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16 July 2008

Miss Odelia Leung
Clerk to Education Panel
Legislative Council
Jackson Road, Central, Hong Kong

Dear Miss Leung,

Legislative Council Panel on Education
Implementation of Small Class Teaching
in Public Sector Primary Schools

At the LegCo Panel meeting on 29 February 2008, the Administration was requested to -

- (a) set a transition period after which additional resources should no longer be provided for schools maintaining 30 students per class;
- (b) explain the arrangements after the transition period; and
- (c) advise the amount of additional resources required for the implementation of SCT in those schools which had opted to operate small classes in the 2009/10 school year, as compared with the resources required had SCT not been implemented in these schools.

For (c) above, we have indicated earlier that we would only be able to arrive at a realistic estimate of the financial implications after we have completed our assessment on the feasibility of SCT under the announced policy. Separately, the Administration has been asked to report on the planning of public sector primary schools in the light of the fluctuations in population. This letter provides our response to the above items.

Background

2. The Government has pledged to implement SCT in public sector primary schools by phases, starting from Primary 1 (P1) in the 2009/10 school year and extending progressively to cover Primary 1 to Primary 6 (P6) in the 2014/15 school year. Schools implementing SCT will be allocated Primary 1 students on the basis of 25 students per class while other schools will be allocated 30 students per class. All public sector primary schools have been invited to indicate their readiness in implementing SCT starting from the 2009/10 school year.

Implementation of SCT in 2009/10 school year and planning of primary school places in the public sector

3. As reported earlier, some 70% of public sector primary schools participating in the current cycle of the Primary One Admission System (POA) have opted for SCT with effect from the P1 cohort in the 2009/10 school year. Premised on the approach agreed with the sector and other stakeholders, we proceeded, from March to June 2008, to assess the demand and supply of classrooms in the 36 school nets under the POA system throughout the six school years from 2009/10 to 2014/15, taking into account individual schools' preference of class sizes, the number of classrooms in the school nets and the latest school-age population projections, with a view to confirming whether it is possible to allow all schools which have opted for SCT in a particular school net to do so and at the same time ensure a sufficient supply of school places in the net to meet projected demand across P1 to P6 over a six-year projection period. We have to ensure adequate supply of classrooms for not only the 2009 cohort of P1 students of a school to study in the SCT environment until P6, i.e. the 2014/15 school year, but also for the school's continuation of SCT for subsequent P1 cohorts. The projection methodology, summarised at Annex, also provides useful reference guiding our planning of public sector primary schools.

4. Based on the latest projections, 297 (or 92%) out of the 323 schools which have opted for SCT will start to implement SCT progressively as from the 2009/10 school year, as the school nets in which they are located would not suffer from shortfall in classrooms by the end of the current projection period in 2014/15 school year or the projected shortfall is considered relatively insignificant.

5. The remaining 26 schools are situated in School Nets 31 and 32 of Yau Tsim Mong as well as Net 40 of Sham Shui Po. The shortfall of classrooms in the 2014/15 school year for each of the three school nets is projected to be around 80 to 100 classes, even after taking into account the convertible classrooms as

reported by all schools in these school nets concerned (i.e. a total of 10 in Nets 31 and 32 as well as 41 in Net 40) and the recycling of vacant school premises, where applicable. Borrowing of school places from adjacent school nets is also considered not feasible as the projected number of classrooms in the adjacent school nets is barely sufficient to meet the demand of their own nets.

Transition arrangements

6. In taking forward the implementation of SCT, we have consulted stakeholders and there is generally a consensus that the Administration should be pragmatic and flexible with the implementation, taking into account practical circumstances such as the availability of classrooms and trained teachers, as well as the wishes and needs of schools, parents and students. Accordingly, we do not consider it appropriate to set a target date by which all primary schools in the public sector must implement SCT. We will instead, as pledged earlier, provide those schools which have come forward for SCT but could not so implement for the time being (the 26 schools mentioned above), as well as those which have yet to come forward, with additional teachers (in the form of Assistant Primary School Master posts) so that they may adopt alternative measures to enhance teaching and learning while maintaining a class size of 30 with effect from the 2009/10 school year.

7. Given that the actual demand and supply situation for each POA cycle might differ from the projection for the six-year period on which our current assessment is based, we will update the projections of demand and supply of classrooms and roll forward our six-year projection annually after each POA cycle, taking into account the updated number of approved classes and the latest population projections. To facilitate planning, we will invite schools which have opted to maintain a class size of 30 to indicate whether they would take forward SCT, and if so, the planned implementation year in March every year. We will then update our assessment as to whether schools' option for SCT, including the cases of the 26 schools mentioned above, could be realized in future POA cycles after 2009/10. Meanwhile, we will also make our best endeavours to look into the availability of sites for school building in Yau Tsim Mong and Sham Shui Po districts.

Financial Implications

8. On the basis of the situation in the 2009/10 school year, i.e. 65% of public sector primary schools to implement SCT, it is estimated that 1 290 additional classes will be operated by the 2014/15 school year. The operation of these

additional classes, together with the provision of additional resources in the form of teaching posts for schools maintaining 30 students per class, would incur an additional recurrent funding¹ of some \$1,700 million by the 2014/15 school year (when SCT is implemented across P1 to P6 for the schools concerned), or \$1,800 million by the 2015-16 financial year. The estimated additional funding represents the additional cost to be incurred compared with the status quo under which all schools would be allocated 30 students per class. For the avoidance of doubt, this cost estimate cannot be compared with the estimate of \$2,400 million quoted by the Administration some time ago, before the policy on SCT was announced, since the earlier figure was premised on the assumption that SCT would be implemented in all public sector primary schools and on prevailing population projections. It is expected that the latest estimate would be adjusted upwards, compared with the status quo, when more schools switch to SCT in future.

9. The above costs have not taken into account resources arising from the implementation of SCT which are non-recurrent in nature, e.g. additional time-limited teaching posts for schools to prepare for SCT, professional development programmes for teachers in taking forward SCT, conversion in schools and building of new schools, etc.

10. I hope this letter has addressed the questions raised on SCT and on the planning of primary school places. For enquiries, please contact Ms L B IP, Principal Assistant Secretary (Education Commission & Planning) at 2892 6621.

Yours sincerely,



(Ms Bernadette Linn)
for Secretary for Education

¹ The estimated additional cost for implementation of SCT in public sector primary schools would lead to an increase in the unit rate subsidy for schools in the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS), all other things being equal. The additional funding for the DSS schools has been included in the calculations.

Planning of Public Sector Primary School Places

Introduction

Planning of public sector (government and aided) primary school places is done on a District Council district basis to enable young children to attend schools close to their home. This note sets out the projection model for compiling the demand and supply of public sector school places covering the period from 2008/09 to 2014/15, its limitations and considerations in planning of school building.

Projection Model

Demand for school places

2. On demand side, the projection model takes into account the demand in the coming school year as reflected by the number of approved classes which public sector schools are expected to operate in each of the 18 District Council districts. This is referred to as the “base-year” (i.e. 2008/09) demand. The adoption of the actual number of approved classes in the coming school year as the base-year demand attempts to take into account the latest pattern of “cross-district schooling”. Such a phenomenon arises from factors like parental choice and the prevailing geographical distribution of schools that has developed gradually over the years. With such factors, it is difficult to enable a perfect match of supply of school places with demand of children living in the same district.

3. For each of the subsequent projection years, the year-on-year change in the demand of a district would reflect the corresponding projected change (increase or decrease) in school-age population¹ (i.e. those aged 6-11) living in the district concerned. This is to uphold the policy of ensuring sufficient provision of primary school places to enable children to attend school close to their home. The year-on-year change in the projected school-age

¹ School-age population projections are compiled based on the latest available territorial-wide population projections (2006-based) released by the Census and Statistics Department in July 2007 and projected population distribution by District Council district released by the interdepartmental Working Group on Population Distribution Projections (WGPD) in December 2007. The school-age population figures deployed include estimates for cross-boundary students but exclude mobile residents.

population is then converted into projected demand for school places, expressed in terms of classrooms, by applying the average class sizes that are applicable to the corresponding cohort of children. For instance, with the implementation of SCT in 2009/10 starting from P1, an average class size reflecting the choices between 25 students per class and 30 students per class for schools in the district concerned is applied to the cohort of children who are projected to enroll in P1 in 2009/10.

Supply of school places

4. On supply side, the number of classrooms available in a projection year takes into account the following:

- (i) Supply from existing schools, including the addition of convertible classrooms where applicable;
- (ii) New schools to be completed under the School Building Programme; and
- (iii) Vacant school premises earmarked/which may be earmarked for future school operation.

5. By matching demand against supply, surplus or shortfall in a district or a school net for each projection year is worked out.

Planning Limitations

6. Reliability of the school place projection results is subject to various limitations, such as demographic changes of the territory-wide population (including movements of new arrival children from the Mainland and babies born in Hong Kong to Mainland women which are particularly difficult to predict), delay in the completion of new housing development projects which may affect the district population projections, parental choices which may affect the demand in individual districts, and changes in development plan of individual schools which may affect the supply.

7. While the Administration has exercised prudence in planning provision of school places taking into account the latest population projections, the availability of resources and other policy considerations, the

various factors mentioned above mean that we can hardly guarantee a perfectly balanced match between supply and demand when planning new school projects.

Focus of School Building in the Medium Term

8. Taking into account our latest assessment, our proposals for new school building projects in the medium term are likely to focus on facilitation of SCT (notably in districts where shortfall of school places is projected such that SCT cannot be implemented according to the indicated wishes of the schools concerned), in-situ redevelopment as well as reprovisioning of existing schools where the facilities have become sub-standard over time.

Education Bureau
July 2008