

Inspection Report

On Focus Inspection

Chinese YMCA Secondary School

Address of School: Tin Fu Court Area 102, Tin Shui Wai, N.T.

Inspection Period : 6th, 7th & 9th February 2007

**Quality Assurance Division
Education and Manpower Bureau**

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**Education and Manpower Bureau
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1. Inspection Methodology

- The focus inspection on the English Language Education KLA was conducted by
Mr David Coles and Ms. Loh Wai-chee, Teresa on 6th, 7th and 9th February 2007;
- During the inspection, the inspectors collected information through the following activities:
 - Observation of 11 lessons taught by 11 teachers of English Language / Use of English.
 - Meeting with the Principal, panel chairperson, teachers and students;
 - Scrutiny of documents and information provided by the school;
 - Scrutiny of samples of students' work and examination papers; and
 - Observation of school activities, such as morning assembly, morning reading session and teachers' sharing on the subject of St Valentine's Day.
- The inspection findings presented in this report were derived from the corporate judgment of the inspection team based on the information collected through the various activities during the inspection period.

2. Learning and Teaching

2.1 The English Language Education Key Learning Area

The subjects inspected included English Language and Use of English.

2.1.1 Student Performance

- In 2004, 2005 and 2006, both the percentages of the passing rates and grades A to C of students in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination English Language (Syllabus B) were well below the territory level in 2004, above the territory level in 2005 and on a par with the territory level in 2006. In 2005 and 2006, both the percentages of the passing rates and grades A to C in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination English Language (Syllabus A) were below the territory levels. The school's value-added was on a par with the territory level in 2005 and was below the territory level in 2006.
- In the Hong Kong Advanced Supplementary Level (ASL) Use of English Examination, the percentages of the passing rates were well above the territory levels in the past three years, with the percentages of grades A to C below the territory level. The school's value-added performance was on a par with the territory level in 2004, and was above the territory levels in 2005 and 2006, with the scores reaching the top 10 % of all schools. The value-added performance is on an upward trend.
- Students are friendly and willing to communicate in English with guests and most can use English to communicate with their peers and teachers, given sufficient encouragement. The upper form students demonstrate confidence and proficiency in speaking the language. Lesson observation reflects that students show interest in learning English and most students are conscientious in completing their assignments. Some junior form students make use of 'mind maps' to help them develop thoughts in advance of writing, whilst the written work of their seniors shows good expression of ideas. A higher level of creativity and critical thinking skills could be developed in the use of the target language.
- For the last three years, an increasing number of students have taken part in the Hong Kong Schools Speech Festival. Some obtained certificates of merit and proficiency, with a few gaining high placing in solo verse speaking and prose reading.

2.1.2 Quality of Learning and Teaching

Major Strengths

Curriculum

- The School's sponsoring body (SSB) is seeking, in the near to medium term, to have the school's status changed, in partnership with its adjacent primary school, to that of Direct Subsidy Scheme(DSS) and English Medium of Instruction (EMI). To that end, the governing body has made the development of English language teaching its first priority and has provided additional resources to further this ambition. A teaching assistant (TA) has been allocated to support the panel of English teachers and the Principal describes the English Department as having a great deal of autonomy. The school is funding the employment of its Native English-speaking Teacher (NET) from its own resources. Thus, the promotion of English language is at the forefront of the school's major concerns and the Panel Chairperson (PC) and her team are all very aware of these expectations and aspirations. From the beginning of the current school year the S1 to S3 classes are streamed on the basis of student English ability and EMI is used for teaching most subjects in the S4 science class. The time allocated to the teaching of the English language KLA is appropriate.
- The PC is a highly committed and hard-working professional and an efficient, effective leader. She knows her team of teachers very well, including those who have joined the school most recently. Given a significant turnover in teaching personnel in the past few years, this has not been an easy task but she has earned the trust and respect of the team. Her monitoring of the panel's work is conscientious but flexible, varying in detail from one individual to another, depending on their experience and performance. The PC conducts regular lesson observation and provides oral and written feedback, works alongside colleagues and encourages teachers to welcome other panel members into their lessons. In this she leads by example, welcoming observation of her own lessons and collecting feedback. There are three panel coordinators and meetings at form level are chaired by them, including the post-examination discussions and analyses. The focus for the panel is very much on learning outcomes and, in particular, success in public examination. There is a strong team identity and sense of purpose.
- The promotion of a reading culture is one of the school's current major concerns. There is a morning reading session timetabled for all forms, with English texts being a requirement for two or three days each week. These periods are effectively used to emphasize the importance of reading and, in some classrooms, teachers set a good example by reading themselves during this time. A Morning Reading Booklet provides a useful support for students in S1 and S2. In addition to this focus on the key task of 'reading to learn', the school places

emphasis on developing communication skills by including English elements in school assemblies, in the form of announcements and book reviews/recommendations by students and teachers. At the time of the Inspection there were oral English activities within the St Valentine's Day theme.

- The curriculum is tailored to fit the school's own priorities and goals and this year it has been decided to use only one text book for teaching. This is a good decision, creating room for teachers to develop their own lesson material based on current news events. There is also a good balance of time and attention given to the different language forms and functions, with lessons identified for the teaching of grammar. There is significant attention, for example, given to good quality sentence construction. For S1 to S3 the curriculum has both a core and an enhanced element, designed to acknowledge and cater for learner differences, another of the school's major concerns. Overall there is a balanced coverage of the language skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening within a sound curriculum framework which includes some opportunity for the inclusion of moral and civic themes. One form 6 lesson, for example, included discussion on population decline and factors influencing the birth-rate in Hong Kong.

Support Measures to Enhance English Learning

- Given its wish to promote the use of English, the school leadership has been authorized by the SSB to make available additional resources for this KLA. The Capacity Enhancement Grant (CEG) is used to employ the full-time TA, whose clerical and preparation work releases teachers to work more efficiently on their core task. This extra resource is well used in line with the PC's insistence on the optimum use of personnel in line with the PC' insistence on the optimum use of personnel in maximizing student learning outcomes. The TA works exclusively in support of the English panel and shares its staff room, which is separate to that used by teachers from other departments.
- The NET is new to the school this year but is already acting as a resource for colleagues by developing school-based assessment materials for the oral element of Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA). He is effectively deployed, for teaching purposes, across three forms and teaches writing as well as speaking and listening. It is planned that, during the course of this year, he will assist with lesson observation to share his different perspectives with colleagues and this will be an appropriate use of his time. His experience is also being called upon in his role as trainer of students entered for the Hong Kong Speech Festival and in taking charge of the school's team participating in a territory-wide public speaking competition.
- A significant feature of this school is the length of the school day, which starts at 8am and sometimes finished at 8pm. There are also additional classes organized

for weekends and during school holidays, predominantly for students requiring additional support. The Principal is committed to providing activities for students to compensate for what he considers to be inadequate opportunities within the district. Although these extra sessions are spread across subjects, the learning of English is supported by the extra teacher time made available to students. At S5 three English teachers give considerably of their time for these co-curricular activities. Bridging courses are provided for S1 students in the summer holiday prior to admission and again at S3 for students moving to the science stream.

Teaching

- Teachers are knowledgeable and have a high proficiency in English. They are friendly, responsible, show enthusiasm for their work and enjoy good relationships with their students. Lessons are well-prepared, with focused learning objectives and clear instructions. Appropriate expectations are set and the learning atmosphere is encouraging and supportive.
- In most lessons, teachers pay due attention to ensure that students are on-task and learning. Verbal approval and recognition are given in response to student effort. Some teachers make good use of games, group work, competitions, or bonus marks to motivate students' learning. In some lessons, teachers make appropriate use of information technology to increase students' learning interest.
- In a few lessons, where very effective teaching is taking place, teachers use well-planned and organized activities to stretch students' attainment and teacher expectation is high. In these better lessons, mainly in the senior forms, conscientious and constructive feedback is given to help students reflect upon, and improve, their learning. Some teachers of the lower ability students successfully make use of well-established routines, good timing, peer support and assessment, and a variety of activities to fully engage them in their learning.

Student Learning

- Students are largely attentive in class. Most are serious and show interest in learning the target language. They are able to follow teachers' instructions in accomplishing individual or group tasks. Most students have the ability to communicate with teachers and their peers in English and, with teachers' encouragement, they are willing to do so. Students are well used to taking part in group work and cooperate well with their peers.
- The upper senior form students take the initiative in learning. They are contributive during group discussion and make good use of teachers' feedback for improvement. Some show confidence in delivering oral presentations before the class, with appropriate use of the voice, eye contact and target language. Analytical power is also demonstrated by students at this level, for example

when exchanging views during discussion.

- Some lower form students also use the language quite well, often making good use of self-study tools such as electronic and conventional dictionaries to check word meaning or for help with their sentence writing.

Performance Assessment

- There is an established policy for assessment which is in line with the Hong Kong Curriculum Guide for the KLA and follows the school's overall assessment policy. Measures are in place to enhance reading ability, for example, in the form of the Morning Reading Booklet which is used to monitor progress of lower form students. Teachers have a good understanding of continuous assessment (CA) and it is used formatively at all levels as part of the overall assessment profile. CA has a number of components including book reports at S3, listening units at S1 to S3, oral presentations on assigned topics at S1 to S2 and a mock TSA examination at S3. There are detailed plans and criteria for the process of CA and a good balance across the language skills. School-based Assessment (SBA) for senior forms, conducted in February and April will be included in the CA programme.
- That the assessment policy is kept under review is evidenced by the decision taken this year to change from two separate examination papers to one. This has been done to remove the stigma associated with such a two-tier process and differentiated, graded questions have been used to achieve the same assessment purpose. The setting of examination questions is an inclusive, open and consultative process whereby all panel members are able to see and comment upon questions set by their colleagues. Post examination meetings at form level are held and chaired by the coordinators. Students' needs are identified and intervention is arranged to support them; this often takes the form of attendance at additional teaching periods. Overall, the frequency of examinations is in line with normal Hong Kong practice and the range of knowledge and skills assessed is appropriate. In this last context, homework assignments are described under three different headings; preparatory, practice and extension. This helps to ensure balance and variety of assessed tasks.
- Assignments are adequate in number and marking is conscientiously conducted. There is a marking scheme but teachers are allowed flexibility in its use, including a start being made on student self-assessment. The PC encourages teachers to select samples of assignments for in-depth marking to give targeted support and feedback, pinpointing student strengths and weaknesses and indicating ways to improve. Some teachers encourage peer assessment, particularly when classmates are making oral presentations to the class. A strong feature of assessment is the practice of the PC working alongside her team members to achieve alignment in assessment, specifically with regard to SBA.

Areas for improvement

Curriculum

- The PC completes a school-based pro-forms as part of the self-evaluation (SE) process but SE at department level is minimal. There is no developed procedure for planning, implementation and evaluation (PIE) although its introduction could greatly support the panels' team goal of efficiency and effectiveness. For example, despite the considerable effort made to promote reading, there is no systematic measure in place to evaluate the outcome or point to ways to improve. Another need within the curriculum management sphere is for a proactive staff development plan to complement the currently reactive arrangement whereby teachers identify courses and request permission to attend. Such a plan would better support targeted and tailored professional development.
- This year the school has purchased 'e-class' software, although it has not yet been used in the English Language KLA. It would be an important step forward as Information Technology (IT), generally, is little used beyond PowerPoint applications in some lessons. As yet, the positive consideration of the incorporation of IT is not part of curriculum planning. More attention needs to be given to generic skill development, particularly with the regard to critical thinking and creativity. This latter would benefit from the inclusion of more language arts features to enrich the learning experience.

Support measures to Enhance English Learning

- As a result of changes in room usage decided at school level, the area previously designated as an English Corner is now used for class teaching. There exists the possibility of recreating such a facility in a small room within this so-called 'English Zone'. Such a development, with appropriate games, publications and visual materials, would provide a much needed boost to pleasurable and informal use of English by students. Consideration should also be given to the creation of a Multi-media Learning Centre (MMLC) or some similar provision for practicing language skills. The school lacks any significant visual stimulation to promote the use or enjoyment of English other than a few display boards in the area of the English staffroom. A range of posters, different text forms, students' work and other eye-catching samples of written English in classrooms and shared areas would do much to raise the profile of the language and provide a rich English environment.
- The school, rightly, places a strong emphasis on academic success and much of its time and energy is spent on ensuring that students are well prepared for success in public examinations. As has been noted, significant extra hours of

tuition are provided. However, for the English Language KLA there is very little extra-curricular activity (ECA) available. There is no English Society or club and no drama or debating experience available to students. This is a significant deficit, particularly in a school with ambitions to attain EMI status.

- In a move to support the morning reading sessions, books have been removed from the school library to create individual libraries in each of the classrooms. The net effect of this understandable and bold initiative has been the loss of a central reference and fiction provision. Although the library room houses computer stations that are used by students and also doubles as a small teaching area, the overall impression is of a rather rundown and undervalued facility. The few shelves, housing a mixture of recent and outdated English fiction together with non-fiction texts, are untidy and uninviting. The school needs to consider the overall picture of its book and non-book English library, decide as to the purpose which it wishes its central library to serve, and act accordingly. The current situation could be improved.
- Greater collaboration between the English and other departments could create opportunities for improving the English language environment across the school.

Teaching

- Most lessons, in particular those where grammar items are taught, tend to be teacher-centred and the atmosphere is rather dry. There could be greater involvement of students in the learning process, whereby they might independently work out and explore potential language use before proceeding with the task sheets. For classes of more able students, teachers should further stretch their performance, particularly in the areas of presentation skills and pronunciation.
- Apart from enhancing students' communication, little has been done to promote the order generic skills, such as those of creativity and critical thinking. Questions are mainly used to check the understanding of content. Graded questions could be used to offer students more challenge and develop their critical thinking. More language arts elements, such as role-play and story telling, could be introduced to promote students' creativity. Singing and listening to songs could be considered, possibly for some purposeful relaxation and enjoyment, part-way through the hour-long lessons. It would provide a useful reinforcement to learning the target language.
- In some lessons, more able students finish the assigned tasks well ahead of the teacher's expectations. Teachers should be more aware of students'

individual difference and provide more challenging tasks accordingly.

Student Learning

- Other than those in the senior forms, most students play a passive role in learning, with listening and reading as their major learning skills. To enhance more independent learning, pre-lesson preparation, note-taking, self and peer-assessment could be systematically developed from the junior level upwards. Greater initiative in learning should be expected from the higher ability students, requiring teachers to adopt a more lively and student-centred approach. A few students show little interest in learning the target language and some talk to each other on Cantonese, despite their teachers' encouragement to use English. Overall, the presentation skills of junior form students need to be improved.

Performance Assessment

- Whilst performance data is currently used to identify student learning needs, there is insufficient use of this information to inform changes in pedagogy. With its good record of using performance data, the English team is in a strong position to analyse this feedback in order to reflect on and, where necessary, adjust teaching strategies.
- The range of assignments set for students could be further broadened to include opportunities for more critical thinking and creativity. In doing so, teachers should build further on the work so far done on peer assessment and provide more opportunities for self-assessment, perhaps developing students' self self-maintained profiles or records of achievement. This, also, would serve to develop a move to the more independent learning which the school wishes to cultivate.
- Assignments, generally, lack challenge for the more able students. The inclusion of more open-ended questions would promote higher order thinking, a development which would address some of the demands of the New Senior Secondary (NSS) Curriculum.

3. Concluding Remarks

With its ambition to attain EMI status, the school is placing the English language KLA at the top of its priority list. Apart from the reservations already referred to in terms of rooms, the subjects is well resourced and the PC exercises considerable autonomy, leading her team with great commitment and strong conviction. The school-based curriculum is well balanced in terms of skills,

forms and functions and aligns with the school's major concerns. There is very strong co-curricular provision, particularly in support of students who are less confident and able. Teachers work hard, have a good command of the language and enjoy good relationships with their students. Students are diligent, open and demonstrate good attitudes towards study and school life.

Assessment practices are formative and good use is made of data to identify students' strengths and needs.

In order to build further on its achievements the school should consider the following issues.

- There is a need for both the planned curriculum and classroom practice to further develop students' creativity and critical thinking. The former could be addressed by the inclusion of different forms of language arts and the latter by promoting greater student independence and active involvement in the learning process. Most lessons currently are too teacher-centred, encouraging passivity and quiescence on the part of students. There is a need for vibrancy and challenge.
- Without compromising its pursuit of academic excellence, the school needs to strike a better balance between striving for success in public examinations and providing a balanced and holistic curriculum for all-round student development. The provision of a rich extra-curricular programme to stimulate and nurture an appreciation and deeper understanding of the English language, in all its forms, is a pressing need.
- The English panel could further its driver for efficiency and effectiveness by developing a systematic self-review programme of PTE. In particular, the use of student performance data to inform changes in teaching strategies would be beneficial.
- Whether or not, in the future, English is to become the medium of instruction the school needs to carefully consider the context within which the English department operates. Currently, the confident panel identity and team spirit are not obviously complemented by strong links with other departments and there is a degree of detachment which is not in the best interests of whole-school development. Increased cross-curricular cooperation would contribute towards the creation of a richer and more coherent English environment for the school.