

For discussion on  
10 November 2008

## **Panel on Education**

### **Measures to Stabilize School Development for Facilitating the Implementation of the New Senior Secondary Academic Structure**

#### **Purpose**

This paper informs Members of the measures adopted by the Education Bureau to stabilize school development for facilitating the implementation of the New Senior Secondary (NSS) academic structure in the wake of student population decline in the recent years.

#### **Background**

2. On 12 June 2006, the Education Bureau submitted to the Panel a discussion paper on the principles and approaches for the class structuring of secondary schools under the NSS. Following consultations on the subject subsequently in 2006, we issued a circular memorandum to secondary schools concerned on 8 August 2006, announcing the class structure policy to facilitate the implementation of the NSS academic structure and explaining the principles and approaches for class restructuring. At the same time, in view of the trend of declining student population in the recent years, we have introduced a series of support measures to maintain the stable development of schools and the teaching force.

#### **Measures to Maintain Stability of School Development and the Teaching Force**

3. It is undeniable that the secondary school student population will decrease in the coming years. Taking heed of the situation, the Administration announced in April this year that an additional recurrent expenditure of \$1.4 billion would be spent on a series of measures targeted to alleviate the pressure of student enrolment in schools, with a view to maintaining the stability of schools and the teaching force. These measures include, inter alia, reduction of students allocated to each S1 class, further relaxation of the criteria for approving classes and lowering of the enrolment cap of S1 classes. Please refer to Annex I for details.

4. The number of S1 students allocated through the school places allocation in 2008/09 has dropped by about 5,000 when compared with that of last year. On

the basis of 38 students per class, about 130 classes should have been reduced. However, with the implementation of the above measures, the number of classes reduced after allocation this school year has dropped significantly from about 130 to about 30. With the reduction of the number of students allocated to S1 by two to 36 per class next school year and a further reduction by two to 34 per class in the 2010/11 and 2011/12 school years; and the relaxation of the criteria for approving classes to 30 per class starting from the 2009/10 school year, it is expected that in the coming three school years (i.e., the 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12 school years), the support measures will help to offset the impact of the declining population.

5. We recognize the importance of maintaining the stability of the teaching force for a smooth implementation of the NSS academic structure. In this connection, we have adopted a series of measures to maintain a balanced supply and demand of teachers. Please refer to Annex II for details.

6. Apart from the above, we have further provided a number of support measures in the 2008/09 school year, including the provision of additional graduate teachers in secondary schools, the advance disbursement of the enhanced Senior Secondary Curriculum Support Grant and the provision of Intensive Learning Support Grant specifically for students with special education needs. We will also introduce the Diversity Learning Grant starting from the 2009/10 school year. Schools may deploy these additional resources flexibly for the implementation of the NSS academic structure.

### **Class Structure of Secondary Schools to Facilitate the Implementation of NSS Academic Structure**

7. The above support measures have proved to be effective as revealed by relevant data. Nevertheless, with a declining student population, it is inevitable that the number of classes in some schools will be reduced. For the implementation of NSS academic structure, a secondary school should be of a considerable size for providing students with a broad, balanced and in-depth curriculum. Such a curriculum is necessary to enhance students' knowledge and skills, to cultivate proper attitudes and values in them, to stretch their potential and to facilitate their whole-person development and their becoming a life-long learner.

8. Under the NSS academic structure, apart from taking the four core subjects (Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies), students may select two or three electives (including Applied Learning) from various Key Learning Areas to suit their individual interests, aptitudes and abilities. This would help to avoid an early streaming of students. Besides, through Other Learning Experiences, students can acquire experiential learning in moral and civic education, physical and arts education. The new curriculum facilitates the building up of a broad knowledge base in students, enhancing their learning abilities and promoting their moral, intellectual, physical, social and aesthetic development. In the light of the foregoing, schools should provide students with a range of electives and combinations of subjects to cater for their diverse needs and interests. Schools

should have a sufficient number of teachers to facilitate the development of learning communities and professional development of teachers. With a comprehensive professional development programme, teachers can develop relevant expertise in the subjects to be offered by the school so that they can be flexibly deployed to take up teaching duties of relevant subjects at the senior secondary levels. To fulfill the above requirements, we consider that the most desirable school size is 24 to 30 classes, with 18 classes (i.e. 3 classes for each level) being the acceptable minimum.

### **School Development Options to Support the Under-enrolled Schools**

9. We have strived to stabilize the development of schools. For schools unable to recruit sufficient number of students for the operation of three S1 classes for the first time in the September headcount, we have offered them various development options since the 2006/07 school year. The development options available are as follows, with details set out in Annex III:

- injection of additional resources by the school sponsoring body;
- merging/collaborating with other schools;
- undergoing special review;
- joining the Direct Subsidy Scheme; and
- turning to private operation

10. If a school is successful in its application for development options, it will continue to receive government subsidies to operate senior secondary classes. If a school does not apply for any development options or is unsuccessful in its application for development option, it can still operate junior secondary classes under the Per Capita Subvention Mode starting from S1 in the subsequent school year. On their completion of S3, the cohort of S1 students for the year in which the school has less than three S1 classes will be offered S4 places in other subsidized secondary schools through a central placement mechanism. This is to ensure that they can have access to broad, balanced and diversified combinations of subjects under the NSS curriculum which cater for the differences in their aptitudes and needs.

### **Situation of the Implementation of the School Development Options**

11. In the 2006/07 school year, there were a total of 11 government, aided and caput secondary schools with less than three S1 classes. Among them, three chose to cease operation, one turned to private mode of operation, and two had adopted the development option of injection of additional resources by the school sponsoring bodies. The other five were unsuccessful in their application of development options. Hence, they began to operate S1 classes under the Per Capita Subvention Mode and participated in the SSPA System under the “no-choice-no-allocation” principle from the 2007/08 school year onwards. In the 2007/08 school year, there was no school being unable to recruit sufficient students for operating three S1 classes. In the 2008/09 school year, two aided and one

government secondary schools have recruited fewer than 3 S1 classes for the first time.

### **New Development Options**

12. Starting from the 2008/09 school year, to further facilitate school development, we will provide two new development options for schools that are unable to operate three S1 classes for the first time. Details are as follows:

- (a) Conditional re-participation in SSPA
  - (i) Schools operating less than 3 S1 classes for the first time may apply for re-participation in SSPA with three S1 classes on condition that, when the current cohort of S1 students with less than three classes promotes to senior secondary level, the schools will inject top-up resources to provide students with a broad and balanced curriculum with different electives and subject combinations, until this cohort of students completes senior secondary education.
  - (ii) Schools adopting this development option may participate in SSPA with three classes in the subsequent year. If the schools can recruit adequate number of students for operating three S1 classes in the subsequent year, they may continue to operate under the class subvention mode and participate in SSPA with three classes in the year after. However, the school sponsoring bodies still have to provide additional resources as committed for the cohort of students with less than three S1 classes when they promote to senior secondary level.
  - (iii) In the event that the schools fail to recruit sufficient number of S1 students for three classes again in the subsequent year, they may either choose the development option of “injection of additional resources by the school sponsoring body” or the operation of junior secondary classes under the Per Capita Subvention Mode.
- (b) Collaboration with post-secondary institutions, professional/vocational bodies to offer courses
  - (i) Schools with less than three S1 classes for the first time may apply for operating practical course(s) in collaboration with post-secondary institutions or professional/vocational bodies, but they still have to provide students with a broad and balanced NSS curriculum and offer a reasonable choice of electives and subject combinations, including collaborative courses. Courses offered in collaboration with post-secondary institutions or professional/vocational bodies must be accredited by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational

Qualifications or / recognized by other professional organizations. The collaborative courses, being different from Applied Learning courses, should be operated on a self-financing basis not incurring additional expenditure from the government.

- (ii) In assessing the applications from schools, we will take into account various factors, including the relevant experience of the schools, the quality and accreditation of the collaborative courses, students' pathways for further study or employment, alignment of these courses with the NSS and the junior secondary curriculum, sustainability of these courses, feasibility of timetabling, deployment of teachers, actual arrangements, the recognition of the post-secondary institutions or professional/ vocational bodies and their initial consent to the collaboration plan, etc. Furthermore, the schools should devise contingency measures to cope with changes to the collaboration plan.
- (iii) As effective learning is based on a critical mass of students, schools meeting the above assessment criteria are still required to recruit an adequate number of students to operate two classes at each level, with a minimum of 21 students per class on average, in order to continue the operation of the collaborative courses.
- (iv) Apart from providing collaborative courses with post-secondary institutions or professional/vocational bodies, schools may also collaborate with other schools to further broaden the NSS curriculum. However, all schools in collaboration must meet the student number requirement in paragraph (iii) above.
- (v) If schools' applications for offering collaborative courses are approved, they may continue to operate under the class subvention mode and participate in SSPA with two classes. If the applications are not approved, schools may operate junior secondary classes under the Per Capita Subvention Mode starting from the subsequent school year.

### **Way Forward for Schools Operating Junior Secondary Classes under the Per Capita Subvention Mode**

13. Schools operating under the Per Capita Subvention Mode generally have a smaller school size and are unable to provide a broad, balanced and diversified curriculum which satisfies the requirements of the NSS academic structure, and this would affect students' learning effectiveness. Furthermore, the Per Capita Subvention Mode is only applicable to junior secondary levels. Thus those schools that were unsuccessful in their applications for development options in the 2006/07 school year and are now operating junior secondary classes under the Per Capita Subvention Mode will, in principle, not be provided with any government

subvention for the operation of senior secondary classes starting from the 2009/10 school year. All their S3 students, on completion of S3, will be allocated to S4 in other subsidized secondary schools where they can benefit from a broad and balanced NSS curriculum.

14. If the schools concerned intend to continue the operation of senior secondary classes, they may apply for operating senior secondary classes in private mode on a self-financing basis. Besides, we will continue our discussion with the schools concerned on other feasible development plans such as merger with other schools in order to provide a broad and balanced NSS curriculum. If an individual school intends to cease operation after the S1 students in 2006/07 have completed their senior secondary education, and is willing to provide top-up resources to ensure the provision of a broad and balanced NSS curriculum to the students concerned, we may give special consideration to such application.

### **Feasibility of Further Relief Measures**

15. Through the implementation of the measures set out in paragraphs 3 to 6 above, we anticipate that there will be a persistent demand for teachers in the coming few years, especially in the 2011/12 school year when S7 students under the existing academic system and SS3 students under the NSS academic structure co-exist.

16. In fact, as stated clearly in the policy document on the NSS academic structure published in 2005, the implementation of the initiatives under the new academic structure would rely on the re-deployment of savings arising from the decline in student population. Notwithstanding this, we have deployed additional resources as appropriate to implement a series of support measures as announced in April this year. We anticipate that, with these support measures in place, the number of secondary schools that would be affected by population decline will be greatly reduced. As resources are not unlimited and taking into consideration the projected overall economic downturn and fiscal constraints in the next few years, there would be little room for further support measures to be introduced.

### **Way Forward**

17. We will continue to liaise closely with those schools which are unable to operate three S1 classes for the first time in 2008/09, to explain the details of various development options and to render necessary assistance. We hope that the schools concerned could arrive at a decision and submit their application for the selected development option by the end of January 2009. On the other hand, we will continue our discussion with those schools operating junior secondary classes under the Per Capita Subvention Mode on possible options for their future development at the earliest opportunity.

18. We will continue to implement various measures announced for

stabilizing the development of schools and the teaching force. Besides, in the 2011/12 school year, we will review the supply and demand of teachers, and study the feasibility of adjusting the standard class size for the 2012/13 school year and beyond in the light of the prevailing economic conditions.

### **Advice Sought**

19. Members are welcome to comment on the development of secondary schools under the NSS academic structure, especially on the way forward set out in paragraphs 17 and 18.

Education Bureau  
November 2008

## **Measures to Maintain the Stability of School Development**

Measures to facilitate the stable development of schools:

1. Relaxation of the criteria for approving classes

In the September headcount of the 2008/09 school year, for schools with surplus teachers as a result of class packing, the basis for calculating the number of approved S1 classes has been lowered from 35 to 33 students per class, i.e., schools with an enrolment of 67 S1 students can meet the minimum requirement for operating three classes, with a minimum of 23 students per class on average. In the 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12 school years, the basis for calculating the number of approved S1 classes will be further lowered to 30 students per class, i.e., a minimum of 61 students will meet the requirement for operating three classes, with a further reduction of the average class size to 21 students.

2. Reduction in the number of students allocated to each S1 class

In the 2009/10 school year, the number of students allocated to each S1 class under the Secondary School Places Allocation will be reduced from 38 to 36. In the 2010/11 and 2011/12 school years, the number of students allocated to each S1 class will be further reduced to 34.

3. Lowering of the enrolment cap of students per S1 class

In the 2008/09 school year, the cap of 40 students per S1 class remains unchanged, including 38 students allocated under SSPA and two repeater places. Starting from the 2009/10 school year, the number of students capped per S1 class will be adjusted according to the number of students allocated to each class in that school year. For example, if 36 students are allocated to each class, the number of students will be capped at 38; if 34 students are allocated to each class, the number of students will be capped at 36.



**Support Measures Implemented to Maintain  
the Stability of the Teaching Force**

To balance the demand and supply of teachers, we have already implemented the following measures to maintain the stability of the teaching force:

1. Provision of more than 750 additional teaching posts at the junior secondary levels over a 3-year period starting from the 2006/07 school year to provide better support for the academically low achievers. As a result, the teacher-to-class ratio for the weakest 10% of students has been improved from the existing 1.3:1 to 2:1. The corresponding ratio for the remaining Band 3 students becomes 1.6:1.
2. Starting from the 2009/10 school year, improvement of the teacher-to-class ratio for the S6/S7 classes under the current structure from 2:1 to 2.3:1. That for other senior secondary levels under the current and NSS structure will be improved to 1.9:1. In the 2012/13 school year, the ratio will be further improved to 2:1.
3. Provision of the Teacher Professional Preparation Grant to schools, which can be used for employing teachers. This arrangement will further increase the number of teachers so that schools can create space and opportunities for the professional development of teachers in preparing for NSS.
4. Employment / secondment of suitable teachers to assist in curriculum development or school-based professional support services in EDB so as to create employment opportunities to absorb surplus teachers.
5. Implementation of the Early Retirement Scheme for Secondary School Teachers.
6. Implementation of a 5-year transitional period for surplus teacher arrangement to absorb surplus teachers in aided secondary schools.

## **Development Options for Schools**

Schools not being able to recruit the minimum number of students for operating three S1 classes may apply for the following development options to take forward their development:

### **(a) Injection of additional resources by the school sponsoring body**

2. Through the injection of additional resources, if a school is able to provide a broad and balanced curriculum under the NSS academic structure, to ensure that students will have diversified choices of electives and access to a variety of subject combinations, and to demonstrate their teachers having the relevant expertise in the subjects to be offered, the school could continue the operation of classes at senior secondary level for the concerned students under the class subvention mode. Schools applying for this option are required to submit a proposal, including staff deployment plan, timetable and resources allocation plan, etc, for EDB's consideration.

3. If the application is approved, the school sponsoring body has to provide a written guarantee of offering sufficient electives for students at senior secondary level. Since there is a three-year interval between the submission of the proposal and the implementation of the plan at senior secondary level, the school sponsoring body has to provide guarantee of resources for the students concerned to complete the three-year senior secondary education in the school.

### **(b) Merging/collaborating with other schools**

4. Through merger or collaboration with other schools, if a school is able to provide sufficient and diversified choices of subject combinations for the students, and to demonstrate their teachers having the relevant expertise in the subjects to be offered, the school could continue the operation of classes at senior secondary level for the concerned students under the class subvention mode.

5. Teachers to be deployed by the school should have expertise in the teaching of the electives of the NSS curriculum. There should be a sufficiently large critical mass of teachers to facilitate the building up of learning communities and the professional development of teachers. Schools applying for this option are required to submit a proposal, including staff deployment plan, timetable and resource allocation plan, etc, for EDB's consideration.

6. The proposal submitted by the school should clearly illustrate relevant administrative arrangements, the feasibility of the collaboration plan (the

arrangements for cooperative learning and project learning among students from different schools under the same electives, the arrangements for pastoral care and monitoring of learning outcomes) and how to maintain the consistency of school-based assessment.

7. The NSS curriculum of individual collaborating schools should meet the basic requirement of being broad and balanced. In the case of a merger, the proposal should outline the post-merger framework of governance and explain how stakeholders of the two schools will participate in school governance.

**(c) Undergoing special review**

8. Schools operating less than three S1 classes for the first time, having assessed themselves as being able to provide quality education reaching the standard of “good” or above, may apply for Special Review. If a school’s overall performance is rated as “good” or above in the Special Review, the school may continue to participate in the SSPA system and will be allocated the resources for operating three S1 classes for three consecutive school years.

9. The performance of a school is evaluated in the light of the performance areas as described in “Performance Indicators for Hong Kong Schools” published by the EDB in 2008. A school will be considered as having a “good” standard of performance only if its strengths outweigh its weaknesses. Besides, the standard of class teaching is another important criterion. Teachers must possess good professional knowledge and skills. Learning and teaching should help effectively consolidate and extend students’ acquired knowledge, and further develop students’ attitudes, knowledge and skills.

**(d) Joining the Direct Subsidy Scheme**

10. Schools wishing to apply for joining the Direct Subsidy Scheme should submit their applications to EDB. The schools concerned have to provide strong justifications, suitable development plans and sufficient evidence to demonstrate their readiness and capability to provide quality education for students and meet all requirements for participation in the scheme.

11. Applications will be considered in accordance with a set of criteria and with reference to the school’s track record. Quality and sustainability are our prime concerns. Besides, the school environment and facilities should meet its development needs and the school should demonstrate sound financial viability in operating the proposed school. The sponsoring body’s commitment to the implementation of the proposed school plan as well as the supply and demand of school places will also be taken into consideration.

**(e) Turning to private mode of operation**

12. A school wishing to apply for turning to private mode of operation should start from the S1 level and extend to other levels by phases until the school has completely turned private. As the government will not provide any subvention to private schools, the sponsoring body should be financially sound and must shoulder all the expenses of operating private classes (including payment for teachers' salary and all expenses related to the private classes).

13. The school should ensure that its operation as a private school will not contravene or violate the land lease conditions of the school site. In addition, the school has to provide evidence that it is capable of providing quality education, its learning environment and facilities meet the requirements for the all-rounded development of students and it has adequate financial resources to ensure its operation in private mode. Parents have to be clearly informed that the school will operate in private mode starting from the S1 level.