

For discussion on
11 April 2011

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Progress of the Voluntary Optimisation of Class Structure Scheme

Purpose

This paper reports the progress of the Voluntary Optimisation of Class Structure Scheme (the Scheme) and gives a brief account of some related issues.

Progress of the Scheme

2. To alleviate the problem of the sharp decline in student population, the Education Bureau (EDB) launched the Scheme in March 2010 to enable schools operating five or more Secondary One (S1) classes to implement the new class structure in an orderly manner. However, only 23 schools joined the Scheme. To encourage more eligible schools to join the Scheme and boost its effectiveness, we introduced enhanced measures under the Scheme in November 2010 after rounds of discussion with the sector and stakeholders.

3. The enhanced measures, which provide participating schools with more manpower and additional subsidies, will not only maintain the stability of the teaching force, but also improve the quality of teaching and facilitate the implementation of the new secondary school academic structure. We have received a total of 202 applications for the Scheme from secondary schools. As one school has been subsequently found ineligible and another one has withdrawn its application, a total of 200 schools will join the Scheme in the 2011/12 school year.

Supply and Demand of S1 Places

4. As we explained at the meeting held on 8 November 2010, the population of secondary school students will continue to decrease by more than 20%, i.e. a drop of about 15 000 students, in the coming years. In the face of this serious situation, even if there are 200 schools joining the Scheme, the reduction in school places is still smaller than the decline in the number of students. For example, the number of primary six students this school year has already decreased by nearly 5 000 over the previous school year. We anticipate that the secondary student population will continue to decline in the coming years. Thus, the larger the number of schools joining the Scheme, the more stable the overall situation in the

upcoming one to two years and the more effective the stabilising effect on the school sector will be.

5. We understand that there are concerns about the "excessive reduction" of S1 places which might occur when 200 secondary schools reduce classes in the 2011/12 school year. The provision of public sector secondary school places is planned on a territory-wide basis. Given the uneven distribution of secondary schools among school nets and demographic movement, it has been a long established practice of making netting arrangements at the Central Allocation stage under the Secondary School Places Allocation System in ensuring a stable supply of school places in each district and providing parents with more school choices. If there is a shortage of S1 places in a district, the deficit will be met by netting S1 places from nearby districts so as not to affect the students in other districts. Factors to be considered in making netting arrangements include the demand and supply of school places in each district, the locations of schools as well as the availability and accessibility of transportation means between the school nets. We will continue to endeavour to achieve a balance between the supply and demand of school places, and provide more school choices for parents under the Scheme through various measures.

Voluntary Class Reduction of Schools

6. As mentioned earlier, the EDB has received a total of 202 applications from about 90% of all eligible schools for joining the Scheme. It reflects the wide popularity of the policy received among the school sector. The EDB has explained the Scheme, which is voluntary in nature, to the school sponsoring bodies and the schools under their sponsorship. It was up to the school sponsoring bodies to decide, according to their will, whether their schools should join the Scheme or not.

7. We understand that a small number of stakeholders have doubts about joining the Scheme. The EDB has received their views through meetings of the School Management Committee, or communications with the school sponsoring bodies and related schools. We have responded to their concerns by explaining the details of the Scheme at meetings and correspondence. We understand that the School Management Committees/Incorporated Management Committees of the aided schools and the School Management Committees of the government schools joining the Scheme have communicated with their stakeholders on the importance of the Scheme in stabilising the ecology of the school sector and enhancing the quality of education.

Way Forward

8. At present, we are in the process of implementing the various work and arrangements related to the Scheme and will report progress to the Legislative Council as appropriate in due course.

Education Bureau

April 2011