

立法會
Legislative Council

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the Administration)

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Panel on Education

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Thursday, 23 October 2008, at 9:30 am
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan (Chairman)
Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG Mei-fun (Deputy Chairman)
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
Prof Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
Hon Starry LEE Wai-king
Hon CHAN Tanya
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon WONG Yuk-man
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-ye, GBS, JP
Dr Hon Samson TAM Wai-ho, JP
- Members attending** : Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Dr Hon PAN Pey-chyou
- Members absent** : Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, SBS, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Mr Michael SUEN Ming-yeung, GBS, JP
Secretary for Education

Mr Kenneth CHEN, JP
Under Secretary for Education

Mr Raymond WONG Hung-chiu, 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)

Dr CHAN Ka-ki
Deputy Secretary for Education (5)

Ms Esther LEUNG, 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)8

Miss Ivy LEONG
Council Secretary (2)3

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 2008-2009

[LC Paper No. CB(2)68/08-09(01), The 2008-2009 Policy Address booklet entitled "Embracing New Challenges" (paragraphs 50 to 52 in pages 15 and 16 and 123 to 127 in pages 40 and 41) and The 2008-2009 Policy Agenda booklet (pages 33, 59 and 63 to 67)]

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The Chairman welcomed representatives of the Administration to the meeting.

Briefing by the Administration

2. Secretary for Education (SED) briefed members on the progress of the implementation of the new initiatives in the 2007-2008 Policy Agenda and the new items on the 2008-2009 Policy Agenda as detailed in the speaking note tabled at the meeting.

Free senior secondary education

3. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that notwithstanding the implementation of 12-year free education from the 2008-2009 school year onwards, it was reported in the media that only 16 of some 40 Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools had reduced their tuition fees in the range of \$1,000 to \$6,000, and more than 30 schools had maintained or even increased their fees. As more than 10 000 students attended DSS schools, he was concerned that these students could not be benefited from the policy. He asked whether the Administration was aware of the situation.

4. Deputy Secretary for Education (2) (DS(Ed)2) explained that with the implementation of 12-year free education in public sector schools, DSS schools, which were provided with subvention on the basis of average unit costs in public sector schools, would correspondingly receive higher subvention. Under the existing policy, DSS schools might apply for an increase of tuition fees depending on their school operating circumstances, actual expenditure and budgetary considerations. In the current school year, 16 and nine DSS schools had applied for downward and upward adjustment of their tuition fees respectively. Only some of the nine schools had been given approval for tuition fee increase after the Administration had carefully examined their grounds for fee increase, such as to cover operating deficit or to finance development plans. She added that the purpose of implementing DSS was to provide diversity in education to suit the different needs of students. The choice for DSS schools or public sector schools left with the parents. DSS schools were required to set aside part of their reserves to provide scholarships for needy students.

Articulation for sub-degree holders

5. Mr WONG Kwok-hing noted with concern that the Administration had increased the non-local student quota for full-time programmes at sub-degree, degree and taught-postgraduate levels beginning from the 2008-2009 academic year. However, the Administration had not addressed the concern of sub-degree students about inadequate provision of articulated undergraduate places in the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions.

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6. DS(Ed)1 responded that the Administration had increased the publicly-funded second-year articulated places for sub-degree holders from 967 to 1927 from the 2008-2009 academic year. Three years later, around one-eighth of undergraduates in the UGC-funded institutions would be sub-degree holders admitted by way of articulation. DS(Ed)1 stressed that in the last academic year, only one non-local student was enrolled in the publicly-funded sub-degree programmes, and all the other non-local students attended self-financing sub-degree courses.

Integrated education

7. Mr WONG Sing-chi noted that many Hong Kong students had specific learning difficulties. He was concerned that although some schools had committed to teaching students with specific learning difficulties or with other special educational needs (SEN), they were unable to enrol sufficient students, with the possibility of closure. He asked how the Administration would help students with specific learning difficulties or other SEN to learn in schools and encourage schools to admit these students.

8. SED clarified that the Administration did not have any policy on school closure. However, owing to the decline in student population, the number of classes run by secondary schools was reduced correspondingly.

9. DS(Ed)3 responded that specific learning difficulties was one type of SEN. Starting from the current school year, the Administration had introduced a new funding mode to allocate additional resources to support secondary schools with enrolment of students with SEN. The Education Bureau (EDB) had been implementing a five-year plan on teachers' professional development in respect of teaching students with SEN, and had developed various resource materials and teaching kits to assist teachers to identify students with SEN and help them in learning. In addition, EDB officers conducted school visits at regular intervals, and provided professional advice to schools on effective ways to assist students with SEN in learning.

10. Mr WONG Sing-chi said that the allocation of more resources did not mean effectiveness. He questioned the effectiveness of the implementation of integrated education. He enquired about the objective of integrated education set by the Administration.

11. DS(Ed)3 explained that students with SEN had different educational needs and their learning objectives varied. It would not be fair to expect them to achieve the same learning outcomes as other students in ordinary classes. Students with SEN should not be assessed on academic aspects alone.

12. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that the Administration should review the

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implementation of integrated education in the light of experience in schools. He pointed out the difficulties encountered by teachers in classes having a few students with SEN, such as students with specific learning difficulties or with other SEN. He noted a plan to construct a primary-cum-secondary school in Tseung Kwan O to cater for students with specific learning difficulties. However, local schools and the District Council had raised objection. He suggested that to enhance teaching and learning outcomes, schools which had already admitted a large number of students with SEN should be modified to become schools specialized in providing education for such students.

13. SED responded that the subject of whether students with SEN should receive education in ordinary schools or special schools had constantly been under discussion. Although there had been concern about the practical difficulties encountered in the implementation of integrated education, the majority view, so far, supported the provision of integrated education to enable students with SEN to learn and interact with other students in ordinary classes. The Administration had improved support for schools with students with SEN, and would review the situation on an on-going basis.

Development of higher education

14. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan expressed disappointment at the absence of any reference to the development of higher education in the Chief Executive's 2008 Policy Address. He said that instead of relying on the importation of talents, the Administration should formulate long-term policies and plans on the fostering of local talents in order to maintain the competitiveness of Hong Kong in a knowledge-based global economy. He considered the 1927 second-year articulated places for sub-degree graduates grossly insufficient, and urged the Administration to review the provision of 14 500 first-year-first-degree (FYFD) places with the aim of meeting the manpower needs of Hong Kong in the long term.

15. SED highlighted the significant developments in the post-secondary education sector over the past few years, including the introduction of four-year undergraduate programmes under the new academic structure, the policy initiative to develop Hong Kong into a regional education hub, the establishment of the \$18-billion Research Endowment Fund and the \$1-billion Scholarship Endowment Fund, etc. The Administration had reviewed the post-secondary education sector and published the Phase 2 Review Report with 22 recommendations to facilitate the long-term development of the sector. The Administration would keep under review the provision of FYFD places having regard to the availability of resources, in particular in the midst of the recent financial crisis. He added that the development of Hong Kong into a regional education hub would help attract talents to come to study and work in Hong Kong after graduation.

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16. Mrs Regina IP said that the UGC-funded institutions were preoccupied in using different marketing tools to promote international recognition and ranking of their programmes. She pointed out that the English and Chinese standards of many university graduates even with first class award were disappointing. She shared the view that the effectiveness of education was not measured by the resources spent. She considered that the institutions should concentrate on upgrading the quality of teaching and their graduates.

Preparation for the new academic structure (the 334 structure)

17. Professor Patrick LAU said that many UGC-funded institutions were concerned about the slow progress of the capital works projects necessitated for the implementation of the new four-year undergraduate programmes under the 334 structure, in particular about the provision of sufficient accommodation facilities for the double cohort.

18. Permanent Secretary for Education (PSED) responded that over the past few years, EDB had worked closely with the UGC and the UGC-funded institutions for the preparation of the implementation of the 334 structure. The UGC had established the 334 Group to coordinate and monitor matters in relation to the implementation of the 334 structure. The Government had earmarked funding for 12 capital works projects for the implementation of the four-year undergraduate programmes. These projects would be submitted to the Public Works Subcommittee and the Finance Committee for funding approval in the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 academic years. In addition, EDB would continue to liaise with the institutions on their progress of preparation for the 334 structure, including curriculum changes and other issues that would impact on the design and the provision of basic education.

Use of e-textbooks

19. Professor Patrick LAU expressed support for the use of e-textbooks, and requested the Administration to expedite the development in this regard, as substantial investment had already been spent in the procurement of computers and establishment of the information technology (IT) networks and facilities in schools.

20. Under Secretary for Education responded that with the developments in the use of IT in education over the past few years, some schools had used e-textbooks and e-learning resources on a pilot basis with satisfactory results. Before the adoption of e-textbooks on a territory-wide basis, the Administration considered it necessary to consult the stakeholders on the various issues, including the contents of e-textbooks and the use of computers in teaching and learning. The Working Group on Development of Textbooks and E-learning Resources would follow up the matter.

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21. Mrs Regina IP said that the use of e-textbooks and e-learning materials would complement but could not replace printed textbooks in student learning. She suggested that the Administration should follow the practice in Canada and the United States to provide textbooks for students. She considered that the current arrangement mainly benefited publishers as they could revise school textbooks unnecessarily.

Implementation of the Education (Amendment) Ordinance

22. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong noted with concern that the 2008 Policy Agenda had not mentioned whether the Administration would move a motion to extend the deadline for aided schools to submit a draft constitution to PSED for the establishment of an Incorporated Management Committee (IMC) which would expire by 1 July 2009. He said that the deadline could be extended to 1 July 2011 by way of a resolution passed by LegCo within the current session. He pointed out that since 436 aided schools (about 50%) had not established their IMCs so far, either the Administration or a LegCo Member should move a motion to extend the deadline for submission of draft IMC constitutions. He asked whether the Administration would take the initiative to move the motion or object to LegCo Members moving the motion. He also enquired whether the Administration would give more time and flexibility for aided schools to implement their IMC constitutions should the deadline be extended.

23. SED said that given the large number of aided schools that had not submitted draft IMC constitutions, he shared the view on the need to extend the deadline. Whether the motion for the purpose should be moved by the Administration or a LegCo Member could be discussed. Depending on the number of aided schools that had submitted IMC constitutions by 2011, the Administration would consider giving a reasonable period of time for them to implement their IMC constitutions. At the present stage, the Administration considered three to four years from 2011 a reasonable period.

24. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong further asked whether the Administration would conduct a study within the next year on the different modes and operational experience of school management committees adopted by various sponsoring bodies. This would shed light on whether the mode of IMC as specified in the Amendment Ordinance was the only effective way in managing a school, and whether other modes to allow participation of stakeholders were also feasible.

25. SED responded that whether other modes of management in aided schools were allowed would depend on their compliance or otherwise with the provisions in the Amendment Ordinance. EDB had established a working group to conduct a three-year review study on the implementation of the Amendment Ordinance covering the period from 2005-2006 to 2007-2008 school years.

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Tutorial schools

26. Mrs Regina IP was gravely concerned about the popularity of tutorial schools in the education system. She disapproved the prevalent belief and value that attending tutorial schools was necessary in order to obtain good results in public examinations, and attaining good results was the route to enjoying a luxurious lifestyle. She found such a belief and value had distorted the aims of education. She called on the Administration to publish a policy statement to rectify the distorted belief and value.

27. SED responded that it was a parental choice of whether their children should attend tutorial schools. He considered that the simple and effective remedy to the current situation was to improve the quality of education. He added that the performance of Hong Kong students in various international assessment programmes had been remarkable. Under the Programme for International Student Assessment 2006, Hong Kong students ranked second in Scientific Literacy and third in Mathematical Literacy and Reading Literacy.

Student financial assistance schemes

28. Miss Tanya CHAN expressed concern about the application of the risk-adjusted factor at 1.5% to cover the Government's risk of default in disbursing unsecured loans to eligible students under the non-means-tested loan schemes administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA). She pointed out that this had generated an income of about \$50 million in the 2006-2007 school year. She called on the Administration to take away or reduce the risk-adjusted factor to alleviate the financial burden of parents and students in the light of the prevailing financial crisis. She also sought information on the default rate of non-means-tested loans in the past years.

29. DS(Ed)6 responded that non-means-tested loan schemes were operating on a no-gain-no-loss and full-cost recovery basis. The current interest rate was around 4.3%, and was considerably lower than the average interest rate on unsecured loans in the market. The interest collected from the risk-adjusted factor of 1.5% was far less than the amount of defaulted loans totalling around \$440 million as of mid-2008. The Administration would closely monitor the default situation with a view to considering whether there were grounds for adjusting the risk-adjusted factor as and when appropriate. It should be noted that the risk adjusted factor had not been increased, notwithstanding the recent increase in default rate.

Refinement of medium of instruction policy for secondary schools

30. Referring to the discussions of the Panel on the fine-tuning proposals for the medium of instruction (MOI) policy for secondary schools at its meeting on 17 July 2008, Ms Audrey EU asked when the Administration would revert to the

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Panel. SED replied that the Administration would report to the Panel on the outcome of its consultation with the stakeholders in December 2008 or January 2009.

Class restructuring of secondary schools

31. Quoting the projections made by the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union on the number of secondary student population from 84 000 in 2007 to 58 000 in 2013, Ms Audrey EU expressed concern about possible closure of secondary schools because of insufficient enrolment. While she noted the new measures recently announced by the Administration to relieve the pressure on Band 3 schools to some extent, she called on the Administration to adopt small class teaching for secondary schools to resolve the problem of under-enrolment and closure of schools.

32. SED pointed out that the benefits of small class teaching at secondary schooling were not conclusive. The Administration would not resort to small class teaching to resolve the problems arising from a declining student population. There were professional views that secondary school class size should be sufficiently large to facilitate interactive learning. He added that secondary schools had already adopted small group teaching for different subjects on a need basis.

Biliterate and trilingual ability of students

33. Ms Starry LEE considered enhancement of students' biliterate and trilingual ability paramount to increasing their competitiveness. She sought information on the Administration's plans to improve students' proficiency in Chinese and English and to use Putonghua to teach the subject of Chinese Language from primary levels.

34. SED responded that the use of Putonghua to teach Chinese Language was different from the teaching of Putonghua in primary schools. He pointed out that there were currently insufficient qualified teachers for teaching Chinese Language in Putonghua, although many schools operated Putonghua classes. He considered that any plan to use Putonghua to teach the subject of Chinese Language at primary levels should only be implemented after the community had had extensive discussion and had reached a consensus. As regards enhancement of students' English proficiency, SED said that the Administration would address this matter in the context of the fine-tuning proposals for the MOI policy for secondary schools.

35. Dr Priscilla LEUNG declared interest as a staff member of the City University of Hong Kong. She expressed concern about the implementation of various education reforms in recent years. She said that as a parent, she found difficulty in catching up with all these reforms. She considered that local

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students should have no difficulty in attaining biliteracy and trilingualism. To improve the English proficiency of students, she considered it necessary for the Administration to work out long-term plans and allocate more resources. She suggested that apart from the Native-speaking English Teacher (NET) Scheme, the Administration should arrange more exchange programmes for local language teachers and students to interact with native English speakers in overseas places.

36. PSED responded that the Administration agreed that the English proficiency of teachers was important. He explained that the operation of the NET Scheme could enrich the English environment in schools. However, it should not be taken as the only effective tool for enhancing students' English proficiency. He pointed out that the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research had allocated around \$60 million to support local language teachers to pursue professional development and participate in overseas immersion programmes.

National education

37. Referring to the opening speech of SED, Mr WONG Yuk-man requested him to explain the meaning of understanding the motherland and of national identity. He considered that unless the Administration could state clearly the elements for identification as a citizen of the People's Republic of China, a Chinese or a citizen of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, the resources devoted to promoting national education would be wasted. He said that to understand the motherland, the learning of the Chinese history was important.

38. SED responded that many people still did not have the opportunity to visit the motherland, and did not understand their motherland. To promote the understanding of the motherland was therefore necessary. He pointed out that the subject of Chinese History was offered at both primary and secondary levels in schools, and would be included in the curriculum under the new senior secondary academic structure.

II. Any other business

39. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 10:30 am.