

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)2015/03-04

(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 16 February 2004 at 4:30 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

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

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

Mrs Cherry TSE, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (2)

Mrs Fanny LAM
Principal Assistant Secretary (Education Commission
and Planning)

Item IV

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

Mr Cheng Yan-chee
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (4)

Mrs Ruth LAU
Principal Education Officer (Kowloon)

Mrs LAI NG Man-yee
Senior Specialist
(Educational Psychology/Student Discipline)

Clerk in attendance : Mrs Percy MA
Chief Council Secretary (2)3

Staff in attendance : Mr Stanley MA
Senior Council Secretary (2)6

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I. Information paper issued since the last meeting
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1268/03-04(01)]

Members noted the membership lists of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority Council and its Research Committee, Finance and General Purposes Committee and School Examinations Board provided by the Administration.

II. Items for discussion at the next meeting
[Appendices I and II to LC Paper No. CB(2)1287/03-04]

2. Members agreed to revisit the issue of "Future Developments in the Higher Education Sector" at the next regular meeting scheduled for 15 March 2004 at 4:30 pm. Members also agreed to invite submissions from members of the public and receive relevant deputations at the meeting.

III. Study on effective strategies of class and group teaching in primary schools

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1282/03-04(01)]

Briefing by the Administration

3. At the invitation of the Chairman, Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM) briefed members on the preliminary findings of the first stage of the study on effective strategies of class and group teaching in primary schools (the Study), and the design framework of the second stage of the Study. He highlighted that the Government agreed that if all other factors were equal, teaching in small classes would be better than large classes. He pointed out that resources for education had increased by some 46% since 1997 and comprised about 25% of the current fiscal budget. He considered that no one could deny that the Government was committed to improving the quality of education in Hong Kong.

4. SEM further said that small class was a teaching strategy for enhancing learning effectiveness. It would therefore be inappropriate to implement small class teaching for the sake of resolving the problem of surplus teachers arising from a declining student population in recent years. He pointed out that the professionalism of teachers was also an important element in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms. In fact, the implementation of small class teaching in California, USA was unsuccessful because of the lack of a corresponding increase in the supply of quality teachers. Bearing in mind the experience elsewhere, the Administration considered it necessary and pragmatic to conduct an in-depth study on how learning effectiveness could be enhanced through the adoption of small class and other group teaching strategies in local primary schools.

First stage of the Study

5. Referring to paragraph 2 of the Administration's paper on the first stage of the Study, Ms Emily LAU asked why only a total of 402 (about 60% of the total) primary schools had responded to the questionnaire survey on existing practice of small class/group teaching strategies issued in July 2003. She also asked how the 28 schools were identified as "potential exemplars" for further studies through visits and class observations.

6. SEM replied that 40% of schools had not submitted a return. Among the 402 respondents, the Administration considered that the 28 schools had been trying out various modes of small class/group teaching strategies with a conscious aim to enhance teaching and learning effectiveness. The so-called small class practised by the rest was in fact pull-out remedial classes.

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7. Principal Assistant Secretary (Education Commission and Planning) (PAS(EC&P)) supplemented that the survey questionnaire covered a wide range of questions on the arrangement of classes in Chinese, English and Mathematics. Compared to surveys in the past, a 60% response rate was not unsatisfactory. She cited examples to illustrate the practices and strategies adopted by these 28 schools in implementing small class/group teaching.

8. Referring to paragraph 9 of the Administration's paper, Mr SZETO Wah asked why EMB had reached the conclusion that there was no significant difference in the nature and quality of teacher-student interactions between small classes and regular/large classes, given that small class teaching had improved students' confidence and increased teacher-student interactions in classrooms.

9. SEM explained that the conclusion was drawn from on-site lesson observations focusing on whether and how the benefits of small classes as claimed by schools had been achieved. He pointed out that the indicators of effective small class teaching such as open-ended questioning, sustained conversation/listening, guided exploration of ideas and peer discussion/interaction were rarely found in the 28 schools identified for further study at the first stage of the Study.

Second stage of the Study

Scope

10. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the second stage of the Study had the following inadequacies -

- (a) the need for small class teaching in secondary schools was ignored as only 40 primary schools and no secondary schools were included in the Study;
- (b) the Study would last for four years, i.e., operating of small classes at the size of about 25 students per class, starting at primary one (P1) students and then progressing to P2 for two consecutive cohorts, followed by an evaluation. However, there was no commitment on the way forward for small class teaching in Hong Kong; and
- (c) the Study would only focus on small class teaching on Chinese, English and Mathematics lessons but not others.

11. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that the Study was incomprehensive, short-term and shortsighted because of the limited scope of the Study and the lack of a timetable for implementation of small class teaching territory-wide. He considered that the Study should include secondary schools

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and cover different primary and secondary levels and subjects so as to meet the expectation of the education sector. He expressed doubt whether the Study was merely proposed as a temporary measure in response to the strong demand of the community for small class teaching in school education. He also asked about the Administration's long term development plan for small class teaching in Hong Kong. Mr SZETO Wah suggested that the Study should cover different levels and schools on an on-going basis.

12. SEM pointed out that there were successful and unsuccessful experiences in the implementation of small class teaching in overseas jurisdictions. Starting the Study with all primary and secondary levels would mean assuming the benefits of small class teaching before the implementation and evaluation of the Study, and assuming that all teachers were ready even now for implementing small class teaching in schools.

13. SEM stressed that given the divergent views and the significant resource implications and hence displacement effect of the small class initiative, the Administration would have to ascertain the benefits of small class teaching in local school environment before deciding on the way forward. He pointed out that the benefits of small class teaching were most significant in the early years of education. Under the second stage of the Study, the Administration would follow up the two cohorts of students longitudinally beyond P2 to see whether the benefits of small class teaching at P1 and P2 could be sustained as the students moved up to higher levels. SEM also pointed out that curriculum adaptation and change in teaching pedagogies were essential to the success of small class teaching. The Administration would provide support and training to serving teachers to help them develop the skills and pedagogies for effective teaching in small classes.

14. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that many secondary schools had a large enrolment of band 3 students and might have to tackle more problematic issues such as bullying and violence in schools. He considered that such schools should be included in the Study so as to enlarge the variety of schools and student subjects under the Study.

15. SEM explained that conducting the Study initially in 40 primary schools to ascertain whether and if so, how small class teaching should be implemented in the Hong Kong context was a prudent and pragmatic way forward given the significant long term implications of the initiative. He added that the case for small class teaching in primary schools was stronger than that for secondary schools. Studies elsewhere had indicated that the effect of small class teaching at junior levels was more effective. In addition, secondary schools had greater resource flexibility to tailor for school-based needs, such as additional resources for split-class teaching and for looking after academically poor intakes at Secondary 1.

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16. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that many cities including Shanghai had adopted small class teaching in school education. Small class teaching in secondary schools was implemented in Shanghai in the current school year, following implementation of small class teaching in primary schools some ten years ago. Hong Kong should include secondary schools in the Study to keep pace with Shanghai and to pave the way for progressive implementation of small class teaching in primary and secondary schools in the future.

17. SEM responded that class sizes of schools in Shanghai were formerly in the range of 40 to 50 students and only a total of 12 schools of 30 students per class were operated in its pilot run of small class teaching. In contrast, the Study in Hong Kong would incorporate 40 schools and a smaller class size of around 25 students.

18. Mr SZETO Wah considered that the Study was meant to strategically defer implementation of small class teaching in school education. Given the adoption and development of small class teaching in some overseas jurisdictions, and to justify the need to conduct the Study as such, he requested the Administration to provide information on overseas studies the Administration had made reference to for consideration of the Panel. SEM undertook to provide a written response.

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Selection criteria for participating schools and implementation of the Study

19. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed concern about certain criteria for the selection of participating schools for the Study, i.e., students' family background, and the number or proportion of ethnic minority students and new arrival children from the Mainland or other countries. Dr YEUNG Sum considered that there was no need to correlate the policy on small class teaching with that on provision of assistance to students from low socio-economic status families.

20. Given the restrictive criteria for the selection of participating schools, Dr YEUNG Sum suggested that the Administration should consult academics in the field and re-examine the need to focus the Study on students from disadvantaged families.

21. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong, Dr YEUNG Sum, Mr SZETO Wah and Ms Emily LAU considered that these criteria would restrict the scope of the Study and as a result, its findings might not be applicable to other public sector schools with characteristics different from the participating schools.

22. SEM explained that the effect of small classes was most affirmative for students from socially disadvantaged families such as ethnic minorities or those with low socio-economic status. In proposing the criteria for the participating schools under the Study, the Administration aimed to identify schools which

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could optimize the benefits of small class teaching. He said that the findings of the Study would be less convincing if it covered a wider variety of schools with a few sample schools in each category.

23. DS(EM)2 supplemented that overseas research studies had found that small class teaching would benefit students from socially disadvantaged families more than students from advantaged families. Given the fiscal deficits, the Administration would have to use the limited resources allocated for the Study in the most cost-effective manner. She added that feedback from schools and teachers also confirmed that students from low socio-economic families and new arrival children were in greater need of individualised attention.

24. Dr YEUNG Sum said that the Administration should avoid creating the impression that the majority of students of the 40 participating schools under the Study were from socially-disadvantaged families. Ms Emily LAU expressed concern about the labeling effect on the participating schools with the result that parents might send their children studying in these schools elsewhere. DS(EM)2 clarified that schools with greater enrolment of students from disadvantaged background were not induced by the proposed school selection criteria for the small class study. Rather, they had already existed as a fact in our school system. Regardless of the Study, such schools would continue to exist. It was likely that these schools and the parents concerned would welcome such additional resources and support.

25. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong suggested that the Administration should work out a timetable for progressive implementation of small class teaching in all public sector schools after the completion of the Study. SEM replied that if the results of the Study were positive, the Administration would draw up a timetable for progressive implementation of small class teaching in other schools.

26. Dr YEUNG Sum considered that the Administration should aim at creating an environment in which all public sector schools could implement small class teaching in the long term. He suggested that apart from the 40 participating schools, other schools should be encouraged to operate small classes through redeployment of existing resources.

27. SEM responded that in line with the spirit of school-based management, the Administration would not interfere with the operation of the existing 402 primary schools which were currently re-deploying their existing resources to implement small class/variable group teaching, and the decision of other schools to do the same. Dr YEUNG Sum remarked that the Administration should study and compare the implementation results of small class teaching in schools under the Study and other schools in planning the way forward.

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28. Ms Emily LAU asked whether the 28 schools identified for further studies during the first stage of the Study would meet the selection criteria for the second stage of the Study as proposed in paragraph 13 of the Administration's paper, and if so, whether these 28 schools would be included in the Study. She considered that inclusion in the Study of a wider variety of primary schools and students from a wider spectrum of family backgrounds would facilitate assessment of the benefits of small class teaching,

29. SEM responded that according to class observations, the modes of small group/class teaching strategies adopted by these 28 schools differed with the model which would be implemented under the Study. In addition, unlike the 40 schools which would be given a cash grant of \$290,000 for each additional small class, these 28 schools were using their existing resources to implement small class/group teaching in different modes. DS(EM)2 clarified that the 28 schools comprised a wide variety of schools. According to an internal simulation exercise, some of them might volunteer to participate and meet the criteria for selection as one of the 40 schools under the Study. PAS(EC&P) supplemented that the Administration had made reference to overseas experience in determining the criteria for selection of participating schools.

Need for the study

30. Ms Audrey EU queried the need to conduct a four-year Study when all agreed that teaching in small classes would be better than large classes if all other factors were equal. She pointed out that as advised by the deputations attending the Panel meeting on 1 December 2003, key stakeholders in school education generally agreed that small class teaching would help promote the quality of education.

31. SEM responded that it would not be appropriate to forecast the results of the Study before it was actually conducted. He explained that there were views in the education community that small class teaching was not necessarily the best way to improve the quality of education, and the professionalism of teachers was more important in improving quality of education. The Administration would have to conduct the Study to ascertain the benefits of small class teaching and the preconditions for securing the identified benefits. SEM reiterated that the results of the Study would be more convincing if the subjects under the study were mainly from vulnerable groups and not high socio-economic families who were able to pay the high costs of personal tuition and tutorial programmes for their children.

32. Dr David CHU considered that the huge demand of students for private tuition and tutorial programmes reflected that the quality of school education did not meet the expectation of parents, and the need for small class teaching in Hong Kong. He pointed out that given the high costs, children of low income families would be in a disadvantaged position in pursuit of private tuition and

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tutorial programmes. SEM pointed out that parents had the right to arrange for their children to receive private tuition or attend tutorial programmes. He did not consider such phenomena a reflection of the need for small class teaching in school education.

Evaluation

33. Referring to paragraphs 15 and 16 of the Administration's paper, Ms Audrey EU asked how the learning process and outcomes of students in the participating schools could be objectively assessed and compared with those of their counterparts in other schools. She pointed out that it would be difficult for parents to challenge the results of the evaluation carried out by the Steering Committee to be established. Ms EU considered that parents would not agree to discontinue small class teaching on the ground that the result of the evaluation was negative.

34. SEM responded that the evaluation under the Study would involve academics. In addition, school-based support would be provided and briefings and workshops would be organized for teachers before the start of the scheme and at intervals throughout the Study. If the Study was conducted in an effective and objective manner, and the outcome indicated that the benefits of small class teaching were not significant, there would be no justifications for investing in small class teaching in all public sector schools.

35. Mr SZETO Wah remarked that some educational studies were successful and some were not. It was unreasonable to deny the benefits of small class teaching on the basis of the result of a study involving 40 primary schools only.

36. DS(EM)2 explained that the learning process and outcomes of students in the 40 schools would be assessed by both quantitative and qualitative instruments. Apart from regular assessment tests, lesson observations, questionnaire surveys, interviews and case studies would be employed for the evaluation. She highlighted that the evaluation would focus on the performance progress of students before and after the implementation of small class teaching, and their relative improvement in comparison with students of similar background in other schools. The objective was to ascertain whether and if so how much improvement had small class teaching brought about. While acknowledging that absolute and precise causation analysis would be difficult given the complex interaction between variables affecting education quality, such difficulty was no different from any social science research studies of a similar nature. She added that the Steering Committee would comprise two local academics and three primary school heads and would advise EMB on the Study and its evaluation.

37. Mr SZETO Wah expressed concern that the result of the Study would be assessed to be negative on the basis of the performance of participating schools

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comprising mostly band 3 students or new arrival children vis-à-vis those schools with a large enrolment of band 1 students. SEM responded that the performance improvements of the participating schools and their students would be assessed by comparison with other schools having a similar student enrolment in the assessment process.

Resource implications

38. Ms Audrey EU considered it acceptable to incur an expenditure of \$80 million for introducing small class teaching to students from vulnerable groups and communities as the first phase of a progressive implementation. Mr SZETO Wah requested the Administration to elaborate on the estimated expenditure for the Study.

39. DS(EM)2 explained that assuming participation of 40 schools involving a total of around 70 additional classes, the Administration would need to redeploy around \$80 million (70 x \$290,000 x 4) from within the education envelop for the 2004-05 to 2007-08 academic years. In addition, another \$5 million would need to be re-deployed for procurement of professional support and provision of training for teachers.

Way forward

40. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that the Administration should allow a reasonable period of time for members to examine the details of the Study and suggest ways to improve its design and implementation. He suggested that the Administration should expand the scope of the Study to cover a wider variety of schools, and plan the structure and implementation of the Study with a view to convincing the key stakeholders that the Study was not a strategic move to defer the decision on adoption of a policy on small class teaching. He anticipated that small class teaching in both primary and secondary schools could be progressively implemented in the school sector, having regard to the financial strengths of the Government.

41. SEM said that primary schools would be invited to apply to join the scheme shortly. However, the Administration welcomed members' views and suggestions on further enhancement of the implementation of the Study. He pointed out that given the fiscal deficits, many academics considered small class teaching not cost-effective and suggested using the resources in other educational areas. Given the need to limit the number of participating schools to 40, SEM reiterated that to include a wider variety of schools in the Study would mean a smaller sample of each category of schools and a lower reliability of the Study findings. He also considered that the result of the Study on 40 primary schools comprising students mainly from disadvantaged families would be more convincing than that on students from a combination of primary and secondary schools.

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Admin 42. Referring to SEM's advice that quite a number of research studies were not in support of small class teaching, Ms Emily LAU requested the Administration to provide details of these views. DS(EM)2 agreed to provide a paper which would summarise, among others, the views of local and overseas researchers on small class teaching.

IV. Bullying and violence in schools

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1287/03-04(01)]

Briefing by the Administration

43. At the invitation of the Chairman, SEM introduced the Administration's paper on bullying and violence in schools. He stressed that the Administration adopted a policy of zero-tolerance towards bullying and violence in schools and was committed to supporting schools in managing and preventing bullying. He informed members that a resource package entitled "Co-creating a harmonious school" had been produced and issued to schools in January 2004 with a view to presenting to teachers a systematic and comprehensive set of reference materials and tools in dealing with bullying in school.

Causes of bullying and violence and remedial measures

44. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed support for the policy of zero-tolerance on bullying and violence in schools as highlighted by SEM in his earlier television appearance. Referring to the video recordings on bullying which were accessible on the Internet, Mr CHEUNG said that the nature of bullying and violence in schools had changed. He considered that the small percentage of bullying and violence cases handled by discipline teachers in primary and secondary schools in the past three school years did not reflect the actual situation of bullying in schools. He suggested that the Administration should conduct a thorough study on bullying and violence in schools and examine the basic elements and causes of these incidents, including the family background of the students involved, the location of the schools with more cases and their student profiles, etc. Based on the results of the study, the Administration should formulate long term policies to prevent recurrence of similar incidents in schools.

45. SEM explained that the information on bullying and violence cases handled by discipline teachers in the Administration's paper was collected from schools. He stressed that in order to establish a harmonious school ethos against bullying and violence in schools, schools should adopt a whole school policy so that all school personnel, parents, and students had a consensus view and clear understanding of the objective, intervention strategies, preventive measures and evaluation mechanism. He considered that if schools were required to report the

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details of all bullying cases to EMB, the outcome could be negative as principals and teachers might not wish to disclose the details of these cases which would affect the image of their schools.

46. Mr SZETO Wah shared the view of Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong that the reported cases of bullying and violence from schools were incomprehensive and insufficient to reveal the causes for students to bully peers in schools. He considered that EMB should examine the recent cases of bullying and violence in schools in the light of students' family background, past behavior, academic performance, peer relationship, etc. SEM responded that the Administration was investigating the causes and effects of the recent bullying and violence cases in schools with a view to preventing recurrence of similar incidents in schools.

47. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that according to frontline educators, bullying and violence in schools appeared to co-exist with youth gangs who might be linked with local triads in the districts. In addition, schools with a large enrolment of band 3 students normally had more youths at risk and bullying and violence cases. Mr CHEUNG considered that the community had ignored the importance of moral and civic education for young students, and the behavior of a student was largely a product of his life experiences and interactions with parents, teachers, peers and friends. He suggested that EMB should keep an overall view of the situation of bullying and violence in schools, and provide appropriate support services and assistance to schools which had a record of more cases. He pointed out that the adoption of small class teaching in schools with more low academic achievers would help reduce the occurrence of bullying and violence cases in schools.

48. SEM agreed that the Administration should reinforce publicity to encourage students and teachers to report to EMB on all cases of bullying and violence in schools in order to plan for the provision of more effective support services and assistance to schools. He also agreed to the need to reinforce moral and civic education in school education, and pointed out that the key learning areas of the new school curriculum had given emphasis on the development of proper values and attitudes towards others. He added that the majority of the schools where recent bullying and violence cases had occurred were already operating smaller classes.

49. Ms Cyd HO urged the Administration to conduct a comprehensive research study on the family background including the attitude of the family towards violence, emotional and behavioral problems and personality traits etc, of students who had bullied peers in schools. She considered that the research should examine the ingredients and motives contributing to the use of force by students to resolve interpersonal conflicts or emotional problems, etc. She believed that the results of the survey could help EMB and schools trace the causes and tackle the problem of bullying and violence in schools.

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50. Principal Education Officer (Kowloon) (PEO(K)) responded that the resources package comprised an assessment questionnaire to review the bullying situation in schools, lesson plans, classroom activities and teacher training workshop materials with demonstration videos and accessories. The assessment questionnaire contained a total of 37 questions which would provide useful information to schools in detection and follow-up of bullying and violence incidents. EMB would continue to assist schools in implementing necessary measures to prevent bullying and violence in schools.

51. Ms Cyd HO said that student in need of support services often had to wait for a few months before their cases could be handled. She pointed out that there were insufficient school social workers and educational psychologists in schools to give immediate attention to students in need of guidance and counselling services.

52. PEO(K) responded that all secondary schools were provided with a stationing school social worker with effect from the 2000-01 school year to strengthen the support for students, parents, and school personnel. The social worker would mobilize community-based welfare services according to the needs of students and individual schools. Similarly, the manning ratios of student guidance personnel in primary schools had also been improved. By way of the Capacity Enhancement Grant, schools were also provided with resources to employ additional teachers or social workers to meet short-term needs.

Referral and protection of students involved in bullying and violence cases

53. Ms Cyd HO pointed out that the Legislative Council Subcommittee on juvenile justice system (the Subcommittee) had discussed the recommendations of a consultancy report on measures alternative to prosecution for handling unruly children and young persons. She considered that students below the age of 10 who had committed or involved in a minor criminal crime for the first time should not be referred to the Police in accordance with the Police Superintendents' Discretion Scheme (PSDS). She agreed that some teachers might prefer not to report cases of bullying and violence to the Police as it would adversely affect the development of the students concerned. She suggested that EMB should collaborate with the Security Bureau, the Police, SWD and non-governmental organizations to establish a set of sequential procedures and referral mechanisms to prevent first-time offenders from re-offending.

54. PEO(K) explained the series of existing procedures and mechanisms for correcting the misbehavior of students who were involved in bullying or violence cases. It started from interviews by discipline teacher, guidance teacher and school social worker to determine the need for referral to adjustment programmes in EMB or placement in the School for Social Development. For more complicated cases, School Development Officer of the Regional Education Offices Guidance and Discipline Section and the Educational Psychology

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Services would be involved. She added that if a student repeated the same misbehavior or offence after attending a series of counselling interviews and adjustment programmes, he should be referred to the Police for follow-up.

55. Ms Cyd HO asked EMB to consider, in collaboration with the Department of Justice (D of J), amending the law to empower the court to order the placement of an unruly student in an adjustment programme or the School for Social Development without the need to obtain parental consent.

56. PEO(K) responded that EMB had sought advice from D of J on the feasibility of establishing a mechanism for referral of students to a special school such as the School for Social Development in the absence of parental consent. However, the response of D of J was negative because under the existing law, parents had the rights to determine the type of education for their children. She assured members that EMB and other relevant departments would continue discussions on the matter.

Definition of bullying in schools

57. Ms Emily LAU pointed out that according to a survey of 7000 and 3000 primary and secondary students conducted by the Youth Studies Net of the City University of Hong Kong, around 60% and 20% of the primary and secondary students had been bullied in schools. She asked about the reason for the discrepancy between the survey findings and the number of bullying and violence cases provided by EMB. She also referred to the newspaper report on a suspected case of bullying in a primary school in Sham Shui Po where neither the Police nor the principal had adopted a proactive approach to follow up the case and asked whether EMB had looked into the claim of the student concerned.

58. SEM responded that the difference in the number of bullying cases between the survey and EMB's records was largely a result of different interpretation of bullying in schools. He pointed out that the respondents to the survey might consider minor verbal insults or physical attacks by peers a kind of bullying in schools. He explained that the cases of bullying and violence reported to EMB were actual cases reported by students and handled by discipline teachers in primary and secondary schools. He stressed that it was imperative that students who were bullied should report to teachers and that teachers should take a positive attitude to follow up.

59. PEO(K) supplemented that the definition of bullying could vary from persons to persons. EMB had explained to teachers, parents and students that bullying in schools should involve negative actions carried out repeatedly over time. There should also be an imbalance in strength. In conducting surveys on bullying in schools, it was important that the stakeholders should share the same interpretation of bullying in school environment. She stressed that EMB and schools considered bullying a serious misbehavior and would provide immediate

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support services to schools on request. She added that EMB officers had visited and provided assistance to the primary school in Sham Shui Po reported to have a bullying case.

Enhancement of educational psychology service for primary schools

60. Referring to paragraph 9 of the Administration's paper, Ms Emily LAU asked about the improvement in the provision of school-based educational psychology service to primary schools.

61. PEO(K) responded that each Educational Psychologist of EMB was assigned to provide school-based services to a number of public sector schools. The Administration would enhance school-based educational psychology service by phased extension from 25 primary schools in 2002-03 to 200 primary schools in 2007-08 through outsourcing to large School Sponsoring Bodies. Currently, a total of 45 primary schools were provided with such service. EMB would monitor the quality of the outsourced service on an on-going basis.

62. Ms Emily LAU asked how EMB would deploy the outsourced resources to meet the needs of schools and students. PEO(K) replied that EMB would arrange the Educational Psychologists provided by the appointed School Sponsoring Bodies to serve not only students with at-risk behavior in ordinary schools, but also gifted students and students with various learning difficulties in other schools such as special schools.

Potential problem of integrated education

63. Mr SZETO Wah advised that some frontline teachers had expressed concern about the practical problems in implementing the policy of integrated education, under which students with certain types of learning difficulties or behavioral problems were enrolled in ordinary schools. They pointed out that some of these students appeared to have difficulties in adapting to the new learning environment and might become a potential source of school violence in the long term. Mr SZETO suggested that EMB should closely monitor the learning progress and behavior of students with special learning needs. He also pointed out that teachers were now overloaded with different types of teaching and administrative work in schools, and could hardly have time to follow up the emotional and behavioral problems of individual students. He also suggested that the Administration should conduct a questionnaire survey on the workload of teachers in schools.

64. SEM responded that integrated education was the prevailing international trend in the provision of education to students with slight learning difficulties or behavioral problems. He acknowledged the heavy workload of serving teachers. He considered that schools should reduce unnecessary administrative and paper work to provide more room for teachers to assist needy students in overcoming

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developmental difficulties and learning the correct behavior towards others.

Proposed study on the problem of bullying at schools

65. Ms Cyd HO, Ms Emily LAU and Dr YEUNG Sum suggested that the Administration should appoint an independent institution to conduct a comprehensive study with a view to identifying the problem of bullying at school and making recommendations for implementation in the longer term. Dr YEUNG suggested that the study should examine how students' behavior and emotion, family and social factors, etc., would contribute to the recent upsurge of bullying and violence cases in schools, and how schools and families should tackle these cases.

66. SEM responded that EMB had already taken steps to find out the cause of bullying in schools and devise measures for preventing the recurrence of similar incidents. He did not consider it necessary to appoint an independent institution to conduct a study on the subject as the causes and factors contributing to bullying were many and apparent. He reiterated that it was imperative that students would report the bullying cases to teachers and the schools should follow up each case in a serious manner.

67. PEO(K) added that schools would not prefer EMB to conduct a high profile research into the situation of bullying and violence in schools. Ms Cyd HO and Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong remarked that EMB should undertake to keep the confidentiality of data and information on bullying and violence cases collected from schools.

68. Dr YEUNG Sum remarked that the study could be conducted in parallel with EMB's investigations into the causes of bullying and remedial actions to curb bullying and violence in schools. He considered that the educational experts in EMB might conduct the study themselves, and that the Administration would have to identify the personal, family and social factors contributing to bullying in schools before it could work out the effective ways to resolve the problem.

69. PEO(K) responded that EMB shared the concern of members on the problem of bullying and violence in schools. It had studied the problem and developed the resources package on bullying with the assistance of an overseas experts in the past 18 months. The package incorporated an assessment tool which was developed by the data provided by 42 local schools. The assessment tool had high reliability and validity in assessment of the situation of bullying in individual schools. A series of teacher training workshops and seminars on the usage of the resource package would be held in March and April 2004 to further support teachers in the application of the identification, intervention and preventive measures in school. She pointed out that the study proposed by members would focus more on social issues than educational issues, and EMB

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should focus on studies related to school curriculum and teaching.

70. SEM stressed that schools should provide a safe and harmonious place for students to study and learn. The Administration would not tolerate any bullying in schools. EMB had advised principals and teachers to take a positive and proactive approach in handling bullying and violence cases, and work towards developing a whole school policy to manage and prevent bullying and violence in schools.

71. Ms Cyd HO moved the following motion -

"That this Panel urges the Administration to complete the study on curbing violence in schools in the next six months and implement the recommendations of the experts as soon as practicable."

72. SEM responded that the Administration would review the research studies on bullying and provide further information for members' consideration in two weeks' time. He requested the Panel to withhold a decision on the motion pending consideration of the Administration's written response. Members agreed.

[Post-meeting note : The Administration's information paper was issued to members vide LC Paper No.CB(2)1770/03-04 on 18 March 2004.]

V. Any other business

73. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:55 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
16 April 2004