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the Administration)

**Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to the Provision of
Boarding Places, Senior Secondary Education and Employment
Opportunities for Children with Special Educational Needs**

**Minutes of meeting
held on Friday, 17 February 2006 at 10:45 am
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung (Chairman)
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
- Member absent** : Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
- Public Officers attending** : Items II and III

Mrs Betty IP TSANG Chui-hing
Principal Assistant Secretary (School Administration &
Support), Education and Manpower Bureau

Mrs Mary MA LO To-wan
Commissioner for Rehabilitation, Health, Welfare and
Food Bureau

Mr SIT Tung
Assistant Director (Rehabilitation and Medical Social
Services), Social Welfare Department

Mr Tony TANG Fat-yuen
Principal Education Officer (Curriculum Development)

Attendance by invitation : Items II and III

Hong Kong Special Schools Council

Mrs Rita MANSUKHANI AU Hay-lun
Chairperson

Mr CHAN Kwok-kuen
Vice-Chairman

Support Group on Integrated Education

Mr Christopher SO Kwok-on
Member

Item III

Hong Kong Association for Parents of Persons with Physical Disabilities

Ms NAM Suk-yee
Vice-Chairman

Ms Sandy LAM Suk-yu
Executive Member

Concern Group on the Provision of Boarding/Respite Service in Schools for the Physically Disabled “「爭取肢體弱能學校開辦住宿/暫宿服務」關注組”

Ms TAM Yuk-fung
Member

Ms HO Bo-ching
Member

Parent Sub-group of Schools for the Physically Disabled “肢體弱能學校家長小組”

Ms YU Tung-mui
Parent, Tuen Mun Pui Oi School

Ms LAM Suk-mui
Parent, Tai Po Elaine Field School

Clerk in attendance : Miss Flora TAI
Chief Council Secretary (2)2

Staff in attendance : Item II
Mr Watson CHAN
Head, Research and Library Services Division

Ms Diana WONG
Research Officer 2

Items II & III

Mr Stanley MA
Senior Council Secretary (2)6

Miss Sherman WOO
Legislative Assistant (2)2

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I. Confirmation of minutes
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1109/05-06]

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2006 were confirmed.

II. Research report on special education in selected places
[RP02/05-06 and LC Paper No. CB(2)1177/05-06(01)]

Briefing by Head, Research and Library Services Division

2. With the aid of power-point computer programme, Head, Research and Library Services Division (H(RL)) of the Legislative Council Secretariat presented the findings of the research report on special education in selected places (the Report) as detailed in the set of presentation materials which was tabled at the meeting [LC Paper No. CB(2) 1177/05-06(01)].

Oral presentations by deputations

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Hong Kong Special Schools Council

3. Mr CHAN Kwok-kuen said that the Report had provided useful information and statistics on the provision of special education in the selected places, namely the State of California (California) in the United States, the Province of Ontario (Ontario) in Canada, England of the United Kingdom and Taiwan. He highlighted that compared to the provision of special education in the selected places, Hong Kong should improve in the development of professional teachers for special education and individualised education programmes (IEP) for students with special educational needs (SEN). He considered that the Government should review the proportion of education resources allocated for special education, the pace of implementation, the provision of additional resources and support for implementation, and the role of special schools in the implementation of integrated education in ordinary schools.

4. Mr CHAN Kwok-kuen further said that the conduct of a research without an element of field study and opinion survey on the interactions of the stakeholders would inevitably be incomprehensive in terms of its findings. He requested the Administration to consolidate the findings of the studies on special education conducted by Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) and tertiary institutions for public consultation and follow-up discussions during the comprehensive review on the provision of special education.

*Support Group on Integrated Education
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1177/05-06(02)]*

5. Mr Christopher SO presented the views of the Support Group on Integrated Education as detailed in its submission. He highlighted that compared to the provision of special education in the selected places, Hong Kong should legislate to protect the right of students with SEN to undergo SEN assessment and receive IEP, the right of parents to participate in the development and implementation of IEP for their children with SEN and to appeal against the decisions made in the identification, assessment or school placement processes. On provision of support for special education, the Administration should provide sufficient resources to special schools and professional development programmes for teachers in teaching students with SEN.

The Administration's response to views of deputations

6. Principal Assistant Secretary (School Administration & Support) (PAS(SAS)) said that the Administration was conducting a comprehensive review on the provision of special education, covering, among others, the provision of professional development opportunities for teachers as well as resources for special schools and ordinary schools in supporting SEN. She explained that the Administration would aim to provide appropriate

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development programmes to cater for the training needs of serving teachers. She agreed that professional development for teachers in special education should keep up with the changing circumstances.

7. PAS(SAS) cautioned that the community should consider the pros and cons of enacting legislation about the right of students with SEN in education, and parents' participation in the identification and assessment of their children's SEN and in the design and implementation of IEP, as well as the appeal against the results of assessments and the decisions on design and implementation of IEP. She pointed out that the experience in some overseas places with legislation on the provision of special education was not always encouraging. In some places, legislation on the provision of special education for students with SEN had led to a large number of legal proceedings that diverted staff and professionals in the special education sector from their primary concern about educating students.

8. PAS(SAS) further said that EMB would follow up with the Research and Library Services Division (RLSD) of the LegCo Secretariat on the percentage of budget allocated for special education with respect to the total education budget in the selected places. She pointed out that different jurisdictions might have different definitions of SEN and adopted different funding models and formulae for calculating the share of special education in the total education budgets. She explained that the allocation of \$1.29 billion (2.6% of the total funding for education) for special education in Hong Kong was calculated from the recurrent funding for special schools only, and did not include funding for implementation of integrated education in ordinary schools and other initiatives in special education such as the provision of professional development programmes for serving teachers involved in teaching students with SEN. She added that some overseas jurisdictions might include the funding for education of gifted children and low academic achievers with poor performance in English etc.

9. PAS(SAS) added that the Administration had commissioned a team of local and overseas experts to conduct a study known as "A Study of the Effectiveness of Special Schools" in October 2005. One of the main findings of the Study was that the overall resources allocation to special schools in Hong Kong was good by world standards. The special schools were staffed with suitable quality teachers, most of whom were highly committed and hardworking. The schools had the support of a range of specialists such as speech therapists which were good by standards in the developed countries. In this connection, she considered that the comparison on funding portion for special education might not be meaningful without knowing the bases of calculation.

10. The Chairman asked whether RLSD would clarify the base for calculation of the share of special education in the total education budgets of the selected places. H(RL) explained that RLSD had written to the relevant

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authorities in the selected places to seek further elaborations on the calculation of their special education budget as a percentage of the total education budget. The replies were awaited. In this connection, the Chairman requested H(RL) to provide the Subcommittee with an update on the issue in due course. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong added that the Report should also incorporate teacher-student ratio in the special education schools in the selected places and Hong Kong.

11. Ms Audrey EU suggested that RLSD should incorporate the additional information provided by the relevant authorities in the selected places into the Report and provide an updated report for members to follow up discussion at future meetings. H(RL) responded that subject to the responses received, RLSD would provide a supplementary report on relevant issues to members in due course.

Discussion

Legislation governing the provision of education for students with SEN

12. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the research findings in the Report provided a foundation for discussion of special education policies in Hong Kong. He pointed out that despite the availability of legislation and better provisions of special education, there were strong resentment against the provision of special education and accommodation for students with SEN in Ontario (paragraph 3.8.1 of the Report referred), and the need for legislative amendments to reduce unnecessary lawsuits and litigation (paragraph 2.2.3 of the Report referred). He also pointed out that legislation of assessment and reassessment might overburden educational psychologists thus preventing them from providing support to schools and children. He considered that legislation on mandatory assessment of SEN and development of IEP for students with SEN and empowerment of their parents to participate in the design and implementation of IEP and lodge appeals should be carefully examined in the context of the situation in Hong Kong.

13. PAS(SAS) responded that the unnecessary lawsuits and litigation in overseas countries had reflected the negative impact of legislation on provision of education for students with SEN.

14. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong remarked that the Administration should examine the issues from the perspectives of key stakeholders and formulate policies that could balance the interests of the key stakeholders in the context of the Hong Kong environment.

15. Ms Audrey EU considered it difficult to compare the provision of special education between Hong Kong and the selected places in terms of their legislation to protect the rights and interests of students with SEN in learning.

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She considered the comparison should start with the fundamental values and beliefs in different places for provision of special and integrated education including the development and implementation of IEP for students with SEN. She invited H(RL) and deputations to express their views from this perspective.

16. H(RL) responded that paragraph 6.1.14 of the Report provided a brief analysis of the general features of IEP in the selected places and in Hong Kong.

17. Mr CHAN Kwok-kuen responded that theoretically there was a spectrum of possible approaches to the provision of education to students with SEN, with the segregation approach at one extreme and the inclusion approach at the other. Between the two extreme approaches in the spectrum, there was the integration approach which encouraged students with SEN to enrol in ordinary schools and integrate with students in ordinary schools in learning. Mr CHAN considered that many western European countries were moving towards the implementation of an inclusion policy, while Hong Kong was more at the stage of implementing an integration policy for the provision of education to students with SEN.

18. Mr Christopher SO said that the role and functions of legislation on protection of the rights and interests of students with SEN in learning should not be distorted by possible abuses of the appeal mechanisms. He considered that parents would exercise their right to appeal with prudence, and it was essential to legislate for protecting the right of students with SEN to receive quality education and their parents to appeal when necessary.

19. PAS(SAS) responded that the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO) was enacted to protect the right of students with SEN in education. Apart from its anti-discrimination provisions, DDO required schools to provide students with SEN with reasonable accommodation and support in learning. She added that while the long-term target was to progress from integration to inclusion, the continued operation of special schools for students with severe and multiple disabilities was essential.

20. Ms Audrey EU agreed that the continued operation of special schools was essential for some students with SEN such as students with severe intellectual disability. She invited deputations to suggest measures to facilitate implementation of integrated education in ordinary schools to progress from the stage of integration to the stage of inclusion.

21. Mr CHAN Kwok-kuen agreed that the operation of special schools to accommodate students with severe intellectual or physical disabilities should continue, regardless of the development of an inclusion policy in mainstream education. He considered that the fostering of an inclusive culture to support students with SEN in learning was crucial to facilitating implementation of integrated education in ordinary schools to progress from the stage of integration to inclusion. In addition, the provision of sufficient resources and the

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assignment of a SEN coordinator or establishment of a Student Support Team to coordinate the delivery of effective support for students with SEN were also important. He added that while schools in some western countries had a culture to celebrate the enrolment of students with SEN, schools in Hong Kong were only encouraged to do so.

22. Ms Audrey EU also considered it unlikely that the establishment of an appeal mechanism by legislation to monitor the implementation of education for students with SEN would lead to unnecessary lawsuits and litigation because it required substantial courage and determination on the part of parents to initiate legal proceedings. She, however, pointed out that imposing such legislative control would have far-reaching implications on the implementation of integrated education in ordinary schools. She invited deputations to suggest the appropriate areas in education for legislative control to be introduced in Hong Kong.

23. Mr Christopher SO reiterated that the introduction of statutory requirements in respect of the right of students with SEN to attend yearly or periodic SEN assessments during school age and their parents to appeal against the results of such assessments and other education-related issues would facilitate the development of an inclusive culture in the implementation of integrated education in ordinary schools.

24. PAS(SAS) pointed out that assessments of SEN were carried out by different professionals depending on the type of SEN and stages of development of the students in different places. The Administration considered that the need to legislate in Hong Kong should be carefully and thoroughly examined in the context of the developments and environment of special education in Hong Kong.

Implementation of integrated education

25. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong noted that the placement of students with SEN in ordinary schools in Hong Kong was about 78% while the proportion in the selected places was above 90%. By comparison, Hong Kong had the highest percentage of enrolment in special schools with respect to the total number of students with SEN. He asked how the Administration would collaborate with parents and the special education sector to speed up progress on implementation of integrated education in ordinary schools.

26. PAS(SAS) responded that the Administration was reviewing the implementation of integrated education in ordinary schools with the aim of improving support to schools, teachers and parents. The ultimate objective was to enhance teaching and learning effectiveness for students with SEN. She pointed out that the proportion of students with SEN in ordinary schools in a particular place was dependent on the geographical distribution of the special

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schools and definition of SEN in the place. In western countries, it might be more convenient for students with SEN to attend ordinary schools in the vicinity of their residence than special schools located at a long distance from their residence.

Age limitation

27. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong noted that students with SEN in California were allowed to complete six years of junior school and six years of high school education up to the age of 22, while students in England would be allowed to stay in school until they reached the age of 19. He considered that the Administration should review the requirement for students with SEN to leave school at the age of 18 in Hong Kong.

28. PAS(SAS) responded that under the new academic structure, all students with SEN would be provided with six years of primary education and six years of secondary education. Normally they would reach the age of 18 after completion of these 12 years of education. However, the Administration would exercise flexibility as to whether students with SEN should leave the school at the age of 18. She pointed out that students with SEN who followed the curriculum in ordinary schools would normally be allowed to complete their secondary education in order to participate in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination. A number of such students would well exceed the age of 18. Furthermore, students in special schools would be allowed to repeat a year of study if their schooling had been adversely interrupted by hospitalization.

29. Referring to paragraphs 6.1.3 and 6.1.4 of the Report, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that in Hong Kong, free and compulsory basic education was provided to children, including children with SEN, from the age of six to 15 years and 11 months, and up to junior secondary level. With effect from the 2002-03 school year, students aged between 16 and 17 years and 11 months in schools for the mentally handicapped might participate in the Extension of Years of Education Programme of their schools on a voluntary basis. Students who reached the age of 18 during the school year could stay in these special schools until the end of the school year. Under the Code of Aid for Special Schools, except with the approval of the Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower, students with SEN in Hong Kong were not allowed to remain in special schools after the end of the school year during which their 20th birthday occurred. Mr CHEUNG considered that the Administration should remove such age limitation from the relevant provisions in the Code of Aid for Special Schools or make clarification.

Professional development for teachers

30. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that paragraph 2.5.4 – 2.5.6 of the Report highlighted the requirement of “highly qualified” for special education

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teachers teaching core subjects to be met by the end of the 2005-06 school year as well as the severe shortage of qualified special education teachers in California. During the 2004-05 school year, 25% of special education teachers in California held temporary or emergency certification, and 21% of special education teacher openings went unfilled. Given the severe shortage of “highly qualified” teachers, the relevant authority had adopted some administrative measures to provide additional flexibility to special education teachers in order to fill vacant posts in California. He asked how EMB would plan the professional development programmes for teachers involved in teaching students with SEN in Hong Kong.

31. PAS(SAS) responded that the experience in California had illustrated the need to set realistic requirements for pre-service teachers to engage in teaching students with SEN, and to plan the appropriate development programmes for serving teachers with a realistic timetable. The Administration was of the view that the best way to empower teachers in handling students with SEN was to provide them with opportunities to practise the knowledge and skills they learnt from the development programmes, and exchange views and share experiences with peers engaged in teaching and supporting students with SEN in other schools. The provision of refresher courses to update their knowledge from time to time was also important.

Support for schools and teachers

32. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung considered that before a consensus on the need to legislate on the provision of education for students with SEN was reached in the community, the Administration should improve support for ordinary schools with enrolment of students with SEN. He pointed out that students with SEN in the selected places were provided with special accommodation to participate in performance assessment, and teachers were encouraged to take actions to ensure that students with SEN were able to participate fully and effectively. In England, the right and interests of students with SEN and other students in ordinary schools were protected by legislation (paragraph 6.1.33 of the Report referred); and in Ontario, students whose needs could not be met entirely in the regular classroom were provided with a range of placement options (paragraph 3.5.22 of the Report referred). By comparison, the provision of integrated education in Hong Kong was piloted in 1998 and formally launched in the 1999-2000 school year (paragraph 6.1.37 referred).

33. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung considered that under the new funding mode, the provision of an additional \$10,000 or \$20,000 for each student with SEN in participating ordinary school was insufficient. He also expressed concern about the reduction in the number of special schools in recent years. He urged the Administration to review the provision of support for ordinary schools to implement integrated education.

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34. PAS(SAS) responded that the Administration was conducting a comprehensive review on the provision of special education for students with SEN which included the implementation of integrated education in ordinary schools. She described the existing support measures for schools and teachers in the implementation of integrated education, including the professional services of EMB and the school-partnership scheme in which 16 special schools and 7 ordinary schools had participated to serve as resource centres for some 100 ordinary schools in the 2005/06 school year. She stressed that besides additional resources, the provision of appropriate and sufficient professional support to schools was crucial to facilitate successful implementation of integrated education. The Administration was exploring the feasibility of providing additional resources to special schools and ordinary schools with substantial experience in teaching students with SEN so that these schools could serve as resource centres to assist other schools in implementing integrated education. Furthermore, EMB was also considering the provision of intervention programmes for students with SEN who require more intensive support.

35. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung remarked that professional support should be made available to schools in need on an on-going basis. PAS(SAS) responded that the resources centres in different districts would provide professional support to schools with students with SEN in their districts on an on-going basis.

Follow-up

36. The Chairman pointed out that based on the findings of the Report, Hong Kong was lagging behind the four selected places in the provision of education for students with SEN in terms of resources allocation, development of IEP and appeal mechanisms, teachers' professional development, and transitional arrangements and services for students with SEN after secondary education. The Chairman and Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong requested the Administration to examine the need to legislate for the protection of the rights and interests of children with SEN in education, and review the role and functions of special schools in the implementation of integrated education in Hong Kong. They also requested the Administration to provide a written response to the findings in the Report and the views and concerns of members and deputations expressed at the meeting.

37. PAS(SAS) responded that the Administration would study the issues in the Report in the light of the concerns of members and deputations. EMB would collaborate with relevant departments and bureaux to examine the pros and cons of legislation in Hong Kong before providing a response to the Subcommittee on the issue. Since considerable amount of time was required to study the issues, the Administration would only provide a written response before the end of the current school year subject to timely clarification of the information provided in the Report.

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38. Responding to the Chairman, PAS(SAS) said that EMB would revert to the Subcommittee in April 2006 on the progress of a review of the implementation of integrated education.

III. Review on the provision of boarding places for children with special educational needs

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1107/05-06(01) and (02)]

Briefing by the Administration

39. PAS(SAS) briefed members on the latest developments in respect of the review on the provision of boarding places for children with SEN as detailed in the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(2)1107/05-06(01)].

Oral presentation by deputations

Hong Kong Association for Parents of Persons with Physical Disabilities
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1177/05-06(03)]

40. Ms NAM Suk-yee presented the views of the Hong Kong Association for Parents of Persons with Physical Disabilities (PD) as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that in view of the boarding needs of PD students, the Association reluctantly accepted the Administration's proposal to construct two regional boarding sections in New Territories East (NTE) and New Territories West (NTW). The Association requested the Administration to continue the search for suitable sites for the provision of boarding services by the remaining three PD schools without a boarding section, plan the provision of boarding sections in new public housing estates, speed up the provision of respite service, increase the supply of boarding places operated on the basis of seven days a week, support the continued operation of the small-scale boarding section in a school in Sha Tin, and provide senior secondary courses in all PD schools under the new academic structure.

Concern Group on the Provision of Boarding/Respite Service in Schools for the Physically Disabled “「爭取肢體弱能學校開辦住宿/暫宿服務」關注組”
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1177/05-06(04)]

41. Ms TAM Yuk-fung presented the views of the Concern Group on the Provision of Boarding/Respite Service in Schools for the Physically Disabled as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Concern Group in principle did not object to the construction of the two regional boarding sections in NTE and NTW to address the urgent needs of PD students. The Concern Group requested the Administration to plan the provision of boarding places for PD schools without a boarding section in public housing estates in the vicinity, consider the provision of boarding section with 25 places, simplify the

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application procedure for respite services in special schools, coordinate the arrangements for provision of boarding places to PD students in PD schools without a boarding section before the operation of the two regional boarding sections, review the proposed increase of boarding fees, and support the continued operation of the small-scale boarding section in a school in Sha Tin.

Parent Sub-group of Schools for the Physically Disabled “肢體弱能學校家長小組”

42. Ms YU Tung-mui said that EMB should collaborate with special schools with a boarding section to simplify the procedures for provision of respite service to PD students, as the need for respite service was always urgent. Ms LAM Suk-mui also requested EMB to coordinate the arrangements for the provision of boarding places to PD students with long-term boarding needs during the transition period before the two regional boarding sections in NTE and NTW came into operation.

Discussion

Provision of respite service

43. The Chairman asked how EMB would assist special schools with a boarding section in the provision of respite service for PD students with urgent needs. PAS(SAS) responded that EMB had discussed with the principals of the special schools with a boarding section the provision of self-financed respite service for PD students. While the principals in general expressed support for the proposal, they would have to discuss with staff and parents the arrangements and level of charges for the provision of respite service. Though EMB would not participate in the school-based discussion and decision in this regard, it had advised the schools to simplify the arrangements for admission of PD students with temporary boarding needs wherever appropriate and to make known to the parents the arrangements.

44. The Chairman considered that EMB should provide some general guidelines for special schools with a boarding section to provide respite service for PD students with urgent needs. PAS(SAS) responded that EMB had already highlighted the areas of concern in the provision of self-financed respite services for PD students during its meeting with the principals of the special schools with a boarding section. She reiterated that the principals had kindly undertaken to discuss with staff and parents to formulate the necessary policies and arrangements for the provision of respite service and determine the appropriate level of fees for the self-financed respite service.

45. Responding to the Chairman, Mrs Rita MANSUKHANI acknowledged that special schools with a boarding section would need some time to formulate the policies and arrangements for the provision of respite service for PD students.

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She pointed out that the special schools would have to plan the necessary staffing arrangements and determine the level of fees for the respite service after consultation with parents and staff. She added that special schools had their unique circumstances, and some of them would be more ready to provide respite service than others.

46. The Chairman agreed that the special schools would need some time to consult parents and staff on the necessary arrangements for the provision of respite service. He requested the Administration to continue discussion with special schools and parents on the matter to which PAS(SAS) agreed.

Expedition of the completion date for the two regional boarding sections

47. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong asked whether the Administration could speed up the construction of the regional boarding sections in NTE and NTW so that they might come into operation earlier than the year of 2010.

48. PAS(SAS) and Principal Education Officer (Curriculum Development) (PEO(CD)) responded that the scheduled four-year programme included the time required for feasibility studies, detailed design and construction works. EMB would closely monitor the progress and expedite actions as far as it was practicable.

49. Miss CHAN Yuen-han considered that the Administration should start the necessary pre-construction processes in parallel so as to bring the completion date forward as early as possible. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong suggested that the Subcommittee should write to request EMB to coordinate with relevant bureaux and departments to work together to expedite the construction of the two regional boarding sections in NTE and NTW. Members agreed. PAS(SAS) undertook that EMB would coordinate with relevant bureaux and departments to expedite the completion of the construction projects.

Allocation of places in the two regional boarding sections

50. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong asked how the boarding places in the two regional boarding sections would be allocated to PD students in PD schools without a boarding section. The Chairman considered that parents should be given a choice in selection of PD schools with a boarding section for their PD children. The Chairman and Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong also shared the concern that PD schools without a boarding section would be disadvantaged in competition for enrolment of PD students, and might possibly be forced to close down due to under-enrolment in the future.

51. PAS(SAS) responded that since not all PD students would have boarding needs, these students could continue to enrol in PD schools without boarding facilities. The allocation of places in the two regional centres would be made on

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the basis of the long-term boarding needs of PD students. Those PD students with long-term boarding need might enrol in PD schools with a boarding section or continue to study in other PD schools without boarding but apply for a place in the regional boarding section. The Administration was open on the arrangement for the allocation of places in the two regional boarding sections, but the placement would depend on students' needs rather than giving a fixed quota for students from PD schools without a boarding section

52. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that while most parents would prefer to take care of their PD children who were accommodated in a boarding section five days a week, parents who took care of their PD children on weekdays might need a rest on Saturdays and Sundays. He considered that the Administration should coordinate with PD schools to provide boarding services which would meet the diverse needs of parents. The Chairman added that EMB should consult parents and sponsors of the PD school on the matter.

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Future provision of boarding places

53. Referring to paragraph 6 of the Administration's paper, Miss CHAN Yuen-han asked why the Administration considered it impracticable to make use of vacant flats in public housing estates to set up small boarding sections with 25 places.

54. PAS(SAS) explained that apart from low cost-effectiveness of small-scale boarding sections, the quality of the boarding service provided at the vacant flats in existing public housing estates would not be satisfactory as there were other constraints and limitations such as physical location, availability of access facilities, areas for boarders' activities, etc. EMB had preliminarily studied the vacant flats in existing public housing estates located in the vicinity of the PD schools without a boarding section, but had not been able to identify any suitable location for the provision of boarding services for PD students. In view of the implementation of the new academic structure in the 2009/10 school year, EMB would continue to liaise with PD schools on the provision of boarding service for PD students.

55. Miss CHAN Yuen-han agreed that there were physical constraints and limitations on the establishment of boarding sections for PD students in existing public estates. She, however, urged the Administration to continue discussion with parents on the construction of boarding sections in new public housing estates. PAS(SAS) agreed to bear this in mind should opportunities arise in future. The Chairman remarked that except from the perspective of cost-effectiveness, he saw no reason to turn down the suggestion to operate small boarding sections located in the vicinity of PD schools as it was in line with the international trend to provide both care and education services in PD schools.

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56. The Chairman asked whether the Administration would review the provision of boarding services operated on the basis of seven days a week in the light of the increasing demand of PD students for such service. PAS(SAS) responded that it was the practice of the Administration to review the demand for boarding service for PD students on an on-going basis and make adjustment to the provision as appropriate.

57. The Chairman asked whether the boarding fees in special schools would be adjusted with the implementation of the new academic structure.

58. PAS(SAS) responded that the existing monthly fee for a boarding place in special schools was around \$440 per month and the monthly fees for hostels under the Social Welfare Department (SWD) ranged from \$1,600 to \$1,800. Making reference to the charges by SWD, the Administration considered that there was room for an adjustment in the boarding fee for students with SEN through a gradual and phased approach. She added that the Administration did not have any firm plan at the moment and would collect parents' views on the level of increase during the consultation period.

59. The Chairman asked whether the Administration would provide subvention to the small-scale boarding section operated by a school in Sha Tin. PAS(SAS) replied that EMB had advised the school sponsor and the parents ways to explore possible sources of funding other than public funds for the continued operation of the small-scale boarding section.

IV. Any other business

60. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 1:05 pm.