Response of School to the Comprehensive Review Report

The Chinese Foundation
Secondary School

Address of School: 9 Harmony Road, Siu Sai Wan, Hong Kong
Comprehensive Review Period: 2, 3 & 9-12 May 2006

Quality Assurance Division
Education and Manpower Bureau

September 2006
Response to the Comprehensive Review Report

(Note: page numbers refer to the Draft Report produced by EMB's QAI/CR Team)

The Supervisor, School Management Committee, Principal and Staff of the Chinese Foundation Secondary School (CFSS) felt encouraged by the Comprehensive Review carried out by the QAI Team of the EMB on 2-3 & 9-12 May 2006. They also found the EMB's Quality Assurance Inspection/Comprehensive Review (QAI/CR) draft report enlightening and reassuring. The report has been carefully read by the staff and members of the School Management Committee. Their consolidated responses are as follows:

We gratefully acknowledge that, through confirming “the school is making good progress in actualizing its educational aspirations (p.4),” the QAI/CR Team has rallied to our support. The team remarked positively on our emphasis on life-wide learning and gifted programmes (p.11), our success in cultivating an English learning environment (p.11), our teachers are responsible and energetic (P.12) and that our students are provided with opportunities for participation and active involvement in the learning process. Their observations on our students enjoying rich learning experiences to develop their potentials (P.15), our policy on supporting gifted students (P.15), our resolution on the development of positive values in students (P.16) and our good and harmonious school atmosphere (P.16) have inspired us to invest extra efforts in these areas in the future.

Other major issues made in the report will be highlighted for follow-up in our future plans. In this regard, we have the following considerations:

Our Self-Evaluation

We chose the formal administrative External School Review (the 5-Year Comprehensive Review) to be carried out by the EMB through the QAI mechanism because our self-evaluation has been an on-going process since inception. We are very pleased that the QAI/CR team has noted “Curriculum evaluation at school level is seriously conducted for the focused development areas such as the junior curriculum reform and the Enrichment Course (P.11)”. In addition, peer lesson
observations, scrutiny of students’ work, surveys for views of parents and students on teaching and assignments, analysis of effectiveness of initiatives such as *Putonghua as medium of instruction in Chinese Language* and *Language Bridging Courses* have been our features for some years. Findings of these mechanisms have been brought up as guidelines for action plans on the occasions of group meetings and performance appraisal interviews.

**Our Organization Structure**

The organization chart of the school might have produced an impression that the present administrative structure is “flat”, meaning that teams and committees have been working without sufficient coordinated planning (last point on page 5). Such deduction appears to have over-simplified the situation. There is no doubt that even in our sixth year, the school is still in her formative stage with a number of middle management positions yet to be filled through promotions or open recruitment, in the event that the former proves not feasible. However, the shortage of middle managers does not necessarily imply a dearth of collaboration and coordination among teams. As a matter of fact, sharing and coordination meetings have never been more frequent with young staff that joined the school from its beginning. Their intimacy and the good team spirit displayed have made it possible for meetings and discussion sessions to be held more frequently and in a less formal (and hence more democratic and liberal) manner.

As indicated in our *School Profile and Development Prospect* presented to the QAI/CR team before the inspection commenced, we intended to create and recruit, from 06-07 onwards, two new positions of Assistant Principals to oversee the “Academic” and the “Student Support” domains. In fact we have already recruited the required personnel to take office in September 2006. Concurrently, we will conduct a review to streamline the functional groups, and to empower colleagues with demonstrated ability and performance to facilitate their delivery of stellar results.

**On working towards distributive leadership**

The vision and mission of the school were designed by our School Sponsoring Body as early as 1999, and incorporated in its application for a DSS school. Some of the ingredients and curricula are non-traditional and thus constitute special features of CFSS. Application for admission of their children to a DSS school is at the absolute discretion of parents who must have endorsed the school’s vision and mission (available to the public in the school website and further elaborated interactively in briefing sessions) before deciding to send their children to us. In this
regard, the school authority has the obligation to uphold the basic principles of the school. In our formative years, with the school tradition, culture and practices yet to be established while teachers were recruited from diverse background, many with little to no experience in school teaching, let alone planning and development, the school needed to exercise a stronger directive leadership to build up a platform of culture and a team of staff dedicated towards our declared vision and mission. We recognize that, at the end of our five-year cycle and having established a school with its own characteristics and features, well supported by staff, students and their parents, and the community at large, it is time to extend our vision to keep pace with the fast changing societal needs. With the recruitment of more well-experienced new staff and the widening of visions of our existing staff, the school appreciates that working towards distributive leadership and growing beyond any individual leader should now be beneficial in our determination to be a visionary institution. In fact, this intent has been brought up and thoroughly discussed either explicitly or in more subtle forms during recent staff and SMC meetings.

**Professional Development and Training**

In terms of academic qualifications, almost half of our teachers have a second degree. Yet we have never lost sight of the fact that effectiveness of teaching and front-line experience and visionary advancement need to be constantly enhanced as well. Over the past years, this has, in large part, been done through experience and professional sharing. In order not to jeopardize staff's dedication to building up a cultural platform for the new school, which demanded that they spent almost all their working days in school, we have put much of our effort in in-house training in different forms such as more formal staff development, held at least three times a year, and peer observations; and in the less formal sharing sessions held almost weekly. More eventful retreats on sharing and ideas-collecting have been held in Beijing & Shanghai (2002) and in Nansha (2004) during major school holidays.

**IT platform for interactive learning**

Before the Comprehensive Review, the school has already installed two Information Technology platforms, viz. *I.T. School* and *e-class*, a double measure seldom available in a single school. We are able to benefit in school administration and interactive learning from the two platforms. In the coming school year, we will help students create their individual portfolios. Considerations will also be given to moving on to closer communication between school and parents through digital channels.
Student-based and/or Teacher-centred Approach

Even within the QAI/CR Team, there were differences in professional judgments on such issues as 'teacher-centred' classroom teaching (P. 12 & 21). However, for a developing school where classes are filled with pupils from different sources vis-à-vis a long-established school with pupils brought up under the same system from Secondary One or even from Primary levels, an appropriate balance between the roles played by the teacher and the students should be left to the wise and capable judgment of the discerning teacher. While student-centred may become a catchword equivalent to good practice, in some cases, being focused on task under a stronger guidance of the teacher, but with student-based materials, may infuse the lesson with richness and purpose. If too much 'freedom' is given, the result might be that some students benefit from freedom of expression while others (more teacher-reliant students from teacher-centred schools) would suffer. This would act contrary to the advocated principle of enhancement-support measures to which we strongly subscribe.

Concluding Remarks

In sum, it is worth cherishing that when the Comprehensive Review was being carried out, the Inspection Team members, with their wide experience, were able to exchange views with staff of the school, and provided the latter with useful information and comments, as well as suggestions to solve surfaced problems. We are also much impressed by the QAI/CR team in their seriousness in carrying out the tasks, their impartial attitude, their assistance in analyzing situations unique to our school and their encouraging expectations of our school to reach a higher plane.

While we appreciate the many favourable comments given under the four domains covered by the QAI/CR, we are well aware that there is always room for improvement in every aspect, including areas where the inspection team has been lenient on account of the school’s short history. It is not the intention of the school to rest complacently on the good ticks awarded on our performance checklist. Instead, we shall seriously consider the weaknesses identified and try to make improvements. It is also our goal to continue our efforts in self-evaluation and in developing corresponding initiatives for further progress. We sincerely hope the EMB would continue to monitor our progress, and to provide candid views, useful advices, and other modes of support to help with future development of our school.