

立法會
Legislative Council

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Panel on Education

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Thursday, 20 October 2005 at 4:35 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 CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon MA Lik, GBS, JP
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
- Member absent** : Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Professor Arthur LI, GBS, JP
Secretary for Education & Manpower
- Mrs Fanny LAW, GBS, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education & Manpower
- Ms Bernadette LINN
Deputy Secretary for Education & Manpower 2
- Mr M Y CHENG, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education & Manpower 3

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. Briefing by the Secretary for Education and Manpower on the Chief Executive's Policy Address 2005-06

Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM) briefed members on the new and on-going initiatives in education set out in the Policy Agenda of the 2005-06 Policy Address. His speaking note was tabled at the meeting and subsequently issued vide LC Paper No. CB(2)140/05-06(01).

Utilisation of unspent funds in education

2. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed dissatisfaction that while the Chief Executive reiterated in paragraph 86 of the 2005-06 Policy Address booklet that the Government would not cut back on total spending on education, the Administration had returned some \$3.8 billion and \$3.3 billion of unspent funds in education to the Treasury in the 2003-04 and 2004-05 financial years respectively. He asked how the Administration would ensure full utilisation of education resources to improve the quality of education.

3. SEM explained that for various reasons, there would be unspent funds in certain educational areas such as funds set aside for carrying out school construction works and providing loans to students under various student financial assistance schemes.

4. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong asked whether it was feasible for the Administration to consult the Panel during the months of January to February of a year on any proposal on utilisation of unspent allocation for other uses, e.g. for use of the Language Fund to strengthen language education, if the unspent allocation was not restricted to designated uses.

5. Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower (PSEM) responded that education resources were earmarked for specific purposes. For example, failure to recruit sufficient Native-speaking English teachers had contributed to the underspending. She welcomed suggestions on virement of funds for alternative one-off purposes, which would have to be thoroughly discussed by the Panel and approved by the Finance Committee.

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Further injection into the Language Fund

6. Referring to paragraph 5 of the Administration's paper entitled "Policy Initiatives on Education in the Policy Agenda for the 2005-06 Policy Address" [LC Paper No.CB(2)48/05-06(01)], Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong asked about the sources of funds for further injection into the Language Fund for planning and implementing additional measures to strengthen language education at schools. SEM responded that the funding for further injection into the Language Fund came from the overall operating expenditure envelope under SEM's purview.

7. Mr CHEUNG Man-kowng said that the community was most concerned about English teaching in secondary schools adopting Chinese as the medium of instruction (CMI schools) and student learning in secondary schools adopting English as the medium of instruction (EMI schools). The community had seen the positive effects of mother tongue teaching on students' learning outcome from the results of the 2005 Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination, but had not been convinced of its long-term benefits on enhancing students' learning outcome. Mr CHEUNG considered that the Language Fund was a major source of funding in support of the implementation of mother tongue teaching in CMI schools and the transitional arrangements for students who were transferred from CMI schools to EMI schools, or switched from learning in Chinese to learning in English in CMI schools. He asked how the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) would redeploy resources to the Language Fund to support CMI schools and EMI schools in language education.

8. SEM responded that the Administration would proceed to seek approval for further injection into the Language Fund in accordance with the stipulated procedure. Since the existing provision for the Language Fund was committed or earmarked for on-going initiatives, the Administration would consult the Panel and seek the support of the Finance Committee for further injection into the Language Fund at a later stage. PSEM supplemented that the proposed injection into the Language Fund would be used, among others, to strengthen the teaching and learning of English Language and widen exposure to English outside classes, as well as the wider use of Putonghua to teach Chinese Language.

Bullying and violence in schools

9. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that apart from strengthening language education, the Administration should place emphasis on moral and civic education in schools. He pointed out that as evidenced by recent incidents of bullying and violence, there were more students with behavioural and emotional problems in schools. Front-line educators in general considered that improving teacher-student interactions and relationship by way of implementing small class teaching and relieving teachers' workload should help improve the situation. Mr LEUNG also pointed out that some schools had given emphasis on moral and

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civil education, and their teachers had given extra efforts in helping students to develop self-control and problem-solving abilities. However, these schools might not be recognised by parents and often faced the problem of under-enrolment. Mr LEUNG asked whether the Government would allocate additional resources to reinforce moral and civic education to enhance students' moral values and civic-mindedness.

10. SEM responded that civil and moral education had been a major area of study in the existing school curriculum and would be reinforced in the new senior secondary curriculum under the new academic structure. He stressed that EMB would not forebear any incidents of bullying and violence in schools. However, it would not be realistic to expect zero occurrence of such cases at schools.

11. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that the Administration should not rely on the implementation of the new senior secondary curriculum to curb bullying and violence among students. He considered that the provision of one school social worker for each secondary school under the current policy was far from adequate for a secondary school with an enrolment of some 1 000 students. He considered that the Administration should allocate additional resources for implementation of appropriate measures to improve the situation in the next 20 months.

12. PSEM responded that apart from enriching moral and civic education in school curriculum, EMB had collaborated with the Police and other disciplinary services and organisations to implement a number of projects to help students achieve healthy intellectual and psychological developments, including implementation of the Understanding the Adolescent Project by phases in all secondary schools since the 2001-02 school year for early identification of the needs and the provision of primary preventive programme to Secondary One students. PSEM added that schools would not rely on one social worker to tackle their students' emotional and behavioural problems. In order to attain a lasting effect on preventing bullying, schools were encouraged to adopt a whole school approach so that all school personnel, parents and students would collaborate to build a harmonious school ethos which would prevent bullying and violence in the long term.

13. The Chairman asked whether the Administration would formulate new policies and work out appropriate measures to curb bullying and violence in schools. PSEM responded that the existing policies and measures would be reviewed and refined in the light of implementation experience on an on-going basis. New policies and new measures were not necessary.

14. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung considered that front-line educators in general found the existing policies and measures including the Understanding the Adolescent Project inadequate for curbing bullying and violence in schools. He suggested that the Administration should implement small class teaching and

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reduce teachers' administrative work so that teachers would have more room to interact with students in and outside the classrooms.

15. PSEM responded that there was no evidence to suggest that the problem of bullying and violence in schools had worsened recently. She pointed out that as a result of education reform, students in general found learning in classes more lively and enjoyable than before. At the Chairman's request, PSEM agreed to provide an information note on bullying in school for members' reference.

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Provision of special education and support for the needy students

16. Dr Fernando CHEUNG pointed out that the 2005-06 Policy Address had not mentioned the provision of special education for students with special educational needs (SEN). He asked whether the Administration would review the provision of special and integrated education under the new academic structure for secondary school education.

17. SEM responded that the review on the provision of special education under the new academic structure was underway. He added that the Government recognised the importance of special education and had all along allocated sufficient resources to the provision of special education.

18. Dr Fernando CHEUNG asked how the Administration would consult the key stakeholders in the special education sector in its review on the provision of special education and integrated education for students with SEN. He anticipated that parents and their children with SEN as well as the various councils and associations in the special education sector would have opportunities to participate in the review.

19. PSEM responded that the review on the provision of special and integrated education had started with a comprehensive review of the curricula for students with different types of SEN. The Curriculum Development Council had established a committee with participation of front-line educators in the special education sector to work out a new curriculum framework for students with different types of SEN. Furthermore, EMB had maintained a regular dialogue with parents to keep them abreast of development and exchange views on the provision of special education.

20. Dr Fernando CHEUNG asked whether the provision of \$75 million to implement the school-based after-school learning and support programmes for children of needy families would continue in the 2006-07 school year. SEM responded in the affirmative.

Education reform

21. Ms Emily LAU said that the teaching workforce had expressed

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grievances about their workload arising from the implementation of various reform initiatives in schools. In addition, many parents said that they had no confidence in the existing education systems and many employers had complained about the declining English proficiency of secondary school and university graduates. On the basis of these observations, she asked about the basis for SEM to say in paragraph 13 of his speaking note that the education reform had started to bear fruit.

22. SEM responded that the results of the education reforms as well as the quality of school and university education should be assessed on the basis of the overall standards of the entire population of school and university graduates. He pointed out that the proportion of the workforce who had completed junior secondary education or below had declined from 44% in 1994 to 33% in 2004. On the other hand, the proportion of the workforce with post-secondary and above qualifications had risen from 17% in 1994 to 27% in 2004. He considered that the improvement in the quality of the entire workforce had reflected the progress and achievements in education in the past decade. He added that being attracted by the quality of Hong Kong students, many overseas institutions would like to recruit students from Hong Kong.

School places for children of expatriates in Hong Kong

23. Ms Emily LAU said that some business associations had expressed concern about the provision of sufficient places in international schools for enrolment of children of their expatriate staff in Hong Kong. She pointed out that some international schools had enrolled a large proportion of local students. As a result, many expatriates working in Hong Kong might find it difficult for their children to enrol in the international schools of their choices. She asked how the Administration would help the expatriates in enrolment of their children to international schools.

24. SEM responded that it was the choice of parents who had decided to send their children to international schools providing different curricula that would help their children to pursue higher education in overseas countries. He pointed out that if international schools had admitted a large number of local students, it was due to their policies in student enrolment. Moreover, many parents of the local students in these schools were returnees from overseas countries holding foreign passports who might wish to send their children to overseas studies in the future.

25. PSEM said that the number of local students enrolled in international schools did not necessarily have a bearing on the quality of education in local schools. She pointed out that parents sent their children to international schools for various reasons, such as an enriched English language environment in these schools, to pave the way for studying abroad, or to avoid the pressure of sitting for the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination. The Administration

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was aware of the current shortage of places for non-local students in some international schools and was liaising with Invest HK on ways to deal with the situation. EMB also agreed to assist in student placement for staff of multinational companies wishing to set up offices in Hong Kong. PSEM informed members that some international schools had modified their enrolment policy to accord priority to expatriate children and children of returnees from overseas who had no or little Chinese language ability. In addition, the Administration was exploring with some EMI schools the possibility of admitting non-local students to facilitate cultural exchanges among local and non-local students.

26. PSEM further said that Direct Subsidy Scheme schools and Private Independent Schools enjoyed autonomy in curriculum design and student enrolment. These schools were also popular with parents. She stressed that the fact that many parents preferred to have their children educated in international schools should not be taken as failure of the local educational system. She pointed out that some five to six new private independent schools would come into operation in the next few years. These schools could also cater for expatriate children and would help to alleviate the pressure on international schools.

Relieving teachers' workload

27. Ms Audrey EU pointed out that the results of a number of surveys on the workload of teachers had shown that many teachers had to work very long hours and they spent a lot of their time in non-teaching activities such as promotion of student enrolment through displaying banners and distributing leaflets. She asked whether the Administration would consider other measures, apart from implementing specialised teaching in public sector primary schools, to help relieve teachers' workload and enhance their sense of satisfaction at work.

28. SEM responded that EMB did not encourage principals to assign these non-teaching duties such as displaying banners and distributing leaflets to teachers. He pointed out that additional resources had been allocated to primary schools with at least 12 classes in the 2005-06 school year to help relieve teachers' workload, implement specialised teaching, and enhance the effectiveness of teaching. He highlighted that specialised teaching was primarily intended to enhance student learning outcome and professional development of teachers. He considered that theoretically speaking, the provision of additional teacher for specialised teaching would to some extent reduce the workload of the teachers in a school. SEM added that the principal of a school could help relieve teachers' workload through cost-effective management of teaching resources. In this regard, EMB attached great importance to principals' training.

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29. PSEM supplemented that schools should review their priorities, in the light of the teachers' capacity. She pointed out that simply adding resources might lead to more, not less work for teachers, as was the experience in recent years. For instance, while the provision of additional English teachers for specialised teaching was aimed to reduce the workload of teachers, some teachers decided to upgrade their professionalism through further study. As a result, they became even busier. As regards non-teaching duties, such as marketing, she said this could be done in a professional way to benefit students, and cited the example of a teacher who showcased the achievements of her students who were trained to participate in the speech festival.

Optimising human resources

30. Ms Audrey EU expressed concern that the heading of the paragraphs relevant to education in the Policy Address booklet, i.e. "Optimising Human Resources" might create an impression that education should aim to facilitate economic development and provision of the necessary human capital in Hong Kong. She asked whether the provision of education was for the purpose of facilitating economic development.

31. SEM responded that it was the position of EMB that education should primarily aim to foster all-round development of students, and not to support economic development. He stressed that the provision of education should focus on the self-growth of a student and his commitment to the society. Ultimately, the all-round development of a student would contribute to the economic development of Hong Kong.

Post-secondary and university education

32. The Chairman asked about the findings of the manpower projection study conducted in 2003 as stated in paragraph 28 of the 2005 Policy Address booklet. SEM responded that according to the manpower projection study, the Administration estimated that by 2007 there would be a shortage of over 100 000 well-educated persons with post-secondary qualification but a possible excess of 230 000 workers with relatively low educational attainment.

33. The Chairman asked whether the Administration would consider increasing the provision of first-year-first-degree places in universities to meet the forecast manpower needs. SEM responded that the Administration had implemented a number of measures to expand the post-secondary sector in recent years. As a result, the proportion of students in the relevant age groups having access to post-secondary education had increased from 33% in 2001 to 66% in 2005.

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34. Mr Patrick LAU expressed support for the increase in admission of non-local students from 4% to 10% in University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions to help Hong Kong become the regional education hub in the longer term. He, however, asked whether the increase of non-local students in these institutions would affect the enrolment of local students and whether there were sufficient hostel places for both local and non-local students.

35. SEM responded that institutions were previously allowed to recruit not more than 4% non-local students of the 14 500 first-year-first-degree places which were subsidised by public funds. The 6% increase of places for admission of non-local students on top of the 4% of the 14 500 places would not be publicly funded. He added that the Administration was considering the suggestion of institutions to allocate the original quota of 4% to local students in exchange for an extra increase of 4% for non-local intake.

36. On provision of hostel places, SEM said that the policy objective was to provide each undergraduate with at least one-year accommodation on campus. He pointed out that when four-year degree programmes came into operation, the demand for student hostel places in university campus would increase. The Administration was collaborating with UGC-funded institutions on a review of the provision of hostel places under the new academic structure for higher education.

37. Mr Patrick LAU suggested that the Administration should consider the redevelopment of vacant factory buildings to provide hostel places for accommodation of both local and non-local students. SEM responded that the Administration was considering the proposals from institutions in this regard.

38. Mr Patrick LAU asked about the provision of further education opportunities for graduates of sub-degree programmes. He also asked whether and how the Administration had assessed the progress of developments in the sub-degree sector.

39. SEM responded that subject to availability of fund, the Administration would increase the provision of subsidised second-year and third-year undergraduate places in UGC-funded institutions for direct entry of sub-degree programme graduates. He pointed out that some 155 overseas institutions had agreed to consider applications from sub-degree holders for enrolment to their degree programmes. Furthermore, some universities in the Mainland had also indicated their intention to collaborate with local universities for enrolment of students who had completed sub-degree programme. SEM considered that the expansion of the sub-degree sector in recent years had provided more education opportunities for students, and would help upgrade the quality of the population in the long term.

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40. The Chairman reiterated his concern about the shortage of some 100 000 labour force with post secondary qualification in 2007. He requested the Administration to provide an information note on the provision of post-secondary education opportunities to meet the forecast manpower needs.

II. Any other business

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
18 November 2005