

For Discussion
on 7 February 2013

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Issues Related to the Shortfall in Primary School Places in the North District

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the measures for diversion of cross-boundary students, the anticipated shortfall of Primary One (P1) places in the North District under the Primary One Admission System (POA System) in 2013, and the measures to ensure sufficient P1 places for eligible students in the North District under the POA System.

Overview of Cross-boundary Students

2. The Government has taken measures since June 2011 to contain the number of non-local expectant women giving birth in Hong Kong. It has also made a decisive move to prohibit non-local expectant women to come to Hong Kong for delivery from 2013 onwards. However, the number of Type II babies (born to Mainland women in Hong Kong and whose fathers are non-permanent residents of Hong Kong) born in Hong Kong during 2006 to 2011 is nearly 160 000, and the number of such babies born during January to October 2012 is about 23 000. Like other locally-born babies, these Type II babies are eligible for local education as Hong Kong residents. The Census and Statistics Department conducted six rounds of Survey on Babies Born in Hong Kong to Mainland Women between 2007 and 2012. Based on the findings of the surveys, together with an analysis of the actual movement records travelling on Re-entry Permits in respect of Type II babies born between 2003 and 2011 with appropriate statistical adjustment, the *Hong Kong Population Projections 2012-2041* anticipates that about 50% of these Type II babies will return to Hong Kong for settlement before reaching the age of 21.

3. For those Type II babies that do not return to Hong Kong for settlement, some of them will cross the Shenzhen boundary to attend school in Hong Kong every day as cross-boundary students. However, it is worth noting that among cross-boundary students are also children of Hong Kong residents living in Shenzhen as well as Type I babies (born to Mainland women in Hong Kong and

whose fathers are permanent residents of Hong Kong). The surge in the number of cross-boundary students over the past years is posing a challenge to us. For 2012, there were about 6 800 cross-boundary students in the public sector primary schools¹. Cross-boundary students are mostly attending schools located in districts close to the boundary control points (including Tuen Mun, Yuen Long, the North District and Tai Po). The capacity of the boundary control points, security issues and the safety of cross-boundary students have been a matter of concern. In addition, the rising number of cross-boundary students, coupled with the fact that most of them choose to attend schools in the North District, will make the shortfall of P1 places more acute in the North District during this transitional period.

Diversion of Cross-boundary Students

4. Taking together the surplus places in the four above-mentioned districts close to the boundary control points, we find that the P1 places available should be able to meet the demand for the time being. Hence, we need to adopt multi-pronged strategies, including diversion of cross-boundary students to school nets with surplus school places, to ensure that there will be sufficient places to cope with a steady growth in the school-age population in Hong Kong.

5. The Lok Ma Chau Spur Line, Shenzhen Bay and Lok Ma Chau (Huanggang) boundary control points, which are close to the western part of the New Territories, are the main boundary control points used by cross-boundary students for attending schools in Tuen Mun and Yuen Long. To address the problem that most cross-boundary students are applying for school places in the North District and to encourage parents to choose schools elsewhere, the Education Bureau worked together with the Security Bureau and the Transport and Housing Bureau over the past two years to make continuous improvements to the immigration clearance and various transportation facilitation services at these three boundary control points. The related measures include:

- (1) increasing the number of pick up/drop off points for school coaches at the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Public Transport Interchange to facilitate local school coaches in providing services to cross-boundary students;

¹ Based on the Education Bureau's research on schools in the New Territories (including Tung Chung) and therefore not reflecting the situation of other districts.

- (2) implementing “simplified clearance procedures for cross-boundary students” at the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line and Shenzhen Bay boundary control points to shorten the time for clearance;
- (3) increasing the special quotas for cross-boundary school coach services in Shenzhen Bay; and
- (4) extending the on-board clearance services to the Lok Man Chau (Huanggang) boundary control point.

POA System

6. The effectiveness of the aforementioned diversion arrangements remains to be seen. Schools in the North District are under real pressure from keen demand for P1 places in this year’s POA because of an increase in the number of cross-boundary students. It is anticipated that the shortfall of P1 places in the North District will last at least up to 2018.

7. Under the existing P1 places allocation mechanism, all eligible children², including cross-boundary students holding a Hong Kong resident status, can apply for admission to public sector primary schools in September 2013³. In brief, the POA System comprises two stages: Discretionary Places Admission stage and Central Allocation stage. During the Discretionary Places Admission stage, parents are open to apply to any public sector primary schools. Each primary school can earmark about half of its P1 places as discretionary places, and the remaining places will be used for central allocation. At the Central Allocation stage, two categories of places are made available, namely places for unrestricted school choices and places for restricted school choices. At present, there are 36 school nets in Hong Kong and children are assigned a school net depending on their place of residence. Regarding cross-boundary students, their parents can choose for them from one of the eight relevant schools nets⁴ in

² Taking the 2013 POA (i.e. application for P1 places in government or aided schools in September 2013) as an example, applicants must meet all the requirements below:

- (1) Hong Kong resident;
- (2) Reach the age of five years and eight months by the time of enrollment in September 2013 (i.e. born on or before 31 December 2007; children who were born on or after 1 January 2008 are underage);
- (3) Not attending any primary school; and
- (4) Have never been allocated a P1 place under the POA System.

³ Public sector primary schools include government and aided schools.

⁴ Cross-boundary children can choose one of the following eight School Nets as their school net for POA:

districts close to and directly accessible from boundary control points (i.e. Tuen Mun, Yuen Long, North and Tai Po) as their school net. The Central Allocation is based primarily on parental choices. For oversubscribed schools, the order of priority in school places allocation will be determined by a computer-generated random number for each applicant so as to ensure fairness.

Provision of P1 Places in the North District in 2013

8. There is a shortfall of P1 places in the North District as most cross-boundary students choose to attend primary schools there. We have imposed restrictions on late submission of applications for P1 places in the North District after the close of POA application under the Central Allocation stage. In addition to making repeated appeals, we have also written to all parents of cross-boundary students on an individual basis, encouraging them to consider sending their children to schools in Tuen Mun West and Tin Shui Wai which are easily accessible from other boundary control points. A preliminary count of applications for places in the North District at the Central Allocation stage shows that the shortfall of P1 places in the district should be less than 1 400.

9. In anticipation of the decrease in population of cross-boundary students several years later, we will adopt more flexible measures to ensure that sufficient P1 places will be made available for take-up in September 2013. Such measures include borrowing places from the adjacent school net (i.e. School Net 84: Tai Po), making use of unused classrooms in the North District and/or converting rooms originally designed for other purposes into additional classrooms, and allocating more students to each class. In addition, we have embarked on extension projects in four existing primary schools in the North District. We have also devised contingency plans to ensure that the additional classrooms needed will be available for use in the 2013/14 school year.

Major Concerns of Stakeholders

10. Stakeholders in the North District, particularly some parents, are concerned that their children may be allocated primary school places in Tai Po,

Tuen Mun: 70 (Tuen Mun West); 71 (Tuen Mun East)

Yuen Long: 72 (Tin Shui Wai); 74 (Yuen Long East)

North District: 80 (Sheung Shui); 81 (Fanling); 83 (Sha Tau Kok)

Tai Po: 84

resulting in cross-district schooling. We will implement special measures after the release of POA allocation results in June 2013 to assist students, who are residing in the North District and have chosen a school net in the North District during their POA application but have been allocated P1 places in Tai Po in the Central Allocation exercise, and want to give up the allocated P1 places and study in their home district instead. We will address their wish to study in their home district by increasing the number of P1 places in the North District.

11. Some stakeholders have proposed that immediate change be made to the order of priority for the Central Allocation exercise under the POA 2013 to allow students residing in the North District to have priority in allocation of P1 places in the district. In fact, when inviting application for POA 2013 (in September 2012), we have made clear to all parents the eligibility requirements (including the child concerned must be a Hong Kong resident), and that P1 places are allocated according to the computer-generated random numbers in the Central Allocation exercise (see paragraph 7). In other words, children residing in the school net do not have priority in the Central Allocation exercise. In this regard, all parents will have legitimate expectations on the publicly announced operation of the Central Allocation exercise (including the order of priority). It is not advisable to change the order of P1 places allocation haphazardly when the exercise is now in progress. We will continue to maintain close contact vigorously with schools in the North District, with an aim to increasing the number of school places in the North District through operation of additional classes and allocating more students per class.

12. As the number of cross-boundary students is expected to keep rising in the coming years, we will continue to collaborate with other bureaux and departments to improve the cross-boundary support measures for more effective diversion of cross-boundary students to other districts. In addition, we will make every effort to enhance the arrangements for the 2014/15 and subsequent school years, with a view to according priority to the students of the North District in a legal and reasonable way. Our objective is to significantly reduce the number of students who need to study in other districts because of the impact of cross-boundary students.

13. It should be noted that since the middle of last year, the number of cases of non-local expectant women giving birth in Hong Kong has decreased drastically. Hence, the demand for school places arising from return of Type II babies (including cross-boundary students) is temporary. Construction of

schools requires precious land resources and substantial funds, and should therefore be in alignment with the long-term development of the districts concerned as well as the existing schools in the districts. We will utilise existing school facilities as far as possible to increase the supply of school places in a timely manner to cope with the anticipated growth of cross-boundary students flexibly. We will also strive to make continuous efforts to identify vacant school premises suitable for school purposes.

14. In view that the age profile of the population of each district will change with time, it is not practical to ensure a sufficient supply of school places for students of the district for each year. Besides, about half of the P1 places of schools under the Discretionary Place Admission stage and the three choices of schools under “unrestricted school choices” in the Central Allocation stage are not restricted to school nets, some of the school places in all schools may be given to students from other districts. Hence, the implementation of “schooling within district” is not practical and will increase difficulty in the planning for school places. In addition, year-on-year changes in the actual demand for school places, particularly for individual districts, are inevitable. Factors in play include parents’ preference, relocation of population, geographical distribution of schools as the result of long-term development, development of individual schools, newly arrived children, etc. This explains why the supply of school places may not be entirely at equilibrium with the actual demand from children living within the district, not to mention the actual demand in individual school nets. To cope with possible shortfall of P1 places at the Central Allocation stage in individual school nets in a particular school year, we will continue to implement the flexible measures set out in paragraph 9 where appropriate to balance the demand for and supply of school places in specific districts/school nets.

15. We will maintain close liaison with schools in the school nets concerned, and work together to deal with the shortfall of school places in individual school nets arising from cross-boundary students.

Education Bureau
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