

LegCo Panel on Education
Reservation of School Sites

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the provision of school sites in achieving various education initiatives.

Background

2. The Education Department (ED) and the Planning Department (PlanD) work closely in reserving school sites. Having regard to the forecast growth and movement of population provided by the Census and Statistics Department, the relevant provisions in the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines (HKPSG), and prevailing education policies (such as whole-day schooling), ED projects the demand and supply of school places and requests PlanD to identify and reserve school sites accordingly. On the other hand, PlanD, in preparing town plans and designing comprehensive development projects, will reserve school sites on the basis of the needs for community services in accordance with HKPSG. In the process, ED will also be consulted.

Schools sites needed to achieve Government's policy objectives

New demand for school places due to population growth

3. Government's policy is to provide nine-year free and universal basic education, and a highly subsidised senior secondary education. Schools will thus need to be built to meet new demand arising from population growth or movement. At present, the provision of primary school places is planned on a district basis to obviate the need for young pupils to travel a long distance to attend schools. For secondary schools, the demand is planned on a territory-wide basis, although adjustment will be made for districts with persistent shortfall or surplus. Between now and the 2007/08 school year, we will be building 26 primary schools, 29 secondary schools and one special school to meet new demand for school places. By and large, adequate school sites have already been reserved for this purpose.

Whole-day Primary Schooling

4. Government's interim target is to enable 60% of our primary school pupils to study in whole-day schools by the 2002/03 school year. To achieve this target, 78^(Note 1) new primary schools are required between 1998 and 2002. To date, 35 schools have already been completed; a further 42 are at various stages of construction. We will be seeking funding approval from the Finance Committee for the only remaining project in early 2001. Apart from constructing new schools, ED has also been converting existing bi-sessional schools into whole-day operation through administrative measures. We are on course to achieve the 60% target.

5. We are further committed to enabling virtually all primary school pupils to study in whole-day schools by the 2007/08 school year. To this end, ED will need to construct another 46^(Note 2) new schools, and to convert more bi-sessional schools to whole-day operation through administrative measures. Of the 46 sites required to build new schools, 38 have already been reserved, and ED is actively identifying the remaining sites with PlanD.

Senior secondary education

6. In this year's Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced that starting from the 2002/03 school year, all Secondary Three students who have the ability and wish to continue with their study will be provided with a subsidised Secondary Four or vocational training place. To achieve this target, eight senior secondary schools will be completed by the 2003/ 04 school year. All the necessary school sites have already been reserved.

Other educational initiatives which will require more school sites

Provision of more post-secondary places

7. The Chief Executive announced in this year's Policy Address that we would support the progressive increase in post-secondary education opportunities. For planning purpose, we aim to reach 60% of

(Note 1) 24 of these 78 schools are also needed for meeting new demand and thus are also counted towards the 26 primary schools in paragraph 3 above.

(Note 2) 2 of these 46 schools are also needed for meeting new demand and thus are also counted towards the 26 primary schools in paragraph 3 above.

the 17-20 age group by the 2010/11 academic year. We estimate that the proposed expansion will provide 28,000 additional student intakes and 71,000 extra student enrolment by the 2010/11 academic year. The pace of development will depend on the actual number of places course providers are able to put on stream each year, acting on market forces. We envisage that the increase will mainly come from the expansion in sub-degree and professional diploma courses on a self-financing basis, particularly through-

- (a) a gradual expansion of existing associate degree or equivalent programmes and the introduction of new programmes by the Federation for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions, comprising the continuing education divisions of the University Grants Committee-funded institutions, the Open University of Hong Kong, the Vocational Training Council and the Caritas Higher Education Service;
- (b) the upgrading of some schools, or selected programmes offered by these schools, to sub-degree or professional diploma level;
- (c) the development of new post-secondary colleges; and
- (d) well-established overseas education institutions setting up a branch in Hong Kong or running joint programmes with local providers.

8. In achieving the policy target, Government will encourage potential providers to maximise the use of their existing land and physical resources to provide the additional student places. To facilitate the emergence of a critical mass of post-secondary colleges, we encourage operators to consider purchasing conveniently located buildings as college premises. To cater for the need for purpose-built college premises, we will consider providing sites at nominal premium to authorised operators of post-secondary courses. Assuming that about 50% of the expansion will be met by newly built premises and assuming a more intensified landuse, we estimate that we will need about seven new sites (equivalent to seven secondary school sites) by the 2002/03 academic year, and another seven sites by the 2007/08 academic year.

School Improvement Programme

9. Many of the existing public sector schools in Hong Kong were built to old planning standards which cannot meet the requirements imposed by the changes in curriculum and teaching approaches in recent years. These schools require additional space and facilities to meet current standards. In mid-1994, the Government launched a phased School Improvement Programme (SIP) covering some 900 schools. We plan to complete the entire programme by 2005.

10. For some schools, SIP works are technically non-feasible due to site constraints or the poor physical state of the school premises. We are considering for 29 such schools other long-term improvement options, including in-situ redevelopment or reprovisioning. In the interim, ED will also consider the feasibility of undertaking short-term improvement measures to the schools. In the light of experience, we reckon that 10% - 20% of the 342^(Note 3) schools in the SIP final phase may also be classified as technically non-feasible after completion of feasibility studies. If all these schools agree on reprovisioning, some 30 to 70 schools may have to be relocated in the medium to long term.

11. In the case of in-situ development, the schools will need to be temporarily decanted. Thus, we will need to build a handful of schools for decanting purpose. These schools can be subsequently re-used and counted towards our long-term provision.

Reduction of class size

12. To enable early implementation of whole-day primary schooling, a decision was taken in 1997 to adjust the class size slightly: two pupils were added back to each class in primary schools (i.e. an average class size of 34.5), and the reduction of class size in secondary schools was temporarily suspended (i.e. an average class size of 40).

13. If Government were to reduce class size for primary schools to 32.5 and secondary schools to 35, then a great number of school sites would be needed. Assuming, for example, that this were to be achieved by the 2007/ 08 school year, ED's rough estimate is that a further 27 primary schools and 49 secondary schools would need to be built.

^(Note 3) There are originally 358 schools in the final phase of SIP. As separate arrangements for reprovisioning and in-situ development have been or are being made for 16 schools in this phase, the number of schools to be dealt with in the final phase is reduced to 342.

Way Forward

14. By and large, adequate sites have already been reserved to implement the policy objectives outlined in paragraphs 3 to 6 above, although we will still need to identify eight more sites in the right districts in order to achieve full implementation of whole-day primary schooling by the 2007/ 08 school year.

15. If we were to implement all the other initiatives set out in paragraphs 7 to 13 above, more land is required. This is not easy, given that land resources are scarce in Hong Kong and there are competing claims for them.

16. At the moment, apart from sites already ear-marked for the policy objectives in paragraphs 3 to 6 above, ED has over 200 sites reserved for school development. However, except for a few, most sites are not readily available in the coming few years because they are intended to tie with future development. In addition, some sites may not be in the right districts or locations, which is particularly pertinent to primary schools that are planned on a district basis. Furthermore, even if all the necessary sites were made readily available, it is doubtful whether the Public Works Programme can accommodate a large number of schools within a short period of time. Where the implementation of initiative requires additional teachers (for example, reduction of class size), we need also to bear in mind the capacity of our teacher training providers in training up new teachers.

17. In view of the above, we have to prioritise the initiatives and find a practical way forward amidst the constraints. Our current thinking is to accord priority to allocating sites for the construction of post-secondary colleges, and helping schools which cannot benefit from SIP to undergo re-provisioning or in-situ relocation (if this is agreeable to the schools concerned). In meeting these demands, we have to find ways of bringing forward the development, hence the availability of reserved sites.

Education and Manpower Bureau
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