

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)792/04-05
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 10 January 2005 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** : Mr Chris WARDLAW
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (5)
- Mr Simon THAM
Chief Curriculum Development Officer
(Native-speaking English Teacher)
- Mr Sam HUI
Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower
(Special Duties)

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

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

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I. Confirmation of minutes

[LC Paper No. CB(2)546/04-05]

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2004 were confirmed.

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

2. Members noted that no information paper had been issued since the last meeting.

III. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[Appendix I and Appendix II to LC Paper No. CB(2)545/04-05]

3. Members noted the “List of outstanding issues for discussion” and the “List of follow-up actions” issued vide LC Paper No. CB(2)545/04-05 on 4 January 2005.

4. Members agreed to discuss the following at the next regular meeting scheduled for 7 February 2005 at 4:30 pm –

- (a) Implementation of small class teaching;
- (b) Government funding to support the development work of the reform of the academic structure of senior secondary education and higher education; and
- (c) Proposed retention of a supernumerary principal education officer post to oversee the preparation, development and implementation of the reform of the academic structure of senior secondary education and higher education

5. Members noted that the Administration had suggested to postpone the discussion of the item on “Review of the medium of instructing for secondary schools and secondary school places allocation” to the regular meeting in March 2005.

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IV. Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme in primary schools

[LC Paper No. CB(2)545/04-05(01) and (02)]

6. At the invitation of the Chairman, Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (5) (DS(EM)5) briefed members on the salient points of the Administration's paper on the subject.

Recruitment and retention of native-speaking English teachers in primary schools

7. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed concern about the problems in recruitment and retention of native-speaking English teachers in primary schools (PNETs). He pointed out that about one-third of the PNETs had left the service during the 2003-04 school year. Mr CHEUNG considered that while the different cultures and expectations in education between local and overseas schools would affect the decision of PNETs to continue their teaching work in Hong Kong, the current arrangements for one PNET to serve two primary schools should be the main cause for the high turnover of PNETs as it would be difficult for the PNETs to develop a sense of belonging. He pointed out that under the arrangement, a PNET would have to work in two primary schools on alternate weeks, and the schools might locate at different districts and adopt different curriculum and pedagogies. He asked whether the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) would consider providing each primary school with a PNET to improve retention of PNETs.

8. DS(EM)5 responded that it was natural that a certain percentage of PNETs would decide to return to their native countries for various professional and personal reasons after completing a two-year service contract in Hong Kong. He pointed out that the native-speaking English teacher scheme in primary schools (PNET Scheme) was introduced to public sector primary schools in the 2002-03 school year on the basis of two primary schools (with six classes or more) to share one PNET. The Scheme was aimed at providing an authentic environment for students to learn English and develop their confidence in using English for communication to support local English teachers in their professional development. DS(EM)5 acknowledged that under the current arrangement, a PNET might have to work in two primary schools on alternate weeks and at different locations. He explained that the objective of the PNET Scheme for the first few years of operation was to establish a basic foundation for expansion of the Scheme to cover all primary schools in the long term. During the past two school years, EMB had played an active role in assisting schools to collaborate the efforts of local English teachers and PNETs to develop innovative learning and teaching methods that best met students' needs. The effective methods and good practices in teaching English Language would be disseminated among primary schools through various teacher development programmes.

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9. DS(EM)5 further said that in view of the benefits of the PNET Scheme on students' English learning, EMB was now expanding the provision of the PNET scheme through recruiting more PNETs on top of those provided to schools on a sharing basis, so that some pairs of schools would have an additional PNET in the current school year. DS(EM)5 added that the size of recruitment was large because additional PNETs were required for the expansion and the replenishment of the PNETs who for various reasons did not wish to renew their service contracts. Nevertheless, the long-term policy objective was to provide all eligible primary schools with a PNET.

10. The Chairman asked whether the Administration had set a timetable for provision of one PNET for all primary schools.

11. DS(EM)5 explained that the implementation timetable hinged on the supply and availability of quality PNETs. Given the recruitment constraint as well as the need to guarantee quality of PNETs, the expansion of the PNET Scheme would have to be implemented on a gradual basis. To speed up the recruitment process, EMB had stepped up recruitment efforts to take in PNETs in the middle of a school year. In other words, recruitment of PNETs was now made an on-going process.

12. Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower (Special Duties) AS(EM)SD supplemented that the service contract of some 170 PNETs had expired at the end of the 2003-04 school year and some 80 PNETs had for various reasons decided not to renew their contracts. This was a little more than the past trend where around three out of every four NETs continued on a second contract in the secondary scheme. AS(EM)SD pointed out that some of these 80 PNETs had informed the schools of their decision to leave the service shortly before the beginning of the 2004-05 school year. As a result, EMB would have to recruit more PNETs for replenishment as well as allocation to primary schools sharing or without a PNET at the same time. As at today, a total of 26 additional PNETs were ready for allocation to schools which were sharing a PNET with another school. He added that 15 primary schools were recruiting a PNET on their own. In other words, some 70 primary schools would have a PNET shortly.

13. AS(EM)SD further said that according to past experience, NETs normally advised schools of their intention to renew the service agreement or not in February/March of a school year. However, there were now more NETs leaving the service during the course of a school year. In view of this, EMB had consulted primary school councils on the arrangements and support measures for provision of replenishment PNETs in the course of a school year. To secure an on-going supply of qualified NETs, EMB had commissioned overseas agencies to recruit potential NETs on a year-round basis. Successful applicants would, after completion of the necessary recruitment procedures, be allocated to schools as soon as they were available to work in Hong Kong. EMB anticipated that the

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arrangement would speed up the recruitment and allocation process, and hopefully more primary schools could be allocated with a PNET in the 2004-05 school year.

14. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that EMB should examine the causes for PNETs to leave the workforce and take appropriate actions to improve the turnover rate. Given the competitive remuneration package for PNETs as compared with the offers in overseas countries such as Australia and New Zealand, EMB should review the current arrangements for two primary schools to share one PNET in order to improve the retention rate of PNETs. He pointed out that as only some 70 primary schools would have a PNET shortly, most PNETs would continue to serve two schools in the 2004-05 school year. Mr CHEUNG highlighted the practical problems of such arrangement and urged the Administration to work out strategies to improve retention of PNETs in the service.

15. DS(EM)5 responded that while there would be some PNETs leaving the service for having difficulties in adjusting to the local teaching or living environment or in working with their superiors and peers, the vast majority of PNETs had left the service for professional or personal reasons. He considered an initial turnover rate of 30% to 40% for PNETs acceptable as they were recruited from overseas countries on the basis of a two-year renewable contract. He added that it was understood that most NETs had left the service for professional or personal reasons rather than unsatisfactory relationship with peers or the school management was confirmed during their exit interviews. Having said that, EMB would continue to monitor the situation and give extra efforts to improve retention of PNETs.

16. Chief Curriculum Development Officer, NET (CCDO(NET)) supplemented that EMB had issued sets of guidelines to schools and principals on deployment of PNETs. EMB encouraged primary schools to assign PNETs to teach key stage one students so that young children could start learning English under the guidance of a native speaker during their early ages. To facilitate interaction and communication among PNETs and schools, EMB had established an Advisory Teaching Team (ATTs) comprising some 20 NETs and 20 local English teachers to provide centralised support to English teaching in primary schools provided with PNETs. The ATT acted as a bridge between PNETs and the school management to facilitate collaboration between PNETs and local English teachers through regular visits and professional development workshops. During these visits and workshops, ATT would obtain feedback from PNETs on the PNET Scheme, and offer advice and assistance to individual PNETs as appropriate.

17. Ms Audrey EU said that good NETs could definitely enhance English teaching and learning in primary schools. She suggested that EMB should explore the feasibility of recruiting native English-speaking persons who did not

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intend to find a day time job and had not attained a recognised qualification in teaching English to assist in teaching English in primary schools located in vicinity of their residence. She pointed out that there were a large number of native English-speaking persons who were spouses of expatriates working in Hong Kong or immigrants returned from overseas countries, and were capable of teaching English in primary schools. Ms EU considered that given the recruitment difficulty and high turnover of PNETs, EMB should take the initiative to co-ordinate the provision of appropriate training to these persons who were capable and interested in teaching English for primary students so that they could contribute to enhancing the quality of English teaching in primary schools in the long run.

18. DS(EM)5 responded that EMB was well aware that community support was paramount to enhancing student learning outcome in school education. He pointed out that apart from the NET Scheme in primary and secondary schools, the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) had co-ordinated a number of community support programmes such as the Reading Ambassadors Programmes to enhance English teaching and learning in schools. Schools could also make use of the Capacity Enhancement Grants and other grants to recruit non-professional staff to assist in teaching English. In response to Ms Audrey EU's request, DS(EM)5 agreed to escalate efforts in enhancing the community-school interface to complement the implementation of PNET Scheme. He, however, pointed out that the original objective of PNET Scheme was to provide qualified professionals to teach English language in primary schools.

19. Ms Audrey EU urged the Administration to take the lead to co-ordinate the provision of more community support programmes on enhancing quality of English language teaching and learning in primary schools. She believed that it would be more effective for EMB, instead of the schools themselves, to co-ordinate the arrangements for capable English-speaking persons in the community to assist in teaching English in schools after completing an appropriate training on teaching English. Responding to the Chairman, DS(EM)5 said that EMB would collaborate with SCOLAR to reinforce efforts to incorporate more community support programmes on teaching and learning English into the school sector.

20. Mrs Selina CHOW said that given the inadequate supply of qualified PNETs from overseas countries, the Administration should work out alternative strategies for recruitment of qualified PNETs in Hong Kong. She suggested that the Administration should expand the scope of the PNET Scheme and provide appropriate training for expatriates and their spouses in Hong Kong who were capable to teach English language at primary levels. She pointed out that spouses of British soldiers stationed in Hong Kong had been employed to teach English language or conversation in schools. She suggested that the Administration should explore the feasibility of attracting these native

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English-speaking persons to teach English in primary schools after completion of some qualifying training.

21. Mrs Selina CHOW considered that although it might not be realistic to expect PNETs to continue teaching in Hong Kong for a long period of time, EMB should improve communication with PNETs in order to improve retention of PNETs. She suggested that EMB should increase the staff establishment of ATT to cover more primary schools and provide more support to PNETs. Mrs CHOW pointed out that apart from problems encountered in daily work and living, PNETs had their personal and social needs. She considered that ATT should play an active role in coordinating social activities for PNETs to interact with one another so that they would develop a stronger sense of belonging and be more willing to continue teaching English in Hong Kong for a longer period of time.

22. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that he shared the view of Mrs Selina CHOW that the Administration should improve communication with PNETs and expand the scope of the PNET Scheme to recruit capable persons such as spouses of expatriates with a high level of English proficiency to teach English in primary schools.

23. AS(EM)SD responded that in accordance with the policy objective of the PNET Scheme, only native English-speaking persons who possessed the required qualifications and teaching experience could be recruited to teach English language in primary schools in the capacity of a PNET. He pointed out that EMB maintained constant communication with the NETs' Association in Hong Kong and had already consulted the Association on the feasibility of employing NETs' spouses who were capable and willing to assist in teaching English in primary schools. In response to members' suggestion, EMB would collaborate with SCOLAR to formulate strategies to attract more native English-speaking persons to assist in teaching English in primary schools. CCDO(NET) added that members of ATT met PNETs and local English teachers on a weekly basis, and would provide advice and assistance on their work on an on-going basis.

24. AS(EM)SD further said that the Administration had established in 2004 a Task Force on Language Support consisting of experienced language teachers and educators as advisors. The Task Force would provide support to primary schools and secondary schools on Chinese and English teaching, and facilitate professional networking and exchange amongst schools through wider teacher development programmes targeting at language teachers including NETs. The PNET Scheme was part of the coordinated English language support strategy and was complementing the curriculum development work and the professional support provided by the Task Force.

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25. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung asked whether EMB had seriously examined the causes for the high turnover of PNETs. DS(EM)5 responded that apart from conducting exit interviews, EMB would continue to solicit feedback from schools and principals on the causes for the departure of PNETs on an on-going basis.

26. Mr LAU Sau-shing asked whether EMB would make use of the various education fairs in Hong Kong and overseas countries to enhance recruitment of NETS. AS(EM)SD replied that EMB had commissioned employment agencies in overseas countries where a large number of NETs came from to recruit potential NETs on a year-round basis. In their recruitment drive, these agencies would make use of the education fairs held in their countries in their recruitment.

Evaluation

27. Referring to paragraph 8 of the Administration's paper, Mrs Selina CHOW asked about the evidence for reaching the conclusion that PNETs had greatly enhanced the English language learning and teaching environment in primary schools.

28. DS(EM)5 responded that whilst the territory-wide level evaluation study was in progress, primary schools with PNETs were required to conduct self-evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the PNET Scheme in their schools. According to the feedback from principals and teachers in schools, the incorporation of PNETs in school education had in general enhanced the English learning environment as a whole. DS(EM)5 added that PNETs also organised and conducted extra-curricular activities in English and helped cultivating a reading culture, as well as assisting in the professional development of other teachers in the schools. He assured members that the Administration would inform the Panel of the outcomes of the PNET evaluation when results were available.

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29. CCDO(NET) supplemented that the presence of PNETs in primary schools had help create an authentic and print-rich English learning environment. More English was being used in school activities and extra-curricular activities such as the English Speaking Days. According to feedback from principals and teachers, the support services offered by ATT in the form of professional development workshops and interviews with PNETs and local English teachers were highly rated.

Resources allocation and others

30. Ms Emily LAU said that she had all along supported the provision of PNETs to all primary schools as young children should be provided with opportunities to learn English as early as possible. She asked whether the Administration had reserved sufficient funds for the provision of a PNET to each

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public sector primary school in the long run. She also asked how primary schools with less than six classes would be assisted in English teaching.

31. AS(EM)SD responded that sufficient funds had been set aside for the provision of a PNET to each public sector primary school. School sponsoring bodies were encouraged to assist in recruitment of qualified PNETs. He added that Advisory Teachers of the ATT would provide assistance to schools with less than six classes in the professional development of their English teachers.

32. DS(EM)5 added that the Administration would step up recruitment efforts to speed up the recruitment progress of PNETs so that each primary school would be allocated a PNET as soon as practicable.

33. Mr LAU Sau-shing asked whether EMB would organise inter-school activities and mixed English classes for students of public sector primary schools and students of international schools or English Foundation Schools, in order to provide opportunities for the students in these schools to learn and speak in English together.

34. DS(EM)5 responded that a large number of inter-school learning programmes and extra-curricular activities involving both public sector and international primary schools had been organised at the community and district level. EMB would give more efforts to promote community support in the organisation of similar learning opportunities for primary school students.

V. Any other business

35. There being on other business, the meeting ended at 5:43 pm.