

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1107/99-00

(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

LegCo Panel on Education

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Friday, 5 November 1999 after House Committee meeting
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members Present** : Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung (Chairman)
Prof Hon NG Ching-fai (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon SIN Chung-kai
Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, JP
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon SZETO Wah
- Members Absent** : Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, JP
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon CHOY So-yuk
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
- Public Officers Attending** : Item I
Mr Joseph Y T LAI
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mr Patrick LI
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower

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Mrs Fanny LAW, JP
Director of Education

Mr Andrew C S POON
Assistant Director of Education (Planning and Research)

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

Item II

Mr Joseph Y T LAI
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mrs Fanny LAW, JP
Director of Education

Mr K K CHONG
Senior Assistant Director of Education (Operations)

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

Staff in Attendance : Ms Bernice WONG
Assistant Legal Adviser 1

Mr Stanley MA
Senior Assistant Secretary (2) 6

I. Education Resource Centre
[Paper No. CB(2)277/99-00(01)]

Mr SZETO Wah, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong, Mr TSANG Yok-shing and Miss Emily LAU were of the view that the Administration's paper did not provide sufficient information on the proposal. They said that the paper gave no details on the proposed uses of the new building and the existing space to be vacated by the four education resource centres and offices. These members had specifically sought the following information in connection with the proposed Education Resource Centre (ERC) -

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- (a) whether the proposed use of the site was the best option given that it was a prime site at the Kowloon Tong MTR station, and whether the six-storey building design had maximized the site potential;
- (b) the estimated construction cost for the proposed ERC excluding the costs for the Public Transport Interchange (PTI);
- (c) the proportion of space for ED offices to the space allocated for education facilities;
- (d) whether the amalgamation of the four existing education resource centres would lead to staff savings or reduction/improvement in the existing level of services; and
- (e) the facilities to be included in the proposed ERC.

2. Representatives of the Administration responded that the proposed ERC would accommodate the Education Department (ED) district offices in Kowloon, four existing education resources centres now scattered in different locations, as well as the Special Education Services Centre now situated at the former Perth Street Government School. The ERC would also provide offices for the Advisory Inspectorate Division and Curriculum Development Institute, and space for education initiatives such as the resource centre for school-based management, IT learning centre, teachers' centre, etc. It might also accommodate the future General Teaching Council if established. As the proposed ERC would be conveniently located above the Kowloon Tong PTI, it was expected that utilization of its facilities would be high.

3. Director of Education (D of E) also confirmed that it was the Administration's objective to maximize the plot ratio of the site. Subject to members' views, the Administration could discuss with MTRC the possibility of reinforcing the piling to cater for the construction of additional storeys if necessary, in case the height restriction for the area would be relaxed in future.

4. Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (DS(EM)) clarified that the estimated construction costs of the ERC would be \$403 million, while that of the PTI would be around \$50 million. The remainder of the project costs (around \$300 million) would cover the piling works, site formation, sewage systems and other common facilities.

5. Some members queried that the main objective of the proposed ERC was to provide office space for ED staff. The ED representatives explained that the objective was mainly to re-provision the four existing education resource centres to enhance their utilization and to provide space for new initiatives. While the detailed space requirements for ED offices were yet to be worked out, the preliminary

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estimate was that staff offices would take up no more than one-sixth of the floor area of ERC. Representatives of ED also assured members that the proposed office space for ED staff in the ERC would not exceed their existing entitlements.

6. On staff savings and improvements of services upon centralisation of the four existing education resource centres, Assistant Director of Education (Chief Inspector of Schools) said that this would bring about more effective deployment of manpower and resources. However, as the existing education resources centres were now operating with the minimum staff, it would not be possible to have staff savings after the relocation, especially if the new ERC was to open for longer hours.

7. As regards the proposed use of the space to be vacated by existing offices and the education resource centres, DS(EM) said that the school premises could be used for whole-day primary schooling or other educational purposes while the government offices would be returned to the Government Property Agency for re-allocation. Offices in rented commercial premises would be de-leased if no longer required.

8. Noting that the proposed ERC was scheduled for completion in 2004, Mr SIN CHUNG-kai urged the Administration to take into account the increased use and development of IT in the coming years. He was worried that the proposed ERC might not be as useful as ED officers would envisage when teachers and students had become more conversant with using IT in teaching and learning. He suggested ED to adopt a flexible and forward-looking approach in designing the new building.

9. D of E responded that even with advanced use of IT, the ERC would still be necessary to provide facilities and space for teachers to share experience. While it would be difficult to forecast the changes in the next five years, she did not envisage a reduced demand for education resource support as a number of education initiatives and education reforms such as learning for life were in the pipeline. Assistant Director of Education (Planning and Research) added that the proposed ERC also included a resource centre for special education, and conference rooms and theatres equipped with high-technology equipment/facilities.

10. DS(EM) added that the project was at a planning stage, and that in finalizing the schedule of accommodation the Administration would fully take into account any new education initiatives arising from the on-going Education Commission review on the academic structure. He explained that there was some urgency in getting the Panel's feedback on the broad proposal because the expansion works for the MTR Kowloon Tong Station passenger hall would commence shortly and that the Administration would need to confirm the construction of a six-storey ERC above the passenger hall, to enable preparatory engineering works to be carried out.

11. Mr TSANG Yok-shing, Mr SIN Chung-kai, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong and Miss Emily LAU reiterated their views that the Administration should have more

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concrete plans on the proposed use of the ERC before seeking funding approval. They pointed out that subsequent changes might have an impact on the building design and engineering works.

12. Deputy Chairman said that he supported the need for constructing a new ERC. However, he shared other members' views that more detailed information on the proposed uses and the planned facilities of the building should be provided to the Finance Committee.

13. In response, D of E assured members that there should not be drastic changes to the proposed use of the ERC which might affect the floor loading or design of the building. As relaxation in the height restriction for buildings in Kowloon Tong would require the approval of Town Planning Board, ED could only plan on the basis of the current permissible plot ratio. She undertook to provide more information on the broad direction for the proposed uses of the space and the facilities in the ERC when submitting the proposal to the Finance Committee.

14. Mr SZETO Wah considered that the premises to be vacated by the existing education resource centres should be reserved for educational uses. He also pointed out that centralization of resource centres might not always be a better alternative to decentralization as some facilities would need to be provided on a district basis to facilitate the users.

15. In concluding the discussion, the Chairman said that most members were of the view that the Administration should provide more detailed information in the Finance Committee paper on the points raised by members. He asked the Administration to note members' views.

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II. Legislative amendments on retirement age for teachers and principals of aided schools

[Paper No. CB(2)277/99-00(02)]

16. The Chairman informed members that Mrs Selina CHOW had stated the views of the Liberal Party (LP) in writing. Members belonging to the LP supported the legislative proposal, as the proposed retirement policy was in line with that of the civil service. Mrs Selina CHOW suggested that when considering applications for extension of service, D of E should evaluate the performance of the principal and whether the School Management Committee (SMC) concerned had a real understanding of the principal's abilities and performance.

17. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed support for the legislative proposal which was only to give legal effect to the existing retirement policy. However, given the recent disputes relating to the extension of service of some serving principals, he was concerned that an independent and fair appeal mechanism should be put in

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place. He said that D of E should also give the reason for rejecting a recommendation for extension of service.

18. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong stressed that the appeal mechanism must be seen to be fair to all concerned. DS(EM) responded that an Appeals Board had already been established under the Education Ordinance to deal with teacher registration and cancellation matters. The Administration would incorporate provisions in the Bill to expand the powers of the Appeals Board to cover appeals against the decisions of the D of E concerning extension of service. While the discussion paper had not mentioned such provisions, DS(EM) assured members that such provisions would be included in the Bill to be introduced into the Legislative Council.

19. Mr SZETO Wah was of the view that ED had in the past adopted a more lenient approach in approving applications for extension of service from school principals than teachers. He was given the impression that those principals of reputable schools and had a record of public service would had a higher chance of getting approval. He suggested that, to enhance transparency, the Administration should stipulate the approval criteria for general information.

20. Miss Emily LAU acknowledged the need to provide some flexibility for D of E to approve extension of service of principals and teachers beyond the age of 60. She shared the view that there should be a set of fair and consistent criteria for approving such applications by D of E.

21. D of E responded that ED had adopted a consistent approach in approving applications for extension of service from teachers and principals of aided schools reaching the retirement age. Considerations for approval included the physical fitness of the applicant, the recommendations of the SMC, and whether a suitable replacement was available. While the experience of serving principals and teachers was definitely an asset to the schools concerned, it would be to the benefit of the school to have a healthy staff turnover plan to keep the school intellectually active and to satisfy the staff expectation for career advancement. D of E agreed that an objective set of approval criteria could be drawn up but it might not be necessary to include the details in the legislation.

22. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong opined that the existing appeal mechanism was not satisfactory because appeals were currently dealt with by the ED which made the original decision. He stressed that there should be an independent appeal mechanism, and its composition and membership should be specified in the Education Ordinance. To enhance transparency and accountability, Government should appoint independent members with high public standing to the Appeals Board.

23. DS(EM) responded that the operation of the existing Appeals Board was transparent and its meetings were open to the public. Its members were drawn from

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different sectors of the community and included school supervisors, lawyers and other community members. He assured members that the Appeals Board would be empowered to deal with appeals concerning extension of service beyond the retirement age of 60. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong stressed that the Appeals Board should deal with all appeals without any filtering process by the ED. DS(EM) said that the Appeals Board had all along dealt with all appeals within its ambit independently. He cited a recent case in which the Appeals Board overruled the decision of D of E regarding the registration of a teacher.

24. The Chairman thanked representatives of the Administration for the briefing.

III. Any other business

25. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:20 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat

3 February 2000