

## **Information Paper**

### **Practical Schools**

#### **Purpose**

This paper provides information on practical schools.

#### **Background**

2. The Education Commission in its Report No. 4 (1990) recommended the establishment of four practical schools with a practically oriented curriculum to cater for 1 800 students of junior secondary school age who are unmotivated and lack interest in common-core curriculum. This alternative mode of education gives this particular group of students equal chances for proper schooling and to prepare them, at the end of Secondary 3, for direct employment, or entry into vocational training courses, or admission to senior secondary education in mainstream schools.

3. Practical schools are purposely designed junior secondary schools with strengthened pastoral care and guidance for students. A standard practical school provides 450 places through the operation of 15 classes. In this relatively small school community, close interactions are frequent amongst students, teachers and school staff. The school activities and functions are also designed to invite more involvement, co-operation, participation and contribution from students. All these work towards the

building up of a close inter-personal relationship, a sense of belonging and a sense of responsibility which are not familiar to students in their former school life.

4. The resources injected into practical schools reflect the enhanced level of care and support provided for the students. The unit cost per place per annum for these schools as at 1 April 1998 is \$50,170 without boarding and \$88,156 with boarding. This compares with a unit cost of \$27,064 per place per annum for S1 to S3 classes in aided ordinary secondary schools. General information on practical schools is provided at **Appendix 1**.

### **Recent Developments**

5. In the 1998/99 school year, four practical schools are in operation, providing a total of 1 350 school places. Details of the capacity and enrolment of practical schools in the respective years are at **Appendix 2**.

6. In response to the recommendations in the Board of Education Report on Special Education (an extract is at **Appendix 3**), the Education Department has taken / will take the following action:

- (a) the Education Department will commission a consultancy study on multiplicity of handicaps among students of special schools, practical schools and skills opportunity schools, which will advise on, among other things, the adequacy of existing staffing and appropriateness of the class size. At present, preparatory work for the consultancy study has

commenced. In view of the complexity, the study is anticipated to take about a year to complete;

- (b) the provision of school social worker has been improved from 0.5 social worker to 75 students to 0.5 social worker to 50 students from September 1998 to provide better support to the students and their families. Also, the School Grant has been increased by 100% i.e. from \$33,190 to \$66,380, in the 1997/98 school year to reflect the actual needs of schools;
- (c) the provision of more experienced boarding staff since September 1998 so as to improve the pastoral and remedial programmes for students; and
- (d) the referral system and admission criteria for practical schools will be reviewed in a study on the existing classification/assessment tools for referral for admission to special schools, practical schools and skills opportunity schools, which is scheduled to commence in March 1999 and complete in September 1999.

7. At present, there is a shortage of 18.5 Educational Psychologists in both the Education Department and aided schools. To address the problem, the Education Department is reviewing the appointment requirements and grade structure of this profession by proposing to remove the Post- Graduate Certificate in Education and post-degree experience from the appointment requirements and bringing the salary scale on a par with that

of the Clinical Psychologist grade. The Education Department is now consulting the Civil Service Bureau, Finance Bureau and the Hong Kong Psychological Society on the proposal. Also, the Education Department will explore with the Hong Kong Institute of Education the possibility of operating part-time teacher training courses to meet the needs of teachers now serving in practical schools.

8. The Board of Education has recently resolved to review the effectiveness of practical schools. This will be an overall review on the various aspects of this type of school.

Education Department  
December 1998

**Information on Practical Schools**

**Target Students**

Practical schools cater for S.1 to S.3 students who are unmotivated and lack interest in common-core curriculum of ordinary secondary schools but who show more interest in practical subjects. It is estimated that there are about 1 800 prospective students for practical schools.

**Referral Procedures**

2. Primary 6 leavers who will benefit from the education offered by practical schools are encouraged to opt for placement in these schools. Each year, applications from students with parents' consent are submitted via their schools and processed through the Secondary School Places Allocation System (SSPA). School social workers of mainstream schools may also refer S.1-S.3 students wishing to transfer to practical schools to the Education Department (ED) for placement throughout the school year.

**The Curriculum**

3. The Curriculum Development Institute of ED has drawn up a curriculum framework for practical schools. The modified curriculum places more emphasis on practical experience than academic knowledge and aims at arousing students' interest and developing a positive attitude

towards learning. The curriculum comprises about 55% academic subjects that is largely the same as that taught in ordinary secondary schools. The remaining 45% of the curriculum comprises cultural and technical/practical subjects, such as Computer Literacy, Accommodation and Catering, Fashion and Clothing, Office Practice (including Bookkeeping, Typing and Word Processing), Hairstyling, Metalwork and Seamanship. Extra learning programmes known as complementary studies are also organised outside school hours. They aim at developing students' potential and experience in various skills in order to prepare them for vocational training when they leave school.

### **Class Size and Class Structure**

4. A standard practical school operates 5 classes each at the S.1 to S.3 levels, with 30 students per class. Each school provides a total of 450 places.

### **Staff Establishment**

5. Practical Schools are provided with an enhanced staff ratio at 1.5 teachers per class. This compares with 1.3 teachers per class at S.1 - S.3 levels in mainstream schools.

### **Support Services**

6. School-based social work service provided at a ratio of 0.5 school social worker to 50 students compares favourably against the

existing provision of 1 to 2 000 for ordinary schools. Sponsoring bodies of practical schools may employ one Educational Psychologist for every 30 special classes, whereas sponsoring bodies of ordinary schools are entitled to one Educational Psychologist for every 380 classes. For schools without a school-based Educational Psychologist, there are regular visits by Educational Psychologist from ED. They may also refer students to the special education services centres for assessment and advice.

### **School Facilities**

7. The practical and diversified curriculum of practical schools requires a different schedule of accommodation. There are 15 classrooms for the full capacity of 15 classes and hence no floating class is required. Each school has a number of workshops/special rooms to provide the necessary facilities for the practical/technical subjects as well as for organising extra-curricula activities. A resource room and a remedial teaching room are available for complementary studies and remedial teaching purpose respectively. There are also offices for school social workers to provide counselling services for parents or students.

### **Boarding Section**

8. A boarding section is also run in each practical school to accommodate students whose home environment is not conducive to their development. Subject to places being available, such service will be arranged upon the recommendations of Educational Psychologists from the Education Department.

## **Post-school Placement**

9. Apart from seeking open employment, S.3 students with a vocational inclination may further their training in technical institutes. Those who are more academically inclined may continue their senior secondary education in ordinary schools through the existing Junior Secondary Education Assessment Scheme (JSEA). In the past three years, 46% S.3 graduates from practical schools continued senior secondary education, 37% enrolled in training courses offered by technical institutes/industrial training centres and 17% entered into open employment.



**Capacity and Enrolment of Practical Schools  
(including Boarding Section)**

School Year	School	School Section			Boarding Section		
		School Capacity	Total Capacity	Enrolment (%)	Boarding Capacity	Total Capacity	Enrolment (%)
1995/96	Hong Kong Sea School	450	<b>780</b>	<b>591 (76%)</b>	225	<b>305</b>	<b>289 (95%)</b>
	TWGHs Practical School	330#			80		
1996/97	Hong Kong Sea School	450	<b>930</b>	<b>688 (74%)</b>	225	<b>345</b>	<b>331 (96%)</b>
	TWGHs Practical School	480*			120		
1997/98	Hong Kong Sea School	450	<b>1050</b>	<b>855 (81%)</b>	225	<b>375</b>	<b>360 (96%)</b>
	TWGHs Practical School	450			120		
	PLK Practical School	150#			30		
1998/99	Hong Kong Sea School	450	1350	<b>1190 (88%) as at 15.9.1998</b>	225	415	<b>362 (87%) as at 15.9.1998</b>
	TWGHs Practical School	450			120		
	PLK Practical School	300#			30		
	Caritas Practical School	150#			40		

- Note: 1) ( ) denotes enrolment rates  
 2) # These schools were/are undergoing a phasing-in programme to provide an ultimate capacity of 450 school places.  
 3) \* Special approval was given to school to operate 16 classes (i.e. 480 places) to meet the demand.

**An Extract from the Board of Education Report on Special Education**

**Recommendations**

10.13 It is recommended that:

- (a) The referral system and admission criteria of PSs should be reviewed because there have been wrong referrals to PSs resulting in low-enrolment of maladjusted schools. It is necessary to differentiate clearly the roles and target students of PSs and maladjusted Schools.
- (b) The class size be reduced from 30 to 25 for PSs and 20 to 15 for SOSs.
- (c) Whether PSs and SOSs should extend their class levels to S4 and S5 will depend on the future needs of society, the needs of the students and the curriculum development. The ED should work closely with the schools regarding the placement of S3 leavers from PSs and SOSs.
- (d) The provisions for social work staff and boarding staff in PSs should be improved.