

**Extract from minutes of meeting of the Public Works Subcommittee
of the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council on 29 October 2003**

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HEAD 703 - BUILDINGS

PWSC(2003-04)50	245ES 302EP	Secondary school in Area 31, Sheung Shui Primary school in Area 31, Sheung Shui
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Mr WONG Sing-chi said that he would support the proposed construction of a primary school in Sheung Shui in order to expedite the implementation of whole-day primary schooling in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, he had reservation about the need to build a new secondary school in Sheung Shui, as he gathered from some secondary school principals in the district that there was already excessive supply of secondary school places in the district at present. Mr WONG pointed out that many public housing projects in the North District had already been put on hold and thus there should be no drastic increase in population in the district in the next few years. He expressed doubt on the accuracy of the Administration's projection on the demand for secondary school places, and cautioned that it would be a waste of public money to build a new secondary school if there was no demand for such school places. Mr WONG suggested that the two school projects be considered and voted on separately.

2. On Mr WONG Sing-chi's suggestion, the Director of Architectural Services (D Arch S) said that as the two school sites in question were co-located and were smaller than the respective standard provisions, the plan was to tender out the construction works for both school projects in one single contract so as to save costs and to provide some facilities straddling the two school sites for the shared use of the schools. While it was technically feasible to construct the two schools separately, the construction costs would nevertheless be higher and some shared facilities might not be provided under this scenario.

3. The Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower (Infrastructure and Research Support) (PAS(I&RS)) said that the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) had an established and effective methodology to project the demand for school places for the school building programme. The projections were derived based on census statistics and were reviewed and updated annually taking into account different factors such as population movements. Both territory-wide projections and projections by districts were available. According to EMB's projection, additional secondary school classes were required in the territory to meet the increase in demand for new school places up to the 2007/08 school year. The demand for secondary school places in the North District would amount to 637 classes in 2004 but only some 590 classes

would be provided. In 2007/08, the demand was projected to be 626 secondary school classes and there would still be a shortfall of 20 classes. PAS(I&RS) stressed that there was a need to provide sufficient secondary school places for students in the coming years although there might be a decline in student population in the longer term.

4. PAS(I&RS) also informed members that the proposed secondary school was planned to be one of the few new senior secondary school (SSS) to be constructed in the next few years, and the proposed school would be the only SSS in the North and Tai Po Districts. The school was expected to offer innovative and diversified curricula at senior secondary levels to cater to the diverse talents and needs of students and to allow for flexible progression pathways for students. PAS(I&RS) also pointed out that there were about 300 school premises in the territory the site areas of which were smaller than the standard provision (6 000 m² to 7 000 m²). On another count, some 300 school premises had already been used for over 30 years. To improve the teaching and learning environment, the Administration was considering plans to redevelop or re-provision these schools for which improvement works were limited or found non-feasible and/or not cost-effective. The construction of new secondary school premises would allow more room for the Administration to take forward the redevelopment and re-provisioning plans for such sub-standard schools .

5. Mr WONG Sing-chi maintained his concern about the discrepancy between the EMB's projection and the observation of school principals. He also commented that the Administration had underestimated the complexity of moving an operating school to a new school building.

6. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong echoed Mr WONG's concern. He referred to a table entitled "Projected School Age Population Aged 6-11 by District, 2002-2010" (*the Appendix to the paper LC Paper No. CB(2)2401/02-03(01) on "Implementation of Whole-day Primary Schooling" provided by the Administration for the Education Panel in June 2003*), and pointed out that a drop of primary students by 16.7% in the years from 2002 to 2010 was projected. Declines in primary student population in different districts, including North District (-22.5%), Sha Tin District (-17.9%), Tai Po District (-39.9%) and Yuen Long District (-21.8%) were also projected. Mr CHEUNG said that he was aware that the demand for secondary school places would reach a peak in the coming few years, but he was not convinced of the need to construct a new secondary school in view of the declining primary student population. He requested the Administration to critically review its projections on the demand for secondary school places and to provide the full details up to year 2010. Mr CHEUNG added that he would support the construction of more primary schools for the implementation of whole-day primary schooling in Hong Kong.

7. In response, PAS(I&RS) reiterated that there would be an overall shortfall of secondary school classes in the years up to 2007/08 and there was a need to meet this shortfall. The demand of secondary school places in Hong Kong would be 12 130 classes in 2004 but only 12 004 classes would be provided. In 2007/08, the projected demand was 12 533 classes and 423 additional classes would be required to meet the shortfall.

8. As regards SSSs, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that many existing SSSs were under-enrolled and some SSSs had already opened classes for junior secondary school students. In response, PAS(I&RS) said that the Administration would flexibly allow SSSs to recruit junior secondary school students having regard to the circumstances of each school.

9. Ms Emily LAU noted that the Administration had not consulted the LegCo Panel on Education (Education Panel) on the present proposal. She considered that the demand and supply of school places was a policy issue and the Administration should consult the Education Panel before they submitted proposed school projects to PWSC for consideration. Noting that the proposed secondary school had yet to be allocated to a school sponsoring body, Ms LAU suggested that the Administration should withdraw the present proposal and thereafter consult the Education Panel to convince members that there was no mismatch between the Administration's school building programme and the projected demand for school places.

10. PAS(I&RS) emphasized that there would be a shortfall of 20 secondary school classes in the North District in 2007/08 and a new secondary school was required to meet the demand for secondary school places. He also pointed out that the school premises of four out of 20 operating secondary schools in the North District had been used for over 30 years. A new secondary school in the District would provide in the longer term a buffer for the Administration to improve the learning environment of these schools. PAS(I&RS) further advised that the Administration would invite eligible school sponsoring bodies to apply for the proposed new schools under the School Allocation Exercise. In past exercises, new schools premises open for allocation were generally over-subscribed by school sponsoring bodies. PAS(I&RS) also said that the Administration had consulted the Panel on Education in early 2003 on reservation of school sites for building schools to meet various policy objectives including provision of adequate school places to meet population demand and to enable whole-day primary schooling.

11. In response to Ms Emily LAU's enquiry about the consultation with the North District Council (NDC), PAS(I&RS) said that the Administration would consult the relevant District Council on each school project. The proposed construction of two schools in Sheung Shui was supported by members of NDC. Mr WONG Sing-chi supplemented that when NDC was consulted on the projects, no detailed information about the new schools and the demand and supply of school places had been provided.

12. Mr TAM Yiu-chung shared the concern about the accuracy of the Administration's projection on the demand for secondary school places. Noting that many rural schools needed to be closed down in the North District due to under-enrollment, he considered that the information provided by the Administration was quite confusing. He suggested that the Administration should clarify the matter and provide more information to convince members that there was a genuine need to provide an additional secondary school in the North District.

13. Miss Cyd HO said that she would support the construction of more schools for the implementation of small class teaching in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, she did not believe that an existing school operating in “sub-standard” school premises might simply move into new school premises to improve its teaching environment, as moving a school to new premises was a very complicated matter.

14. Taking note of D Arch S’s confirmation that it was technically feasible to construct the proposed two schools separately, the Chairman invited members’ views on Mr WONG Sing-chi’s suggestion that the two school projects be voted on separately. At the same time, the Chairman asked the representatives of the Administration to discuss among themselves as to whether the Administration would withdraw the proposal.

15. Mr Abraham SHEK expressed his concern about the possible impact on the shortfall of secondary school places in the North District if the construction of the proposed schools were postponed.

16. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed support for Mr WONG Sing-chi’s suggestion. He reiterated that he supported the construction of a new primary school but the construction of a new secondary school would require further deliberation.

17. Noting that constructing the two schools separately would affect the shared facilities of the schools, Mr IP Kowk-him suggested that the Administration should withdraw the entire proposal and provide further information in respect of the projected demand for school places to support the proposal.

LegCo
Secretariat

18. Ms Miriam LAU and Ms Emily LAU commented that the Administration should withdraw the entire proposal and then consult the Education Panel to clarify the related policy issues. Ms Emily LAU also requested the LegCo Secretariat to prepare a background brief to facilitate the discussion at the Education Panel.

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19. The Deputy Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury (Treasury)³ said that having regard to members’ concerns, the Administration would withdraw the entire proposal. The Administration would consolidate relevant information to address members’ concerns raised at the meeting and consult the Education Panel before the proposal was resubmitted to PWSC. Mr WONG Sing-chi said that the Administration should consult the Education Panel as soon as possible so that construction of the proposed primary school would not be unduly delayed.

20. The item was withdrawn by the Administration.

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