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Panel on Education

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 10 July 2006**

New senior secondary academic structure for special schools

Purpose

This paper summarises the deliberations of Members on the new senior secondary academic structure for special schools.

Background

2. In 2000, the Education Commission (EC) recommended the adoption of a three-year senior secondary academic system to facilitate the implementation of a more flexible, coherent and diversified senior secondary curriculum. In May 2003, EC set out the proposals for developing a new senior secondary and higher education academic structure (the “3+3+4” structure). In his 2004 Policy Address, the Chief Executive confirmed the policy direction of developing the new academic structure.
3. The Administration issued, in October 2004, a Consultation Paper entitled “Reforming the Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education” for public consultation on the design blueprint, timing of the implementation and financial arrangements of the proposed “3+3+4” academic structure. The consultation exercise ended on 19 January 2005.
4. On 18 May 2005, the Administration published the Report entitled “The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education – Action Plan for Investing in the Future of Hong Kong”. The Report summarised the results of the consultation exercise and set out the road map for implementing the new academic structure in 2009-10.

5. In January 2006, the Administration published a consultation document entitled “Action for the Future – Further Consultation on Career-oriented Studies and the New Senior Secondary Academic Structure for Special Schools” (the consultation document). The consultation document proposed that under the new senior secondary structure, all students, including those with special educational needs (SEN), would be provided with six years of secondary education.

Deliberations of members

Relevant meetings

6. The Panel held several meetings to discuss the “3+3+4” structure since October 2004. Since March 2005, the Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to the Provision of Boarding Places, Senior Secondary Education and Employment Opportunities for Children with Special Educational Needs discussed issues relating to special education under the new academic structure. The concerns expressed by members about special education under the new academic structure are summarised in the following paragraphs.

10-year basic education for students with intellectual disability

7. Members expressed support for the incorporation of the provision of special education and integrated education in the new senior secondary (NSS) structure. They, however, noted with concern that under the new academic structure, physically disabled students (PD students) and hearing impaired students (HI students) would be provided with 10 years basic education, but students with intellectual disability (ID students) would be provided with nine years basic education only. They queried the disparity of treatment for students with different disabilities.

8. The Administration explained that it had adopted the broad principle that students with SEN who were intellectually capable of pursuing the ordinary curriculum would follow the ordinary curriculum and be assessed with appropriate accommodation in the same way as other students in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) under the NSS academic structure. HI students with normal intelligence but severe to profound hearing impairment might have difficulty in language acquisition and development as well as in auditory reception and oral expression, and PD students of normal intelligence might have severe or multiple physical disabilities. The learning of these students was regularly and frequently disrupted by therapies and hospitalization. As these students were capable of following the ordinary curriculum and attending the public examinations, the Administration considered it appropriate to follow the existing practice to provide them with an additional year of study in order to prepare them better for the three-year senior secondary education, leading to HKDSE.

9. The Administration further explained that ID students would be provided with individualised education programme tailored by teachers in special schools. ID students who were unable to pursue the ordinary curriculum would not go through ordinary NSS assessments and examinations leading to HKDSE. The Administration would consider the need of individual ID students to repeat a year of study.

10. Some members were of the view that the provision of four-year junior secondary education to PD or HI students but only three-year junior secondary education to ID students might contravene the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO). They sought the written advice of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) in this regard.

11. In its written reply, EOC informed members that it had discussed with the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB). According to EMB, PD students and HI students would undergo the ordinary NSS leading to HKDSE. Their learning patterns suffered from delays and disruptions because of their impairment. In order to compensate for the delays and disruptions, PD and HI students in special schools would be provided with 10 years of basic education so that they were better prepared for NSS. ID students who were unable to pursue the ordinary curriculum would not go through ordinary NSS assessments and examinations leading to HKDSE. On the basis of EMB's explanation, EOC considered that there did appear to be a material difference between ID students and PD students or HI students in terms of whether they were to undergo the ordinary NSS leading to HKDSE. This being so, it did not appear that special school academic structure involved a contravention of the DDO.

Development of curriculum and assessment frameworks

12. Members noted that the great majority of special schools operated only one class per level. They were concerned that the small school size and small number of senior secondary classes in special schools would limit the choice and combination of NSS subjects to be offered in individual special schools. They considered that EMB should encourage special schools to collaborate and share resources with other special schools and/or ordinary schools in the vicinity to provide a wider NSS curriculum.

13. The Administration responded that it had earmarked resources to cater for the potential demand for additional classes in special schools and would encourage special schools to collaborate and share resources with other special schools and/or ordinary schools in the vicinity to provide a wider range of NSS subjects. However, parents would prefer their children with SEN to complete primary and secondary education in the same school. In this connection, the Administration would pilot the NSS(ID) curriculum programmes in various

types of special schools, and examine the delivery of the new academic structure and its impact on the operation of the special schools during the transition period leading up to 2009.

14. As regards members' concern about the progress in developing the NSS(ID) curriculum and the assessment framework, the Administration explained that it would make reference to overseas experiences and collaborate with local and international experts in the design and development of the NSS(ID) curriculum. The draft NSS(ID) curriculum would be piloted in conjunction with the 24 draft subject curriculum frameworks for students of the mainstream curriculum and be validated to develop a more consolidated and reliable learning outcome framework. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority would take part in the development of learning outcome and advise on the validity and assessment design and processes. The Committee on Special Educational Needs of Curriculum Development Council was collaborating with local and international experts and frontline teachers to develop the various subject curriculum frameworks. So far the progress of development was smooth and satisfactory.

Career-oriented Studies

15. Members in general supported the provision of career-oriented studies (COS) courses for students with SEN. They were concerned that under the planned COS pilots, students with SEN would be provided with a limited number of COS courses, such as cleansing services, and food preparation and servicing. Moreover, students with SEN might need to attend COS courses at venues provided by course providers.

16. The Administration explained that the COS curriculum, as an integral part of the NSS curriculum, was intended to provide choices to meet the diverse learning needs of students, including those with SEN. To ensure quality and consistency of standards, the number of courses offered under COS would be kept within a manageable limit at the initial stage. When relevant parties, including schools, parents and the relevant industries, had built up sufficient experiences, the scale of COS would be expanded to provide a wider range of choices for students. Students without ID would follow the ordinary school curriculum and join the same COS courses as other students, with special arrangements and support as necessary and appropriate. ID students would be provided with COS courses with appropriate adaptation that would suit their needs.

Skills opportunity schools

17. Some members were concerned about the future of the two skills opportunity schools under the new academic structure. These members pointed out that students in these schools were not intellectually disabled, but

required closer attention and more assistance from teachers in learning. Although these students might take COS courses under the NSS curriculum, the recurrent resources for these schools would be provided on the basis of 30 students per class. Some members urged the Administration to provide skills opportunity schools with appropriate resources to operate smaller classes.

18. The Administration pointed out that classes in these schools currently accommodated 25 to 30 students. Under the new academic structure, additional resources would be allocated for the operation of senior secondary classes and COS programmes which would be conducted in small classes. The Administration would provide appropriate support for these schools to implement the new senior secondary curriculum.

Age limit for special education

19. Starting from the 2002-03 school year, the two-year Extension of Years of Education (EYE) Programme was implemented in schools for the mentally handicapped to facilitate the smooth transition of the Secondary Three students from school to work, post-school placement and adult life in line with the curriculum reform. At present, enrolment to the EYE programme was subject to an age limit of 18. Some members asked if the Administration would review the age limit for students with SEN in special schools under the new academic structure.

20. The Administration explained that with the implementation of the NSS academic structure, all students would be provided with six years of primary education and six years of secondary education. There would no longer be any need to operate the EYE programme which was intended for ID students aged 16 to 17 and 11 months. EMB would allow flexibility in the age limit for enrolment of students in special schools.

Approach in implementing special education

21. Some members considered that the focus of the consultation document was on the integration of students with SEN in ordinary schools, and the interests of students with severe ID and specific learning disabilities were neglected. These members were of the view that the Administration should review the provision of special education from the perspective of students with SEN. The review should come up with special measures and arrangements to support student learning in special schools, in line with the concept of positive discrimination under the DDO.

22. The Administration explained that the Government policy was to facilitate students with SEN to study in ordinary schools insofar as they could benefit from integrated education. Students with severe, profound or multiple disabilities who could not be benefited from ordinary school settings would be placed in special schools where their disabilities, impairments and learning

difficulties would be properly managed. Special education was provided for children with SEN to overcome their barrier in learning arising from disabilities, and to enable them to maximise their potential and lead an independent life. Students in special schools should be provided with opportunities to interact with ordinary students in other settings to enhance learning and social integration.

Resources

23. Members expressed concern about allocation of resources to support the implementation of special education under the new academic structure. Some members were concerned whether the allocation of \$115 million was sufficient to support the operation of the pilot COS and senior secondary classes in special schools during the transition period leading up to 2009.

24. The Administration pointed out that the \$115 million was committed for the transition period leading up to 2009 to encourage the growth of diversity of curriculum, assessment and pathways in the senior secondary schools, including COS pilots. The allocation was sufficient for piloting the COS courses and the NSS(ID) curriculum in conjunction with the draft subject curriculum framework for students with ID in special schools. The appropriate level of resources for special schools would be determined when details of the NSS(ID) curriculum, the learning outcomes, and assessment standards had been worked out with the consensus of key stakeholders.

25. Some members noted the conclusion of the “Study of the Effectiveness of Special Schools (the Study)” that the overall resource allocation to Hong Kong’s special schools in terms of human, financial and capital, was good by world standards, and the real challenge lay in resource management in special schools. These members asked whether the conclusion reflected the Administration’s intention to maintain the resource allocation for special education at the current level.

26. The Administration responded that it was committed to the implementation of the NSS academic structure and had earmarked resources to cater for the potential demand for additional classes in special schools. The Study was conducted to assess the effectiveness of resource utilisation in special schools in support of student learning, and had identified the elements for successful school management as well as the areas for management improvement. The conclusion of the Study should apply to all public sector schools in terms of cost-effective deployment of scarce public resources.

27. Some members urged the Administration to plan the necessary conversion works for existing special schools so that they would have sufficient classrooms, facilities and boarding places for providing the new NSS(ID) curriculum from the 2009-10 school year.

28. The Administration assured members that resources had been earmarked for capital works, including conversion works for ordinary and special schools for the implementation of the new academic structure in the 2009-10 school year. EMB was aware of the need for additional facilities in some special schools, and had already commenced discussion with these schools on the necessary conversion and improvement works that should be carried out in connection with NSS.

Tuition fees and boarding fees

29. Some members were concerned whether tuition fees in special schools would be increased under the new academic structure, and if so, whether parents would be informed of the increase in advance.

30. The Administration explained that under the current policy, senior secondary students in both ordinary and special schools would pay the same level of tuition fees at 18% of the total unit cost of secondary education. In computing the average unit cost, the cost of both ordinary and special schools would be aggregated. In other words, students in ordinary and special schools at the same level of study would pay the same level of tuition fee. The total unit cost of senior secondary schooling would take account of all the investment in the new senior secondary education, including that in special schools. The tuition fees for senior secondary classes would be known nearer the time of implementation of the new academic structure.

31. As regards members' concern about boarding fees in special schools, the Administration responded that it was open and would consider the views of the stakeholders.

Relevant papers

32. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in the **Appendix**.

**Relevant documents on
new senior secondary academic structure for special schools**

Date of meeting	Meeting	Minutes/Paper	LC Paper No.
29.10.04	Panel on Education	Minutes of meeting	CB(2)350/04-05
		The Administration's paper entitled "Reforming the Academic Structure of Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education - Actions for Investing in the Future"	CB(2)90/04-05(01)
		The Administration's paper on "Provision of free education in Hong Kong and overseas countries"	CB(2)1721/04-05(01)
		Consultation document on "Reforming the academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education - Actions for investing in the future"	Consultation document on "Reforming the academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education - Actions for investing in the future"
20.12.04	Panel on Education	Minutes of meeting	CB(2)1430/04-05
3.1.05	Panel on Education	Minutes of meeting	CB(2)1764/04-05
5.1.05	Council meeting	Hon LAU Chin-shek raised a written question on "Arrangements for students with special education needs under the proposed senior secondary education system"	Hansard (page 68 – 71)

Date of meeting	Meeting	Minutes/Paper	LC Paper No.
30.3.05	Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to the Provision of Boarding Places, Senior Secondary Education and Employment Opportunities for Children with Special Educational Needs	Minutes of meeting	CB(2)1321/04-05
		The Administration's paper on "Issues relating to the proposed academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education"	CB(2)1130/04-05(02)
25.4.05	Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to the Provision of Boarding Places, Senior Secondary Education and Employment Opportunities for Children with Special Educational Needs	Minutes of meeting	CB(2)1650/04-05
		The Administration's paper on "Proposed Arrangements for Students with Special Educational Needs under the New Senior Secondary Education"	CB(2)1317/04-05(02)
30.5.05	Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to the Provision of Boarding Places, Senior Secondary Education and Employment Opportunities for Children with Special Educational Needs	Minutes of meeting	CB(2)2207/04-05

Date of meeting	Meeting	Minutes/Paper	LC Paper No.
3.6.05	Panel on Education	Minutes of meeting	CB(2)2583/04-05
		The Administration's paper entitled "Measures to Support Development of the New Academic Structure of Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education"	CB(2)1716/04-05(02)
		The Administration's paper entitled "Implementation of the New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education – Additional Staffing Support"	CB(2)1716/04-05(03)
		Consultation report on the New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education - Action plan for investing in the future of Hong Kong	Consultation report on the New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education - Action plan for investing in the future of Hong Kong
24.6.05	Finance Committee	Minutes of meeting	FC125/04-05
		New Item "Measures to Support the Development of the New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education"	FCR(2005-06)24
20.10.05	Panel on Education	Minutes of meeting	CB(2)429/05-06
		The Administration's paper entitled "Policy Initiatives on Education in the Policy Agenda for the 2005-06 Policy Address"	CB(2)48/05-06(01)

Date of meeting	Meeting	Minutes/Paper	LC Paper No.
13.2.06	Panel on Education	Minutes of meeting	CB(2)1456/05-06
		Consultation document entitled “Action for the Future - Further Consultation on Career-oriented Studies and the New Senior Secondary Academic Structure for Special Schools”	Consultation document entitled “Action for the Future - Further Consultation on Career-oriented Studies and the New Senior Secondary Academic Structure for Special Schools”
17.3.06	Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to the Provision of Boarding Places, Senior Secondary Education and Employment Opportunities for Children with Special Educational Needs	Minutes of meeting	CB(2)1740/05-06
		The Administration’s paper on “Future development of special education under the new senior secondary academic structure”	CB(2)1361/05-06(01)

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