

For discussion on  
28 April 2003

**Legislative Council Panel on Education**  
**Consolidation of High Cost & Under-utilized Primary Schools**

**Purpose**

This paper informs Members' of the criteria for consolidating high cost and under-utilized primary schools.

**Background**

2. According to the 2001-based Projected Population Distribution by District Council districts in 2001-2011, the total projected school age population aged 6-11 is estimated to decrease from 493,200 in 2002 to 410,600 in 2010, representing a 17% drop of 82,600 over eight years. As a result, there is a sharp decrease in the demand for primary school places in Hong Kong as a whole.

3. The trend of declining population in the 6-11 age group has already led to reduction of classes in schools in many districts. The situation is even more serious among rural schools, which were mostly built in the early 1950s when primary education was not universal. The facilities of these rural schools are grossly sub-standard compared to the standard school designs developed in the last decade. Many of them only have a few classrooms; some are still operating combined classes (i.e. putting students of 2 or more class levels in the same class). Their remoteness adds to their difficulty in the recruitment and retention of qualified and experienced teachers. With more and more schools of standard design established in the new towns in recent years and ease of access with modern public transportation, the popularity of rural schools declines sharply more so than schools of the same vintage in the urban area.

4. The high unit cost of under-utilized schools is a major concern, especially under the current stringent financial conditions. The highest unit cost of a primary school place was \$353,225 in 2001/02 school year, representing more than 14 times of the average unit cost of \$24,258. The high cost schools are usually small schools with low student enrolment. The sub-standard facilities of small schools raise further concerns about the adverse impact on student learning. The professional opportunities for teachers in small schools are reduced, and the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum is much harder when the critical mass of teachers is too small. The Public Accounts Committee has also called for action to reduce surplus school places, in particular, in the high cost and under-utilized primary schools.

### **Criteria for Consolidation**

5. The flowchart in Annex summarizes the criteria for consolidating high cost and under-utilized primary schools. If a school is not allocated any Primary One class in year N, then the year in which it will close will be determined by the total enrolment or number of operating classes in year N. The gradual phasing out is to minimize the impact on the pupils who will be affected by the closure of schools. Details are set out below.

- (a) The over-arching consideration is that there must be an adequate supply of school places in the school net in which the concerned school is located.
- (b) When the condition in (a) is met, schools with combined class(es) in the 2002-03 school year will not be allocated any Primary One classes in the 2003-04 school year. Combined class is educationally undesirable, as pupils of two or more levels have to learn in the same classroom. This affects the personal development of pupils and creates difficulties for curriculum planning.
- (c) In the 2003 Primary One Admission (POA) exercise, schools which fail to attract 23 or more students will not be allocated Primary One class.

- (d) Subject to the condition in (a), schools with unit cost 150% or more of the territory-wide average will not be allocated Primary One classes in the POA exercise. The year to be closed will be determined by existing enrolment or number of operating classes as shown in Annex. Most of these schools also fall within the two criteria in (b) and (c) above.

6. We estimate that about 77 schools meet the above criteria for consolidation. It should be noted that the number of schools would vary depending on the changes in enrolment of the schools over the years. As a standard procedure, placement service will be provided to the pupils affected. In view of the overall surplus of school places, there should not be any difficulty in placing the affected pupils in other schools.

### **Financial Implications**

7. If all 77 schools are phased out by 2006/07, the annual recurrent savings would be \$372.5m.

### **Advice Sought**

8. Members are welcome to comment on the criteria for consolidation of high cost and under-utilized primary schools.



**Schools WITH combined class(es) and  
with no Primary One in year N**

- When there are 2 classes **OR** the present enrolment is less than 49<sup>#</sup>, the school will be closed in the N+1 year
- When there are 3 classes **OR** the present enrolment is between 49 to 72, the school will be closed in the N+2 year
- When there are 4 classes **OR** the present enrolment is greater than 72, the school will be closed in the N+3 year

**Schools WITHOUT combined class and  
with no Primary One in year N**

- When there is 1 class **OR** the present enrolment is less than 33<sup>\*</sup>, the school will be closed in N+1 year
- When there are 2 classes **OR** the present enrolment is between 33 to 64, the school will be closed in the N+2 year
- When there are 3 or more classes **OR** the current enrolment is greater than 64, the school will be closed in the N+3 year