

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)2974/02-03

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by the Administration)

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Panel on Education

**Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 16 June 2003 at 4:30 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Dr Hon YEUNG Sum (Chairman)
Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung, BBS (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP
Hon CHOY So-yuk
Hon SZETO Wah
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Hon MA Fung-kwok, JP
- Members absent** : Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Item IV

Professor Arthur K C LI, GBS, JP
Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mrs Fanny LAW, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mr LEE Kwok-sung
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and
Manpower (Education Commission and Planning)

Item V

Mr CHENG Man-yiu
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (3)

Mrs Betty IP
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and
Manpower (School Administration and Support)

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 Nos. CB(2)2384/02-03 and CB(2)2404/02-03]

The minutes of the meetings held on 28 April and 19 May 2003 were confirmed.

II. Information papers issued since the last meeting

2. Members noted the following information papers -

- (a) Referral from the Complaints Division on arrangements for class resumption in primary schools and the guidelines on the prevention of the spreading of atypical pneumonia in schools [LC Paper No. CB(2)2327/02-03]; and
- (b) Start-up loan for post-secondary education providers [LC Paper No. CB(2)2368/02-03(01)].

III. Items for discussion at the next meeting

3. The Chairman informed the meeting that the Panel had scheduled two special meetings as follows -

- (a) A special meeting on 23 June 2003 at 2:30 pm to discuss "Consolidation of high cost and under-utilized primary schools"

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and "Results of the 2003 Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers"; and

- (b) A special meeting on 30 June 2003 at 4:30 pm to discuss "Future provision of associate degree programmes in City University of Hong Kong".

IV. Study on teaching in small classes

Rationale for changing the approach of the study from a longitudinal study to a small and variable group teaching

4. The Chairman reminded members that in response to Mr SZETO Wah's oral question raised at the Council meeting on 13 November 2002, the Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM) had replied that a study on teaching in small classes would be conducted in 30 to 40 public sector primary schools from the 2003-04 school year. The participating schools would try out the class size of about 20 students at junior levels and relevant professional training and support would be provided to the teachers as appropriate. When SEM briefed the Panel on the key issues on the education agenda for 2002-03 at the Panel meeting on 18 November 2002, SEM had also informed the Panel that the Administration would conduct a longitudinal study on the impact of teaching in small classes from the 2003-04 school year in order to find out the necessary pre-conditions and teaching strategies which would maximize the benefit of teaching in small classes.

5. The Chairman further said that the Administration subsequently briefed the Panel at the Panel meeting on 19 May 2003 on a proposed study on effective strategies of small class and other variable group teaching in primary schools (the proposed study). According to the Administration, the proposed study would replace the longitudinal study and aim to identify the good practices in small class and group teaching in public sector primary schools for dissemination to and adaptation by other schools to enhance learning effectiveness. Some members had expressed strong dissatisfaction with the Administration's position on the ground that the proposed study was in essence different from the proposed longitudinal study and was not a study about teaching in small classes.

6. At the Chairman's invitation, SEM explained that teaching in small classes was a highly controversial issue and so far overseas educational research and experiences had failed to establish a conclusive correlation between teaching in small classes and effectiveness of learning. He pointed out that his reply to Mr SZETO Wah's oral question at the Council meeting on 13 November 2002 about a pilot scheme on teaching in small classes was made on the basis of some preliminary thinking. The pilot scheme was originally

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proposed to include around 30 to 40 public sector primary schools and start from the 2003-04 school year, followed by a review to be conducted after two years' implementation.

7. SEM further explained that at the Panel meeting on 18 November 2002, some members had expressed concerns about the financial implications of implementing teaching in small classes in primary schools. After further consultation with experts in the field, and having regard to the fact that some local primary schools had been able to make use of existing resources and school facilities to implement various forms of small group teaching for certain subjects, the Administration considered it justified to conduct the proposed study with a view to identifying the good practices in small class and group teaching for dissemination to or adaptation by other schools.

8. The Chairman asked why the Administration considered it appropriate to replace the longitudinal study with the proposed study.

9. SEM explained that there were diverse views about the proposed longitudinal study on teaching in small classes. Opponents of teaching in small classes considered that the professionalism of teachers was more important in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in a class room setting. They had pointed out that there were students enrolled in classes with more than 40 students who demonstrated an outstanding level of learning outcome. Given the complexity of the problems involved and the resource constraints, the Administration considered it necessary to conduct an in-depth case study on how learning effectiveness could be enhanced through the adoption of small class and other variable group teaching strategies by optimizing the use of existing teaching and learning resources.

10. Mr SZETO Wah enquired about the concerns of members on implementation of teaching in small classes. SEM responded that at the meeting on 18 November 2002, Mr SZETO himself had questioned the need to conduct the longitudinal study on teaching in small classes.

11. Mr SZETO Wah said that he had queried at that meeting whether the benefit of teaching in small classes could be assessed if only one class in each pilot school was put under the longitudinal study. Mr SZETO added that he had suggested the Administration to provide suitable support measures to schools and teachers on implementation of teaching in small classes. Although he considered that the benefit of teaching in small classes was apparent, he had not suggested the Administration to give up the longitudinal study. He stressed that the proposed study was in essence not a study on teaching in small classes.

12. In response, SEM stressed that the Administration had not changed its stance on teaching in small classes. He said that the proposed study was just another way to assess how teaching in small classes would enhance the

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effectiveness of teaching and learning in a class room setting. Specifically, the proposed study would assess how different pupil grouping strategies could be implemented in schools through strategic and flexible re-deployment of existing resources to enhance student learning. SEM pointed out that there were schools who had been able to make use of existing resources and school facilities to implement various forms of small group learning for certain subjects to enhance learning effectiveness.

13. Mr SZETO Wah was of the view that small group teaching was not equivalent to teaching in small classes. SEM, however, considered that if the impact of small group teaching on students' learning outcomes was positive, the impact of teaching in small classes on students' learning outcomes should also be positive.

The proposed study - implementation and financial implications

14. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that teachers' professionalism and teaching in small classes were not mutually exclusive and should be equally important in enhancing students' learning outcomes. He pointed out that Mr SZETO Wah had suggested the Administration to implement teaching in small classes in 30 to 40 primary schools with a smaller student intake, instead of carrying out the proposed longitudinal study. However, the proposed study would extend the period of the study to 2006 and reduce the number of participating schools from 30 - 40 to 10. Mr CHEUNG held a strong view that the Administration should set a time limit for identifying the good practices in variable group teaching, and start implementing the good practices in other schools on an incremental basis. He suggested that the Administration should set out a timetable, specify the number of participating schools and the support measures for implementation of teaching in small classes.

15. SEM responded that he concurred with Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong that teachers' professionalism and teaching in small classes could both enhance students' learning outcomes. He, however, pointed out that the impact of teaching in small classes on quality of education was still a highly controversial issue among experts and there was so far no conclusive evidence on its effectiveness in teaching and learning. In fact, some experts had argued that the quality of teachers and the teaching strategies were more important than class size in enhancing quality of education. Given the substantial resources required for implementing teaching in small classes in public sector primary schools, the Administration would have to ascertain its benefits by a comprehensive and objective study. Under the proposed study, the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) would first conduct a six-month survey on existing good practices of effective small and variable group teaching strategies now being adopted in schools. SEM added that depending on the resources available, the Administration would consider allowing more schools to participate in the proposed study in the second stage.

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16. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed support for the Administration to take six months to evaluate the merits of small class and other variable group teaching strategies currently adopted by some primary schools and to identify the good practices for other schools to follow. He considered that interested sponsoring bodies should be allowed to make application for their schools to participate in the proposed study. He suggested that the Administration should make an estimate of the level of resources which would be set aside for assisting participating schools to implement teaching in small classes in due course.

17. The Chairman was of the view that the Administration should take advantage of the declining student population to implement teaching in small classes in schools which had a lower student intake. He pointed out that many members held the view that like the small class sizes of international schools, teaching in small classes would definitely upgrade the quality of education in public sector primary schools.

18. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that while members in general agreed that teaching in small classes had its benefits, there were conflicting views on its effects on student learning. He considered that the declining student population had created an opportunity for surplus teachers to pursue further or refresher studies in order to prepare for their future return to the education sector. Mr CHEUNG doubted whether the existing level of subsidy would be adequate to implement teaching in small classes in all public sector primary schools. He pointed out that while the unit cost of a primary school place was between the range of \$20,000 to \$30,000, the annual fees of those famous international schools were over \$100,000. He also pointed out that popular primary schools in Hong Kong often operated classes with more than 40 students. If their classes were restricted to accommodate 25 students or less, parents might hold strong view against the arrangement if their children were rejected by these schools due to limited places in the schools.

19. Mr Tommy CHEUNG further said that more schools should be invited to participate in the proposed study so that the findings of the study would be more reliable. He asked whether the Administration had proposed to invite 10 public sector primary schools to take part in the second stage of the study because of the resources constraint or an estimate that only about 10 schools were currently adopting small and variable group teaching strategies.

20. SEM responded that some public sector primary schools had been able to use existing resources to operate small class and group teaching strategies to enhance learning effectiveness. The Administration aimed to ascertain how these schools could exercise group teaching strategies without incurring additional resources and identify the good practices for dissemination to or adaptation by other schools. He added that since no additional costs would be

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incurred for the schools, there was no need in principle to restrict the number of schools participating in the first stage of the proposed study. Other schools would then be invited to try out the good practices.

21. Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower (PSEM) supplemented that EMB had not estimated the number of schools currently practicing variable group teaching strategies, but would issue a circular to invite all these schools to notify EMB for an expert assessment of their group teaching strategies. Subject to available resources, the Administration would expand the scope of the proposed study to cover more schools.

22. Mr Tommy CHEUNG expressed concern about the financial implications of the proposed study. He pointed out that those high cost and under-utilized primary schools were operating small classes with less than 25 students. He asked whether the proposed study would be extended to include these schools.

23. PSEM clarified that the proposed study was designed to identify the effective strategies of small class and other variable group teaching rather than to implement teaching in small classes in primary schools. She pointed out that high cost and under-utilized schools normally operated classes of less than 25 students but the quality of education they provided was no better than those of the schools with a class size of 40 students. In the light of members' concerns, the Administration would consider including in the proposed study the effects of teachers' professionalism and teaching methods on teaching in small classes. PSEM stressed that the main aim of the proposed study was to identify the good practices of variable group teaching strategies for different subjects in schools operating large classes. She added that according to some international experts in education, a large class of 40 students or more would facilitate exchange of views and experience sharing among students, which would create positive effects on student learning in some subjects, e.g. General Studies. Whereas, small group teaching was beneficial to teaching and learning in language subjects, including Chinese and English. In fact, one of the main themes of education reform was to encourage schools to adopt variable group teaching strategies for different teaching and learning activities.

24. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung held the view that while students with high academic calibre could derive more benefits from learning in large classes, students with low academic calibre would learn better in small classes. He agreed that the ultimate objective of teaching in small classes was to enhance student-teacher interaction. He did not consider that there was the need to conduct the proposed study as a large class comprising high academic achievers would certainly have better learning outcomes than a small class comprising low academic achievers. Mr LEUNG asked for the purpose of the proposed study and how it would be implemented.

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25. PSEM responded that the purpose of the proposed study was mainly to see how different student grouping strategies could be achieved in schools through strategic and flexible re-deployment of existing resources and to identify the necessary conditions to ensure successful student grouping strategies and effective learning; and to ascertain whether with professional support the successful experiences of variable class size and small class and group teaching strategies could be acquired or adapted by other schools. She agreed that students would have different background and learning abilities. The Administration would ensure that the sample of participating schools would represent a fair distribution of different abilities in learning. She added that teaching in small classes would be more beneficial to junior primary classes and in particular children from disadvantaged families.

26. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung considered that the evaluation of the proposed study should not emphasize too much on the results of students' attainment in Chinese, English and Mathematics. He pointed out that for students with low academic abilities or improper learning attitudes, a change in learning attitude or behaviour should be regarded as one of the positive effects of teaching in small classes.

27. PSEM agreed that a change in learning attitude or behaviour was in fact an improvement in learning for certain types of students. She pointed out that EMB had introduced the Academic Value-added Indicators and the Affective and Social Outcome Indicators for schools to assess their strengths and weaknesses in both academic and non-academic areas. Apart from the attainment tests in Chinese, English and Mathematics, various case study methods, such as classroom observations, questionnaire surveys and interviews, etc., would be used to assess students' learning progress in non-academic areas covering their learning attitudes and behaviours.

28. Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung sought clarifications about the meaning of implementing small class and other variable group teaching without incurring additional resources. He expressed support for providing additional resources for schools to implement teaching in small classes in order to improve quality of education as long as the community as a whole considered it worthwhile to do so. Mr YEUNG also asked how participating schools would be selected and whether the names of participating schools would be kept confidential to avoid possible labeling effect in case their group teaching strategies were evaluated as not effective.

29. SEM responded that the proposed study would examine how some local primary schools had managed to use existing resources to implement various forms of small group learning for certain subjects. As regards selection of participating schools, the Administration could not force schools to participate in the proposed study and would discuss with schools which had an interest in participation.

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30. PSEM supplemented that schools participating in the proposed study would be funded as other public sector primary schools, which was largely based on the number of classes.

31. Mr SZETO Wah said that he could not understand how small class and variable group teaching could be implemented without incurring additional costs, given that each lesson of a large or small class would have to be conducted by a teacher. SEM reiterated that the proposed study would explore how some primary schools were able to operate small class and variable group teaching under the existing level of funding.

32. Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung suggested that if teaching in small classes were implemented in public sector primary schools, the Administration should consider allocating funding to schools on the basis of a student unit cost and let schools decide the sizes of their classes for different subjects and different level of studies, etc.

33. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that additional resources should be provided to schools adopting variable group teaching strategies or teaching in small classes. Otherwise it would be unfair to students in large classes of the same school. He suggested that a pilot scheme on teaching in small classes should be implemented within an affordable budget. He cited the pilot scheme on implementation of the use of information technologies in schools as an example to illustrate the need to implement a major policy on an incremental basis. Mr CHEUNG pointed out that to allocate primary education resources on the basis of a student unit cost for implementing teaching in small classes at the initial stage was not financially viable. To do so would mean that teaching in small classes would not be implemented for good. Mr CHEUNG added that he would be pleased to prepare a detailed proposal on implementation of teaching in small classes if the Administration was willing to consider.

34. Mr SZETO Wah said that he considered that Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung's suggestion of allocating primary education resources on the basis of a student unit cost would mean the transform of all public sector primary schools into Direct Subsidy Scheme schools. Miss CHOY So-yuk expressed objection to Mr SZETO Wah's interpretation of Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung's suggestion in his absence.

Way forward

35. The Chairman asked what the Administration would provide for further discussion of teaching in small classes after six months. SEM replied that the Administration should be able to identify the good practices of small class and other variable group teaching in six months and revert to the Panel accordingly.

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36. PSEM explained that starting from the 2003-04 school year, the proposed study would be implemented in two stages and last for three years. Stage one would commence with a survey on existing good practices which would last for six months. During stage two, the good practices would be applied in participating schools and the progress of implementation would be assessed by an expert team. The final report would be made available by end-2006. However, the Administration would put into practice any positive findings during the course of the study without having to wait for the final report. PSEM stressed that the proposed study had taken into account the concerns of members about the cost implications of teaching in small classes and the views of academics in the field. It represented the most cost-effective and practicable way forward at a time of financial stringency. The study would identify existing good practices for dissemination by way of expert assessment.

37. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed strong dissatisfaction that the Administration could only provide a set of good practices of variable group teaching after six months for implementation and evaluate the proposed study in participating schools until end-2006. He said that PSEM was personally not in favour of teaching in small classes. Mr CHEUNG considered that PSEM was trying to use the proposed study to muddy the issue of teaching in small classes and to delay its implementation. Mr CHEUNG said that he had observed the operation of variable group teaching in some schools, which was in essence flexible allocation of students in classes for different teaching and learning activities. He did not consider such arrangements fair to students in large classes. He suggested that in view of the resource constraints, teaching in small classes should be progressively implemented in primary schools. He considered it acceptable for the Administration to conduct a survey and an evaluation on existing practices of variable group teaching strategies in schools, and thereby recommend a set of good practices for all schools to decide whether they should follow. Since variable group teaching was already adopted by some schools, Mr CHEUNG strongly requested the Administration to evaluate and identify the good practices in six months' time and revert to the Panel for discussion on the way forward. He also urged the Administration to work out a budget for implementation of teaching in small classes in primary schools at the initial stage.

38. SEM responded that it was not fair for Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong to say that PSEM objected to teaching in small classes. He stressed that PSEM had all along demonstrated a rational and objective attitude towards the issue of teaching in small classes and its implementation in primary schools. He explained that after collecting the necessary data in six months, the Administration would need time to conduct a detailed evaluation to identify the attributes contributing to successful student grouping strategies and effective learning. He stressed that a comprehensive evaluation on the overall benefits of variable group teaching would be fair to students in large classes of the schools concerned.

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39. PSEM also expressed objection to Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's allegation that she personally objected to teaching in small classes. She pointed out that there was a need to evaluate the proposed study by professional experts in the education sector in order to ascertain the real benefits of small group teaching and its relationship with the professionalism of teachers and teaching strategies. She stressed that professional evaluation was essential for successful implementation of small group teaching and such evaluation should be free from any political consideration.

40. As regards the duration of time for evaluation, Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower (Education Commission and Planning) PAS(ECP) explained that after consulting members at the Panel meeting on 18 November 2002, the Administration had consulted overseas academics in the field and observed the operation of local primary schools adopting different small class and group teaching strategies. He considered that EMB's work plan was in line with Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's expectation in that it had planned to identify a set of good practices and evaluate their effectiveness in six months. After that, EMB would invite interested schools to participate in the proposed study and implement the set of good practices under a comprehensive study on their effectiveness in enhancing students' learning outcomes. In addition, resources would be allocated for the provision of expert support to participating schools throughout the implementation and evaluation process. The Administration would take into consideration the actual number of schools currently practising small class and group teaching strategies and increase the number of participating schools as appropriate. PAS(ECP) stressed that to ascertain whether the set of good practices could be applied in other primary schools to enhance students' learning without concomitant changes to other important contextual variables, such as school heads' leadership, teachers' professionalism, school facilities, parents' support, etc., a comprehensive evaluation with expert participation for a duration of two years was necessary. Nevertheless, EMB would conduct an interim review one year after implementation and might adjust the implementation and evaluation plan in the light of the findings of the review.

41. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong responded that the merit of teaching in small classes was apparent. He considered that a good teacher should be able to assist students to learn effectively, regardless of whether the teaching and learning activities took place in a large or small class. However, given the same teacher, teaching and learning would be more effective in a small than a large class. Mr CHEUNG was of the view that the Administration should implement a pilot scheme of teaching in small classes as soon as practicable in order to meet the expectations of the community and benefit the future generations in education. Subject to availability of resources, the scope of the scheme could be expanded to cover more schools.

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42. Mr SZETO Wah agreed that the evaluation on the proposed study should be comprehensive in order to be fair to students in large class of schools adopting variable group teaching strategies. He stressed that members were familiar with the issues on teaching in small classes and their views should be respected and should not be regarded as non-professional or having a political consideration. He suggested that the Administration should provide members with the details of the good strategies and practices, the particulars of the schools practising variable group teaching, and the report of the interim review on the proposed study when available. At the Chairman's request, SEM undertook to provide the information in due course.

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43. SEM stressed that the Administration respected members' views on teaching in small classes and had no intention to say that their views were not professional. He considered the proposed study in line with members' expectations and the policy direction of the Administration.

44. In concluding the discussion, the Chairman requested the Administration to evaluate and identify the good practices for inviting interested sponsoring bodies to apply for their schools to participate in the proposed study in six months, and explain the criteria for its evaluation of the good practices. In response, SEM agreed to revert to the Panel after six months with a preliminary report on the strategies and practices which had been evaluated and identified as effective for implementing teaching in small classes in primary schools.

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V. Implementation of whole-day primary schooling
[LC Paper No. CB(2)2401/02-03(01)]

45. At the Chairman's invitation, Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (3) (DS(EM)3) took members through the Administration's paper on the subject. Members noted that the Administration had achieved its interim target of providing 60% of primary school students with whole-day schooling in the 2002-03 school year.

Evaluation of whole-day primary schooling

46. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong asked whether the Administration would conduct a comprehensive review of whole-day primary schooling (WDPS) with a view to improving the provision of WDPS and the quality of primary education. He considered that given the substantial expenditure incurred for the construction of new schools for implementation of WDPS, the Administration should consult the views of stakeholders on the effects of WDPS on provision of primary education.

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47. DS(EM)3 responded that the Administration had commissioned the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) to conduct an evaluation on the effects of WDPS on provision of primary education. According to HKIEd, students and teachers who were transferred from a half-day to a whole-day primary school had responded favourably to WDPS. In general, schools operating on a whole-day mode enjoyed more flexibility in scheduling classes and their students had more time to interact with fellow classmates and teachers. The Administration would disseminate the good practices adopted by some whole-day primary schools to other schools for reference and adaptation.

48. Mr SZETO Wah said that the benefits of WDPS to teachers and students were apparent. He considered that EMB should review WDPS with the aim of identifying the good practices in scheduling classes, organization of extra-curricular activities within school hours and on Saturdays, re-design of curriculum to reduce home assignments, etc, for enhancing the quality of primary education. He suggested that EMB should encourage whole-day primary schools to adopt the good practices wherever practicable. DS(EM)3 replied that the Administration would continue to do so.

49. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong suggested that EMB should review whether WDPS had affected students' participation in sports and recreation activities. He pointed out that students attending whole-day schools would have no spare time for entertainment if they were still required to do a lot of assignments after school.

50. Miss CHOY So-yuk suggested that the review of WDPS should evaluate how whole-day schools had made use of the longer school hours to foster an all-round development of their students, such as their participation in sports and conceptual development in environmental protection and civil education, etc.

51. DS(EM)3 responded that under the education reform, all schools should move towards providing an all-round education to their students. While EMB had provided a set of detailed guidelines on the provision of school curriculum and extra-curricular activities, whole-day primary schools were encouraged to organize various academic and non-academic activities for their students having regard to their different circumstances. He added that the report of HKIEd on WDPS had evaluated the merits of WDPS from various perspectives. At the Chairman's request, DS(EM)3 undertook to provide the Panel with the report after the meeting.

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Implementation of whole-day primary schooling

52. Mr SZETO Wah asked about the implementation progress of WDPS and the follow-up for the 27 schools which so far did not have a plan for switching to operate from a bi-sessional to a whole-day mode.

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53. DS(EM)3 explained that as of to date, 170 school premises were still operating in bi-sessional mode and 103 of them had an agreed plan for conversion to WDPS. Of the remaining 67 schools, a total of 27 schools did not have a plan for conversion purpose. The Administration would continue to monitor their enrolment situation and explore possible means of conversion, including the possibility of building new schools.

54. Responding to Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong, Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower (School Administration and Support) (PAS(SAS)) confirmed that the Administration aimed to reach agreement with each of the remaining 67 bi-sessional schools on a plan for conversion by 2007. She highlighted that 11 and three of the remaining 67 schools would be allocated new school premises and vacant premises respectively through the school allocation exercises. A merging of the morning and afternoon sessions would be considered for turning another 26 schools which had a classroom utilization rate or enrolment rate of less than 80% to operate on a whole-day mode.

55. Miss CHOY So-yuk considered it difficult to encourage under-enrolled whole-day primary schools to merge with a more fully enrolled bi-sessional school in the vicinity. She asked how many mergers had been made so far.

56. PAS(SAS) replied that the Administration would consider merging of primary schools as a means of conversion when it was proposed by the school management concerned. In view of the fact that different school sponsoring bodies would have different visions and missions in running their schools, so far there had been only one such proposed merger from the school sponsoring bodies.

57. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung asked whether there were whole-day primary schools operating on a summer time table during the summer. DS(EM)3 replied that a few whole-day primary schools might still adopt a summer time table in scheduling classes. Nevertheless, EMB had advised schools of the need to make better use of WDPS to enhance quality of education.

VI. Any other business

58. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:15 pm.