

For discussion
on 12 December 2005

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Review of Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools and Secondary School Places Allocation

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members on the long-term arrangements in respect of the medium of instruction (MOI) for secondary schools and Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) mechanism put forward by the Education Commission (EC) and accepted by the Administration.

BACKGROUND

2. The existing MOI arrangements for secondary schools follow the *MOI Guidance for Secondary Schools (Guidance)* which has been implemented since 1998. Separately, the Government started to implement the short-term SSPA mechanism in 2000, and undertook to review it in the 2003/04 school year. The EC set up a Working Group on Review of SSPA and MOI for secondary schools (Working Group) in July 2003 to take forward the review of the two issues at the same time.

3. The EC's Working Group published the *Review of Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools and Secondary School Places Allocation – Consultation Document* on 3 February 2005 for public consultation which ended on 2 July 2005. Taking into account the views collected, the EC has finalized its recommendations and submitted a report ("*the Report*" at **Annex**) to the Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM). We have accepted all the recommendations put forward by the EC.

MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS AND ANALYSES OF ISSUES OF CONCERN

MOI

Overall direction: Consolidation versus change (paragraphs 2.3 - 2.11, 3.1 and Annex 3 of *the Report*)

4. Hong Kong has gone a long way, since the early 1980s, in promoting the use of the mother tongue as the MOI in our secondary schools. We have moved from promotion and persuasion (which have proven insufficient for changing a deep-rooted bias towards using English as the MOI (EMI)) to the enforcement of a policy framework embodied in the *Guidance*. Since the implementation of the policy framework from the 1998/99 school year, we are gratified to note the improvements in teaching and learning in schools using Chinese as the MOI (CMI). There is, in fact, general acceptance of the merits of mother-tongue teaching in the community. Public debate has focused on implementation details and the English proficiency of students learning through the mother tongue. Hence, the way forward should be to consolidate rather than change the direction of the MOI policy.

The “between-school streaming” approach (paragraphs 3.41 - 3.55 of *the Report*)

5. Some people have criticized the present MOI policy as divisive in that secondary schools have to adopt either CMI or EMI at junior secondary levels (i.e. the between-school streaming approach), and are being labelled according to the MOI adopted. Some schools consider that they should have the flexibility to use different MOI for different categories of students within the school (i.e. the within-school streaming approach). However, this would increase teachers’ workload tremendously and intensify the labelling effect within a school.

6. For so long as students’ ability to learn in English is one of the prescribed criteria for EMI teaching, the labelling effect will unlikely go away in the short term. We should aim to reduce the labelling effect over time by working with the school sector to demonstrate that students in CMI setting can learn their subjects better as well as learn English well. On

balance, therefore, the Administration has accepted the EC's recommendation to continue with the between-school streaming approach.

Thresholds on EMI-capable students (paragraphs 3.13 - 3.23 and 3.29 of *the Report*)

7. We have accepted the EC's recommendation that a school adopting EMI teaching should have at least 85% of its Secondary (S) 1 intake being among the top 40% of the students in the cohort. We understand that there are diverse views on these two thresholds, but it appears to us that there are no justifiable alternatives. At least, the two thresholds are supported by research or practical experience in the school sector.

8. In line with EC's recommendation, we shall lower the threshold percentage of EMI-capable students for through-train secondary schools to 75% for S1 entrants from the linked primary school while maintaining the threshold of 85% EMI-capable students for the external S1 intake. This should help address the uncertainty among the prospective through-train secondary schools which are obliged, by design, to admit all Primary 6 graduates from the linked primary schools. We are satisfied that the lower threshold will not compromise the interests of students, as through-train schools should be better able to handle greater student diversity given their capacity for offering a curriculum coherent with that for the linked primary schools, and their better knowledge of how students from the primary schools have learned.

Enhancing students' exposure to English in schools adopting mother-tongue teaching (paragraphs 3.55 and 4.10 - 4.16 of *the Report*)

9. The Administration has accepted the EC's recommendation to increase students' exposure to English under CMI setting. Schools adopting mother-tongue teaching may allocate not more than 15%, 20% and 25% of the total lesson time at S1, S2 and S3 respectively for extended learning activities conducted in English, subject to the core contents of the non-language subjects being taught in CMI and that the normal progress of the teaching and learning of the content subjects will not be undermined. To help schools implement the extended learning effectively, the Administration will conduct a study to collect information on the local and

overseas experiences and to develop effective models, learning materials and professional support.

Additional resources for schools to enhance English language education (paragraphs 4.18 – 4.21 and 4.25 of *the Report*)

10. To implement EC's recommendations, the Administration proposes to make an injection into the Language Fund for supporting a scheme which gives non-recurrent additional resources for CMI schools, as well as EMI schools, to build capacity in promoting the teaching and learning of English language, and in so doing, raise the English proficiency of their students. Details are set out in the paper on "Injection into the Language Fund" (LC Paper No. CB(2)581/05-06(03)).

Implementation timetable for MOI recommendations (paragraphs 3.61 - 3.65 of *the Report*)

11. The implementation of the revised MOI arrangements for secondary schools, *viz.* the first review of MOI status for individual schools, will be deferred from the 2008/09 school year to the 2010/11 school year. This is in response to the call for deferment during the public consultation so as to allow more time for schools to get prepared, and avoid over-burdening schools in the run-up to the reform of the senior secondary education.

SSPA (paragraphs 6.3 - 6.43 of *the Report*)

12. For SSPA, the key recommendations, to be implemented with effect from the 2006/07 school year (applicable to students entering S1 in September 2007) are to give parents more choices of secondary schools in the allocation process and to update the instrument for scaling student performance between primary schools for banding purpose. Some critics have cast doubt on the fairness of the scaling instrument, *viz.* using the performance of students of the previous cohorts to scale students' performance in the following cohort but, on balance, we support EC's recommendation as being more desirable educationally.

THE WAY FORWARD

13. The Administration will implement the various recommendations according to the timetable proposed by the EC. The implementation of measures requiring additional funding, *viz.* the non-recurrent programmes for schools to build up their capacity for the teaching and learning of English and the study on extended learning activities in English, will be subject to the additional funding requirements under the Language Fund being approved by the Finance Committee.

Education and Manpower Bureau
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