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LegCo Panel on Education

**Report of the Subcommittee on
facilities in special schools for physically handicapped children**

Purpose

This paper reports on the work of the Subcommittee on facilities in special schools for physically handicapped children (the Subcommittee).

The Subcommittee

2. The Subcommittee was formed under the LegCo Panel on Education at the meeting on 26 October 1998 to follow up issues concerning the improvements to the facilities and learning environment in the special schools for physically handicapped children. Chaired by Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong, the Subcommittee has held three meetings and paid visits to five special schools, including the two schools which provide boarding places to physically handicapped children.

3. The membership list of the Subcommittee and representatives of the Administration and organizations who have attended discussion is in **Appendix I**. A list of special schools visited is in **Appendix II**.

Work of the Subcommittee

4. The Subcommittee has discussed with representatives of Hong Kong Special Schools Council (HKSSC), Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation Community Rehabilitation Network (HKSR) and parents' association the provision of facilities in special schools for physically handicapped children. Following a visit to special schools on 18 November 1998, the Subcommittee has identified a number of areas which require improvements and has urged the Administration to take immediate improvement measures including the provision of air-conditioning and standard items for special schools.

5. The Subcommittee has reviewed the progress at meetings held on 25 November 1998 and 26 February 1999, and during a visit to special schools on 5 May 1999. Details of the deliberations and achievements of the Subcommittee are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Air-conditioning

6. The Subcommittee is particularly concerned about the difficulties and discomfort of those physically handicapped children who have to wear braces or thick protective garments in movements and during sleep. These thick garments are rather uncomfortable especially in hot, humid summer. To provide a better environment to these handicapped children in order to enhance their concentration at school, the Subcommittee has urged the Administration to provide air-conditioning to all classrooms, special rooms, school hall and the boarding section of special schools for physically handicapped children.

7. The Administration has advised that the Subcommittee's proposal will involve substantial capital and recurrent costs and has an impact on other government and subvented institutions for the physically handicapped. As a first step, ED will provide air-conditioning to all classrooms and facility rooms of special schools from the 1998/99 school year. It has also agreed in principle to support the provision of air-conditioning to the boarding section of special schools for physically handicapped children. As regards air-conditioning for the school hall, the Administration will have to carefully examine the policy and resource implications.

8. The Chairman of the Subcommittee has also suggested the two electric companies to provide a preferential rate on electricity or donate air-conditioners to these special schools. The Hong Kong Electric Company Limited and China Light & Power Company Limited have subsequently responded in April 1999 that they are willing to donate a total of some 90 air-conditioners and the installation costs to special schools with boarding places for the physically handicapped children. These air-conditioners will be installed before summer. Parents' representatives have agreed to pay reasonable fees for electricity of air-conditioning in the boarding section.

Special furniture and equipment

9. The Subcommittee has noted that some physically handicapped children require tailor-made furniture and special equipment at school, and that these special items are more expensive than the standard items. To ensure that suitable furniture is provided for physically handicapped children, the Subcommittee has suggested, and the Education Department (ED) has agreed, that adjustable desks and chairs will be included as standard provisions for these special schools. HKSSC has agreed to suggest to ED the specifications and the costs of these desks and chairs. ED will also approve applications for the purchase of tailor-made furniture items based on the average and reasonable costs quoted by local suppliers.

10. Considering that handicapped students in these special schools often require ambulating equipment, ED has agreed to the Subcommittee's suggestion that suction machines, beds with railing, emergency call bell, small drawer sets for medicine and sterilizers should be included in the list of standard provisions for special schools.

11. With regard to special schools' original proposal of increasing the spending limit of school principals from \$3000 to \$8000 under the School and Class Grant, the survey of HKSSC indicated divergent views of the special schools concerned. Under the present system, school principals can apply for non-recurrent subsidy under ED's annual allocation to purchase special items which are over and above the principals' spending limits. To enable school principals to procure their furniture and equipment (F&E) in a more timely and efficient manner, ED will simplify and streamline the procedures for processing applications from special schools for F&E grants. Considering that school principals have yet to reach a consensus regarding the need to increase the spending limit, the Subcommittee agrees that the proposal may be held in abeyance.

Size of classrooms

12. The Subcommittee has noted that special schools have requested increasing the provision of classrooms for physically handicapped children as many of them are wheelchair-bound and require supporting equipment in their movements. During a visit to special schools on 5 May 1999, the Subcommittee has recommended providing larger classrooms and more flexible partitioning of classrooms/activity rooms in special schools for physically handicapped children. After discussion, ED has agreed to recommend an increase of the provision of classroom size from 45m² to 55 m², and to consider the case for increasing it to 60m² as suggested by the Subcommittee, in the design of special schools for physically handicapped children.

Kitchen facilities

13. The Subcommittee has noted that some parents have requested the provision of kitchen facilities in all special schools for physically handicapped children. Currently, only the two special schools which offer boarding places are provided with standard kitchen facilities. Members have noted, however, that some special schools without boarding facilities have converted their pantries or staff quarters to semi-kitchen for preparation of special diets for children who have chewing and swallowing difficulties. According to these schools, most private caterers are unwilling to provide special diets for these children in view of the small number of children involved and the scattered locations of these schools. The Subcommittee considers that parents also have a role in preparing lunches for their children, but notes that some parents may have difficulties in this respect.

14. The Subcommittee has noted that there are fire safety considerations, in

addition to manpower and other resource implications, for providing kitchens in special schools. At the suggestion of Hon HO Mun-ka, the Subcommittee has sought the assistance of the Hospital Authority to make use of the latter's Food Chill Service to provide special meals to students in special schools. This can solve the problem of special diet for special schools in the long term if welcome by parents and schools. ED and HKSSC are discussing the delivery arrangements with the Hospital Authority.

School bus

15. The Subcommittee considers that Government should provide school bus service for physically handicapped children as they cannot make use of the public transport facilities and they are required to attend school under the nine-year compulsory education policy. At present, most of the school buses of these special schools are acquired by private donations, with drivers provided by ED. Parents have to pay about \$400-\$500 a month for school bus service. In response to members' concern, the Administration has advised that so far special schools have no problem in obtaining donations for purchase and replacement of old school buses. If there are difficulties in arranging transport for these students, ED will have a responsibility to assist in this respect. Nevertheless, if the Administration is to meet all recurrent costs of school bus service, it will have to carefully examine the policy and resource implications.

16. Noting that school buses of special schools have to stop in restricted zones for picking up and setting down of physically handicapped children, the Subcommittee has written to the Transport Department requesting compassionate arrangements for granting restricted zone permits to school buses for physically handicapped children. The Subcommittee has noted that there have not been difficulties in granting such permits.

Hydrotherapy service

17. In view of the benefits of hydrotherapy to the physical development of handicapped children, the Subcommittee has urged the Administration to examine the need for providing a hydrotherapy pool for each special school for physically handicapped children. The Administration has advised that the suggestion will have substantial resource and manpower implications. In this respect, the Subcommittee has noted that special schools which do not have their own hydrotherapy pools currently make use of the Hospital Authority facilities in the vicinity. The Subcommittee therefore recommends these schools to continue making use of the facilities available in the community while exploring the possibility of providing a smaller pool in the design of special school.

School design and re-provisioning of old schools

18. Members of the Subcommittee have noted with concern that some special

schools are already very old and their design does not meet present day standards. During the visit in November 1998, the Subcommittee urged the Administration to take urgent remedial measures to improve the uneven ground and the fire exit of Margaret Trench Red Cross School, and to speed up the re-provisioning of old schools already on the schedule. The Administration has undertaken to carry out emergency repairs and the necessary improvement works to the schools concerned. It is noted that re-provisioning of schools is on-going, and the progress will depend on availability of suitable sites.

19. The Subcommittee also recommends the Administration to provide purpose-built special schools as the standard school design definitely does not suit the special needs of handicapped children. In this connection, the Subcommittee is particularly concerned about the provision of toilet facilities, handrails, ramps, lifts, storage area, access roads and other facilities required by physically handicapped children. Members have suggested the Administration to consult the users on the detailed design of new schools and the necessary alteration works required for some old schools. The Administration has also agreed to include provision of toilets near the classrooms of junior classes in the future school design, and to consult the schools on other special requirements in the design stage.

Conclusions

20. HKSSC and HKSR are kept informed of the progress made by the Subcommittee in pursuing the various improvement proposals. They are appreciative of the achievements made so far.

21. The Administration will continue to discuss with HKSSC and individual schools concerned to implement the agreed improvements. In view of the substantial progress made, the Subcommittee considers that no further meetings need be held and a report on its work should be submitted to the Panel on Education for information.

Legislative Council Secretariat

17 June 1999

LegCo Panel on Education

**Subcommittee on facilities in special schools
for physically handicapped children**

Membership List

Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong (Chairman)
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum

**LegCo Panel on Education
Subcommittee on facilities in special schools
for physically handicapped children**

**List of representatives of the Administration and organizations
who have attended discussion**

The Administration

Education and Manpower Bureau

Mrs Margaret CHAN (Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower (9))

Education Department

Mr K K CHONG (Assistant Director of Education (Services))

Mr M S LAU (Assistant Director of Education (Services))

Mr S K LEE (Principal Education Officer (Services))

Mr Albert K W WONG (Senior Inspector (Special Schools Planning))

Organizations

Hong Kong Special Schools Council

Mrs LING LAU Yuet-fun, Laura

Mr Andrew TSE Chung-yee

The Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation Community Rehabilitation Network

Mr CHING Pui-kei (Parents' representative)

Mrs MAK CHAN Lai-lun (Parents' representative)

Mrs POON MOK Hing-yin (Parents' representative)

Mr YEUNG Ka-wai (Parents' representative)

Ms HO Shuk-yi (Registered Social Worker)

**LegCo Panel on Education
Subcommittee on facilities in special schools
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List of special schools visited

18 November 1998

Hong Kong Christian Service Pui Oi School

Margaret Trench Red Cross School

John F Kennedy Centre*

5 May 1999

Jockey Club Elaine Field School

Princess Alexandra Red Cross Residential School*

(*with boarding section)