

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)351/04-05
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 8 November 2004 at 4:30 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Dr Hon YEUNG Sum (Chairman)
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
- Member absent** : Hon MA Lik, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Item IV
Mrs Fanny LAW, GBS, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower
Miss Vivian LAU
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (6)
Mrs Elaine CHAN
Controller, Student Financial Assistance Agency

Item V

Mrs Fanny LAW, GBS, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mrs Cherry TSE, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (2)

**Attendance by
invitation** : Item V

Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union

Mr CHAN Kwok-kuen
Director of Publication Department

Miss SY On-na
Deputy Director of Publication Department

Kwun Tong Schools Liaison Committee

Mr WONG Wing-tim
President

Mr MA Wo-sang
Vice-President

The Council of Central and Western District School Heads

Mr YEUNG Chor-kit
Member

Ms LEE Yuet-ying
Executive Committee Member

Committee of Schools' Principals (Yau Tsim Mong)

Mr WONG Kwok-kong
Member

Mr WONG Yuk-tong
Member

Shatin District Primary School Heads Association

Mr SHIN Kei-lit
Chairman

Mr NG Shun-cheong
Vice-Chairman

Shatin District Secondary School Heads Association

Mr HO Kuen-fai
Chairman

Ms YUEN Sui-han
Secretary

Southern District Joint Schools conference

Ms FUNG Pik-yee
Principal

Tai Po District Primary School Heads Association

Mr SUN Lit-yau
Principal

Mr LEE Mang-ching
Secretary

The Alliance for Small-class Learning and Teaching to
Promote Quality Education

Mr CHOI Wing-tim
Convenor

Mr IP Kin-yuen

Lecturer, Department of Educational Policy and Administration,
The Hong Kong Institute of Education

Wong Tai Sin District School Liaison Committee

Mr LEE Pun-cho
Chairman

Wong Tai Sin Secondary School Heads Association

Mr LEE Pun-cho
Vice Chairman

Sai Kung District School Heads Association

Ms POON Suk-han
Chairperson

Mr SO Yau-hang
Vice Chairperson

Hong Kong Aided Primary School Heads Association

Mr LAM Seung-wan
Chairman

Mr CHEUNG Yung-pong
Wan Chai District Co-ordinator

Kowloon City District School Principals' Liaison Committee

Mr PUN Tin-chi
Member

Ms YU Kuen-on
Secretary

Association of School Heads of Islands District

Mr AU-YEUNG Sung-fan
Chairman

Mr NG Mar-chau
Vice Chairman

Subsidized Primary School Council

Mr FUNG Ka-ching
Member

Tsing Yi Primary School Head's Association

Ms YAN Yuen-yee
Chairman

Mr YEE Yok-kuen
Vice-Chairman

Hong Kong Association for Specific Learning Disabilities

Mrs KWAN TO Ling-chu
Secretary

Mrs LAU LI Man-ying
Executive Committee Member

Federation of Parent-Teacher Association, Tai Po District

Ms FUNG Wai-ching
Chairman

Mr LAM Wai-hong
Vice-Chairman

Lingnan Hang Yee Memorial Secondary School

Ms Mellissa YAM Sui-lee
Principal

The Joint Council of Parent Teacher Associations of
The Shatin District

Ms WONG Lai-ching
Chairman

Mr YU Wing-fai
Advisor

Federation of Parent-Teacher Associations, Tuen Mun

Ms SUEN Man-lai
Member

Federation of Parent Teacher Associations in Kwun Tong District

Mr KAI Ping-chung
Chairman

Mr TSUI Kar-keung
Operator

Dr Albert CHAU W.L.

Director of General Education, The University of Hong Kong

Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Ms Angela NG
Chief Officer (CY)

Federation of Parent Teacher Association of Hong Kong
Eastern District

Mr JAO Ming
Chairman

Mr YAN Chi-hung
Vice-Chairman

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

Staff in attendance : 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)83/04-05]

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2004 were confirmed.

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

2. Members noted that no paper was issued since the last meeting.

III. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[Appendices I and II to LC Paper No. CB(2)130/04-05]

3. Members noted the “List of outstanding issues for discussion” and the

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“List of follow-up actions required” which were tabled at the meeting.

4. Referring to his letter to the Clerk which was tabled at the meeting, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that he had received complaints that the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (HKIVE) had increased the course fees of some part-time programmes by more than 5%. He proposed to discuss the matter with the Administration and HKIVE, preferably at the next meeting. Mr LEUNG Kwan-yuen declared interest as a member of the Vocational Training Council. As two discussion items had already been proposed, he suggested that the Panel might seek clarifications from the HKIVE on the matter, before deciding whether it should be discussed at a meeting.

5. After discussion with the Administration, members agreed to discuss the following items at the next meeting scheduled for Monday, 13 December 2004 at 4:30 pm –

- (a) Native-speaking English Language Teacher Scheme in primary schools;
- (b) School self-evaluation; and
- (c) Increase of course fees by HKIVE.

6. Members also agreed to hold a special meeting from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm on 20 December 2004 to receive views from deputations on the Consultation Document entitled “Reforming the academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education – Actions for investing in the future” published by the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) in October 2004.

IV. Review of student travel subsidy scheme
[LC Paper No. CB(2)130/04-05(01)]

7. At the invitation of the Chairman, Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower (PSEM) briefed members on the main points in the Administration’s paper on the subject.

Consultation

8. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong noted that while some 60 000 students would be benefited by the proposed merger of the Student Travel Subsidy Scheme (STSS) and Cross-net Travel Subsidy Scheme (CTSS), about 22 000 applicants would have their travel subsidy reduced by half with the implementation of the two-tier subsidy arrangement. He asked whether the Administration had consulted any parent associations on the proposed subsidy arrangement.

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9. PSEM responded that the Administration had consulted the Primary One Admission (POA) Committee at its meeting on 27 September 2004 and received full support from its members. She pointed out that students who were eligible for assistance under the existing CTSS for travel subsidy in the 2004-05 school year would not be affected. The Administration considered it fair to use the same criteria for provision of a full rate or half rate grant to applicants under the merged scheme, which would encompass all local full-time primary to undergraduate students, including primary students attending private schools and schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS).

10. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that it was inappropriate that only POA Committee was consulted as the proposal would affect the interest of parents. In view of Mr CHEUNG's concern, PSEM pointed out that the primary objective of the proposed merger was to rationalise the two schemes to ensure that financial assistance was provided to genuinely needy students.

11. Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (6) (DS(EM)6) added that under the current CTSS, needy primary students attending schools located within their residing POA Net were not eligible for any travel subsidy even though they lived beyond ten minutes' walking distance from their schools. The proposed merger would benefit some 60 000 students, including those in public sector schools as well as in private or DSS schools, who were currently not eligible to CTSS. She added that the proposed two-tier subsidy structure would not affect the more needy students who would pass the means test for a full rate grant. Those who passed the means test for a half rate grant would on average receive \$50 less in a month under the merged scheme. At present, for instance, an applicant from a four-member family with a monthly household income between about \$8,000 to about \$21,500 would be eligible for a half-rate grant.

12. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered it essential to consult parents of the 22 000 students who were affected by the proposed merger of STSS and CTSS. He suggested that the Administration should consult parent-teacher/parents associations and individual parents in schools on a random basis. The Chairman, Dr Fernando CHEUNG and Ms Emily LAU expressed support for Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's suggestion. The Chairman asked whether the Administration would incorporate the views of the affected parents in its proposal to be submitted to the Finance Committee for consideration on 19 November 2004.

13. PSEM responded that the Administration would consult the home-school cooperation committees and parent-teacher associations on the proposed merger of STSS and CTSS. The Administration would also try its best to incorporate the views of relevant parent associations in its submission to the Finance Committee for consideration. In order to meet the agreed deadline for provision of paper to members of the Finance Committee, she suggested that the views of relevant parent-teacher/parent associations on the proposed merger be separately

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provided in the form of a supplementary paper before 19 November 2004. Members raised no objection.

Eligibility criteria and financial implications

14. Noting that under the merged scheme, applicants from a four-member family with a monthly household income of about \$8,000 would be provided with a half rate grant from the 2005-06 school year, Dr Fernando CHEUNG considered that the existing means test for the travel subsidy schemes might not have addressed the needs of students in low-income families. He suggested that the eligibility criteria should be reviewed in the light of the prevailing social and economic conditions. Dr CHEUNG requested the Administration to provide more detailed information on the criteria for determining a full rate or a half rate grant for families with different income and different number of members. The Chairman remarked that according to the survey of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, a four-member family with a monthly income below \$9,000 should be regarded as a low-income family.

15. Ms Emily LAU agreed that the Administration should review the eligibility criteria and provide more information on the criteria for providing a full or half rate grant to needy students with different family income levels to facilitate members' consideration of the proposed two-tier subsidy arrangement. Ms LAU asked about the range of reduction in subsidy which would be granted to former CTSS applicants under the merged scheme, and the financial implications if full rate grant was provided to all eligible applicants.

16. DS(EM)6 responded that under the proposed two-tier subsidy arrangement, an applicant, say of a four-member family with a monthly income between about \$8,000 to about \$21,500, would on average have his subsidy reduced by \$50 a month. Based on the estimated number of successful applications and average subsidy for the 2004-05 school year, the net additional recurrent cost of the proposal to merge the existing student travel subsidy schemes was about \$30 million per annum. If a one-level subsidy arrangement was adopted for the merged scheme, the total additional recurrent cost would be more than \$60 million.

17. Ms Emily LAU considered that genuinely needy students should be provided with adequate financial assistance. PSEM responded that the two-tier arrangement was a well-established mechanism for determining the level of assistance, and it also applied to other primary and secondary student financial assistance schemes. The Administration had conducted surveys on STSS in the past and received no adverse comments on the arrangement so far. To uphold the principle of providing subsidy according to means and ensure consistency between student financial assistance schemes, the Administration recommended that the two-tier subsidy arrangement should also be applied to students aged below 12 under the merged scheme. Having said that, the Administration would

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review the means test for various student financial assistance schemes to identify areas of improvement. The Administration would revert to the Panel on the eligibility criteria under the merged scheme at a future meeting.

18. The Chairman, Ms Audrey EU and Mr Tommy CHEUNG considered that the proposals, if approved by the Finance Committee, should be implemented as soon as possible in the 2004-05 school year to benefit the needy students. The Chairman suggested that the Panel should separately discuss the eligibility criteria of the merged STSS at a future meeting. Members agreed.

Transitional arrangement

19. Ms Audrey EU asked how and when the needy students would receive the full rate or half rate grant under the merged scheme in the 2004-05 school year. She considered that the Administration should aim at providing the grant to needy students as early as possible.

20. PSEM responded that that since the 2004-05 school year had commenced, the Administration also aimed to implement the new arrangements as early as possible. She pointed out that applications for STSS/CTSS grant would be invited at the commencement of a school year, and grants would be provided to successful applicants on a one-off basis.

21. Controller, Student Financial Assistance Agency supplemented that the Agency had informed parents of the Administration's intention to rationalise the two schemes and that the Administration's recommendations would be considered by the Finance Committee on 19 November 2004. The provision of subsidy to successful applicants under the merged scheme would be made as soon as practicable after the Finance Committee's approval. She added that grants under STSS and CTSS were normally provided to needy students in November each year. The Agency would review the procedures for application with a view to speeding up the provision of the subsidies under the merged scheme.

V. Implementation of small class teaching

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)130/04-05(03) – (10), CB(2)169/04-05(01) – (03) and CB(2)183/04-05(01)]

Meeting with deputations

22. The Chairman welcomed representatives of the Administration and the 27 deputations and individuals to the meeting. The views of these deputations and individuals are summarised in paragraphs 23 to 53 below.

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*Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union
[LC Paper No. CB(2)130/04-05(04)]*

23. Miss SY On-na presented the views of the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Union fully supported the concept of small class teaching, and considered that the declining student population in recent years had created a golden opportunity for implementing small class teaching in schools. The Union also fully supported the joint proposal of the primary school heads associations in 18 Districts on progressive implementation of small class teaching in individual districts. In brief, the school heads associations requested the Administration to freeze the number of primary one (P1) classes in each district at the current level, and reduce the standard class size in primary schools progressively from 37 to 23 students in the light of the declining student population in the next decade.

24. Miss SY further said that implementation of small class teaching as proposed in the joint proposal would improve the quality of primary education, without creating additional recurrent costs and affecting parental choice in selection of primary schools. She stressed that the Administration should not confuse the public by linking the implementation of small class teaching with a motive to resolve the problem of surplus teachers in the school sector. Miss SY added that many schools in support of small class teaching had demonstrated substantial improvement in quality of school education and attracted large enrolment of students. In fact, the joint proposal suggested that schools failed to achieve the minimum student intake would not be allocated a P1 class.

*Kwun Tong Schools Liaison Committee
[LC Paper No. CB(2)183/04-05(01)]*

25. Mr WONG Wing-tim presented the views of the Kwun Tong Schools Liaison Committee as detailed in its submission which was tabled at the meeting. He highlighted that the Committee supported implementation of small class teaching to improve quality of school education. The Committee considered that small class teaching should be implemented with the adoption of appropriate strategies and pedagogies, having regard to the different circumstances, including the needs of parents and students, in individual schools. The Committee also considered that the aim of implementing small class teaching was not to resolve the problem of surplus teachers or reduction of class in schools.

The Council of Central and Western District School Heads

26. Mr YEUNG Chor-kit said that the Council of Central and Western District School Heads fully supported the implementation of small class teaching in schools.

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Committee of Schools' Principals (Yau Tsim Mong)

27. Mr WONG Kwok-kong said that the majority of school heads of the Committee of Schools' Principals (Yau Tsim Mong) supported implementing small class teaching from P1 with class sizes of 14-20 students from the 2005-06 school year. Some school heads also considered that the timing for implementing small class teaching and the modes of operation should be decided by the schools concerned. They concluded that the Administration should provide an additional teacher for every 10 small classes in operation.

*Shatin District Primary School Heads Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)130/04-05(05)]*

28. Mr SHIN Kei-lit presented the views of the Shatin District Primary School Heads Association as detailed in its submission. He added that the Association had met the Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM) on 21 October 2004 and was pleased to learn that SEM himself was in favour of small class teaching. He pointed out that all principals, 99% of teachers and 96% parents who had responded to the survey conducted by the Association in September 2004 had indicated support for small class teaching.

29. Mr SHEN further said that as there were 143 operating P1 classes and 3002 kindergarten students in Shatin in the current school year, the Association reckoned that implementing small class teaching with a class size of 23 students in primary schools from the 2005-06 school year would mean a total requirement of about 131 P1 classes. This would lead to a reduction of 12 P1 classes and hence no additional cost would be incurred. As the student population would continue to decline, there should be no shortage problem in the supply of school places and teachers for progressive implementation of small class teaching at different levels in the next few years.

*Shatin District Secondary School Heads Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)130/04-05(05)]*

30. Mr HO Kuen-fair said that the Shatin District Secondary School Heads Association supported the proposal of Shatin District Primary School Heads Association on progressive implementation of small class teaching at different levels in primary schools in Shatin. He urged the Administration to formulate a timetable for progressive implementation of small class teaching in primary and secondary schools in different districts. Mr HO also informed the Panel that the Education and Welfare Committee of Shatin District Council had passed a motion urging the Government to implement small class teaching in Shatin from the 2005-06 school year.

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Southern District Joint Schools Conference

31. Ms FUNG Pik-yee said that the Southern District Joint Schools Conference supported implementation of small class teaching in school education. She pointed out that small class teaching was already implemented in pre-primary education. She considered that small class teaching would enhance teaching and learning in classes, and facilitate implementation of various education reform measures in schools.

Tai Po District Primary School Heads Association

32. Mr LEE Mang-ching said that Tai Po District Primary School Heads Association supported implementation of small class teaching in school education. He pointed out that implementation of small class teaching and adoption of appropriate pedagogies and teaching strategies would definitely improve quality of education. He added that with the assistance of the Hong Kong Institute of Education, some Tai Po schools had operated small classes in the 2003-04 school year. Students in these small classes had demonstrated improvements in their academic and non-academic performance.

The Alliance for Small-class Learning and Teaching to Promote Quality Education

[LC Paper No. CB(2)130/04-05(06)]

33. Mr CHOI Wing-tim presented the views of the Alliance for Small-class Learning and Teaching to Promote Quality Education on progressive implementation of small class teaching as detailed in its submission. He pointed out that both the Education Commission Report No.5 published in 1992 and the Report on Review of 9-year Compulsory Education published in 1997 had recommended, among others, improvement in teacher-to-class ratio in primary and secondary schools to improve quality of education. He urged the Administration to implement small class teaching to facilitate teaching on a student-centred basis in school education.

Mr IP Kin-yuen, Lecturer, Department of Educational Policy and Administration, The Hong Kong Institute of Education

34. Mr IP Kin-yuen highlighted that small class teaching was an essential condition for successful implementation of education and curriculum reform. He pointed out that small class teaching would enable teachers to interact with students and enhance teaching and learning outcome, which could not be carried out effectively in large classes. He also cited the implementation of small class teaching in Shanghai as an example to illustrate that along with appropriate implementation strategies on professional development of teachers, educational researches and performance assessment, small class teaching in school education would help enhance smooth progress in education reform and quality of

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education.

*Wong Tai Sin District School Liaison Committee
Wong Tai Sin Secondary School Heads Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)130/04-05(07)]*

35. Mr LEE Pun-cho said that Wong Tai Sin District School Liaison Committee and Wong Tai Sin Secondary School Heads Association supported the implementation of small class teaching in school education as soon as practicable. He stressed that small class teaching was an essential condition for effective teaching of Liberal Studies in senior secondary classes under the proposed reform on senior secondary education. He pointed out that small class teaching would facilitate teacher-student interactions, enhance quality of teaching and learning as well as reduce individual difference in learning. Mr LEE also suggested that the Administration should increase the number of participating schools in the Administration's study on effective strategies of class and group teaching in primary schools (the Study), particularly in districts where the student population had substantially declined.

Sai Kung District School Heads Association

36. Mrs POON Suk-han said that the Sai Kung District School Heads Association fully supported the adoption of small class teaching to improve quality of school education. The Association also agreed that implementation of small class teaching should be incremental in the light of the prevailing fiscal deficits.

*Hong Kong Aided Primary School Heads Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)169/04-05(01)]*

37. Mr LAM Seung-wan presented the views of the Hong Kong Aided Primary School Heads Association as detailed in its submission. He highlighted that the Association supported small class teaching and was looking forward to collaborate with the Administration in working out the appropriate plan and arrangements for progressive implementation in the 18 districts. The Association considered that most teachers were professionally competent and should be able to teach effectively in small classes after receiving the necessary training. The Association also considered that small class teaching would benefit gifted students and students with special learning needs. Mr LAM added that the Association was conducting a questionnaire survey to examine the student population situation in each district and would provide the results to the Administration for consideration in due course.

Kowloon City District School Principals' Liaison Committee

38. Mr PUN Tin-chi said that the Kowloon City District School Principals'

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Liaison Committee supported small class teaching. He considered that the benefits of small class teaching were apparent, and there was no need to compare the relative importance of small class teaching and teachers' professionalism in enhancing quality of education. He pointed out that the professionalism of a teacher should not only be judged on his competence and qualifications in teaching, but also his abilities to motivate students in the development of positive values and beliefs. He added that teachers were now overloaded with the education reform initiatives, and had little time to communicate with students on an individual basis. The adoption of small class teaching would facilitate development of better teacher-student relationship as well as positive values among students in the long run.

*Association of School Heads of Islands District
[LC Paper No. CB(2)130/04-05(08)]*

39. Mr AU YEUNG Sung-fan introduced the submission of the Association of School Heads of Islands District which represented the views of both primary and secondary heads in Islands District on small class teaching. He highlighted that the Association supported implementation of small class teaching to enhance the effectiveness of school education.

Subsidized Primary Schools Council

40. Mr FUNG Ka-ching said that the Subsidized Primary Schools Council had all along advocated improving teacher-to-student ratio in schools to enhance quality of education. He pointed out that given the current primary student population at different levels, the implementation of small class teaching in primary schools would not prevent reduction of classes or resolve the problem of surplus teachers, and closure of under-utilized schools in the future. The Council considered that the savings arising from reduction of classes and closure of under-utilized schools should be retained for use in the primary school sector. He added that implementing small class teaching in primary schools in the light of declining student population would not incur additional costs in education.

*Tsing Yi Primary School Head's Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)130/04-05(09)] (revised)*

41. Ms YAN Yuen-yee presented the views of the Tsing Yi Primary School Head's Association as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the 18 primary schools in Tsing Yi supported implementation of small class teaching to improve quality of education as soon as practicable. The Association considered that small class teaching would definitely help improve teacher-student interactions in primary schools, and better prepare schools for teaching Liberal Studies in senior secondary classes in the future. Ms YAN said that the Association supported progressive implementation of small class teaching in different districts.

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*Hong Kong Association for Specific Learning Disabilities
[LC Paper No. CB(2)169/04-05(02)]*

42. Mrs LAU Li Man-ying and Mrs KWAN TO Ling-chu presented the views of the Hong Kong Association for Specific Learning Disabilities as detailed in its submission. Mrs LAU highlighted that the Association supported implementation of small class teaching to improve quality of education and student-teacher interaction and relationship in teaching and learning. The Association considered that small class teaching would benefit students with specific learning disabilities who needed more personal care and assistance in learning. Mrs LAU requested that the Administration should formulate a timetable for implementing small class teaching and supporting services in school education as soon as possible.

43. Mrs KWAN TO Ling-chu supplemented that the Association considered that small class teaching for integrated education should be implemented in schools with teachers who had attended at least 60-hour relevant professional development in special education. The Association suggested that the Administration should provide pre-service and in-service teachers with appropriate training on the needs of students with specific learning disabilities, ensure the establishment of a whole-school culture on integrated education, and the provision of individualised teaching for students with specific learning disabilities in public sector schools. Mrs KWAN added that the Legislative Council should discuss the provision of integrated education to students with specific learning difficulties, as well as the provision of appropriate assistance when they sat for public examinations.

Federation of Parent-Teacher Association, Tai Po District

44. Mr LAM Wai-hong said that the Federation of Parent-Teacher Association, Tai Po District supported the implementation of small class teaching in school education. He considered that small class teaching would provide more room for teachers to assist students with different abilities in learning, and parents should have a choice to send their children to attend schools with large or small classes. He expressed confidence that teachers who had received the relevant training would be able to teach effectively in small classes.

Lingnan Haug Yee Memorial Secondary School

45. Ms Mellissa YAM said that teachers in the Lingnan Haug Yee Memorial Secondary School supported small class teaching. With a resource provision for operating six classes at junior secondary levels, the teachers there had collaborated to operate four ordinary classes and three small classes of 26 students each. The school had found small class teaching more effective in promoting student learning outcome, and hoped that small class teaching would

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be implemented in all primary and secondary schools as soon as possible.

The Joint Council of Parent-Teacher Associations of the Shatin District

46. Mr YU Wing-fai said that the Joint Council of Parent-Teacher Associations of the Shatin District considered that parents should have a choice in pursuit of quality whole-person education for their children. The education reform would result in the provision of a wider diversity in education. He pointed out that schools had their unique culture and circumstances, and should be allowed to operate classes of different sizes.

Federation of Parent-Teacher Association, Tuen Mun

47. Ms SUEN Man-lai said that the Federation of Parent-Teacher Association, Tuen Mun supported early implementation of small class teaching. She considered that small class teaching would benefit students in learning, particularly kindergarten and primary school leavers who had to get accustomed to a higher level study in a new learning environment. She added that as a result of a decline in student population and with the establishment of through train schools which were preferred by parents, more primary schools in Tuen Mun had to tackle the problem of insufficient student enrolment.

Federation of Parent Teacher Associations in Kwun Tong District

48. Mr TSUI Kar-keung said that children needed attention from teachers in classes and parents would like their children to be attended by teachers. He considered that small class teaching would create room for teachers to communicate with students individually, and should be implemented in all public sector schools when there were sufficient qualified teachers. He considered that for primary schools in Shatin to implement small class teaching, there should be an open, transparent and independent evaluation of the supply of qualified teachers.

49. Mr KAI Ping-chung said that parents supported small class teaching as it would help schools reinforce civil and moral education in schools. He pointed out that teachers were now overloaded at work and could hardly attend to the needs of students on an individual basis. He, however, pointed out that small class teaching should be implemented on a gradual basis, and should not be implemented for the sake of resolving the prevailing problem of surplus teachers.

Dr Albert CHAU W. L. , Director of General Education, University of Hong Kong

50. Dr Albert CHAU said that psychologists in general considered that small class teaching would benefit students in the development of higher order

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thinking skills such as critical thinking and problem solving skills. These skills would more effectively be learnt by way of life experiences, and developed through close interactions between teachers and students. It was also agreed that teaching by examples in small class was the best way to help students to develop such higher order thinking skills. Dr CHAU considered that to benefit students' development, implementation of small class teaching should start at primary schools. As advocated under the education reform, teachers should play the role of facilitator to assist students to learn according to their interests and abilities, and achieve an all-round learning experience.

51. Dr CHAU further said that some academics attending the seminar on learning effectiveness and small class in HKU on 7 November 2004 had cited a number of overseas studies on small class teaching to substantiate the saying that the effect of small class teaching was not apparent on students with average or high academic performance, and was relatively more apparent on low academic achievers and students from socially-disadvantaged families. Dr CHAU pointed out that these studies on small class teaching were centred on learning outcome based on traditional assessments instead of new learning concepts such as learning to learn and developing higher order thinking skills. He considered that research on small class teaching should be conducted and interpreted in the context of local circumstances. He suggested that the Administration should appoint local academics to conduct research studies on the benefits of small class teaching in the light of the needs of the students, educational objectives and circumstances in Hong Kong.

*Hong Kong Council of Social Service
[LC Paper No. CB(2)169/04-05(03)]*

52. Ms Angela NG presented the views of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Council understood the heavy workload of teachers and the needs of students in learning. She considered that small class teaching would enhance teacher-student interactions and relationship in schools, and would enable teachers to assist students at risk and academically low achievers on an individual basis. She said that social service providers supported implementation of small class teaching on an incremental basis. They anticipated that the Administration, schools and parents would collaborate to work out the necessary supporting elements and conditions, the priority and the timetable on implementation of small class teaching to cater for the different needs of students and schools.

Federation of Parent-Teacher Association of Hong Kong Eastern District

53. Mr JAO Ming said that the Federation of Parent-Teacher Association of Hong Kong Eastern District supported implementation of small class teaching in alignment with the proposed reform in the academic structures for senior secondary and higher education (the "3+3+4" structure). Mr JAO considered

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that small class/group teaching would help create a teaching and learning environment conducive to development of creative thinking and language abilities of students. He added that small class teaching would benefit student learning in Liberal Studies which involved group discussions and debates on selected topics. He hoped that Hong Kong would follow Shanghai and some overseas countries to implement small class teaching and improve teacher-student relationship in the long run.

Other submissions received

54. Members noted the submission from Tuen Mun District Secondary School Heads Association (LC Paper No.CB(2)130/04-05(10)).

The Administration's response to views of deputations/individuals

55. The Chairman summed up that all deputations/individuals attending the meeting had expressed support for implementation of small class teaching. They in general considered that small class teaching would improve teacher-student interactions and relationship, reduce individual difference in learning, facilitate student learning and development in higher order thinking skills, and motivate students to learn by themselves. Some deputations considered that small class teaching should be implemented in alignment with the proposed "3+3+4" structure, and would benefit the teaching and learning of Liberal Studies under the proposed new senior secondary curriculum. Some deputations also pointed out that given the larger student population of P3-P6 students, progressive implementation of small class teaching from P1 in the 2005-06 school year would not give rise to additional recurrent costs.

56. In response, PSEM drew Members' attention to the gist of the seminar on effective learning and class size organised by HKU on 7 November 2004. At the seminar, academics present, including Professor Maurice Galton who was appointed by the Administration as the consultant to the Study, and Mr IP Kin-yuen who had spoken just now, had shared the conclusion that small class teaching would not automatically bring about effective student learning. She pointed out that while nobody would object to small class teaching *per se*, research studies had failed to provide conclusive evidence on its effectiveness on teaching and learning. In particular, some overseas studies on small class had demonstrated disappointing results due to lack of purposeful prior planning and hasty implementation. The studies suggested that pedagogical changes constituted a key condition for realising the benefits of small class. PSEM added that the Administration looked forward to sharing the experiences of those schools which had indicated that they had experience in operating small classes.

57. PSEM further pointed out that given the substantial financial implications of implementing small class teaching in public sector primary schools, the Administration had initiated a three-year pilot study on small class teaching

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involving 37 schools to identify the supporting conditions necessary to maximise the benefits of small class teaching in primary schools in the Hong Kong environment. The aim was not to delay small class implementation but rather to ensure its successful implementation. PSEM explained that the Study would assess students' achievements on standard tests, improvements in learning behaviour including their self-confidence, motivation in learning, and abilities to develop generic skills and higher order thinking skills. The Study would also link students' learning outcome to the teaching pedagogies and strategies for small class teaching, and the latter would be covered in the professional development of the teachers concerned. The Study would be monitored by a Steering Committee comprising academics and frontline educators. Interim reviews would be conducted annually.

58. On the recommendations of Education Commission Report No.5 to improve teacher-to-student ratios to 1:22 in primary schools and 1:17 in secondary schools in the 2007-08 school year, PSEM said that the ratios were already 1:19.5 in primary schools and 1:18 in secondary schools in the 2003-04 school year. She added that the Chief Executive had announced on the Teachers Day that the Administration would improve teacher-to-class ratio from the current 1.4:1 to 1.5:1 in primary schools in the 2005-06 school year.

59. PSEM also said that the Administration was well aware of the heavy workload of teachers in the course of implementing the education reform, and had proactively discussed with the profession on feasible ways to improve the situation. In this connection, the Administration was reviewing the codes of aids for public sector schools for the purpose of simplifying the administrative procedures, including enhancing schools' flexibility in the use of funds through one-line vote on non-salary grants. Furthermore, schools were encouraged to assign fewer subjects and levels of classes for teachers in order to enhance the coherence and lessen the burden of lesson preparation.

60. On budgetary constraints, PSEM pointed out that like other bureaux, EMB shared a part in reducing government operating expenditure to \$200 billions by the 2008-09 financial year. Given the various initiatives in education, the Administration would have to explore with the community the priority of education initiatives which would benefit students most and in the most cost-effective way.

Discussion

The Study – implementation and evaluation

61. Ms Audrey EU said that while deputations unanimously supported small class teaching, most of the academics, except Mr IP Kin-yuen, attending the seminar in HKU on 7 November 2004 had expressed reservations about the cost-effectiveness of small class teaching. In view of this, the Administration

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would have to ascertain the benefits of small class teaching by way of conducting the Study. If the outcome of the Study was negative, small class teaching would not be implemented in public sector schools. Since the participating schools were selected and members of the Steering Committee which would assess the outcome of the Study were appointed by EMB, Ms EU asked whether deputations were aware of the criteria for selecting participating schools and for assessing performance improvements under the Study. She also asked whether deputations would accept that a policy decision to give up or withhold the implementation of small class teaching would be determined by the outcome of the Study.

62. Mr SHIN Kei-lit of the Shatin District Primary School Heads Association responded that primary schools which met the specific conditions were allowed to join the Study. He pointed out that up to now, EMB had not provided the necessary support and assistance to schools such as the provision of professional development for teachers on effective pedagogies and teaching strategies for implementing the Study. Mr SHIN agreed that evaluation of the outcome of the Study should include student learning outcome in both academic and non-academic areas. As there were many variables affecting quality of education, it would not be realistic to conclude from the outcome of the Study that it was cost-effective to implement small class teaching or not. He considered that implementation of small class teaching in primary schools in Shatin would not be in conflict with the progress of the Study. He pointed out that there were precedents that EMB had implemented a new educational initiative in schools whilst a pilot study on the subject was in progress. Ms Audrey EU remarked that given the fiscal deficits, the Administration might decide not to proceed with the implementation of small class teaching if the outcome of the Study was negative.

63. Mr WONG Kwok-kong of the Committee of Schools' Principals (Yau Tsim Mong) said that he had worked in a school which operated small classes to accommodate a group of 20 low academic achievers at P4 level. He pointed out that the benefits of small class teaching were demonstrated by the improvement in the student performance. Mr WONG added that small class teaching could improve teacher-student relationship in schools, and would create room for teachers to assist students in developing their potentials and talents in both academic and non-academic areas. He wondered how the performance of students would be evaluated under the Study.

64. In response to the queries about the selection criteria of participating schools and evaluation criteria of students' performance, PSEM explained that the criteria for selecting participating schools were set out clearly in a paper submitted to the Panel and subsequently in a circular to schools. She pointed out that the 37 participating schools had practised different approaches and strategies for small and group teaching. To help maximise the benefits of small

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class, the support should be tailored to their needs and characteristics of the participating schools rather than offered in a one-size-fits-all approach. She added that apart from academic indicators, evaluation under the Study would also be made by way of questionnaires to be completed by schools, teachers, parents and students.

65. Mr YEUNG Chor-kit of the Council of Central and Western District School Heads expressed concern about the reliability and consistency of the evaluation on student performance under the Study, given that participating schools were allowed to adopt different methodologies or models to implement small class teaching. He pointed out that participating schools were only informed in early November 2004 of the need to plan the implementation of small class teaching themselves, and of the arrangements for professional development workshops on 11 and 12 November 2004. As different implementation approaches and strategies would be adopted by the 37 participating schools, Mr YEUNG queried how the benefits of small class teaching could be fairly and consistently assessed during the three-year evaluation period.

66. PSEM acknowledged that it would be difficult to assess and compare the qualitative improvement in education among participating schools with different circumstances. EMB would arrange experts to observe the teaching and learning activities in participating schools and would provide advice and assistance as appropriate.

67. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that the benefits of small class teaching on improving teacher-student interaction and relation were apparent. He considered it unnecessary to conduct the Study in order to justify implementation of small class teaching in primary schools on a gradual basis. Dr CHEUNG pointed out that the Administration had not conducted any similar studies on the implementation of the proposed “3+3+4” structure, the school-based management, etc.

68. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong also asked why the Administration did not consider it necessary to conduct a study on the proposed “3+3+4” structure in order to ascertain its cost-effectiveness as it had done so in the case of small class teaching. He pointed out that the fact that the Steering Committee comprised some academics who were not in favour of small class teaching but no academics such as Mr IP Kin-yuen who was in favour of small class teaching had reflected the Administration’s stance on the matter. Mr CHEUNG considered that the Administration should allow primary schools in Shatin to operate small classes.

69. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung expressed reservations about the reliability of the Study which included only 37 participating schools and covered a period of three years. He pointed out that improvements in student learning outcome would not

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be substantial over a three-year period. He considered that if the Administration did not intend to implement small class teaching, it should drop the Study and save an expenditure of some \$80 million. He also considered that the Administration had already taken a position in small class teaching, and the outcome of the Study would be used to justify its decision not to implement small class teaching after three years.

70. PSEM responded that the policies on school-based management and inclusion of Liberal Studies in senior secondary curriculum were formulated after years of relevant trials and studies. The proposed “3+3+4’ structure was in line with international trend and the benefits from the articulation perspective were clear. School-based management had been promoted for over 10 years before the draft Bill was submitted. On the other hand, research on small class teaching had failed to draw conclusive evidence on its benefits.

71. PSEM stressed that the academics attending the seminar on learning effectiveness and class sizes on 7 November 2004 were renowned and independent experts in the field. She pointed out that these academics had the consensus that the professionalism of teachers was most vital to the success of small class teaching and the provision of training to teachers was important, and that small class teaching had more significant positive effects in the early years of schooling and on students with weak family support. They also took the view that the effectiveness of small class teaching should be assessed not only on the basis of students’ scores in standardised tests but also their progress in whole-person development. She added that the Study had been designed to assess the effects of small class teaching on these aspects in the 37 primary schools.

72. Mr IP Kin-yuen considered that the academics attending the seminar on learning effectiveness and class size on 7 November 2004 had expressed their views on small class teaching, but it would be difficult to say whether the speakers had come to any consensus in a seminar. He pointed out that the academics attending the seminar had agreed on the importance of teachers’ professionalism in small class teaching, but some of them had not expressed any views as to whether small class teaching had more positive effects in early years of schooling and students from disadvantaged families. Mr IP added that small class teaching would bring about changes in learning outcome, but would not automatically create a change in pattern and behaviour in respect of teaching and learning.

73. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that the Administration should disclose the names of the 37 participating schools to improve the transparency of the Study. He pointed out that the outcome of the Study should not be solely determined by the Steering Committee, and that the public should be given the opportunity to understand the practices of these schools under study. Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (2) responded that the invitation had

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been extended to all public sector schools of which almost 60 applied entirely on a voluntary basis. All applicant-schools which operated more than one P1 class in 2004-05 and whose classes could be sub-divided into the research range of 20-25 students were screened-in. No additional criteria had been applied. She stressed that there were strict ethical rules in the academic world against disclosure of participants' identity in research studies. The Administration had all along adopted and respected this. Even for studies commissioned by EMB to tertiary academics and which involved sampling, the academics would not inform EMB, nor would EMB demand to be informed, of the subjects sampled and covered in the studies. In other words, the Administration would refrain from interfering with the work of the academics and consultants.

74. Dr Albert CHAU agreed that disclosure of the participating schools under the Study would to some extent affect the implementation of the Study in individual schools, and thus the results of the Study if the experimental schools were subject to inspection as their names had been disclosed. He considered it more important to establish a control group for comparison purpose in the Study. The results of the study would not be affected if the names of all participating schools including those in the control group were disclosed.

Financial implications

75. Ms Emily LAU considered that resources allocation for education should be increased to improve quality of education. She, however, would like to know how small class teaching could be implemented in primary schools in Shatin without incurring additional recurrent costs.

76. Ms YUEN Sui-han of the Shatin District Secondary School Heads Association explained that based on the information available to the Association, there were about 143 P1 classes and 3002 kindergarten pupils in Shatin in the 2004-05 school year. If a class size of 23 students was adopted for P1 classes in the 2005-06 school year, a total of 131 P1 classes would be needed to accommodate the 3002 kindergarten leavers in Shatin. In other words, about 12 P1 classes could still be reduced in the next school year.

77. Ms Emily LAU asked about the estimated reduction of savings from reduction of classes if small class teaching was implemented in Shatin in the 2005-06 school year. Ms YUEN Sui-han responded that implementing small class teaching at P1 level in Shatin would mean a reduction in savings of around \$10 million. She added that the Administration would still achieve a saving of about \$35 million as a result of the declining P1 student population in Shatin in the 2005-06 school year.

78. Ms Emily LAU remarked that the Administration should consider re-deploying \$10 million savings from reduction of classes to let more primary schools in Shatin operate small P1 classes in the 2005-06 school year. PSEM

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responded that the resources allocated for the Study was intended to cater for 40 participating schools. The number of participating schools was limited to 40 because EMB needed to provide appropriate support to participating schools and EMB would be unable to provide the participating schools with the support required if the number were increased. The Administration would review the Study annually, and would invite more schools to join the Study subject to availability of funds and professional support resources.

Follow-up

79. The Chairman thanked deputations for their attendance and views. He suggested that the Panel should discuss the implementation progress of the Study at a future meeting. Members agreed.

VI. Any other business

80. The meeting ended at 7:45 pm.

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Legislative Council Secretariat
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