**School Talk**

# Catering for learner diversity: start from nurturing student motivation and engagement

**L**earner diversity is a big challenge for Islamic Dharwood Pau Memorial Primary School (IDPMPS). Since their students come from different countries, including Hong Kong, Mainland China, India, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan and Egypt, their cultures, learning interests and styles are very different. The non-Chinese students who have been newly transferred to the school face the most difficulties in adapting to the new learning environment and local education system. Some of them were even just early learners in English when they first arrived in Hong Kong. In this issue, we are glad to have the Principal and the English Panel Head of IDPMPS to share their valuable views and experiences on how they cater for learner diversity in their school.



### School Profile

Islamic Dharwood Pau Memorial Primary School is an EMI (English as Medium of Instruction) school. The school has both non-Chinese speaking students (ethnic minority students) and local students. They started using *Lighthouse for Hong Kong* this school year.

> To cater for learner diversity, we should not only think of how to create a successful language learning environment or what teaching strategies should be applied in the classroom, but we also need to stimulate and arouse students' motivation to learn, and raise their consciousness of self-improvement. In fact, helping students to build up positive attitudes towards learning is our greatest aim so that they can achieve educational excellence.
>
> — *Ms Salim Sekena, Principal of IDPMPS*

**Light Up** *Your Path to Better English*

# " School Talk "

The Principal of IDPMPS believes that catering for learner diversity not only narrows the gap between more able and less able students, but also helps all students fully unleash their potential. For less able students, the school provides a variety of language learning programmes and all-round support, such as remedial classes and after-school tuition classes for homework support. Enrichment programmes like the Young Performers Certificate (YPC) classes taught by NET teachers weekly, strengthens students' English proficiency. For high achievers, opportunities to participate in school competitions and leadership training programmes are provided to widen their exposure as well as to boost their self-confidence.
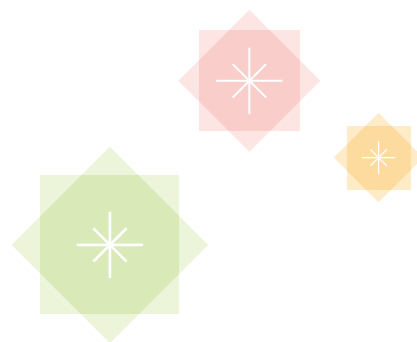
## Goal Setting Programme to improve students' self-responsibility in learning

**Ms Salim Sekena:** All students have a heart to pursue progress and success in their learning. IDPMPS students are no different. In order to encourage students to improve themselves, we started the 'Goal Setting Programme' last October. This is a personalised learning programme. Each student needs to review which areas they should improve and develop an achievable action plan. Teachers discuss with them individually, give them advice, guide them to do self-evaluation and follow up on their progress. The programme aims to foster students' self-reflective attitude and stimulate their desire for self-improvement. We urge our students to understand that they should take responsibility for their own learning and strive for excellence.

**Ms Salim Sekena**
Principal of IDPMPS

## To maximise students' participation in class

**Ms Salim Sekena:** We believe all students are curious about everything and eager to learn. If teachers provide them with interesting activities, the students can participate in the learning tasks actively. Therefore, we always emphasise the importance of an engaging learning environment. We are working hard to create a happy and supportive learning environment by using a cooperative learning approach, which helps drive students' motivation to learn.

**Ms Tse:** For classroom teaching strategies, the small class teaching approach has been implemented to meet the needs of diverse students. The core teaching comes first in class, then the whole class is divided into groups of 4 to 5 students, and language activities are assigned to them. The advantage of small class module is that it helps students focus and concentrate in class. Through various interactions, students can establish closer relationships with one another and with teachers. We can capture students' attention more easily and this is very effective in enabling those less able students to grasp the language faster.

## Cooperative learning strategies for small class teaching

**Ms Tse:** Our school focuses on 1 to 2 different cooperative learning strategies every year. This year, the 'Numbered Heads Together' and 'Three Steps Interview' activity approaches have been chosen for teachers to implement in their lessons. During the small group activities, each student has a different role in the group. They have to interact with other students and make use of the target language items in order to complete the tasks. It can enhance all students' engagement and hence maximise their participation. All of them end up benefiting from cooperative learning.

I think *Lighthouse* offers a wealth of resources and good teaching support. The information and notes provided by *Lighthouse* Teaching Planners are useful. The suggested small class teaching strategies are practical and effective. The game suggestions are also good reference and good inspiration for our teachers. We adopt the theme and adjust these materials according to our teaching plan. In addition, we found that the supporting worksheets are useful for group discussion. These materials help us a lot when we plan how to meet the needs of diverse students.

## Higher-order thinking skills training for developing learners and high achievers

**Ms Tse:** Our school also advocates higher-order thinking strategies. We apply Bloom's taxonomy in class. Lower level questions (e.g. extract information or applied knowledge) are given to less able students, while challenging questions (e.g. evaluation or creating) are assigned to high achievers to encourage their higher-order thinking. It can help foster students' creativity and critical thinking.

We appreciate the higher-order thinking strategies in *Lighthouse* Teaching Planners. For example, a case is mentioned in a chapter that students are always late for school. There is a Bloom's taxonomy table to suggest students think of the possibilities and reasons of being late. I think this kind of table helps students evaluate how they can perform better. This material perfectly matches our school strategy as it allows students to evaluate themselves.

## Flexible use of teaching resources to meet the needs of diverse students

**Ms Tse:** For the teaching materials, we can flexibly use the exercises in *Lighthouse* Workbooks and Grammar Books to cater for diverse students. Since the books provide the suggested model answers, we can edit and adjust the question types easily. Less able students are given more instructions in writing. We can modify the question types to 'fill in the blanks' or 'words given', or to provide sentence beginnings for students to complete the tasks. For more able students, only a few hints are given to them to complete the tasks. In addition, we extract the comprehension tasks from *Lighthouse* Writing Books to design higher-order thinking skills questions. We modify the question types from MC to full sentences in their writing assignments so as to help them practise their writing in complete sentences. Besides, *Lighthouse* teaching resources platform provides some picture cards for each chapter in WORD format. We usually print them out for less able students to learn or do matching at home in order to encourage self-directed learning.

# Lighthouse for Hong Kong
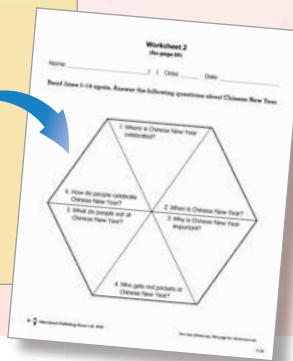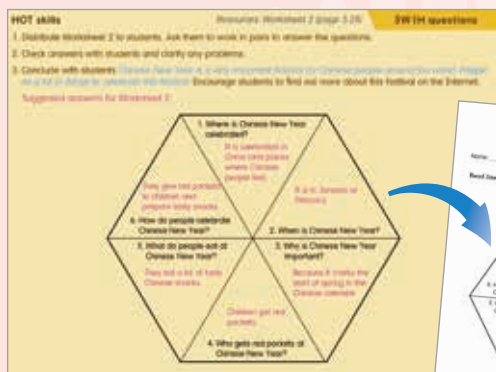
# Catering for learner diversity
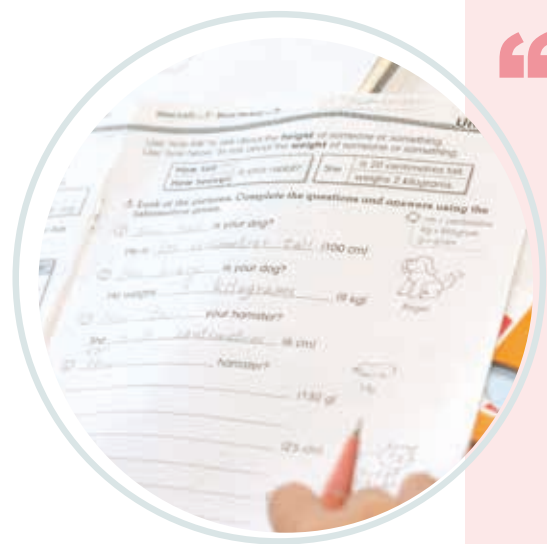
## Small Class Teaching Plan

- Detailed small class teaching plan, worksheets and game cards are provided in Teaching Planners
- Many interesting activities are suggested to encourage collaborative learning
- The suggested activities involve students in meaningful interactions which make use of the target language items
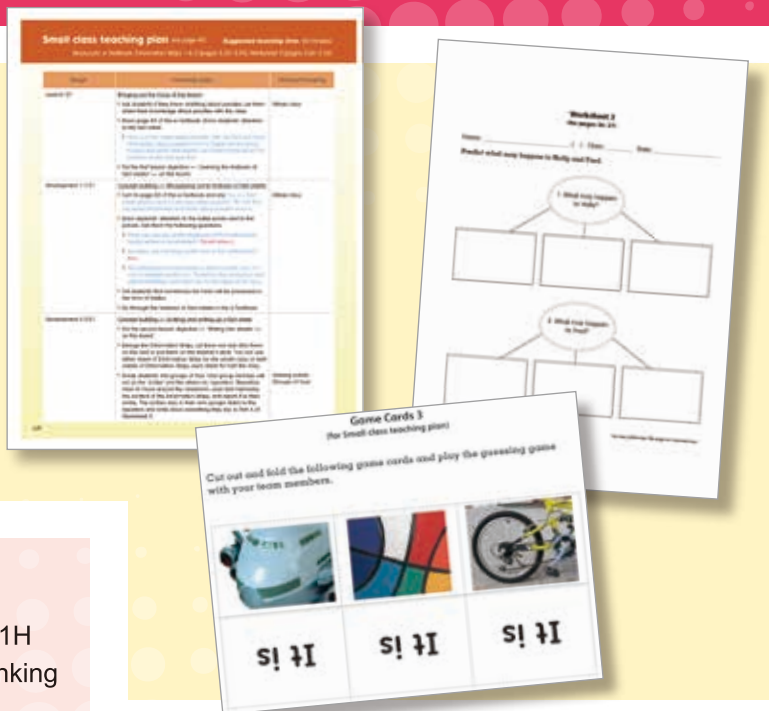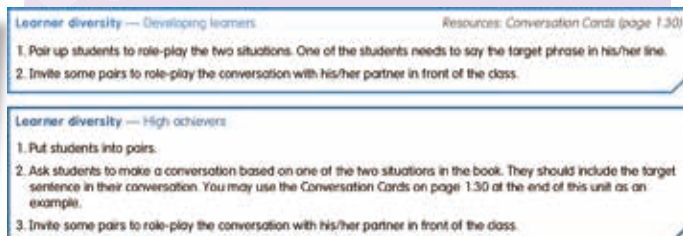
## Higher-order Thinking Skills (HOT)

- Different types of HOT skills: Bloom's taxonomy, 5W1H questions, 6 thinking hats, etc. to foster students' thinking
- Include a variety of HOT skills activities, with worksheets and suggested answers

## Learner Diversity Suggestions

- Practical and useful suggestions are given to cater for developing learners and high achievers

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