

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)922/05-06
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Monday, 24 October 2005 at 8:30 am
in Conference Room A 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 Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
- Members absent** : Hon MA Lik, GBS, JP
Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Item I
Mrs Fanny LAW, GBS, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower

Ms Bernadette LINN
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (2)

Mr Chris WARDLAW
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (5)

Mr Sam HUI
Assistant Secretary (Special Duties), Education and
Manpower Bureau

Item II

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

Ms Bernadette LINN
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (2)

Ms Maisie CHAN
Principal Assistant Secretary (Infrastructure and
Research Support), Education and Manpower Bureau

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. Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme

Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower (PSEM) briefed members on the main points of the Administration's paper on the subject [LC Paper No. CB(2)109/05-06(01)].

2. Members noted the background brief prepared by the Legislative Council (LegCo) Secretariat on the subject [LC Paper No. CB(2)109/05-06(02)].

Recruitment and retention of Native-speaking English Teachers (NETs)

3. Members noted that the Special Allowance and Gratuity (SA&G) Committee of the Native English-speaking Teachers' Association (NESTA) had made a further submission to the Panel [LC Paper No. CB(2)128/05-06(01)]. Ms Emily LAU asked how the Administration would respond to the views and concerns in the submission. PSEM said that the Administration had considered the views of the SA&G Committee and the basic principles for the provision of the retention incentive. The Administration would consider whether the retention incentive should be provided on resolution or termination of a contract before the expiry date, having regard to the circumstances of each case.

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4. Referring to paragraph 35 of the Administration's paper, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong requested the Administration to elaborate on the factors affecting job satisfaction of NETs in schools. Mrs Selina CHOW added that given the high attrition rates, the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) should improve job satisfaction of NETs and reduce any disputes arising from cultural difference between NETs and schools or local teachers.

5. PSEM responded that the results of the survey among NETs conducted in July 2005 revealed that there was some discontent on matters of school administration matters. According to the survey, some NETs were concerned about the provision of salary payment on time and the duration of the summer break and leave arrangement; and many NETs were disappointed with the arrangements that staff meeting and professional development day were conducted in Chinese. She, however, highlighted that the survey indicated that the overall perception of respondents on the working conditions and adequacy of support provided to them was positive and most of them enjoyed being NETs. In general, NETs did not see problems working in local schools, and could work well with local teachers, English panels and school heads.

6. PSEM further said that EMB would play an advisory role in settlement of disputes or conflicts between schools and NETs arising from staff administration matters. On provision of support from EMB, NETs and local English teachers in primary schools (primary NETs) were supported by the extensive network of the Advisory Teaching Team which had conducted regular meetings, workshops and seminars for them. The Administration planned to provide similar support to NETs in secondary schools (secondary NETs) in the 2005-06 school year.

7. Referring to paragraph 40 of the Administration's paper, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong advised that EMB should ensure that schools would observe the principle of fairness as compared with local teachers in provision of more flexible leave arrangement to relieve NETs for their major festive holidays and compassionate occasions.

8. PSEM responded that EMB would provide more guidelines to schools on administration of the NET scheme and on NET deployment including the provision of flexible leave arrangement to relieve NETs for their major festive holidays and compassionate occasions, on the basis that the NETs might make up duties on other occasions for local teachers to ensure fairness. She anticipated that schools would observe the principle of fairness and follow the guidelines on leave arrangement for both NETs and local teachers.

9. Ms Emily LAU noted that paragraph 4 of the Administration's paper stated that of the 376 primary NETs recruited through EMB in the 2005-06 school year, 180 were serving one primary school and 196 were serving two primary schools. She considered that as funds had been set aside for the

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provision of one NET for each primary school, EMB should endeavour to provide one NET for each school as soon as practicable.

10. PSEM responded that the policy was to provide each primary school with one NET as soon as practicable. She explained that EMB had managed to recruit a steady flow of new NETs to Hong Kong in the last few years. Due to the high attrition rate of NETs, achievement of the policy target was delayed.

11. Ms Emily LAU expressed concern about the high attrition rates of primary and secondary NETs (between 39% to 53%) in the 2002-05 school years, and in particular the attrition rates ranging from 55% to 71% of serving secondary NETs with two to six years of service in the 2004-05 school year. She pointed out that the attrition rates had all along been way above the estimated 20% in 1998. She considered the high attrition rates of NETs unacceptable and urged the Administration to improve recruitment and retention of NETs in the 2005-06 school year.

12. PSEM responded that to improve recruitment and retention of NETs in the 2005-06 school year, the Administration had proposed to introduce a retention incentive for NETs with longer years of service as detailed in paragraph 15 of the Administration's paper. An upward adjustment of the special allowance for NETs from \$10,500 to \$12,950 had been proposed after a review of the prevailing rental prices in the year 2005. She pointed out that most NETs would leave the service after six years of service on personal or career planning consideration.

13. Mr Jasper TSANG asked whether the Administration had estimated the effect of the proposed retention incentive and the increase of special allowance on retention of serving NETs. He cautioned that once implemented, it would be difficult to revoke the provision of the retention incentive on the ground that it had little effect in the retention of NETs in the future.

14. PSEM responded that the retention incentive and upward adjustment of special allowance were proposed in response to the concerns of members and NESTA and its SA&G committee about the projected 49% and 46% attrition rates of primary and secondary NETs respectively at the meeting of the Panel on 11 July 2005. She pointed out that apart from the decrease in attractiveness of the remuneration package for NETs as a result of civil service pay cuts, currency variation and rising flat rentals, NETs had their personal reasons to leave the service. It would be difficult to estimate the effect of the retention incentive and the adjustment of special allowance on the retention of NETs.

15. Ms Emily LAU shared the concern of Mr Jasper TSANG. She, however, appreciated the difficulty to estimate the effect of the retention incentive and the adjustment of special allowance on the retention of NETs. She considered it appropriate to provide a more competitive remuneration package for persons

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with high proficiency in English to teach English Language in schools. She suggested that the Administration should review the NET Scheme in the light of changing circumstances in a year and revert to the Panel in due course.

16. Referring to paragraph 35 of the Administration's paper, Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that some 64% of NETs responding to the survey conducted in July 2005 had indicated that they had to sit through staff meeting or professional development day conducted in Chinese. Among these NETs, 28% were assisted by local teachers to understand the discussion but 36% felt frustrated as they could not understand and make any contribution. He also cited his experience to explain that without adequate communication with and support from local teachers, many NETs were working in isolation and felt frustrated in schools. He asked whether the Administration would consider increasing the number of NETs in each school to improve quality of English teaching as well as job satisfaction of NETs in schools.

17. PSEM responded that schools should consider the views of NETs and respect the right of NETs to participate and contribute in staff meetings or professional development day. She stressed that while mother-tongue teaching would benefit students in learning, schools using Chinese as the medium of instruction were encouraged to use English to conduct staff meetings and teaching and learning activities outside classroom where appropriate to create an English-rich environment to enhance student learning in English.

18. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung remarked that there were practical difficulties for most schools to use English to conduct staff meetings and teaching and learning activities outside classroom in some situations. Ms Emily LAU shared the view of Mr LEUNG and said that the Administration should consider allocating additional resources to strengthen English teaching in schools. She added that some local teachers had expressed concern about conducting staff meetings in English.

19. Referring to paragraph 15(f) of the Administration's paper, Mr Jasper TSANG asked whether the Administration had set out criteria for assessing the eligibility for the retention incentive for schools to follow. He considered that if the retention incentive was provided for NETs with satisfactory performance only, NETs who for various reasons were not given the incentive might feel frustrated or disappointed and leave the service.

20. PSEM responded that there would be NETs who had not performed satisfactorily and were not recommended for a renewal of contract by the school management. In fact, some schools had asked whether they could use the resources incurred for the employment of a NET to employ a local teacher with high English proficiency to teach English Language. In order to ensure the standard of serving NETs, the Administration intended to make clear that eligibility for the retention incentive was subject to the school management's

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satisfaction with the NET's performance and its willingness to retain the services of the NET concerned. She added that all local teachers were also subject to performance appraisal on an annual basis.

21. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that recruitment of sufficient and qualified NETs was a difficult task because apart from an attractive remuneration package, prospective NETs would consider a number of factors before deciding to leave their home countries to work in Hong Kong. He considered that the proposed increase of special allowance would at least satisfy the needs and expectation of serving NETs in the short term, but could not guarantee the retention of serving NETs in the long term. He considered it reasonable to assume that 95% of NETs would ultimately return to their home countries for personal and professional development reasons. To improve retention of serving NETs, the Administration should collaborate with schools to improve job satisfaction of NETs. Apart from staff administration matters, EMB and schools should maintain close communication with NETs and show more concerns about their difficulties in day-to-day teaching work and collaboration with peers in schools.

22. PSEM responded that according to the survey among NETs in July 2005, some 81% primary NETs and 65% secondary NETs had indicated that they loved to teach Chinese students in local schools, and more than 60% NETs said that they found no problem working with local teachers. The Administration would review the retention of NETs after implementing the retention incentive and the new special allowance in a year.

Role of NETs and development of local teachers/persons in English teaching

23. Ms Audrey EU considered that the upward adjustment of the special allowance with respect to the rising flat rentals in Hong Kong was reasonable and would have a short-term effect on retention of NETs. She, however, expressed concern about the long-term cost-effectiveness of the NET Scheme in upgrading the quality of English teaching in schools. She suggested that the Administration should aim at upgrading the English proficiency of local teachers in the long term, and arrange training for retired persons with high proficiency in English to teach or assist in teaching English in schools.

24. PSEM responded that the NET Scheme was introduced in schools with the aim of enriching the language environment and bringing in a wider variety of teaching methods in schools. She agreed that the long-term objectives should be the development of a competent teaching workforce and the creation of an English-rich environment in schools. She pointed out that only qualified and experienced teachers could teach English Language in schools. Since the upgrading of the English proficiency of the entire teaching workforce would take time, NETs would continue to serve a major role in English teaching and creating an English-rich environment in schools. She added that the Finance

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Committee had approved funds for local language teachers to pursue professional development and participate in overseas immersion programmes.

25. Ms Audrey EU remarked that a teacher's proficiency in English would unlikely be considerably improved after the teacher had participated in an overseas immersion programme. She considered it more practical to train capable persons residing in Hong Kong with a high level of English proficiency to assist in English teaching in schools in the short term. She pointed out that paragraph 91 of the 2005-06 Policy Address had stated that the Government was considering introducing a new admission scheme in 2006 to allow a certain number of talented people from the Mainland and overseas who met specific eligibility criteria to stay in Hong Kong for a certain period of time, without the requirement of securing an offer of local employment beforehand. She considered that in the light of this new policy, EMB should play a more proactive role to assist spouses of NETs to find employment in Hong Kong.

26. PSEM explained that the long-term policy objective was to upgrade the professionalism of language teachers in order to improve quality of language education in schools. She agreed that persons such as retirees and spouses of NETs who were proficient in English could assist teachers in English teaching and learning in schools. EMB had been assisting the spouses of NETs in application for a permit to work in Hong Kong. Schools were also encouraged to employ spouses of NETs to assist in English teaching and learning activities on a temporary or part-time basis.

27. Mrs Selina CHOW said that the Liberal Party supported the implementation of the NET Scheme to enrich the language environment in schools. She considered that while the long-term objective was to upgrade the professionalism of local English teachers, NETs should continue to contribute to the development of pedagogies and English-rich environment to enhance student learning in English. She asked whether EMB would consider applying flexibility in devising the remuneration package for NETs who came to work in Hong Kong with their families on the basis of not jeopardising the principle of fairness and contravening civil service regulations.

28. PSEM responded that in line with the civil service regulations, NETs were paid on the basis of their professional service, regardless of their personal and family circumstances which might involve a wide variety of situations. The Administration would have to strike an appropriate balance in devising the remuneration packages for NETs and local English teachers. She added that the school culture and living environment in Hong Kong were very different from those in the home countries of NETs, and some NETs might find it difficult to adapt to the local teaching and living environment. To raise the level of their job satisfaction would be an effective way to retain NETs.

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Follow-up

Admin

29. In summing up, the Chairman said that the Panel was generally supportive of the proposal to enhance the remuneration package for NETs. He, however, advised that EMB should work out measures to promote job satisfaction and reduce attrition rate of NETs so that they could continue to contribute to enhance the English proficiency of local students. He requested the Administration to revert to the Panel with its review findings in due course. The Administration noted the request.

II. Review of School Building Programme

30. PSEM briefed members on the Administration's latest proposals under the School Building Programme (SBP) Review as detailed in the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(2)109/05-06(03)].

Use of vacated school premises

31. Members noted the background brief prepared by the LegCo Secretariat on the subject [LC Paper No. CB(2)109/05-06(04)]. Ms Emily LAU drew members' attention to paragraphs 44 and 50 of the brief which stated that the Panel had not discussed the implementation of the School Improvement Programme and the use/intended use of the premises of those schools which had been closed. Ms LAU asked how the Administration would utilise the vacated school premises. She pointed out that the community had queried the need to construct new school premises, given the under-enrolment in schools and the closure of existing schools in recent years. She considered that the Administration should provide a paper on the use/intended use of the premises of those schools which had been closed.

32. PSEM responded that most of the vacated school premises were formerly rural schools in remote locations. Many school sponsoring bodies (SSBs), including SSBs of international schools, had requested the allocation of vacated school premises in urban areas for various educational purposes, in particular those premises in which improvement works had been carried out. The Administration would publish those locations to be re-allocated for education and manpower-related purposes and invite applications for allocation of these premises at a later stage. The Chairman requested the Administration to note the wish of members to discuss the use of these vacated school premises in due course.

The latest proposals on adjustments to SBP

33. Ms Emily LAU said that as the Administration's paper had not specified the school projects recommended to proceed, be reviewed or dropped under the

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proposed adjustments to SBP, many SSBs had written to members requesting the disclosure of the details of the school projects concerned. In this connection, she asked whether EMB could inform members of the SSBs/schools which were not satisfied with the proposed adjustments.

34. PSEM responded that the Administration had consulted the affected SSBs/schools on the proposed adjustments to SBP. She pointed out that some of the SSBs/schools in connection with the 22 school projects recommended to proceed had written to members expressing their wish that the projects should start as soon as possible. The SSBs in connection with the four projects pending further review and the 13 projects to be dropped had expressed agreement to the proposed adjustments. She added that SSBs had requested EMB not to disclose their names in the Administration's paper in order to avoid unnecessary adverse impact on student enrolment.

35. Referring to paragraph 17 of the Administration's paper, Ms Emily LAU asked whether the District Councils would support the proposed adjustments to SBP and the timetable for the commencement of the 22 school projects recommended to proceed. She pointed out that the Sha Tin District Council might not support the construction of new school premises in the district in the light of a declining student population there.

36. PSEM responded that none of the 22 school premises to be constructed was located in Sha Tin. At this stage, the Administration envisaged that the District Councils concerned would not oppose the construction of the 22 school premises. The Administration would proceed with the necessary consultation with District Councils and seek the approval of the Public Works Subcommittee and the Finance Committee as soon as practicable.

37. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong advised that the Administration should decide the construction of a new school premises in the light of the demand and supply of school places in the district concerned, having regard to the population trend and the latest population forecast. He considered that the Census and Statistics Department should explain why the 2003-based population projections had showed a sharper decline in the population of school-aged children as compared with the projection in 2001.

38. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that he would not oppose the school projects which were intended for conversion of existing bi-sessional primary schools into whole-day operation, and for redevelopment and reprovisioning of existing sub-standard schools. As regards school projects allocated for the operation of private independent schools and Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools, Mr CHEUNG said that he would consider the Administration's proposal on a case-by-case basis, having regard to the uniqueness and educational services provided by the schools concerned. PSEM responded that the Administration would specify the special curriculum of the school concerned

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and its unique education attributes that would enhance diversity in the school sector in its submission to the Public Works Subcommittee for consideration.

39. Mrs Selina CHOW asked whether the Administration had consulted the affected SSBs on the proposed adjustments which would result in a projected shortfall of 24 primary classes in Kwai Tsing in the 2010-11 school year.

40. Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (2) (DS(EM)2) explained that the shortfall of 24 classes was a result of the proposals to drop a school project and to reduce the scope of another in Kwai Tsing after a review of the current enrolment of and consultation with the primary schools concerned. She considered that the projected shortfall would be offset by the decline in demand in the next few years. She added that due to a declining student population and parental choice for school places outside the district or the public school sector, there were already surplus primary school places in the district at present.

Special schools

41. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong and Dr Fernando CHEUNG expressed support for the two projects involving the construction of a primary school and a secondary school specialising in children with dyslexia and operating as through-train school respectively. They asked how the Administration would identify students with dyslexia for enrolment of primary one students in the primary school, given that identification of special educational needs of students were currently carried out at primary one and two levels. PSEM responded that the Administration was exploring the feasibility of advancing the identification process to start from pre-primary level. The Administration would make reference to overseas experience on the matter.

42. Dr Fernando CHEUNG asked how the Administration would redevelop or reprovision existing special schools with sub-standard premises or sharing a premises with another school. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung also urged the Administration to review the provision of sufficient space and facilities for special schools in a comprehensive manner.

43. PSEM responded that the Administration was reviewing the provision of special education, including the provision of school premises and facilities for special schools, for the implementation of the new academic structure in the 2009-10 school year. DS(EM)2 supplemented that the Administration would submit two school projects relating to redevelopment/reprovisioning of two special schools to the Public Works Subcommittee for consideration in the next few months.

Meeting with SSBs

44. PSEM asked whether the Panel would support the Administration to

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proceed with the consultation with District Councils and seek the funding approval of the Finance Committee for the 22 school projects. Of the four school projects pending further review, two were for whole-day conversion and would proceed as originally planned if justified by the student enrolment in the schools and the supply and demand of places in the districts concerned in 2006. As regards the 13 school projects to be dropped, the Administration had proposed alternative arrangements for six and these had been agreed with the affected SSBs.

45. DS(EM)2 supplemented that of the remaining seven school projects proposed to be dropped, four involved existing primary schools which had already managed to convert to whole-day operation in-situ without the need for additional premises (including a government school), two were new DSS schools, and one was a new aided primary school in Tuen Mun. She pointed out that the SSBs had agreed to the proposed adjustments in view of the decline in student population and student enrolment. The affected SSB of the new primary school in Tuen Mun had requested the Administration to favourably consider the possibility of funding the construction of new premises in another district for the operation of a DSS school in the future.

46. Ms Emily LAU suggested that the Panel should hold a meeting to receive views of the affected SSBs/schools on the proposed adjustments to SBP. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung expressed support for the decision and suggested that the discussion could be held in an open or close meeting at the request of SSBs. Ms Audrey EU also considered it necessary to listen to the views of SSBs opposing the proposed adjustments at an open meeting. If the SSBs concerned were unwilling to do so, members could consider listening to their views through the LegCo Redress System. Mr Andrew LEUNG remarked that the Panel could arrange to receive views from SSBs concerned if there was such a request. The Chairman suggested to invite the SSBs who had written to members on the matter to indicate whether they would like to express their views to the Panel at a future meeting. Members agreed.

Clerk

47. PSEM informed the meeting that to facilitate the Panel's consultation work, EMB would inform the Secretariat of the Government's recommendations in respect of those projects on which the SSBs concerned had written to the Panel.

III. Proposed duty visit to Shanghai to study its experience in implementing small class teaching

48. Member agreed that the Panel should visit Shanghai for the purpose of studying the municipality's experience in implementing small class teaching. The Chairman invited suggestions on the preliminary dates for the duty visit to Shanghai. After discussion, members agreed to schedule the duty visit

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tentatively from 18 to 21 April 2006. The Chairman added that members could make suggestions on the organisations and individuals to be visited.

[*Post-meeting note* : The Chairman had written to the Secretary for Education and Manpower on 14 November 2005 on the proposed visit.]

IV. Any other business

Regular meeting in March 2006

49. In order to avoid clashing with the special Finance Committee meeting to be held from 13 – 16 March 2006, members agreed to reschedule the regular meeting in March 2006 to Monday, 27 March 2006 at 8:30 am.

50. The meeting ended at 10:23 am.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
19 January 2006