

25 September 2007

Paper for Legco Bills committee on the ESF ((Amendment) Bill

1. Background

This paper will offer the observations and opinions on the proposed amendment to the ESF Ordinance Bill from two ESF principals Mr. John Brewster Principal of Beacon Hill School (an ESF Primary school with a Learning Support Class) and Mr. John Wray Principal of South Island School (an ESF secondary school with a Learning Support class).

1. Removal of Legco Members from the Composition of the Board of Governors.

1.1 The consultation process on the revised ordinance was both extensive and inclusive and the principals felt that representation and contribution of Legco members has been valuable and important particularly due to the fact that a significant member of our students and their families are permanent residents of Hong Kong.

2. Representation of parents of children with Special Educational Needs within the composition of the Board of Governors and the School Councils.

-All parents including those with children with Special Educational Needs currently have equal opportunity to be represented on both the board of governors and school councils without having any group specifically identified.

- Other special interest groups do not have specific representation on our Councils, these include language groups, ability groups, and other minority groups.

- Schools would find it impossible to identify accurately which parents of children should be considered. E.g.: A child with a mild Special Educational Need versus a child with a severe Special Educational Need.

- Highlighting parents of Special Educational Needs children as a separate group is against our school philosophy of inclusivity and anti- discrimination.

2.1 As principals we believe that

-Parents of children with Special Educational Needs are currently involved with existing advisory groups within ESF and this group should now be formalised and given more support and guidance from ESF.

- Opportunities already exist for parents of children with Special Educational Needs to be involved with School Councils however, schools should become more proactive and invite interested parents for their input when required.

3 Amendment of section 4 (1)(a) of the Ordinance, Objects and Powers of the foundation, to include the words irrespective of disability and Special Education Need.

3.1 In Hong Kong

- It is important that schools are capable both physically and monetarily of catering for the needs of all of the children in their care.
- Therefore to have an “open door” policy irrespective of disability or Special Educational Need is not viable for us to successfully cater for the needs of all students.
- As mentioned previously, to highlight Special Educational Needs children is both discriminatory and does not give equal representation to other interest groups.
- We strongly believe that ESF schools currently provide excellent provision for our Special Educational Needs students and we are continuously and actively improving this provision within available resources.
- This amendment would not be consistent with similar policy for local schools or schools in other countries.