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Panel on Education

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 16 April 2009**

Admission of non-local students below post-secondary level

Purpose

This paper sets out the issues of concern raised by Members concerning the admission of non-local students below post-secondary level.

International schools

2. Under the current policy, international schools, local private schools and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools are allowed to admit non-local students. International schools generally refer to those schools offering full non-local curricula designed primarily for non-Chinese speaking students and foreign nationals most of whom would eventually return to their home countries for education. In the 2008-2009 school year, there are 68 international schools in Hong Kong providing 19 251 and 15 347 primary and secondary places respectively and offering curricula of the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea, Germany, France, Singapore and the International Baccalaureate. According to the established policy, international schools should mainly serve their publicly stated target group of students. If their student mix falls below a certain level (50% of the target students in the student body) so that they will clearly not be achieving this objective, the Permanent Secretary for Education has the power to require them to rectify the situation.

3. In the 2007-2008 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced that the Administration would make available at least three greenfield sites at nominal premium and vacant school premises for the development of new international schools or the expansion of existing schools. Four greenfield sites in Kowloon Bay, Lai Chi Kok, Sai Kung and Tuen Mun were subsequently identified for the purpose.

Student exchange programmes

4. Under the existing policy, overseas students may be admitted to private schools on a self-financing basis, subject to the fulfillment of the relevant immigration requirements. In practice, overseas primary and secondary students come to Hong Kong mainly for short-term exchanges, rather than for full-time enrolment in local schools. Insofar as student exchanges are concerned, local schools have been admitting overseas students, notably through the arrangement of the American Field Service (AFS). AFS is a non-profit and non-government organization that arranges inter-cultural student exchange programmes. In the 2006-2007 school year, 33 local secondary schools accommodated, through host families, a total of about 50 overseas students admitted through AFS.

5. As regards admission of non-local students from the Mainland below the post-secondary level, the Ministry of Education of the Central People's Government has specifically advised that the Administration should first try out short-term student exchanges between "sister schools". Under the current policy, secondary school students from the Mainland who are accompanied by teachers are allowed to enter Hong Kong for short-term exchange programmes up to two weeks.

6. In July 2006, the Administration relaxed the existing policy to encourage the development of student exchange programmes to enhance the exposure of local students and to pave the way for opening up schools for admission of students outside Hong Kong, particularly from the Mainland, in the longer term. Under the relaxed policy, schools may develop boarding facilities in-situ for the purpose of student exchange programmes, subject to the approval by the Director of Lands and support of the Secretary for Education. The development and operation of such facilities should be on a self-financing basis and subject to certain conditions.

Members' concerns

7. The Panel on Education had not discussed the subject of admission of non-local students below post-secondary level per se. The Panel had considered the provision of hostels for non-local students. Members also raised questions about the provision of international school places in the Council and in examining the Draft Estimates of Expenditure for the HKSAR Government. The issues of concern raised by Members are summarized below.

International school places

8. Members in general supported the policy initiative to expand the international school sector to promote diversity in education, address the demand of families coming to Hong Kong for work and investment and facilitate the development of Hong Kong into a regional education hub. There was a concern about the adequacy of making available only three greenfield sites for the development of new international schools and expansion of existing schools.

9. The Administration explained that given the scarcity of land, the initial plan was to provide at least three greenfield sites for developing new international schools and 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. In addition, 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.

10. Some members considered that the insufficient number of international school places for children of expatriates working in Hong Kong was partly because of a large enrolment of local students. Members were of the view that expatriates were most concerned about the provision of quality education for their children. The provision of sufficient international school places was important in attracting and retaining overseas talents to stay and work in Hong Kong. Members noted with concern the criticism about the complicated procedure for expanding international schools in Hong Kong. It was claimed that as many as 14 government departments were involved in dealing with applications for expanding international schools.

11. According to the Administration, it had been liaising with international schools and rendering assistance on school development matters through assigned officers. The Development Bureau was aware of the concerns raised by international schools over their expansion plans, in particular on planning and land issues. School expansion plans often involved changes in land use which might require approval by the Town Planning Board and consultation with the District Councils concerned. In this regard, the Development Bureau would continue its liaison with the relevant departments including the Education Bureau with a view to expediting the necessary procedures and resolving matters at an early stage.

12. As far as school registration and school extension were concerned, the Administration pointed out that it had published comprehensive guidelines which were applicable to both public sector schools and private schools including international schools. These guidelines covered all the necessary application procedures and requirements of the relevant departments. Since the expansion of international schools might take different forms and the involvement of different government departments might vary depending on the circumstances of each case, the Development Bureau would consider further enhancing the transparency of the relevant application procedures by working with other government departments to run joint briefing sessions at which practical examples would be made reference to.

Boarding facilities for non-local students

13. Members noted that the lack of boarding facilities had posed a problem on the further development of student exchange programmes at the school level. At present, only a handful of secondary schools offered a very limited number of boarding places for non-local students. Under the sister schools schemes, some participating schools had encountered difficulties in identifying enough host families to accommodate the visiting students, mainly due to the relatively small size of residential flats in Hong Kong. AFS had indicated that, without appropriate boarding facilities, it would be difficult to support further expansion of its academic exchange programmes in Hong

Kong.

14. Members noted that primary and secondary schools with enrolment of non-local students were not provided with publicly-funded boarding facilities. Different views had been expressed by members on whether subsidies should be provided for the provision of boarding facilities for non-local students. There was a view that apart from a relaxation of land use for hostel development within the site boundaries of schools, the Administration should provide subsidies and make land grants as appropriate for school sponsors to provide boarding facilities for non-local students. However, there was another view that given the resources constraints and the competing priorities in education, public funds should not be used to subsidise the provision of boarding facilities for non-local students in schools at the present stage.

15. According to the Administration, the Government did not have a policy to subsidise the provision of boarding facilities for non-local students in schools. Nevertheless, to encourage the development of student exchange activities for the benefit of secondary school students and to pave the way for an expanded scope of the sister school arrangement in the longer term, the Administration had relaxed the policy in July 2006 to enable schools in operation to develop self-financing boarding facilities in-situ for the purpose of student exchange programmes.

Relevant papers

16. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in the **Appendix**.

**Relevant papers on
admission of non-local students below post-secondary level**

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	13.10.2005	Minutes Administration's paper on the provision of places in international schools
Panel on Education	11.12.2006 (Item V)	Minutes CB(2)543/06-07(03) CB(2)543/06-07(04)
Legislative Council	17.10.2007	[Question 19] Asked by : Hon TSANG Yok-sing Provision of international school places Reply Hansard (English) (page 92-93)
Panel on Education	18.10.2007 (Policy Briefing)	Minutes CB(2)44/07-08(01)
Panel on Education	23.10.2008 (Policy Briefing)	CB(2)68/08-09(01)
	<i>10.2006</i>	Legislative Council Brief "Provision of boarding facilities for non-local students in the school sector" EMB(I)P/EHUB/1/1
	<i>12.2008</i>	Legislative Council Brief "Provision of boarding facilities for non-local students in international schools and local schools" EDB(I)IS/1/08
		Press release dated 19 March 2008 Expressions of interest invited from international schools for new sites