Challenges & Opportunities
-- Our school policy to meet changes

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I. The Senior Secondary Education Reform

Every major reform would be an object of vilification by some and praise by others. The forthcoming education reform is no exception. As a DSS school with flexibility on funding disposal and deployment of human resources, we would grasp its blessings and jettison the anticipated evils.

- Curriculum Issue -- One of the major areas of dispute is the new curriculum design, stipulating that Liberal Studies (LS), a subject many teachers not familiar with, would be designated as a core study. It is a difficult subject for teachers with traditional teaching styles who are accustomed to teaching factual knowledge in a unilateral way under a well-defined syllabus. In LS, solutions of the issues under discussion are meant to be open ended. We agree that the subject is challenging to teachers and the first draft of topics ill-conceived. Although this subject has not been taught in our school, our school-based enrichment course introduced in 2000 has equipped our versatile teachers with the audacity and skills of planning and teaching new topics. Conducting presentations and supervising team projects are routine practices of our teachers. Some units listed in the draft Liberal Studies have been covered in our enrichment course. Media & Society, Self & Personal Development are just some of the examples. More than a subject in its own right, our main objective is to enable students to apply the skills they learnt in this subject to other conventional subjects and to life-long learning. Taking science as an example. Learning skills such as SCAMPER and 3 dimensional thinking skills have been injected into our teaching methodology. Besides, with the objectives similar to that of liberal studies, our enrichment course has laid a firm foundation of inquiring approach and project working skills in our junior students. We are of the opinion that the proposed Liberal Studies curricula are too knowledge-congested and it cannot distinguish itself as a subject capable of “developing in students a range of skills for life long learning”. In fact, a more in-depth study on the subject matter and teaching strategies shows that our enrichment course would complement the draft liberal studies in
areas of critical and divergence thinking, project skills, scientific investigations and level of prescription.

Another contention is on the $4C + 3X$ formula (4 core subjects plus 3 electives), resulting in a midway between the present HKCEE and HKAL when we come to the number of subjects. Some educationists are of the opinion that the $3X$ would limit the scope of areas of studies. As a school we have to follow the mandatory stipulation. In fact, too many subjects in the examination syllabus would cause fragmentation and duplication in the knowledge base. On the other hand, the pedagogic shift from the knowledge-based to skill-based has helped to alleviate the limitation. For example, with good knowledge and skills in geography, one would be adequately prepared for advanced studies in humanity and other arts subjects. With the advent of a knowledge-based society, the relation between one’s former studies and present career is becoming more and more faint. It is no surprise we can always hear a human resource manager or even a university admission officer saying: “We don’t care what you study. We only care how you study.” This notion also brings us to the paradigm shift in teaching and the school-based Enrichment Course.

The shift can also be applied to streamline the curriculum at the junior level. A working team has been set up to combine History, Geography and EPA as Integrated Humanities. In contrast to many other schools, we will keep Chinese History as a separate subject so as to make our students more acquainted to the history and culture of our own country. In the meantime, another team has already started to give our Integrated Science a major overhaul so that students would be better prepared for the future senior curriculum.

- **Choice of subjects** – The absorption of extra teaching post requirement for split-classes into the normal establishment would discourage public sector schools from opening up a wider choice of subjects for senior students. Subjects like music and visual arts are particularly sensitive to the change. For realistic reasons we may not vote to include these subjects in the $3X$ electives. Should the need arise; we will take them as additional subjects to be taught outside the regular timetable. With a higher flexibility in the teaching establishment, we are not bound by staff reduction.
Career Oriented Curriculum (COC) -- We do hope to see some of our students being groomed for creativity industry or to become visual artists. In fact, even with the small handful of S.5 graduates in our formative years, we have already had students admitted to The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts and to a ballet school overseas. However, in face with the growing intellectual demand from all lines of business, we believe that a firm grounding in basics such as language proficiency and learning skills would better prepare our students for higher levels in their future careers. We believe that the conventional ‘academic subjects’ are within reach of most of our students. Furthermore, how COC are received on a par with other ‘academic subjects’ as entry requirements to tertiary education is yet to be confirmed. To those who have made up their minds to a vocation at the school age, we still prefer, at least for the time being, laying a study path that leads to full-time technical/vocational courses with professional recognition to adopting the shakily based COC. In case when individual students have a keen interest in these subjects, the school would be most prepared to assist them in registering for courses held outside school hours by external education bodies. We recommend interested students to take the career oriented subjects on top of the 4 C + 3X in the new curriculum. In the meantime, we will make extra effort in nurturing students’ talents in these areas.

Class size – The present class size of 30 in S.6 & 7 in public sector schools over the past years was established with sound reasons. Raising the class size of the future Senior Secondary 1-3 would be a retrograde step and is against the interest of the students, teachers and the school at large. The measure is particularly infelicitous if we are to encourage more class interactions. Our policy is to target the class size to no larger than 30, or even smaller at senior level.

Nurturing talents of students with student portfolio – It has been our practice for years to include a detailed student portfolio in the school report. At present we are making use of students’ records of personal qualities, fitness and skill assessment to form an indispensable part of the student report. In the Skill Assessment we include learning experiences, community service, sporting and cultural activities and achievements. With a belief that students learn best through building on strengths, we
will take one step forward to implement the Individual Education Programme.

The above measures taken by our school are not a stopgap response to the forthcoming Education Reform. In fact, some innovations have already been implemented for a number of years while others are in the pipeline or are being tested with a view of being adopted as standing practices in our school.

II. The Language Policy of the school under the new MOI Requirement

With the terms listed in the “Review of Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools and Secondary School Places Allocation” Consultation Paper, our School will continue to adopt English as the medium of instruction (EMI).

Direct Subsidy Scheme schools are generally free from experiencing the anxiety over the “Changing Train”. Administratively, there is an agreement between the EMB and our school that we are given the flexibility on the choice of medium of instruction. The principle is consolidated in the consultation paper, “the Working Group recommends that the current flexibility be maintained”. On the other hand, we note that in order to continue adopting EMI, we need to fulfil the three prescribed criteria for EMI teaching namely student ability, teacher capability and school support measures. Based on our present situation, we have full confidence that we can meet all these criteria even if the new MOI arrangement becomes effected in the near future.

- **Student Ability** –
  Authority suggests that about 40% of Hong Kong students are competent enough to learn using EMI. According to figures given to the school on students allocated to our school through SSPA in the past two years, more than 95% of them belonged to the top 40 percentile in English. Last year when we had our first lot of S.5 students taking the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination, our passing rate in English (syllabus B) was 100%. All these statistical results indicate that our students have reached a reasonable level of competency in using English as a medium of learning.
Teacher capacity –
Among teachers teaching in EMI at our school, more than 97% of them have met the specific qualifications stipulated in the consultation paper. The remaining very small minority is expected to meet the requirement in the very near future without being even selected for classroom observation.

School support measures –
Throughout the years, our school has been running summer English programmes for the newly admitted Secondary One students in August. In the beginning of every school year the school also runs a language-bridging course for S.1 students from September to November. It is a school based new curriculum design that takes up 4 periods per week. Most students would not find much difficulty in using English as the medium of learning after they have finished the bridging course. Like most schools, the NET scheme is a standard of the school. The school has a substantial extensive reading scheme, which is highly subscribed to by students, especially those in the junior classes. In school functions, students are given ample opportunities to act as ceremony presenters in the biliterate trilingualism mode so as to sharpen their language skills.

With consultation in progress and contention boiling up in the city, we have no intention to be categorized into either the ‘for’ or the ‘against’ group. Our principle is to give the able students and teachers a right to practise using English as a medium of learning and instruction.

In the current egalitarian social clime, pressure is mounting for extra support, both in terms of funding and human resource deployment, to be directed to CMI schools. At present, in the aided sector, a typical CMI school with underachieving students would have two to four more teachers than its EMI counterpart. How much the gap would be widened still depends on the result of wrestling and bargaining. To make the situation worst, the recent Senior Secondary Education Reform is giving the education community a bleak scenario that an average aided school would have to cut four to five teachers when the reform goes full swing. Government subsidy to DSS schools would also be cut accordingly. To uphold the principle that resources of our school are not jeopardized in the name of any “Reform”, we would
stand to provide quality education for our students. In concrete terms, our school would maintain a teacher class ratio of not less than 2 in contrast to the official proposal of 1.7 for junior secondary and 1.9 for senior secondary. To capitalize on the benefits brought by the education reform, teachers’ preparation work would be further supported by the growing teams of teaching assistants and clerical staff.

All in all, through government subsidies and fees collected for tuition, we will ensure that our students will not be deprived just because of their having motivated attitudes and beautiful minds.

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The following is a cut-and-paste excerpt of the Executive Summary in the Review of MOI of secondary schools & SSPA. The part selected is considered to be proposals that would exercise an impact on our school. For details please refer to the full text which could be downloaded from the EMB website.

Medium of Instruction (Summary)

10. The proposals of the Working Group on the prescribed criteria for EMI teaching are summed up below.

Student Ability

11. As mentioned in paragraph 5 above, since the overall academic performance can be used to gauge student ability, the Working Group proposes:

(a) In assessing students’ ability, their overall academic performance in the internal assessment (IA) of their primary schools (the second term of Primary (P) 5 and the first and second terms of P6) is taken as the basis. However, given the disparity in the assessment modes and standards among schools, a scaling instrument is needed. For this purpose, the IA results will be scaled by the pre-Secondary 1 Hong Kong Attainment Test (pre-S1 HKAT) currently conducted annually.

(b) Since past data demonstrate the stability of pre-S1 HKAT results between two adjacent cohorts of the same school, it is proposed to collect samples of the pre-S1 HKAT results biennially and to take the average of the results of the two most recently sampled pre-S1 HKATs to derive the instrument to scale primary schools’ IA results of the coming cohort of P6 students proceeding to Secondary (S) 1.

(c) A research study indicates that currently, at most 40% of S1 students are able to learn through English. Therefore, the Working Group proposes that the scaled scores will be put into a pecking order and the top 40% of students will be taken as having the ability to learn through English.

(d) According to the Guidance, schools intending to adopt English as the MOI must have at least 85% of students being able to learn through English. We propose to continue with the requisite percentage. Should the within-school streaming be adopted, an EMI class should have at least 85% of its students being EMI-capable. Should schools be bifurcated into EMI and CMI schools, then an EMI school should have at least 85% of its S1 intake being EMI-capable.
Teacher Capability
12. Regarding the language proficiency requirement of EMI teachers, the Working Group considers the basic requirement as “teachers should be able to communicate their subject content to students intelligibly and their use of English should have no adverse impact on students’ acquisition of the English language”. Specifically, the Working Group proposes that teachers should attain any of the following qualifications in order to be eligible to teach in EMI:
(a) a Grade C or above in English Language (Syllabus B) in the HKCEE, or its equivalent (including band 6 or above in the International English Language Testing System; a pass or above in English in the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (Overseas) Examination);
(b) a Grade D or above in Use of English in the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination;
(c) having met the Language Proficiency Requirements (English); or
(d) a Grade C or above in English Language in the defunct Hong Kong Higher Level Examination.

13. As for serving EMI teachers who have not attained any of the above qualifications, they may have their capability certified in one of the following ways:
(a) to obtain the relevant qualifications within two years starting from the 2005/06 school year; or
(b) to opt for classroom observation by both subject and language experts appointed by the EMB to assess their overall capability to teach through English, viz. “to communicate the subject content intelligibly and their use of English should have no adverse impact on students’ acquisition of the English language”.

14. Besides, EMI teachers should accumulate a minimum of 15 hours of EMI-related continuous professional development activities for every three years.

Support Measures
15. The Working Group is of the view that secondary schools using English as the MOI should purposefully and strategically provide a language environment conducive to learning English. These include, for instance:
(a) strengthening the teaching and learning of English as a subject;
(b) creating an English-rich environment; and
(c) devising well designed bridging programmes.
The Working Group proposes that schools intending to adopt English as the MOI should set out the related support strategies and specific measures in their school development plans and annual school reports. Based on the results of schools’ self-evaluation and external school review mechanism, the EMB could then assess qualitatively and quantitatively whether adequate support measures are in place.

**MOI Arrangement at Junior Secondary Levels**

17. The Working Group has considered two main options, namely the within-school approach and the bifurcation approach. Intuitively, the within-school approach (i.e. adopting different MOI for different classes) not only allows greater flexibility to schools, but also reduces the “MOI-mismatch” of students and provides parents with more choices. However, there are many drawbacks associated with this option:

(a) Given the community’s prevailing preference for EMI teaching, the number of EMI classes in a school might be conveniently used as an “indicator” of how “good” a school is. People may devise a more elaborate school labeling schema by drawing up a “league table” of schools according to the number/proportion of EMI classes they operate, i.e. with full adoption of EMI being regarded as grade one schools, and the grade drops in tandem with the decreasing number or proportion of EMI classes. It would, in effect, create multiple labeling among schools.

(b) The strong labeling effect could induce schools to seek to operate as many EMI classes as possible so as to attract students. Due to market forces, many schools might operate EMI class(es) as far as they can. Some schools that have so far been upholding mother-tongue teaching would be under immense pressure to operate some EMI classes, even though this may be contrary to their education philosophy.

(c) The streaming of students into EMI or CMI classes within the same school would also undermine the self-image of CMI students and induce within-school labeling. Students would also be subject to the unsettling effects of possible switches between CMI and EMI teaching in S2 and S3.

(d) In the pursuit of more EMI classes, schools may find it prudent to require teachers to obtain the qualifications for EMI teachers as mentioned in paragraphs 12 and 13 above as early as possible. Besides, teachers need to prepare teaching materials and examination papers in both English and Chinese, as well as to devise different teaching pedagogies and support measures for different MOI classes. The pressure on and workload for teachers will increase significantly.

Overall, the within-school approach would impede the overall development of schools and bring about undue pressure on teachers and students.

18. If bifurcation of CMI and EMI schools is maintained,
(a) Secondary schools will continue to be predominantly CMI schools. Schools would not feel pressured to switch to EMI teaching for some junior secondary classes, thus obviating the problem set out in paragraph 17 above.

(b) With the same MOI, all CMI schools will have a “fair competition”. They can develop their own characteristics in school-based curriculum, student support, diversified extra-curricular activities and home-school cooperation, etc. They can also capitalize on the relatively greater space for development by focusing on teaching pedagogy improvements and strengthening of language education.

(c) It entails lesser pressure on teachers, thus enabling them to have more time for student support, professional development and enhancing teaching effectiveness.

(d) The labeling effect of the bifurcation approach is notably less than that of the within-school streaming.

(e) Students can experience their junior secondary education through the same MOI, without being subject to the undue anxieties arising from switches between CMI and EMI classes. Therefore, with student effective learning and all-round development as the overriding concern, the Working Group proposes to maintain the current bifurcation approach under which most of our secondary schools would practise mother-tongue teaching. This would help promote the development of mother-tongue teaching which has begun to bear fruit.

19. Besides, the Working Group proposes to introduce a six-yearly review mechanism to assess whether there should be any change to the MOI adopted by individual schools.

MOI Arrangement for Schools Joining the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS)

21. Having considered the broad direction of mother tongue teaching, the Working Group is of the view that DSS schools have to meet the prescribed criteria of student ability, teacher capability and support measures if they are to adopt English as the MOI. In operationalizing this principle, having regard to the DSS concept, the Working Group recommends that the current flexibility be maintained. However, since an immersion mode is more effective in overcoming the barriers of using a second language to learn, the Working Group does not recommend that DSS schools adopt different MOI for different subjects at junior secondary levels.
22. For transparency, DSS schools should state in their school development plans and annual reports their MOI arrangement and the supporting educational considerations, the implementation strategies and fulfilment of the three prescribed criteria. It is an established practice of the EMB to conduct focus inspections at DSS schools as and when necessary. Should such inspections suggest any MOI practices being inconsistent with a school’s professed education philosophy, the EMB would take appropriate measures, including requiring the school to rectify the situation immediately.