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Panel on Education

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 14 February 2011**

Provision of school places in the Islands District

Purpose

This paper sets out the concerns of the Panel on Education ("the Panel") about the provision of school places in the Islands District.

Background

2. According to the Administration, it is the policy of the Government to provide sufficient public sector school places for all eligible school-age children. The current Primary One Admission ("POA") System adopts the principle of vicinity as the basis for the allocation of Primary ("P") 1 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. Under the POA System and the SSPA System, parents may choose schools without restriction of school nets both at the Discretionary Places ("DP") Admission stage and under Part A for Unrestricted School Choices at the Central Allocation ("CA") stage. The allocation of school places is based on school nets under Part B for Restricted School Choices at the CA stage.

3. 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). The Islands school net (NT9) under the SSPA System covers the Lamma Island, Po Toi Island, Cheung Chau, Peng Chau, Mui Wo, Pui O, Tai O and Tung Chung. Each school net comprises all participating secondary schools physically located in that district and a number of secondary schools in other

districts. As the supply and demand of S1 places change over years, the secondary schools from other districts and the number of school places they provide may vary from year to year.

4. The Education Bureau ("EDB") has set up a Working Group on Review of School Nets, comprising representatives of major school councils, parent representatives, representatives of Committee on Home-School Co-operation and lay members to review the existing demarcation of the school nets and deliberate on the long-term arrangements, taking into account factors such as changes in the student population, demand and supply of school places, distribution of schools and transportation network in each district.

Deliberations of the Panel

5. The Panel had discussed the provision of school places in the Islands District per se and in the context of considering the proposal for the relocation of two drug treatment and rehabilitation centres ("DTRCs") of the Christian Zheng Sheng Association ("CZSA") in Ha Keng. Deputations had been invited to attend the meeting on 11 July 2009 to give views on the subject. The concerns of members are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

Adequacy of school places in the Islands District

6. Having regard to the remoteness of the Islands, members were concerned about the adequacy of public sector primary and secondary school places in the vicinity for selection by the local children. They noted that many students residing in the Islands District had to spend considerable time and money to travel to schools in other districts, such as the Central and Western ("C&W") District. Parents were worried about the safety of their children as they spent considerable time on transport, and students were discouraged from participating in after-school activities because of the long travel time.

7. According to the Administration, more school choices from Hong Kong Region had been made available for students in the Islands District. In the 2009-2010 school year, a total of 43 school choices were provided for selection by all P6 students in the Islands School Net to further increase the choices for parents and to better meet the needs of students residing in different parts of the Islands District. In addition to the seven participating secondary schools physically located in the Islands District, 36 schools in the

nearby districts, with 27 in Hong Kong Region (as compared to 15 in the 2008-2009 school year) were included.

8. The Administration pointed out that in the 2009-2010 school year, of the 1 231 P6 students in the Islands District taking part in the SSPA System, about 64% were offered DP or CA places under unrestricted school choices. Only 36% of students had to be allocated S1 places within the school net through CA. Among them, about 84% were allocated to secondary schools in the Islands District and around 16% to schools in other districts (with about 11% to Hong Kong Region). Moreover, among the schools netted from other districts, half of them had all their school places filled up after allocation. About 70% of the students were allocated to these schools according to their first three choices under the SSPA System. This proved that these schools were popular among students of the Islands District.

9. The Administration assured members that in order to meet the possible demand for public sector school places, it had reserved sites in Tung Chung for school building purpose. There were still several dozen vacant classrooms in the public sector primary schools which could be used to meet any growth in the demand for primary places in the district. With reference to the latest enrolment statistics from P1 to P6 as at mid November 2010, the projected demand for public sector S1 places in the Islands District would drop continuously in the coming years. The number of P6 students would decrease from about 1 200 in the 2010-2011 school year to about 800 in the 2015-2016 school year.

10. As regards the transport conditions in the Islands District, the Administration advised that it normally took about 45 minutes to travel say from Mui Wo to the C&W District by fast ferry, and from Tung Chung to the urban areas by bus. Students from low-income families were provided with travelling subsidies. The annual travelling subsidies for primary students going to schools in the urban areas ranged from \$2,800 to \$3,700, and those for secondary students ranged from \$6,300 to \$17,000. The annual travelling subsidies for primary students going to schools within the Islands District ranged from \$700 to \$1,100, and \$6,000 to \$6,900 for secondary students.

11. Members considered that the Administration had under-estimated the travelling time taken by Islands students to go to schools which could be as long as two to three hours to go to schools in the C&W District, as not only the ferry trip but the whole journey time between home and school should be counted.

Provision of school places and school net arrangements in South Lantau

12. Members were concerned in particular about the supply of public sector primary and secondary school places for students residing in South Lantau. According to the information provided by deputations, South Lantau had a population of about 17 700 and over 3 500 were full-time students. As there was no secondary school in the vicinity, South Lantau residents had all along requested the allocation of the former New Territories Heung Yee Kuk Southern District Secondary School ("ex-SDSS") site for operating a secondary school for local children. Members were concerned that the ex-SDSS site had been idling for many years, wasting public resources. Noting that the proposed relocation of the DTRCs of CZSA to the ex-SDSS site had yet to be finalized, members called on the Administration to decide expeditiously the site for the DTRCs of CZSA as it had implications on whether the ex-SDSS site could be allocated for the operation of a secondary school.

13. According to the Administration, it had been communicating with CZSA concerning the relocation of its DTRCS in Ha Keng to the ex-SDSS site. The relocation could not be effected as CZSA had yet to submit the required information. The Administration would need to seek the views of local residents on the relocation. While the Administration had not made any commitment to allocate the ex-SDSS site to CZSA, no other options for use of the site had been contemplated for the time being. The Administration stressed that the closure of the ex-SDSS was due to its low intake of students. It was at the request of local residents that the Administration had expanded the Islands School Net to allow Mui Wo students to choose schools in other districts.

14. Some members considered that the low intake of students in the ex-SDSS was because of the high turnover rate of its principals. Should there be a quality secondary school in the area, local students might choose to study there instead of selecting schools in other districts such as Cheung Chau and Tung Chung.

15. The Administration clarified that the ex-SDSS was a government school, and its teaching quality was on par with that of other public sector schools. It had only one S1 class in the last few years before closure, and the number of its S1 students decreased from 18 in the 2002-2003 school year to 13 in the 2003-2004 school year, while the overall student population in Mui Wo in the corresponding period was not declining. This reflected that many Mui Wo parents preferred sending their children to schools outside the area.

16. As regards the demand of South Lantau students for S1 places, the Administration advised that 59 P6 students in South Lantau participated in the SSPA System in the 2009-2010 school year. Of the 37 students who were offered DP or CA places under unrestricted school choices, 25 were allocated to secondary schools in the Islands District and 12 to schools in other districts. Only 22 students had to be allocated school places within the school net through CA. Among them, 16 were allocated to secondary schools in the Islands District and six to schools in other districts. The number of P6 students in South Lantau participating in the SSPA System was projected to be around 50 annually in the coming six years based on the latest enrolment statistics. Based on the population projection and pattern of parental choices in the past SSPA results, there was no evidence of sufficient demand of school places to support the operation of a new secondary school in South Lantau. In the Administration's view, even if all the P6 students proceeded to S1 in South Lantau, the number of students would still be too small to operate a secondary school with at least three S1 classes as required under the New Academic Structure.

17. Some members were of the view that while the preferred solution was to operate a secondary school for local students in South Lantau, the interim relief measure was to change the school net of South Lantau from Islands to C&W so that students, such as those living in Peng Chau, could go directly from home to schools located in C&W District.

18. The Administration stressed the need to follow the established mechanism for demarcation of school nets. The Administration advised that the Working Group had been deliberating on different proposals of merging the school nets. Before completion of the school net review, the existing demarcation of the 18 school nets should remain unchanged. In the interim, the Working Group had suggested that the Education Bureau should continue with the present netting arrangements of including more school choices from other districts which was a more flexible and balanced approach to cater for the different educational needs of students in the Islands District.

The educational needs of non-Chinese speaking students in South Lantau

19. According to the information provided by deputations, over 3 500 full-time students were residing in South Lantau. Of these, 655 were primary students including non-Chinese speaking ("NCS") students. The number of NCS students constituted about one-third of the school-age population in South Lantau and had been increasing steadily. Members considered that the number of P6 students participating in the SSPA System could not reflect the actual demand for S1 places in South Lantau. NCS students did not participate in the SSPA System as they preferred Direct

Subsidy Scheme secondary schools adopting English as the medium of instruction ("MOI"). Members considered it important to ascertain the number of NCS students in South Lantau in order to determine whether a local secondary school should be provided.

20. The Administration maintained its stance that the number of P6 students participating in the SSPA System formed the basis of its assessment on the demand for public sector S1 places. Of the 50 NCS P6 students in the Islands District participating in the SSPA System, 23 were from Mui Wo School and Bui O Public School in South Lantau. The Administration was aware of the number of students in the primary schools of South Lantau, including local and international primary schools. Of the 23 P6 students attending the Lantau International School in Tong Fuk in the 2010-2011 school year, the majority of them was NCS students. These students would likely prefer secondary schools that offered non-local curriculum. In case these students wished to attend schools that offered local curriculum, they could participate in the SSPA System and apply for the designated schools for NCS students. The Administration stressed that there were sufficient places in these schools to meet the demands of NCS students.

Formulation of school policy for the Islands District

21. Members were of the view that the factors to be considered for the operation of schools in urban and remote areas should be different. While the requirement of a minimum number of 61 students at each level could be maintained for schools in urban areas, such a requirement should be relaxed for schools in remote areas given the inconvenient transport conditions. Members called on the Administration to broaden its vision and formulate an appropriate policy for the operation of different types of secondary schools, such as those with boarding facilities to attract students from local and other districts, or those with direct subsidies using English as MOI for NCS students. Members suggested that at least one primary school and one secondary school should be provided in each Island of the Islands District should the student population reach a reasonable level. In the view of some members, the school should have at least two classes at each level and be given adequate teaching manpower to sustain its operation.

22. The Administration maintained its view that in addition to the consideration of public resources, the need to provide a broad and balanced curriculum to cater for the diverse learning interests of students and to create opportunities for them to interact with each other should be taken into account. Under the existing policy, 61 students at each level were the acceptable minimum. Two factors had been taken into account in formulating the policy of the three-class requirement for each level. First,

there should be sufficient teaching manpower and expertise for deployment. Second, there should be a critical mass of students, say around 700, to facilitate effective peer and collaborative learning as interaction among students was important in the learning process. While the Administration had all along considered that 24 classes, i.e. four classes for each level, were the most appropriate structure, it also recognized that flexibility should be allowed. As such, it allowed under certain conditions schools to operate 18 classes with 20 students for each class and three classes for each level. The Administration had no intention of adopting two sets of policies for urban and remote areas in terms of school operation.

23. Some members did not subscribe to the view that a secondary school would need to have a large number of students in order to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for students. They pointed out that the total number of students in some quality overseas private schools ranged from 200 to 400, and students of these schools were able to enjoy the benefit of small class teaching and participate in a variety of activities.

Relevant papers

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

Relevant papers on the provision of school places in the Islands District

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	17.6.2009 (Item II)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	11.7.2009 (Item IV)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	18.3.2010 (Item IV)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	30.4.2010 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	12.7.2010 (Item IV)	Minutes Agenda
Legislative Council	17.3.2010	Question asked by Hon Cyd HO on "Demand and Supply of School Places for Primary and Secondary Schools" Hansard (English) (page 69)
Panel on Education	13.12.2010 (Item IV)	Minutes Agenda