

For discussion on 16 November 2006

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Establishment of an Academy for Gifted Education

PURPOSE

In his Policy Address delivered in October 2006, the Chief Executive announced an Academy for Gifted Education (the Academy) to stretch the potential and nurture the talent of students.

PROPOSAL

2. The Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM) proposes to provide \$100 million, for setting up the Academy to provide more structured, articulated and challenging off-site programmes for students with exceptional talent, and to promote the concepts and practices of gifted education. This is to complement donation by Sir Joseph Hotung of an equal amount for the same purpose. The Academy, together with gifted education in schools, will help expand the talent pool for Hong Kong as a world city.

JUSTIFICATIONS

The need for the Academy

3. Gifted education is part of quality education. Currently, the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) is implementing a three-tier gifted education framework. At Level 1, support is given within classes. At Level 2, pull-out programmes are provided within the school. At Level 3, off-site programmes are provided for the exceptionally gifted in collaboration with the tertiary institutions and professional bodies.

4. An effective gifted education curriculum is based on the normal class curriculum, but with appropriate modifications that accord with the characteristics of the gifted students and meet their special needs. Schools, through school-based programmes¹, should primarily be responsible for helping students to develop their higher-order thinking skill, creativity, and personal-social competence² and to provide learning opportunities that suit their interests and abilities.

5. It is recognized that students' potential and talent are wide-ranging. To cater for the diversity of student needs, Level 3 programmes aim to provide off-site learning opportunities not available in schools for students with exceptional talent. Mainly conducted in collaboration with local tertiary institutions, these programmes largely focus on mathematics, science and technology though in recent years they have been extended to cover languages and humanities. There is an increasing demand for a wider range of services and opportunities to cater for the diverse abilities, interests, social and emotional needs of the gifted students. These programmes are important not only in helping to develop our gifted students in their specialist areas, but also in enabling them to attain all-round personal development, to develop their confidence in pursuit of excellence, as well as to deepen their passion and commitment to serve the community, the nation and the world in maintaining Hong Kong as a world city.

6. The proposed Academy will narrow the present service gap by-
- a. providing more learning opportunities for students to turn their potential into achievements not only in disciplines such as science and mathematics but also in areas of arts, humanities and sports including specialist niche areas such as history, archaeology, astronomy, etc. ;
 - b. mobilising the efforts of parents, teachers and academics, business and community leaders to create a supportive and enriching learning community for students;
 - c. expanding the pool of talents in Hong Kong, in terms of both

¹ That is through Level 1 and Level 2 programmes. The Gifted Education Section of the Curriculum Development Institute of EMB provides a range of web-based curriculum resources, identification tools, and implementation guidelines for school-based programmes to support gifted education in schools.

² Higher order thinking skill, creativity and personal-social competency are the three key elements of gifted education.

number and diversity, to support the social and economic development of Hong Kong as a world city; and

- d. developing through partnership with similar institutions in other countries a knowledge hub for gifted education for expert exchange, research and development, along with professional development for teachers.

7. The proposed Academy will specialise in providing Level 3 programmes for exceptionally gifted students, while the existing Gifted Education Section under EMB will concentrate its efforts at Levels 1 and 2 activities. The proposed Academy will build on local experiences in gifted education to meet the rising expectations for more services and opportunities for students with exceptional talents. While the Academy will cater primarily for the needs of local gifted students between the ages of 10 and 18 at the top end of the ability range (about 2% or some 10 000 students), it has the potential to be developed into a platform for international exchanges as well as research and development with Mainland and overseas educational bodies through exchange activities.

Implementation of the Academy for Gifted Education

8. We propose that the service coverage of the Academy will include:
 - a. For students – off-site support for the exceptionally gifted students. Learning opportunities thus aim for “enrichment” - i.e. development of knowledge not normally attainable in school contexts, and “acceleration” – such as programmes set at undergraduate level. There will be further networking of existing student alumni in order to maintain the cohesion amongst students, the Academy, the partners and Hong Kong so that they would continue to sustain and broaden our talent pool in the long run.
 - b. For teachers - diversified training opportunities for teachers to enhance their capability in nurturing gifted students in schools.
 - c. For parents - guidance service on parenting the gifted and to facilitate the formation of a parent community to provide mutual support.

d. For the academics and professionals - research to provide evidence-based advice on services for the gifted, effective pedagogy, and government policy. The Academy aims to set up a network of mentors comprising different expertise to support the development of gifted students in Hong Kong.

9. EMB will provide administrative support in setting up the Academy and aims to have it up and running as soon as practicable. A Preparatory Committee has been set up, comprising school heads, teachers, parents and members of the community, prominent academics, representatives of the donor and the Administration, to prepare for the establishment of the Academy. The Preparatory Committee will advise on the best organisational, financial, staffing and other relevant arrangements for the Academy.

10. The Academy would be appropriately staffed for leading, directing, and implementing gifted education related programmes or services for students, teachers and parents. We envisage that the Academy in its initial years of operation will comprise a small core team of staff. The Academy is expected to solicit support as needed through contracted expertise and services and other collaborative approaches.

11. We propose to support the accommodation needs of the Academy in its initial phase of development by providing surplus government accommodation situated in a convenient location for students, teachers and parents. The funding resources are to be spent on students, parents and teachers direct rather than on bricks and mortar for a physical premise. It is anticipated that provision of services is to be contracted out to tertiary institutions, professional bodies, social service agencies, or individuals with expertise in a particular field. We expect that the bulk of the education programmes and activities will be held at the venues of the course providers, similar to existing arrangements for Level 3 programmes. In future we may consider designating a number of existing schools which are experienced in gifted education to serve as resource schools or outreach gifted education centres of tertiary institutions to offer programmes during weekends and public holidays.

Funding the Proposed Academy

12. In support of the Administration's mission and commitment to provide gifted education, Sir Joseph Hotung has committed a donation of \$100 million for setting up and running the proposed Academy. While the donation is not contingent upon the proposed injection of \$100 million, the Administration considers that Government's injection of an additional \$100 million will give the Academy a stronger financial footing and capacity for responding more readily to the demand for gifted education services and opportunities for students, and support for teachers and parents. SEM envisages the Academy as the vehicle and focal point to galvanise community support for students with exceptional talent, enhance existing services and draw upon local and overseas expertise and research into gifted education development.

13. The operation of the Academy and allocation of resources in pursuit of supporting gifted education is subject to on-going assessment of programme effectiveness and the need to vary implementation details in the light of experience and feedback.

Evaluation

14. Programmes commissioned by the Academy will be subject to evaluation by the participants, including end-of-programme, post-programme questionnaires and focus group discussions. Staff of the Academy may randomly sit through programmes that are offered for the first time to ensure that they meet the requirements. In addition, longitudinal studies will be undertaken to evaluate the impact of the overall support provided for gifted students, including the support complemented by parents and schools to these students as appropriate. We already have some tracking work underway and the Academy could step up systematic tracking over time to assess impact. In the long run, we would also like to see the Academy develop its network of gifted students who have left the programmes, become successful people in society and could contribute to maintaining the well being of Hong Kong.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

15. We propose to make a grant of \$100 million to support the Academy.

SEM will consider future funding needs in the light of experience and requirements for meeting the educational needs of gifted students.

16. We will seek the approval of the Finance Committee of the proposed grant in the near future, subject to Members' views.

BACKGROUND

17. The policy on gifted education for schools in Hong Kong was first recommended by the Education Commission in its Report No. 4 (1990). A three-tier gifted education framework after piloting was adopted in 2000.

18. Currently, the education sector worldwide generally adopts a broad definition of giftedness, using multiple criteria instead of relying on IQ test. Gifted students may demonstrate talents in different areas. For instance, some gifted students have high IQ scores; others may be gifted academically, or in leadership, art or sports. Thus, gifted students are best identified using multiple methods, such as student performance, behavioural checklists, teacher/parent/peer/self nomination, student portfolios, standardized tests, etc. In Hong Kong, a broad definition using multiple intelligences instead of a restrictive one focusing merely on the academically gifted is adopted.

19. Since 2000, EMB has been providing off-site support in partnership with tertiary institutions for the exceptionally gifted whose needs cannot be met by school-based programmes. Since 2004, the scope of these programmes has been broadened to include the domain of Humanities in addition to Leadership, Science and Mathematics. A total of some 210 gifted education programmes were organized under the *Support Measures for the Exceptionally Gifted Students Scheme* over the past three years. The number of students benefited from these programmes has increased from about 2,000 in 2003 to about 5,000 in 2006.

Education and Manpower Bureau
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