

For discussion on
13 December 2010

Legislative Council Panel on Education
School Net Arrangements in Islands District
under the Secondary School Places Allocation System

Purpose

This paper informs Members the present school net arrangements in Islands District under the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) System¹ and updates Members on the principles and criteria for identifying S1 places from other districts such as Hong Kong Region to be netted to Islands District in order to provide more school choices to parents.

Background

2. It is Government's policy to provide sufficient public sector school places for all eligible school-age children. Provision of public sector secondary school places is planned on a territory-wide basis to achieve a balance in the overall supply and demand in Hong Kong.

3. Under the SSPA System, the whole territory is divided into 18 school nets in line with the district administration boundaries. The school net to which a P6 student belongs is determined by the physical location of the primary school the student attends. 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.

¹ The SSPA System is divided into 2 stages: Discretionary Places (DP) and Central Allocation (CA). The key features are as follows:

- At the DP stage, the maximum DP quota is 30% for each secondary school, and each P6 student can apply to two schools.
- At the CA stage, 10% of the CA places of each secondary school are set aside for *unrestricted* school choices in Part A, and students can choose a maximum of three secondary schools from any school nets. As for *restricted* school choices in Part B, students can choose a maximum of 30 schools within their own net.

Netting arrangements are conducted annually to ensure an adequate supply of S1 places to meet the demand and to provide parents with more school choices in each school net.

Allocation of S1 Places to Students in Islands School Net under SSPA System

4. Under the SSPA System, parents of P6 students studying in schools in the Islands District may choose schools in or outside the District at both the DP stage (a maximum of 2) and for *unrestricted* school choices (a maximum of 3) at the CA stage. It is only for *restricted* school choices at the CA stage that allocation of S1 places is done on a net basis (a maximum of 30 school choices within the net).

5. In the 2009/10 school year, of the 1 231 P6 students in Islands District participating in the SSPA System, about 64% students were offered DP or CA places under unrestricted school choices. Only 36% students had to be allocated S1 places within the school net through CA. Among them, about 84% were allocated to secondary schools in Islands District and around 16% were allocated to schools in other districts (with about 11% to Hong Kong Region) based on parental choices. It is worth noting that when parents select schools for their children, whether the school is in their vicinity is not their prime and only concern. The education philosophy and curriculum characteristics of the school are also their considerations.

Supply and Demand of Public Sector School Places in Islands District under SSPA System

6. In recent years, about 1 300 P6 students in Islands District participate annually in the SSPA System. Sufficient S1 places are provided each year to meet the demand of P6 students in Islands District. Based on the Government's latest population projection, the student population of Islands District would remain fairly stable in the coming few years. That said, 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 Islands District would continuously drop in the coming few years as the number of P6 students would decrease from about 1 200 in the 2010/11 school year to about 800 in the 2015/16 school year.

Provision of Public Sector School Places in South Lantau

7. We understand that some Members are concerned about the provision of public sector secondary school places for students studying in the two primary schools in South Lantau, i.e. Mui Wo School and Bui O Public School. In the 2009/10 school year, 59 P6 students² in South Lantau participated in the SSPA System. Of the 37 students who were offered DP or CA places under unrestricted school choices, 25 were allocated to secondary schools in 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 Islands District and 6 to schools in other districts. In fact, the number of P6 students in South Lantau participating in the SSPA System is projected to be around 50 annually in the coming 6 years based on the latest enrolment statistics. Even if all the P6 students proceed 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 required under the New Academic Structure. Besides, there are still about ten vacant classrooms in the public sector secondary schools in Islands District, which are available for meeting any growth in the demand for secondary school places in the district.

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. Under the New Academic Structure, schools need to provide a broad and balanced curriculum to cater for the diverse learning needs and interest of students. To ensure students' access to a reasonable choice of subject combinations, 18 classes (i.e. 3 classes for each level) are the acceptable minimum so that the students would benefit from six years of secondary education and develop their potential to the full. In deciding to operate a new school in remote area, its capability for sustainable development is a key consideration. Based on the population projection and pattern of parental choices in the past SSPA results, there is no evidence of sufficient demand of school places to support the operation of a new secondary school in South Lantau.

² There were originally 63 P6 students in South Lantau but 4 of them had applied for cross-net allocation in other school nets due to change of residence. Hence, for the Islands School Net, the number of students participated in SSPA is 59.

Principles and Criteria in School Net Arrangements for Islands District

9. Netting arrangements are conducted each year based on the prevailing principles viz. to ensure sufficient supply of S1 places to meet the demand and to increase parental choices in each of the 18 school nets. To enable parents to have more choices, a number of secondary schools (normally, a total of not less than 30 school choices) would be provided in each school net.

10. In line with the above principles, we have followed a set of criteria for identifying S1 places from other districts to be netted to Islands District which is as follows –

- (a) the demand and supply of S1 places in the Islands District and other relevant districts;
- (b) the availability and accessibility of transportation means to students in different parts of the district; and
- (c) the past allocation results reflecting parental choices (i.e. secondary schools chosen by parents at the DP and CA stages).

11. For paragraph 10(c) above, it is worth-noting that based on the allocation results in the 2009/10 school year, students in different parts of Islands District have different choice patterns, and are summarized as follows -

- (a) Tung Chung: about 90% of the students have selected and were allocated to schools in Tung Chung;
- (b) Cheung Chau: about 80% of the students have selected and were allocated to schools in Cheung Chau;
- (c) South Lantau: about 65% of the students have selected and were allocated to schools within Islands District;
- (d) Tai O: about 90% of the students have selected and were allocated to schools within Islands District;

- (e) Peng Chau: about 90% of the students have selected and were allocated to schools in Hong Kong Region; and
- (f) Lamma: about 80% of the students have selected and were allocated to schools in Hong Kong Region.

12. To further increase the choices for parents and to better meet the needs of students residing in different parts of Islands District, we have provided more school choices from Hong Kong Region in our netting arrangements for students in Islands District. In the 2009/10 school year, a total of 43 school choices were provided for selection by all P6 students in Islands School Net. In addition to the 7 participating secondary schools physically located in Islands District, 36 schools in the nearby districts, with 27 in Hong Kong Region (as compared to 15 in the 2008/09 school year) were included.

13. Given the special circumstances of Islands District, the school choices made by parents vary on different islands and this explains why the existing mechanism of including schools from other districts to increase diversity is a more flexible and balanced approach to cater for the different educational needs of students in Islands District. Same as previous years, for the 2010/11 school year, we will conduct the netting arrangements when the projected demand and supply of S1 places are available in March 2011. The school choices will be made known to parents of P6 students by mid-April 2011.

Request for School Net Review

14. Due to different transportation means in different parts of Islands District, some of their residents have asked for a change of school net from Islands to Central and Western (C&W), as in the case for SKH Wei Lun Primary School in Discovery Bay (DB).

15. The school net for P6 students of SKH Wei Lun Primary School under SSPA has been *temporarily* assigned to C&W in the 1990s on the ground that DB was then accessible only by ferry services between DB and Central. The temporary netting arrangement of SKH Wei Lun Primary School has been reviewed by the SSPA Committee from time to time. In the light of the restrictions in the land transport in DB, the Education Bureau has continued with the temporary netting arrangement

but recommended to put up the case for consideration by the Working Group set up in 2006 to review the school nets under the SSPA System.

Working Group on Review of School Nets

16. The Working Group (WG) on Review of School Nets, comprising representatives of major school councils, parent representatives, representatives of Committee on Home-School Co-operation and lay members, was set up by the Education Bureau to review the existing demarcation of the 18 school nets with a view to recommending feasible options to the Bureau. The WG has been deliberating on different proposals of merging the school nets. The WG is of the view that before completion of the school net review, the existing demarcation of the 18 school nets should remain unchanged. In the interim, the WG has suggested EDB to continue with the present netting arrangements of including more school choices from other districts which is a more flexible and balanced approach to cater for the different educational needs of students in Islands district.

Way Forward

17. We would continue to review the supply and demand of public sector secondary school places to ensure the provision of adequate public sector schools in Islands district.

Education Bureau
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