

## Chapter 5

### Primary education - Planning and provision of primary school places

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Audit conducted a review to examine the system of planning and providing public-sector (i.e. government and aided) primary school places to ascertain whether there are areas for improvement.

2. The Committee held two public hearings on 2 and 9 December 2002 to take evidence on the issues examined in the Audit Report.

3. At the public hearing on 2 December 2002, **Prof Hon Arthur LI Kwok-cheung, Secretary for Education and Manpower**, made an opening statement. He said that:

- it was the Administration's pledge to provide high-quality education. In pursuing this goal, it was important to ensure the effective use of resources. However, the focus should not only be whether there was a match between the supply and demand of school places, but also the quality of education. The key to achieving quality education depended, apart from the effective use of resources, on the commitment of the education sector and the support of the various sectors in the community;
- in recent years, the Administration had tried to introduce diversity and the market mechanism to the education system, with a view to providing choice for parents and students and encouraging schools to pursue self-improvement. To enable the mechanism to function, it was necessary to allow a reasonable degree of surplus supply. Moreover, demographic changes and population movements in Hong Kong had been rapid. There was a need to build new schools at suitable locations to meet new demand arising from population growth or to replace old schools in those districts where the population had decreased;
- the Education Commission report issued in 2000 recommended that parents should be given more choices. The recommendation had been accepted by the Administration and implemented from 2001. Under the current Primary One Admission (POA) system, about 55% of the school places were available for cross-district student enrolment, as compared to 35% in the past. This had injected an element of uncertainty in the planning of provision of school places;
- actually, some schools that were located in districts where the local student population was dropping could attract students from other districts. Hence, the actual situation of supply and demand could not be deduced simply by comparing the student population in a district with the number of school

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places available in the same district. For instance, Audit pointed out that there would be excess supply of school places in Wan Chai. However, the total number of applications received by the schools in Wan Chai during the Discretionary Places Admission stage of the POA process in 2002 was 2.4 times of the school places earmarked for Discretionary Places Admission. This explained that whether a school was popular depended on a variety of factors, such as the mode of school management and teachers' professionalism. On the one hand, the declining student population in recent years had led to problems of under-enrolment and vacant classrooms in some schools. On the other hand, it provided an opportunity to upgrade the quality of education;

- in view of the continued decline of student population, the Administration planned to tighten the criteria for allowing a school to operate a Primary One class from the 2003-04 school year. Currently, if the number of students allocated to a Primary One class of a school was less than half of a normal class size, and at the same time, there were still unfilled places in the other schools of the same school net, the school might not be allowed to operate that particular class. To further ensure the effective use of resources, the Administration planned to adjust the criterion of "half" of a normal class size to "two-third";
- the facilities of rural schools were inferior to the standard primary schools. This, coupled with the declining student population, had resulted in the under-enrolment of many rural schools. The Administration would critically review the future of rural schools, taking into account the need to provide quality education, and the fact that there was sufficient capacity in standard schools and that many rural areas were now connected with newly developed areas nearby by transport network; and
- government primary schools had been pioneers and role models in education reforms. They had been playing a leading role in implementing many education initiatives, such as opening up the School Management Committee to parents and outsiders, enrolling "over-aged" students and those who had learning or emotional problems. In order to reduce the cost differential between operating government primary schools and aided primary schools, the Administration would actively consider Audit's recommendation of using contract terms for hiring future staff of government schools. The Administration would also actively review the distribution of government primary schools, so as to ensure sufficient choice for parents in all districts.

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### Planning and provision of public-sector primary school places

4. Paragraphs 2.2 to 2.20 of the Audit Report mentioned that according to Audit's projection, by 2010, the overall supply of primary school places would exceed the overall demand by about 27,600 places, which was equivalent to 35 standard primary schools. Moreover, between 2002 and 2010, the children population in the six to 11 age group would decline by 17% from 493,200 to 410,500. On the other hand, by 2010, there would be a total shortfall of 16,400 school places in four districts, namely, Sham Shui Po, Kwun Tong, Kwai Tsing and the North District.

5. The Committee further noted that according to the school building programme of the Education Department (ED)<sup>1</sup> of March 2002, there were 69 new schools being planned. Of these, 22 were being planned for the seven districts where there would be a significant excess supply of school places. 18 of these 22 projects were still at the early stage of development and the building works would start after 2002. The Committee asked whether the Administration agreed to Audit's recommendation that the building works of these 18 new schools should be put on hold.

6. **Mr LEE Hing-fai, Director of Education**<sup>2</sup>, responded that:

- the school building programme was subject to review and adjustment from time to time. Some new projects might be added to and some withdrawn from the programme due to various reasons. Before the building works of a new school commenced, the ED would review the need of the project;
- the school building programme referred to in the Audit Report was the one as of March 2002, which was being reviewed. If any of the new projects in the programme were no longer justified due to decreased demand in the long term based on the latest information, they would be deleted. New projects would be added to the programme if they were justified by demand and if suitable sites were available. Hence, there would be no question of serious excess supply of school places in 2010 as projected by Audit;

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<sup>1</sup> The Education and Manpower Bureau and the Education Department have been merged from 1 January 2003 and, since then, the Education and Manpower Bureau (the new organisation after the merger) takes charge of both the formulation and implementation of education policies.

<sup>2</sup> Following the merger of the Education and Manpower Bureau and the Education Department, the post of Director of Education was deleted on 1 January 2003.

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- apart from population demand, the ED would also take into account other factors such as the need to reprovise existing schools which had poor physical conditions. Moreover, according to the population projections of the Census and Statistics Department, the number of children at school age would decline over the next few years and reach the trough between 2010 and 2013. The number would rise again starting from 2010. The ED would consider the changes in the demand for school places arising from the changes in the student population in all these years when reviewing the school building programme; and
- of the 18 schools recommended by Audit to be put on hold, the ED had decided to suspend nine school projects which were located in the districts projected to have excess supply of primary school places in both 2007 and 2010 based on the latest population projection. Regarding other school projects, four were being further reviewed to ascertain if they should be suspended. The remaining projects would also be reviewed. The school sites that had been reserved but were considered no longer required would be returned to the Planning Department.

7. The Committee understood that funding approval from the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council (LegCo) would have to be obtained prior to the commencement of the building works of new school projects. As the ED would continue to review the need for the new projects in the school building programme, the Committee asked whether the ED, when seeking funding approval from the Finance Committee, would provide information on the results of its review, such as population changes and the projected supply and demand of school places.

8. The **Director of Education** replied in the affirmative. He stated that when the ED sought the Finance Committee's funding approval for a new school project, it would set out all the justifications. For instance, it might be necessary to build a new school to meet new demand arising from population growth in some new areas, implementation of whole-day primary schooling, or reprovise and redevelopment of existing old schools.

9. The Committee further asked at which stage a school project in the school building programme could be withdrawn. The **Director of Education** explained that in general a project could be suspended any time before the tendering process was completed. In the past, there had been school projects that were suspended due to different reasons, such as population changes, technical problems and high construction costs.

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10. On the number of school projects that would be suspended, the **Secretary for Education and Manpower** informed the Committee, vide his letter of 29 January 2003 in *Appendix 55*, that apart from the nine projects mentioned at the public hearing, the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) had decided to suspend another five school projects due to various reasons, e.g. high site formation costs and technical constraints of the school sites concerned. The distribution of the 14 suspended projects by district was:

District	Number of suspended projects
Eastern	3
Central and Western	2
Wan Chai	1
Yau Tsim Mong	1
Kowloon City	2
Tai Po	1
Tuen Mun	2
Tsuen Wan	2
<i>Total</i>	<i>14</i>

11. The Committee was concerned that there were some schools that were built a long time ago and had sub-standard facilities. As savings could now be achieved due to the suspension of some new school projects, it asked whether the savings would be deployed to help expedite the reprovisioning and redevelopment of such old schools.

12. In his letter of 29 January 2003, the **Secretary for Education and Manpower** advised that:

- on the one hand, suspension of the school projects would achieve savings. On the other hand, the Administration would launch a rolling programme from the 2003-04 school year to reprovision or redevelop schools which were substantially below present-day standards; and
- the programme would require additional resources. The number of reprovisioning and redevelopment projects to be carried out each year would depend on the availability of both funding and land resources. The EMB estimated that about 10 schools would benefit from the first batch of the programme.

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13. Regarding the four districts with a projected shortfall of primary school places (i.e. Sham Shui Po, Kwun Tong, Kwai Tsing and the North District), the Committee asked whether the ED had a concrete plan for constructing new primary schools there. In his letter of 31 December 2002, in *Appendix 56*, the **Director of Education** advised that:

- the ED updated the school building programme from time to time to ensure that, where there was a projected shortfall of school places, new schools would be developed to meet the shortfall. It was planning to construct sufficient new primary schools to meet the projected demand for additional primary school places in the four districts in question. On the other hand, where a decline in primary student population was projected in subsequent reviews, the ED would seek to restore the balance of demand and supply by stepping up its efforts to phase out substandard or ineffective schools; and
- subject to regular review of a number of constraints, such as population changes, the ED would work towards a tentative target of full implementation of whole-day primary schooling by the commencement of the 2007-08 school year. To this end, the ED was planning to construct a total of 19 new primary schools from 2003 to 2007 in the four districts in the light of the latest population forecast. Audit had taken into account 12 of these new primary schools in its projected supply of primary school places. Of the remaining seven new primary schools, three were located in the North District, two in Shum Shui Po, one in Kwai Tsing and another one in Kwun Tong.

14. The Committee appreciated that it would not be accurate to assess the supply and demand of school places in a district purely on the basis of local student population because under the current POA system, 55% of the Primary One school places could be allocated to children residing in any school net. While parents had more flexibility in selecting schools, there would also be a greater chance of mismatch between the district population projection and actual enrolment. Wan Chai was a case in point. According to Table 1 of the Audit Report, the demand in the district would be 5,300 in 2010 whereas the supply would be 9,300, indicating an excess supply of 4,000 places. However, as pointed out by the Secretary for Education and Manpower, the total number of applications received by the schools in Wan Chai during the Discretionary Places Admission stage in 2002 was 2.4 times of the Discretionary Places available. This reflected that when parental preferences were taken into account, there would not be any excess supply of school places in the district.

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15. As there were a number of volatile factors, including parental choices and population movements, that would affect the actual demand for school places in each of the 18 districts, the Committee asked how the ED could quantify the impact of such factors, so as to arrive at a more accurate projection of demand and supply.

16. The Committee also noted that the Hong Kong Island was demarcated into four districts. However, some areas in different districts were not too far away from each other. For example, it was quite convenient to travel from Wan Chai to North Point. The Committee wondered whether it would be too rigid to assess the demand and supply of school places based on the 18 administrative districts.

17. **Mrs Fanny LAW, Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower**, and the **Director of Education** responded that:

- after each POA cycle, the ED would compile statistics on the number of Discretionary Place applicants received by each school and identify the popular schools. The current POA system would be reviewed in 2003. The Administration would take into account the mismatch of the demand and supply of primary school places caused by the volatile factors when conducting the review. Moreover, the ED would consider other relevant factors such as the class structure of the schools in the district. For instance, if there were schools that were very crowded, the ED might consider reducing their number of classes. The locations and operating standards of the schools, as well as the transportation network of an area would all be considered;
- if the primary school places available in a particular district exceeded the local student population, the Administration would not build new primary schools in that district to meet the demand from students residing in other districts. Instead, the Administration might expand existing schools in the district or redevelop those schools with old school buildings to bring them up to present-day standards; and
- it was true that assessing the demand and supply of school places by administrative districts could not reflect the actual situation. In fact, the whole territory was divided into some 50 primary school nets and the area covered in each school net was smaller than that in an administrative district. Nevertheless, it would not be useful to address the problem simply by redefining the school nets. A more reasonable approach would be to look at the situation of each school to identify the popular ones and the number of applications they received while the unpopular schools with low enrolment would be phased out.

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18. The Committee asked how the Administration would deal with the problem of excess demand for school places in some very popular schools. Referring to the situation in Wan Chai, the Committee pointed out that while the total number of applications received by the schools in the district was 2.4 times of the Discretionary Places available, probably only one school was popular while the others were not. In the circumstances, it would be useless to build additional schools there.

19. The **Director of Education** responded that:

- the ED originally had a plan to build a new 18-classroom primary school in Wan Chai at the site where the Lui Kee Education Services Centre was located. However, the project would now be put on hold. In fact, it was one of the nine projects that the ED had decided to suspend due to projected decline in student population; and
- at the same time, there were some schools in Wan Chai which were not preferred by parents or had unsatisfactory operation standard. The ED would gradually phase out these schools. The total supply of school places in the district would thus be reduced.

20. The Committee considered that the problem of mismatches between the demand and supply of school places in different districts might be resolved through the market mechanism. It thus enquired:

- whether the Administration would consider publicising the good schools and enhancing the mobility of students, such as by offering some travelling allowance or making special arrangements to facilitate cross-district enrolment; and
- for the unpopular schools, whether the Administration would help to enhance their teaching quality or school premises so as to attract students.

21. The **Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower** responded that:

- the Administration worked towards enhancing the quality of education. It would not be too meaningful to focus on the size of student population and supply of school places on a district basis. Instead, it would be more appropriate to obtain an overall view of individual schools by examining their enrolment situation, management quality, culture, attainment, leadership and



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so on to identify the weaker players. On the one hand, the ED's regional staff would offer assistance to those schools that could improve. On the other hand, if the schools were really not operating up to standard, the ED was prepared to take back the school premises and reallocate them to other school sponsoring bodies;

- sometimes parents chased after the famous schools due to some misconceptions. Through the School Profiles, the ED hoped to inform parents that there were also good schools in their local districts. Moreover, to increase diversity in the education system and to provide more choice for parents, the Administration encouraged the establishment of direct subsidy schools and private schools; and
- the Administration also had measures to promote the less popular schools. For instance, it would improve the premises of those schools with poor physical conditions. It also publicised and disseminated the good teaching practices introduced by some schools through district exchange programmes.

22. According to paragraphs 2.23 to 2.27 of the Audit Report, some primary schools had a significant number of vacant classrooms. The problem was particularly serious in 30 schools, each of which had seven or more vacant classrooms. After analysing the classroom utilisation situation of the six schools in close proximity in Tai Wai (i.e. Schools A to F), Audit considered that it was possible to improve the overall vacant classroom situation of four of them by merging Schools A to D into two schools, and phasing out any two of the four schools. As the six schools might be run by different school sponsoring bodies, the Committee enquired whether the Administration had any difficulty implementing Audit's recommendations.

23. The **Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower** and the **Director of Education** replied that:

- it was indeed difficult to merge schools. The Administration had tried to merge some rural schools in the North District into a centralised school, but to no avail. Perhaps when a new school was to be set up in future, the Administration would invite the existing schools in the district, including the rural schools, to apply to operate the school. When there was a new school, parents would have more choices. The enrolment of some existing schools might be further reduced and they could eventually be phased out; and

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- for schools with low enrolment, the Administration would first conduct an overall assessment of the schools, including the extent of the under-enrolment, the school leadership, the school culture, and the operation standard. Starting from the beginning of 2002, when the number of classes operated by a school was less than 60% of its maximum capacity, the ED would draw up a plan to cease using or re-allocate the school premises concerned. The ED had already discussed the matter with the relevant school sponsoring bodies in April and July 2002, including those of the six schools in Tai Wai.

24. The Committee was concerned that the closure of a school would affect the students and parents. It therefore asked:

- about the criteria for closing a primary school;
- when the ED decided that a school should be closed, how early would the school be notified; and
- whether the ED would adopt a phased approach in closing a school, such as by ceasing the allocation of Primary One students to the school in the first place and extending the cessation to other grades in the school on a one-grade-per-year basis.

25. The **Director of Education** explained that the ED's plan was to close a primary school about three years after it had stopped operating Primary One classes. The whole process should not last for five to six years as very few operating classes would remain in the last few years. Primary One classes would be stopped first, followed by the higher grades.

26. In his letter of 6 December 2002, in *Appendix 57*, the **Director of Education** informed the Committee of the main factors that triggered the consideration of closing an aided primary school, as follows:

- the supply and demand of primary school places of a district and school net;
- the enrolment and class structure of a school;
- the performance of a school in terms of management and organisation, learning and teaching, student attainments, etc.;

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- the transportation and future development of an area; and
- the operating costs.

27. Referring to the EMB's plan to tighten the criteria for operating Primary One classes from the 2003-04 school year, the Committee was concerned whether the Administration had consulted the schools and affected parties before drawing up the revised criteria. It therefore asked whether:

- the school sector had been duly informed of the proposal; and
- the relevant parties had been properly consulted and, if so, their response.

28. The **Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower** and **Mr LEE Kwok-sung, Assistant Director of Education (Planning & Research)**, stated that:

- all schools understood the criteria for operating Primary One classes and the consequence of not being allowed to operate any such class. It was the established mechanism that if a school was not allowed to operate any Primary One class at the beginning of a school year, it would have to cease operation after three years;
- staff of the ED's Regional Education Office had been in close liaison with the schools. If a school was required to stop operating a Primary One class in the following school year, the ED's regional staff would have informed the school in advance. Actually, the ED had held a briefing session in June 2002 for those schools which were required to reduce their Primary One classes in September 2002. After collating the opinions received at the briefing session, the ED would further discuss with the schools concerned; and
- arrangements were also being made by the ED to consult the Hong Kong Subsidised Primary Schools Council and the POA Committee on the revised criteria. Details of the finalised proposal should be available by January 2003.

29. The Committee questioned whether the revised criteria for determining the number of classes that a school might operate were objective enough.

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30. In response, the **Director of Education** and the **Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower**, vide their letters of 6 December 2002 and 29 January 2003 (in *Appendix 58*) respectively, elaborated on the existing and revised criteria for operation of Primary One classes and how schools were informed of the number of Primary One classes they were allowed to operate. They stated that:

- in early September, each school would be informed of the provisional number of Primary One classes to be operated for the following school year, which was calculated as the number of Primary Six classes in the current school year or the number of classrooms divided by six (whichever was the greater and subject to the availability of classrooms). Schools were also clearly informed that the provisional number of Primary One classes, based on which the notional quota of discretionary places was calculated, was only tentative and was subject to adjustment in relation to the actual demand;
- the overall number of Primary One classes to be operated by primary schools was primarily based on the actual demand for Primary One places within the school net. To decide the number of Primary One classes which a primary school might operate, the ED would take into consideration a number of factors, including the number of classrooms available, the optimum class structure for the school, the number of children already admitted by the school during the Discretionary Places Admission stage and parental choices in the Central Allocation stage;
- based on the result of a computer analysis of the actual choices made by parents during the Central Allocation stage, the ED would work out the tentative number of students to be allocated to each primary school. Currently, as a matter of principle, if the number of children allocated to a particular class of a school was less than half of a normal class size, and at the same time, there were still unfilled places in the other schools of the same school net, the school might not be allowed to operate that particular class; and
- for better resources management and to minimise the situation of under-enrolled classes, the criteria for operating Primary One classes would be tightened as from the 2003-04 school year. If the total number of students allocated to a Primary One class of a school was less than 23, the school might not be allowed to operate that class.

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31. On the consultation with the school sector, the **Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower** advised in her letter of 29 January 2003 that:

- the EMB had consulted the relevant primary school council and the committee on the revised criteria, and schools had been duly informed of the arrangement in writing in January 2003; and
- the EMB would inform schools of the approved number of Primary One classes for the 2003-04 school year in April 2003.

### Enrolment and class size

32. The Committee understood from paragraphs 3.2 to 3.9 of the Audit Report that the current standard class size in primary schools is 30 or 32 for classes using the activity teaching approach, and 35 or 37 for classes using the conventional teaching approach. Audit noted that of the 11,742 operating classes in all public-sector primary schools in the 2001-02 school year, 4,782 (i.e. 41%) were over-enrolled. The over-enrolment situation was serious in 286 classes, where the actual number of students exceeded the standard class size by seven or more students. The worst case was a Primary Six class of a school in Tai Po, where 42 students were enrolled in a class adopting the activity teaching approach. In another case, School G had a capacity of 872 school places but it had enrolled 204 more students (or 23%). On the other hand, paragraph 3.11 of the Audit Report revealed that a serious under-enrolment situation existed in some classes where the unfilled places were eleven or more.

33. The Committee asked about the reasons for the serious over-enrolment and under-enrolment situations in some schools, and whether the Administration would take any measures to ensure that schools would keep to the standard class size as far as possible.

34. The **Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower** and the **Director of Education** explained that:

- the total number of students allocated to each class through Discretionary Places Admission and central allocation was strictly in accordance with the standard class size. The situation of over-enrolment and under-enrolment had arisen due to parental choices and the force of the market mechanism. After the allocation of school places by the ED, some parents might choose not to let their children enroll in the schools allocated to them. On the other hand, some popular schools might accommodate a few more students. As a result, the actual enrolment of a class would differ from the standard class size;

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- there was no definite conclusion on the most suitable class size. Actually, the effectiveness of teaching and learning depended more on the instructional methods of the teachers than the number of students in a class. It would be more appropriate to allow schools to make their own professional judgement on whether they could admit students in excess of the standard class size and to allow parents to make the choice. Nevertheless, when admitting students, schools had to observe the approved capacity of each classroom, or the maximum capacity of 45 students for a classroom permitted by the fire safety regulations, etc., whichever was the less; and
- the ED would “pack” as far as possible under-enrolled classes for cost-effectiveness. Moreover, schools that could not admit enough students after the Central Allocation stage might be required to reduce their number of Primary One classes according to the revised criteria for operation of such classes.

35. It appeared to the Committee that as long as the approved capacity of the classrooms was not exceeded, the Administration would turn a blind eye to the situation of over-enrollment. The Committee referred to the school in Tai Po in which there were 42 students in a Primary Six class adopting the activity teaching approach. Compared to the standard class size of 30 students for an activity approach (AA) class, the actual number of 42 exceeded the standard class size by 40%. The Committee questioned whether:

- the school was adopting the AA in name only, while the class size was in fact too large for genuine activity approach teaching; and
- the Administration would take any action to rectify the situation.

36. The **Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower** and the **Director of Education** said that:

- it might be too rigid and inappropriate to judge whether the AA was adopted simply by the number of students in a class. Nowadays, the AA was regarded as a kind of student-centred instruction methodology which aimed at helping students to develop an independent mind. It would be more important that the teachers were able to stimulate students to think and participate in discussions in class. Moreover, different class sizes might suit different subjects. For instance, smaller classes might be suitable for language subjects as more attention could be given by the teachers to the disparities of the students and students would have more chances to practise their oral and writing skills. On the other hand, a larger class would facilitate the generation of more viewpoints for discussions; and

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- it was inconclusive that a causal relationship existed between class size and learning effectiveness. Other factors like family support to the students, the students' background and aptitudes, the use of an appropriate instruction methodology might have a greater impact on learning than class size. From experience, there were some classes with more than 40 students each and the teachers still did not find the task difficult. The students also had good academic performance. In contrast, there were some classes which had only 20 students each but the teachers already felt that the task was too demanding because they had to take care of the students like nannies. In fact, too small a class was not conducive to effective learning due to a lack of interaction between students and a lack of positive competition.

37. In the light of the Administration's reply, the Committee asked whether it considered that the standard class size of an AA class should be abolished or reviewed. The Committee also noted from paragraph 1.11(e) of the Audit Report that the Administration would conduct a study to identify the pre-conditions for effective learning in small classes. It asked about the timetable and scope of the study.

38. In her letter of 2 January 2003 in *Appendix 59*, the **Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower** advised that:

- there had been new developments on the primary school curriculum with the release of the "Learning to Learn - The Way Forward in Curriculum Development" in 2001 and the "Basic Education Curriculum Guide - Building on Strengths" in 2002 by the Curriculum Development Council. Under the new curriculum, primary schools were expected to adopt student-centred learning and teaching approaches. AA was only one of such approaches. Schools adopting AA would be allowed to maintain their existing class size for the time being. Standardisation of the class size of AA and non-AA classes would only be made gradually to enable schools to cope with the changes; and
- the Administration was still considering the details about the study on small class teaching, including its timetable and scope. It would take into account findings from overseas studies, advice from local and non-local experts and the present local context in working out the design of the study.

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39. As the standard class size of an AA class was smaller than that of a conventional class, the Committee asked whether it was possible that some schools which could not admit enough students might claim to be adopting the AA in order to avoid a reduction in the number of their classes and the need to lay off redundant teachers.

40. The **Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower** replied that schools had to go through an application process if they wanted to adopt the AA. The ED would focus on the teaching effectiveness of the schools rather than their class size.

41. The Committee understood that the Administration would try to “pack” under-enrolled classes in order to save costs, and reduce the number of classes that a school was allowed to operate if it could not admit enough students. The Committee also noted that some students allocated to a school might initially enrol at the school but did not turn up after the school year had started and as a result, the number of students in the classes of the school might drop below 23. The Committee enquired whether, under such circumstances, the ED would require the school to cease operating those classes.

42. The **Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower** said that the ED would inform the schools of the approved number of Primary One classes for the next school year in April or May 2003. By then, the schools would know the number of classes to be reduced and the number of teachers to be made redundant. Normally, unless the decrease in the number of students was very great, the ED would not require a school to cease operating a class after the school year had begun to avoid affecting the students. The ED would prefer to deal with the under-enrolment in the following school year.

### School Improvement Programme

43. According to paragraphs 4.5 and 4.6 of the Audit Report, as at the beginning of the 2001-02 school year, there were 18 schools each of which had eleven or more vacant classrooms. Audit found that the improvement works under the School Improvement Programme (SIP) had been completed in three of these 18 schools (i.e. Schools I, J and K), and SIP works were scheduled to be carried out in the remaining 15 schools. Audit considered that it was questionable whether there was a need for SIP works to be carried out to provide additional floor areas at Schools I, J and K.



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44. Paragraphs 4.7 and 4.8 of the Audit Report also revealed the ED had approved a budget of \$33 million for carrying out the SIP works at a whole-day school in Wah Fu Estate. This school had 23 classrooms but 14 were vacant. The major item of the improvement works planned was to build a six-storey multi-purpose annex. Audit considered that a more cost-effective way to upgrade the facilities at this school was to convert the existing vacant classrooms into various function rooms under the SIP, instead of building a new annex. The Committee asked whether the Administration agreed to Audit's view.

45. The **Director of Education** responded that it was the Government's target to implement whole-day primary schooling for all students by the 2007-08 school year. To fulfill this target, new schools were built and no single classroom would be given up. In other words, all the vacant classrooms in those schools for which SIP works had been carried out would be used by the commencement of the 2007-08 school year.

46. The **Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower** supplemented that:

- when the ED sought funding approval for the SIP works for these schools, there was no data then to indicate that the population of children in the age group of six to eleven would decrease rapidly;
- it was the SIP's aim to upgrade the teaching and learning environments of schools. Although there were vacant classrooms in these schools, the SIP works were still justified because poor facilities could be one of the reasons for their low enrolment. They might be able to attract more students after their school premises had been upgraded. If the low enrolment was due to the schools' poor operating standards, the ED would deal with the problem by taking back the school premises and allocating them to other school sponsoring bodies. In this way, educational resources would not be wasted; and
- given the current fiscal constraints, the Administration was reviewing the cost-effectiveness of the SIP works for individual schools. For instance, for those schools which only had six or seven classrooms and there was no way to bring their facilities up to the present-day standards, the ED might only carry out some instead of all the SIP works. In the review, the ED would also take into account the projected decline in the student population and look into the possibility of merging those schools that were surplus to requirements, etc..

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47. On the question of whether the Administration had informed the LegCo of the existence of the large number of vacant classrooms in these schools when it sought funding approval for the SIP works concerned, **Mr Patrick LI, Assistant Director of Education (Infrastructure)**, said that when the ED sought funding approval from the LegCo, all the vacant classrooms in these schools were projected to be required for meeting future demand for school places. Otherwise, the ED would have converted them for other uses.

48. To ascertain the justifications for carrying out the SIP works at Schools I, J and K to provide additional floor areas, the Committee enquired:

- at the time of seeking the LegCo's funding approval for the SIP works concerned, why the ED considered that the vacant classrooms in these schools would be needed for use as classrooms;
- whether the existence of the large number of vacant classrooms in these schools at the time of the audit review was due to a change of circumstances and, if so, what the changes were; and
- about the details of the uses proposed by the ED for the vacant classrooms in these three schools.

49. The **Director of Education** provided a detailed response vide his letter of 19 December 2002 in *Appendix 60*. He stated that:

### School I

- when the ED sought funding approval from the LegCo for the SIP works in May 1996, six of the 11 vacant classrooms were retained with a view to alleviating the school place demand as projected on the basis of the population projection at that time;
- the only change of circumstances was that the school had been experiencing a decline in Primary One intakes since it was located in an "aging" district. In the 2000-01 and 2001-02 school years, more new arrival children (NAC) had been admitted, particularly at Primary Two level. However, the demand of school places arising from the NAC was expected to drop significantly in the 2002-03 school year;

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- this was a 30-year old premises. In the 2002-03 school year, this 23-classroom school operated 13 classes. With seven classrooms having been converted for other educational uses, the actual number of vacant classrooms was three;

### **School J**

- when the ED sought funding approval for the SIP works in May 1997, 11 vacant classrooms were retained in anticipation of the implementation of whole-day primary schooling which, as considered on the basis of the population projection at that time, might otherwise need to be provided through the building of new schools;
- there had been a decline in the number of operating classes of this school in recent years. This was mainly due to the drop in demand for primary school places;
- in the 2002-03 school year, this 24-classroom school operated 12 normal classes. The school converted the remaining classrooms into special rooms;

### **School K**

- when the ED sought funding approval for the SIP works in May 1997, 11 vacant classrooms were retained in anticipation of the implementation of whole-day primary schooling;
- the existence of a large number of vacant classrooms was due to the decline in the school-age population in the district in the past few years and the fact that the school was situated in an aloof site and was not easily accessible; and
- the school had changed most of its surplus classrooms for other uses, such as remedial teaching (involving two classrooms) and a parent resources centre.

50. The Committee noted from paragraphs 4.12 to 4.17 of the Audit Report that five of the 167 primary schools that were included in Phase V of the SIP were likely to be closed down. One of these five schools was located in the Lower Ngau Tau Kok Estate and was expected to be demolished by 2008-09 at the latest. The other four were rural schools that were considered by the ED as schools that were surplus to requirements. The Committee queried the need to incur substantial expenditure on the SIP works at these schools.

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51. The **Assistant Director of Education (Infrastructure)** replied that:

- the scope of the SIP works for the school in Lower Ngau Tau Kok Estate had been reduced in the light of the scheduled demolition of the school in 2008-09 under the Housing Authority's Comprehensive Redevelopment Programme;
- only "essential items" had been included in the SIP works for Schools I, J and K and the school in Lower Ngau Tau Kok Estate. The costs involved were significantly less than those for schools for which the full scope of works in the SIP was carried out; and
- the ED was aware of the fact that rural primary schools had all along faced the problem of under-enrolment and as a result had a high cost of operation per student. A comprehensive review of the future development of rural primary schools was being conducted. As the demand for these schools might not be great, the Administration had decided to shelve the SIP works for 62 rural schools for which the SIP works had not yet commenced.

52. The Committee asked how the respective amounts of expenditure on the SIP works for these four schools compared to the expenditure on those schools for which the full scope of SIP works were carried out.

53. In his letter of 19 December 2002, the **Director of Education** advised that:

- for the school in Lower Ngau Tau Kok Estate, other than a preparation room for computer-assisted learning and a light weight canopy, the reduced scope of works covered solely conversion works to provide for core/essential items including a computer-assisted learning room, a language room, a multi-purpose room, a student activity centre and two supportive rooms. These facilities would be used by the students for at least five school years;
- the "essential items" of SIP works under Phases II and III in which works for Schools I, J and K were carried out included staff rooms, a staff common room, interview rooms, a student activity centre, a library and disabled access only; and
- the costs of the SIP works for Schools I, J, K and the school in Lower Ngau Tau Kok Estate as compared to the average cost/budget ceiling for full scope of SIP works conducted in the respective phases were:

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School	SIP Phase	Estimated cost	Average cost/budget ceiling * for full scope of works in respective SIP phases
I	II	\$13.15 m	\$18.66 m
J	III	\$14.84 m	\$21.81 m
K		\$14.17 m	
School in Lower Ngau Tau Kok Estate	V (Final Phase)	\$6.08 m	\$32.96 m

(\*There was no budget ceiling for projects in Phases II and III. Thus, instead of budget ceiling, only the average cost for Phases II and III was provided.)

54. In view of the above information provided by the ED, the Committee invited the Director of Audit to comment on whether, after examining the additional information, he still considered that the need to carry out the SIP works at Schools I, J and K was questionable.

55. The **Director of Audit** offered his comments vide his letter of 7 January 2003, in *Appendix 61*. He advised that:

- the crux of the matter was that there were 11 vacant classrooms each in Schools I, J and K when funding for the SIP works was sought in 1996 and 1997. In respect of the SIP works for School I, five of the 11 vacant classrooms were converted to alternative uses and six remained vacant. However, five additional classrooms were also provided in the new annex built under the SIP. Because of the low enrolment in the school, the total number of vacant classrooms remained at 11 after the SIP works were completed (as mentioned in Table 12 of paragraph 4.5 of the Audit Report). It was considered that the six remaining vacant classrooms could also have been converted to provide the “essential items” of the SIP, while the five new classrooms would not have been required. This would have obviated the need for building the new annex;
- in respect of Schools J and K, similarly, the 11 classrooms that were vacant in each school at the time of funding approval provided significant usable floor areas which could also have been converted into various function rooms;

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- according to Table 12 of the Audit Report, there were still significant numbers of vacant classrooms in Schools I, J and K at the beginning of the 2001-02 school year (i.e. 11, 11 and 17 respectively) after the completion of the SIP works. It was worthy of note that these three schools had been experiencing difficulties to attract students. For the 2002-03 school year, the number of Primary One applications for discretionary places each school received was about ten; and
- in view of the above, he was of the view that the “essential items” of the SIP could have been provided to Schools I, J and K by converting the then vacant classrooms into various function rooms, instead of building additional floor areas. Had such an approach been adopted, the cost of SIP works carried out would have been reduced significantly. After reviewing the information provided by the Director of Education, he maintained the view that the need to provide additional floor areas at Schools I, J and K was questionable.

56. The **Secretary for Education and Manpower**, in his letter of 24 January 2003, in *Appendix 62*, responded to the Director of Audit’s comments. He stated that:

- the Director of Audit’s major query was that if the vacant classrooms in the three schools’ old premises had been used to house the “essential items” provided for under the respective SIP projects, the two annexes in Schools I and K and the additional floor area in School J would have been unnecessary given that subsequent enrolment of the schools did not justify the retention and/or provision of new classrooms. He had the following views on the Director of Audit’s comments:
  - (a) the reason for retaining the vacant classrooms in School I (six classrooms), School J and School K (11 classrooms each) and building additional classrooms in Schools I and K (five classrooms each) under the respective SIP projects was that they were anticipated to be required to meet the projected demand at the time when funding approval was sought in 1996 for School I and in 1997 for Schools J and K. In the cases of Schools J and K, the classroom requirement for implementation of whole-day primary schooling had also been taken into account. In other words, based on the data then available, there was a need to reserve sufficient number of vacant classrooms in the three schools to meet the projected demand; and

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- (b) to improve the classroom teaching and learning environment, the ED had accommodated five of the required classrooms in each of Schools I and K in the new annexes built under the respective SIP projects. For the vacant classrooms of equivalent number in the old premises, they were substandard and did not meet modern day educational needs of the students. These classrooms were therefore converted into alternative uses;
- the use of most or all of the vacant classrooms in Schools I, J and K had been changed to other teaching and learning activities in the 2001-02 school year. This was to take account of the latest enrolment situation and the latest projection of the supply and demand of primary school places;
- population projection formed the basis for planning the provision of school places. Planners could only use the latest data available to them and it was unreasonable to assume that they could foretell the drop in demand for school places a few years down the road; and
- to ensure prudent use of public funds, the EMB would continue to monitor the enrolment situation of the three schools and would closely liaise with them to make sure that available resources including their vacant classrooms were put to the best use for the benefits of teaching and learning.

57. The Committee referred to the Director of Education's statement that all the vacant classrooms in these schools would be used by the commencement of the 2007-08 school year. As there was still quite a long time before 2007, the Committee asked whether the Administration would encourage the schools to make use of the vacant classrooms temporarily instead of allowing them to be left idle in the coming few years.

58. The **Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower** and the **Director of Education** said that the Administration would not allow the classrooms to be left idle until 2007. It would take measures to optimise the use of the classrooms, such as by allocating more students to these schools while requiring them to improve their teaching quality. The ED also offered schools incentive and flexibility to make full use of the space in their premises.

59. The Committee further asked whether the Administration had imposed any restrictions on the conversion of vacant classrooms for other uses or had provided the schools with assistance in this regard.

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60. In his letter of 29 January 2003, the **Secretary for Education and Manpower** stated that:

- the EMB had not imposed any specific restrictions on the conversion of vacant classrooms. However, in September 1999, it had issued to all aided schools an Administrative Circular, stipulating the guidelines that schools should follow if they wished to make any changes to the use of rooms (including vacant classrooms) in their schools. In general, schools should take into account the following considerations:
  - (a) whether structural conversion was involved and, if so, whether such conversion complied with stipulated requirements overseen by various government departments;
  - (b) whether the change of room use was hazardous to the health and safety of pupils and staff;
  - (c) whether the quality of teaching and learning was affected; and
  - (d) whether additional recurrent and/or non-recurrent subsidies from the Government were involved;
- depending on the specific circumstances of schools, the EMB had also carried out works for conversion of vacant classrooms in schools into alternative uses under the SIP for the benefits of teaching and learning; and
- the EMB would continue to closely monitor the room use situation in schools and liaise with schools on the ways to improve the utilisation of vacant classrooms, as appropriate and necessary.

### **Rural primary schools**

61. The Committee noted that the Administration was conducting a comprehensive review of the future development of rural primary schools. As many rural primary schools were not able to provide a suitable environment for quality education and social development due to their inferior facilities and the small number of students, the Committee asked whether the Administration would expedite the review and phase out without delay those rural schools that were no longer necessary.



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62. The **Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower** responded that:

- the review was underway and was expected to be completed by the summer of 2003. In the face of the present fiscal constraints, the Administration was keen to close those schools that had high operating costs, such as rural schools. The EMB was most willing to explore ways to save resources without adversely affecting the quality of education, and it would discuss with the school sponsoring bodies concerned where necessary; and
- in the review of the development of rural primary schools, the Administration would take into account the situation of different schools and make appropriate arrangements. Rural schools that only had a few students incurred a very high operating cost. The Administration intended to merge, relocate or phase out such schools wherever possible. It would explore ways to facilitate the transportation of the students to other districts to attend schools with better facilities. One option was to provide school buses for the students. For those rural schools that were located not very far away from one other, they could be replaced by centralised schools. The Administration would explore the possibility of expediting the construction of centralised schools. The Administration would review the situation of each and every rural school to map out the most appropriate arrangements.

63. Paragraph 5.6 of the Audit Report stated that the ED had not drawn up any timetable for closing down the remaining four rural schools in Category C (i.e. rural schools that were classified as surplus to requirements). The Committee asked whether any progress had been made.

64. The **Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower** and the **Director of Education** replied that:

- as the students in the Category C schools could be transferred to standard schools nearby, the ED was already discussing with the schools concerned with a view to closing them down; and
- actions would also be taken to phase out these schools if the number of students they admitted during the Discretionary Places Admission and Central Allocation stages did not meet the criteria for operation of Primary One classes.

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### Government primary schools

65. According to paragraph 6.20 of the Audit Report, government primary schools were more costly to operate than aided primary schools. In 2001-02, the cost differential was about \$5,700 per student. In view of the substantial cost differential, the Committee asked whether the Administration agreed that there was a need to reduce the number of government primary schools.

66. The Committee also noted from paragraph 6.25(b) that the Director of Education had undertaken to explore the feasibility of using contract terms to hire future staff in government schools as far as practicable. The Committee enquired whether the Administration had now decided that the use of contract staff was feasible and whether there was any resistance from the staff side.

67. The **Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower** and the **Director of Education** responded that:

- the EMB considered that there was a need to retain government schools as they played a leading role in piloting many education initiatives. For example, school-based management was first introduced in government schools three years ago;
- due to the severe budget deficit of the Government, the EMB was discussing with the principals and teachers of government schools the feasibility of using contract terms to hire staff. Furthermore, given the drop in the demand for school places due to the decreasing number school-age children, the scale of operation of government schools would have to be trimmed down. Some teaching posts might not be needed in the long term and so would have to be filled by staff on contract terms. As a matter of fact, the ED had had the experience of hiring non-civil service contract teachers in primary schools. When deciding on the matter, the ED would take into account the future development of government schools in the light of the declining student population. It would also consider the terms of the contract;
- regarding staff reaction, some teachers had expressed concerns about the proposal as the reasons for their joining government schools were to secure a stable job, and to be able to change schools if they so wished. Also, government schools offered more promotion opportunities; and

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- in any case, the ED would begin to try using contract terms to hire staff in government schools from 2003. Nevertheless, the Administration wished to make clear that contract teachers would not necessarily be the first ones to be laid off when there were excess teachers in a school due to merger or other reasons. The Administration would certainly take into consideration the ability and performance of individual teachers when making such decisions.

68. The Committee queried whether there was really a need to retain government schools for trying out education initiatives. It considered that some aided schools might be willing to be pioneers. The Committee further asked whether the Administration would build new government schools.

69. The **Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower** said that:

- same as aided primary schools, government primary schools also faced the problem of declining school-age population. If they had difficulty admitting sufficient students, the Administration would consider the option of merging them or ceasing their operation. In deciding whether to build new government schools, the EMB would take into account factors like the demand for school places due to the implementation of whole-day primary schooling in government schools; and
- retaining a small number of government schools could ensure that the ED's staff had frontline teaching experience. This would enable the staff to better understand the actual situation in schools and the needs of different types of students. It was not always possible to require sponsoring bodies to reserve teaching posts for the ED's staff. Moreover, in respect of student admission, government schools would not be choosy.

### Primary One Admission system

70. The Committee understood from paragraphs 7.30 to 7.32 of the Audit Report that the ED's current system for preventing and detecting the reporting of false residential addresses by parents had its limitations because the documents requested by the ED for residential addresses were not entirely reliable. Audit considered that the ED should strengthen the verification process by conducting home visits on a selective basis and take a tougher stance against those parents who were found to have used false addresses to gain an unfair advantage in the POA process. The Committee asked about the Administration's view on Audit's recommendations.

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71. The **Director of Education** and the **Assistant Director of Education (Planning & Research)** said that:

- the ED doubted the cost-effectiveness of home visits as a lot of manpower and time would be involved. Moreover, home visits could only be conducted with the consent of the people concerned; and
- in order to deter the use of false addresses, the ED was considering the feasibility of requiring parents to report their addresses under oath.

72. The Committee pointed out that if parents reported their addresses under oath, it would be a criminal offence to report false addresses and the penalty would be very heavy, including imprisonment. As the parents' reason for using false addresses was to enhance their children's chance of being admitted to some schools, the Committee wondered whether it was justified to impose such heavy penalty as imprisonment on those parents who were found to have reported false addresses in the POA exercise.

73. To ascertain the severity of the situation of using false address, the Committee enquired about the number of complaints on false address and the number of substantiated cases in the past five years. The **Director of Education** provided the information vide his letter of 19 December 2002, as follows:

School year	No. of complaints received	No. of substantiated cases
2002-03 (as at December 2002)	1	0
2001-02	4	0
2000-01	4	1
1999-2000	1	0
1998-99	4	2
1997-98	2	0

74. The Committee further asked how the ED would implement Audit's recommendation of taking tougher measures against dishonest parents. The **Director of Education** advised, in his letter of 31 December 2002, that:

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- according to the ED's records, in the past five years, there were only 15 complaints on false address and only 3 of them were substantiated after investigation. After careful consideration, the ED did not intend to take legal action against this minority group of dishonest parents for the time being as this would complicate the POA procedure and cause inconvenience to the majority of the parents. The ED believed that, in the long run, raising the quality of education provided by all schools would be more basic in minimising the luring factor for the use of false address; and
- the ED would keep close watch of the situation on the use of false address in the POA exercise and continue to explore ways of further strengthening the effectiveness of the existing system. As the situation of using false address was not serious, the ED considered that there was no urgent need of taking tougher measures against dishonest parents at the present stage.

### **75. Conclusions and recommendations      The Committee:**

#### **Planning and provision of public-sector primary school places**

- expresses concern that:
  - (a) by 2010, the overall supply of primary school places would exceed the overall demand by 27,600 school places, which is equivalent to 35 standard schools, and mismatches would occur in nine of the 18 districts;
  - (b) the expected excess supply of primary school places is unlikely to reverse, as the number of children in the age group of six to eleven is expected to remain at a low level for the next two decades;
  - (c) of the 69 new schools that were being planned, 22 were for the seven districts where there would be a significant excess supply of school places;
  - (d) not enough school places are being planned for two districts where there will be a serious shortfall of school places; and
  - (e) some schools had each seven or more vacant classrooms, which represent under-utilisation of existing educational resources;

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- notes that:
  - (a) the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) will tighten the criteria for operating Primary One classes from the 2003-04 school year, to the effect that if the total number of students allocated to a Primary One class of a school is less than 23, and there are still unfilled Primary One places in other schools of the same school net, the school may not be allowed to operate that class;
  - (b) the EMB has decided to suspend nine school projects in the seven districts projected to have excess supply of primary school places in both 2007 and 2010 based on the latest population projection, and another five school projects due to various reasons, e.g. high site formation costs and technical constraints of the school sites concerned; and
  - (c) the EMB plans to construct a total of 19 new primary schools from 2003 to 2007 in the four districts with a projected shortfall of school places in the light of the latest population forecast;
- urges the Secretary for Education and Manpower to:
  - (a) explore measures to address the problem of expected serious excess supply of school places;
  - (b) review the school building programme, taking into account:
    - (i) the savings that can now be achieved due to the suspension of the school projects; and
    - (ii) the need to expeditiously reprovision or redevelop existing schools which have poor physical conditions; and
  - (c) consult the Legislative Council (LegCo) and parties concerned regarding the revised criteria for operating Primary One classes;

### **Enrolment and class size**

- expresses concern that:
  - (a) a serious over-enrolment situation existed in some classes where the actual number of students exceeded the standard class size by seven or more; and

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- (b) a serious under-enrolment existed in some classes where the unfilled places were eleven or more;
- acknowledges that the EMB will conduct a study to identify the pre-conditions for effective learning in small classes and is considering the details of the study, including the timetable and scope;
- urges the Secretary for Education and Manpower to consult the LegCo and parties concerned when conducting the study on small class teaching;

### **School Improvement Programme**

- expresses serious dismay that some schools had not made use of their vacant classrooms although they had been left idle for a long time;
- expresses concern that:
  - (a) the School Improvement Programme (SIP) can be more cost-effectively carried out in schools with many vacant classrooms by converting vacant classrooms into various function rooms, instead of building additional floor areas; and had such an approach been adopted, the cost of the SIP works carried out would have been reduced significantly; and
  - (b) five schools that would be closed down are included in Phase V of the SIP;
- notes the Director of Education's statement that according to the ED's projection, all the vacant classrooms in those schools for which SIP works had been carried out would be used by the commencement of the 2007-08 school year when whole-day primary schooling was fully implemented;
- acknowledges that the EMB has decided to shelve the SIP works for 62 rural schools as the demand for such schools may not be great;
- urges the Secretary for Education and Manpower to:
  - (a) explore ways to make use of the vacant classrooms temporarily, pending full implementation of whole-day primary schooling;
  - (b) re-examine the SIP plans for schools which have many vacant classrooms and, where feasible, convert the existing vacant classrooms into various function rooms, instead of building additional floor areas; and

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- (c) shelve the SIP works or reduce the scope of the works to be carried out for schools that will be closed down in the near future, having regard to the remaining life span of the schools concerned;

### **Rural primary schools**

- expresses concern that many rural schools are not able to provide a suitable environment for quality education and social development because of the inferior facilities and the small number of students;
- acknowledges that the EMB:
  - (a) has drawn up a timetable to phase out all Category C rural schools that are surplus to requirements; and
  - (b) is reviewing the future development of rural primary schools;
- urges the Secretary for Education and Manpower to draw up action plans to transfer students attending rural schools to nearby standard schools as far as possible, so as to ensure that the students can study in a more suitable school environment with better school facilities;

### **Government primary schools**

- expresses concern that:
  - (a) government primary schools are not evenly distributed in accordance with the broad guidelines that each district should have one government primary school; and
  - (b) the cost differential between operating government primary schools and aided schools had widened from 21% in 1990 to 26% in 2001;
- acknowledges that the EMB:
  - (a) is reviewing the role, provision and the future development of government primary schools; and
  - (b) will try using contract terms to hire staff in government schools from 2003;



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### **Primary One Admission system**

- expresses concern that:
  - (a) about half of the parents who responded to the audit survey considered that the Primary One Admission (POA) information provided by the ED was insufficient and were not satisfied with the information provided; and
  - (b) the ED's current system for preventing and detecting the reporting of false addresses by parents has its limitations because the documents requested by the ED for residential addresses are not entirely reliable;
- urges the Secretary for Education and Manpower to:
  - (a) take appropriate action to provide the public with additional information on the POA process, which is mentioned in paragraph 7.12 of the Audit Report; and
  - (b) provide a hyperlink to the POA on the front page of the EMB's Website throughout the year; and

### **Follow-up actions**

- wishes to be kept informed of:
  - (a) the progress of all the actions taken by the EMB to ensure that the standard class size is followed as far as possible;
  - (b) the progress of the study on small class teaching;
  - (c) the actions taken by the EMB to improve the cost-effectiveness in the implementation of the SIP;
  - (d) the progress made by the EMB in phasing out rural schools;
  - (e) the outcome of the review of the future development of rural primary schools; and
  - (f) the outcome of the review on the role, provision and development of government primary schools.