

立法會 *Legislative Council*

LC Paper No. PWSC 22/07-08(01)

Information Note for Public Works Subcommittee

Impact of the implementation of small-class teaching on new school projects

Background

When the funding proposals for construction of schools (Project Codes **340EP**, **339EP**, **341EP** and **261ES**) were discussed at the Public Works Subcommittee (PWSC) meeting on 31 October 2007, Hon Emily LAU raised concern about the implication of the Chief Executive (CE)'s pledge to implement small-class teaching on the size and number of classrooms in these projects. While PWSC supported the relevant funding proposals for submission to the Finance Committee (FC) for consideration at its meeting on 16 November 2007, Ms LAU enquired whether similar questions had been raised on the implementation of school-related funding proposals. This information note is prepared to follow up Ms LAU's request and provide a summary on previous discussions by the Legislative Council (LegCo) regarding the implementation of the School Improvement Programme (SIP), in particular for upgrading the facilities in schools which would shortly be closed down due to under-enrolment.

Implementation of the School Improvement Programme

2. SIP was recommended by the Education Commission (EC) in its Report No. 5 which was endorsed by the Executive Council in February 1993. It aims to progressively upgrade the teaching and learning environment of schools built to old planning standards so as to provide additional space and facilities for teaching, out-of-class activities and supporting services for both teachers and students. Under SIP, improvement works were carried out in five phases. Funding for the final batch of schools in the final phase of SIP was approved by FC on 5 December 2003. The total number of projects included in the five phases of SIP and the approved project estimates as at 30 April 2005 are given in the **Appendix**.

Public Account Committee's Report on the Director of Audit's Report on SIP

3. In his Report No. 39 tabled in the Council on 20 November 2002, the Director of Audit ("Audit") had made a number of observations in respect of SIP. Audit questioned the need to build a new annex or additional floors for schools with vacant classrooms which could be converted into function rooms. Audit considered that these

vacant classrooms were not expected to be filled due to the decrease in the population of children. Audit also pointed out that five schools included in Phase 5 of the SIP were likely to be closed down, and among them four were considered as schools surplus to requirement. The SIP budget for these four schools was approved in February 2001 at a total amount of \$48.7 million. Audit considered that the need to incur substantial expenditure on the SIP works was questionable, having regard to the short remaining life span of these schools.

4. When the Audit Report No. 39 was considered by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), members expressed concern about the cost-effectiveness of SIP. They urged the Administration to re-examine SIP plans for schools with many vacant classrooms and shelve SIP works or reduce the scope of the works to be carried out for schools that would be close down in the near future.

Deliberations by other LegCo committees on SIP

5. The Administration's proposal for the improvement works for schools in the final phase of SIP was considered by PWSC at its meeting on 29 October 2003. There were concerns that some schools included in SIP might be closed down in the new future due to under-enrolment. Members requested the Administration to critically review the scope of the proposed improvement works, having regard to the remaining life span of the schools concerned. According to the Administration, it had reviewed SIP in the light of the recommendations in the Audit Report No. 39. Members were assured that the proposed improvement works for the schools in question were justified.

6. The question of cost-effectiveness of SIP was again raised at the special meeting of FC to examine the Estimates of Expenditure 2005-2006 held on 12 April 2005. Noting that some schools which had carried out improvement works under SIP stopped admitting Primary 1 students in the school years 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 and might eventually be closed down due to low admission, some members were concerned that the resources allocated for the improvement works would be wasted. They queried the lack of coordination among different government departments in handling these school projects. The Administration's explanation was that as it normally took several years to complete a building project, changes which were not foreseen at the time of project initiation might occur. Nevertheless, the Administration had withheld about 100 SIP projects having regard to the latest forecast of the school-age population. Members however remained of the view that the Administration should review the cost-effectiveness of SIP taking into account the declining school-age population and the overall supply and demand of school places in each district.

7. The subject of disposal and use of vacant school premises was deliberated at the meeting of the Panel on Education on 14 May 2007 during which the unsatisfactory planning of SIP was raised. Members noted with grave concern that some 41 primary school premises vacated as a result of under-enrolment in recent years had undergone SIP incurring a total cost of some \$900 million. According to the Administration,

while some school premises had become vacant due to unforeseen circumstances, it had strived to make the best use of the premises in a timely manner and the majority of vacant school premises which had undergone SIP would be re-cycled for educational use.

Implementation of small-class teaching

8. In his 2007 Policy Address, CE pledged that starting from the 2009-10 school year, small-class teaching will be implemented in Primary One of suitable public primary schools by phases. By the 2014-15 school year, this initiative will be extended to all classes from Primary One to Primary Six. According to CE, the full implementation of small-class teaching hinges on having enough teachers and classrooms. Therefore the Government needs to be flexible and pragmatic in implementing this policy. The Education Bureau will allow flexibility and fully consult the stakeholders and respect their opinions in formulating detailed implementation arrangements, which are expected to be finalized by September 2008.

9. At the PWSC meeting on 31 October 2007, there was concern that the implementation of small-class teaching might have impact on the size and number of classrooms in the proposed school projects. The Administration was requested to examine whether new design would be required and whether flexibility could be provided to allow for modifying of design for the new schools so as to cater for the possible increase in the requirements for school facilities arising from small-class teaching. In planning new school projects, the Administration should consult the school sponsoring bodies on their views on the implementation of small-class teaching and take these into account before putting the proposals to LegCo for approval.

Appendix

Number of schools included and approved project estimates under the five phases of the School Improvement Programme
(As at 30 April 2005)

Phase	No. of schools included	Approved Project Estimate (\$M)
1	102	1, 130
2	130	2, 351
3	150	4, 163
4	122	4, 557
5	239	8, 693
Total	743	20, 894

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
 15 November 2007