

立法會
Legislative Council

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LegCo Panel on Education

Minutes of Meeting
held on Monday, 19 April 1999 at 4:30 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

Members Present : Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung (Chairman)
Prof Hon NG Ching-fai (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, JP
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon SIN Chung-kai
Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon CHOY So-yuk
Hon SZETO Wah

Public Officers Attending : Item II
Mrs Fanny LAW, JP
Director of Education

Item III

Mr Raymond YOUNG
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mrs Fanny LAW, JP
Director of Education

Mr K S LEE

Principal Education Officer (Allocation & Support)

Item IV

Mr Raymond YOUNG
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mrs Fanny LAW, JP
Director of Education

Mr C K TAM
Assistant Director of Education (Chief Inspector of Schools)

Attendance by Invitation : Hong Kong Association of Heads of Secondary Schools

Mr LAM Wing-biu
Vice-chairman

Sr WONG May-may
Executive Committee Member

Clerk in Attendance : Mrs Constance LI
Chief Assistant Secretary (2) 2

Staff in Attendance : Mr Stanley MA
Senior Assistant Secretary (2) 6

I. Date of next meeting and items for discussion
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1625/98-99]

Members agreed to discuss the following two items at the next meeting on 17 May 1999 -

- (a) progress of Year 2000 compliance exercise in Government, Government-funded and Government-regulated organizations; and
- (b) supervision of the administration of UGC-funded tertiary education institutions including staff recruitment and administration of

employment contracts.

2. Members also agreed to invite representatives of the governing bodies and staff associations of the eight UGC-funded tertiary education institutions to the meeting. To facilitate discussion at the meeting, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong and Miss Emily LAU would prepare a list of concerns for advance information of the governing bodies and staff associations of these institutions.

II. Information paper(s) issued since last meeting

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1625/98-99]

3. Members noted the report of the Consumer Council on its recent Study of Market Practice in the Textbook Industry, which was requested by members at the meeting held on 28 July 1998.

III. Improvements to the Secondary School Places Allocation System (SSPA)

[Paper Nos. CB(2)1713/99-00(02) - (03)]

4. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr LAM Wing-biu of the Hong Kong Association of Heads of Secondary Schools (HKAHSS) said that HKAHSS had strong views against releasing information about the banding of students in the SSPA exercise. He said that the results of Primary Six students of a school in the Academic Aptitude Test (AAT), categorized in five bands, did not reflect accurately the individual students' academic attainments. In essence, HKAHSS held the following views -

- (a) banding was only an allocation instrument and a student's allocated band did not reflect his/her academic achievements in the school;
- (b) the qualities and academic achievements of students allocated the same band could vary from district to district;
- (c) the AAT results of a school were the collective attainments of its students and were used for determining the allocation of bands to its students; and
- (d) students ranked top during internal assessments were not necessarily the top scorers in AAT. It was noted that boys on average obtained higher scores than girls in AAT while girls on average performed better than boys in the internal assessments.

5. Mr LAM stressed that the disclosure of allocation bands would bring about

undesirable labelling effect on lower band students as they would be looked upon as low achievers, jeopardizing their self-image and confidence. Moreover, following the implementation of the Medium of Instruction (MOI) Policy from Secondary One in the 1998-99 school year, disclosure of allocation bands had encouraged and facilitated more students of higher bands to change schools after the release of the allocation results. In this connection, HKAHSS had conducted a survey covering 342 member schools. The survey revealed that out of the 234 schools which had responded, a total of 4 908 Secondary One students had not taken up the places allocated to them through the central allocation. Some 5 892 Secondary One students were however accepted into the discretionary places of other schools. He said that the large number of students changing schools had seriously hampered the operation of the SSPA system.

6. Sr WONG May-may of HKAHSS supplemented that the survey was conducted in response to the grave concerns expressed by school heads about the high mobility of Secondary One students in the 1998-99 school year. According to survey results, the average mobility of Secondary One students in schools adopting Chinese and English as their MOIs were 15.14% and 5.45% respectively. Some schools were over-enrolled and the size of Secondary One classes ranged from 23 to 45. Sr WONG said that the confusion in the 1998-99 allocation exercise was attributed in part to the surplus supply of about 5 100 Secondary One places and the introduction of the MOI policy in the year. HKAHSS therefore suggested the following remedial actions for the 1999-2000 allocation exercise -

- (a) Education Department (ED) should discuss with the Office of the Privacy Commissioner on non-disclosure of the allocation bands of students;
- (b) the number of Secondary Two classes should remain unchanged irrespective of the actual enrolment of Secondary One students;
- (c) the MOI policy should be reviewed; and
- (d) value-added indicators should be adopted to assess the academic achievements of students.

7. The Chairman then invited Principal Education Officer (Allocation & Support) (PEO(AS)) to explain the operation of the SSPA system. PEO(AS) highlighted the following features of SSPA -

- (a) the allocation of Secondary One places was based on the results of three internal assessments conducted by schools in Primary Five and Primary Six. The chance of a Primary Six student being allocated to a school of his/her choice depended largely on his/her attainments in these internal assessments;

- (b) as different schools might have different curricula and standards of assessment, students participating in SSPA were required to sit for the AAT. The results of AAT would be used to scale and convert the schools' internal assessment for fair comparison of assessment results of different schools. The AAT score of a student would not affect his/her marks attained in the internal assessments;
- (c) the whole territory was divided into 18 school nets. Each net comprised all the participating primary and secondary schools physically located in the area, and secondary schools situated in other areas providing school places for the net;
- (d) students would be divided into five equal allocation bands based on their order of merit in the internal assessments scaled by the AAT of all students in a school net. Boys and girls were ranked separately. The order of allocation for students of the same band was determined by a computer-generated number allotted to each student; and
- (e) allocation of Secondary One places was based on the school-net. Band One students were allocated places first based on their parents' choices, followed by Band Two and so on. Within a band, all first choices would be allocated first, to be followed by second choices and so on. The process would repeat until all students in the net had been allocated a place.

8. With regard to the points raised by representatives of HKAHSS, PEO(AS) made the following responses -

- (a) some parents preferred a particular medium of instruction and the availability of 5 100 Secondary One places in 1998-99 had provided more opportunities for them to change schools. The situation would be improved with ED reducing the number of floating classes in secondary schools, thus lowering the number of surplus Secondary One to around 1 800 in 1999-2000. It was envisaged that some of these places would be taken up by newly arrived children from the Mainland; and
- (b) ED would not release the banding information to students from the 1999-2000 school year. ED had also obtained legal advice and the consent of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data on the proposed elimination of banding information after the 1999-2000 allocation.

9. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said he was more concerned about the labelling

of schools which were allocated more Band Five students. To reduce the psychological impact on students enrolled in these schools, Mr CHEUNG suggested the Administration to consider grouping the five bands into three and allocating students from more than one band to each school.

10. Director of Education (D of E) noted Mr CHEUNG's suggestion. She said the Education Commission (EC) was conducting an overall review of the education system in Hong Kong, and SSPA had been included in the second phase of the review. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong commented that education reforms should require careful deliberations. He pointed out that schools enrolling more Band Five students had less Secondary Four places, creating considerable difficulties for these students to continue education after Secondary Three.

11. Miss Emily LAU agreed with Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong that measures should be taken to reduce the labelling effects on Band Five students. She suggested that the allocation system should provide sufficient flexibility to accommodate the parents' choices. She therefore questioned why HKAHSS suggested a mechanism against students changing schools after the SSPA central allocation. She also queried the rationale for not disclosing the banding information to students. Mr SIN Chung-kai held similar views, expressing reservations about the suggestion of HKAHSS that the change of schools after the central allocation should be approved by ED.

12. Sr WONG of HKAHSS clarified that the proposal was only to prevent too many changes within the few days after announcement of central allocation results. She said that there were similar restrictions for Primary One Admission System and the Junior Secondary Education Assessment System. Sr WONG also pointed out that some students who were allocated schools of their first choice still applied for discretionary places in other schools. Such practice would result in a waste of resources and cause confusion to the schools concerned.

13. Responding to Miss Emily LAU, D of E explained that banding of students was a device for allocation of school places only. It was not a good indicator of the students' abilities. Indeed, the cut-off scores for different bands varied between districts. The labelling effect was also demoralising to students of the lower bands. She pointed out that the student movement in 1998 was the result of market force as explained in paragraph 8 above. As a result of having fewer students, schools admitting more Band Five students should be able to pay more individual attention to their students. This was desirable from an educational point of view. Responding to Miss LAU's concern about the possibility of reduction of classes due to insufficient intake of Secondary One students in some schools, D of E said that the intake of Secondary One students might vary each year and ED had no intention of cutting classes of the schools, provided Director of Audit would not query. As a member of Public Accounts Committee, Miss LAU said that she supported D of E's position. She considered that schools

admitting more Band Five students should be allowed to retain existing resources even if student number dropped.

14. Responding to Mr Andrew WONG on the desirability of disclosing the banding information, D of E reiterated that the information was no more than a tool for allocation of Secondary One places and could be misconstrued as a measure of a student's overall ability. Mr LAM of HKAHSS supported non-disclosure of the banding information in order to avoid stigmatization of students who were allocated lower bands.

15. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung asked whether measures could be taken to achieve a more even distribution of students of different bands to avoid concentrating Band Five students in some secondary schools. D of E responded that the EC was reviewing the SSPA. One school of thought was to widen the range of abilities within each school. She pointed out that it would pose difficulties in teaching if the learning abilities of students in a class varied too much. She said that most people would judge the performance of secondary schools on the basis of their public examinations results. To change this attitude, ED was considering the formulation of value-added indicators for assessing the achievements of schools and its students. ED was also considering releasing more information on secondary schools, for example, their achievements in art, music, or sport to facilitate parents to select schools for their children. PEO(AS) supplemented that the SSPA system had also provided for parental choices and the allocation results were often the outcome of market force. He said that the long-term goal of ED was to develop a set of value-added indicators for schools admitting more lower band students. Schools which had less intake of Secondary One students would be allowed to operate smaller classes to enhance the quality of education.

16. Dr YEUNG Sum shared the concern about the labelling effect and expressed support for non-disclosure of banding information to schools and students. He considered that it would take time to change parents' attitude towards the mother tongue teaching policy. He also supported Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's proposal of a Three Bands system to reduce the negative impact on students in Band Five schools.

17. Mrs Selina CHOW commented that there should be a balance in allowing changes of parental choices after the central allocation. She was of the view that while parents could have a choice in selecting schools for their children, too many changes after the central allocation would definitely cause confusion to all concerned. As regards the disclosure of banding information, she considered that the issue was whether the information should only be released to the individuals concerned or to other parties. She also welcomed the development of value-added indicators and requested the Administration to elaborate on the coverage and application of such indicators.

18. D of E responded that as the AAT scores were not directly related to the student's academic attainment, disclosure of such information might have adverse psychological effects on the students. On the value-added indicators, PEO(AS) said that ED was still considering whether these indicators should include extra-curricular activities and physical education in addition to academic attainments. The Chairman advised that the Panel would discuss the value-added indicators at a future meeting.

19. Mr SZETO Wah expressed support for non-disclosure of allocated bands. He considered that the 1998 situation would not recur because the confusion last year was only the combined effect of three factors taking place at the same time.

20. Miss Emily LAU asked whether HKAHSS had any views on the proposal of adopting different MOI for different subjects in private independent schools. Mr LAM of HKAHSS said that from the professional angle, HKAHSS considered that mother tongue teaching was good for Secondary One to Three students. For Secondary Four to Five, schools should have the discretion to adopt the MOI best suited to the needs and standards of their students.

21. The Chairman thanked representatives of HKAHSS for attending the meeting.

IV. Teaching of Putonghua in schools

[Paper Nos. CB(2)721/98-99(01) and CB(2)1713/98-99(04)]

22. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong briefed members on his submission, highlighting his concerns about the provision of sufficient teachers for teaching Putonghua, the adequacy of Putonghua lessons in schools, and the allowances for Putonghua classes. He also made the following suggestions -

- (a) the Putonghua proficiency of some existing teachers would require improvement;
- (b) there should be more Putonghua lessons in schools to meet the curriculum requirements; and
- (c) the provision of recurrent grant and special grant to schools for Putonghua teaching should be based on the actual number of classes operated, with flexibility in the use of such grants.

23. Assistant Director of Education (Chief Inspector of Schools) (ADE(CI)) responded as follows -

- (a) as Putonghua was a relatively new subject, it was noted that some Putonghua teachers might still lack confidence in teaching Putonghua. ED would therefore provide more training to these teachers, for example, by arranging summer courses in Beijing;
- (b) ED noted that some schools had difficulties in arranging two Putonghua lessons a week for Primary One and Primary Two students, and that some 30% of primary and the majority of secondary schools could arrange only one Putonghua lesson a week. The situation was unsatisfactory and ED hoped this would be improved after the comprehensive review on school curriculum;
- (c) ED had substantially increased the level of grants for Putonghua teaching from the 1998-99 school year. ED had noted that most schools used the allowances for purchase of teaching materials and equipment, and ED would review whether more flexibility should be allowed in the use of these allowances; and
- (d) for schools which did not teach Putonghua as a subject, they could apply for other funding support from ED in the organization of extra-curricular activities for promoting the use of Putonghua.

24. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong commented that there were already too many subjects in the school curriculum. He suggested that ED could consider the alternative of designing some practical Putonghua sessions to develop students' skills in communicating in Putonghua. He also suggested establishing benchmarks for Putonghua teachers and organizing short summer courses for students to speak Putonghua. With regard to the use of grants, Mr CHEUNG urged the Administration to provide more flexibility for schools in using the grant as long as it was for promoting Putonghua teaching. The Deputy Chairman expressed support for extending Putonghua teaching to outside the classroom, subject to the availability of an effective evaluation system.

25. Miss CHOY So-yuk agreed with Mr CHEUNG's suggestions. In view of the inadequate supply of proficient Putonghua teachers, she suggested ED consider employing native speakers who might not necessarily have the recognized qualifications for teaching in public sector schools. ADE(CI) responded that all teachers in public sector schools must meet the basic qualification requirements. For those without the recognized qualification, they could assist in organizing extra-curricular activities conducted in Putonghua. Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (DS(EM)) supplemented that some schools had employed Putonghua speaking teachers who had passed ED's language assessment test to teach Putonghua on a temporary basis.

26. Mr SIN Chung-kai supported setting benchmarks for Putonghua teachers.

In view of the difficulties in providing sufficient qualified teachers to teach Putonghua, he saw no objection for schools to optimize their resources by employing temporary teachers who met the benchmarks for teaching Putonghua. However, he questioned the need for including Putonghua as a subject in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE).

27. D of E said that students were free to choose whether to select Putonghua as a subject for the HKCEE. Schools were encouraged to organize special Putonghua courses outside school hours for which the special grant could be used for hiring Putonghua instructors. She also supported flexibility in the use of grants by schools. On the objectives and targets of Putonghua teaching in schools, D of E suggested stakeholders in the education sector to forward their views to the EC. A set of assessment criteria or formula would be devised to evaluate the objectives and achievements of students in the use of Putonghua.

28. Mrs Selina CHOW commented that the teaching of Putonghua in schools should aim at enhancing the students' abilities in communicating in Putonghua. She saw no particular need for treating it as another academic subject since the Chinese language was already taught as a subject in school. As it would take time to train up sufficient members of qualified Putonghua teachers, she supported making use of the service of native-speaking teachers from the Mainland. However, she did not agree that Putonghua courses should be treated only as an extra-curricular activity, and she urged the Administration to formulate a set of benchmarks for assessing and recognizing the Putonghua standard of teachers and students as soon as practicable.

29. In response, D of E pointed out that schools already had the flexibility of providing Putonghua courses in classrooms or outside school hours. The schools also had discretion in deploying their teachers for teaching Putonghua, or utilizing 5% of the discretionary allocation (for school-based management schools) to employ contract or temporary Putonghua teachers. She agreed that the immediate task was to set appropriate benchmark tests to assess the competence of Putonghua teachers. A trial run had already been completed and the benchmark tests for Putonghua teachers could start by the end of 1999.

30. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong stressed that the current arrangement of having one Putonghua lesson a week in some schools was unsatisfactory. However, in view of the heavy school programme, it would be more practical for schools to adopt other methods to teach Putonghua as a language for communication, for example, by organizing Putonghua programmes outside school hours. Nevertheless, he was in support of including Putonghua as a subject of the HKCEE, to enable students to have a choice whether to take it as a formal subject for public examination.

31. Mr SZETO Wah suggested that ED should develop a special Putonghua

teaching programme tailor-made for children in Hong Kong. He disagreed with the saying that Putonghua training could enhance the Chinese language ability of students. To speed up the process of supplying sufficient number of qualified Putonghua teachers, he suggested ED to take a proactive approach to assess the standards of native-speakers who could be employed as temporary teachers for this purpose. This would be a more cost-effective alternative to providing training to local teachers.

32. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung supported engaging native-speakers to teach Putonghua as many local teachers were not confident of teaching Putonghua despite training.

33. Miss CHOY So-yuk reiterated her suggestion of dispensing with the requirement for a degree-holder to teach Putonghua so that there would be more supply of Putonghua teachers. She also asked about the timing for completing the study now conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong on the effectiveness of using Putonghua as a medium of instruction in Chinese language teaching.

34. DS/EM replied that the study would be a three year study to evaluate the progress made by the same class of students for analysis and comparison with other students attending classes using Cantonese as the medium of instruction. While the study was expected to complete by the end of 2001, an interim report might be available before then for discussion by the Panel.

35. In response to Miss CHOY So-yuk, DS(EM) said that the Language Fund had also provided funding support to a number of schools to use Putonghua as the medium of instruction for some core subjects and the effects of such teaching would be seen some time later. As regards the suggestion of modelling the teaching of Putonghua in the Mainland or Taiwan, DS/EM said that most subjects in these areas were taught in Putonghua, and it might not be appropriate to model on their teaching methods.

36. In concluding the discussion, the Chairman advised the Administration to expedite actions to enhance Putonghua teaching in schools. He urged the Administration to devise some long-term plans pending the outcome of the three year study. DS/EM noted the comments and advised that the benchmark tests for Putonghua teachers would be implemented soon.

V. Any other business

37. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:30 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat

29 December 1999