Information Note

Legislative Council Panel on Education
Meeting on 28 October 2002

Priorities in Education for 2002-03

Purpose

        This note sets out for Members' information the key issues on the education agenda for 2002-03.

Overview

2.   The blueprint for the education reform, announced in the CE's Policy Address in October 2000, is being rolled out systematically and on schedule. Initially, the aims are to increase education opportunities, provide more choice, remove constraints and create space for teachers and students. Ultimately, reform must impact on teaching and make a difference to student learning. This will require changes to the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

3.   We have made great strides in expanding post-secondary and senior secondary education. This year, 42% of secondary school leavers have the opportunity to continue education and over 99% of S3 students were allocated school places in S4 or vocational institutions. By September 2003, eight senior secondary schools will begin operation and will provide more curricular choices to suit the interests and aptitude of individual students. In addition, more private independent and direct subsidy scheme schools will come into operation over the next three years, adding choice and diversity to the education system.

4.   Following the abolition of the Academic Aptitude Test (AAT) in 2000, we have seen encouraging improvements in teaching and learning practices among primary schools. There is greater emphasis on the promotion of reading and language education; project/experiential learning has become more common; and learning activities have extended beyond the classroom. We are optimistic that the pace of change will gather momentum in the years ahead.

5.   The curriculum prescribes the content and determines the

outcome of learning. The curriculum reform is progressing intensively and on schedule. At the basic education level (P1 to S3), the four key tasks are moral and civic education, "learning to read, reading to learn", project learning and information technology (IT). Curriculum guides and teaching resources are being produced, action research on pilot projects is being carried out together with professional development and sharing of good practices. The "seed" projects are bearing fruit with very positive feedback from schools.

6.		At the secondary level, curriculum development is in progress, and schools are consulted at every stage of the process. A new curriculum for Chinese and English has been implemented. New curricula for the other six key learning areas will be rolled out over the next two years.

7.		In the final analysis, the success of any education reform depends on the people in the system, including the school managers, principals, teachers, parents and students. Among the stakeholders, the principal has an important leadership role and can make a difference. We have developed a framework for continuing professional development of principals which is being implemented in 2002-03 school year. From 2004-05, all aspiring principals must have completed a designated training programme before being considered for appointment.

8.		We shall work in partnership with school sponsoring bodies over the professional development of principals and teachers, and in monitoring and upgrading school performance. In this connection, we have stepped up quality assurance inspections and follow-up actions, and are developing self-evaluation tools for schools.

9.		Also worth mentioning is that we have completed a review on the harmonisation of kindergartens (KGs) and child care centres (CCCs), and introduced improvements to the kindergarten subsidy scheme and financial assistance for students.

The Year Ahead

10.		We will proceed steadily following the timetable of the education reform, as shown in Annex. In addition, we have to re-prioritise existing activities, re-engineer work processes, and re-organise the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) and the

Education Department (ED) in view of budgetary constraints, so as to enhance operational efficiency and cost-effective use of resources.

11.	The key tasks for the coming year fall into four categories – efficiency drive, system review and development, legislative programme, teaching and learning.

(a) Efficiency drive

12.	We aim to merge EMB and ED with effect from 1 January 2003 (see LC Paper No. CB(2) 132/02-03(01)) so as to integrate policy formulation and implementation, and reduce doubling of work. We have also initiated a review of existing activities and work processes with a view to eliminating unnecessary controls and streamlining procedures for greater efficiency and better co-ordination. Through these efforts, we expect to achieve some savings.

13.	In addition, we shall work with the school sector to identify the scope for re-deployment of resources to ensure more cost-effective use. The over-arching principle is that any new arrangements must not compromise the quality of education or frustrate the education reform. We shall maintain essential services and honour the policy commitments in the CE's Policy Address over the years. We hope to arrive at a list of efficiency measures that are agreeable to the majority of schools.

(b) **System review**

14.	We have committed to a review of the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) system and the Medium of Instruction (MOI) policy in 2003-04. We also have to evaluate the revised Primary One Admission (POA) system and consider whether the points system has to be further modified. These are complex and controversial issues which will require careful analysis and extensive consultations. We aim to complete the study by mid-2004.

15.	The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) meanwhile is conducting its own institutional review. This is an important exercise with potentially far-reaching implications. We wish to see improvements in the public examination systems to help realise the objectives of the curriculum reform and create a positive impact on the learning culture and practices in the schools.

16.   We shall continue to work on the development of curriculum guidelines and standards, the Basic Competency Assessment, school performance indicators and self-evaluation tools, in partnership with frontline workers. There will be consultation and training before new arrangements are implemented.

(c) Legislative programme

17.   We intend to introduce three education amendment bills during the 2002-03 legislative session for the purposes of giving effect to the proposed merger of EMB and ED, implementing school-based management, and updating teacher registration requirements. Details are set out in the legislative programme which was issued by the Director of Administration to the Chairman of House Committee (CSO/ADM CR14/3231/97(01)) on 8 October.

(d) Teaching and Learning

18.   We shall step up educational research to evaluate the impact of the education reform on teaching and learning, e.g. the seed projects on curriculum reform. Based on research evidence, resources can be more effectively deployed in areas that will achieve the maximum impact. For example, there have been calls for a reduction in class size in primary education. However, we know from overseas experience that reducing class size per se may have very little effect on the quality of education. We need to find out the necessary pre-conditions and teaching strategies, which would maximise the benefit of small class size. We therefore propose to conduct a longitudinal study on the impact of small class size from the 2003/04 school year.   The research design is being developed.

19.   Enhancing the professional leadership and capability of principals and teachers will continue to be a key task in the year ahead. The priorities will be on curriculum leadership, language education, reading and moral and civic/national education.   The Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications (ACTEQ) is reviewing the initial teacher preparation and continuing professional development needs of teachers, and will work with the teacher education providers to develop a framework of continuing education for teachers.

20.   The existing structure of the teaching grades is complex,

outdated and creates management problems in schools. We believe there is scope for simplification and rationalisation, and hope to develop a simpler and more flexible system that provides incentives for and rewards good performance. We have yet to start the review and recognise the sensitivities involved, in particular, at a time when resources are limited. We will consult stakeholders concerned on any proposed changes.

21. Nurturing our next generation is not the sole responsibility of the school. Parents also have a vital role to play. The Home School Cooperation Committee (HSCC) has been successful in promoting the formation of Parent-Teacher Associations over the years. The next phase will be to strengthen home school co-operation to support students' learning activities. Parents and teachers have to develop better common understanding about the objectives of education, the mission of the school, the learning goals and progress of the students.

Conclusion

22. This note does not seek to cover every aspect of work in the education policy area. There are other ongoing initiatives (e.g. whole-day primary schooling, school improvement programme, Native English-speaking Teachers (NET) Scheme), and follow-up to earlier reviews, e.g. the University Grants Committee's review on higher education, and SCOLAR's review on language education. We shall brief Members on significant policy issues and funding proposals as and when they arise.

Education and Manpower Bureau
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Implementation Timetable for various education reform measures
In the coming five years

Reforms	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
SSPA	Interim mechanism → Review			New long-term mechanism →	
MOI policy		Review		Implement changes recommended in the review →	
Language benchmarking				All English + Putonghua teachers have to attain the benchmark	
Existing curriculum reform	First stage of the reform →			Review	Second Stage →
Basic Competency Assessments		S1-S3 (student level)	S2 (student level)	S3 (System level)	
Reform of public examinations	To revise the mode and contents of the examinations to tie in with the curriculum reform →				