

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 Thursday, 28 February 2002 at 10:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

Members Present : Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung, BBS (Chairman)
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah
Hon SZETO Wah
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok
Hon MA Fung-kwok

Members Absent : Dr Hon YEUNG Sum (Deputy Chairman)
Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP
Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP

Public Officers Attending : Item IV
Mr Matthew CHEUNG, JP
Director of Education

Mr S L MA
Principal Education Officer (Infrastructure)
Education Department

Item V

Mr Matthew CHEUNG, JP
Director of Education

Mr Andrew C S POON
Assistant Director of Education (Chief Inspector of Schools)

Item VI

Mr Matthew CHEUNG, JP
Director of Education

Mrs Betty C H IP
Assistant Director of Education (Education Services 2)

Attendance by Invitation : Hong Kong Association for Specific Learning Disabilities

Ms CHEUK Wai-man
Chairman

Ms HO Yee-mi
Member

Ms LI Man-ying
Member

Ms LEUNG Yuk-ping
Member

Ms IP Yee-kin
Member

Clerk in Attendance : Miss Flora TAI
Chief Assistant Secretary (2)2

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

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I. Confirmation of minutes

[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1173//01-02]

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2002 were confirmed.

II. Information paper issued since the last meeting

2. Members noted that the Administration had provided a paper on further information on the qualifications of staff appointed under the Capacity Enhancement Grant which was issued vide LC Paper No.CB(2)1082/01-02(01) on 11 February 2002.

III. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[Appendices I and II to LC Paper No. CB(2)1171/01-02]

3. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the City University of Hong Kong had recently not renewed the contracts of a number of lecturers in its School of Law. These lecturers had considered that injustice existed in the University's procedures for the termination of appointment or non-renewal of employment contract. He said that representatives from the Concern Group of the Law School of City University should be invited to express their views and that the Panel might also invite the Administration to respond.

4. The Chairman pointed out that the Panel could not and should not deal with such cases of individual complaints. Depending on members' views, the Panel could discuss the subject of supervision of the administration of University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded tertiary education institutions and related issues. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed agreement with the Chairman. He added that it was not for the Panel to deal with individual complaints. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that he agreed that the subject should be discussed. He added that apart from the procedures relating to termination of appointment or non-renewal of employment contract, he was also concerned about the use of Chinese in legal education.

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5. The Chairman proposed and members agreed that the Panel would discuss the following items at the next regular meeting scheduled for Monday, 18 March 2002 -

- (a) Capital Works projects of UGC-funded institutions (as proposed by the Administration); and
- (b) Supervision of the administration of UGC-funded tertiary education institutions.

IV. Preliminary study on reviewing the progress and evaluating the Information Technology in Education projects

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1171/01-02(01)]

6. At the invitation of the Chairman, Director of Education (D of E) briefed members on the salient points of the Administration's paper on "Interim review of the five-year strategy on information technology in education". He highlighted the specific findings of the consultancy study commissioned by the Education Department (ED) in 2000-01 to review the progress and effectiveness of various initiatives in the promotion of Information Technology (IT) in education. The review was completed in end 2001 and had provided a basis for determination of future measures in the use of IT in education. The Administration would conduct a final evaluation of the Five-year Strategy on IT in Education in 2003 to review the overall progress of the strategy and achievements in the use of IT in education.

Students' access to IT facilities after school hours

7. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong noted that despite the improvement in the computer-to-student ratio in recent years, the consultancy study had concluded that computers available for students' use outside normal school hours were often limited. He pointed out that students without a computer and access to the Internet at home were at a disadvantageous position in learning. Although some 23 000 sets of notebook computers were procured for loan to needy students in secondary schools, he considered that needy students were not having sufficient access to IT facilities. Mr CHEUNG remarked that more statistical information should be included in the paper. He asked whether the Administration could provide statistics on students' use of computers and IT facilities in and after school.

8. In response, Principal Education Officer (Infrastructure) (PEO(I)) of ED said that 506 and 560 public sector schools had applied for an incentive grant to extend the opening hours of computer facilities beyond normal school hours in the 1999-00 and 2000-01 school years respectively. Schools which had not done so might be concerned about the necessary manpower support and security control measures for opening up their IT facilities for students' use after school hours.

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9. PEO(I) further said that according to a Thematic Household Survey on IT Usage and Penetration conducted by the Census and Statistics Department during April to June 2001, 82.7% school students aged 10 or over had access to computer at home and 77.8% of them had access to the Internet. While these figures were not unsatisfactory, ED would continue to encourage schools to make the best use of their available IT resources to meet the needs of those students who did not have a computer at home. He added that some students might refrain from borrowing notebook computers from schools to avoid being labelled as "needy students". ED would collaborate with schools to rectify the incorrect perception to improve the utilisation of notebook computer on loan, as well as to encourage schools to open their libraries, computer rooms, etc for students' use after school hours. D of E supplemented that many schools had proactively installed additional workstations at different parts of school premises to facilitate students' access to IT facilities.

10. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed disappointment that only 560 of around 1 300 primary and secondary schools had used the incentive grant scheme to prolong the opening hours of their IT facilities. He said that it would be a complete waste of resources if schools locked up the computers simply for fear that the computers might be damaged by misuse. Mr CHEUNG held a strong view that schools should strive to make the best use of available IT resources including notebook computers to cater for the needs of students, particularly those 12.7% students who did not have access to computer facilities. He urged the Administration to enhance equal opportunities in students' learning through IT facilities.

11. D of E responded that ED totally agreed with the consultant's recommendation that schools should open up IT facilities after school hours. Starting from the 2001-02 school year, all public sector primary and secondary schools had been provided with the incentive grant for making their IT facilities available for student access after school hours. PEO(I) supplemented that ED would provide assistance to individual schools on a needs basis. ED would also continue to encourage schools to extend the opening hours of their libraries and computer rooms for students' access.

12. Mr SZETO Wah suggested that the Administration should make it compulsory for schools to extend the opening hours of their IT facilities from the 2002-03 school year, unless they could provide justifications for not doing so. He also suggested that students without a computer at home should be given priority in use of IT facilities and notebook computers after school hours. D of E undertook to seriously consider Mr SZETO's suggestions. He added that apart from school days, ED would encourage schools to open up IT facilities on Saturdays and Sundays.

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Software development for school education

13. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung considered that the provision of sufficient and appropriate software for teaching and learning was imperative in promoting the quality of school education. He urged the Administration to develop specific software to facilitate communications between teachers and students, as well as to enhance effective teaching and learning in schools.

14. D of E responded that the Information Technology Education Resources Centre of ED was collaborating with the tertiary education sector, the Hong Kong Education City (EdCity) and IT professionals in software development for teaching and learning in school education. These software would be made available in EdCity's web-site on the Internet. PEO(I) supplemented that EdCity was established in August 2000 to serve as a cyber centre for information, resources, interaction and services of education-related matters for all teachers, students, parents and members of the public. EdCity hosted a repository of teaching and learning resources and provided a platform for teachers to share their experience. Currently, around 3 000 multi-media software were available at the web-site of EdCity on the Internet. PEO(I) added that software development by EdCity was now made through the collaboration of a team of experienced teachers and in-house IT professionals. EdCity anticipated that with the participation of private sector, software development for local school education could progress at a much faster rate.

15. The Chairman asked how the Administration could maximise the benefits of IT in enhancing teaching and learning if students themselves did not like using the school IT facilities after school hours. D of E responded that the Curriculum Reform would encourage students to use IT facilities. Students should use computers outside school hours to conduct researches over the Internet for collection of relevant data and information to complete their project assignments.

Curriculum reform

16. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung considered that software development should match with the pace of curriculum reform in order to maximise the benefits of using IT in education. He also suggested that school curriculum should aim to require students to use computers on a regular basis. He added that some students might consider themselves as capable of using computers while actually they were not familiar with the basic operations.

17. D of E agreed that curriculum reform should create more opportunities for teachers to use the Internet to access valuable teaching materials and information, support facilities and services. They should in turn teach students how to search information on the Internet, and use IT to teach them certain concepts and knowledge in a more lively and interactive manner. He added that ED will

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conduct large-scale IT in education leadership programmes for school heads so as to empower them to take up the leading role in promoting IT in schools. He anticipated that school heads would give more efforts in changing the attitude of those teachers who still perceived their role as providers of knowledge, instead of facilitators developing in students the skills to critically select and analyse information through the use of IT. This called for a paradigm shift.

18. The Chairman urged the Administration to realise its policy commitment to enhance the use of IT in delivery of around 25% school curriculum. He questioned how the objective could be achieved in the absence of supporting measures such as the provision of sufficient access to IT facilities and homework assignments involving extensive use of computers.

19. PEO(I) responded that although schools were not compulsorily required to provide students with specific lessons on the use of IT, many schools had developed their own school-based curricula in computer studies and required students to use computers to prepare assignments and submit them through electronic transmission. He pointed out that in the light of the eight identified key learning areas under curriculum reform, schools were advised to devise their school-based curriculum with the applications of IT facilities. In fact, many schools had stepped up efforts in promoting the use of project learning and IT to enhance students' learning effectiveness. ED would assess students' usage of computer in their learning by way of student opinion survey and might adjust the 25% target to meet the needs of changing circumstances.

V. Regulation of tutorial schools

20. Members noted the submissions of the Oxford Oriental School of Languages and "香港輔助教育機構聯會" which had been issued with LC Paper Nos CB(2)1171/01-02(03) and CB(2)1213/01-02(01) respectively.

21. At the Chairman's invitation, D of E briefed members on the main points of the Administration's paper on "Regulation of private schools offering non-formal curriculum" [LC Paper No. CB(2)1171/01-02(02)]. He highlighted the measures proposed by ED to tighten control and enhance transparency of private schools offering non-formal curriculum (PSNFCs) which included private tutorial schools, be they operated on a profit-making or non-profit making basis. D of E stressed that while ED had its role and responsibilities in the regulation of PSNFCs, consumers were in the best position to decide whether they were getting value for money and to exercise the rights of consumers when choosing PSNFCs. ED would therefore strengthen consumer education on the selection of PSNFCs. He further pointed out that after the enactment of the Education (Amendment) Ordinance 2001 on 1 June 2001, school fees had to be collected on an equal monthly basis unless with the permission of D of E. However, some PSNFCs, in

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particular those which had large capital investment and high operation cost, had expressed grave concern over the stringent requirement on collection of fees on a monthly basis. These PSNFCs pointed out that the requirement had caused serious cash flow problems and might put them out of the business in the end. In this context, ED had granted exemption to a few bona fide non-profit-making PSNFCs with proper refund procedures and with a good track record.

22. D of E further said that in considering whether similar exemption should be given to profit-making PSNFCs, it was imperative that these PSNFCs should provide proof of financial security to guard against any financial loss of students in case of abrupt school closures. In this respect, ED had liaised with the Consumer Council, some leading banks, the Professional Insurance Brokers Association and some PSNFCs in exploring various options for providing financial security. He stressed that at this stage ED was only exploring the feasibility of giving exemption to PSNFCs which could provide sufficient financial guarantee. ED would encourage and facilitate bona fide PSNFC operators to voluntarily unite together to form federations of their own. He anticipated that federations of PSNFCs would eventually agreed on a code of practice to enable self-regulation, ensure quality of education services provided, enhance consumer protection and ultimately secure the confidence of consumers.

Bank guarantee and insurance coverage

23. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed appreciation of ED's co-ordination efforts with PSNFCs in exploring the feasible options to guard against students' financial loss in case of abrupt school closures. He asked whether banks and insurance companies were prepared to provide guarantee and insurance coverage to PSNFCs, and whether PSNFCs were willing to bear the costs incurred. He was concerned that banks and insurance companies might require PSNFCs to pay a high cost.

24. D of E said that the general response of PSNFCs towards providing financial protection to students was positive. To obtain the necessary insurance coverage, a critical mass of participating PSNFCs would have to be established. He said that it was encouraging that following discussion with ED, 18 PSNFCs had now come together to form the Hong Kong Federation of Private Educators. This was an important step forward. Separately, ED had appointed an insurance consultant under the Professional Insurance Brokers Association to examine the feasibility of providing financial security and the study was expected to be completed in a few weeks' time. D of E anticipated that the Federation could attract more PSNFCs to join and subsequently serve as a truly representative body of the trade to communicate with the Administration.

25. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung asked how ED would ensure that students were really protected by the insurance coverage. He pointed out that the terms and

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conditions specified under an insurance policy could be very complicated for a layman to interpret. D of E stressed that ED would only consider giving exemption to PSNFCs which had secured a comprehensive insurance coverage to compensate students in the event of school closure.

26. Mr LAU Kwong-wah expressed reservations about exempting PSNFCs which had procured sufficient financial guarantee from the requirement of collecting fees on a monthly basis. He pointed out that these PSNFCs might still run into financial difficulties after obtaining the exemption. In fact, many organisations which seemed to be in good financial position had declared bankruptcy to the surprise of the general public in the past.

27. D of E reiterated that ED would not give exemption unless a full protection was guaranteed by way of an insurance coverage or bank guarantee. To further protect the benefits of students, the Hong Kong Federation of Private Educators was considering to set up a fund to compensate students in case a member school closed down. ED would encourage the setting up of such fund to facilitate industry self-regulation as well as to provide consumer protection for the students in the long run.

28. Mr MA Fung-kwok considered that as commercial organisations, PSNFCs would implement advance payment schemes in order to retain students. He suggested that the Administration should explore the feasibility of securing insurance coverage for individual students of PSNFCs to insure against school closure. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong remarked that students registered in a PSNFC having an insurance coverage should be entitled to refund of paid fees in case the PSNFC closed down. D of E undertook to relay Mr MA's suggestion to PSNFCs and the insurance industry for consideration.

Self-regulation and ED's monitoring role

29. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong held a strong view that ED should continue to play a monitoring role in the supervision of PSNFCs. He suggested that even if a PSNFC was exempted from the requirement on collecting school fees on a monthly basis, there should be a limit to the number of monthly fee to be collected. He pointed out that after procuring an insurance coverage and obtaining an exemption, a PSNFC might collect a large amount of fees from students and subsequently ran into bankruptcy for some reasons. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung echoed that ED should maintain close supervision on the operation of PSNFCs and should not leave the task to self-regulation by the trade.

30. D of E responded that ED would continue to explore ways to step up monitoring and control of PSNFCs without over-regulating the sector and without draining the department's limited manpower resources. It would strengthen enforcement, issue warnings to school operators who had breached the Education

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Ordinance, and institute proceedings if prosecutions were warranted. As regards the number of monthly fee to be collected by an exempted PSNFC, ED would carefully decide the appropriate terms and conditions of the exemption given to a particular PSNFC. He added that insurance companies would also play an active role in supervising the operation and financial status of PSNFCs under their insurance coverage.

31. Mr SZETO Wah suggested that the Administration should establish a points penalty system to regulate the operation of PSNFCs and cancel the registration of those PSNFCs if they repeatedly failed to comply with the statutory requirements. He also asked how ED would supervise the operation of PSNFCs when there were a number of PSNFC federations.

32. D of E responded that ED would consider cancelling the registration of a school which had been convicted of serious offences under the Education Ordinance. He pointed out that the existence of more PSNFC federations would enhance self-regulation as well as communication between ED and PSNFCs. He added that federation membership would not exempt a PSNFC from the requirement on collecting fees on a monthly basis, nor would it be free from ED's monitoring.

33. Mr MAK Kwok-fung expressed doubts about the effect of self-regulation. He asked how often ED would conduct random inspections to ensure compliance with statutory requirements. Mr LAU Kwong-wah considered that publication of PSNFC's over-enrolment, over-charging, false or misleading advertisement on ED's homepage on the Internet might not be sufficient for deterring the malpractices of PSNFCs. They urged ED to adopt a more active role in ensuring compliance.

34. D of E responded that schools would be required to self-report school information to ED according to regulation 94 of the Education Regulations with effect from April 2002. The purpose of self-reporting was to regularly remind schools of the need to comply with the safety requirements and observe the regulations under the Education Ordinance. Staff of Regional Education Offices of ED would conduct random checks on schools' submissions and take appropriate follow-up action in case of non-compliances and/or false reporting. The frequency of inspections would vary from districts to districts and from months to months. ED would follow up complaints about any PSNFC's contravention of the Education Ordinance and take prosecution actions as appropriate. D of E added that ED had initiated prosecutions against a number of PSNFCs in case of serious and repeated offences.

35. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong remarked that ED should monitor the quality of education provided by PSNFCs which had been exempted from the requirement on collecting schools fees on a monthly basis. He pointed out that the quality of

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education provided by these PSNFCs might decline over time. Refund of advance payment should be allowed if students were not satisfied with the quality of education after enrolment.

Role of PSNFCs

36. Miss Cyd HO said that while PSNFCs served an important role of providing diversity in education to different social sectors, it was a problem of mainstream school education when over 60% of the 730 day PSNFCs and 40% of the 630 evening PSNFCs were providing homework supervision for primary school pupils.

37. D of E explained that private education sector played a useful role in the provision of education service. He pointed out that many PSNFCs providing homework supervision for primary school pupils were simultaneously providing child care services to children of working parents. The existence of these PSNFCs was market-driven. Mr LAU Kwong-wah remarked that under proper regulation, PSNFCs had their functions and contributions in the society.

Other issues

38. Dr LO Wing-lok enquired about the Administration's policy on teachers taking up part-time employment in PSNFCs. D of E responded that a serving teacher in public sector school should obtain the prior approval of the School Management Committee (SMC) before taking up part-time employment. Serious disciplinary action would be taken against a teacher taking up part-time employment without the consent of SMC.

39. The Chairman suggested that in line with its policy of encouraging life-long learning, the Administration should consider allowing PSNFCs to operate classes on Sundays to accommodate the different needs of working adults in education. Miss Cyd HO expressed support for the Chairman's suggestion. D of E explained that the existing General Holidays Ordinance had placed a restriction on the operation of educational establishments on "Sundays". In the light of present day circumstances, D of E agreed to seek advice from the Department of Justice.

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VI. Issue of students with learning difficulties

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1171/01-02(04) to (05), CB(2)1213/01-02(02), CB(2)1224/01-02(01)-(02)]

40. Members noted the submission of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) [LC Paper No. CB(2)1224/01-02(02)].

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Meeting with Hong Kong Association for Specific Learning Disabilities (the Association)

41. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms CHEUK Wai-man, Chairman of the Association, briefed members on the main points of the two submissions of the Association [LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1171/01-02(05) and 1224/01-02(01)]. She highlighted that students with specific learning difficulties (SLD) had serious and persistent difficulties in learning to read and write which were not related to a lack of intellectual capacities or brain damage. Their parents would have to put in extra efforts to assist them in learning. Ms CHEUK invited members to make reference to the legislation in the United Kingdom and the United States which protected the interest of these children. She suggested that schools with qualified teachers and appropriate resources should be designated to accommodate students with SLD in each of the 18 districts. As such, children with SLD at these schools would not have to face the discrimination in schools providing integrated education as some parents there might not accept the special arrangements such as extra examination time for students with SLD. She expressed appreciation of the Administration's efforts in helping children with SLD and suggested that the support services put forward by ED and professionals should be pilot run in these schools.

42. Ms CHEUK Wai-man further said that according to the medical sector, some 10 % to 15% school students had SLD and that SLD were inborn. The Association suggested that the Administration should increase resource allocations, enhance teachers' professional development, reinforce public education, provide facilitative examination setting and establish a working group to improve support services for students with SLD on a continuous basis. She cited a research study in UK which indicated that students with SLD without proper support service in education would very likely become problem youths in the community. Ms CHEUK informed members that the Association was arranging to conduct a similar survey in Hong Kong.

43. In response, D of E said that ED would continue to collaborate with the Association to provide appropriate support services for students with SLD. He stressed that students with SLD who could hardly be distinguished by appearance were not different from other students in terms of intellectual capacities. The earlier students with SLD were identified, the more could be done to help these children. ED would continue to encourage a whole-school approach to provide holistic support for students with SLD in schools. Apart from continuous professional development of teachers, parent education and home-school cooperation were crucial in identifying and supporting students with SLD. ED would continue to arrange local and overseas experts to provide training for teachers to develop the effective teaching strategies and management skills.

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44. D of E further said that ED had established two working groups to follow up issues relating to providing support for students with SLD. One working group was working with tertiary institutions to conduct researches and develop strategies to support students with SLD. In particular, the group participated in a joint research with the University of Hong Kong (HKU) and the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) with a view to developing checklists and screening tools, as well as remediation programmes. The other group was established to promote home-school cooperation and public education to support students with SLD. D of E added that some 200 to 300 students had been assessed as having SLD by the Department of Health (DH) last year.

Members' concerns and suggestions

Identification and proportion of students with SLD

45. Mr LAU Kwong-wah asked why the number of students assessed to have SLD had substantially increased in recent years. He urged the Administration to assess the number of students with SLD at different level of primary and secondary education for the purpose of long-term policy formulation. Mr MA Fung-kuok considered that early identification of students with SLD was imperative in helping students with SLD. He pointed out that children who were identified and supported at early ages were more likely to improve and adapt to integrated education. He added that early identification had implications on reducing costs of providing services to problem youths in the long term.

46. In response, Assistant Director of Education (Education Services 2) (ADE(ES)2) said that the number of students assessed to have SLD was increasing in recent years because of parents' and teachers' increased awareness of SLD. Overall speaking, ED provided a thorough professional assessment to students suspected of having SLD which included assessing the students' intelligence, reading and writing abilities, and social adjustment at school and at home. In August 2000, the "Hong Kong Test of Specific Learning Difficulties in Reading and Writing" jointly developed by HKU, CUHK and ED was published to enhance identification of students with SLD. The "Hong Kong Specific Learning Difficulties Behaviour Checklist for primary one students" had recently been introduced to enhance early identification of children with SLD and provision of timely intervention. Preparation of similar behaviour checklists for different levels of school education was underway.

47. Dr LO Wing-lok considered that the Administration should conduct a comprehensive, systematic and scientific research to assess the proportion of students having SLD in schools to facilitate planning for provision of support services in schools. Dr LO pointed out that while the Association said that some 10% to 15% school students had SLD, only 200 to 300 students were identified by DH as having SLD in a year. Miss Cyd HO suggested that ED should establish a

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mechanism for SLD assessment of all students and compile relevant statistics for planning the provision of necessary support services in the long run.

48. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the medical sector had different estimates, ranging from 3% to 15%, of students with SLD. Mr CHEUNG considered that given the controversy about the percentage of students with SLD, the Administration should collaborate with HKU and CUHK to develop an objective and reliable mechanism for assessment of students with SLD.

49. D of E highlighted the features of the Hong Kong Specific Learning Difficulties Behaviour Checklist which was designed to help schools to identify students with SLD at primary one. He pointed out that the completion of an assessment for more than 900 000 primary and secondary school students would take years to complete. Promoting the community's awareness and acceptance of individual difference should be a more pragmatic approach to help students who were currently suffering from SLD. In particular, the role of parents and teachers in identifying young children suspected of having SLD was paramount. ED would reinforce public education and provide sufficient training for teachers and guides for parents. ADE(ES)2 supplemented that most students having SLD but had yet been identified at primary classes were included under the Intensive Remedial Teaching Programme in primary schools. In other words, timely intervention should have been provided to these children at their early ages.

50. Miss Cyd HO remarked that DH should consider providing outreaching services for children suspect of having SLD. Mr MA Fung-kwok also suggested that ED should liaise with DH to approach students attending intensive remedial service at school for an assessment. D of E noted their suggestions and added that ED had provided teachers with a checklist for identification at age 7 to 10, and was considering extending the checklist to other levels of school education.

Integrated or special education

51. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong and Miss Cyd HO considered that as an interim measure, it would be beneficial for students with different types of SLD to be accommodated in schools which were staffed with qualified teachers, designed and equipped with the necessary aids and equipment. Mr CHEUNG suggested that the Administration should consult EOC whether such approach and arrangement would contravene the Code of Practice on Education published by EOC under section 65(2) of the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO). Mr MA Fung-kwok added that from the perspective of cost-effective utilization of resources, teaching students with SLD at schools with the necessary resources and staff should remain a pragmatic policy consideration in the long run. Dr LO Wing-lok stressed that once the number of students with SLD was ascertained, the Administration should pool the resources so that schools admitting these students would be well-equipped with the qualified teaching staff and necessary facilities.

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52. D of E responded that students with SLD had the discretion to apply for enrolment in mainstream schools or special schools which were designed and equipped with facilities for students with special needs. Parents were encouraged to seek advice and assistance from ED in this regard. As regards compliance with DDO, D of E said that ED would collaborate with EOC on matters related to accommodation of students with SLD in schools as well as other issues which might give rise to discrimination within the school environment.

53. ADE(ES)2 supplemented that since the 1970s, the government's policy was to help students with a disability integrate into the mainstream schools as far as possible so that they could receive appropriate education along with their peers. Parents in need of advice could approach the school development officers and work with the school to improve their children's educational opportunities. Schools requiring additional support could in turn contact ED for advice and assistance. She pointed out that designating a school for students with SLD might not be the best option in the interest of these students. Through a referral system established between ED and DH, the Child Assessment Centres and the Student Health Service would refer students assessed to have SLD to ED for provision of appropriate educational services. Upon receipt of a referral, ED would assess the educational needs of the students and provide parents with advice on school placement. She stressed that these schools should not be labelled as schools for students with SLD.

Discrimination against students with SLD

54. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung and Mr MAK Kwok-fung expressed concern about possible discrimination against students with SLD in school education. They pointed out that some schools and teachers might prefer not to enrol students with SLD. Mr LEUNG cited a case to illustrate that some ordinary schools might consider it unfair for students with SLD to be provided with special arrangements in examinations. Mr LEUNG emphasized that it was most important that schools and teachers should uphold the principle of equal opportunities in dealing with students with SLD.

55. D of E responded that schools had been provided with a set of information materials and an information guide to support services for students with SLD in ordinary schools for reference. On supervision of school operations, schools were required to set out their policies on provision of education for these students. He reiterated that most students having learning difficulties but had yet been identified as students with SLD should have been arranged to attend the Intensive Remedial Teaching Programme in primary schools or the School-based Remedial Support Programme at the junior secondary level.

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56. Miss Cyd HO considered that to avoid discrimination, principals and teachers should understand their role in the provision of support services to students with SLD in school education. She stressed that special care must be taken to avoid hurting the feeling or self-respect of students with SLD and their parents. ADE(ES)2 responded that all schools and teachers should be aware that educational establishments including schools should conform to the requirements under the DDO.

Examination arrangements

57. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong suggested that the Hong Kong Examinations Authority (HKEA) should adopt accommodative measures for students with different types of SLD in public examinations. He considered that students with dyslexia should be given additional time in examinations in both school and public examinations.

58. D of E responded that ED had published a teaching guide to help teachers to understand the needs of students with SLD and provide appropriate assistance. Section 5.9 of the teaching guide described the strategies to help students with SLD. The section suggested a list of adjustment measures such as the provision of extra examination time for these students to take examinations and tests in schools. As regards public examinations, ED had approached HKEA on special examination arrangements such as special examination centres for these students.

59. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung considered that the fostering of a caring culture towards students with SLD was imperative in school environment. He pointed out that some principals and teachers did not accept that students with SLD should be provided with particular arrangements in learning and examinations. He urged the Administration to liaise with HKEA to reinforce support for these students to participate in public examinations and with EOC to ensure schools' compliance with DDO. Mr LEUNG stressed that HKEA should set an example in making accommodative measures to help students with SLD for schools to follow.

Professional development and school-based support

60. Members asked about the provision of additional resources for schools and support for teachers to promote and facilitate the implementation of the whole-school approach to integrated education. They considered that teachers played an important role in the delivery of services to student with SLD and should be trained on the necessary teaching strategies and accommodative measures for these students in ordinary schools.

61. D of E responded that under the intensive remedial teaching programme, schools would be provided with an additional teacher for admitting eight students with special educational needs. Starting from the 2002-03 school year, schools

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would have extra funds to employ additional services of the student guidance officers/teachers (SGOs/SGTs) or social workers to manage students' problems. The SGO/SGT to student ratio would also be lowered from about 1:1680 to around 1:950 so that most schools would have a SGO/SGT. In addition, school-based educational psychological service would be introduced for primary schools as from 2002-03. By 2007-08, 200 primary schools would be provided with such service. ADE(ES)2 supplemented that ED had established a referral system with DH for provision of educational services. Students assessed to have SLD by DH would be referred to ED's educational psychologists for appropriate follow-up support. Normally, educational psychologists would discuss with parents and teachers on ways to help the students. Whenever necessary, they would visit schools to conduct case conferences and provide consultation and advice to teachers.

62. ADE(ES)2 further said that additional teacher and professional support in the form of induction workshops and a 10-hour school-based staff training were provided for schools adopting a whole-school approach to integration. The course content of both pre-service and in-service teacher training would be reviewed and strengthened. In addition, ED would organise territory-wide or regional seminars, workshops and experience-sharing sessions by local or international experts for teachers, especially language teachers and resource teachers, to enhance their knowledge and to introduce effective teaching strategies and management skills in supporting students with SLD. These professional training would be organised to tie in with the continuous professional development plan of teachers where appropriate.

Use of IT

63. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed concern whether students with SLD such as hearing impairment, visual impairment and dyslexia would be provided with special software for learning through computer. He urged the Administration to develop appropriate sets of learning aids for students with different types of SLD.

64. D of E responded that ED would continue to collaborate with the IT sector to develop local software for students with SLD. The Special Education Resource Centre (SERC) had been established under ED for aggregating and disseminating information, teaching resources and issues of special education. SERC would support staff in both special and ordinary schools. It maintained a website on the Internet with a digital repository to house the teaching resources from special schools and ordinary schools implementing school-based remedial support programmes for academically low achievers. The website also provided a platform for teachers to share their teaching resources and experiences in teaching students with SLD.

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65. Miss Cyd HO suggested that for parents' easy reference, ED should make use of the Internet to provide information on school facilities and teachers' qualifications in respect of schools providing integrated or special education for children with SLD. ADE(ES)2 noted the suggestion, saying that ED had prepared a pamphlet to help parents with children having special educational needs to seek appropriate professional support. The information guide to support services for students with special education needs in ordinary schools also provided school personnel with relevant information and easy reference on educational support services and community-based resources in catering for the diverse needs of students.

The way forward

66. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung suggested that a subcommittee should be established to follow up the provision of support services for students with SLD in schools. The Chairman considered that enhancing support services for students with SLD in schools should be an on-going process. He suggested that the Administration should be requested to brief the Panel on its progress of work in enhancing support service on a regular basis.

67. Mr SZETO Wah expressed support for the Chairman's suggestion. He said that the Panel should follow up the issue by discussing with the Administration, HKEA and EOC. Mr MA Fung-kwok and Mr LAU Kwong-wah expressed a similar view. Mr MA stressed that the executive authorities had the duty to liaise with HKEA and EOC regarding support services to students with SLD and the Panel should play a monitoring role only. Mr LAU suggested that the Panel could follow up the issue after the Administration had discussed members' views and suggestions raised at the meeting with HKEA, EOC and the Association. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong highlighted that the Administration should liaise with HKEA about provision of special arrangements for students with SLD in public examination; and with EOC as to whether provision of education for students with SLD in designated schools would contravene DDO.

68. D of E undertook to liaise with relevant parties and brief the Panel on ED's progress of work in respect of support services to students with SLD on a regular basis. The Chairman suggested and members agreed that the Panel should follow up the discussion at a special meeting with relevant parties.

VII. Any other business

69. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 1:35 pm.