

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)3330/03-04

(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 19 July 2004 at 4:30 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung, BBS, JP (Chairman)
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum (Deputy Chairman)
Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon MA Fung-kwok, SBS, JP
- Members absent** : Hon SIN Chung-kai, JP
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon SZETO Wah
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Mr CHENG Man-yiu, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (3)

Mrs Michelle WONG
Principal Education Officer
(School Administration and Support)
- Attendance by invitation** : Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union

Mr CHAN Kwok-kuen
Director, Publication Department

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Miss SY On-na
Deputy Director, Publication Department

Government Educational Staff Union

Mr LEE Ming-kai, Louie
General Secretary

Mrs YEUNG YICK Ka-yee
Secretary

The Alliance of small-class teaching to promote quality education

Mr CHOI Wing-tim
Chairman

Mr WONG Hak-lim
Member

Subsidized Primary Schools Council

Mr TSOI Kai-chun
Vice-Chairman

Mr FUNG Ka-ching
Executive Committee Member

Clerk in attendance : Ms Doris CHAN
Chief Council Secretary (2)2

Staff in attendance : Ms Joanne MAK
Senior Council Secretary (2)2

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I. Confirmation of minutes
[LC Paper No. CB(2)3090/03-04]

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 May 2004 were confirmed.

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II. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2890/03-04(01), CB(2)2963/03-04(01) and CB(2)3091/03-04(01)]

2. Members noted the following papers which had been issued after the previous meeting of the Panel -

- (a) Administration's responses to the concerns raised by Duty Roster Members and the "爭取基層生活保障組" in respect of the Student Travel Subsidy Scheme [LC Paper No. CB(2)2890/03-04(01)];
- (b) submission from a group of persons and representatives of indigenous inhabitants of the New Territories on the Administration's policy on consolidation of high cost and under-utilized primary schools [LC Paper No. CB(2)2963/03-04(01)]; and
- (c) submission from Hong Kong Baptist University Faculty and Staff Union [LC Paper No. CB(2)3091/03-04(01)].

III. List of outstanding issues

[Appendices I and II to LC Paper No. CB(2)3088/03-04]

3. Members noted the list of outstanding items for discussion and the list of follow-up actions.

IV. Review on the implementation of the recommendations of the Education Commission Report No. 5 on improving teacher-student ratios and class sizes in primary and secondary schools

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)3088/03-04(01), (02) and (03)]

4. The Chairman welcomed the representatives of the Administration and the deputations to the meeting.

Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union

[LC Paper No. CB(2)3088/03-04(01)]

5. Mr CHAN Kwok-kuen presented the views of Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union as detailed in its submission. Mr CHAN urged the Administration to -

- (a) immediately implement the recommendations of the Education Commission (EC) as contained in its Report No.5 (ECR5) such

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that the standard class size in primary schools should be reduced to 35 for conventional classes, and to 30 for Activity Approach classes. At secondary level, the standard class size should be reduced to 35; and

- (b) expedite the implementation of whole-day primary schooling and improve the teacher-to-class ratio in whole-day primary schools from the present 1.4:1 to 1.5:1, as recommended by EC in 1992.

6. Ms SY On-na said that a recent survey conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong had shown that a high percentage of teachers were suffering from stress as a result of the Education Reform and heavy workload. Ms SY urged the Administration to pay attention to the findings and address the problem. She added that reducing class sizes would be conducive to enhancing the quality of education and would facilitate teachers in handling students with different abilities.

Government Educational Staff Union

7. Mr LEE Ming-kai also urged the Administration to immediately reduce the standard class size at each level from Primary 1 to Secondary 5 in accordance with the recommendations of EC set out in its Report No.5.

8. Mr LEE Ming-kai further said that the Administration should provide information on the new mechanism for secondary school places allocation to be introduced and what had been explored since the abolition of the Academic Aptitude Test in April 2000.

The Alliance of small-class teaching to promote quality education

9. Mr CHOI Wing-tim said that recently the Alliance together with 10 other educational groups had jointly published a statement demanding the Administration to resume the policy of reducing class sizes pursuant to the recommendations of ECR5. Mr CHOI further said that given the decline in school-age population, it was an opportune time to implement small class teaching, which was already being implemented in neighbouring places including Taiwan, Japan, Shanghai and Macau.

Subsidized Primary Schools Council

10. Mr FUNG Ka-ching said that the Subsidized Primary Schools Council strove for the implementation of a teacher-to-class ratio of 1.5:1 in whole-day primary schools as recommended by EC in 1992. Mr FUNG pointed out that it was essential to achieve such a ratio in order to attain quality education.

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11. As regards the class size, Mr FUNG Ka-ching said that it should be 30 for Activity Approach classes. However, in 1998 the then Education Department had decided that a class size of 32 should be adopted as a provisional measure in order to speed up the implementation of whole-day primary schooling and cope with demands for school places posed by the large number of new arrival children. Mr FUNG further said that since there were now not too many new arrival children and as the number of school-age children was declining, the class size in primary schools should be back to 30. However, if this could not be achieved immediately due to budgetary constraints, a teacher-to-class ratio of 1.5:1 should at least be implemented first in whole-day primary schools, to be followed by reducing the class size to 30.

12. Mr FUNG Ka-ching further said that the Administration had informed the education sector that there would no longer be any subsidies for Activity Approach classes. Mr FUNG said that therefore there would not be any difference between Activity Approach and Non-activity Approach classes. Mr FUNG considered that the class sizes in all primary schools should be 30.

13. Mr FUNG Ka-ching further said that the Subsidized Primary Schools Council was of the view that resources saved from the reduction in classes due to declining school-age population should be devoted to primary education and not to be taken away.

Other submission received

14. Members noted that North District Primary School Heads Association had also provided a submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)3088/03-04(03)) for this meeting.

The Administration's response

15. Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (3) (DSEM(3)) said that the Administration had been striving to implement the recommendations contained in ECR5 on improving the teacher-to-class ratios and the class sizes in primary and secondary schools on a gradual basis. DSEM(3) further said that although the target of improving the ratio for whole-day classes of primary schools to 1.5:1 had not been fully met, the ratio had been raised to 1.4 teachers per class now. DSEM(3) said that for secondary schools, the staffing levels had also been raised, with one additional Certified Master/Mistress post being provided to each school with 30 classes or less, and two such additional posts to a school with more than 30 classes.

16. DSEM(3) further said that the Administration understood the aspirations of the education sector. However, bringing changes such as improving the teacher-to-class ratio in whole-day primary schools from the present 1.4:1 to 1.5:1 would entail significant recurrent staff costs. DSEM(3) said that the

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Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) had yet to secure the necessary resources to meet the additional recurrent expenditures, and would further explore how to tackle the resource problem. DSEM(3) pointed out that in fact, about 30% of primary schools had the class size of 30 or less.

Discussion

17. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong asked whether it was due to changes in policies or resource constraints that the Administration had failed to implement small class teaching and, if it was the latter, what would the timetable be for the implementation. Mr CHEUNG pointed out that almost the whole community had reached a consensus that small class teaching was conducive to enhancing quality of education. Mr CHEUNG criticized the Administration for failing to live up to its promise in deferring the implementation. Mr CHEUNG also queried why EMB, in the face of fiscal constraints, still had allocated \$550 million for supporting school-based professional support programmes which, in his view, could not achieve any meaningful purpose. Mr CHEUNG said that Hong Kong was lagging behind many Asian places which were already implementing small class teaching.

18. DSEM(3) reiterated that the Administration would have to first resolve the resource problem before it could implement the recommendations in ECR5 on improving the teacher-to-class ratios and the class sizes. DSEM(3) said that the Administration was only unable to provide a concrete timetable for the implementation of the recommendations, but he was not saying that the Administration had decided not to implement them. DSEM(3) explained that the new grant of \$550 million was different in nature because it was a one-off grant. However, the implementation of measures such as improving the teacher-to-class ratios would incur additional recurrent expenditures. DSEM(3) added that at a previous meeting of the Panel, the Administration had briefed members on the preliminary findings of the first and second stage of the Study on Effective Strategies of Class and Group Teaching in Primary Schools (the Study).

19. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered it unacceptable that the Administration was not able to provide a timetable for the implementation of the relevant recommendations in ECR5, which had been endorsed by the Administration for 12 years. Mr CHEUNG asked why the Administration had not redeployed the resource savings, achieved by reduction in classes and phasing out some under-enrolled primary schools, to finance the implementation of those recommendations. Mr CHEUNG further asked the Administration to consider immediately reducing the class size in band 3 secondary schools, which at present was 40.

20. DSEM(3) responded that before 1998, the Administration had been on the way to realise the class size in primary schools as recommended in ECR5.

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However, after consultation in 1998, the target had been adjusted in order to speed up the implementation of whole-day primary schooling and cope with demands posed by a large number of new arrival children.

21. In response to Mr CHEUNG's concern about the class size in band 3 secondary schools, DSEM(3) said that the actual class size in most of these schools was significantly less than 40. In fact, some band 3 secondary schools were requesting for over-allocation of students, as they did not wish to have packing classes even if some students decided to quit.

22. Dr David CHU also urged the Administration to provide a timetable for the implementation of small class teaching, which he considered was the simplest way to enhance the quality of education. DSEM(3) responded that he was unable to do so at the present moment, as EMB was unable to commit the necessary additional resources and it had to further explore how to resolve the resource problem. DSEM(3) pointed out that the 30% of primary schools, which had a class size of 30 or less did not demonstrate good teaching or learning effectiveness. The Administration had therefore planned to invite about 40 schools to participate in the Study, which would shed light on what support measures would be needed to maximise the benefits of small class teaching. DSEM(3) said that the project would commence in the 2004/05 school year and would complete by the end of 2006/07. The report of the Study would be ready by early 2008.

23. Dr YEUNG Sum said that the Administration was obliged to realise the vision in ECR5, and it was also an opportune time to reduce class sizes given the declining school-age population. Dr YEUNG asked whether the Administration would first reduce the standard class size by five places at each level from Primary 1 to Secondary 5, as recommended in ECR5, and implement the other recommendations contained in that report by phases.

24. DSEM(3) reiterated that to improve the teacher-to-class ratio in whole-day primary schools from the present 1.4:1 to 1.5:1 would entail significant recurrent staff costs. Taking the projected position in the 2007/08 school year as an example, the Administration estimated that the additional annual staff cost would be around \$385 million. DSEM(3) said that nevertheless, EMB would explore how to tackle the resource problem and undertook to provide a concrete proposal on the way forward early in the following legislative term.

Admin

25. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung asked whether the Study would be used by the Administration to procrastinate the reduction in the standard class sizes in primary and secondary schools. Mr LEUNG also queried what the Administration had done in the past in exploring how to implement the recommendations in ECR5.

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26. DSEM(3) clarified that the class size mentioned in the Study was 25. The class sizes referred by the deputations were the recommendation in ECR5, i.e. 35 for conventional classes and 30 for Activity Approach classes.

27. DSEM(3) further said that after the issue of ECR5 in 1992, the Administration had implemented the recommendations on the class sizes, commencing from Primary 1 in the 1993/94 school year. In 1998, after consulting the education sector, the Administration decided to speed up the implementation of whole-day primary schooling. To facilitate the early achievement of whole-day primary schooling for all, the standard class size in primary schools was increased by two places, starting with Primary 1 in the 1998/99 school year and to be phased in over six years. DSEM(3) explained that every year, the Administration was reviewing the demand and supply for school places and assessing the class structures of each school.

28. DSEM(3) pointed out that there had been ups and downs in the economic situation of Hong Kong in the past few years. He said that as improving the teacher-to-class ratio would incur significant recurrent staff costs, the Administration had to carefully make long-term budgetary planning for this.

29. Ms Cyd HO expressed concern about the increase in workload faced by teachers over the years. In response to Ms HO, Mr TSOI Kai-chun said that the primary school sector had long awaited the implementation of the recommendations contained in ECR5, particularly on improving the teacher-to-class ratios. He pointed out that there had been a substantial increase in the workload for teachers arising from extra non-teaching work, which had seriously affected their family lives and reduced their time that could be spared for students.

30. DSEM(3) said that the Administration was also concerned about the heavy workload of teachers and had taken various support measures to alleviate the problem, such as by providing native-speaking English teachers, Capacity Enhancement Grant for schools to hire additional staff, etc. He added that the Administration had also managed to improve the teacher-to-class ratio in whole-day primary schools from 1.3:1 to the present 1.4:1 and would explore how it could be further improved.

31. Ms Cyd HO suggested that EMB should explore if there was room to further streamline administrative work procedures to alleviate the heavy workload of teachers. DSEM(3) responded that the administrative work handled by teachers had been streamlined in the past few years, such as the procedures involved in the Student Travel Subsidy Scheme. DSEM(3) said that taking the Capacity Enhancement Grant as an example, application forms had already been significantly simplified.

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32. Commenting on the additional annual staff costs of \$385 million, Mr WONG Hak-lim said that as pointed out in ECR5, the forecast decline in school-age population would enable the Administration to achieve resource savings and allow the standard class size to be reduced gradually. Mr WONG further said that when the Administration decided to adjust target by increasing the standard class size in primary schools from 35 to 37 in 1998, the education sector had supported the policy on the understanding that the teacher-to-class ratio in whole-day primary schools would be 1.5:1. However, such a ratio had never been achieved. Mr WONG pointed out that the Administration actually had already achieved resource savings in the process.

33. Mr WONG Hak-lim further said that eight or nine years ago, there were some 80 000 Secondary 1 students but the number would drop to about 50 000 in the coming two to three years. The money saved through reduction in classes and phasing out schools would be substantial and the Administration should provide detailed information on this.

34. Mr WONG Hak-lim pointed out that as EMB required secondary schools to have a class size of 40, many of the schools (even including band 1 schools) were worried that they could not admit enough students. As a result, some of them had over-enrolled students and this had affected the quality of education.

35. Mr WONG Hak-lim said that the small class/group teaching to be tried out through the Study could not benefit the participating students in terms of plot ratio of school area enjoyed by each student. Mr WONG said that compared with other countries, Hong Kong students had the least room in schools for learning. Mr WONG also pointed out that the mode of small class/group teaching adopted in the Study was actually the mode of split-class teaching, and a lot of time would be wasted when the students had to be allocated to different classrooms for certain lessons. Mr WONG further said that 20 years ago this approach of teaching had already been tried out for teaching Chinese and English under another scheme, and there had been detailed reports on the teaching and learning effect of such an approach. Mr WONG said that he did not understand why the Administration still had to waste time to conduct the Study. Mr WONG further said that the Alliance had earlier made a submission to EMB detailing its views and he urged the Administration to involve education professionals in the design of the small class/group teaching modes to be tried out through the Study.

36. Dr YEUNG Sum said that the Democratic Party had also expressed similar concern when the Panel discussed the Study at a previous meeting and he thanked Mr WONG for making this point even clearer. Dr YEUNG suggested that the Panel should require the Administration to submit its proposal for discussion at an early meeting of the Panel in the next legislative session. The Chairman agreed to put Dr YEUNG's suggestion to the Panel in the new session and requested the Administration to submit the proposal early.

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37. In concluding the meeting, the Chairman thanked members for their contributions to the work of the Panel and the Secretariat staff for their assistance.

38. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:10 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
23 September 2004