

For information for meeting on 19 July 2004

Legislative Council Panel on Education
Teacher-to-class Ratios and Class Sizes in
Primary and Secondary Schools

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the progress of the implementation of the recommendations of the Education Commission (EC) as contained in its Report No. 5 (ECR5) on improving the teacher-to-class ratios and the class sizes in primary and secondary schools.

Background

2. In recognition of the additional workload arising from the recommendations in ECR4 and ECR5 and in response to increasing demands from the community, EC recommended in 1992 that *staffing levels* in both primary and secondary schools should be improved as follows -

(a) For primary schools

The teacher ratio for bisessional classes should be raised from 1.2 teachers to 1.3 teachers per class by phases from September 1993 with full implementation by September 1995. The teacher ratio for whole-day classes should be improved from 1.4 teachers to 1.5 teacher per class, following the full implementation of the 1.3 bi-sessional ratio.

(b) For secondary schools

Each secondary school with 30 classes or less should be provided with one additional Certificated Master/Mistress post and a larger school with two such posts by September 1995.

3. Having regard to the then forecast decline in school-age population, possible constraints of accommodation and teacher supply, etc, EC also recommended in its Report No. 5 a *reduction in the standard class size* of five places at each level from Primary 1 to Secondary 5, to be achieved by phases.

Development

Teacher-to-class Ratios

4. For primary schools,
- (a) the provision of 1.3 teachers per bisessional class was implemented by phases from September 1993 and completed by September 1995; and
 - (b) the increased provision of 1.4 teachers per whole-day class from 1.2 was phased in from September 1992 over a period of five years.

Since 1997, we have provided primary schools with additional teachers for specific objectives¹, and through various sources of funding². The teacher:student ratio in primary schools has thus improved from 1:22.8 in the 1997/98 school year to 1:19.5 in the 2003/04 school year. The equivalent teacher-to-class ratio in the 2003/04 school year is 1.68 per class.

5. At the secondary level, one additional non-graduate teaching post has been provided to each school with effect from September 1994 and one more additional non-graduate teaching post to a school with more than 30 classes with effect from September 1995 as recommended in ECR5. In the 2003/04 school year, the teacher:student ratio for secondary schools is 1:18 as against 1:20 in the 1997/98 school year.

¹ Additional teachers provided to primary schools have included a teacher-librarian in the rank of Certificated Master/Mistress by phases since September 1998, and from the 2002/03 school year, an additional graduate teacher to serve as the curriculum leader for five years and a Native-speaking English Teacher on a sharing basis between two schools.

² Various sources of funding provided to schools that allow them to employ additional teachers have included the Quality Education Fund, the Capacity Enhancement Grant and the Student Guidance Service Grant.

Class sizes

6. As recommended in ECR5, the class size in primary schools was reduced by five places by phases, commencing from Primary 1 in the 1993/94 school year. In 1998, the actual average class size in primary schools was 33.4.

7. Meanwhile, there was discussion on the merits of whole-day primary schooling. After consulting the education sector, the Government decided in 1997 to speed up the implementation of whole-day primary schooling. Our interim target was to enable 60% of primary school pupils to study in whole-day schools by the 2002/03 school year and we aim to provide by 2007/08 adequate places for virtually all primary pupils to enjoy whole-day schooling. To facilitate the early achievement of whole-day primary schooling for all, the standard class size in primary schools was increased by two places, starting with Primary 1 in the 1998/99 school year to be phased in over six years, i.e. to reduce the class size by three instead of five as originally planned (see paragraph 6 above). Notwithstanding this change, the average class size has improved to 32.9 in 2003.

8. We met the 60% target of whole-day primary schooling in the 2002/03 school year according to our schedule and have further increased the percentage to 66% in the 2003/04 school year. We are progressing well towards our target of full implementation.

9. As regards secondary schools, the class size will be reviewed in the context of the review of the academic structure of senior secondary education.

Way Forward

10. To improve the teacher-to-class ratio in whole-day primary schools from the present 1.4:1 to 1.5:1 will entail significant recurrent staff costs. Taking the projected position in the 2007/08 school year as an example, we

estimate that the additional annual staff cost will be around \$385 million.³ It is difficult to commit such additional resources at a time of fiscal stringency.

11. As regards class size in primary schools, we have initiated a pilot study on small class teaching. The study will throw light on the impact of small class on student learning, and the supporting conditions necessary to enhance the impact.

12. The forecast decline in student population over the next 10 years provides an opportunity for improving teacher-to-class ratio or reducing class size. However, given the prevailing budgetary constraints and uncertainty over the amount of education funding available, it is not possible to contemplate any improvement in staffing or class size at this stage.

13. Despite the above, through various measures introduced over the last 10 years, support and resources for schools have been enhanced to realize the vision in ECR5. (An extract from Chapter 9 “The Impact of this Report” is attached at the Annex.) Specifically, we have already -

- (a) more than reached the target teacher:student ratio of 1:22 for primary schools set out in ECR5;
- (b) as indicated in paragraph 5 above, progressively moving towards the target teacher:student ratio of about 1:17 for secondary schools;
- (c) enhanced the academic and professional qualifications of primary school teachers in the direction set out in ECR5;
- (d) set up the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications and introduced various initiatives to enhance teacher professionalism;
- (e) provided schools with information technology hardware and software; and
- (f) through, Y2K-design school premises, and where technically

³ We have assumed 100% implementation of whole-day primary schooling by 2007 and have worked out the estimated cost of \$385 million on the basis of the 2001-based population projections, which may need adjustment in the light of recent projections.

feasible, the School Improvement Programme, provided schools with staff common/meeting rooms where teachers can discuss school and professional matters, as well as provision of special rooms for a wide range of extra-curricular activities for students.

Education is so important to Hong Kong that we shall continue to do our best, within the professional and financial resources available, to enhance support to schools and teachers.

Education and Manpower Bureau
July 2004

Extract from Chapter 9 “The Impact of this Report”, Education Commission Report No. 5

9.3 Once all our recommendations have been implemented in full, we envisage that the increased investment will enable our schools of the future to provide a quality of education appropriate to a highly developed 21st century society and economy. The following paragraphs describe the difference we believe our recommendations will make to the schools:

In the standard primary school of the future, at least 35% of the teachers are graduates. Many of the nongraduates have acquired an Advanced Teacher’s Certificate, and some are working towards a degree. The ratio of teachers to students is about 1:22, with more teachers and fewer students per class. With its increased complement of senior teachers, all or most of them graduates, the school has developed a full range of academic and nonacademic activities which are planned, implemented and evaluated with the participation of the professional staff.

With the additional investment at secondary level - smaller classes, more teachers, a teacher:student ratio of about 1:17, a larger complement of SGM posts – the secondary schools find themselves better equipped to build on the improvements at primary level, and to prepare their students for the opportunities and challenges of further education, work and citizenship in 21st century Hong Kong.

Teachers in both primary and secondary schools use their common room for informal discussions on school and professional matters, and for school-based teacher development programmes. The student activity centre houses a lively range of extra-curricular activities. Computers lighten administrative chores, and provide access to large central databases of curriculum materials. With the help of their Parent-Teacher Associations, schools have developed systematic programmes to introduce parents to the work of the school, explain how they can help to promote the child’s learning, and encourage them to take an active part in school life.

The teachers of the future are almost all professionally trained, or are undergoing initial professional training during the first few years of their career. With the more supportive school environment, and the more systematic provision of professional development opportunities in the light of advice from the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications, new teachers have more encouragement to make a long-term commitment to a career in education. The Institute of Education, housed in upgraded campuses, offers full time and part time courses at sub-degree and degree level, and contributes to educational research.