

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1359/06-07
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

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**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 Monday, 26 February 2007, at 10:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung (Chairman)
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
- Member absent** : Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Item II
Mrs Fanny LAM FAN Kit-fong
Principal Assistant Secretary (School Administration
and Support), Education and Manpower Bureau

Mrs Florence AU WONG Wai-yin
Senior Education Officer (Special Education Support 1),
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

**Attendance by
invitation** : Item II

The Association of Parents of the Severely Mentally
Handicapped

Ms CHENG Yee-man
Chairman

Hong Kong Association for Parents of Persons with
Physical Disabilities

Ms Sandy LAM Suk-yu
Vice-Chairman

Ms Catherine CHEUNG Wan-ching
Vice-Chairman

The Parents' Association of Pre-School Handicapped
Children

Mrs WU YU Tung-mui
Executive Committee

Mrs TAN CHEUNG Kwok-chun
Executive Committee

**Clerk in
attendance** : Miss Odelia LEUNG
Chief Council Secretary (2)6

**Staff in
attendance** : Mr Stanley MA
Senior Council Secretary (2)6

Miss Carmen HO
Legislative Assistant (2)6

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I. Confirmation of minutes

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1142/06-07]

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2007 were confirmed.

II. Boarding services for students with special educational needs

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1123/06-07(01)]

2. The Chairman recapitulated members' concern about the provision of boarding services for students with special educational needs (SEN). He highlighted that the Subcommittee looked forward to the early completion of the two 60-place boarding sections located in New Territories East (NTE) and New Territories West (NTW) respectively. He pointed out that parents of students with physical disability (PD students) had expressed concern about the insufficient provision of residential respite services, in particular on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays. While parents were expected to take care of their children with SEN on these days, there were situations in which temporary or urgent respite services for these children was needed. Members agreed to follow up the issue at this meeting.

Oral presentation by deputations

The Association of Parents of the Severely Mentally Handicapped
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1175/06-07(01)]

3. Ms CHENG Yee-man presented the views of the Association of Parents of the Severely Mentally Handicapped as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Association considered that the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) should publicise the criteria for allocation of boarding places in special schools to students with severe disabilities, the number of students on the waiting list, and the average waiting time for the provision of a boarding place. In addition, the Administration should provide sufficient residential respite service for needy families, in particular single parent families or families with either or both parents working in the Mainland or in serious illness. She pointed out that the respite service provided by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and Po Leung Kuk was targeted at persons aged 15 or above. EMB should collaborate with the special schools to provide more seven-day boarding service and make use of the vacant places on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays to provide respite service for needy students, in particular those aged six to 15.

Hong Kong Association for Parents of Persons with Physical Disabilities
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1175/06-07(02)]

4. Ms Sandy LAM presented the views of the Hong Kong Association for Parents of Persons with Physical Disabilities as detailed in its submission. She

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highlighted that the Association requested the Administration to continue to search and identify suitable sites and earmark resources for the establishment of a boarding section in existing special schools for students with physical disability (PD schools) without such a facility. The Association considered that EMB should coordinate the provision of respite service for needy students aged from six to 15. She pointed out that some parents had refused or deferred their medical operations because they could not leave their disabled children at home. She also requested the Administration to provide recurrent funding to a school in Sha Tin to support its operation of a small-scale boarding section.

*The Parents' Association of Pre-School Handicapped Children
[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1175/06-07(03) and (04)]*

5. Mrs TAN CHEUNG Kwok-chun introduced the submission of the Parents' Association of Pre-School Handicapped Children. She highlighted that the Association was of the view that the site identified for the construction of a new 60-place boarding section in Tuen Mun was located at a distance from the existing Pui Oi School. PD students and staff of the School would need to take some five minutes travelling between the School and the new boarding section in future. The Association suggested that the Administration should make use of the available sites in the vicinity of the School to construct the new boarding section. She added that the existing school premises had structural defects and any major construction works carried out in its vicinity would have serious impact on the safety of the building.

The Administration's response

6. In response to the views and issues of concerns raised by the deputations, Principal Assistant Secretary (School Administration and Support) (PAS(SAS)) said that the objective of providing boarding service in special schools was to cater for the long-term boarding needs of students with severe disabilities and to facilitate them to receive school education during school days. She pointed out that -

- (a) EMB had issued guidelines which set out the criteria for allocation of boarding places for students with severe disabilities who were homeless, residing at a long distance from schools or not being adequately taken care by their parents or relatives.
- (b) EMB had set up a special team to oversee the vetting of applications and allocation of boarding places to needy students. EMB staff would explain to parents the criteria for allocation and the availability of places in different special schools as appropriate;

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- (c) The provision of seven-day boarding service was targeted at students with severe disabilities and genuine long-term boarding needs. EMB reviewed the supply and demand of seven-day boarding places on an on-going basis and had increased the supply by 55 places in the 2006-2007 school year;
- (d) Respite service was not a core service of EMB. However, EMB would normally have no objection if special schools with unfilled boarding capacity provided respite service on a self-financing mode and voluntary basis to meet temporary or contingency needs of students. Currently, 20 special schools had boarding sections, and most of them were providing respite service for their students in need; and
- (e) The site for the construction of a 60-place boarding section for Pui Oi School was identified after careful consideration and consultation with the relevant departments. The space in the vicinity of the existing Pui Oi School was around 2 000 square metres which was definitely insufficient for constructing a 60-place boarding section and a new school premise with 10 standard classrooms for PD students.

7. Commissioner for Rehabilitation (C for R) said that the current rehabilitation policy encouraged disabled persons to live with their family members wherever possible. The Radio and Television Hong Kong had recently commissioned a university to conduct an opinion survey on the subject and found that disabled persons felt most happy when they stayed and maintained good relation with their family members. The Administration was aware of the need for respite service from children with severe disabilities to meet special circumstances. Subject to availability of resources, SWD would continue to provide respite service in its subvented adult residential homes for people with disabilities over the age of 15.

8. Assistant Director (Rehabilitation and Medical Social Services) AD(R&MSS) said that SWD provided residential respite service for people with disabilities aged 15 or above in some subvented rehabilitation residential homes. Currently, these residential homes provided one to four respite places. SWD would continue to provide more respite service places for people with disabilities aged 15 or above in new residential homes.

9. AD(R&MSS) further said that SWD also provided holiday care and family-based respite services for temporary day care of children aged between six to 14 with disabilities after school or during public holidays and long school holidays. SWD reviewed the provision of these services on an on-going basis. In response to the views of parent organizations, the number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating these respite services had

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increased from three in 2005 to 10 in 2007. Currently, around two-thirds and half of the users of the holiday care services and family-based care respite services respectively were aged 18 and below. There were capacities in both services to cope with more users.

Residential respite service

10. Miss CHAN Yuen-han said that everyone agreed that children with disabilities should preferably be taken care by their parents or relatives in a home environment. However, the provision of residential respite service in special schools was necessary and essential for parents with genuine needs to leave their disabled children aged below 16 on a temporary or urgent basis. She considered that EMB and SWD should collaborate to provide residential respite service for students aged below 16 with genuine needs.

11. PAS(SAS) explained that the objective of providing boarding services in PD schools was to facilitate PD students to receive education during school days. The core service of PD schools was to provide educational services for PD students, and PD schools should not be overloaded with non-core services. Nonetheless, EMB had no objection if special schools with a boarding section made use of unfilled boarding places to provide respite boarding service for their students on a voluntary and self-financing basis.

12. C for R supplemented that the various types of residential services operated or funded by SWD were targeted at persons with different types of disabilities aged 15 or above. It would not be appropriate for these residential homes to provide respite service for students aged six to 14 as the care services required for these students were different from those currently provided in SWD's adult homes.

13. The Chairman expressed disappointment that both EMB and SWD had refused to follow up on the provision of residential respite service for students aged six to 15 with genuine needs.

14. Ms CHENG Yee-man said that some special schools providing five-day boarding service had already made use of the unfilled places to provide respite service for their students in need. As a caring and responsible Government, the Administration should coordinate the efforts of the relevant departments and work out measures to provide appropriate respite service. She also expressed concern about the insurance coverage for students receiving residential respite service in special schools. PAS(SAS) said that the block insurance for aided schools would cover activities and services as long as they were provided by schools.

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15. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that instead of encouraging special schools with a boarding section to provide residential respite service on a self-financing mode, EMB should formulate a policy for special schools to provide such service for PD students with genuine needs.

16. PAS(SAS) replied that this would imply a policy change to the provision of services by special schools and the Administration would have to carefully examine the issues involved before considering a policy for provision of respite service by special schools.

17. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung remarked that the Subcommittee had discussed the provision of residential respite service for students aged below 16 at previous meetings. He expressed disappointment at the inaction on the part of the Administration to review the subject and formulate a policy to cater for the needs of parents and students with disabilities.

18. PAS(SAS) reiterated that residential respite service was not a core service of special schools. She explained that the conduct of a thorough review and the formulation of a central policy on the subject should involve the relevant bureaux/departments.

19. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that EMB and SWD should coordinate to regulate the provision of respite service in special schools and residential homes respectively. He considered that parents should be charged on the basis of the marginal costs incurred for the provision of respite service. He also considered it unacceptable that SWD refused to provide respite service at residential homes on the ground that the staff were not trained in the provision of care services for children aged six to 15.

20. PAS(SAS) responded that the boarding places in special schools were intended for students with long-term boarding needs, with a view to facilitating their schooling. Nevertheless, the Administration agreed that special schools might make use of unfilled boarding places to meet the temporary or urgent needs of students and parents with genuine reasons.

21. AD(R&MSS) said that currently, the majority of residential homes under SWD provided one to two respite places for needy persons aged 15 and above who would be attended to together with other adult boarders at the residential homes. It was practically difficult for the NGOs operating these residential homes to set up the necessary facilities and make arrangements to cater for the needs of a few temporary boarders aged six to 14.

22. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong was dissatisfied with the response of EMB and SWD on the provision of respite service for students with disabilities. He considered it ridiculous and unacceptable that being the responsible departments to provide education and care services for the disabled respectively, both EMB

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and SWD did not consider it their responsibility to provide residential respite service for school-age children with genuine needs.

23. The Chairman said that as a parent of a child with intellectual disability, he shared the view that EMB should be responsible for providing respite service in special schools with a boarding section. This arrangement was reasonable and essential. He considered it illogical and irresponsible for EMB to refuse to take up such responsibility. He cited his personal experience to explain the practical problems and unsecured feeling of children if they were to stay with adults with disabilities in residential homes. Should EMB maintain that the provision of respite service did not fall within the service scope of special schools, SWD should set up a special division to provide respite service for students aged six to 15.

24. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan shared the view of the Chairman that EMB should provide respite service. He considered the issue in question a typical example of bureaucratic inefficiency and rigidity that deprived needy persons of an essential welfare service. Mr LEE suggested that the Subcommittee should write to request the Chief Secretary for Administration (CS for A) to follow up the issue and provide a written response within a specified period.

25. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that the provision of boarding places in special schools would facilitate student learning. He expressed support for the Subcommittee taking up the matter with CS for A. While raising no objection to the proposal, Miss CHAN Yuen-han considered that EMB had the responsibility to provide a written response, say in three months' time.

26. Ms Audrey EU considered that the Chairman should write to CS for A, the Secretary for Education and Manpower, and the Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food to express the concern of the Subcommittee on the absence of respite service for students aged six to 15 and request their written replies in two to three months' time. Members agreed.

27. PAS(SAS) and C for R responded that the Administration would follow up the matter in the light of members' concern.

28. Ms Sandy LAM said that in the absence of respite service, some parents had no choice but to apply for a boarding place for their children in special schools who might not have such a need.

29. PAS(SAS) said that any persons who had such information should approach EMB and EMB would investigate any reported misuse of boarding places in special schools.

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Provision of boarding service

30. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan suggested that EMB should publicise the criteria for allocation of boarding places to PD students. He expressed concern about the claim that even the social workers in special schools were not familiar with the allocation criteria. He considered that EMB should decentralise the allocation of boarding places to special schools which could then make decision on the basis of the social workers' recommendations.

Admin

31. PAS(SAS) responded that EMB had all along examined the long-term boarding needs of the students with disabilities and their family circumstances in accordance with the criteria for admission to boarding sections of special schools, taking into account the recommendations of professionals concerned. Special schools were also required to review the long-term boarding needs of individual boarders on an annual basis. She added that applicants who were recommended by professionals, such as social workers would normally be favourably considered for the allocation of a boarding place. At the request of the Chairman and Mr LEE Cheuk-yan, she undertook to provide information on the criteria for admission to boarding sections of special schools and the number of successful and unsuccessful applicants who were recommended by the professionals.

32. The Chairman and Mr LEE Cheuk-yan sought information on the reasons for centralising the allocation of boarding places in 2005. The Chairman pointed out that some principals of special schools had queried the bureaucratic procedures for vetting applications for allocation of boarding places. He considered that in line with the spirit of school-based management, EMB should leave it to special schools and social workers to decide the eligibility or otherwise of disabled students for boarding places, and EMB should maintain a central register in this regard.

Admin

33. PAS(SAS) explained that as the provision of boarding service was planned on a territory-wide basis, it was more cost-effective for EMB to centralise the allocation. In fact, many parents approached EMB to request for allocation of boarding places. In view of members' concern, she undertook to provide information on the centralised allocation of boarding places.

Admin

34. The Chairman pointed out that SWD provided regular updates on the allocation of residential places for people with different types of disabilities on its website on the Internet. Such updates included information on the number of eligible applicants on the waiting list and the date of their applications. He asked whether EMB could provide similar information on the allocation of boarding places in different types of special schools on its website on the Internet. PAS(SAS) agreed to provide a written response regarding the waiting situation for admission to the boarding sections.

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35. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung was concerned whether the construction of the two 60-place boarding sections could meet the long-term demand for boarding places. He said that the Administration should work out a long-term development blueprint for the provision of boarding services in the light of the changing social circumstances. He requested the Administration to work out a five-year projection on the supply and demand of boarding service for PD students.

36. PAS(SAS) reiterated that the provision of boarding places was planned on a territory-wide basis. In response to the suggestion of the Subcommittee, EMB had reviewed the provision of boarding services and proposed the construction of the two 60-place boarding sections in NTE and NTW. Upon their completion, there would be a total of four boarding sections to cater for PD students with long-term boarding needs, one in each of Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, NTE and NTW regions, which would meet the demand of PD students in the foreseeable future. She undertook to provide information on the projected supply and demand of boarding services for PD students for the foreseeable future.

Admin

37. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung expressed concern about the late completion date of the two 60-place boarding sections in the 2010-2011 school year. He asked whether the Administration could expedite the completion of the two projects. PAS(SAS) replied that the two projects were already awarded Category B status. Pending the completion of the necessary design, consultation and tendering work, the two projects would be upgraded to Category A status in mid 2008. If everything went smoothly, works could start in late 2008 and be completed for use in the 2010-2011 school year.

38. Ms CHENG Yee-man said that the Administration should review the staff establishment of special schools for students with severe intellectual disability (ID schools). She pointed out that because of the reduced boarding places in Caritas Medical Centre for students of the Caritas Jockey Club Lok Yan School, ID schools had admitted more ID students with boarding needs and were in need of additional staff.

39. Senior Education Officer (Special Education Support 1) responded that EMB had increased the boarding places for ID schools in the light of the demand. She pointed out that EMB reviewed the staff establishment for special schools and their boarding sections on an on-going basis. The current staff-to-student ratio for ID schools was about 1:2. In addition, special schools were provided with flexibility in the use of funds and could employ appropriate staff to cater for the needs of their students.

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Boarding section and new premises for Pui Oi School

40. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that if the selected site for the construction of the 60-place boarding section for Pui Oi School was spacious enough, EMB should relocate the school premises to the new site to operate primary and secondary classes. This would avoid the need for PD students to travel between the existing school and the boarding section in the future.

41. PAS(SAS) explained that under the current standards, a suitable site for the construction of a special school with 18 classrooms should require an area of around 6 900 square metres. The existing Pui Oi School occupied a site area of around 1 800 square metres. Given the urgent need for additional boarding places for PD students residing in NTW, the Administration had conducted an extensive land search in NTW and identified a site with an area of about 4 300 square metres which was located at a distance of around 3-5 minutes' travel from Pui Oi School. EMB planned to construct new premises with 10 classrooms for Pui Oi School to operate its secondary classes at the new site. The existing premises would be used for primary classes upon the completion of the new premises. Hence, there was no need for PD students to travel between the two school premises to attend classes. PAS(SAS) added that the new school project had been awarded Category B status and was scheduled to be upgraded to Category A status in mid-2008 for completion for use in the 2010-2011 school year.

42. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the relevant Government departments should examine the structural safety of the existing Pui Oi School to ensure the safety of students and staff. Mrs TAN CHEUNG Kwok-chun said that in September 2005, parents were advised that the existing Pui Oi School was safe as long as there was no major construction works carried out in the vicinity of the School.

43. The Chairman pointed out that as a PD school, Pui Oi School operated on two-storey premises and some improvement works had been done to upgrade the facilities. However, water leakage problem and structural defects had been identified after the improvement works. The Architectural Services Department was arranging on-going maintenance works for the School.

44. PAS(SAS) replied that school safety was most important. The relevant departments would conduct regular checks and examination to ensure that the existing premises were safe for school operation.

45. Mrs TAN CHEUNG Kwok-chun said that she would accept the provision of the primary and secondary classes at separate locations of Pui Oi School. However, the Administration should plan the long-term operation of Pui Oi School in terms of staff establishment and transport arrangements, having regard to the workload of teachers and specialist staff, such as nurses and occupational

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therapists, who would have to travel between the new boarding section and the existing School.

46. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that it would be ideal if a suitable site with an area of 6 900 square metres could be identified for the construction of a 60-place boarding section and new premises for Pui Oi School to provide both primary and secondary education. However, in view of the scarcity of land resources and the urgent need for a new boarding section in NTW, the Administration should continue with the existing project to construct the new boarding section and the new premises for Pui Oi School to operate secondary classes under the new senior secondary structure. Mr CHEUNG suggested that as the matter was an individual case, the Subcommittee should refer it to the Complaints Division of LegCo for follow up. Members agreed.

III. Any other business

47. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:32 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
23 March 2007