

**Code:** E01 / E05

**Title:** Helping cross-boundary students at the starting line of their English language learning journey

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The number of Cross-boundary students (CBS) keeps increasing in these few years and the Hong Kong Eng Clansman Association Wu Si Chong Memorial School has admitted a number of CBS since 2012. Teachers quickly responded to the special educational needs of the students and have implemented a number of curriculum initiatives. Statistics show that the students are making substantial progress. In fact, most of them showed development on par with local students. The students' growth can be attributed to the school's systematic, comprehensive and timely support which is translated into the teachers' pro-active and thorough understanding of the students' English language experience and standard, intensive teacher and peer help, availability of an array of online teaching and learning materials, effective communication with parents and practical parent-pupil phonics classes.

A good beginning is the start to a successful learning journey. The School believes that having a complete understanding of the students' background and academic standard at the very beginning of the primary school education helps teachers plan and tailor their curriculum and set appropriate expectations on their students. Over the last two years, the School conducted pre-Primary 1 questionnaire surveys and pre-Primary 1 tests with all their P.1 parents and students respectively. While the pre-Primary 1 surveys facilitated the School's understanding of the parents' expectations of the English language education in Hong Kong, students' parental support at home and the kind of English language support the students need most at the School, the pre-Primary 1 tests gave teachers a glimpse into students' basic English language skills on the alphabet, numbers, colours and phonics.

Helping the CBS is a race against the clock. Teachers understand that this special group of second language learners needs constant and abundant exposure to English if they have to catch up with their local Hong Kong counterparts in a short period of time. Before the P.1 term officially commenced, students had to make good use of their summer holiday to speed up their learning through a summer program involving listening to online English songs and alphabet learning. Once the official school term started, the CBS were then assigned to different buddy groups in which upper primary school students offered intensive help in terms of general greetings, listening to English instructions, body parts, numbers, etc.. Formative assessments were set to allow timely evaluation of the students' progress.

The School understands phonics skills are the indispensable building blocks of the English

language learning journey. Phonics helps children read by enhancing letter and word recognition, enabling students to dissect words into sounds and to blend sounds into words. Mastering phonics skills means improving spelling ability and increasing pronunciation. Parents' support and understanding of phonics learning would certainly help speed up the students' learning of the English language. Parents of CBS were invited to attend a 6-week parent-pupil phonics program in which general classifications of phonemes into long vowels and short vowels, digraphs and consonants were introduced to parents. Parents and their children also had hands-on experience of producing and blending English sounds themselves. The parents' involvement in the learning significantly increased the students' chances of practicing the necessary phonics skills out of school hours and consequently, as parents reflected, the phonics knowledge has substantially increased students' confidence in learning English.

Throughout the course of supporting the CBS, the School has put much emphasis on communication with parents. Effective communication has helped parents understand education differences between Mainland China and Hong Kong in terms of pedagogy used in classrooms, views on assessments and homework policies. The School found that the enhanced understanding has been often accompanied by better family support for the students' learning.

In this sharing session, teachers will share with participants some early intervention strategies to cater for the needs of the cross-boundary students. Participants will be shown the conceptions behind and findings of the School's pre-Primary 1 tests and questionnaire surveys. Participants will also see how the School supports the cross-boundary students with intensive teacher and peer assistance through summer courses, buddy programs, availability of an array of online teaching and learning materials, effective communication with parents and practical parent-pupil phonics classes. Videos of the parent-pupil phonics lessons and parent interviews and curriculum materials used will also be shared and discussed.