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Panel on Education

**Background Brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 14 May 2007**

Disposal and use of vacant school premises

Purpose

This paper summarizes the issues of concern raised by Members about the disposal and use of vacant school premises.

Background

2. According to the 2001-based Projected Population Distribution by District Council districts in 2001-2011, the total projected school age population aged 6-11 was estimated to decrease from 493 200 in 2002 to 410 600 in 2010, representing a 17% drop of 82 600 over eight years. As a result, there was a sharp decrease in the demand for primary schools as a whole. The declining population in the 6-11 age group had led to a reduction of classes in schools in many districts. In March 2003, the Administration informed Members of its intention to consolidate high cost and under-utilised primary schools to ensure effective use of public funds.

3. The policy on the consolidation of high cost and low utilisation primary schools was implemented with effect from the 2003-2004 school year. Schools which fail to attract 23 students in the Primary One Admission exercise will not be allocated Primary One (P1) class. The year in which the school will be closed is determined by the existing enrolment or the number of operating classes.

4. The Administration estimated that 77 primary schools would fall within the consolidation criteria and be phased out by 2006-2007.

Issues of concern

5. The Panel on Education has not discussed the subject of disposal and use of vacant school premises. In the course of discussion of the primary school

consolidation policy and the School Building Programme, members expressed concern about the use of vacant school premises. Questions in this respect were also raised at Council meetings and when Members examined the annual Estimates of Expenditure of the Government. The following provides a gist of the issues raised.

Number of vacant school premises

6. When Members examined the Estimates of Expenditure of the Government in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008, information was sought on the number of premises which had been left vacant due to the closure of schools because of under-enrolment of P1 students.

7. According to the Administration, since the implementation of the school consolidation policy in the 2003-2004 school year, a total of 39 aided primary schools without P1 admission had ceased operation (from the 2003-2004 to 2006-2007 school years inclusive), and another 15 would cease operation in the 2007-2008 school year.

Use of vacant school premises

8. In response to Members' questions about the existing use or intended use of vacant school premises, the Administration advised that among the 39 school premises vacated up to the 2006-2007 school year, one in Kwai Tsing would be converted as a centralised onscreen marking centre of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority. Eleven premises had been earmarked or were being considered for educational uses, such as merging of schools, conversion of bi-sessional primary schools to whole-day operation, temporary usage by schools undergoing redevelopment, international schools or education centres. The rest were small premises located in remote areas with little potential for educational uses. These premises had been/would be returned to the Government for disposal in accordance with the relevant lease conditions and the established policy for any other uses where appropriate. The Lands Department had received applications from members of the public for using some of the vacant premises for running community facilities. These applications were being considered in consultation with the relevant bureaux and departments.

9. A suggestion was made by members to convert some vacant school premises for operating sub-degree programmes. The Administration responded that a Land Grant Scheme had been introduced under which sites would be allocated to post-secondary institutions for constructing purpose-built campuses. For those institutions that did not want to build new campuses, the Education and Manpower Bureau would examine whether suitable vacant school premises would be available to cater for their accommodation needs.

Disposal of teaching equipment in closed schools

10. A question was raised at a Council meeting on how the teaching equipment in closed schools was disposed of. The Administration explained that according to the current practice, the Management Committee of schools which ceased operation could propose and, upon approval of the Administration, transfer the teaching equipment and items deemed useful or having saleable value to other schools in need of them, or donate them to charitable organizations. This arrangement ensured that available resources were put to gainful uses.

School Building Programme

11. Members noted that while some schools were closed due to under-enrolment, new school projects under the School Building Programme had continued. A Y2K school with construction cost of \$100 million which commenced operation in 2000 had failed to admit 23 students in the 2006-2007 school year and would cease operation. Members queried the need for further school building projects.

12. The Administration explained that the School Building Programme served various policy objectives. Some schools were built to meet the changes in demand for educational facilities arising from demographic changes. Some aimed to inject diversity in the education system and provide choice for parents. Some were required to facilitate existing schools to offer whole-day education or to improve the learning environment by means of redevelopment and reprovisioning. The Administration adjusted the Programme from time to time, taking into account the population projections and prevailing developments in education. The Administration would also review the provision of school places and the use of the school premises to ensure prudent and flexible use of resources. All school building projects proposed by the Government were subject to thorough deliberation, due consultation with the local community through District Councils, and funding approval from the Legislative Council before implementation. These projects, regardless of their locations, must be formulated on the basis of sound justifications, specific policy objectives and the long-term interest of students. However, owing to the usual lapse of four to five years between project planning and completion, during which there might be social changes, for example, changes in the school-age population, individual school building projects might not match seamlessly with the prevailing situation when the schools commenced operation.

13. The Administration pointed out that of the 100-odd school projects completed during 2001-2002 to 2005-2006 and funded for completion from the 2006-2007 onwards, most were for the purposes of facilitating existing schools to offer whole-day education, upgrading substandard school premises, and providing parents with choices of different types of schools.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
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Relevant papers on disposal and use of vacant school premises

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	17.3.2003 (Item V)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	26.5.2003 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	19.4.2004 (Item V)	Minutes Agenda
Legislative Council	18.5.2005	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 88 - 89 (Question)
Finance Committee		Administration's replies to Members initial written questions (Reply Serial Nos. EMB064 and EMB065)
Legislative Council	22.3.2006	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 18 - 20 (Question)
Panel on Education	27.3.2006 (Item IV)	Minutes Information paper provided by the Administration in response to members' questions raised at the meeting (Item (d))
Legislative Council	21.6.2006	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 83 - 92 (Question)
Finance Committee		Administration's replies to Members initial written questions (Reply Serial Nos. EMB054, EMB055 and EMB061)