

## **Comprehensive Review Report**

**United Christian College (Kowloon East)**

**Address of School: 2 Lee On Lane, Kwun Tong, Kowloon, Hong Kong.**

**Comprehensive Review Period: May 18, 19, 20, 21 & 22, 2009**

**Faculty of Education  
The University of Hong Kong  
October 2009**

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## **Introduction**

Under the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) service agreement, a Comprehensive Review (CR) is required to examine the performance of a school after it has operated for five years. A CR for the United Christian College (Kowloon East) (hereafter UCCKE or ‘the school’) was carried out over the period May 18 to 22, 2009. The terms of reference are to observe and record, to evaluate and to advise and recommend. The report comprises a Management Review and a Programme Review. The Management Review examined Management and Organization, Student Support and School Ethos, and Student Performance. The Programme Review considered Teaching and Learning.

### **1.1 School Background**

UCCKE was founded in 2003 by OMS International, the Free Methodist Church and Schools for Christ Foundation, with the vision of providing best quality Christian education through a cohesive team of dedicated Christian teachers who uphold a philosophy of Christian school education.

The school’s stated vision commits the institution to providing quality whole-person education based on God’s love and biblical principles. Its mission is to identify and develop students’ God’s given abilities and talents to their fullest potential so that students become people with faith, moral character, knowledge, culture and aspirations in a caring environment. Through this, students will formulate life directions and goals, build a positive life view, develop a solid foundation for further education, form a habit of lifelong learning, acquire a sense of social responsibility and live life according to God’s will.

The school puts God first in the things it does in undertaking what is best for its students. It not only emphasizes academic excellence, but values students’ spiritual growth, character building and non-academic development. The school is an EMI (English as the Medium of Instruction) co-educational school. Its priority is to provide well-rounded, quality education, emphasizing academic excellence, broadening international perspectives and fostering positive and lasting godly values.

The school’s core values place God at the centre and emphasize integrity, academic excellence and a caring community. The school upholds an obligation of stewardship

towards its students and its teachers, who share the same vision and goals of quality Christian education and work together to echo God’s calling with zeal and conviction to foster an environment of love and respect for the students.

The school holds the following beliefs about learning, namely that:

- people are created in the image of God and thus every child is precious;
- the concerted efforts of dedicated and professional teachers and the support and involvement of parents are critical to a child’s education;
- a well-articulated curriculum, sound biblical teaching, a healthy school culture and well-equipped facilities are indispensable to effective learning;
- children enjoy learning and are inherently intelligent;
- learning should not be confined to classrooms;
- learning is not merely individualistic; knowledge can also be obtained through learning communities;
- learning is not one-way but interactive;
- learning is a process of constructing knowledge;
- learning is cognitive and can be activity based; and
- learning is through the study of events to cultivate independent and critical thinking.

The class organization and numbers of students in 2008-09 were:

Level	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	Total
No. of classes	5	5	5	6	5	2	2	30
No of students	150	158	148	174	138	57	50	875

There are two form teachers in each class from Secondary 1 to 5 to strengthen pastoral support and civic-moral-health education.

At the time of this Review there were 62 full-time teachers; this included the Principal and Vice-Principals (VPs), two part-time teachers and two social workers.

## **1.2 Comprehensive Review Methodology**

Prior to and during the CR, the Review Team (the team) scrutinized documents and data provided by the school. The core members of the team paid a preparatory visit to the school on March 15, 2009 during which they attended a presentation by the Principal on the strengths and development priorities of the school. The team then explained to the teaching staff the purpose and operation of the CR, and responded to questions.

During the review period, the subject specialists of the Review Team observed 55 lessons and subject-related extra-curricular activities. They examined documents including minutes of staff meetings, subject department meetings and functional committee meetings, schemes of work, examination and test papers, and samples of student work. They also held discussions with the Principal, the two VPs, panel chairs, subject teachers, students, administrative staff, parent representatives as well as members of the School Management Committee (SMC).

The following Key Learning Areas (KLAs) were reviewed: English Language Education, Chinese Language Education, Mathematics Education, Science Education, Social Science and Business Education, Technology Education, Physical Education and Arts Education. Lessons were observed and, to align with the practice for school reviews in Hong Kong, a four point scale – excellent, good, acceptable, and unsatisfactory – was adopted to evaluate the quality of learning and teaching. The subject specialists of the Review Team met with panel chairs. Initial oral feedback was given to the whole panel after completion of all lesson observations and the examination of relevant documents.

The report's findings were derived from corporate judgment of the Review Team based on evidence and the information gathered through the above-mentioned methods during the review period.

## **Management Review**

### **2. Management and Organization**

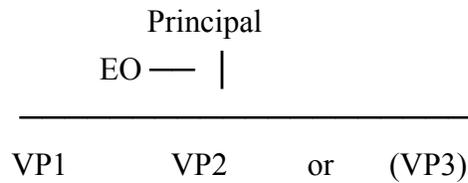
The success of learning and teaching in this relatively new school is strongly dependent on its management as it is on the teachers and teaching and on the school's students and parents. This section considers the organizational structure of the school and the ways that the school is dealing with teaching quality, curriculum change and relationships with parents.

#### **2.1 Organization and Administration**

The SMC comprises members from the sponsoring body, a parent, the school chaplain, a teacher representative, and an outside member who is a senior teacher from another school. Most members of the SMC have been known to the Principal for a long while and have confidence in him. Because of this trust, they give the Principal great autonomy in managing the school. The SMC members share the same vision and mission of the school. They are generous with their time in supporting the school's development and help the school with fund raising for new projects. They, particularly the Supervisor who was previously a teacher in United Christian College, are well acquainted with the teachers and meet them regularly either in school or in church gatherings.

The Principal is an experienced educator. He is dedicated and is serious in his commitments. He worked for many years as a principal in another school which bears the same name and was established by the same sponsoring body. In 2003, when he took up the principalship of this school, 7 colleagues from the old school joined him. These teachers, all have 10 or more years teaching experience, share similar values and have worked hard with the Principal in developing the school. They took on various positions in the school, mobilized other and in particular new teachers and worked closely with parents. During these years, with the help of the VPs and senior teachers, the Principal has continued to cultivate consensus among teachers around the school's vision and mission, promoting teacher professional development, building up teamwork, and practicing shared leadership with a relatively large group of senior teachers. From around the school's third year, its reputation as a place for learning and good education became known among parents. The strong Christian faith and values also attracted many parents of similar faith from other districts of Hong Kong.

There is a clear division of labour among the senior teachers. One VP is responsible for academic affairs and IT; the other VP, who is equally experienced but is relatively new to the post, takes charge of student affairs and co-curricular activities. Other senior teachers, who are either panel chairs or chairs of various committees, are committed to leading other teachers. There is an Executive Committee (EO), headed by the Principal with the two VPs and senior teachers as members, which takes on functions such as staff appraisal, crisis management, school administration and other tasks including school publications and beautifying the school premises. Under the present structure, the EO is in parallel with the two VPs; all of them are answerable to the Principal. The structure requires the Principal to take up the work of the EO and makes him answerable to himself. This may have overburdened the Principal and rendered the structure to be unnecessarily recursive. One way to avoid this situation is to appoint a third at VP level to look after the work of the EO which might focus on teacher appraisal, development and improvement, and related issues. In this way, the workload of the two VPs could be lightened. The role of the EO could be made advisory, and its members could include the VPs, a small number of senior staff and other teachers. This would release the Principal from daily routine to concentrate on strategic planning and development.



It is fortunate that the school was able to have a group of experienced teachers to take on various positions to help to build up the school from the beginning. As they share the same faith, this further strengthens their team spirit. The success of the school thus far also owes much to their dedication and hard work. Compared to them, the new teachers look young and inexperienced. Mainly because of this, few of them are given any major role in the school, although they are equally anxious to learn and improve. New teachers need support and opportunity to grow. As UCCKE develops and new teachers become more experienced, the school should involve them more in school management issues and listen more to their voice, a desirable strategy to cultivate a stronger sense of belonging and ownership.

The school administration was reviewed and found to be in order. Records are adequately kept and a filing system has been developed to index, store and retrieve files. The school office has experienced staff who carry out daily routines smoothly. Over the years, an office clerk has been in charge of financial accounts. The account ledgers are well kept and the procedures issued by Education Bureau have been followed. The school's accounts are audited annually by professional accountants. There are budgets for school activities and teachers need to seek prior approval for expenses out-side of these. Teachers are required to closely adhere to procedures and this they do. Being a DSS school, students bear some of the cost of extra-curricular activities and the school has set up appropriate procedures for form teachers to handle student charges. The school is about to complete a student dormitory in order to recruit overseas students. The school accounts will become more complex and may require employment of a professional to handle the job. This is an issue of which the school is fully aware and which the school plans to follow up. The financial management of the school is basically sound and prudent. The resolution of the major concerns that arose during the previous year reflected that the school was able to deploy resources effectively in implementing priorities.

## **2.2 Staff Appraisal and Development**

An appraisal system which includes self evaluation has been used to assess the performance of teachers. The objectives, procedures and evaluation criteria are clear. Appraisals are normally conducted by senior teachers and subject panel chairs. The teachers are as a whole satisfied with these criteria and this procedure. Each year, the Supervisor is involved in meeting some teachers to understand teacher attitudes and feelings towards the school. Apart from enhancing communication, the role of the Supervisor could be extended to include a mechanism for appeal by teachers. As the system develops, more information will be gathered on teachers' strengths and weaknesses in teaching and other related issues. In so far that the information currently available is being used, these data could be better utilized and developed into themes addressed in staff development activities using outside specialists where appropriate. For example, subject specialists could be invited when 'lesson study' is identified as a way to improve teaching.

The school has a policy for staff development. New teachers participate in an induction programme. Teachers in general are keen to learn and many enrol in post-graduate studies,

the number of teachers obtaining master degrees being on the rise. Teachers are required to attend workshops, seminars, and talks throughout the year. The school also organizes its own staff development activities. In-house seminars, workshops and talks are held regularly. Recently, with an aim to broaden the exposure of teachers, overseas visits and exchange programmes have been organized. Teachers visited schools and attended workshops in Shanghai and Singapore. All teachers have attained more CPD hours than the required 50 hours per year.

Thus far, the staff development activities are of a general nature. As the school grows, more specific topics should be organized in staff development activities to meet the increasing demands of teachers in teaching. For example, it might organize focused lesson observation to help teachers understand their strengths and weaknesses in teaching, in classroom and time management, in questioning skills, in use of teaching aids, and in sharing good practices. The school has provided some financial support for staff professional development but it is not widely known among the teachers. There is a need to improve the publicity of the scheme so that more teachers can benefit and the concerns expressed in the stake-holder surveys of teachers can be addressed.

There is awareness of the need for quality assurance. Many subjects and committees adopt a similar format which incorporates a quality assurance mechanism such as SWOT in the analysis. However, the quality of the analysis varied. One common weakness is the lack of focus. In the report, the strengths and weaknesses were often listed but either the enhancement measures are absent, or measures are insufficiently specific, or success criteria are missing. It is often uncertain if improvement has occurred or how improvement was made. To address the issue, the school should organize in-house workshops to promote techniques in quality assurance. Outside experts could be invited if there is a need.

## **2.3 Curriculum**

A committee has been set up for planning the forthcoming New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum under the leadership of a VP. The School has made the NSS curriculum one of the major concerns in its development plans. Each subject panel has tried to align their subject curriculum with the overall objectives, and to initiate planning and development in alignment with the school's major concerns. One example is Liberal Studies, one of the four core subjects in the new curriculum; it started its planning well ahead of time in

preparing for change by involving teachers across disciplines in training workshops, trialing new Problem Based Learning (PBL) classroom methods and approaches to supervising students' independent study.

Since its establishment, the school has defined major concern (MC) foci as strategic areas in its yearly plan. Each year linkage was made with the previous year's plan so that the major concerns could be addressed over the following years. Due largely to the dedication of the teachers as many of them belong to the same or similar Christian denominations, they are committed to UCCKE's values of Christian education. The work in religious activity to promote students' spiritual development, as reflected in a major concern in 2008 'God as the centre', is apposite. An integrated approach was adopted in which classroom teaching was permeated with biblical values and supported by activities such as class fellowship, student prayer groups and bible study. Individual teachers served as role models which had a great impact on the students.

The work in curriculum development was also impressive in co-curricular activities and Planning-Implementation-Evaluation where a good effort was made in following through the process. However, development work was less effective in school-based curricula. Likewise with respect to the MC 'to further develop the academic potential of students' of 2008-09, a follow-up of 'Academic Excellence' of 2007-08', there was a tendency to link academic excellence to the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) success, a yardstick on which the school had placed great importance and had achieved a good record after a few years. Class tests and quizzes were increased drastically, particularly in the senior forms as a result of the volume of homework being reduced following parental complaint. The balance between homework and class tests was upset and the academic focus of students was dominated by a concern to obtain high scores in tests and quizzes.

Where there are frequent tests, the students naturally give more attention to contents to be assessed and ignore the rest. However, repeated high scores in tests may not represent genuine understanding and improvement in the subjects learned. This is an issue the school needs to be aware of. The school could consider organizing in-house workshops with outside experts to alert the teachers to this issue and find ways to remedy the situation.

## **2.4 Relationships**

The school attaches great importance to working with parents and values home-school co-operation. The Parents-Teacher Association (PTA) was established soon after the school opened and the school maintains close relations with parent members of the PTA as well as other parents. The attendance at the PTA is good. Talks and seminars are frequently organized for parents to acquire a common language when communicating with their children. ‘Happy hours’ are held regularly where parents are invited to come to talk to teachers in an informal atmosphere. Parents are informed of teaching schemes and they often raise issues about their children’s learning at school and home. One example referred to earlier related to a comment that too much homework was given following which the school adjusted its policy. Instead of homework, the students, particularly those in S4 and S5, were given more class tests. This evidences the willingness of the school to listen to parents’ suggestions. Parents praised the hard work of the teachers. Some parents take up voluntary service in the school, such as working in the library, manning the PTA hotline, providing career guidance, and offering parent education. Parents respect the school’s emphasis on Christian faith and welcome the school’s open-door policy. The notion that the school is a big Christian family is well received and parents are very satisfied with the easy communication between parents and school.

## **2.5 Learning Support**

The library facilities are fully utilized. There is a good collection of books including textbooks, reference materials, magazines, journals and fiction. The stock is regularly updated. However, more books on popular science could be bought to stimulate the interest of more students in science subjects, particularly in Chemistry and Physics. The school has good library support for teaching and learning through explicit teaching of library and reading skills and organization of extended research sessions for students. Furthermore, the classrooms are all well-equipped with modern facilities and equipment, which offer good resource support for learning and teaching.

### **3. School Ethos and Student Support**

#### **3.1 School ethos**

The school places great emphasis on providing quality whole-person education anchored in God's love and biblical principles in order to help students become people with faith, moral character, culture, knowledge and aspirations.

Most teachers in the school are young. They are sincere, devoted, energetic and enthusiastic in both teaching and learning. They care for the students and have good rapport with students. There is good team spirit. Teachers share teaching resources and collaborate in planning lessons. In a few subjects, the teachers work hard to produce tailor-made materials that will benefit students. With the support of the school, they have conducted peer observation which has helped to build confidence and professional expertise, although improvement as suggested in the KLAs reports could be made. Teachers who chose to stay are in accord with the Vision and Mission of the school. Sharing the same faith may have strengthened the bonds among themselves and between themselves and the school.

Students, parents, staff and SMC have a strong sense of belonging to the school. Virtually all the stakeholders that we met were acquainted with the school's Vision and Mission and its message came through strongly in all our meetings and discussions with them. Almost everyone with whom we talked was proud to be part of the school.

The school ethos has been well developed and received by the stakeholders concerned. In the meeting with students, they expressed their love for the school because of the caring attitude of the teachers, the positive learning atmosphere and the strong religious ethos.

In the meeting with parents, they remarked that the school door is always open. There is always someone to whom they can talk and they felt that their children are being well taken care of by the school. They reiterated that they love the school and it is a big Christian family.

#### **3.2 Support for student development**

The overall planning of support for student development is comprehensive. The school

has set clear objectives for support programmes for student development, particularly in the implementation of the major concern “To cultivate students’ integrity” regularly and systematically as exemplified below.

### Discipline and Counselling

The work of the Discipline and Counselling (D&C) Team is aligned with the school’s major concerns. The team holds regular meetings to discuss discipline and pastoral matters. Form coordinators facilitate horizontal communication among form teachers at the same level and provide vertical links across levels. In general, students are well behaved and possess positive learning attitudes. Student time management, however, seems to be of concern to the D&C team. The team could collaborate with other colleagues e.g. the Moral and Civic Education (M&C) Team to address their concerns.

The school rules, systems of reward and punishment as well as procedures for handling misbehaviour are fair and reasonable. They are clearly written in the student handbook. Parents appreciate the D&C team members’ patience when counseling students who misbehave and in praying with them to God for forgiveness and help. Prefects are empowered to supervise the conduct of students in all forms. The Prefect Handbook is well prepared and a prefect training camp is organized to foster team spirit.

The school social workers and their team provide personal counseling services for students. In addition, the social workers work closely with the D&C team in planning and delivering support programmes for students. These include relaxation and stress management, developing self-esteem, handling conflict, preparing for the NSS curriculum, maintaining good communication with parents, and developing inter-personal skills. Shue Yan University students majoring in Social Work help with the implementation of the programmes. Parents are also invited to share with students their experiences in their professional fields as part of the career Counselling programmes.

The school provides adequate support to new students. A bridging programme is arranged for students transiting from primary to secondary school life and a “Big Brother and Sister” programme is arranged to supplement this. As noted by the students and reflected by the teachers, new students adapt to secondary school life quickly and comfortably.

For students with learning problems, the school offers well-developed remedial classes to

help them improve academic performance. However, it is recommended that the school puts in place more comprehensive measures to cater for learning diversity.

### Moral and Civic Education

The M&C team is effective. The roles and duties of each member are clearly defined. They work collaboratively in delivering lessons and educational talks, preparing materials as well as in communicating with parents.

Moral and civic education is offered to students through both the formal and informal curriculum. In the formal curriculum, it is delivered to Secondary 1 to 3 classes through well-planned Moral Education lessons and Life and Study Skill lessons. These aim to cultivate students' positive values and attitudes, emotional health, life and management skills. The well-prepared teaching schemes are constantly updated, with current issues supported by rich, enjoyable school-based teaching materials. External expertise (e.g. from The University of Hong Kong) and resources are appropriately used. The school has developed a 'Habits of Mind' programme which has successfully helped to establish a positive school culture. In the informal curriculum extra-curricular activities are provided, which seek to address emergent moral and civic issues in a spontaneous manner.

The M&C team works closely with parents. Parents are well informed of teaching schemes so that they can discuss some of the issues with their children at home. Students are also required to do some homework which must have parental endorsement on completion.

The school provides adequate opportunities for students to serve and care for others. Among the many programmes, a class-based social service programme is a great success. In line with a policy of setting an average of 10 hours of social service per year as one pre-requisite of graduation, a class-based social service activity has been launched on Wednesdays after school. Students from each class take the initiative to seek opportunities for serving the community and they organize their own self-designed social service programme. Parents also actively participate in helping to implement this programme by, for example, vetting the programme prepared by the students and acting as team guardians. On the whole, as shown in our interviews with students, they are positive to the school's provisions for moral and civic education, particularly the class-based social service programme.

In the delivery of religious education, each class is divided into two groups for Bible lessons. One group is for older Christians and leaders while the other is for non-believers and new converts. Different curricula are offered to each to meet needs and interests. This curriculum policy is considered reasonable and effective.

### Student Council

There are nine official members of the Student Council (SC). Each level in the school is entitled to nominate and vote for one student to be a member. The other members are voted for by the school population as a whole. In addition to these nine, many volunteers are recruited to assist in the administrative work and this allows junior form students to gain experience.

The role of the SC is to serve fellow students and most of the inter-class competitions are organized by the Council. These activities provide ample opportunities for students to develop organizing skills and confidence. Furthermore, the members are assured that their views and proposals for school improvement are taken seriously by the school. Although not all proposals have been accepted, they appreciate the school's quick response and feedback, its willingness to discuss and debate and to help them understand the difficulties involved with some of their proposals.

### Co-curricular activities

The school offers a wide range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities to help students develop their interests and maximize their potential in various pursuits, be they intellectual, sporting, musical, aesthetic or scientific.

These activities are divided into subject-related activities (e.g. English, Chinese, Japanese, French, and music), interest clubs (e.g. film, drama, and campus TV), community organizations (e.g. Red Cross), school teams (e.g. basketball, archery, and hockey) and others (e.g. Current Affairs Quiz). However, most are linked to the training of school teams. There are few activities for students of average ability to raise their awareness and interest. Furthermore, the link between the co-curricular activities and the formal curriculum needs to be reviewed and refined.

### **3.3 Home-school co-operation**

The school places great value on home-school co-operation. As a part of this, there is an orientation programme for the parents of newcomers to the school. The principal talks to the parents on school's Vision and Mission. The Habits of Mind programme is explained so that parents can share a common language with their children regarding the foci of their school life. In addition, talks and seminars are organized regularly throughout the year to meet the interest and needs of the parents and average attendance is around 150 to 200 people. The relationship with parents is thriving and benefits the school in many ways. Parents are happy with the opportunities to communicate their views with the school and the way the school responds. They also value the links with school created through the Parents Network, the e-class and the four Parent Letters sent out each year.

In addition to two Parents Days, parents can also meet the teachers at the four Parent-Teacher Happy Hours sessions. They seem pleased to be kept well informed about their children's school life and performance. In return, they are willing to support the school.

Parents also appreciate the fact that they are actively invited to participate in major school events and are happy to work with the school as volunteers to help in organizing whole-school functions as well as class-based social service activities.

The majority of the parents respect the school for stressing Christian and moral values. They value the teachers not only for their efforts in providing a positive learning environment for the students but also for the love and care shown to their children.

The Parents-Teacher Association (PTA) has a strong team of enthusiastic parent members who are a valuable resource for the school. Parent volunteers are ready to support the school through, for example, helping with the organization of major whole-school functions, advising students in class-based social services, providing career guidance, and offering parent education.

### **3.4 Links with external organizations**

As mentioned earlier, the school maintains close links with external bodies, voluntary agencies and non-government organizations to provide a wide range of activities for students, staff and parents. Examples encompass the United Christian Community

Church, Hong Kong Christian Service, The University of Hong Kong, Shue Yan University and the Red Cross. The school makes good use of community resources to support initiatives.

#### **4. Student Performance**

That students enjoy school, have a strong sense of belonging and love their school has already been referred to. The students show great respect for their teachers and relate well to each other. They are very polite, well-mannered and conscientious. Most exhibit confidence in and eagerness for learning. While variations occur across subjects, most students engage enthusiastically in the learning and teaching process, actively responding to teachers' questions in class as well as completing assigned tasks in a serious manner.

Students participate actively in various co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. Student leaders, such as the committee members of the SC are mature and responsible and show a strong sense of commitment, leadership and readiness to serve others.

Since the establishment of the school, students' performance in public examinations has been steadily improving. In the HKCEE 2008, student results in the three core subjects (English Language, Chinese Language and Mathematics) and the best six subjects were above the average for schools with a similar intake; 91.4% of the students obtained passes in five or more subjects.

Students' non-academic achievement is also very good and is reflected in student participation rates and successes in various activities and competitions. The prizes and awards won by UCCKE students in external competitions have been growing steadily both in number and level of achievement. School teams have gained awards in the Hong Kong Schools Music Festival, Speech Festival and Drama Festival. Other successes include awards and prizes in inter-school sports competitions (for football, basketball, hockey, badminton and athletics), various Mathematics competitions, the World Robot Olympiad and the Junior Achievement Company Programme.

## **Programme Review**

### **5.1 Curriculum planning and management**

The school has a wide and balanced curriculum which, following the school's stated mission, emphasizes academic excellence, broadening students' international perspective and fostering positive and lasting godly values in the lives of students. It aims to provide a biblically based, whole person education and instill in students a desire for life-long learning.

One of the salient features of the curriculum is its emphasis on students' spiritual development. Classroom teaching is integrated with biblical values, with Form Chapel and Class Fellowship. Student prayer meetings and bible study groups have been organized. Christian education is offered to students through a team of committed teachers who are dedicated to the philosophy and values of Christian school education.

The curriculum of the School is diversified and flexible to cater for the equally diverse needs and interests of students. Classes are streamed in accordance with the English ability of students. Those students with good proficiency can opt to learn Chinese Language in Putonghua. Teaching in Mathematics is organized in small groups according to ability and Bible classes are streamed in line with the religious background of students. In the senior secondary curriculum, the school offers fifteen elective subjects from the NSS curriculum and arts students can choose science and business subjects, and vice versa. This initiative breaches the boundary of streaming found in some traditional schools and offers students more flexibility in course selection. The school system has been developed to be able to align the planning of its curriculum with the MC "To further develop the academic potential of students".

The curriculum stresses the development in students of a high level of bi-literate and tri-lingual proficiency. Other than English and Putonghua, students are offered the option of a third language: French or Japanese. The school encourages a positive reading culture through various reading programmes, for example, Reading Circles and Readathons.

The school puts a strong emphasis on thinking skills and project learning. The thinking skill – 'Habits of Mind' initiative has been integrated into the curriculum and a school-based curriculum 'Life and Study Skills' programme has been developed for junior form

students to develop critical thinking and project learning skills. The school also has a strong school-based moral-civic-health education curriculum, which supports students' all-round development. To widen global perspectives, the school has organized student study tours to Mainland China and overseas and invited sister-schools from all over the world for exchange visits. All these were well received by the students, showing that the school is able to link the planning of its curriculum with the major concern 'To facilitate students' response to global concerns'.

Another feature of the curriculum is that in junior forms the science curriculum is implemented through the independent study of Physics, Chemistry and Biology. Although this arrangement aims to help students develop a more solid foundation in science, the integrated nature of science and its relevance to daily life issues need to be strengthened. On the other hand, humanities subjects, namely World History, Chinese History and Geography, are taught through block systems within junior forms, in order to reduce student workload. However, some students when interviewed commented that the learning experience is sometimes quite fragmented and the curriculum continuity is difficult to maintain. There is still room for improvement for the present block systems. More work could be done to enhance the subject continuity across years of study and to strengthen connections among subjects within the same key learning area.

To prepare for the forthcoming curriculum change, the school has made the NSS curriculum a major concern in their development plans. Each subject panel has not only aligned their subject curriculum with the overall objectives, but also initiated planning and development to cope with the challenges ahead.

The formal curriculum is supplemented by an informal curriculum which seeks to foster students' non-academic development, character building and spiritual growth. This is implemented through various co-curricular and extra-curricular activities such as an open day, a variety show, an annual concert, a singing contest, overseas study tours, summer camps, social service and participation in cultural exchange activities. The evidence suggests that these activities help students build self-esteem and confidence, as well ensuring all-round, whole-person education.

While UCCKE has made commendable progress since its foundation, curriculum integration needs to be improved. More collaboration across KLAs, such as between Liberal Studies, English Language, Chinese Language and Computer & Information

Technology, between Physical Education and Science, and between various humanities and business subjects is needed to reinforce student learning across subjects. This would improve consistency in the development of school-based curricula. In this context, continuous staff development to enhance teacher understanding and expertise in curriculum planning, management and evaluation should be pursued in a more systematic way. Furthermore, it is suggested that the school improves the school-based curriculum for Music and Physical Education to cater for the diverse needs and abilities of students so as to realize students' varying potentials.

## **5.2 Teaching**

Teachers are sincere, dedicated and enthusiastic. They exhibit a caring attitude towards students and there is good student rapport. They enjoy excellent relationships with students and a harmonious classroom atmosphere creates a supportive learning environment.

Teachers are willing to share teaching resources and collaborative lesson planning occurs in some subject panels. A collegial and supportive culture has been established. Furthermore, peer observation is conducted regularly and has helped to develop confidence and professional expertise among teachers.

The school has a clear medium of instruction policy which teachers follow closely. The policy is based on a bi-literate and tri-lingual approach, providing a favourable environment for the learning of English and Putonghua along with Cantonese. Students cope and manage to respond sensibly to teacher questions in class using the appropriate language for the subject concerned.

Teaching and learning is supported by a well stocked library. There is the explicit teaching of library and reading skills as well as the organization of extended research sessions for Secondary One students. Classrooms are all well-equipped with modern facilities and equipment, which offers good resource support for learning and teaching.

Almost all of the fifty-five lessons observed fell in the range excellent to acceptable. Most lessons observed were well prepared and organized with clear learning objectives. The majority of the teachers demonstrated a mastery of subject knowledge, communication skills and classroom management skills, all of which promote positive

learning attitudes in students. In some of the excellent lessons that were observed, an ethos of genuine peer support and collaboration was developed. Students were eager to participate in collaborative learning tasks and group discussions generating peer learning. However, while there are variations among subjects and teachers, classroom teaching in general tends to be teacher-centred and teacher-student interaction is not organized in a very effective and meaningful way.

As a developing school, UCCKE is well positioned to further improve in the domain of learning and teaching. It is recommended that a wider repertoire of teaching approaches and strategies be developed by teachers. In particular, teachers should be encouraged to develop professional competence in the design and implementation of more effective collaborative inquiry-based learning in classes. Such lessons can help to engage students in active learning, deepen student understanding of subject matter as well as developing student thinking skills. There is also room for improvement in the teachers' questioning skills to develop deep learning and higher-order thinking.

Teachers need to develop greater awareness and professional expertise to draw upon the authentic experiences of students in curriculum planning and teaching. By this means, students can develop a more personal and contextualized understanding of concepts to be learned. Teachers need additional support to improve instructional planning and the teaching strategies they use.

More importantly, to pursue the school's vision of developing students' academic excellence, more emphasis and effort is needed in developing students' intrinsic motivation for learning by cultivating their interest and curiosity towards learning in subjects/key learning areas. This should be further supported by a more systematic and thoughtful planning of co-curricular activities organized by academic societies and clubs in the school. In addition, to help students to understand and respond to global concerns, teachers should consider how to systematically permeate these concerns into the classroom learning and teaching in different subjects.

Finally, to cater for the increasing learner diversity of the students and improve educational experiences, it is recommended that in addition to the existing provisions a more differentiated curriculum be developed along with the necessary appropriate forms of classroom teaching such a curriculum.

### **5.3 Student learning**

Students are intelligent, polite, attentive and eager to learn. They demonstrate strong learning potential and positive learning attitudes. They are active in their approach to learning and their learning performance is in general good.

The students, both in lessons observed and in group discussions with team members, exhibited positive views about learning and teaching at UCCKE. Many were keen to express themselves and their views appeared unrehearsed and frank. It is clear from observations in classrooms and on other occasions that most enjoy their school life and the learning experiences it offers. Those students with experiences of attending other schools felt that UCCKE is unique in the caring and supportive atmosphere within which teachers and students enjoy excellent relationships with each other based on God's love. On the whole, students are offered good learning experiences by the school.

However, although the school has implemented some measures to address issues concerning the diversity of interests, needs and achievement across its student population, more can be done to cater for different learning abilities. This could be accomplished through, for example, curriculum adaptation and more differentiated learning resources, graded instruction and worksheets/assignments, teachers' flexible use of questions in class, and better monitoring of enrichment/remedial classes in some subjects. The school needs to continue to be proactive in catering for learning diversity so that all students realize their potential with appropriate and adequate learning support.

### **5.4 Assessment**

The school has a clear assessment policy for homework and assessment. This emphasizes both continuous and summative assessment and, as a part of this, places importance on the regular use of quizzes to motivate students to study. As there was a tendency to link academic excellence to HKCEE success, class tests and quizzes were increased drastically, particularly in the senior forms, as reflected by the students whom we interviewed. The balance between homework and class tests was upset and the academic focus of students was dominated by a concern to obtain high scores in tests and quizzes.

A better balance between quiz and assignment/homework is recommended, as assignments and quizzes serve different functions in respect of learning. Instead of

repetitive, low-level questions in assignments, multi-level tasks and questions with challenging questions are needed to consolidate and extend what students have learned, thereby maximizing their learning potential and catering for individual differences. To address the MC 'to further develop the academic potential of students' in a more thoughtful and effective way, instead of holding frequent quizzes in class, more class time should be devoted to fostering student learning through well-designed instruction. The school could consider organizing workshops to alert the teachers to the importance of developing students' genuine interest towards the subjects and find ways to remedy the situation.

With respect to 'Assessment for Learning', there is good work on evaluating the implications for learning underlying summative assessments. Teachers should build on steps taken to evaluate student performance in examinations. They should make progress towards introducing a more systematic approach to evaluation that will facilitate easier identification of students' strengths and areas of concern and refine classroom practice that will improve learning. More work is needed to better understand students' learning difficulties and misconceptions in homework. Teachers should be encouraged to help students understand their strengths and weaknesses by providing more student-friendly feedback on work. It is important for teachers to monitor the follow-up of their recommendations and adjust their planning and teaching to improve learning.

## Concluding Remarks

United Christian College (Kowloon East) has succeeded in delivering a quality whole-person education based on sound Christian principles. The school has largely achieved the major goals they set for the first five years of operation, which included: laying a solid foundation for future growth; building an effective team comprising principal, VPs, teachers, parents and students; cultivate positive school ethos; establishing a good reputation in the community; and creating among students a sense of belonging. The success of accomplishing the high aspirations set out in its original proposal is exemplified by the following achievements, namely the development of:

- The strong commitment of the SMC complemented by the leadership of founder-principal
- A supportive, cohesive and dedicated team of teaching and supporting staff
- Enthusiastic parents who feel very much part of the UCCKE community and demonstrate good school and parent rapport
- Students who are generally happy and love their school and who exhibit good rapport with their teachers
- A positive school ethos with family spirit, caring attitude and spiritual emphasis
- Flexibility towards challenge and change and a caring atmosphere
- A good reputation for offering quality Christian education in the community
- A solid foundation for future development (both in respect of infrastructure and culture for learning)

The school clearly has delivered quality educational experience and student achievements (both academic and non-academic) commensurate with the Vision and Mission of its original proposal to secure Direct Subsidy Scheme status. To build on existing strengths for continuous improvement, the school needs to address the following issues:

### Learning and Teaching

- To further improve the quality of teaching and learning, the school needs to give additional professional support to teachers so that they can develop a wider repertoire of teaching approaches and strategies, in particular of ways to design

and conduct effective and meaningful collaborative inquiry-based learning in class that will develop students' deep understanding of the subject matter and good thinking skills.

- The good work on school-based curriculum development should be taken forward to: (i) improve provisions to cater for learner diversity by means of a differentiated curriculum and concomitant classroom instruction; (ii) refine assessment for learning by providing appropriate feedback to students on their work which will enable them to build on their strengths and identify aspects for improvement; and (iii) strengthen the links between key learning areas to further develop students' cross- and multi-disciplinary learning.
- To pursue the school's vision of developing students' academic excellence, greater emphasis is needed on developing students' intrinsic motivation for learning by cultivating their interest and curiosity towards the various subjects/key learning areas. This should be supported by more systematic and thoughtful planning of co-curricular activities organized by student leaders of the academic societies and clubs and a better balance between quiz and assignment/homework.

#### Management and Organization

- Six years on, it is an appropriate time to undertake a holistic review of the management structure and operation of the school to meet the challenges of a growing and complex organizational and curriculum structure.
- The school should revisit its staff development policy and practices to consider how best to mutually support the emerging needs of individual staff and the school. In particular how to develop teachers' pedagogical competence to improve the quality of learning and teaching and how to enhance teachers' understanding and expertise in curriculum planning and evaluation for quality assurance will be one of the major concerns in future development plans.