Focus Inspection Report
on the Use of English as the Medium of Instruction
at the Junior Secondary Level

Ma On Shan St Joseph’s Secondary School

Address of School: 8 Hang Kwong Street,
Ma On Shan, Shatin, New Territories
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Quality Assurance Division
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Focus Inspection Team

Team Leader
Mr IP Wing-tong

Member
Mr CHAN Haw-fung
Ms LAU Mei-shan, Amy
Ms LAU Wai-mei
Ms NG Wing-chee, Ita

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1. Inspection Methodology

- The focus inspection was conducted on 14, 15 and 17 May 2012 to help the school review the effectiveness of its medium of instruction (MOI) arrangements for S1 and S2 in the 2011/12 school year. Below is a summary of the arrangements:

  - In S1A, English is used as the MOI for five content subjects, namely, Mathematics, Computer Literacy (CL), Integrated Science (IS), History and Integrated Humanities (IH). In S1S, English is used as the MOI for IS, History and IH and extended learning activities (ELA) in English are implemented in Mathematics and CL. For the other two S1 classes, ELA in English are implemented for five content subjects, namely, Mathematics, CL, IS, History and IH.

  - The arrangement for S2 is the same as that for S1.

- The inspection team used the following methods to review the effectiveness of the above arrangements:

  - Observation of 7 lessons at S1 and S2 taught by a total of 7 teachers, including 1 History, 1 CL, 2 Mathematics and 3 IS lessons;

  - Observation of various school activities, including English Airtime in the morning assembly, lunchtime and after-school English-related activities, English ELA in IH and an English Enhancement activity lesson;

  - Meetings and interviews with the Principal, the Vice Principal (VP), the key members of the English Enhancement Committee (EEC), subject panel chairs concerned, subject teachers concerned, the school librarian, the native-speaking English teacher (NET) and one group of randomly selected students from S1 and S2;

  - Study of documents and information provided by the school; and

  - Study of samples of students’ work and assessment papers.

- The inspection findings presented in this report were derived from the corporate judgement of the inspection team based on the information collected through the above methods.
2. Planning, Implementation and Evaluation of the School-based MOI Arrangements

- Aligned with the school policy that places emphasis on developing students’ bi-literacy and tri-lingualism, a clear direction has been set by the School Management Committee to guide the formulation of the whole-school language policy (WSLP). The objectives of the WSLP include enhancing students’ exposure to the use of English and Putonghua and preparing them for learning subjects using English as the MOI in the senior secondary forms. In the process of formulating the policy, teachers and parents have been properly consulted. Due consideration has been given to teachers’ capabilities, parents’ expectations, students’ needs and their abilities. With respect to the chosen subjects for which English is used as the MOI, due attention is given to the need for articulation in terms of the choice of MOI with the corresponding curriculum at the senior secondary level.

- Clear mechanisms have been set up to stream and allocate students to S1A, S1S, S2A and S2S, the classes using English as the MOI for a number of subjects. These include the pre-S1 Hong Kong Attainment Test and the school-based test for assessing students’ ability to learn in English at S1 and internal assessment for streaming and selecting students when they are promoted to S2. Parents have been duly informed of the criteria for placement in English MOI classes. Given that some students need to adapt to a change in the learning medium when they are promoted to S2, suitable measures, such as a bridging programme, could be provided to support students with difficulties in adapting to the change.

- In alignment with the WSLP, “Enhancing English learning, boosting two languages and three dialects” has been identified as one of the school’s major concerns in the current school development cycle from 2009/10 to 2011/12. The EEC, led by the VP, which comprises the Principal and six KLA coordinators, plans and coordinates the work related to the school’s language policy. Programme plans for various measures, including staff development, cross-curricular collaboration, enrichment of school language environment, reading programmes and bridging programmes, are clearly devised with detailed implementation strategies. The EEC sets up different task groups to further focus on the major programmes, such as the English Enhancement Programme, Staff Development programmes and Language Across the Curriculum (LAC). Good effort has been made by the Committee in promoting LAC and collaboration among the subject panels has been strengthened. However, content subject panel members are less aware of the need for collaboration than those of the English Department. To enhance the capacity of content subject teachers to help students learn in English, further language support from the English panel for the content subject teachers is needed. For example, English teachers could share their vocabulary building skills with other teachers or observe some lessons conducted by content subject teachers in English and provide advice on the use of language skills for their improvement.

- The school encourages teachers to attend relevant external professional development programmes. Several in-house workshops on using English as the MOI, conducted by an experienced professor, were arranged to help teachers
grasp language support and vocabulary building skills. Some of the skills were adopted to enhance students' exposure to English. Peer lesson observations (PLO) are arranged by some subject panels concerned. However, there is a need to sharpen the focus of PLO on students' language support needs so that appropriate measures to help students and suitable training programmes for teachers can be further developed. Professional development activities, such as sharing among different subject panels of good practice in meeting students' learning needs, could be enhanced.

- ELA in English, with a focus on learning subject-specific vocabulary, are conducted in five content subjects to provide opportunities for students to have more exposure to, and application of, English. The panels concerned are given autonomy in designing and implementing ELA. In some subjects, vocabulary items are taught discretely, with the result that students have difficulties in remembering and using them. Professional discussion and cross-curricular sharing of practice could be further promoted to improve pedagogy, especially for facilitating students' vocabulary acquisition and developing their vocabulary-building strategies.

- Questionnaires, stakeholders' views and analysis of students' performance in examinations are appropriately used to evaluate the effectiveness of the MOI arrangements. Some learning difficulties of students are identified. In some subjects, the vocabulary list is modified and greater flexibility in setting of assessment on ELA are allowed to better suit the students' ability. The findings could be further used to address students' language support needs and to inform subsequent curriculum planning and refinement of learning and teaching strategies.
3. Learning and Teaching

3.1 Curriculum and Assessment

- The curriculum planning undertaken by the subject panels concerned is aligned with the MOI arrangements. In considering the language needs of students, the content of some subjects has been trimmed. Due consideration is given to appropriate coverage of the essential topics and vertical articulation with the senior secondary curriculum. For further improvement, subject panels could identify students' language support needs and sharpen the language focus in curriculum planning. For example, teachers could highlight suggestions in the schemes of work to enhance the effectiveness of learning and teaching of the subjects in English.

- To increase students' exposure to English, ELA in English are conducted in S1 and S2, with a focus on teaching subject-specific vocabulary. Students' performance in using the vocabulary items is assessed in examinations to evaluate the effectiveness of their learning. In order to enhance students' learning, more effective strategies, especially those for facilitating students' vocabulary acquisition and developing their vocabulary-building strategies, such as reuse and recycle of vocabulary in proper context, could be explored. There could be a more judicious use of Chinese translation to avoid students' reliance on it.

- Collaboration among the subject panels has been strengthened this year through the implementation of LAC, which enhances the effectiveness of the adoption of English in learning the subjects and fosters the professional growth of teachers. Through the arrangement of LAC, subject-specific language features of IS, History and IH, such as vocabulary and sentence patterns, are embedded in the S1 and S2 English curriculum. English teachers also conduct visits to History lessons and, after the lesson observation, discuss strategies for teaching in English. These are good initial attempts at collaboration that could be further enhanced by organising more cross-curricular learning activities and peer lesson observation involving the active participation of other subject teachers concerned.

- Professional exchange of ideas in the use of English in teaching content subjects has been promoted by conducting collaborative lesson preparation and peer lesson observation. A number of relevant seminars and workshops are also provided for the teachers concerned. For further professional exchange and capacity-building, teachers could focus more on how to identify students' learning difficulties and provide language support for vocabulary acquisition and writing and speaking skills.

- School-based teaching and learning materials are designed in some subjects to facilitate students' learning, such as notes and worksheets for students. In most subjects, a good variety of assignments, such as workbooks, worksheets, vocabulary lists and reading reports, is used for consolidation. In one subject, practical exercises and projects are used to provide students with opportunities to integrate and apply their subject knowledge. In some subjects, supplementary exercises or challenging tasks are given to more able students to realise their potential. However, to cater for learner diversity, different strategies, such as
graded worksheets, could be used. Teachers could make better use of different exercises to scaffold students' writing skills as practised in one subject. Good effort has been made to encourage students to learn subject-specific vocabulary by using 'Foldables', on which students can write down the meaning and examples of word usage, to create the 'Word Wall'. To further enhance the effectiveness, strategies for reuse and recycling of vocabulary could be developed.

- In general, students are able to finish their assignments properly. Most teachers' marking is carefully done and students' corrections are followed up. However, in order to help students' improve, teachers' feedback could be more focused on students' use of subject-specific language and subject content.

- Continuous and summative assessment in different modes, such as dictation, quiz and written examination papers, are appropriately set in terms of coverage, level of difficulty and use of English. More-able students are capable of applying subject knowledge and use complete sentences in their work. However, students' application of subject-specific vocabulary in assessments still needs to be improved. In some subjects, detailed evaluation is conducted of each question type in assessment papers to identify students' learning difficulties. Teachers could further use the evaluation data to inform curriculum planning and learning and teaching strategies.

3.2 Support Measures

- To support new S1 students to adapt to using English to learn, a two-tiered summer bridging programme is suitably arranged. The first tier focuses on English classroom language, while the second is more on subject-specific language pattern for students who have passed the school-based test and will learn the content subjects in English in S1. The bridging programme is organised and run by subject teachers. The subject panels concerned review the effectiveness of the bridging programme in timely fashion. At present, some students, who used to learn the content subjects concerned in Chinese in S1 and need to adapt to using English to learn in S2, have difficulties in learning in English. The school could consider arranging a summer bridging course or a tutorial programme for these students to help them adapt gradually to the use of English as the MOI.

- Conscientious efforts have been put into promoting reading across the curriculum. The librarian collaborates well with the content subject teachers in promoting reading activities. There are bookshelves in the library stocked with English books, on social science and science disciplines, which are suitable for junior form students. Students are encouraged to borrow the books and they show a keen interest in reading them. During morning assemblies on Fridays, students also take turns to introduce their English readers, helping to promote a reading culture in the school. Students from 1A, 1S, 2A and 2S are also given some English reading materials to read in the morning reading sessions on Wednesdays and their reading skills are also gradually developed by their completing comprehension exercises. The stock of English reading materials
and audio visual resources is also constantly updated in the English corners to encourage extensive reading and viewing.

- Good attempts have been made in the development of a favourable English learning environment, through creating opportunities for students to share their thoughts with the whole school during English Airtime in the morning assemblies. It helps to boost students’ confidence in using English. During the English Festival, lasting for a fortnight in April, a range of enjoyable activities, including ‘Troy can Cook’, Big TV and Easter Treasure Hunt, are in place to arouse students’ interest in learning English. These activities are well-received by the junior form students. To accommodate more students in these activities, there are two English corners and an extended area called the English zone outside the English corners. During lunchtime, students participate actively in the activities held in the English Zone, with conversation conducted in English. To enhance students’ exposure to English, there is visual display of subject-specific information and English learning materials, such as proverbs and sayings, both inside the classrooms and around the campus. An English drama course is also, thoughtfully, arranged for students in 1A, 1S, 2A and 2S to further enhance their confidence in using English.

- To address the professional development needs of the teachers concerned, a seminar on pronunciation and stress taught by the NET, has been suitably arranged. Peer lesson observation across panels has been initially established. Some teachers have taken the initiative to join relevant courses to enhance their effectiveness in teaching in English. Given this good foundation, in-house sharing across different panels could be further promoted to better identify and address students’ language needs in aspects such as vocabulary-building, reading and writing.

3.3 Classroom Learning and Teaching

- In general, the lessons are organised with clear focuses. Various resources, such as video material, smart-board and colour chalks are used effectively to facilitate students’ understanding. Teachers are responsible. They, generally, give instructions clearly in English and present the subject content at an appropriate pace. There is good interaction, either between teacher and students or among students, in most lessons. While language strategies, such as explaining vocabulary in simple English, reading aloud and breaking words into syllables, are sometimes applied in lessons, teachers’ awareness of the use of supporting strategies could, on the whole, be strengthened.

- Students are, generally, attentive and able to follow instructions. They are mostly engaged in learning tasks. In general, they are able to grasp the subject content. In some lessons, learning activities, such as group discussions and role play, are conducted for students to communicate and work with peers, to apply their learning, or to present what they have learnt. While some of them show greater initiative in learning and jot down notes independently, in general, they mainly rely on teachers’ instructions and input. Self-directed learning could be further promoted.
• Questioning is used to check students' understanding, with timely and positive feedback provided in most lessons. Given students' willingness and ability to learn in English, a wider range of questions and activities, with specific and formative feedback, could be given to develop students' potential. More wait time could be allowed for students to think of the answers. When given the opportunity, students attempt to communicate in English. Some of them respond in phrases or complete sentences, with adequate proficiency and confidence. For the less-able, proficiency and confidence in classroom communication in English need to be enhanced. There could be more scaffolding, such as paraphrasing, prompting and rephrasing of students' responses, to develop their competence and confidence in using English to express what they have learnt.

• To cater for learner diversity, teachers mostly walk around to monitor students' learning progress during classwork period and provide individual support where needed. More diversified strategies to cater for learner diversity could be employed.
4. Way Forward

The school has formulated a clear WSLP to develop students’ bi-literacy and trilingualism. Arrangements have been made to provide opportunities for students to be exposed to English and to equip them to learn content subjects in English at the senior secondary level. Programme plans are clearly devised and implemented, and a monitoring and reviewing mechanism is in place. Conscientious efforts have been made to promote reading across the curriculum and a good attempt has been made to develop a favourable English learning environment. Teachers are, generally, competent in presenting subject content systematically in lessons. Students are, on the whole, able to use English in their daily learning. They are able to follow instructions and grasp the learning content. For continuous improvement of the school-based MOI arrangements, the school could direct more effort and attention to the following issues:

4.1 Enhancing Professional Development and Cross-curricular Collaboration

- Capacity-building, with the focus on the use of English as the MOI, could be enhanced for teachers to better cater for students’ language needs. Teachers could attend more relevant training programmes and share among peers what they have learnt. Peer lesson observation and collaborative lesson planning could be conducted across subjects to facilitate more useful and in-depth cross-curricular professional sharing. Based on the existing practice, the school could enhance the internal sharing practices by involving more content subject and English teachers. This could also be used to indentify students’ language support needs so as to help students learn in English. The findings could be further used to inform subsequent curriculum planning and refinement of learning and teaching strategies.

4.2 Strengthening Support for students’ learning needs

- There is a need for teachers concerned to deliberate more on students’ support needs, in terms of mastering subject-specific language features. Concrete follow-up measures could be devised to address these needs. Timely support measures, such as adaptations in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, could then be designed to address those needs. Moreover, given that some students need to adapt to a change in the learning medium when they are promoted to S2, suitable measures, such as bridging programmes, could be provided to support them in adapting to the change.