

Inspection Report

On Focus Inspection

St. Joseph's College

School Address : 7 Kennedy Road, Central

Inspection Period : 15, 21, 22 and 23 October 2020

**Quality Assurance and School-based Support Division
Education Bureau**

December 2020

Notes on the Focus Inspection Report

1. This report covers the current development of English Language Education Key Learning Area (KLA) in the school and the key Focus Inspection (FI) findings. Suggestions for improvement are also given for reference of the school.
2. The report is intended for the key stakeholders of the school, including members of the Incorporated Management Committee (IMC) and teachers.
3. The IMC should lead the school to follow up the suggestions made in the report, in order to facilitate the improvement of the English Language Education KLA and enhance its continuous development.

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1. Inspection Methodology

- 1.1 The focus inspection was conducted in October 2020 to evaluate the development of the English Language Education (ELE) KLA of the school.
- 1.2 The inspectors employed the following methods to understand the situation of the school:
 - Scrutiny of documents and information provided by the school;
 - Observation of 10 lessons taught by 10 teachers;
 - Meetings and interviews with the Principal, panel chairpersons, teachers and students; and
 - Scrutiny of samples of students' work and assessment papers.

2. Learning and Teaching in the English Language Education Key Learning Area

2.1 Student Performance

- Students' overall performance in English Language is good. They show understanding of various text types and can apply a wide range of reading skills and strategies to process texts of different complexities, such as working out the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases by using semantic clues, and inferring feelings of characters. The more able students are able to read beyond the lines by, for example, identifying writers' attitudes signalled in texts. Students understand teachers' instructions, and some show understanding of authentic spoken texts in less familiar accents. They can speak fluent English and are able to express their ideas clearly. Some demonstrate the use of a wide range of vocabulary to convey their ideas concisely. Students can express their ideas clearly in writing through different text types including stories, letters and feature articles, in which their critical thinking skills and creativity are well demonstrated. Most students can write with fluency, employing a good variety of sentence patterns, vocabulary items and idioms to express their ideas while some less advanced writers can further improve on the logical development of ideas.
- Students are keen on taking part in English-related activities held within and outside school such as the inter-class public speaking competitions and the Hong Kong Young Writers Awards. Some of them have actively participated in English-related territory-wide competitions including inter-school debating competitions and the Hong Kong Schools Speech Festival, and have obtained different awards including the First, Second and Third places in the latter.
- In the past three years, the percentages of students attaining Level 2 or above, Level 3 or above and Level 4 or above in English Language in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination were above the territory averages of day school students. Taking into consideration the S1 intake, the school attained excellent results in English Language in the HKDSE Examination over the past three years.

2.2 Quality of Learning and Teaching

- The programme plan of ELE aligns closely with the school's major concerns. The English curriculum is with clear aims and objectives. Evaluation appropriately covers curriculum implementation and students' academic progress.
 - The programme plan of ELE aligns closely with the school's major concerns of 1) exploring and fostering potential in students, making them contributive members of society, and 2) building teachers' professional

capability with appropriate implementation strategies. A wide array of co-curricular activities (CCA) such as debates and public speaking activities is held to stretch students' potential, and exchange programmes and study tours are organised for widening students' exposure. Positive values and attitudes are incorporated in the curriculum, including Integrated Learning (IL) implemented in collaboration with the Moral and Civic Education (MCE) Committee. Greater professional exchange within the panel has been promoted through peer lesson observation and joint-school sharing.

- Clear KLA-specific aims and objectives are set for both the junior and senior forms. To attain the aim of nurturing the junior form students to love the language and to use it confidently and effectively for study and leisure, promoting extensive reading and building a strong language foundation are set as the prime concerns in the junior curriculum. Students are introduced to different genres of reading materials, most of which are classic readers. There is also the use of course and skills books, anthology and teacher-designed supplementary worksheets. The emphasis of the senior form is raising students' language proficiency, generic skills and cultural awareness, and preparing them better for public examinations. In addition to the practice of the four language skills, discussion on social issues through readers for enhancing students' generic skills are rightly in place in daily learning and teaching.
- The English panel conducts regular reviews on the progress of learning and teaching. Due to class suspension, adjustments in examination coverage and format were worked out in the last school term to assess student learning more accurately. With the experience of conducting online learning during the period, and upon reflection, an e-Learning Team has been recently set up within the panel to foster greater use of information technology in learning and teaching. Yearly evaluation echoes well the ELE plan, covering curriculum implementation, assessment policies and different support measures. Special attention is given to students' academic performance and participation of CCA. Suggested measures are properly followed up, such as the adoption of an additional writing reference book at the senior form to cater for students' learning needs in this language skill. On the other hand, greater teacher collaboration focusing on addressing issues identified through panel's SWOT analysis, such as the greater disparity among students, will be desirable.
- Values education is well incorporated in the curriculum and promoted through cross-disciplinary collaboration. Students' expected learning outcomes need to be worked out at different year levels.
 - The ELE curriculum covers the essential components of the subject

knowledge, four language skills, generic skills, and positive values and attitudes; and with a good balance of Interpersonal, Knowledge and Experience Strands. A good attempt is made in this school year to devise a curriculum framework across the two key stages for greater coherence. Currently, both the Schemes of Work (SoW) and the curriculum framework are mainly on reading texts, dictation, language content covered in the course/skills books, as well as writing tasks. The development of students' generic skills, and values and attitudes, as discerned in the curriculum implementation, could as well be reflected in the SoW. A clear curriculum framework covering the progressive development of all language skills, language development strategies, generic skills, and values and attitudes has yet to be worked out. There should as well be clear stipulations of students' expected learning outcomes at different year levels. More focused evaluation could then be made on students' learning progress.

- In closely working with the MCE Committee, IL is found at S2 and S4, covering themes of integrity, discipline, gratitude and self-esteem. At times, different scenarios and choices are provided to promote students' self-reflection and self-discovery. Different social issues and topics in relation to careers and life planning are as well found. Worksheets are designed with pre-reading materials, "food for thought" and follow-up questions to enhance students' thinking skills. A good attempt is also made with the Music department for cross-curricular English learning. Students are provided with opportunities to use the target language purposefully.
- Rich inputs of reading texts have successfully raised students' literacy and fostered their generic skills. More deliberation could be made on providing a contextual use of the target language.
 - The panel attaches great importance to reading to learn. Different genres such as novels, poetry and dramas, and a variety of literary works are introduced across S1 to S5. Reading texts are carefully selected, with some covering issues like gender and race, and social inequality to enhance students' critical thinking skills. The text materials are complemented with quality supplementary worksheets and materials to support student learning, and are reviewed from time to time to suit students' interests and abilities. Literary features and devices like plot development, direct/indirect characterisation, persuasive strategies and dramatic techniques are well covered. Students' literacy, language skills, appreciation of literary works, as well as knowledge of the world have been greatly enhanced. As reflected from students' work, ample room has been provided for their free expression, and development of creativity and critical thinking skills.

- Specific reading lessons are allocated in S1-2, with teacher-taught readers, students' self-study readers and book sharing. The three types of reading arrangements could be better integrated to heighten students' reading interest and consolidate their language use by organising some motivating activities, such as "from page to stage". While there is some natural integration between reading and other language skills, such as speaking through book sharing and writing through reading logs and book reports, some more meaningful writing tasks could be designed for students to apply the different language items and literary devices learnt from reading. A new initiative is launched in this school year to conduct Reading Workshops in S2 IL lessons, tapping the expertise of the Native-speaking English teacher. Good thought is given to fostering students' self-reflection and developing their passion for reading.
- Apart from reading, the daily learning and teaching inclines more on the teaching of language forms and functions, with the use of course/skills books and through grammar practices. To nurture students' love for English and thus enable greater learning effectiveness, more activities could be designed to facilitate students' meaningful and integrative use of the language.
- Assessment papers are appropriately set. More thought could be given to the effective use of assessment data to inform curriculum planning.
 - Both formative and summative assessments are suitably conducted to assess students' mastery of the four language skills, language forms and functions, text types, as well as language arts in the junior secondary curriculum. The types of assessments, including those for continuously checking students' learning progress, and their weighting are clearly indicated in the assessment guidelines for teachers' easy reference. Assessment papers are in general well designed with appropriate question types and intents, and a progressive level of difficulty across year levels. Passages for the Reading Papers are carefully selected with up-to-date topics familiar to students. This can arouse not only students' interest but also facilitate their comprehension of the texts. Due emphasis is placed on the assessment of students' language use including vocabulary, and language forms and functions in the General English Papers. However, some language items are occasionally assessed in the form of discrete items, which is not desirable for the assessment of students' language use in context.
 - The marking scheme for assessment papers is properly developed, with careful deliberation among the level teachers upon trial marking conducted on a few copies of students' assessment papers. Detailed analysis is made on students' performance in most internal assessments, and students' strengths and weaknesses are broadly identified. However,

the suggestions for improvement made are rather general without concrete details. More thought could be given to using performance data to inform curriculum planning, and devising specific implementation strategies in terms of curriculum adjustment and learning and teaching strategies.

- A good variety of assignments is designed to support student language learning, with constructive feedback provided to help students hone their writing skills.
 - A clear assignment policy specifying the types of assignments and their frequency at each year level is made known to all panel members. A variety of assignments is appropriately designed to support students' development of language skills, reading and writing skills in particular. Commendable effort is also made in the design of some reading tasks in which students are encouraged to connect their reading experiences not only to themselves but also to the world. From the students' work scrutinised, students are eager to express their ideas with insightful reflection on themselves and relevant social issues. Conscientious effort is made in the marking of students' pieces of writing with detailed comments on the aspects of content, language and organisation. The feedback provided is encouraging and specific, pinpointing students' strengths and weaknesses in their writing and providing suggestions for further improvement. For example, practical suggestions are given on how to improve the cohesion among ideas and prompts are provided for students to enrich the content. The writing marking scheme at the junior secondary level focuses only on language and content. The panel needs to consider providing students with comments on their organisation as well to help them write more coherently and logically. While the design of the supplementary worksheets is class-based, some decontextualised grammar practice is found at the junior secondary level, which may not be desirable for students' authentic language use.
- Students are eager to learn and respond to teachers' questions. More opportunities should be provided for students to use the language in meaningful learning activities.
 - Teachers possess sound professional knowledge and are highly proficient in English. They are friendly and supportive, and can maintain good interaction with students. Students are attentive and actively engaged in learning activities. They are responsive to teachers' questions, and are willing to express ideas in class with confidence. When called upon to express their views, some passive students usually answer in short utterances while the more outspoken ones give coherent responses with sensible elaborations using an extensive variety of vocabulary and sentence structures in a natural manner. They are also able to apply the knowledge and skills acquired in the lessons to perform learning tasks.

- Lessons are generally designed with clear learning objectives. Relevant learning tasks are properly sequenced and conducted at an appropriate pace. However, the teaching content is relatively limited in a few lessons where direct instruction is adopted with little opportunity for students to use the language in meaningful contexts. Given that students generally hold very positive attitudes towards learning English, teachers could assign students suitable pre-lesson preparation tasks to familiarise them with the learning content, and engage them in lesson activities that generate quality interaction and require higher-order thinking skills.
- Lecturing and questioning are the most commonly adopted teaching strategies in the classroom. Lessons are predominately teacher-led and heavily guided by teachers' explanation. Questioning is primarily used to check students' learning progress and their understanding of learning content. In more effective lessons, questions are used to invite students to share their views, prompt students to elaborate their answers, or foster student-teacher interaction. While social distancing is observed in class with the adjusted seating arrangements, teachers could conduct more pair work activities to enhance students' peer interaction for genuine communication. Feedback provided to students is timely and positive, acknowledging their efforts in giving responses to questions. More specific feedback could be given in the form of probing and prompting to elicit more elaborated ideas from students.
- e-Learning is not prevalent in classroom learning and teaching. Teachers mainly use presentation slides with pictures to facilitate students' understanding and present the learning content in an organised manner. There could be a wider use of e-learning to enhance greater learning and teaching effectiveness, such as in facilitating teachers' quick grasp of students' performance and providing them with instant feedback, as well as strengthening students' motivation and interaction, and promoting their self-directed learning capabilities. In a more effective lesson, a learning management system is aptly used to demonstrate student learning outcomes in class. This not only boosts students' interest in the lesson, but also facilitates the teacher's feedback on students' work.
- Support measures are well in place to support students in need and create a language rich learning environment. A more diversified range of teaching strategies is necessary to cater for students' different learning abilities.
 - Proper support measures are in place to support students' learning of the target language. To better support student learning, a summer bridging course is provided for the newly-joined S1 students, in particular those coming from other primary schools, to help them adapt better to the new learning environment. Split class is found at S1-2 to facilitate greater teacher attention to individual students. Supplementary worksheets are

developed primarily on a class basis to suit students' learning needs. Teachers will meet with the less able students on a monthly basis to keep track of their learning progress and render necessary help. Writing courses for remedial and enhancement purposes are outsourced in an attempt to scaffold students' writing skills or to enable the more able ones to excel in public examinations.

- Strategies to cater for learner diversity are, on the other hand, limited in classroom learning. Teachers mainly monitor students' learning progress through direct questions to engage students. Some teachers use video and audio clips to expose students to authentic use of the language and cater for their different learning styles. To further cater for students' individual needs, teachers could adopt various strategies such as varying the questions in terms of language and cognitive demands.
- There is a good variety of co-curricular activities both inside and outside the school, including debates, public speaking, reading and writing activities and competitions. Students' leisure reading is well supported by a variety of means, including the i-read award scheme, class library, library book exhibitions, and online reading platform. It is pleasing to know that the stock in the library is expanding. The English Corner could be further furnished to make it a more attractive place for students to enjoy more fun-filled activities.
- The panel chairpersons effectively lead the panel with the assistance of level co-ordinators. Teachers' professional sharing could be further strengthened.
 - The English Department is well supported by the English panel chairperson, the junior English panel chairperson, as well as form coordinators for the smooth daily operation. In addition to regular panel meetings, informal discussion through daily face-to-face communication and instant messaging apps are held to discuss panel matters. The panel is a stable one with a harmonious working relationship among the members. While there is sharing of form-based materials via the common folder, teachers' lesson preparation and the design of supplementary learning and teaching materials are largely class-based. In addition to the existing peer lesson observation, teachers' professional capabilities could be further enhanced through more sharing of pedagogies and effective strategies. This is especially important for some less experienced teachers teaching more challenging classes, like those with greater student disparity.

3. Suggestions for Improvement

- More collaborative efforts are necessary within the panel to develop a holistic and progressive curriculum framework, with students' learning outcomes clearly set at different year levels. Evaluation of the ELE curriculum could be strengthened, in terms of aligning the strategies with the issues identified through SWOT analysis, as well as a more effective use of students' performance data to feed back to curriculum planning and pedagogy.
- Given students' generally good learning attitudes and ability, suitable pre-lesson preparation tasks and more effective use of IT in education could be promoted to enhance students' self-directed learning capabilities. With the greater disparity among students in recent years, a wider range of strategies need to be deployed. There could as well be greater collaboration among teachers on curriculum adaptation and sharing of effective teaching ideas.