

立法會
Legislative Council

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**Report of the Panel on Education
for submission to the Legislative Council
1998-99**

Purpose

This report gives an account of the work of the Panel on Education during the 1998-99 Legislative Council session. It will be tabled at the meeting of the Council on 30 June 1999 in accordance with Rule 77(14) of the Rules of Procedure of the Council.

The Panel

2. The Panel was formed by resolution of the Legislative Council on 8 July 1998 for the purpose of monitoring and examining Government policies and issues of public concern relating to education matters. The terms of reference of the Panel are in **Appendix I**.

3. The Panel comprises 11 members, with Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung and Dr Hon NG Ching-fai elected as Chairman and Deputy Chairman respectively. The membership list of the Panel is in **Appendix II**.

Major work

4. To adequately equip our next generation with information technology (IT) skills for meeting the challenges of an information age, the Panel urged the Government to take early actions to implement the five-year strategy plan for enhancing the use of IT in education and in the community. With regard to accommodation constraints in schools and the rapid changes in information technology, the Panel advised the Government to provide more flexibility to schools in the acquisition of IT facilities. The Government accepted the suggestion and allowed schools to make use of surplus funds to purchase more advanced IT facilities. Members also asked the Government to expedite site preparation and computer installation works in schools, so that all schools could start IT education at the earliest possible opportunity. Some members had suggested that the

Government should provide financial assistance to enable needy students to purchase computers for practice at home.

5. On the delivery of quality education, the Panel advised the Government to provide more resources to schools, and to reduce the class size of primary and secondary schools so that teachers could devote more time to individual students. The Government responded that due to resource constraints, priority was given to achieving whole-day primary schooling by 2007-2008, and that the timetable for reduction of class size had been slightly adjusted. Nevertheless, the Government was considering measures to allow more flexible use of resources by schools under the School Management Initiatives Scheme. In this connection, some members considered that practical schools and schools with a higher intake of Band Five students should be given additional support and resources to alleviate teachers' workload.

6. Regarding the use of the \$5 billion Quality Education Fund, the Panel urged the vetting committee to enhance the transparency and fairness of the assessment system. Members generally agreed that the Fund should only be used to finance projects which could enhance quality education as well as those projects which were innovative, cost-effective and had potential for wider application in other schools.

7. In view of Government's reluctance to provide air-conditioning in all schools (other than those included in the Noise Abatement Programme) on grounds of resource constraints, the Panel had strongly urged the Government to give priority to special schools for physically handicapped children. A subcommittee was subsequently formed under the Panel to follow up improvements to the facilities in these special schools. To reduce the discomfort of handicapped children who had to wear braces at all times and to enhance their concentration at school, the Government had agreed, as a first step, to provide air-conditioning to all classrooms and facility rooms in special schools. In response to the subcommittee, the two electric companies also agreed to donate air-conditioners to the boarding section of special schools. With regard to the requirement of special facilities, the Government had undertaken to include basic ambulating equipment and adjustable desks and chairs in the list of standard provisions for these special schools. As the design of some old schools did not meet present day standards, the Government would also consider providing larger classrooms and tailor-made toilet facilities in the future design. The subcommittee had also sought the assistance of Hospital Authority to provide special meals to handicapped students who had chewing difficulties.

8. The Panel expressed grave concern about the high prices of school textbooks which had caused much financial burden on parents. Noting that publishers included donations to schools in the costs of textbooks and revised the editions frequently, members urged the Government to impose more specific guidelines against such practice. The Panel also requested the Consumer Council to study the marketing practices of textbook publishers. To reduce the weight of textbooks, some members

proposed setting a maximum weight of textbooks to encourage the use of light-weight paper and separate publication of textbooks and workbooks.

9. Concerning the construction of new schools in anticipation of an influx of newly arrived children, the Panel sought a briefing from the Government on its plans to meet the new demand. Members noted that Government had made provisions in the School Building Programme based on previous forecasts since up-to-date estimates on new immigrant children were not available at the time of the briefing. As a measure to overcome the shortage of school sites in urban areas, the Government would relax the height restriction for new schools. Some members also suggested constructing several new schools in the form of “school estates” in newly developed or re-developed areas.

10. On promoting sport and physical education in schools, members requested Government to provide more space and facilities in the new school design. Considering the space constraint in Hong Kong, some members suggested the provision of a standard sports venue in each school district for shared use by schools.

11. Members welcomed the overall review of the Education Department (ED) which aimed at streamlining the structure of ED to enhance efficiency and to delegate more powers to schools to encourage school-based management. Members noted the various recommendations of the consultancy report and had given views on some of the proposals. The Panel reminded ED to fully consult the affected parties and staff on the re-organization and to strengthen partnership with advisory bodies and other stakeholders. The Panel would follow up important issues arising from the reform.

12. The Panel received a briefing from the Education Commission (EC) on the consultation document on “Aims of Education” in Hong Kong. Members noted that EC sought community participation in devising a common set of education objectives for re-prioritizing the various education initiatives. Some members disagreed with the approach as the consultation document did not offer concrete proposals to solve the long-standing problems in education. Some other members considered it impractical to seek a consensus on education objectives. In general, the Panel supported an education system which would offer diversity and choices and which was capable of delivering quality education.

13. The Panel supported the Government’s initiatives to develop a vibrant private school sector. Members noted that two sites would be granted at nominal premium for non-profit-making private schools to operate under a ten-year service agreement, while interest-free capital loan and enhanced subsidies would be provided to private schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme. Since private schools would enjoy independence in the selection of the language of instruction and setting of school fees, members urged the Government to guard against creating elitist schools for only the rich. On the terms of the service agreement, some members requested the Government to include management of surplus school funds and provision of scholarships and financial assistance to needy students.

14. In view of public concern about the operation of unregistered kindergartens and over-enrollment in kindergartens, the Panel sought a briefing from the Government on preventive and enforcement measures. The Government agreed to adopt a strict approach in enforcement and would at the same time expedite the processing of registration applications. Kindergartens would be required to display the registration certificate in a prominent place, and registration details such as student capacity would be available for public inspection. To effectively enforce the rules, members suggested ED conduct surprise inspections on kindergartens during and after registration.

15. The implementation of the Target Oriented Curriculum (TOC) in schools was discussed by the Panel. Members considered that the hasty decision of Government to implement TOC had given rise to confusion and additional workload in schools without improving the quality of education. Some members therefore suggested discontinuation of TOC altogether. While acknowledging that TOC would need improvements particularly in the assessment and recording methods, the Government was of the view that the education community did not object to the concept of TOC. To address the concerns of schools, the Government would allow flexibility in the selection of the assessment method. The Panel had urged the Government to conduct an overall review of TOC to ensure that it would meet the demands of the next century.

16. On higher education, the Panel expressed concern about the supervision of the administration of tertiary education institutions by their governing councils, in particular matters relating to staff appointment and termination of employment contracts. The Panel had invited representatives of the governing councils and staff associations of these institutions to discuss the present mechanisms and the measures to enhance transparency of the operation of these governing councils.

17. With regard to the provision of resources for establishing centres of excellence in universities, the Panel sought clarification and assurance from the Government that the 5% savings identified by University Grants Committee would be ploughed back for development of these centres and related quality assurance initiatives in the institutions.

18. On integrating children with special needs in ordinary schools, the Panel discussed with the Government the effectiveness of the two-year pilot scheme. The Panel noted that the scheme was generally well-received by parents and schools, and that extra support and additional teachers had been provided to schools participating in the pilot scheme. Members considered that more ordinary schools should be encouraged to take on handicapped students, and that enhanced community education would help promote a friendly school environment for students with special needs. As regards children with reading and writing difficulties, members suggested increased publicity so that professional assistance could be given to these children at an early stage.

19. The Panel also urged the Government to take early actions to improve the language proficiency of students in view of the community concern about the declining language standards of the younger generation. On the development of benchmarks for English teachers, members noted that the same standards would apply to teachers in schools using English or Chinese as the medium of instruction, and that teachers could be benchmarked by way of examination or training. Members also noted the operation of the Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme, the use of Language Fund and the teaching of Putongua in schools.

20. With regard to the public examination system, the Panel discussed with Hong Kong Examinations Authority the proposed school-based assessment system. While acknowledging that non-academic abilities should be recognised in the intake of university undergraduates, members urged the Authority to be careful in selecting a fair and objective assessment method with regard to the implications on teachers' workload and pressure on students.

21. In addition, the Panel discussed issues relating to the future of government bought places in private schools, and the training and development programme for school principals. The Panel also received briefings by the Government on the Chief Executive's Policy Objectives for 1998-99 and the progress of Year 2000 compliance of computer systems in the education field. The Panel also discussed with the Government financial proposals relating to the special Furniture & Equipment Grant for schools, the flexibility arrangements for schools in the acquisition of IT facilities and services, the home financing scheme for eligible staff in tertiary education institutions funded by the University Grants Committee, and the proposed creation of a supernumerary directorate post in ED to co-ordinate the re-structuring of ED.

22. During the period from July 1998 to June 1999, the Panel held a total of 18 meetings, of which three were held by the Subcommittee on facilities in special schools for physically handicapped children. The Panel and the Subcommittee also visited education institutions and special schools to observe their facilities and discuss the improvements and new developments in these institutions.

Legislative Council Secretariat

25 June 1999

Legislative Council

Panel on Education

Terms of Reference

1. To monitor and examine Government policies and issues of public concern relating to education matters.
2. To provide a forum for the exchange and dissemination of views on related policy matters.
3. To receive briefings and to formulate views on any major legislative or financial proposals in the relevant policy area prior to their formal introduction to the Council or Finance Committee.
4. To examine and to report on any major issues of wide public concern in the relevant policy area as referred by the Council or House Committee or as raised by the Panel itself.

LegCo Panel on Education

Membership List

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

Total : 11 Members

Date : 14 July 1998