

For information on

11 July 2009

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Supply and Demand of

Public Sector School Places in the Islands District

Purpose

At the special meeting of the Legislative Council Panel on Education on 17 June 2009, Members requested the Administration to provide information on the supply and demand of public sector school places at both primary and secondary levels in the Islands District, and suggested that special arrangements should be made in consideration of the educational needs of students residing in remote areas. This paper sets out the Administration's response.

Background Information

2. It is the long-standing policy of the Government to ensure that there are sufficient public sector primary and secondary schools to provide free and universal education for all eligible school-age children. The current Primary One Admission (POA) System basically adopts the principle of vicinity as the basis for the allocation of Primary One (P1) places and the whole territory is divided into 36 school nets. Under the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) System, the territory is divided into 18 school nets in line with the district administration boundaries. The Government has been planning and providing public sector secondary school places on a territory-wide basis to ensure that there are sufficient public sector secondary school places across the territory, with a view to achieving a balance in the overall supply and demand of school places in Hong Kong.

Supply and Demand of Public Sector School Places in the Islands District

3. At the primary level, there are currently four POA school nets in the Islands District, namely, Net 96 (Lamma Island), Net 97 (Cheung Chau), Net 98 (Lantau Island and Tung Chung) and Net 99 (Peng Chau and Discovery Bay), with around 1,000 children applying for P1 places each year. The available places in the schools in each of the nets are

sufficient to meet the demand in the same net. Moreover, there are still several dozen vacant classrooms in the public sector primary schools in the Islands District, which can be used to meet any growth in the demand for primary school places in the district. At the secondary level, around 1,300 Primary 6 (P6) students in the Islands District take part in the SSPA System each year. Sufficient Secondary 1 (S1) places are provided annually to meet the demand of P6 students in the Islands District. Furthermore, there are still over ten vacant classrooms in the public sector secondary schools in the Islands District, which are available for meeting any growth in the demand for secondary school places in the district.

4. In the long term, the student population of the Islands District will remain stable in the coming few years with no foreseeable growth according to the Government's projections of population distribution.

Allocation of School Places to Students in Mui Wo

5. We understand that some Members are especially concerned about the adequate supply of public sector primary and secondary school places for children residing in Mui Wo. At the primary level, the POA System is divided into two stages, namely, the Discretionary Places Admission (DP) stage and the Central Allocation (CA) stage. Parents residing in Mui Wo may choose schools located in Mui Wo or elsewhere according to their preference at both the DP and CA stages. According to the 2009 POA allocation results, while the two primary schools in Mui Wo, i.e. Mui Wo School and Bui O Public School, can offer a total of 50 places, only 41 P1 applicants have been allocated to the two schools. This shows that these two primary schools can already provide sufficient places for P1 applicants residing in Mui Wo. As at 31 May 2009, the numbers of P1 students in Mui Wo School and Bui O Public School were 27 and 12 respectively, which were broadly comparable to the figures in the past few years.

6. Under the current SSPA System, parents may also choose schools in or outside the Islands District at both the DP and CA stages. According to the principle of demarcation of school nets, the secondary school net for CA to which a student belongs is determined by the location of the primary school that he/she attends. As such, students in Mui Wo belong to the Islands school net. In the 2008/09 school year, not less than 30 secondary schools were provided for selection by all students in the Islands school net, which covers Mui Wo. Besides the secondary schools physically located in the Islands District (5 in Tung Chung and 2 in Cheung Chau), some schools in nearby districts (more than 10 on Hong Kong Island) were also included to meet students' demand for CA places and give parents more choices. In the 2007/08 school year, 55 P6 students in Mui Wo took part in the SSPA System. Among them, only 26 had to be allocated school places within the school net through CA. Of these 26 students, 16 were allocated to the secondary schools in the Islands District and 10

to those in other districts. As for the remaining 29 students who were offered DP or CA places under unrestricted school choices, 15 were allocated to the secondary schools in the Islands District and 14 to those in other districts. In fact, just around 50 P6 students in Mui Wo participate in the SSPA System every year. Even if all the students proceed to S1 in Mui Wo, the number of students will still be too small to operate for a secondary school with at least three S1 classes.

Members' Suggestions on Special Arrangements for Students Residing in Other Remote Areas

7. For primary schools, the number of P1 classes that a school may operate has all along been determined by a set of fair and transparent criteria. According to the existing criteria for operating P1 classes, the Education Bureau will consider special factors, such as whether a school is located in a remote area where there are no appropriate alternative schools providing the school places needed, in addition to the number of students allocated to a school, when deciding whether it is necessary for the school to operate a P1 class.

8. We have reservations about Members' suggestion that public sector secondary schools in remote areas should be exempted from meeting the requirement of operating at least three S1 classes because under the New Senior Secondary (NSS) academic structure, schools have to provide a broad and balanced curriculum and ensure that students have access to a reasonable choice of subject combinations that meet their individual needs. For a school to have sufficient resources for providing a flexible, coherent and diversified senior secondary curriculum that can cater for students' varied needs, interests and abilities under the NSS academic structure, the most desirable school size is 24 to 30 classes, with 18 classes, i.e. 3 classes for each level, being the acceptable minimum, so that the students will benefit from six years of secondary education and develop their potential to the full.

Way Forward

9. We will continue to review the supply and demand of public sector primary and secondary school places from time to time to ensure the provision of adequate public sector schools.

Education Bureau
July 2009