

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Latest Proposals under the School Building Programme Review

PURPOSE

This paper reports the latest adjustments to allocated projects under the School Building Programme (SBP).

BACKGROUND

2. At the meeting on 30 May 2005, we briefed this Panel on proposed adjustments to some of the 41 allocated projects under the SBP review¹. The review took into account –

- (a) the 2003-based population projections which showed a sharper decline in the population of school-aged children than that projected in 2001;
- (b) concerns expressed by Legislative Council (LegCo) and District Council members as well as major stakeholders over projects involving cross-district relocation of primary schools for whole-day conversion;
- (c) the latest enrolment of bi-sessional primary schools for which new premises have been allocated for whole-day conversion;
- (d) the physical conditions of the schools concerned; and
- (e) the scope of using vacant school premises in lieu of new school premises.

3. Members expressed concerns about the impacts of the proposed adjustments

¹ Please refer to LC Paper No. CB (2)1656/04-05(01).

on the School Sponsoring Bodies (SSBs) and schools affected, and requested the Administration to further review the adjustments in consultation with the SSBs and submit a report to the Panel afterwards.

4. Accordingly, we approached the SSBs for the 39 projects under planning². Taking into account the views expressed, we have modified the proposed adjustments as set out in the following sections.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Whole-day conversion projects

5. At the meeting on 30 May 2005, Members re-confirmed support for the Administration's policy to convert bi-sessional primary schools into whole-day operation, and requested that school building projects for the purpose of facilitating this policy objective be given priority in the SBP review.

6. Out of the 39 allocated projects under review, **20** are for whole-day conversion. As these projects are meant to facilitate changes in the operation mode of existing schools rather than to add new schools, our recommendations to proceed or drop individual projects per se would not change the existing supply of primary school places territory-wide. That said, the agreement of individual SSBs to reduce the scope of their projects would help to alleviate the surplus projected for future years. After consulting the SSBs concerned, we intend to proceed with the majority of the projects, as follows –

- (a) proceed with four projects as originally planned (keeping the allocated sites and project scope unchanged). The projects are spread across Kwun Tong, North, Yuen Long and Tuen Mun districts;
- (b) proceed with five projects on the allocated sites (one each in the Southern, Sham Shui Po and North districts and two in Tsuen Wan district) but with a reduced scope, having regard to our latest projections on the projected surplus of school places in the said districts and the fact that classroom vacancy rates in these districts already ranged from 8%

² With the support of the Panel on 30 May, we secured the Finance Committee's funding approval for one Private Independent School project in Sha Tin and one Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) school project in Kowloon City in June 2005. The two projects are hence excluded from our further review.

to 16% in the 2004/05 school year;

- (c) pursue alternative arrangements for two projects (including in-situ extension in one case, and allocation of a replacement site in the same district in which the existing bi-sessional school is situated for another case) to avoid cross-district relocation from Tuen Mun to Yuen Long ;
- (d) allocate replacement sites, one each in Kwun Tong, Sham Shui Po and Kowloon City, for three projects (with two involving reduction in scope) which cannot be taken forward on the original sites located in the South-east Kowloon Reclamation Area under review;
- (e) further review two projects (one in Yuen Long and one in Kwai Tsing) where the prospect of in-situ conversion into whole-day primary mode cannot be ruled out at this stage given the decline in student enrolment for the schools concerned. Our understanding with the SSBs is that the projects would go ahead so long as the schools concerned manage to maintain their current enrolment (and hence justify the need for a new school building to house one of the two bi-sessions) in the 2006/07 school year; and
- (f) drop four projects (one in Kwai Tsing, two in North and one in Yuen Long) where the existing bi-sessional schools, due to declining student enrolment, have already managed to achieve whole-day conversion in-situ by phases without the need for new buildings. The SSBs proposed and we agreed to consider in-situ upgrading of sub-standard premises for three of the schools involved.

Redevelopment and reprovisioning

7. This Panel has always been supportive of Government's policy to improve the physical conditions of existing school premises to current standards. Out of the 39 allocated projects under the review, **six** are for redevelopment and reprovisioning of existing schools housed in sub-standard premises. We stand by our earlier recommendation to proceed with all six projects as originally planned (one each in Central and Western, Kowloon City, Sham Shui Po, Southern and two in Wan Chai districts). By their nature, the projects would not materially affect the existing

supply of school places.

Private Independent Schools (PISs)

8. At the meeting on 30 May 2005, Members noted that PISs are not direct competitors of schools in the public sector since they operate on a self-financing basis and admit students from all over the territory. With Members' endorsement, we have since then sought and obtained funding approval of the Finance Committee for a PIS project in Sha Tin district. Accordingly, we propose to uphold our earlier recommendation to proceed with all **three** remaining PIS projects (all are for through-train PISs, one each in Islands, Sham Shui Po and Yau Tsim Mong district), in order to meet the demand from expatriate students as more multinational firms are established in Hong Kong, and to provide choice for local parents who seek non-mainstream curriculum.

Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools

9. At the meeting on 30 May 2005, Members noted our proposal to drop the construction of new DSS schools in districts with projected surplus, unless the schools concerned could offer a diversified curriculum or other unique education attributes that would represent significant contribution to enhancing diversity in our school sector. With the support of this Panel, we have since then sought and obtained funding approval of the Finance Committee for a DSS secondary school specializing in design and arts in the Kowloon City district.

10. Applying the same principle, we have further reviewed the remaining **six** DSS projects under planning and propose to –

- (a) proceed with one project in Yuen Long, involving a new through-train primary-cum-secondary school offering International Baccalaureate (IB) programme at all levels;
- (b) allocate a site in Tin Shui Wai, Yuen Long district for a new secondary school which attempts to integrate youth services (being the specialty of the school sponsor) and education in a school setting;

- (c) further review two projects involving the primary and secondary sections of a DSS through-train school in the Islands district (Tung Chung), subject to the SSB's re-consideration of the school's niche and further assessment of population intake in the area concerned; and
- (d) drop two projects located in districts with projected surplus of school places (Eastern and Tsuen Wan), and which the SSBs have agreed not to pursue.

New aided schools

11. Of the 39 projects under planning, **four** involve the construction of new aided schools originally intended for meeting a projected increase in demand. After discussion with the relevant SSBs, we propose to –

- (a) proceed with two projects involving the construction of a primary school and a secondary school in Sai Kung district (Tseung Kwan O) specializing in children with dyslexia. The two schools are expected to operate as a “through-train”. We support this project as we see a case for facilitating the development of a school which serves this particular group of students with special education needs and which has the potential of developing into a resource school in this field;
- (b) proceed with a project involving the construction of a through-train school in the Islands district (Discovery Bay) funded primarily by a private developer as a condition of the land lease. For this particular case, we think the contractual obligation of the developer and the legitimate expectation of residents in the private development should take precedence over our latest projections on demand and supply of school places. That said, we will discuss with the SSB the need to open the new school by phases to commensurate with actual demand. In this regard, it is noteworthy that while our projections show a shortfall of about 20 classes at the primary level by the 2010/11 school year even after counting the supply from this school, existing schools in the district already have spare capacity in terms of vacant classrooms. We are also conscious of the potential for population growth in the Tung Chung/Discovery Bay area given the development of tourism attractions

in that part of Hong Kong; and

- (c) drop a new aided primary school project in Tuen Mun having regard to the projected surplus of school places in the district (surplus of about 150 classes at the primary level by the 2010/11 school year).

OVERVIEW

12. We have largely reached consensus with the affected SSBs on our latest proposals. Since the proposed adjustments involve revocations of, or modifications to, recommendations on school allocations made by the School Allocation Committee (SAC)³ on previous occasions, we have also sought and secured SAC's endorsement of the adjustments in September 2005.

13. A comparison between our original proposals in May 2005 and our latest recommendations (in terms of the status of a project on the site originally allocated) is summarized below –

	<u>Proceed</u>	<u>Further review</u>	<u>Drop</u>	
Original Proposals	17 ⁴	11	11	
Latest Recommendations	22	4	13	(including six with alternative arrangements agreed with the SSBs)

14. Taken together, our proposals to drop or reduce the scope of individual projects would reduce the surplus supply of primary school places projected for the following districts in the 2010/11 school year by which time all projects are expected

³ The SAC, comprising both government officials and non-officials familiar with the Hong Kong education system, makes recommendations to EMB on the selection of applicants for new or vacant school premises.

⁴ With the support of the Panel on 30 May, we secured the Finance Committee's funding approval for one PIS project in Sha Tin and one DSS school project in Kowloon City in June 2005. The two projects are hence excluded from our further review.

to be completed –

District	Projected Surplus (in classes) in 2010/11	
	Original Projections	Projections After Adjustments
Eastern	112	98
Southern	62	50
Yau Tsim Mong	139	103
Wong Tai Sin	284	236
North ⁵	85	-12
Yuen Long	97	31
Tsuen Wan	41	35
Kwai Tsing ⁵	4	-24

At the territory level, the proposed adjustments will reduce the overall surplus supply of primary school places by some 230 classes (from surplus of 1 640 to 1 410 classes, or surplus at 12% of overall supply) in the 2010/11 school year. The projected surplus at the territory level is for illustration only as primary school places are planned and provided on a district basis to enable young children to attend schools close to their home. At the district level, there must be a reasonable degree of surplus supply of school places to cater for the mobility of students across districts. It should also be noted that the figure represents the aggregate surplus for Primary 1 to 6, largely resulting from the declining student population experienced in the past few years. Focusing on Primary 1 enrolment alone, we do not expect big fluctuations in demand and supply in the next few years. On the demand side, the population decline in the relevant age group is expected to have stabilized. On the supply side, all new primary schools under construction and to be completed in the next few years are to meet the policy objectives of whole-day conversion as well as the rolling redevelopment and reprovisioning programme, and therefore should not have a material impact on existing supply.

15. At the secondary level, the few adjustments would not materially alter our original projection pointing to a surplus of some 1 200 classes (or 10% of overall supply) by the 2010/11 school year. This projected surplus would give room for

⁵ The negative value in respect of the North and Kwai Tsing districts denotes a projected shortfall, which is considered to be temporary as the student population is projected to decline for some more years in the future.

secondary schools to ameliorate the number of floating classes⁶ currently in operation. Besides, as diversity and choice are key values underpinning our education system, a reasonable degree of surplus supply of school places is acceptable.

16. Members may wish to note that the above projections have reflected the impact on the supply of school places arising from the proposed adjustments to the school projects under review. They are based purely on the location of and standard class size of schools, and the projected school-age population in the districts concerned. They have not taken into account fluid factors such as the actual choices of some parents for school places outside the districts/outside the public school sector and over-enrolment in individual schools. On the supply side, the projections have yet to take account of any changes in the supply of existing schools as a result of latest developments such as whole-day conversion plans and school mergers.

WAY FORWARD

17. Subject to any comments which the Panel may have on our latest proposals, we will follow up the adjustments along the directions set out in this paper. In respect of the school projects under the “to proceed” category, we will consult the relevant District Councils and seek the funding approval of the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council in due course. As regards the school projects under the “to further review” category, we will keep in view the developments in close consultation with the SSBs.

18. Looking ahead, we envisage that any new projects to be considered under the SBP for allocation in the next two years (before the next population update in 2007) would primarily be projects for whole-day conversion and redevelopment and reprovisioning of existing schools. We will continue to deal with new allocations in consultation with the SAC, and keep under review projects under planning to ensure that any necessary modifications precipitated by changes in circumstances are introduced in time, before the necessary funding approval is sought.

Education and Manpower Bureau
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⁶ Floating classes are those classes which do not have a classroom as a home room in a classroom environment.