

立法會
Legislative Council

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(These minutes have been seen by
the Administration)

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LegCo Panel on Education

Minutes of Meeting
held on Monday, 20 March 2000 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 Cyd HO Sau-lan
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
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, JP
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon CHOY So-yuk
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon SZETO Wah

Public Officers Attending : Agenda item IV

Mr Joseph W P WONG, JP
Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mrs Fanny LAW, JP
Director of Education

Mr Philip K F CHOK
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower

Ms Michelle LI
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mrs Margaret CHAN
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower

Agenda item V

Mr Raymond YOUNG
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mrs Fanny LAW, JP
Director of Education

Mr Anthony K H TONG
Deputy Director of Education

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

Agenda item VI

Mr Joseph LAI
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mrs Margaret CHAN
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mrs Fanny LAW, JP
Director of Education

Ms Susanna S M CHEUNG
Assistant Director of Education (School Based Management)

Agenda item VII

Mr Joseph LAI
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mrs Margaret CHAN
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mrs Fanny LAW, JP
Director of Education

Mr Stanley Y H YING
Senior Assistant Director of Education (Implementation Team)

Mrs Lesley Y C WONG
Assistant Director (Funding Reform)

Clerk in : Mr LAW Wing-lok
Attendance Chief Assistant Secretary (2) 5

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

Action

I. Confirmation of minutes of meeting on 21 February 2000

[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1414/99-00]

The minutes were confirmed.

II. Information paper issued since last meeting

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1350/99-00]

2. The Chairman said that members had been provided with a set of presentation handouts and press release relating to the Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM)'s press conference on 9 March 2000. The documents contained information on subject matters which would be discussed under agenda item IV.

III. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[Appendices I and II to LC Paper No. CB(2)1417/99-00]

3. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next meeting scheduled for 17 April 2000 -

- (a) Government evening schools;
- (b) Consultancy study on registration procedures for kindergartens and tutorial schools;
- (c) Learning environment in primary and secondary schools;
- (d) Review of Student Travel Subsidy Scheme; and
- (e) Follow-up discussion on supervision of University Grants Committee-funded tertiary education institutions (appeals mechanism and release of attendance records).

4. In response to the Chairman, Mr SZETO Wah clarified that item 3(d) was a referral from the Duty Roster Members (DRMs). After receiving a concern group on 17 March 2000, the DRMs requested the Panel to follow up with the Administration on the issue as to whether travel subsidy could be provided to primary school students who, as

Action

a result of the arrangements for providing whole-day schooling, were required to continue study in a new school located within the same school net but at a distance from their residence.

IV. Budget proposals on education

[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1350/99-00]

5. SEM said that as mentioned in the 2000-01 Budget speech by the Financial Secretary, Government would allocate an additional \$1.24 billion in 2000-01 for the budget proposals on education and manpower, of which \$300 million would be spent on promoting employment and encouraging continuing education, \$140 million to help needy students and \$800 million for implementing the education reform.

6. SEM highlighted the following new initiatives on education in the coming financial year -

- (a) The Government had earmarked \$60 million to encourage people to enrol in bridging programmes under the "Project Springboard" which would be organized by the Federation for Continuing Education in Tertiary Institutions (the Federation). The Project would incorporate day and evening programmes for secondary 5 school leavers and adult learners to pursue continuing education. Starting from October 2000, some 5 500 places would be offered in the first year and would be increased in subsequent years in the light of the actual demand. The programmes would be skill-oriented and operated on a modular structure, providing core subjects on language training, information technology application and other practical subjects. Upon completion of the programmes, students might pursue courses at a higher level offered by the organizers or other institutions. The Government would launch a series of publicity programmes and exhibition activities in June 2000. Participants would receive a reimbursement of 30% of the tuition fee upon satisfactory completion of each module of study. This pilot subsidy scheme would be implemented for a period of three years and a comprehensive review of its cost-effectiveness would be conducted before the end of the three-year period.
- (b) The Government would extend the scope of recognized institutions under the Non-means Tested Loan Scheme to include professional or continuing education courses offered locally by non-local universities and professional bodies, registered schools, and recognized training institutions. In so doing, the number of eligible applicants would increase from 200 000 to 700 000 people.

Action

- (c) The Education and Manpower Bureau would set up a website on continuing education by July 2000 to provide aspiring students and adult learners with a convenient access to information on courses which could cater for their lifelong learning needs and interests. The website aimed to link up with major education and training institutions for the provision of a one-stop service.
- (d) A sum of \$140 million would be spent on improvement of the School Textbook Assistance Scheme and Student Travel Subsidy Scheme to help needy students.
- (e) A sum of \$800 million had been set aside for the implementation of the education reform which would enable an early start on those recommendations of the Education Commission that the Government and the community considered to warrant priority action.

7. The Chairman thanked SEM for his introduction and invited questions from members.

8. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong noted the favourable response to the Information Technology (IT) Training Assistant Programme offered by the Vocational Training Council. However, he pointed out that computer education in secondary schools could not equip graduates with the level of competence to take up employment in the IT industry. Secondary school leavers who wished to pursue a career in IT would have to attend further training in computer operation and applications. Mr CHEUNG further said that at present around 43% of the households in Hong Kong were in possession of computers. Children of the remaining 57% households would have to learn and practise computer operations in schools and community centres, which at present were unable to provide sufficient IT facilities for these children.

9. Mr CHEUNG urged the Government to review its IT policy and strategies in the light of the rapid advancement in IT technologies and the increasing demand for trained manpower by the IT industry. He considered that children should start learning computer operation at their early age and suggested that the Administration should consider expanding the scope of the School Textbook Assistance Scheme to assist each needy family to procure a computer.

10. In response, SEM said that the Administration would continue to review its policy and strategies in IT education in the light of new developments in IT and the needs of the community. He pointed out that resources had been allocated for providing additional computers and support services to community and youth centres. In addition, an allowance was given to schools to open their computer rooms after school hours so that children and youth could have greater access to IT facilities. He said that the merit of providing a computer to each needy family would have to be weighed against the high costs involved and its effectiveness vis-à-vis other options which were already being

Action

pursued by Government. He pointed out that learning through computers and the Internet had much room for expansion, but there were constraints in expanding computer training facilities because of a shortage of classrooms and qualified trainers. The Government was actively liaising with outside organizations to provide more computer training facilities.

11. SEM further said that the Curriculum Development Council had consulted the IT industry and stakeholders concerned and would seek to improve the syllabus for computer subjects in schools so that secondary school graduates would learn similar level of knowledge and skills as provided by the IT Assistant Training Programme.

12. Mr SIN Chung-kai was of the view that the provision of 1 000 training places of the IT Assistant Training Programme in 2000/01 was inadequate to meet the manpower needs of the IT industry. He considered that the Administration should increase the provision to a total of 2 000 training places.

13. SEM reiterated that there were constraints in the Administration increasing the number of training places because of the shortage of qualified trainers and training venues. He pointed out that the Government was in the process of consulting the industry on how to further expand the training capacity including the provision of courses through the Internet. He added that the Administration would provide a progress report to the Panel in a few months' time.

14. Mr SIN Chung-kai said that continuing education opportunities on the Internet could not replace the interaction and exchange of views between trainers and trainees in a classroom setting. He suggested that the Government should explore the possibility of converting the vacant premises at the Kai Tak Airport site into classrooms for conducting the IT Assistant Training Programme. Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (DS/EM) replied that the feasibility of conducting IT training course in unoccupied premises at the Kai Tak Airport was being examined.

15. Mr Andrew CHENG enquired about the purpose of introducing the Project Springboard, given that the Youth Pre-employment Training Programme had only been implemented last year and its effectiveness had not been evaluated. He was of the view that the Government should incorporate the contents of the Programme in school education so that secondary school graduates would have learnt the basic job skills and developed a sense of responsibility and self-confidence, thus enhancing their employment opportunities.

16. SEM said that the Youth Pre-employment Training Programme was launched in September last year to tackle the problem of youth unemployment. The Programme aimed to provide young school leavers with practical employment-related training so as to enhance their job skills, thereby improving their employability and competitiveness. The Government had decided to continue and further expand the Programme. A new "on-the-job" training component would be provided to further enhance the employment

Action

opportunities of the trainees. He added that there was no plan to run the Programme on a permanent basis and a comprehensive review of the Programme would be conducted before launching this year's Programme in October. He agreed with Mr CHENG that the school curriculum should be expanded to cover the components of the Programme to cater for the future employment needs of school leavers.

17. Director of Education (D of E) supplemented that the Curriculum Development Council was conducting a holistic review of the Hong Kong School Curriculum and would propose reform measures for public consultation in June 2000. She pointed out that the future school curriculum should be learner-focussed and should aim at providing students with five types of learning experiences for whole person development. The contents of basic education would be enriched to provide students with practical learning experiences to develop their intellectual abilities, acquire life skills and pre-employment experiences, appreciate physical and aesthetic arts, and participate in social and community service programmes. It would also lay emphasis on the development of a set of generic skills among students for lifelong learning. D of E added that a curriculum with a wider variety of subjects would be provided in senior secondary education. In view of the favourable response of the Youth Pre-employment Training Programme, ED would coordinate with disciplinary forces and uniformed groups to enable school students to have more training opportunities in these organizations.

18. Mr TSANG Yok-sing enquired about the objective of the "Project Springboard" and asked whether the implementation of this programme implied that the Government had no intention to increase school places for Form 6 students. Mr TSANG also asked whether the "Project Springboard" would be implemented on a permanent basis.

19. SEM said that the "Project Springboard" would provide an alternative route for secondary school leavers not possessing the minimum academic requirements for enrollment in higher level courses. The programme would be organized by the Federation which comprised UGC-funded tertiary education institutions except the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. The programme would operate on a modular structure and require students to complete at least ten modules which included such core subjects as IT/Computer, Chinese, English and some elective subjects. Upon graduation, students might pursue continuing education in the certificate or diploma courses offered by the same institution or other institutions of the Federation. SEM added that the Government had set aside funds for the initial three-year operation of the programme and would review its cost-effectiveness before the end of the three-year period.

20. Mr TSANG further asked how secondary 5 students with below par examination results at the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination would be able to benefit from the bridging programmes under the "Project Springboard" which provided courses in Chinese, English and IT/Computer, when they failed to attain the required standard in these core subjects at school.

Action

21. In response, SEM said that the programme was designed and run by the Federation which would provide quality assurance of the programme in terms of programme contents and teaching standard. He reiterated that the programme aimed to provide an alternative route for secondary 5 students to attain the required academic standard for enrollment in continuing education programmes.

22. Dr YEUNG Sum expressed reservations as to whether graduates of the bridging programme would be able to attain the academic requirements for enrolment in local universities.

23. SEM replied that members of the Federation had undertaken to accept the graduation certificate awarded under the "Project Springboard" for admission to their continuing education programmes at certificate or diploma level. DS/EM supplemented that members of the Federation also operated part-time degree courses jointly with overseas universities, which offered an alternative route for graduates who wished to pursue degree courses.

24. Miss Emily LAU held the view that more resources should be allocated for education. She enquired how the total expenditure on education as a percentage of the gross domestic product in Hong Kong in the past five years compared with those of its main competitors.

25. SEM responded that the total expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic products in Hong Kong had increased from 2.99% in 1996-97 to the estimated 4.15% in 2000-01. This compared favourably with the percentage of about 3.6% in Singapore two years ago. The percentages in Taiwan, Japan, the US and European countries ranged from 5% to 7%, whereas the percentage in Mainland China was about 3%. He said that in 2000-01, about 22.3% of total government expenditure went to the education sector, which was of a higher percentage than in other countries. He pointed out that the proportions of the education provision spent on tertiary education and basic education would be one-third and two-thirds respectively. He added that there had been lower percentage increase in the provision for tertiary education in the past few years so that more resources could be diverted to basic education.

26. Miss LAU requested the Administration to provide a table comparing the total outlay on education as a percentage of gross domestic product in Hong Kong in the past five years with those in the countries mentioned by SEM in paragraph 25 above. SEM undertook to provide the Panel with the information as far as practicable.

Adm

27. Miss Cyd HO enquired about the cost implications for extending the provision of free education from nine years to 11 years, so as to cater for students leaving the schools after completing secondary three.

28. SEM responded that the cost of providing 11-year free education would be quite

Action

substantial, given that the average cost of a secondary 4 or secondary 5 place was about \$33,000 a year. He pointed out that the Government currently provided 82% of the cost of secondary 4 and secondary 5 places in government and aided schools. The Chairman requested the Administration to provide the information as requested by Miss HO.

Adm

29. The Chairman thanked SEM for briefing members on the budget proposals on education and other related issues. He said that members would have the opportunity to raise further questions at the special meetings of the Finance Committee scheduled to take place over the next few days.

V. Language teaching in schools

LC Paper No.CB(2)1417/99-00(01)

30. The Chairman invited questions from members on the paper which was issued prior to the meeting.

31. Mrs Selina CHOW said that she and the Liberal Party supported the enhanced Native English-speaking Teacher (NET) Scheme from the very beginning. In view of some NETs' comments on the restrictive teaching environment in secondary schools, she enquired about the measures taken by the Administration to improve the operation of the Scheme.

32. D of E responded that the review on the NET Scheme being conducted by the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) would be expected to be completed in 2000/2001. According to the preliminary information obtained, the provision of NETs had helped to improve the ability of secondary students in listening and speaking English, particularly in cases where the NETs were able to obtain the cooperation and support of the local teachers in the schools concerned. She pointed out that rather than relying on NETs, the upgrading of students' proficiency in English in the long-term should depend on strengthening the school curriculum and enhancing the teacher training programmes to train and develop local teachers up to the required language benchmark.

33. Mrs Selina CHOW was of the view that NETs should have a role to play in improving students' English standard in the long run. She pointed out that some serving NETs had expressed the view that they were restricted by the school curriculum in their teaching methods and styles. She asked whether the Administration would consult NETs in its review of the school curriculum for English subjects. She also asked how interpersonal problems between NETs and school supervisors/principals might be resolved.

34. D of E responded that NETs were mainly engaged in secondary one classes and they had considerable flexibility in designing their teaching methods and programmes. The Quality Education Fund had supported a website on the Internet to enable English

Action

teachers to share teaching experience and exchange views. She acknowledged that there were interpersonal problems between NETs and local teachers in some schools. She anticipated that the review on NET Scheme would produce recommendations on how to improve communication between NETs and local teachers.

35. Miss Emily LAU agreed that the long-term aim should be to develop sufficient local teachers who were qualified to teach English. Miss LAU asked whether, in formulating strategies for teaching English in schools, the NET Scheme should be introduced in primary education rather than in secondary education. She pointed out that according to paragraph 9 of the Administration's paper, there was evidence to show that good quality early education would result in better language development, better ability to cope with intellectually demanding contents and more positive attitude towards learning. She took the view that learning English should start at an early age and wondered whether the Administration had adopted the right strategy in prioritizing the use of resources for the NET Scheme.

36. D of E responded that some researches indicated that early intervention was essential, but there was also the evidence of a strong correlation between the first and second language proficiency and that a good mastering of mother tongue language would enhance students' learning of another language. She agreed that the provision of good English teachers at the primary level could help students to develop proficiency in English more effectively. She pointed out that a total of 16 primary schools were at present provided with funding from the Language Fund and the Quality Education Fund to recruit NETs. Consideration was being given to deploying NETs to primary schools on a district basis, e.g. deploying one NET to serve a few primary schools within the same district.

37. DS(EM) supplemented that the Government was cognizant of the body of research indicating that good quality language education at an early age would be beneficial to students and this was the reason why the Administration would allocate more resources to the teaching of English language in primary schools. However, he would find no evidence that the provision of NETs in secondary schools would be less effective in upgrading students' proficiency in English than providing NETs in primary schools.

38. Miss Emily LAU expressed disappointment that after putting in so much efforts and resources to provide NET to secondary schools, the Administration had not been able to ascertain whether it would be more effective to start the NET Scheme at primary or secondary schools.

39. Assistant Director of Education (Planning & Research) (ADE(P&R)) responded that a project conducted by Hong Kong Council of Early Childhood Education and Services supported the teaching and learning of English language in pre-primary centres. The Education Department had extended the project on reading and English language learning in five primary schools this year. Deputy Director of Education

Action

(DDE) added that the decision of not introducing the NET Scheme at primary schools initially was partly based on the consideration that there might be communication difficulties between NETs and local primary school teachers.

40. D of E asked whether members would support ED transferring NETs who were not effectively deployed in some secondary schools to selected primary schools. Miss Emily LAU expressed support for such an arrangement provided that there were sound reasons for the transfer.

41. Dr YEUNG Sum shared the view that children starting language learning at an early age would achieve better language development. He pointed out, however, that many students studying in international schools had achieved higher proficiency in English than Chinese because of much lesser exposure to the teaching of Chinese at school. He hoped that schools of education at tertiary institutes and the HKIEd would undertake studies on developing strategies for language learning in both English and Chinese at the primary education level. ADE(P&R) remarked that ED had launched some research-based projects to promote strategic language teaching and learning in both English and Chinese in lower primary classes.

42. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that while the standard of English should be improved, Chinese students should aim to achieve competence in Chinese language first. He asked the Administration to give more details about how the three initiatives mentioned in Strategy 4 in paragraph 11 of the paper would be implemented as they had far reaching implications on the professional development for language teachers.

43. DDE responded that the drawing up of Strategy 4 was based on studies undertaken by Dr P K JOHNSON and Dr NG Seok-moi which were included as annexes to the Education Commission Report No. 6. In regard to the initiative of capitalizing on the more innovative and effective teaching methods of NETs for sharing with local English teachers, ED would establish teams each consisting of one NET, one local English teacher and a teaching assistant to visit and participate in the teaching and learning activities of primary schools on a rotation basis. The purpose of establishing such teams was to develop new teaching methods and programmes for teaching English at primary school level. A series of seminars would be organized to enhance the sharing of experience among the participating NETs and local English teachers.

44. As regards the second initiative which involved introducing a pilot scheme to teach Chinese using Putonghua as a medium of instruction, DDE said that students' standard of Cantonese would not decline given its frequent use in daily life. The crucial factor to be considered was whether such a teaching method would enable students to learn Putonghua as well as the subject matter more effectively. He added that ED would make reference to the critical success factors identified in existing schools using Putonghua as the medium of instruction. A study on a more scientific basis would be undertaken next year to ascertain the effectiveness of this teaching method.

Action

45. As regards the third initiative which required all primary and secondary school teachers teaching Chinese, English and Putonghua to attain the relevant language benchmarks within five years, DDE said that ED would work with the teacher education institutions to strengthen teacher training programmes with a view to training and developing teachers up to the required language benchmarks within a fairly long grace period. Teachers who failed to attain the benchmarks within the time frame would be allowed to teach in non-language subjects.

46. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong referred to the establishment of teams on a trial basis mentioned in paragraph 43 above and asked about the total number of teams established and whether such teams would be established on a permanent basis.

47. DDE responded that subject to funding about 20 teams would be established to serve some 40 primary schools. The Quality Education Fund had also received other applications for funding similar teams. He hoped that the Quality Education Fund would give favourable consideration to such applications.

48. Mr CHEUNG asked whether the establishment of such teams would be extended to secondary schools. DDE said that a small team led by a retired professional had been established to promote innovative pedagogy such as engaging secondary students in learning English through dramas or poetry recitation.

49. D of E supplemented that in order to ensure that resources were put to optimum use, the NET Scheme would be introduced to those primary schools which were keen to have NETs to teach English, rather than deploying NETs to all primary schools.

50. Miss Cyd HO expressed concern that local language teachers in primary schools could not communicate effectively with NETs. She enquired whether there would be sufficient training places for serving language teachers to achieve the benchmark qualification in the next five years. D of E responded in the affirmative.

51. Mr TSANG Yok-sing said that language learning in both English and Chinese by students mainly took place in classrooms according to the pre-set school curriculum. Despite the fact that a number of new initiatives - such as improving the learning environment and introducing the NET Scheme - had been implemented in recent years, the language standard of secondary school graduates was still unsatisfactory on the whole. He asked whether the Administration would review the school curriculum to improve language education in schools.

52. DDE responded that school curriculum at various levels had been continually revised to take account of the changing needs of the community. He pointed out that according to the Education Commission report No. 6, environmental factors were affecting language proficiency. To address this, measures were being taken to provide good quality language education to children at an early stage of their schooling, including strategies to encourage wider participation of parents and the community. He

Action

added that critical to the success of these strategies was the need to make full use of existing resources, redeploying as necessary to achieve optimum benefits.

53. D of E said that the teaching and learning process in schools should be improved to motivate students' interest in learning languages and other subjects. Traditional practice about the use of dictation and composition to assure technical accuracy at the expense of creativity should be abandoned. She anticipated that teachers could share their valuable teaching experiences through a district teacher network as well as the state-of-the-art teaching resources available in an education specific intranet.

54. Mr TSANG Yok-sing said that students would not indulge in video games and comic books if school education was interesting and effective. He suggested that ED should find out the reasons for students' loss of interest in reading and learning and take appropriate measures to improve the learning environment and quality of language teaching.

55. DDE said that ED had taken a series of improvement measures to enhance interest in language learning both inside and outside schools. DS/EM added that the role of teachers in classroom teaching was paramount and a set of benchmark standards would be set for language teachers. As regards school curriculum, the Curriculum Development Council would continue to review the school curriculum in the light of the changing needs of the community. He pointed out that the syllabuses for English and Chinese would be revised to give more emphasis on active learning and practices.

56. Mr SIN Chung-kai said that parents would like to make use of the long summer holidays to develop their children's language abilities. He was of the view that ED should take the lead in providing students with more authentic language environment outside schools. He suggested that ED should, in conjunction with the Mainland authorities and the consular offices in Hong Kong, organize more Putonghua immersion camps in the Mainland and arrange exchange programmes with overseas institutions.

57. In response, DDE said that ED had been planning a number of such exchange programmes including three Putonghua immersion camps and two English immersion camps this summer, benefiting some 1800 and 1 000 students respectively. In addition, ED had organized for local business organizations to provide secondary students with attachment opportunities in order to raise their awareness of the importance of English in the workplace and to expose them to authentic language environments.

58. Miss Cyd HO expressed reservations about the Government's strategy to encourage wider participation of parents in developing children's language learning habits. She pointed out that there were some 400 000 parents who might not have received adequate education to help their children to develop good reading skills and habits for lifelong learning.

Action

59. DDE said that ED was addressing the equity of access issue. In collaboration with the Radio Television Hong Kong, ED was developing radio programmes to engage parents in shared reading and story-telling with their children. ED would provide guidelines and learning materials in the form of publications, homepages and radio broadcasts to enable parents to play the role as their children's first teachers. Apart from organizing extension activities in public libraries to enable students and parents to develop interest in reading, ED had encouraged schools to apply for library cards on behalf of the students to enable them to borrow library materials from public libraries and thereby begin their life-long learning.

60. Prof NG Ching-fai was of the view that the Administration should have the determination to improve students' English standard and he considered that the NET Scheme was one of the tools to help achieve the aim. He stressed that it was important that NETs should be provided with opportunities to experience the Hong Kong culture and communicate with different walks of life in the community. D of E concurred with Prof NG and said that NETs who were of Chinese origin and good at Cantonese and Putonghua had shown a stronger commitment to Hong Kong.

61. Mrs Selina CHOW was of the view that of the six strategies mentioned in paragraph 11 of the paper, the strategy of improving the pedagogy of teachers through strengthening continuous professional development was most crucial to success in language teaching in the longer term. She urged the Administration to put in more resources to assist language teachers in developing their professional competence.

62. D of E responded that apart from the training programmes for serving language teachers to achieve the benchmarks within five years, the district education offices would assist in developing a district teacher network to promote best practices in language teaching. The recent advances in IT had facilitated efficient dissemination of quality teaching resources. An education specific intranet, as well as education websites on the Internet, would be developed to provide teachers with the teaching resources they needed.

63. Mrs CHOW suggested that immersion camps should be organized for serving language teachers. DDE responded that prospective and serving local teachers in English would be given opportunities to receive training overseas. Exchange programmes between teachers in overseas institutions and local teachers were being arranged on a trial basis in the coming months.

64. Mrs CHOW further suggested that the Administration should adjust the teacher-to-student ratio for language classes. The Chairman requested the Administration to consider Mrs CHOW's suggestion.

VI. Revisions to the fines provisions in the Education Ordinance and the Education Regulations

[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1417/99-00(02)]

65. At the invitation of the Chairman, DS/EM briefed members on the background of the proposal to revise the fines provisions in the Education Ordinance (the Ordinance) and the Education Regulations (the Regulations). He said that the fines imposed under the Ordinance and the Regulations had not been revised for a long time. Arising from a spate of incidents of kindergartens over-enrolling, over-charging and operating without registration, the community as a whole had expressed concern that the existing levels of fines were not adequate to deter kindergarten operators from committing such offences. In particular, Members of LegCo had repeatedly urged the Administration to step up enforcement action and impose heavier penalties on kindergartens which failed to comply with the regulatory requirements. In view of these developments, the Administration had conducted a review of the fines provisions in the Ordinance and the Regulations. The opportunity was also taken to convert the fines to the appropriate levels according to the standard scale of fines under the Criminal Procedure (Amendment) (No.2) Ordinance 1994. The proposed maximum fines were detailed in paragraph 10 of the paper.

66. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed support for increasing the level of fines to deal stringently with any kindergartens or schools which acted against the law. However, he pointed out that the proposed increase of penalties on the basis of inflation since the last adjustment in 1971 was inadequate to deter kindergarten operators from over-enrolling and over-charging. He considered that the increase of the maximum penalty for contravening section 84(3) of the Ordinance from HK\$5,000 to HK\$50,000 was particularly insignificant as the amount of school fees derived from over-enrolling and over-charging would far exceed the proposed maximum fine. He stressed that over-enrollment in kindergartens was a particularly serious offence as children's lives could be put at risk if there were to be a fire. He also questioned why some parents had not received refund of school fees from some kindergartens after the court had convicted the kindergartens concerned of over-charging.

67. DS/EM said that the Administration had considered proposing heavier maximum penalty for offences such as over-enrollment in kindergartens. However, in order to bring the current proposal into operation in the 2000/01 school year, the Government had proposed to increase the fines to take account of the effect of inflation from 1971 to the present by way of a LegCo resolution. The fines would also be converted to the appropriate levels in accordance with the scale of fines under the Criminal Procedure (Amendment) (No.2) Ordinance 1994. He pointed out that further adjustment to the fine levels for offences under the Ordinance would be considered in the context of the overall review of the Ordinance and the Regulations. He added that the proposed maximum penalty of \$50,000 for over-enrollment would be applied to each kindergarten class.

68. D of E supplemented that apart from imposing heavier fines, ED was considering other penalty measures such as cancelling the school registration, restricting persons

Action

convicted of an offence from being appointed as managers, and establishing a central enforcement team within ED to speed up the prosecution process. She further said that a comprehensive review of the Ordinance and the Regulations would be undertaken soon with a view to plugging loopholes in the existing legislation, such as the lack of any provisions to order school operators to refund over-charged school fees to parents.

69. Miss Emily LAU shared Mr CHEUNG's views and urged the Administration to consider imposing a much higher penalty for over-enrolling than the fine of \$50,000 proposed in the paper.

70. D of E explained that adjustment of fines on the basis of inflation was an expedient interim measure which would send a strong message to kindergarten operators that ED had stepped up enforcement actions against those operators acting in breach of the law. There was also the question of the relativity of the fines vis-à-vis other fines for offences. However, in the light of members' views, ED would explore the feasibility of further increasing the level of penalty for offences under section 84(3) of the Ordinance. It would be necessary to justify the higher level of penalty proposed and assess the relativity with the penalties for offences of similar gravity.

71. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that he would propose an amendment to increase the proposed maximum fine for an offence under section 84(3) if the proposed maximum fine of \$50,000 for such an offence remained unchanged when the relevant subsidiary legislation was introduced into the LegCo.

72. The Chairman said that members supported in principle the proposed maximum fines set out in paragraph 10 of the paper with the exception of the fine in section 84(3) of the Ordinance. He requested the Administration to consider members' strongly held view that the proposed maximum fine of \$50,000 for an offence under section 84(3) should be raised to a much higher level .

VII. Operating Expenses Block Grant

[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1417/99-00(03)]

73. Members unanimously expressed support for the proposals as detailed in the paper.

VIII. Any other business

74. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 7:00 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat

14 April 2000