

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)396/07-08
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by the Administration)

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Panel on Education

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Thursday, 18 October 2007, at 11:45 am
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP (Chairman)
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, SBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
- Member attending** : Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
- Members absent** : Hon SIN Chung-kai, SBS, JP
Hon LI Kwok-ying, MH, JP
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
- Public Officers attending** : Mr Michael SUEN Ming-yeung, GBS, JP
Secretary for Education

Mr Raymond WONG, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education

Mr Michael WONG, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education (1)

Ms Bernadette LINN, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education (2)

Mr CHENG Man-yiu, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education (3)

Mrs Betty IP
Deputy Secretary for Education (4)

Mr Christopher WARDLAW
Deputy Secretary for Education (5)

Miss Vivian LAU, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education (6)

Clerk in attendance : Miss Odelia LEUNG
Chief Council Secretary (2)6

Staff in attendance : Mr Stanley MA
Senior Council Secretary (2)6

Miss Carmen HO
Legislative Assistant (2)6

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I. Briefing by the Secretary for Education on the Chief Executive's Policy Address 2007-2008

[LC Paper No. CB(2)44/07-08(01), The 2007-2008 Policy Address booklet entitled "A New Direction for Hong Kong" (paragraphs 87 - 94 in pages 38 - 40 and paragraphs 115 - 120 in pages 49 - 51) and The 2007-2008 Policy Agenda booklet (pages 50 - 52 and 54 - 56)]

Secretary for Education (SED) briefed members on the major new initiatives in education as detailed in the Administration's paper.

Small Class Teaching

2. Dr YEUNG Sum expressed support for the Administration's decision to implement progressively small class teaching (SCT) in public sector primary schools, starting with the cohort of students entering Primary 1 (P1) in the 2009-2010 school year, and eventually covering P1 to P6 classes in the 2014-2015 school year. As the Administration had not announced any timetable for implementing SCT in secondary schools, he suggested that consideration be given to reducing the class size of secondary schools by two students per year starting from the 2008-2009 school year so that the cohorts of students receiving SCT could proceed to secondary schools with small class size after completing primary education in the 2014-2015 school year.

3. SED responded that the Administration would take into account the experience of the implementation of SCT in primary schools before deciding the way forward for SCT in secondary schools. As SCT would be implemented in primary schools in the 2009-2010 school year, it was too early at this stage to make any commitment for secondary schools, including on the viability of reducing the class size by two students per year.

4. Ms Audrey EU and Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong echoed Dr YEUNG Sum and called for the implementation of SCT in secondary schools by reducing progressively the class size by two students per year from the 2008-2009 school year. Ms EU enquired about the respective costs for implementing such a proposal and SCT in secondary schools. She also sought information on the progress of the pilot study on SCT in selected primary schools.

5. SED pointed out that the estimated cost for implementing SCT in secondary schools would be some \$7 billion. Given the introduction of various new initiatives in education in the 2007-2008 Policy Address, which would have impact on resources, the Administration needed to consider the cost implication of further initiatives. The possibility of reducing secondary class size by two students per year would be considered in the 2009-2010 school year. The Administration would continue with the pilot study on SCT which would shed light on the cost-effective strategies and pedagogies for maximising the benefits of implementing SCT in the local context. The Administration would also formulate appropriate development programmes for pre-service and in-service teachers on the basis of the findings of the study. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the implementation of the proposal of reducing the secondary class size by two students per year would not need \$7 billion.

6. Mrs Selina CHOW expressed support for giving the choice to schools to opt whether or not to implement SCT. She considered it most crucial to provide the necessary professional development for teachers for successful implementation of SCT. She was also concerned about the professional

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development for language teachers including native-speaking English teachers.

7. SED responded that about 3 000 additional teachers would be required for full implementation of SCT in primary schools. However, with the phased introduction of SCT and as schools would be given the option to decide whether and when to implement SCT, there would be sufficient time for the Administration and schools to plan for the professional development for teachers to acquire the appropriate pedagogies for teaching in small classes.

8. Permanent Secretary for Education (PSED) supplemented that the Education Bureau (EDB) would arrange necessary professional development programmes for teachers of small classes with reference to the findings of the pilot study on SCT to be available in 2008. In line with the spirit of school-based management, schools and teachers should design their school-based curriculum and pedagogies in the light of the needs and abilities of their students. He added that both EDB and the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research had allocated substantial resources for upgrading the standard of language teachers in recent years.

9. Mr TAM Yiu-chung said that the Democratic Alliance for Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB) supported the adoption of SCT in primary schools. He, however, pointed out that SCT would not automatically improve the quality of education. He called on the Administration to learn from the experience in implementing mother tongue teaching in secondary education and to thoroughly consult the stakeholders, in particular front-line teachers and parents, on the implementation of SCT which would have impact on pedagogies and assessment. He opined that as schools would be given a choice to decide whether to implement SCT, popular schools with over-enrollment of students might not wish to switch to SCT. This might create a labeling effect whereby only schools with less popularity would implement SCT.

10. PSED responded that the Administration agreed on the need for schools and teachers to adapt to SCT, which would take time. The Administration would consult the stakeholders before the end of the year, with a view to confirming before September 2008 the arrangements for progressive implementation of SCT.

11. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung supported the implementation of SCT which would assist teachers in class management and facilitate interaction with students. However, he pointed out that appropriate support measures must be provided in order to achieve the positive effects. Moreover, the good pedagogies and practices relevant to SCT in primary schools might not apply to SCT in secondary schools. He suggested that instead of making reference to the implementation of SCT in primary schools, the Administration should seriously consider reducing secondary class size as soon as possible. Mr LEUNG added that the cost of implementing SCT in secondary schools should be less than

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estimated because of a declining student population.

12. SED responded that as the student population was expected to decline in the coming years, the actual class size in secondary schools would inevitably be smaller. The Administration would review and adjust, if necessary, the standard class size for secondary schools in the light of the student population projections and the implementation of the new senior secondary academic structure from the 2009-2010 school year. As SCT in primary schools would also be implemented progressively from the same school year onwards, the Administration would consider the operational experience of SCT in deciding the way forward for secondary schools in the 2009-2010. In the run up to 2009, the Administration would concentrate its work on the preparation and arrangements for implementation of SCT in primary schools and the new senior secondary academic structure.

13. Mr Abraham SHEK considered it necessary to implement SCT in secondary schools as soon as practicable. He was of the view that teachers with the commitment and enthusiasm in their profession should be able to teach effectively in both large and small classes. He did not share the view that only teachers who had attended the necessary professional development could teach effectively in small classes.

14. Mr Tommy CHEUNG cautioned that the implementation of SCT should not be used as a means to support the continued operation of primary schools with unsatisfactory performance. He considered appropriate teaching strategies and pedagogies important to enhance teaching and learning outcomes in small classes. He sought information on the criteria to be adopted by the Administration in deciding which schools should implement SCT.

15. SED responded that the decision as whether or not to implement SCT would rest with the primary schools. Schools not opting for SCT would continue to be allocated students on the basis of 30 students per class. Should there be a policy to implement SCT in secondary schools, the decision would also be left to individual schools to opt whether to implement SCT.

16. Mr Tommy CHEUNG further said that subvention for Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools should be calculated on the average unit cost of aided schools adopting SCT. He was concerned that the implementation of SCT in some popular schools might result in a substantial reduction of their student population as some of their class size was as large as 44 students. Such reduction of student population would have an adverse impact on their participation in various activities. He considered that the Administration should provide financial assistance to schools to find space to accommodate additional classrooms in order to maintain the size of their current student population. SED replied that the Administration would consider the detailed arrangements for implementing SCT in primary schools.

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Provision of 12-year free education

17. Mrs Selina CHOW noted that with the implementation of 12-year free education, the subvention to be received by DSS schools would be increased correspondingly. She was concerned whether the increased subvention would be passed over to parents of students in DSS schools in terms of reduced school fees.

18. PSED responded that under the existing policy, Government subvention for DSS schools was determined on the basis of the average unit cost of aided schools. With the investment of additional resources into public sector schools for implementing free senior secondary education, the subvention to be received by DSS schools would be increased correspondingly. However, as DSS schools enjoyed autonomy in determining their school fees, they could decide how best to use the additional resources.

19. Mr TAM Yiu-chung sought clarification on whether full time courses offered by the Vocational Training Council (VTC) for senior secondary school leavers would be fully subvented. PSED replied that only full time courses offered by VTC for Secondary 3 (S3) school leavers would be fully subvented.

20. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung pointed out that there would be no more S5 school leavers after the implementation of the new academic structure in the 2009-2010 school year. He suggested that given only two cohorts of S5 school leavers before then, the Administration should, as a transitional arrangement, consider providing full subvention for VTC courses for these S5 school leavers.

21. SED responded that the policy was to provide full subvention for full time courses offered by VTC for S3 school leavers. Nevertheless, he agreed to explore the possibility of providing short-term arrangements for the VTC courses for two cohorts of S5 school leavers before the implementation of the new senior secondary academic structure.

Developing Hong Kong as a regional education hub

22. Dr YEUNG Sum expressed support for developing Hong Kong as a regional education hub. He opined that the provision of student hostels and university library services should be enhanced to support the implementation of the initiative.

23. Professor Patrick LAU expressed support for the new initiatives in education in the 2007-2008 Policy Address. He asked whether the Administration would review and increase the provision of publicly-funded undergraduate places in the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions, having regard to the increase of non-local student quota for

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publicly-funded programmes at the sub-degree, degree and taught post-graduate levels from 10% to 20% of the approved student number targets for these programmes.

24. SED explained that the increase of non-local student quota would not affect the provision of publicly-funded places for local students in the UGC-funded institutions as non-local students had to bear their own study costs and were required to pay a higher fee. At present, the Administration had no plan to review the number of publicly-funded places in the UGC-funded institutions.

25. Professor Patrick LAU urged the Administration to explore alternatives for the provision of student hostels to accommodate the increase in non-local student quota. He pointed out that unlike local undergraduates who were normally provided with a hostel place for one academic year, non-local students would need a hostel place throughout their studies in Hong Kong.

26. SED acknowledged that the increase in non-local student quota would lead to a corresponding increase in the demand for student hostels. The Administration would continue to search for appropriate sites for the construction of additional student hostels, and explore the feasibility of constructing joint hostels to accommodate students from different UGC-funded institutions.

Expanding the international school sector

27. Mrs Selina CHOW expressed support for expanding the international school sector, but was concerned about the adequacy of making available only three greenfield sites at nominal premium for the development of new international schools or the expansion of existing schools.

28. SED explained that due to the scarcity of land, in particular on the Hong Kong Island, the initial plan was to provide at least three greenfield sites for developing new international schools or expanding existing schools. The Administration would continue to search for appropriate sites for the construction of new international schools or relocation of existing international schools.

29. PSED supplemented that apart from the provision of three greenfield sites, the Administration had been assisting international schools by facilitating individual applications for expansion in-situ or by allocating suitable vacant school premises for their use. In this connection, the Administration had recently allocated two vacant school premises for the expansion of two existing international schools.

Education for children of ethnic minorities

30. Dr YEUNG Sum pointed out that the proficiency of students of ethnic minorities in Chinese Language had been an obstacle to their pursuit of university education. He considered that the UGC-funded institutions should take the lead in the provision of equal opportunities for ethnic minority students to access university education. He noted that the Administration had been negotiating with the UGC-funded institution in this regard, and enquired about the progress of the matter.

31. Deputy Secretary for Education (1) (DS(Ed)1) said that whilst the Administration had been discussing with the institutions concerned matters relating to the admission of non-Chinese speaking students, the autonomy of the UGC-funded institutions in such matters should be respected. DS(Ed)2 supplemented that the Administration and the representatives of the UGC-funded institutions had come to the view that institutions might consider accepting alternative qualifications in Chinese for students pursuing the local curriculum who had learned Chinese Language for less than six years while receiving primary and secondary education; or who had learned Chinese Language for six years or more in schools but had been taught an adapted and simpler curriculum not normally applicable to the majority of students in local schools. The Administration would continue to discuss with the institutions the related issues including the confirmed specified circumstances for acceptance of alternative qualifications in Chinese Language; the minimum gradings in these alternative qualifications to be accepted for admission to specific faculties/programmes; and the mechanism for identifying the relevant students.

32. Ms Emily LAU considered that inadequate support had been provided for ethnic minority students in schools and universities. She called on the Administration to deploy more resources to assist ethnic minority students in this regard.

33. DS(Ed)2 responded that EDB had implemented a number of measures to support ethnic minority students in school education, including the provision of onsite support to schools in their development of school-based curriculum and the development of a draft supplementary guide on the teaching of Chinese to non-Chinese speaking students which would be available for consultation by the end of 2007 or early 2008. In addition, the Administration had commissioned tertiary institutions to run training programmes for Chinese Language teachers involved in teaching Chinese to non-Chinese speaking students, and to establish resources centres to support ethnic minority students in learning Chinese after school.

34. Mr Albert CHAN considered that so far, the Administration had not taken actions to facilitate ethnic minorities to establish in Hong Kong. He called for

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improvement in the policies for ethnic minorities. Mr CHAN suggested that as the population of ethnic minority in Tin Shui Wai was relatively large, the Administration should consider allocating a vacant school premises to interested parties for providing one-stop education and support services for ethnic minorities from Southeast Asian countries.

35. DS(Ed)2 responded that the prevailing Government policy was to encourage ethnic minority children to enrol in mainstream schools and learn together with their Chinese counterparts. The idea of running a school for a designated group was not in line with the policy. However, the establishment of a resources centre for ethnic minorities could be explored and EDB was pursuing the idea in consultation with other departments.

36. Mr Abraham SHEK expressed support for Mr Albert CHAN's suggestion. He opined that if Mr CHAN's suggestion was considered to be inconsistent with the prevailing policy to provide integrated education for ethnic minority children, the possibility of operating an education and resources centre for ethnic minorities by way of a social enterprise could be explored.

Sub-degree education

37. Ms Audrey EU was concerned about the limited number of articulated places in the UGC-funded institutions for sub-degree holders, which had become a bottleneck. She asked how the Administration would resolve the problem and improve the quality of sub-degree education in the long run.

38. SED acknowledged the existence of a bottleneck in respect of articulated places. He said that various measures were being considered to address the issues relating to sub-degree education and priorities would be given to enhancing the recognition of sub-degree qualifications and facilitating sub-degree holders to pursue further education or seek employment in both the public and private sectors. The Administration would continue to discuss with key stakeholders issues concerning sub-degree education, including the relationship between sub-degree qualifications and the qualifications framework.

39. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the competition in the sub-degree sector was so fierce that many providers had admitted students regardless of their academic qualifications in order to survive in the market. Some providers invested heavily on advertising and promotional activities, the costs of which were covered by high tuition fees. According to the information provided by the Administration, of the \$50 000 tuition fee payable by a sub-degree student, on average, \$12 000 was used to repay the start-up loans borrowed by the institutions and for premises construction. He urged the Administration to formulate a policy for sub-degree education in five aspects, namely, status of sub-degree education, quality of sub-degree programmes, recognition of

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sub-degree qualifications, education and employment opportunities for sub-degree graduates and financial assistance for the providers. Mr CHEUNG cautioned that if the problems relating to sub-degree education remained unresolved before the development of Hong Kong into a regional education hub, it would give rise to increasing discontent among sub-degree students and graduates.

40. SED responded that the Administration acknowledged the problems in the sub-degree sector, and would collaborate with key stakeholders to work out measures to address them, including those relating to the quality of sub-degree programmes and their recognition.

41. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan echoed Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong concerning the problems in the sub-degree sector. He considered that there were "bubbles" in the provision of sub-degree education. He highlighted the inadequate provision of articulated places in the UGC-funded institutions for sub-degree holders totalling only 1 600, and urged the Administration to work out a timetable for resolving the bottleneck for sub-degree graduates to pursue undergraduate education in local universities.

42. SED did not agree that there were "bubbles" in the provision of sub-degree education. However, he acknowledged the need to enhance the recognition of sub-degree qualifications for study and employment purposes, including in the context of the qualifications framework. As regards continuing education for sub-degree holders, he explained that further thoughts could be given to the option of a credit transfer system to allow sub-degree graduates to make progress in accordance with their own pace and preference.

Provision of free pre-primary education

43. Ms Audrey EU and Ms Emily LAU considered it important to provide free pre-primary education for all children. They requested the Administration to consider extending the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (the Scheme) to cover private independent kindergartens to increase parental choice in early childhood education. They asked for information on the estimated additional recurrent cost in this regard.

44. SED responded that the Administration had widely consulted the stakeholders in the community on the scope of and the eligibility criteria for the Scheme. As the Scheme had been approved by the Finance Committee for implementation in the 2008-2009 school year, and would be reviewed three years after implementation, the Administration considered it inappropriate to modify the Scheme at this stage. He added that around 80% of the kindergartens had applied to join the Scheme. Together with around 15 000 children receiving subsidy under the various financial assistance schemes, almost 90% of children were subsidized in pre-primary education in one way or the other. SED

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undertook to provide written information on the cost for the provision of free pre-primary education.

45. Mr Tommy CHEUNG opined that Legislative Council Members in general supported the Scheme and agreed that the Scheme should cover all kindergartens, be they operated on a profit-making or non-profit-making basis. The co-existence of profit-making and non-profit-making kindergartens had created competition and promoted the quality of pre-primary education over the years. The Administration should extend the scope of the Scheme to cover all kindergartens as soon as practicable.

Ratios of graduate teacher posts in public sector schools

46. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan pointed out that at present, 70% and 95% of teachers in primary and secondary schools were degree holders respectively. However, a substantial number of them were not receiving the pay of a graduate teacher post in public sector schools. He opined that instead of improving the ratio of graduate teacher posts in public sector primary and secondary schools to 50% and 85% respectively, the Administration should provide all teachers holding a recognized degree with graduate teacher posts in public sector schools.

47. SED responded that the Administration had considered the current circumstances in proposing the increase of the ratios of graduate teacher posts in public sector primary and secondary schools up to 50% and 85% respectively in the 2009-2010 school year.

48. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that teachers were disappointed with the initiative to increase the ratios of graduate teacher posts in public sector primary and secondary schools to 50% and 85% respectively only in the 2009-2010 school year. He pointed out that according to the information provided by the Administration, only 4 900 of the 16 200 serving teachers with a degree were holding a graduate teacher post in primary schools in the 2006-2007 school year. He considered it unacceptable that the majority of serving teachers in primary schools were not fairly remunerated, and asked for a timetable for the provision of graduate teacher posts for teachers with degree qualifications.

49. SED responded that not all serving teachers in public sector primary and secondary schools were in possession of a recognised degree. He said that the Administration would review the situation in the light of the circumstances after the full implementation of the initiative.

Special education

50. Mr Abraham SHEK expressed support for the new education initiatives in the Policy Address 2007-2008, but expressed disappointment at the non-provision of additional resources for special education. He opined that

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special education was an integral part of the education system and students with special educational needs (SEN) should enjoy equal opportunities in education.

51. SED responded that the Administration had formulated policies and allocated considerable resources for the provision of special education and integrated education for students with SEN. To facilitate the implementation of integrated education, EDB had arranged professional development for serving teachers to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge for teaching students with SEN. Under the new funding mode for primary schools, schools were provided with additional resources for enrolment of students with SEN at the rate of \$10,000 or \$20,000 per student per annum, depending on the degree of support required.

Attracting talents to engage in the teaching profession

52. Mr Abraham SHEK considered that at present, the remuneration package and professional status of the teaching profession were not attractive enough to attract persons with calibre to join the teaching field. He suggested increasing the teachers' salaries and retitling the Hong Kong Institute of Education as a university to attract quality students to pursue undergraduate studies in education and engage in the teaching profession after graduation.

Teachers Relief Grant

53. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that teachers in schools with incorporated management committees (IMC) had grievances over the operation of the Teacher Relief Grant (TRG). He pointed out that with the implementation of a lump-sum TRG, teachers taking sick leave in excess of two and a half days in a school year would have to bear the cost of supply teachers. He asked whether EDB would review TRG with a view to improving its operation.

54. DS(Ed)4 explained that TRG was introduced to simplify the administrative workload of schools in claiming reimbursement for employing supply teachers to replace teachers on leave. Under TRG, an annual recurrent cash grant was provided to each IMC school to cover approved leaves of teachers on the permanent establishment. The rate of 2.5 man-days only served as the basis of calculating the annual recurrent cash grant, and this did not mean that teachers could only take sick leave for 2.5 days. For teachers with sick leaves of 30 days or more, schools could still seek reimbursement from EDB for employing supply teachers. In addition, schools were allowed to retain any unused TRG up to a surplus level equivalent to three years' provision. As TRG had been introduced for two years, the Administration would see how the operation could be improved.

II. Any other business

55. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 1:04 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
20 November 2007