	Kajiado	Kajiado
011	Isiolo	Isiolo	035	Kericho	Kericho
012	Meru	Meru	036	Bomet	Bomet
013	Tharaka-Nithi	Kathwana	037	Kakamega	Kakamega
014	Embu	Embu	038	Vihiga	Mbale
015	Kitui	Kitui	039	Bungoma	Bungoma
016	Machakos	Machakos	040	Busia	Busia
017	Makueni	Wote	041	Siaya	Siaya
018	Nyandarua	Ol Kalou	042	Kisumu	Kisumu
019	Nyeri	Nyeri	043	Homa Bay	Homa Bay
020	Kirinyaga	Kerugoya	044	Migori	Migori
021	Murang'a	Murang'a	045	Kisii	Kisii
022	Kiambu	Kiambu	046	Nyamira	Nyamira
023	Turkana	Lodwar	047	Nairobi	Nairobi
024	West Pokot	Kapenguria			

Introduction



This is **Usawa Agenda’s third Senior School Survey (SESS) report** for Kenya. It is motivated by the desire to shine a spotlight on this under-researched yet crucial sub-sector of Kenya’s education system. The timing of this report makes it a crucial reference point in the sector—it is the first report published after the first cohort of CBE learners joined Senior School. Its findings, therefore, shed light on the capacity gaps requiring urgent action to fill so this penultimate segment of the pioneer cohort of CBE learners’ education sets them up for success post-school.

This report builds on the evidence generated and shared in the previous two SESS reports, published in 2022 and 2024. Both reports noted that the grades learners obtain in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations are not entirely dependent on their ability and effort; rather, they are influenced by numerous school-level factors. Yet learners bear the full responsibility for the grades they obtain. Like the previous report, this report also presents findings from private and special schools. This evidence is generated from a nationally representative sample of senior schools.

In consonance with the organisation’s strategic focus, the report confronts the salient issues in the Senior School sub-sector with renewed boldness. Coming shortly after the re-categorisation of secondary schools and their renaming as senior schools, the report reframes the title of the second SESS report, which asked the question, **“Is our secondary school system unjust by design?”**, as a new question: **“Is our Senior School system unjust by design?”** In doing so, the report sharpens the lens through which the data generated are viewed, the questions asked of the evidence, and the stakeholders invited to engage with the findings.

Drawing on a nationally representative sample, this report provides deeper insights into the drivers of learning and academic performance across Kenya’s diverse senior schools, with a clear focus on the underlying structures that sustain enduring inequities. The report takes note of the recategorisation of schools from national, extra-county, county, and sub-county schools to Cluster One, Cluster Two, Cluster Three, and Cluster Four, respectively. It underscores the fact that this recategorisation has not altered the hitherto skewed resource allocation in favour of Cluster One schools. Cluster Four schools, which

constitute most of the schools and educate the majority of learners, continue to lag behind in resource allocation and, consequently, in performance in national examinations.

The report also takes note of the country's continued pursuit of policy, legal, and institutional reforms aimed at fulfilling the constitutional requirement to provide free and compulsory basic education, and meeting its global obligations with respect to education. Additionally, the report contributes further evidence to the ongoing debate, reforms, and planning for the effective and successful implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE), particularly as the second cohort of learners prepare to transition from Junior School to Senior School at the end of the year. It shines a spotlight on the preparedness of senior schools to implement CBE following the less-than-seamless transition of the first cohort of CBE learners and highlights the pain points associated with the placement of learners.

As with the previous SESS reports, this report presents evidence about the Kenyan education system that should contribute to the global agenda to address systemic education injustices that make global promises to the majority of the world's children ring hollow. The fact that education has always been the last beacon of hope for most children

from disadvantaged backgrounds should compel all stakeholders to confront these challenges and seek solutions. This report hopes to contribute data that can inform critical systemic changes towards education justice, under which all children can thrive.

Failure to use the data from this and other reports to advance education justice now is neither strategic nor safe. Progress requires dispassionate engagement with the facts, which we hope this report will elicit.

a) The brief on the survey

To achieve this, the study employed stratified random sampling to obtain a nationally representative sample of 1,344 secondary schools. Stratification was conducted at three levels: county, gender, and school category. Six categories of schools were included in the sample: Cluster One, Cluster Two, Cluster Three, Cluster Four, private schools, and special schools. Within these categories, schools were further stratified into boy, girl, and mixed senior schools. Survey tools were developed, pre-tested, and piloted prior to the survey. The primary respondents were the principals of the selected schools. Data analysis involved weighting the observations to ensure that the findings accurately reflected the distribution and relative representation of schools in the national population.

KEY FACTS ON THE STATUS OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN KENYA



FACT ONE: Uniform costs remain a significant financial burden on parents and guardians — A complete set of school uniforms costs more than KES 5,000 in 4 out of 10 senior schools.



FACT THREE: A typical Cluster One school has almost seven times as many learners per class as a typical Cluster Four school.



FACT FOUR: Non-payment of school fees is the leading cause of learner absenteeism, hindering their regular participation in school and limiting their learning opportunities.



FACT TWO: Kenya's Senior School system unequal. Cluster One schools are better resourced, while Cluster Four and special schools remain heavily understaffed and under-equipped with critical learning infrastructure—science labs, computer labs, libraries, and sports facilities.



FACT FIVE: A child who attends a Cluster One senior school is more than eight times as likely to score a mean grade of C+ and above as one in a Cluster Four senior school.

Key Findings



a) School Characteristics

Table 1: Distribution of the surveyed schools by category

School Category	Frequency	Percentage
Cluster Four	446	37.4
Cluster Three	208	17.4
Cluster Two	146	12.2
Cluster One	98	8.2
Special Schools	33	2.8
Private	263	22.0
Total	1,194	100.0

- 1,194 schools were surveyed against the target of 1,344 representing 89% response rate.

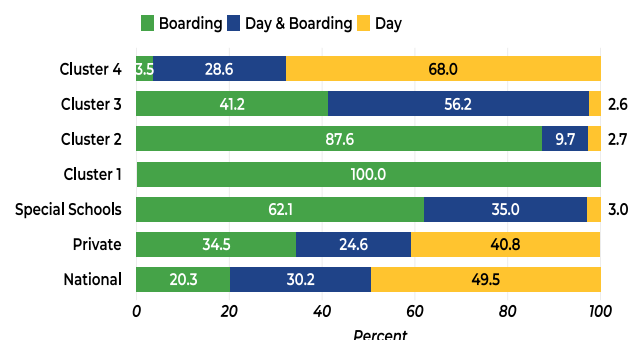


Figure 1: Distribution of schools by category and residency type

- 1 in 2 senior schools in Kenya are day schools.
- 7 in 10 Cluster Four senior schools are day.
- All Cluster One senior schools are boarding
- 3 in 100 special senior schools are day.

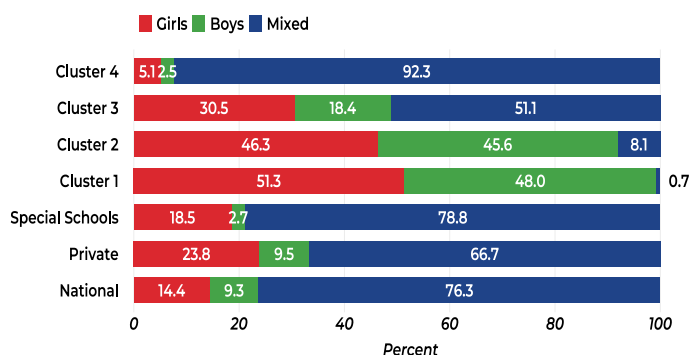


Figure 2: Distribution of senior schools by category and gender

- The surveyed schools were 9.3% boy; 14.4% girl; and 76.3% mixed gender.
- 9 in 10 Cluster Four schools are mixed.
- 8 in 10 special schools are mixed.
- 1 in 100 Cluster One schools are mixed.

Table 2: Average number of streams by school category and class

School Category	Class			Average
	Form 2	Form 3	Form 4	
Cluster Four	1.9	1.8	1.8	1.8
Cluster Three	2.8	2.7	2.6	2.7
Cluster Two	5.2	4.5	4.3	4.7
Cluster One	9.5	7.5	7.2	8.1
Special Schools	2.1	1.7	1.6	1.8
Private	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.4
Average	2.4	2.2	2.1	2.2

- Private schools are the smallest in size, with an average of 1 stream per class.

- Cluster One schools are on average more than four times the size of private schools, with 8 streams per class compared to 1 in private schools.
- Across all school categories, the average number of streams declines as one moves from Form 2 to Form 4.
- Nationally, the average number of streams per class is 2. The number of streams decreases consistently from Form 2 to Form 4.
- This variation may reflect a mix of changes in enrolment patterns and student dropout over the course of senior schooling.

Age bands shown in years

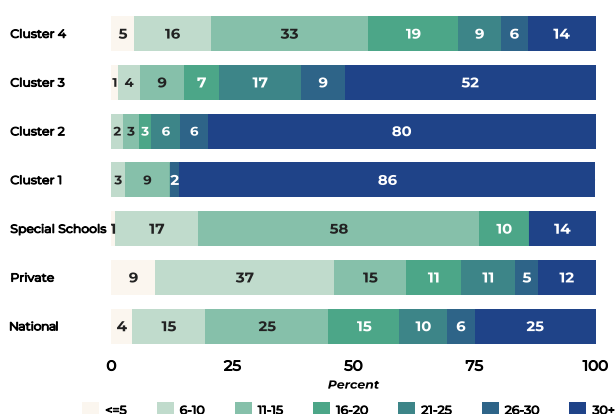


Figure 3: Distribution of schools by category and age

- 86 in 100 Cluster One schools have been in existence for more than 30 years, and none has existed for less than 5 years.
- 14 in 100 Cluster Four schools have existed for more than 30 years, with the majority of them, 53 in 100, having existed for a maximum of 15 years.
- 12 in 100 private schools have existed for more than 30 years, with the majority of them, 61 in 100, having existed for a maximum of 15 years.
- 14 in 100 special schools have existed for more than 30 years, while a great majority, 76 in 100, have existed for a maximum of 15 years.
- Overall, 1 in 4 senior schools have existed for more than 30 years; 6 in 100 for 26–30 years; 1 in 10 for 21–25 years; 15 in 100 for 16–20 years; 1 in 4 for 11–15 years; 15 in 100 for 6–10 years; and 4 in 100 for 5 years or less.
- Number of private senior schools has expanded significantly in the last 10 years, with 9.1% of them being 5 years or less, old.

NOTE: Inclusion in the sample was pegged on a school having presented candidates in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations for the year 2024, which cut out schools that were less than four years old.

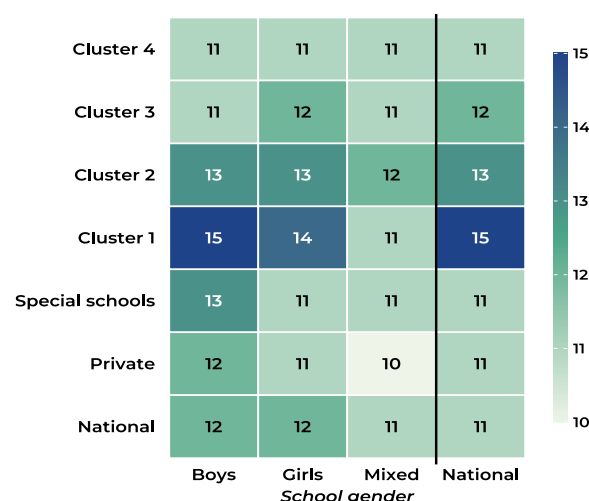


Figure 4: Number of subjects examined at KCSE varies by school category and gender

- Generally, boy senior schools offer more examinable subjects than girl senior schools across the different school categories except Cluster Three.
- Cluster One schools offer the highest number of subjects, averaging 15 subjects, compared to 13 by Cluster Two schools, and 12 by Cluster Three and 11 by Cluster Four schools.
- Mixed senior schools offer fewer subjects across most school categories, particularly among private schools where the average is 10 subjects compared to 12 and 11 offered by boy and girl private schools respectively.
- Schools offering more subjects provide learners with a wider range of academic and career pathways, highlighting disparities in opportunities across school type and gender categories.

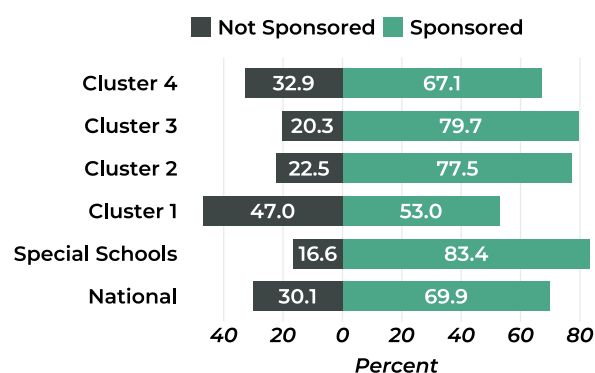


Figure 5: Distribution of schools by category and sponsorship status

- On average, 7 in 10 senior schools in Kenya are sponsored.
- 8 in 10 special senior schools in Kenya are sponsored.

- 53 in 100 Cluster One senior schools in Kenya are sponsored.
- 67 in 100 Cluster Four senior schools in Kenya are sponsored.

b) Special Needs Education Issues

Table 3: Most mentioned challenges facing schools in the delivery of quality education to SNE learners.

Challenges facing special schools	Percent
Lack of specialised personnel to support the unique needs of the learners	61.0
High cost of learning materials	48.5
Inadequate funding from the government	44.3
Inadequate infrastructure	40.0
Parents are reluctant to contribute adequately to meet the full cost	32.6
Lack of assessment at the foundational level	26.2
Low ICT integration in teaching and learning	19.5
Other	13.9

- Lack of specialised personnel to support the unique needs of learners is the most mentioned challenge, cited by 61% of senior school principals.
- High cost of learning materials is the second most mentioned challenge, cited by 48.5% of senior school principals.
- Inadequate funding from the government is the third most mentioned challenge, cited by 44.3% of senior school principals.
- Inadequate infrastructure is also a major challenge, cited by 40% of senior school principals.

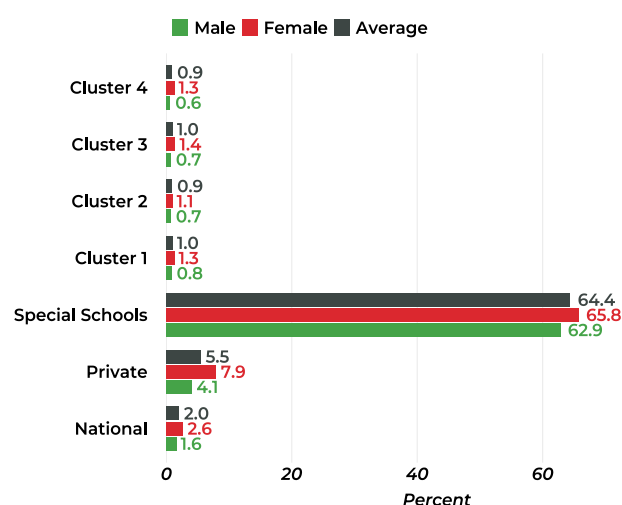


Figure 6: Teachers trained in Special Needs Education (SNE) by gender and school category

- 6 in 10 special school teachers are trained in SNE.

- 6 in 100 private school teachers are trained in SNE.
- Across Clusters 1 to 4, only 1 in 100 teachers are trained in SNE.
- Nationally, only 2 in 100 Senior School teachers are trained in SNE.

c) School and Class Attendance

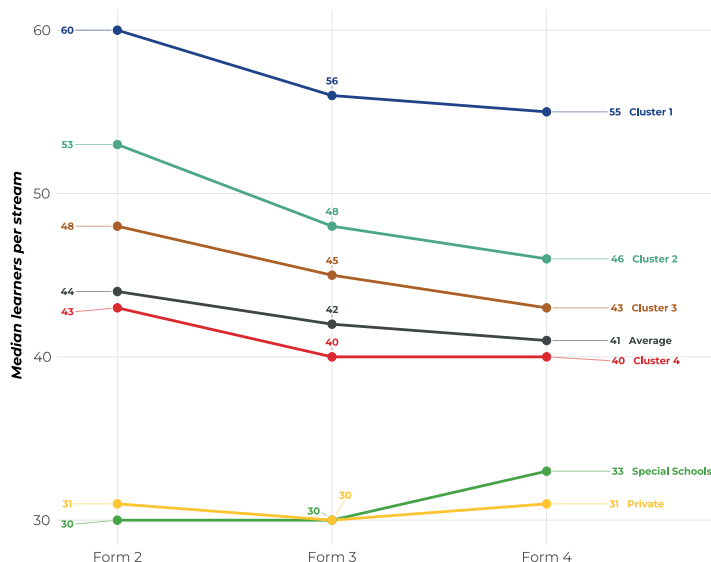


Figure 7: A typical Cluster One school has almost twice as many learners per stream as a typical private school

- A typical Cluster One school has 55, 56 and 60 learners per stream in Form 4, Form 3 and Form 2 respectively.
- A typical Cluster Four school has 40, 40 and 43 learners per stream in Form 4, Form 3 and Form 2 respectively.
- A typical Cluster Three school has 43, 45 and 48 learners per stream in Form 4, Form 3 and Form 2 respectively.
- A typical private school has 31, 30 and 31 learners per stream in Form 4, Form 3 and Form 2 respectively.
- A typical senior school in Kenya has 41, 42 and 44 learners per stream in Form 4, Form 3 and Form 2 respectively, suggesting possible changes in enrolment, dropout, or both.



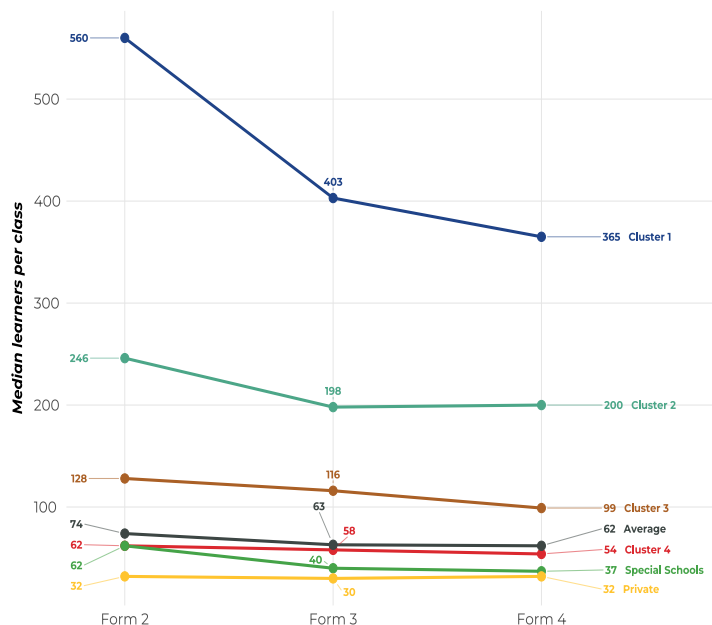


Figure 8: A typical Cluster One school has almost seven times as many learners per class as a typical Cluster Four school

- A typical Cluster One senior school has more than twice the number of learners per class in a typical Cluster Two school, more than three times the number of learners per class in a typical Cluster Three school and more than seven times the number of learners per class in a typical Cluster Four school.
- A typical private senior school has less than 10% of the learners per class in a typical Cluster One school.

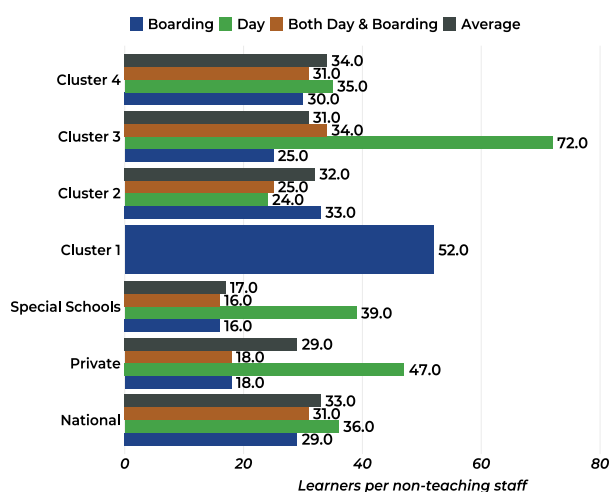


Figure 9: Number of learners per non-teaching staff member by residency type & category

- On average, day schools have more learners per non-teaching staff member, at 36:1, compared to boarding schools at 29:1.
- Overall, the ratio of learners to non-teaching staff in senior schools is 33:1.
- The ratio varies across school categories, with Cluster One schools having the highest ratio at 52:1, while special schools have the lowest at 17:1.

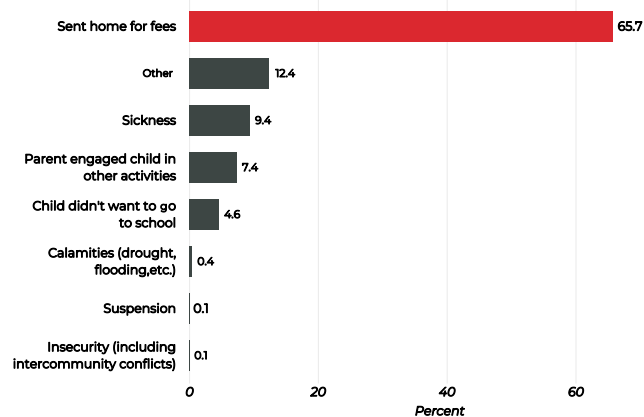


Figure 10: Most mentioned reasons for learner absenteeism

- The most frequently mentioned reason for learner absenteeism is being sent home for non-payment of fees.
- 7 in 10 principals report that being sent home for non-payment of fees is the main reason for learner absenteeism.
- 1 in 10 principals report sickness as the main reason for learner absenteeism.
- 7 in 100 principals report parents engaging children in other activities as the main reason for learner absenteeism.
- 5 in 100 principals report learner choice as the main reason for learner absenteeism.
- 1 in 100 principals attribute learner absenteeism to suspension, insecurity, or calamities.



Figure 11: Teacher absenteeism varies across school category

- Cluster One schools have the least teacher absenteeism rate, at 5.9%, followed by Cluster Two schools at 6.6%.
- Special schools have the highest teacher absenteeism rate, at 14.9%.
- The overall teacher absenteeism rate has reduced to 8.3% as compared to 13.2% in 2024.

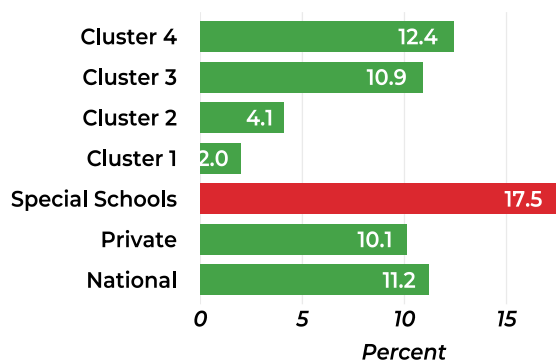


Figure 12: Lesson attendance by teachers varies by school category

- On average, 11.2% of lessons are unattended by teachers.
- Special schools have the highest unattended lessons, at 17.5%, followed by Cluster Four schools at 12.4%.
- Cluster One schools have the least unattended lessons, at 2%.

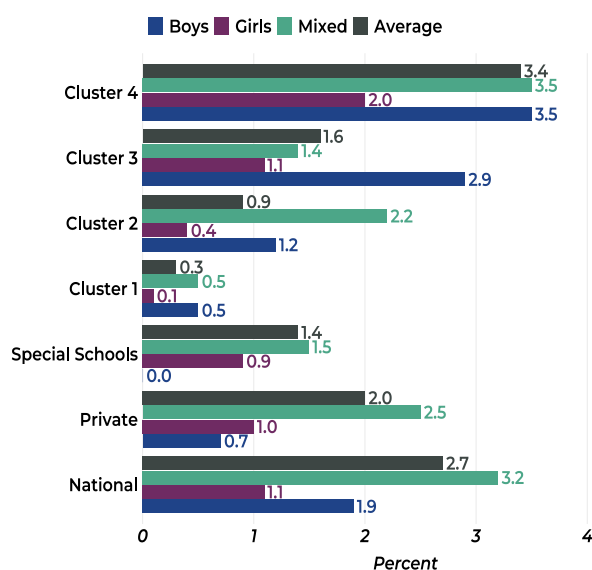


Figure 13: Estimated dropout rate by school category and gender

- 3 in 100 Senior School learners dropped out of school in the one year preceding this survey.
- Mixed schools have the highest dropout rate at 3.2%, followed by boy schools at 1.9% and girl schools at 1.1%.
- Cluster Four schools have the highest dropout rate by category, at 3.4%, while Cluster One have the least dropout rate, at 0.5%.
- Private schools have a dropout rate of 2%, while special schools have 1.4%.
- Across most school categories, dropout rates are higher in boy and mixed schools than in girl schools.

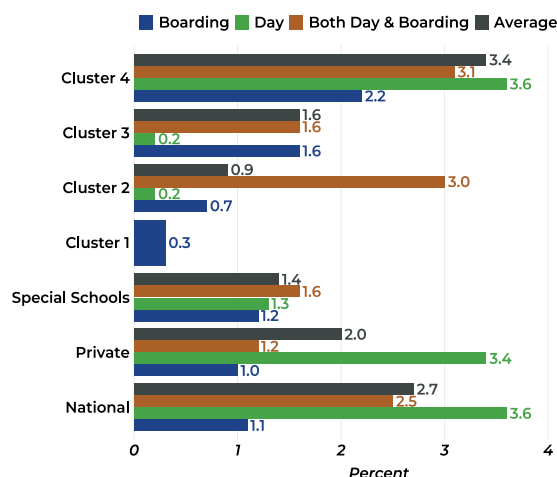


Figure 14: Estimated dropout rate by school category and boarding status

- A learner in a day school is more than three times as likely to drop out of school as their counterpart in a boarding school.
- A learner in a day and boarding school is more than twice as likely to drop out of school as their counterpart in a boarding school.
- Cluster One schools have the least dropout rate, at 0.3%.
- A learner in a Cluster Four school is more than 11 times as likely to drop out of school as their counterpart in a Cluster One school.

d) Teachers and School Leaders

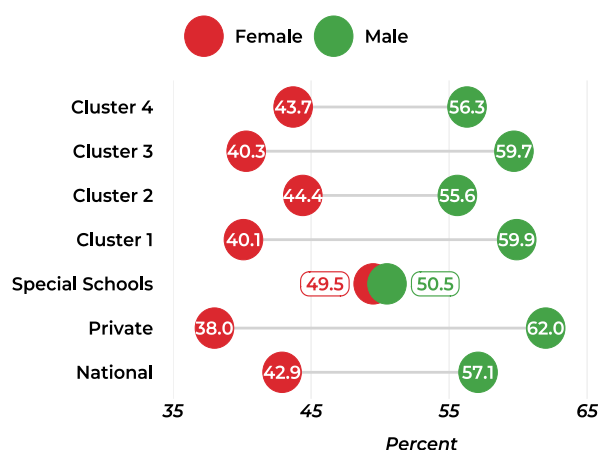


Figure 15: Distribution of teachers by gender and school category

- 57 in 100 Senior School teachers in Kenya are male, while 43 in 100 are female.
- Male teachers dominate all school categories.
- The widest gender gap in teacher distribution in favour of men is in private senior schools where 62 in 100 teachers are male.

- 60 in 100 teachers in Cluster One senior schools are male.
- The narrowest gender gap in teacher distribution in favour of men is in special senior schools where 1 in 2 teachers are female.

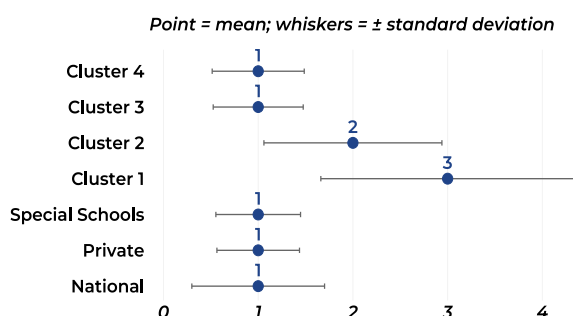


Figure 16: Number of teachers per examined subject by school category

- Cluster One schools have more than three times the number of teachers per examined subject in Cluster Four and 3 schools.
- Cluster One schools also have more than twice the national average of the number of teachers per examined subject.
- Cluster One schools are therefore more resilient to outward teacher transitions than the other categories of schools.
- Cluster Four and 3 schools are the most vulnerable to outward teacher transitions among all the categories of schools.

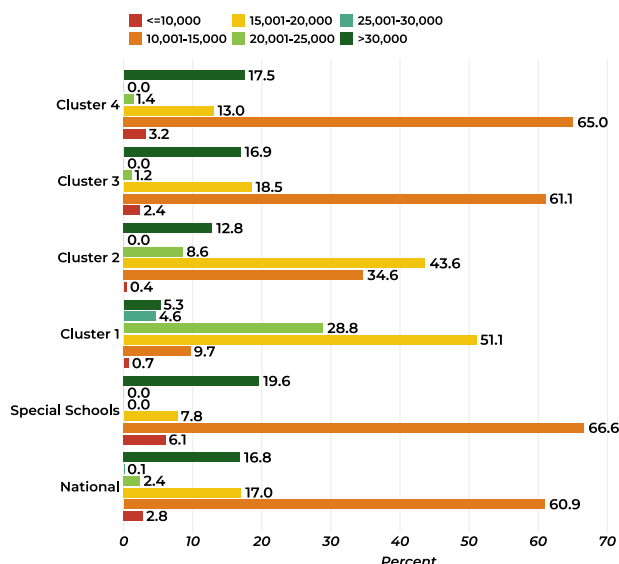


Figure 17: Distribution of BOM teachers by monthly pay and school category

- Majority of teachers employed by the school Boards of Management (BOM), 61 in 100 earn a monthly pay of between KES10,001 and KES15,000.

- 24 in 100 BOM teachers earn a monthly pay of more than KES20,000, with 16 in 100 of them earning above KES30,000 monthly.
- Cluster One schools pay teachers employed by their BOM better than other categories, with 4 in 10 of their teachers earning a monthly pay of at least KES20,000.
- Special schools pay teachers employed by their BOM the least, with the majority of their teachers (7 in 10) earning a maximum of KES15,000, 6 in 100 of whom earn less than KES10,000.

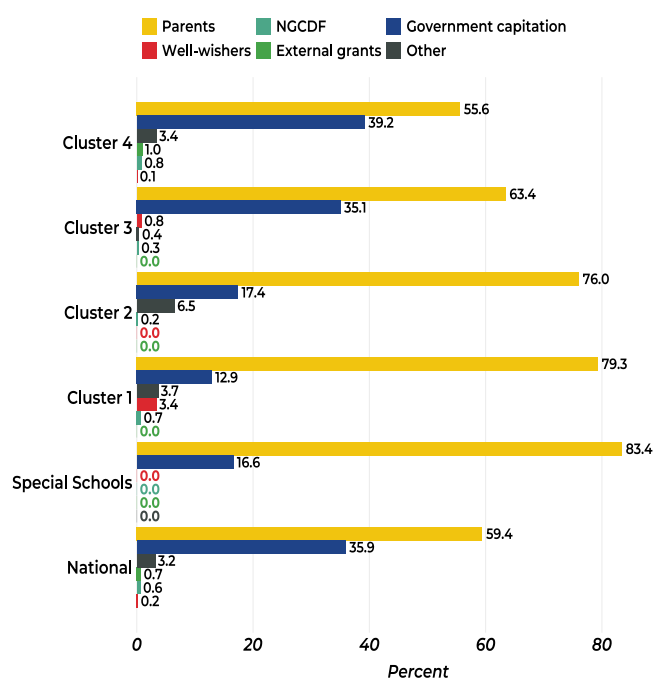


Figure 18: Sources of funds used to pay BOM teachers in public senior school by category

- Parents contribute 59.4% of the money used by schools to pay BOM teachers.
- Schools use government capitation to pay 35.9% of the money owed to BOM teachers.
NOTE: There is no vote in the capitation funds for this.
- 39.2% of Cluster Four schools and 12.9% of Cluster One schools use government capitation to pay BOM teachers.
- 79.3% of Cluster One schools and 55.6% of Cluster Four schools use parents' contributions to pay BOM teachers.

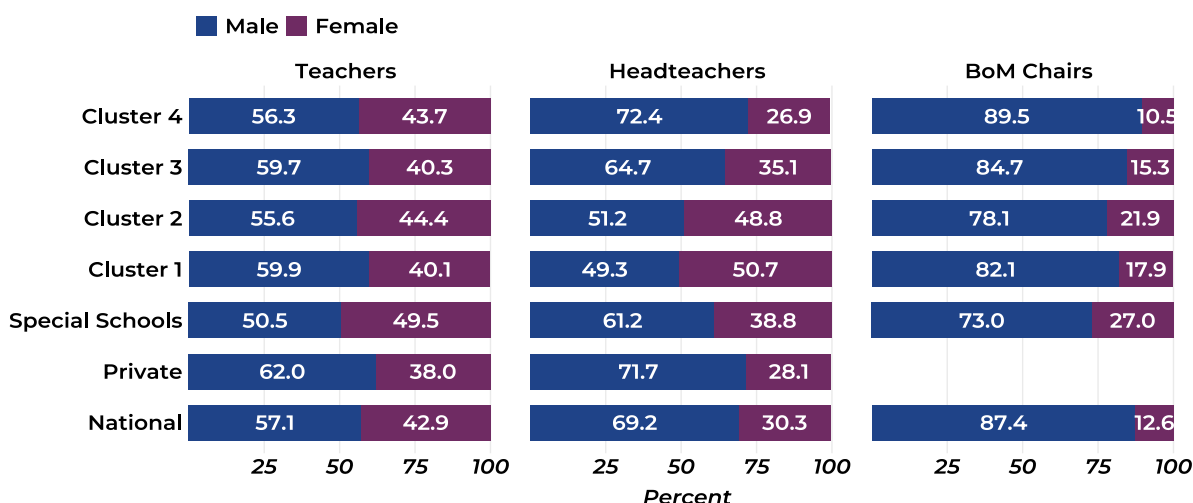


Figure 19: Distribution of teachers and school leaders by gender and school category

- Women are under-represented in Senior School leadership.
- While women are 42.9% of the teachers, they make up only 30.3% of the principals and 12.6% of the Boards of Management (BOM) Chairs.

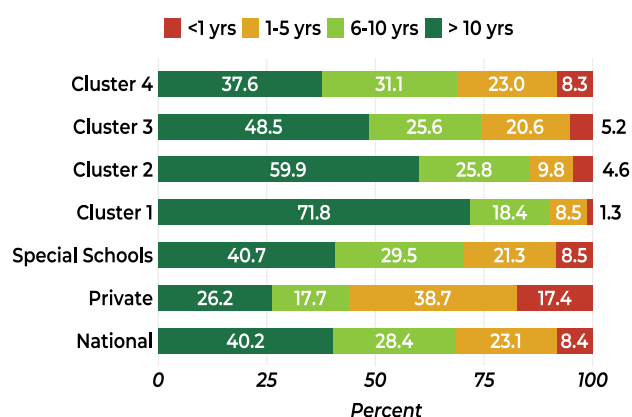


Figure 20: Distribution of school principals by years of experience and school category

- On average, 8 in 100 Senior School principals in Kenya have served for less than 1 year as principals.
- 23 in 100 Senior School principals in Kenya have served for 1 – 5 years as principals.
- 28 in 100 Senior School principals in Kenya have served for 6 – 10 years as principals.
- 40 in 100 Senior School principals in Kenya have served for more than 10 years as principals.
- The number of principals' years of experience increase progressively from Cluster Four to Cluster One schools.

- 72 in 100 Cluster One school principals have served for more than 10 years as principals with only 1 in 100 having served for less than a year as principals.
- Private schools have the least experienced principals with 26 in 100 of their principals having over 10 years of service as principals.

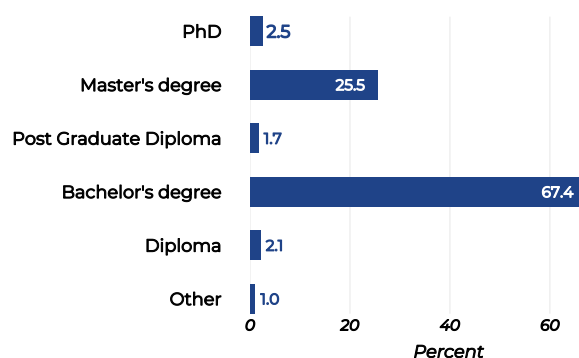


Figure 21: Distribution of school principals by highest level of qualifications achieved

- 67 in 100 principals hold a Bachelor's degree and 26 in 100 hold a Master's degree.
- 3 in 100 principals hold a PhD, 2 in 100 hold a Post Graduate Diploma, and 2 in 100 hold a Diploma.



e) School Facilities and Services to Learners

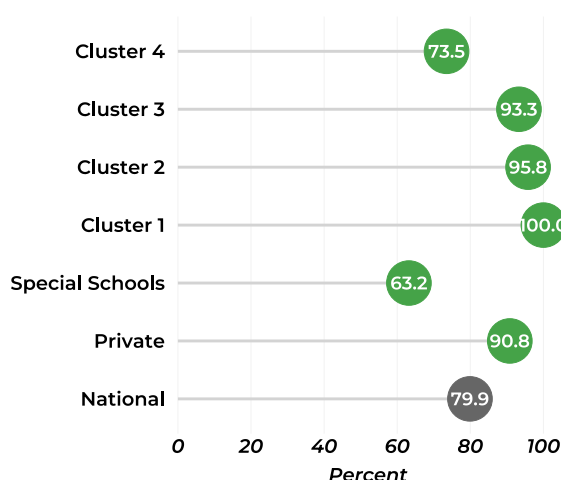


Figure 22: Schools with an administration building/block/space by category

- Nationally, 2 in 10 senior schools lack an administration block/space for teachers' use.
- All Cluster One schools have administration block/space for teachers' use.
- 27 in 100 Cluster Four schools lack an administration block/space for teachers' use.
- Special schools are the worst affected by lack of an administration block/space for teachers use, with only 6 in 10 of them having such space.

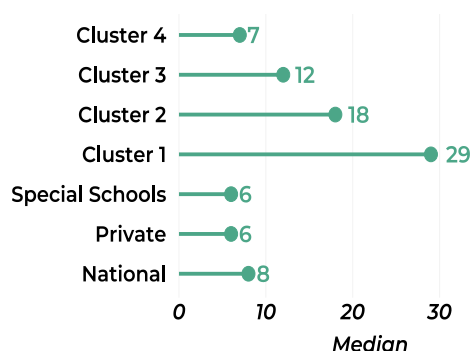


Figure 23: Usable classrooms in a typical Senior School by category

- A typical Senior School in Kenya has 8 usable classrooms.
- A typical Cluster One Senior School in Kenya has 29 usable classrooms.
- A typical Cluster Two Senior School in Kenya has 18 usable classrooms.
- A typical Cluster Three Senior School in Kenya has 12 usable classrooms.
- A typical Cluster Four Senior School in Kenya has 7 usable classrooms.

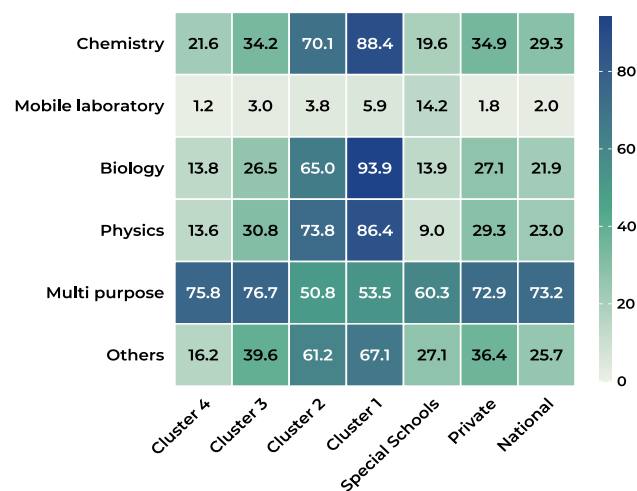


Figure 24: Laboratory ownership by Senior School category (Percent)

- Laboratory ownership varies significantly by type of laboratory and school category.
- On average, 29.3%, 21.1%, 23% and 73.2% of schools own chemistry, biology, physics and multipurpose laboratories, respectively.
- Cluster One schools are better equipped with the different types of laboratories than the other categories of schools.
- 88.4% of Cluster One schools, 19.6% of special schools, 34.9% of private schools and 21.6% of Cluster Four schools, own chemistry laboratories.
- Special schools are the least equipped with laboratories.



Table 4: Schools with an operational library by category

School Category	Operational Library	
	Library	Library Linked To Online Resources
Cluster Four	29.1	9.8
Cluster Three	47.5	12.3
Cluster Two	71.3	27.7
Cluster One	79.3	37.6
Special Schools	17.5	33.0
Private	54.1	34.9
Average	37.9	17.4

- Nationally, 38 in 100 Senior Schools own a library.
- 17 in 100 Senior Schools own libraries that are linked to online resources.
- 8 in 10 Cluster One schools own a library.
- 7 in 10 Cluster Two schools own a library.
- 3 in 10 Cluster Four schools own a library.
- 2 in 10 special schools own a library.

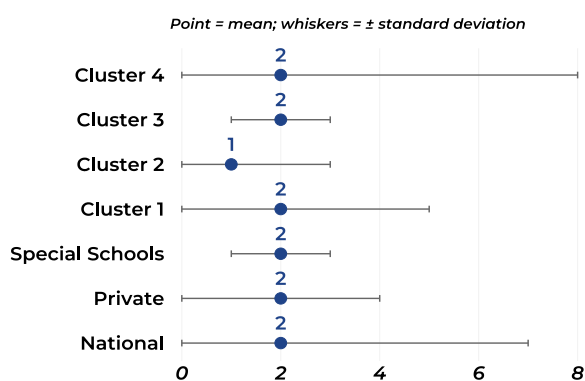


Figure 25: Number of learners sharing a textbook by school category

- Apart from Cluster Two schools, where the learner/textbook ratio is 1:1, all other senior schools have an average of 2 learners per a textbook.
- However, the variability as shown by the standard deviation indicates inequitable distribution of books within school categories.
- Cluster Three, special and private schools show even distribution of schools around the average of two learners per a book.
- Cluster Four schools show extreme differences within the category with most schools having more than two learners per a book.
- In Cluster Two schools, the ratio of textbooks to learners is 1:1



f) School Uniform and Scholarships/Bursaries

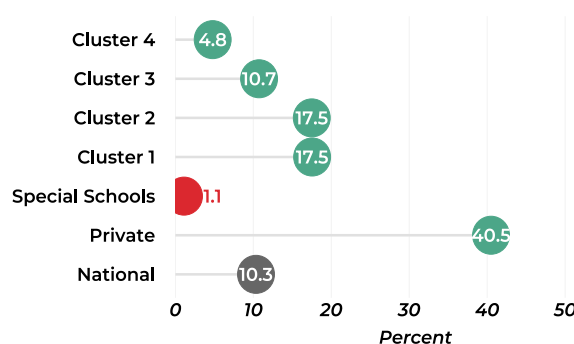


Figure 26: Private schools lead in supplying uniform to their Learners

- Nationally, 1 in 10 senior schools supply uniforms to their learners.
- 2 in 5 private schools supply school uniforms to their learners.
- 1 in 5 Cluster One and Cluster Two schools supply uniform to their learners.
- 5 in 100 Cluster Four schools supply uniforms to their learners.

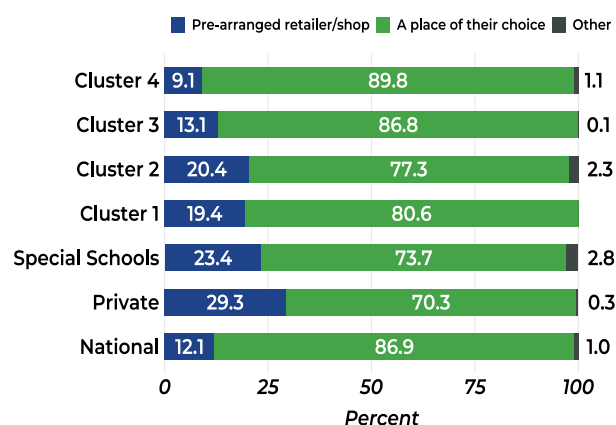


Figure 27: Private schools lead in directing learners to preferred uniform vendors

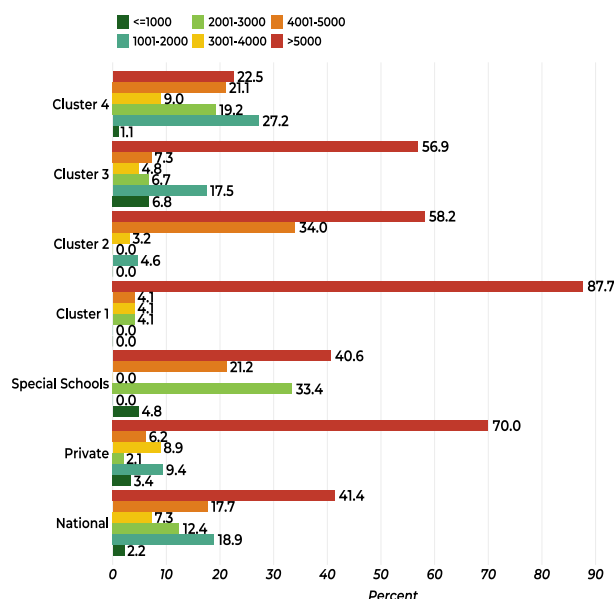


Figure 28: Uniform cost varies by school category

- A set of school uniforms costs more than KES 5,000 for 4 in 10 Senior Schools nationally.
- A set of school uniforms costs a maximum of KES 1,000 for 2 in 100 Senior Schools nationally.
- A set of school uniforms costs more than KES 5,000 for 9 in 10 Cluster One, 6 in 10 Cluster Two, 6 in 10 Cluster Three, and 1 in 5 Cluster Four Senior Schools.
- A set of school uniforms costs a maximum of KES 3,000 for 4 in 100 Cluster One, 5 in 100 Cluster Two, 3 in 10 Cluster Three, and 1 in 2 Cluster Four Senior Schools.

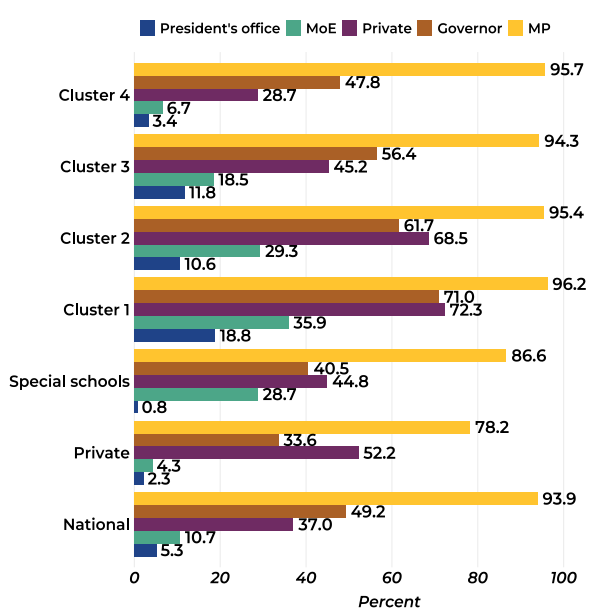


Figure 29: Members of Parliament (MPs) spread bursary funds across schools

- Nationally, learners in 94 in 100 Senior Schools received bursary support from MPs.
- Learners in 49 in 100 Senior Schools received bursary support from Governors.
- Learners in 37 in 100 Senior Schools received bursary support from private funders.
- Learners in 11 in 100 Senior Schools received bursary support from the Ministry of Education.
- Learners in 5 in 100 Senior Schools received bursary support from the Office of the President.
- Learners in Cluster One schools are the leading beneficiaries of bursaries from all sources.

■ No ■ Yes

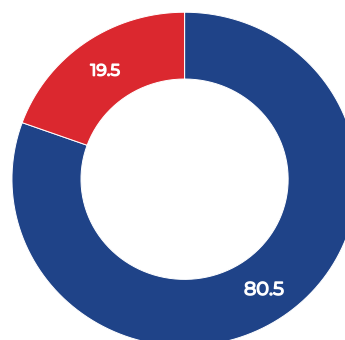


Figure 30: Principals' views on whether scholarships/ bursaries benefit the most deserving learners

- 1 in 5 principals hold the view that scholarships/bursaries do not benefit the most deserving learners.
- However, the majority, believe that scholarships/bursaries benefit the most deserving learners.



g) School Health, Sanitation and WASH Matters

Table 5: Capacity to provide psycho-social support to learners varies across school categories

School Category	Psycho-Social Support Services					
	A Guiding & Counselling Office	Teachers Trained In Guiding & Counselling	Non-Teaching Staff Trained In Guiding & Counselling	Peer Counselling Service For Teachers	Teacher-Supervised Peer Counselling Or Mental Health Services	Conduct Counselling On Mental Health Issues
Cluster Four	69.9	87.6	6.0	57.3	70.5	70.1
Cluster Three	90.6	89.2	13.2	54.8	77.0	73.8
Cluster Two	92.7	86.2	30.5	64.5	84.0	84.5
Cluster One	99.3	97.4	32.2	67.5	90.8	89.7
Special schools	46.6	90.8	15.4	64.0	83.9	71.1
Private	77.6	88.7	38.0	48.5	74.5	76.5
National	75.3	88.0	13.4	56.9	73.8	73.1

- Nationally, 75 in 100 Senior Schools have a guiding and counselling office.
- 88 in 100 Senior Schools have teachers trained in guiding and counselling.
- 13 in 100 schools have non-teaching staff trained in guiding and counselling.
- 38 in 100 private schools have non-teaching staff trained in guiding and counselling.
- Almost all Cluster One Senior Schools have a guiding and counselling office.
- Less than half of the special schools have a guiding and counselling office.
- 57 in 100 Senior Schools have peer counselling or mental health services for teachers.
- 68 in 100 Cluster One schools have peer counselling or mental health services for teachers.
- Less than half of the private schools have peer counselling or mental health services for teachers.

Table 6: Capacity to provide various medical support services to learners varies across school categories

School Category	Medical Support Services				
	Sick Bay/ Sanatorium/ School Clinic	Medical Personnel Working In School	Other Staff Trained In First Aid	Link To Any Health Facility For Referrals	Fully Equipped First Aid Kits
Cluster Four	4.6	34.1	41.0	68.4	66.0
Cluster Three	29.7	61.9	56.9	83.9	85.9
Cluster Two	67.6	76.6	75.9	88.9	94.1
Cluster One	89.1	96.3	87.0	92.6	99.3
Special Schools	16.0	77.8	66.6	90.8	84.9
Private	40.1	61.0	67.9	82.9	89.8
National	17.7	64.0	49.5	74.2	74.0

- Nationally, 18 in 100 Senior Schools have a sick bay, sanatorium, or school clinic.
- 9 in 10 Cluster One schools, and only 5 in 100 Cluster Four schools have a sick bay, sanatorium, or school clinic.
- 3 in 10 Cluster Four schools lack fully equipped first aid kits.
- 64 in 100 schools have medical personnel working in the schools.
- 1 in 2 schools have other staff trained in first aid.
- 74 in 100 schools have fully equipped first aid kits.

Table 7: Main source of drinking water by school category

School Category	Sources of Drinking Water							
	Borehole	Well	Rain Water	Pipe	Water Vendors	River	Bottled Water	Other
Cluster Four	33.7	2.9	24.2	29.4	2.9	5.5	0.1	1.4
Cluster Three	45.6	1.7	12.5	27.9	5.4	3.3	0.0	3.6
Cluster Two	45.2	0.5	8.8	30.4	0.9	6.2	1.0	7.0
Cluster One	49.6	3.7	3.3	34.2	3.3	5.3	0.0	0.7
Special Schools	30.5	0.0	21.3	23.1	3.0	7.3	0.0	14.8
Private	34.4	1.5	4.5	41.1	9.4	1.1	4.7	3.4
National	36.5	2.4	19.1	30.5	3.8	4.8	0.6	2.5

- On average, 36.5% of senior schools in Kenya rely on boreholes as their main source of drinking water, while 30.5% rely on piped water.
- Boreholes and piped water jointly account for the main sources of drinking water for 88.3%
- of Cluster One schools and 63.1% of Cluster Four schools.
- 24.2% of Cluster Four schools rely on rainwater as their main source of drinking water.
- Special schools have the highest reliance on other sources of drinking water, at 14.8%.

**Table 8: Senior schools' experience of water shortage in the month to the survey**

School Category	Number of Days of Water Shortage						
	<0 Days	1-2 Days	3-5 Days	6-7 Days	8-14 Days	15-24 Days	25+ Days
Cluster Four	69.4	10.4	9.1	3.7	4.1	2.1	1.2
Cluster Three	72.9	9.5	7.9	3.5	2.8	2.9	0.6
Cluster Two	74.8	11.8	5.6	1.8	4.4	1.1	0.6
Cluster One	70.2	15.7	10.8	2.0	1.3	0.0	0.0
Special Schools	65.3	9.4	10.2	2.8	11.6	0.7	0.0
Private	70.6	13.4	7.7	2.1	1.8	1.7	2.8
National	70.4	10.8	8.6	3.3	3.8	2.0	1.2

- 7 in 10 Senior Schools did not experience water shortages in the month prior to this survey.
- 1 in 10 schools experienced water shortages for between 1 and 2 days, while 9 in 100 schools experienced shortages for 3 to 5 days.
- 1.2 percent of schools experienced water shortage for 25 days or more in the month prior to this survey.
- 3 in 100 private schools experienced water shortage for longer than 25 days.
- No Cluster One school experienced water shortage longer than 14 days prior to the study.

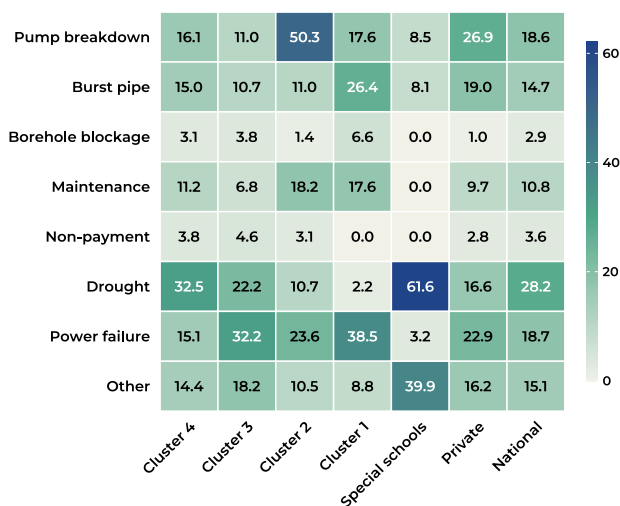


Figure 31: Most mentioned causes of water shortage by school category

- Nationally, drought resulting in limited water harvesting is the most frequently mentioned cause of water shortages, reported by 28.2% of schools.
- Power failure at the source is the second most frequently mentioned cause nationally, at 18.7%, followed closely by water pump breakdowns, at 18.6%.
- Among Cluster Four schools, drought is the leading cause of water shortages, reported by 32.5% of schools.
- In Cluster Two schools, the leading cause is water pump breakdowns, at 50.3%, while in Cluster One schools, power failure at the source is the leading cause, at 38.5%.
- Special schools mainly reported drought as the cause of water shortages, at 61.6%, while 26.9% of private schools reported water pump breakdowns.

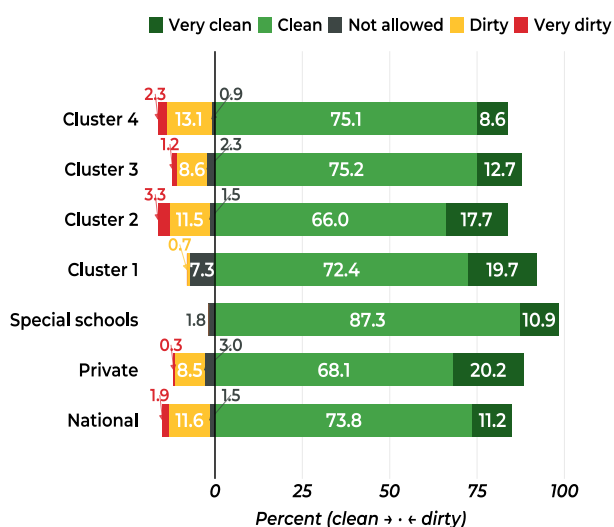


Figure 32: General state of sanitation facilities by school category

- On average, 11 in 100 schools have very clean sanitation facilities, while 74 in 100 have clean sanitation facilities.
- 12 in 100 schools have dirty sanitation facilities, while 2 in 100 schools have very dirty sanitation facilities.
- 2 in 100 schools did not allow Research Assistants to observe their sanitation facilities.
- Almost all special schools have clean, to very clean sanitation facilities.
- Cluster Four category has the highest proportion of schools noted to have dirty, to very dirty sanitation facilities.
- 7 in 100 Cluster One schools denied Research Assistants access to observe their sanitation facilities—higher than any other category.

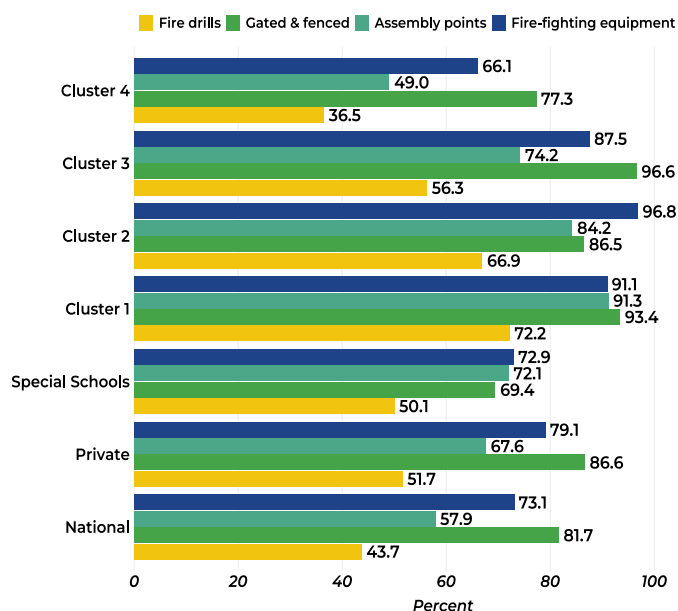


Figure 33: Percentage of schools that have taken diverse students' safety measures

- 7 in 10 schools have fully functional fire-fighting equipment.
- 6 in 10 schools have designated fire assembly points.
- 8 in 10 are gated and fenced.
- 4 in 10 have performed fire drills.
- Cluster One category has the highest proportion of schools that perform fire drills and have fire designated fire assembly points.
- Cluster Two category have the highest proportion of schools with fully functional fire-fighting equipment.
- Cluster Four category lags behind in most safety measures, with less than half of its schools performing fire drills and having designated fire assembly points.

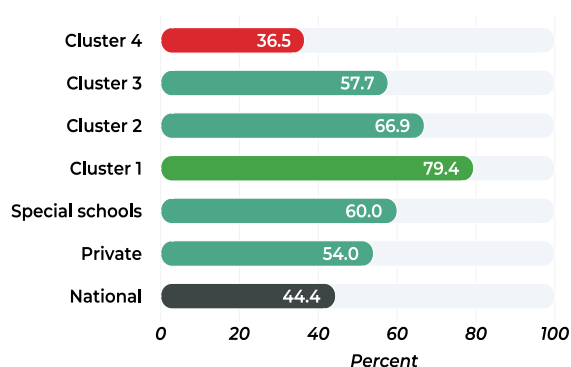


Figure 34: The majority of Senior Schools lack procedures for handling children with chronic illnesses

- 44 in 100 Senior Schools in Kenya have procedures for handling children with chronic illnesses.
- 79 in 100 Cluster One schools have procedures for handling children with chronic illnesses.
- 67 in 100 Cluster Two schools have procedures for handling children with chronic illnesses.
- 60 in 100 special schools have procedures for handling children with chronic illnesses.
- 37 in 100 Cluster Four schools have procedures for handling children with chronic illnesses.

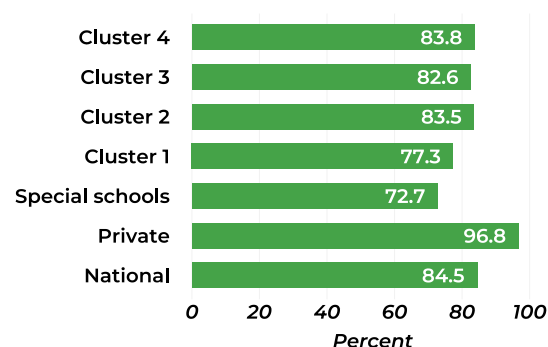


Figure 35: Private boarding schools most compliant with the safety guidelines on spacing of learners' beds in the dormitories

- 85 in 100 boarding and day-and-boarding schools adhere to the safety guidelines on spacing of learners' beds in dormitories.
- Private schools have the highest compliance rate, with 97 in 100 complying.
- Special schools are the least compliant with 73 in 100 of them complying.
- 77 in 100 Cluster One schools are compliant.

Note: The data covers only day-and-boarding and boarding schools, as the question was not applicable to purely day schools.

Table 9: Percentage of schools with diverse sporting facilities by category

Sporting Facilities	School Category						National
	Cluster Four	Cluster Three	Cluster Two	Cluster One	Special Schools	Private	
Volleyball Pitch	84.2	92.3	96.6	97.4	84.8	82.3	86.3
Basketball Pitch	19.3	44.4	80.5	95.4	17.5	42.6	30.8
Tennis Court	9.3	31.3	58.6	61.7	4.9	27.1	18.5
Badminton Court	17.8	36.9	56.3	61.5	23.8	25.1	24.8
Football Pitch	87.0	91.4	93.2	94.8	74.5	87.9	88.1
Net Ball Pitch	56.8	68.6	51.5	64.0	53.4	44.5	56.8
Swings And Slides	0.2	1.1	0.3	7.7	0.0	2.8	0.7
Running Tracks	36.1	54.1	56.7	58.1	28.4	29.0	39.5
Rugby Pitch	9.2	25.8	45.5	54.6	0.7	16.1	15.5
Handball Pitch	49.0	68.0	73.7	75.1	30.6	38.8	52.5
Hockey Pitch	2.9	14.4	39.5	53.3	1.2	6.2	8.3
Other Specify	3.9	4.1	9.9	10.3	10.7	4.7	4.6

- 88 in 100 Senior Schools have football pitches.
- 86 in 100 schools have volleyball pitches.
- 57 in 100 schools have netball pitches.
- 40 in 100 schools have running tracks.

h) Access to ICT Facilities and Services

Table 10: Ownership of ICT resources vary across school categories

School Category	Ict Resources				
	Radios	Lcd Projectors	Tablets	Teacher Digital Devices	Operational Computer Lab
Cluster Four	19.9	43.8	6.0	26.6	18.6
Cluster Three	37.2	75.4	6.7	39.6	48.9
Cluster Two	61.7	93.9	11.1	47.2	78.7
Cluster One	77.2	98.0	12.7	65.2	89.8
Special Schools	56.1	64.3	16.6	45.7	42.1
Private	35.7	64.0	25.3	43.3	54.1
Total	28.4	55.0	8.7	32.5	32.2

- Ownership of ICT resources varies significantly across the different categories of schools.
- Nationally, 55% of schools own LCD projectors, 32.5% own teacher digital devices, and 32.2% have operational computer labs.
- Only 8.7% of the Senior Schools own tablets.
- The percentage of Cluster Four schools that own any of the listed ICT resources consistently falls below the national averages.
- Cluster One schools lead in the ownership of all the listed ICT resources except for tablets where they trail private schools.

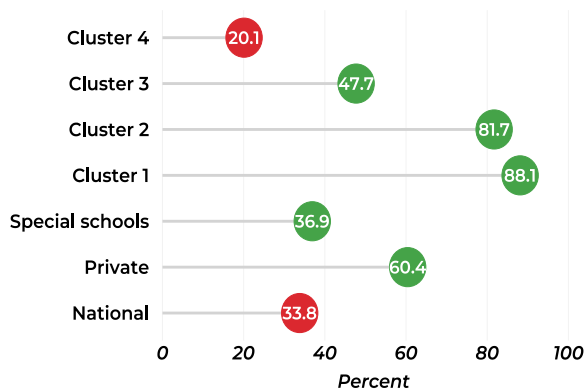


Figure 36: Schools offering computer lessons by school category

- Nationally, 3 in 10 Senior Schools offer computer lessons.
- 9 in 10 Cluster One schools and 8 in 10 Cluster Two schools offer computer lessons.
- Only 1 in 5 Cluster Four schools and 2 in 5 special schools offer computer lessons.

Learning Outcomes and their Drivers

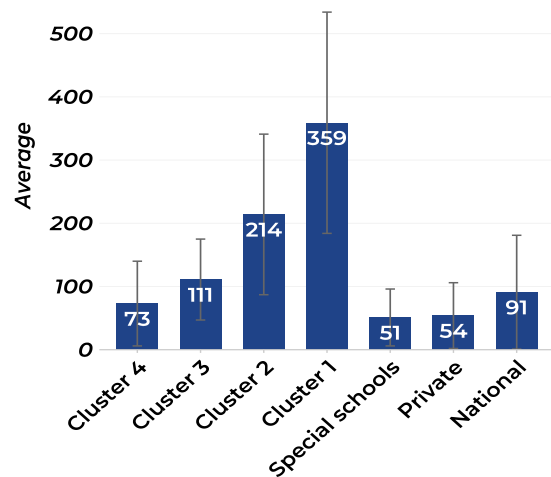


Figure 37: Number of 2024 KCSE examinations candidates in a typical school by category

- A typical Cluster Four Senior School presented 73 candidates for the 2024 KCSE examinations.
- A typical Cluster One Senior School presented 359 candidates for the 2024 KCSE examinations.
- A typical Cluster Four Senior School is 20% the size of a typical Cluster One Senior School.
- A typical Special Senior School is the same size as a typical private Senior School.
- On average there were 91 candidates per school.

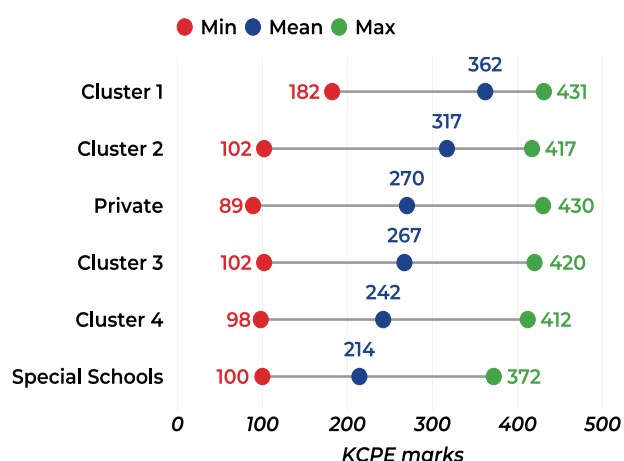


Figure 38: KCPE marks for 2024 KCSE examinations candidates by school category

- Senior schools admit learners with diverse entry marks.
- The average KCPE marks for 2024 KCSE candidates differ across school categories, ranging from 214 marks in special schools to 362 marks in Cluster One schools.
- Cluster Four schools recorded an average of 242 marks, while private schools recorded 270 marks.
- The minimum KCPE marks ranged from 89 in private schools to 182 in Cluster One schools, while the maximum marks ranged from 372 in special schools to 431 in Cluster One schools.
- The wide range of entry marks for private schools spotlights the fact that private schools are as diverse as public schools, ranging from small low-cost schools to giant high-cost ones.

Table 11: Regression results of candidates' KCSE performance on school factors and entry scores

Factor		Odds ratio	P>z	[95% CI]		Odds ratio	P>z	[95% CI]	
KCSE Grade									
KCPE Entry Marks		-	-	-	-	1.03	0.000	1.03	1.03
Principals' education level (Ref: Bachelor & below)									
	Post Graduate	0.90	0.452	0.68	1.19	0.77	0.093	0.57	1.04
	PhD	0.99	0.976	0.56	1.76	0.91	0.740	0.53	1.57
	Others	0.36	0.000	0.21	0.61	0.34	0.000	0.20	0.58
Principal had management training (Ref: No)									
	Yes	1.06	0.735	0.77	1.46	1.06	0.771	0.71	1.58
School has counselling teacher (Ref: No)									
	Yes	1.04	0.844	0.73	1.47	1.06	0.781	0.71	1.57
School has a medical personnel (Ref: No)									
	Yes	1.66	0.006	1.16	2.38	1.40	0.037	1.02	1.91
Number of fully equipped First Aid kit		1.03	0.109	0.99	1.06	1.02	0.437	0.97	1.07
School category (Ref: Cluster Four)									
	Cluster Three	1.03	0.857	0.72	1.48	-	-	-	-
	Cluster Two	2.20	0.002	1.32	3.65	-	-	-	-
	Cluster One	8.37	0.000	4.68	14.97	-	-	-	-
	Special School	1.91	0.332	0.52	7.11	-	-	-	-
	Private	1.57	0.028	1.05	2.35	-	-	-	-
School boarding status (Ref: Day)									
	Day and Boarding	1.50	0.092	0.94	2.42	1.63	0.077	0.95	2.79
	Boarding	2.52	0.001	1.49	4.27	1.79	0.051	1.00	3.21
School gender category (Ref: Mixed)									
	Boys	0.95	0.820	0.64	1.42	0.78	0.245	0.52	1.18
	Girls	1.20	0.336	0.83	1.75	1.06	0.797	0.69	1.63

Table 11 presents findings of two logistic regression models fitting the learning outcomes (KCSE Grades) attained by candidates in the 2024 national examinations as the dependent variable and a host of regressors as indicated. One model includes KCPE entry scores but excludes the category of school attended, while the other includes the category of school attended but excludes entry marks. This follows a determination that KCPE marks are highly correlated with the school category attended.

Model I: Without Entry Marks

- A child who attends a senior school that has medical personnel is 66% more likely to score a mean grade of C+ and above in KCSE examinations than one in a school without such personnel.
- A child who attends a Cluster Two senior school is more than twice as likely to score a mean grade of C+ and above in KCSE examinations as one in a Cluster Four senior school.
- A child who attends a Cluster One senior school is more than eight times as likely to score a mean grade of C+ and above in KCSE

examinations as one in a Cluster Four senior school.

- A child who attends a private senior school is 57% more likely to score a mean grade of C+ and above in KCSE examinations than one in a Cluster Four senior school.
- A child who attends a Boarding senior school is more than two and a half times as likely to score a mean grade of C+ and above in KCSE examinations as one in a Day senior school.

Model II: With Entry Marks

- A child with specific senior school entry marks is 3% more than likely to score a mean grade of C+ and above in KCSE examinations than one with one mark less.
- A child who attends a senior school that has medical personnel is 40% more likely to score a mean grade of C+ and above in KCSE examinations than one in a school without such personnel.

Conclusions



The 2026 Senior School Survey provides important evidence on the progress and challenges facing Kenya's Senior School sub-sector at a critical stage of the Competency-Based Education (CBE) transition. While significant progress has been made in expanding access and establishing senior schools, the findings demonstrate that access alone does not guarantee just participation or quality learning. Persistent differences in resources, infrastructure, staffing, ICT, safety, health services, and learner support continue to shape the experiences and opportunities of learners across school categories.

The survey shows that **inequality remains a defining feature of the Senior School subsector**. Cluster One schools are generally better resourced, while Cluster Four (which educates the majority of learners), and special schools face greater constraints. These disparities have implications for the quality of education learners receive and raise important questions about the effectiveness of current resource allocation mechanisms in addressing historical and structural inequalities.

The findings also demonstrate that **the cost of education continues to undermine effective participation**. Non-payment of school fees is the leading reported reason for learner absenteeism, while the cost of school uniforms places an additional burden on families. For learners with special needs, these challenges are compounded by shortages of specialised personnel, inadequate funding, expensive learning materials, and limited access to teachers trained in Special Needs Education.

At the same time, teacher and learner participation, availability of essential facilities, water and sanitation, ICT access, safety, and support services remain

important areas requiring sustained attention. The differences observed across school categories suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach to education planning and financing may not adequately respond to the varying needs of schools and learners.

The central message of the survey is therefore clear: **Kenya's ambition for equitable and just education cannot be achieved by expanding access alone**. It requires deliberate action to ensure that resources follow need and that schools serving disadvantaged learners receive the additional support necessary to provide quality education. This includes increased investment in infrastructure, teachers, ICT, specialised support, health and safety, water and sanitation, psychosocial services, and conducive learning environments.

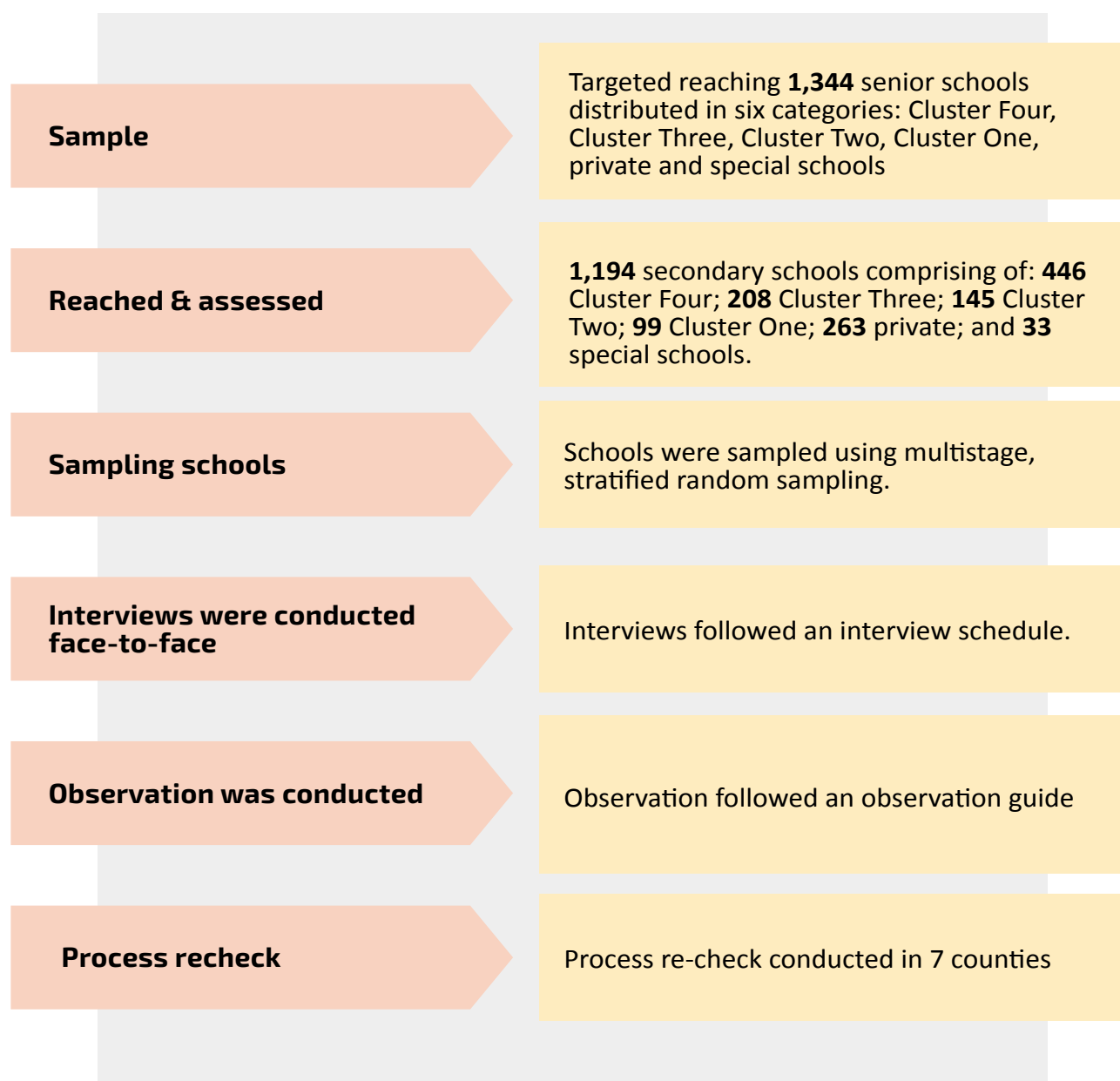
As Kenya approaches 2030, the evidence presented in this report provides an important basis for strengthening accountability and informing policy, planning, and resource allocation. National and county governments, Civil Society Organisations, school leaders, communities, development partners, private sector actors, and other stakeholders must work together to address the inequalities identified by the survey.

Ultimately, the success of Senior School education should not be measured only by how many learners enter school, but by whether **every learner has a fair opportunity to attend, participate, learn, and succeed**. The 2026 Senior School Survey provides both a warning and an opportunity: a warning that persistent inequalities cannot be ignored, and an opportunity to use evidence to build a more just, safe, and appropriately resourced education system for every learner in Kenya.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Selecting the schools

The sampling frame was made up of all senior schools in Kenya that presented candidates for the 2024 KCSE examinations. A nationally representative sample was obtained.



Notes

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