

立法會
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LegCo Panel on Education

Minutes of Meeting
held on Saturday, 9 October 1999 at 8:30 am
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

Members Present : Prof Hon NG Ching-fai (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, JP
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon SIN Chung-kai
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon CHOY So-yuk
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon SZETO Wah

Members Absent : Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung (Chairman)
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum

Members Attending : Hon Kenneth TING Woo-shou, JP
Hon Ronald ARCULLI, JP

Public Officers Attending : Mr Joseph W P WONG, GBS, JP
Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mr Philip K F CHOK, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (1)

Mr Raymond YOUNG, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (2)

Mr Joseph Y T LAI
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (3)

Ms Michelle LI
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower (1)

Mrs Fanny LAW, JP
Director of Education

Mr Anthony K H TONG
Deputy Director of Education

Clerk in Attendance : Mrs Justina LAM
Assistant Secretary General 2

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

I. Briefing by the Administration on the Chief Executive's Policy Address 1999

The Chairman welcomed representatives of the Administration to the meeting. At the Chairman's invitation, Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM) briefed members on the salient points of the 1999 Policy objectives and programmes on education (see SEM's speaking note in the Appendix).

2. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that to implement the policy of whole-day primary schooling, progress to reduce class size had been suspended. With the average class size of 37 students in primary schools and 40 students in secondary schools, teachers could give little attention to individual students. The situation was even worse in schools with a large intake of band 4 and 5 students. Mr CHEUNG added that the fact that some 23 000 candidates failed in all subjects in this year's

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Hong Kong Certificate of Education examination was a reflection of the poor learning environment in schools. He asked whether the Administration would review its policy on class size of primary and secondary schools.

3. SEM responded that the average class size of primary schools including those adopting the "activity approach" was about 34.5 students. He explained that the education sector had for many years strongly and unanimously urged for the implementation of whole-day primary schooling. In order to achieve the target of enabling 60% and 100% of primary school pupils to study in whole-day schools by 2002 and 2007 respectively, considerable resources had to be committed. As a result, reduction in class size across-the-board would unlikely be possible before 2002. Nevertheless, for schools with a large number of low academic achievers, the Administration would not rule out the possibility of making special arrangement to reduce the class size. He undertook to pursue the matter and consult the Panel in due course.

4. Director of Education (D of E) said that it would not be practical to expect a significant reduction in class size in the short term. However, the Education Department (ED) would endeavour to acquire additional school sites for construction of more new primary and secondary schools. The progressive implementation of quality private schools, including non-profit-making private independent schools and schools operating under the Direct Subsidy Scheme, would provide a greater diversity in schools and contribute to reducing the class size of public sector schools in the long run. She added that arising from a surplus supply of secondary one places, schools admitting a majority of band 4 and 5 students had smaller class size in the 1998/99 and 1999/00 school years. She pointed out that when the matter was previously discussed by the Panel, ED had already made it clear to Members that it had no intention of correspondingly cutting back on the number of teachers in these schools so that the teachers could give more time and attention to the students.

5. D of E further said that to help alleviate teachers' workload, schools were encouraged to assign non-teaching duties to supporting staff. She stressed that the schools which participated in the school-based management (SBM) scheme were given management responsibilities and additional resources, including an annual allocation of \$155,000, to implement the various SBM initiatives. ED was ready to provide advice and assistance to schools and would work out models on effective use of resources for their reference. D of E added that team teaching was encouraged and subject to availability of resources, consideration would be given to the appointment of teaching assistants.

6. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that although junior primary classes adopting the activity approach enjoyed a smaller class size, senior primary classes had an average size of 37 students. He stressed that the existing learning environment in

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secondary schools was not conducive to the provision of quality education, and the reduction of class size in schools admitting mostly band 4 and 5 students should be given top priority.

7. Miss Emily LAU said that in his Policy Address, the Chief Executive said that Hong Kong could become a cosmopolitan city comparable to New York and London. Students should be given a well-rounded education and their intelligence and creativity should be developed. Miss Emily LAU expressed doubts and concern as to how such objectives could be achieved when cronyism and favouritism was practised by Government. Individuals in business and politics were “penalized” for voicing dissenting views, for example, Members belonging to the Democratic Party and independent legislator, Hon Miss Margaret NG, were barred from going to the Mainland. She questioned how teachers could have the courage to teach students creativity and independent thinking, given such a closed, conservative environment.

8. SEM said that he disagreed with Miss LAU. He stressed that freedom of expression was one of the major characteristics of Hong Kong, and every citizen enjoyed equal right to express his feelings and ideas freely. He could not understand why Miss LAU held the view that students’ creativity was being stifled. D of E responded that the influence of the school environment was most direct on students. She considered that the school environment was becoming much more open and democratic. She pointed out that in some schools, students were consulted on school regulations which demonstrated that principals and teachers were increasingly ready to listen to the views of students. She added that the operation of School Management Committees would be made more open and transparent.

9. Referring to the survey on the major aspects of performance of first degree graduates which would cover language proficiency, numerical competence, computer literacy, communication skills and work attitudes, Miss Cyd HO commented that the results of education should not be evaluated solely on the basis of meeting the needs of the employers. She stressed that education should aim at an all-round development of the younger generation and that honesty, integrity and independent thinking should also be taught. The education system should also cater to the needs of the students and in this connection, Miss HO suggested that the Administration should consult the views of students on how the system could be improved.

10. SEM responded that the Administration was well aware that education should provide students with an all-round development, including acquiring knowledge and skills as well as developing positive values and attitudes. Given that most university students would be joining the workforce after finishing their studies, and in view of the community’s increasing concern about their standards, it was necessary to conduct assessment surveys in a systematic manner. The survey would cover not only the language and numeracy standard of the graduate but also their

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work attitude. The findings of such surveys would serve as a benchmark for assessing the output of the education system. D of E said that she agreed that it was important to listen to the views of young people. However, she considered that face-to-face contact to be much more effective than conducting surveys in obtaining the views of students.

11. Mr TSANG Yok-sing expressed concern about whether the work environment in primary and secondary schools could attract teachers of the highest calibre, given the heavy workload and high expectations of parents and students. He asked whether Government had made any assessment on how a quality workforce could be retained.

12. SEM said that the terms and conditions of appointment for new entrants were competitive. The entry salary for a new teacher was set at a level higher than that of other jobs in Government or the private sector requiring similar qualifications. As regards teachers' workload, the Administration had in recent years allocated additional resources to improve the situation. For instance, more clerical staff had been provided to schools. In addition, old design schools would progressively be upgraded under the School Improvement Programme. D of E responded that she believed that competition for teaching posts was keen under the current economic conditions. She said that the teaching profession should aim to attract people who were committed to working with young people and students. She added that to ensure effective utilization of resources, ED was working on establishing some models for the reference of schools.

13. Mr TSANG Yok-sing pointed out that when the economy revived, teachers might leave the profession. He asked whether SEM or D of E had talked directly to frontline teachers about their problems. SEM responded that the best teachers were not necessarily those with the highest academic qualifications, but those who had a genuine interest in the profession and committed themselves wholeheartedly to working with young people. He added that during his almost weekly visits to schools, he had received no negative feedback from teachers about salary levels. However, many did express frustration at the large class size and insufficient work space which was most critical in schools of the older designs. SEM assured Members that the Administration would keep the matter in view.

14. Mr CHENG Kar-foo was of the view that the healthy development of children depended not only on school education but also on family education. Referring to paragraph 81 of the Policy Address, he enquired about the Administration's measures to encourage parents to participate in activities organized by schools.

15. In reply, SEM said that enhancing contact with parents was not merely a question of resources. It was also necessary to provide adequate channels to reach the parents. He agreed that more efforts should be devoted to achieving the goal of

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making parents a partner in education. He added that schools were encouraged to be more open about parents' participation in school affairs and in listening to their views.

16. Responding to Mr CHENG Kar-foo and Mr SIN Chung-kai's questions on a time frame for the provision of teaching assistants, D of E reiterated that schools under SBM had been given additional resources. She added that some principals had reflected to her that although schools had been provided with substantial funds for day-to-day management, the rules and regulations governing the use of funds were rigid. She reiterated that ED aimed to establish models of effective deployment of resources for the reference of schools.

17. Mr SIN Chung-kai commented that the Administration should allocate more resources for promoting the use of Information Technology (IT) in education. He suggested that teaching assistants could be deployed to say, disseminate information through the Internet and electronic mail (e-mail) to parents on a regular basis. He believed that with the aid of IT, parents could play a more active role in school affairs and the education of their children. He pointed out that the Singapore Government had initiated programmes on teaching parents to be better parents.

18. SEM agreed with Mr SIN on the extensive use of IT in education. D of E added that under the Quality Education Fund, funds had been allocated for three pilot projects on the development and use of IT systems and facilities in education, including the use of e-mail to enhance communication between schools and parents. There were now some schools which had established computer links with parents, and students could send assignments using e-mail.

19. Miss CHOY So-yuk expressed support for the Administration's efforts in educating students about environmental protection. She suggested that ED should set up training centres for students to experience first-hand what environmental protection meant in real-life situations. D of E responded that ED and the Environmental Protection Department had since 1992 held regular conferences on promoting student's awareness of environmental protection and many activities were held in schools each year on this theme. She added that there was already an Environmental Education Resources Centre. However, the direction for future development was to integrate the theme of environmental protection into different subjects.

20. Mrs Selina CHOW expressed concern about the overall decline in the standards of English among students and the workforce, and the deficiency in teaching of the English language in schools. In view of the increasing popularity of the use of Chinese in both the commercial and public sectors, she was worried that the existing enhancement measures such as the Native-speaking English Teachers (NET) scheme in schools could not improve the situation. Given that parents

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expected their children to be bi-literate, she enquired about the measures to enhance the standards of English teachers who played the most crucial role in promoting the English standards of students. She also urged the Administration to accelerate the pace of developing a set of benchmarks to ensure the proficiency of teachers in the English language.

21. SEM said that his briefing at the beginning of the meeting had highlighted the various initiatives on raising the standard of English. He stressed that Government gave equal weight to Chinese and English. He added that the Administration would launch a territory-wide "English in the Workplace" Campaign to implement a business and school co-operation scheme whereby individual business organizations and schools would form a partnership in providing students with more opportunities to learn English in an authentic working environment. The Campaign would also include activities to encourage every trade/profession to set English language benchmarks for their employees. Regarding the language ability of teachers, SEM said that the Administration was taking steps to set benchmarks for language teachers and provide the necessary training to enable them to attain the standards.

22. Deputy Director of Education responded that the NET scheme was making good progress, and schools were encouraged to involve the native English-speaking teachers not only in lessons but also in extra-curricular activities for students. To foster a self-learning culture, students were encouraged to use computer tools and software in learning English. In addition, the Quality Education Fund had allocated resources to support programmes aiming to improve English standard and successful experience would be shared among schools. D of E pointed out that as the development of a student to be truly bi-literate and tri-lingual would take time, it should start from pre-school and primary education. She stressed that the school curriculum for English language was designed to develop students' knowledge and proficiency in both spoken and written English.

23. The Chairman said that local tertiary education institutions had the capability to train and develop more talents for the growth of the community. To achieve the objective of the Policy Address of developing quality people and quality home, he requested the Administration to consider increasing the number of places for post-graduate studies. SEM replied that the Administration had already advised the University Grants Committee that Government would consider additional allocation for increasing the number of graduate intake in the coming three academic years, with a view to developing the necessary talents to meet the future economic and social needs of Hong Kong.

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24. The Chairman thanked representatives of the Administration for the briefing.
25. The meeting ended at 9:35 am.

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