

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)2592/04-05
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 13 June 2005 at 4:30 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Dr Hon YEUNG Sum (Chairman)
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
- Member absent** : Hon MA Lik, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Professor Arthur LI, GBS, JP
Secretary for Education and Manpower
- Mrs Fanny LAW, GBS, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower
- Professor Maurice GALTON
Consultant
- Ms Bernadette LINN HH
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (2)

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

Ms Hera CHUM Chui-chi
Senior Education Officer (Research and Test
Development)2

Attendance by invitation : Steering Committee of the Study on Small Class Teaching in Primary Schools

Professor HAU Kit-tai
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Dr Thomas TANG K W
The Open University of Hong Kong

Mrs LIU NG Ka-yee
Headmistress, Hennessy Road Government Primary
School (morning session)

Ms CHEUNG Wai-ching
Headmistress, St. Bonaventure Catholic Primary School

Dr Albert CHAU Wai-lap
Director of General Education, The University of Hong
Kong

Dr CHAN So-kuen
Lecturer, Department of Statistics and Actuarial Science,
The University of Hong Kong

Dr LAI Kwok-chan
Principal Investigator, Small Class Teaching Research
and Development Project, The Hong Kong Institute
of Education

Mr IP Kin-yuen
Lecturer, Department of Education Policy and
Administration, The Hong Kong Institute of
Education

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Kowloon Bay St. John the Baptist Catholic Primary School

Ms SO Wan-hang
Headmistress

Ms CHANG Chi-kuen
Primary School Mistress (Curriculum Development)

Fanling Assembly of God Church Primary School

Mr HUNG Wai-shing
Headmaster

Ms WONG Lai-ming
Small Size Class Co-ordinator

Sun Fong Chung Primary School (morning session)

Mr CHIU Lam-shing
Headmaster

Miss FUNG Shui-lan
Deputy Head

Wai Chow Public School (Sheung Shui) (afternoon session)

Mr CHOW Hin-yu
Headmaster

Miss WONG Mui-yung
Primary School Mistress (Curriculum Development)

Buddhist Wing Yan School (afternoon session)

Ms LI Yuk-chi
Principal

Ms SO Wing-fung
Teacher

Pok Oi Hospital Chan Kwok Wai Primary School

Mr LI Wing-hing
Principal

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S.K.H. Lui Ming Choi Memorial Primary School
(afternoon session)

Mr YEUNG Chor-kit
Headmaster

Wai Chow Public School (Sheung Shui) (morning session)

Mr CHAN Siu-hung
Deputy Head

S.K.H. Yat Sau Primary School

Mr LAM Seung-wan
Principal

Clerk in attendance : Miss Flora TAI
Chief Council Secretary (2)2

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

Miss Sherman WOO
Legislative Assistant (2)2

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I. Confirmation of minutes
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1824/04-05]

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 May 2005 were confirmed.

II. Information papers issued since the last meeting

2. Members noted that the following papers had been issued since the last meeting –

- (a) Letter from four Parent-Teacher Associations to the Chairman of Working Group on Review of Secondary School Places Allocation and Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools dated 6 May 2005 [LC Paper No. CB(2)1521/04-05(01)];
- (b) Paper provided by the Administration on “Stabilisation of slopes within the university campus, phase 13, The Chinese University of

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Hong Kong” [LC Paper No. CB(2)1612/04-05(01)];

- (c) Letter from Pun U Association Wah Yan Primary School Parents-Teachers Association to the Chairman of the Education Commission dated 23 May 2005 [LC Paper No. CB(2)1671/04-05(01)]; and
- (d) Paper provided by the Administration on “Start-up Loan for Post-secondary Education Providers” [LC Paper No. CB(2)1838/04-05(01)].

III. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[Appendices I and II to LC Paper No. CB(2)1845/04-05]

3. Members noted that the Administration had not proposed any item for discussion at the next regular meeting in July 2005. As the Council meeting of 29 June 2005 would very likely resume on 30 June 2005 to deal with unfinished business, members agreed to cancel the special meeting scheduled for 30 June 2005 and defer discussion of the following items to the next meeting scheduled for Monday, 11 July 2005 –

- (a) Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme; and
- (b) Training of kindergarten teachers.

4. Some members asked when the Administration could revert to the Panel on its review of the School Building Programme (SBP). Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM) replied that the Administration needed time to discuss with the school sponsoring bodies/schools concerned the proposed adjustments to the school projects under SBP, taking into consideration members’ consensus reached at the meeting on 30 May 2005. The Administration would revert to the Panel on SBP as soon as practicable.

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5. Some members asked the Administration to confirm whether it had indicated to the media that tuition fees for senior secondary education would be increased from the 2005-06 school year. SEM replied that the Administration would consult the Panel on any increase in tuition fees and provide a paper to the Panel accordingly.

[*Post-meeting note* : The item “Revision of senior secondary school fees” was subsequently included in the agenda for the meeting on 11 July 2005.]

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IV. Review of the progress of the study on small class teaching in 37 primary schools and the way forward

[LC Paper No.CB(2)1845/04-05(01)]

6. The Chairman welcomed Professor Maurice GALTON, the four academics, members of the Steering Committee of the Study on Small Class Teaching in Primary Schools (the Steering Committee), representatives of nine participating schools and the Administration to the meeting.

7. Members noted the following papers –

- (a) Background brief on implementation of small class teaching prepared by the Legislative Council (LegCo) Secretariat [LC Paper No. CB(2)1845/04-05(02)];
- (b) Referral from the Complaints Division regarding the LegCo Members' meeting with Sha Tin District Council members on 12 May 2005 [LC Paper No. CB(2)1866/04-05(01)]; and
- (c) Submission from the Coalition of Education-Concerned Parents [LC Paper No. CB(2)1933/04-05(03)].

Views of academics and deputations

8. At the invitation of the Chairman, deputations briefed members on their views and suggestions as summarised in paragraphs 9 to 25.

Dr Albert CHAU Wai-lap, Director of General Education, The University of Hong Kong

9. Dr Albert CHAU said that while he had no doubt about the reliability of overseas research findings that the benefits of small class teaching (SCT) was not significant in terms of enhancing student learning under specific circumstances, he had experienced that SCT had substantial impact on enhancing teaching and learning outcome in classroom settings in Hong Kong. Dr CHAU then described the benefits of SCT on teaching and learning including students' self-regulation and learning motivation. He also pointed out that effective teaching pedagogies and existence of a strong collaborative culture were important to enhance the cost-effectiveness of SCT in school education.

10. Dr CHAU said that he agreed that the design of the three-year longitudinal study on SCT (the Study) should aim at assessing the benefits of SCT in terms of its impact on students' academic performance and disposition in the local context, and identifying the teaching pedagogies and support necessary for maximising the benefits of SCT. He considered that the Study should be evaluated on the condition that appropriate teaching pedagogies and strategies

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were adopted by the participating schools, and in the context of the objectives of the education reforms.

*Dr CHAN So-kuen, Lecturer, Department of Statistics and Actuarial Science
The University of Hong Kong
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1911/04-05(01)]*

11. Dr CHAN So-kuen presented her views on the implementation of SCT as detailed in the submission. She considered that SCT would facilitate teaching and learning outcome, and enhance quality of school education as a whole. Citing her assumptions and cost estimates for implementing SCT from Primary 1 (P1) in the 2005-06 school year and progressively extended to P2-P6 in the 2006-11 school years, she estimated that full implementation of SCT would increase the number of primary classes by 2 345 and recurrent costs by \$1.13 billion to \$1.8 billion (not \$3.1 billion as estimated by the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB)) in the 2010-11 school year. Dr CHAN considered that the Administration should implement SCT to enhance the quality of human resources and the competitiveness of Hong Kong in the face of the declining student population and the aging population.

*Dr LAI Kwok-chan, Principal Investigator, Small Class Teaching Research and Development Project, The Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd)
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1933/04-05(02)]*

12. Dr LAI Kwok-chan presented his views as detailed in the submission which was tabled at the meeting. He pointed out to the Panel the limitations in the interpretation and generalisation of the overseas research findings conducted by Professors HANUSHEK and HATTIE on SCT. He highlighted that SCT was essentially a change of contextual variables in the teaching and learning process, and its effects should be assessed through the learning and teaching interactions in classroom settings.

13. Dr LAI further said that HKIEd had been co-ordinating the conduct of a SCT refinement project comprising eight participating primary schools for a year. He pointed out that teachers and principals were enthusiastic about implementing SCT for the purpose of enhancing teaching and learning outcome, and not improving job security or reducing surplus teachers. He suggested that the Administration should formulate flexible policies and provide sufficient support to schools to implement SCT, in order to enhance quality of teachers and school education in the long run.

*Mr IP Kin-yuen, Lecturer, Department of Education Policy and Administration
The Hong Kong Institute of Education*

14. Mr IP Kin-yuen expressed support for extending SCT to include a number of selected schools which had a high concentration of disadvantaged

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students. He, however, pointed out that the Administration should consider the policy implications of extending the implementation of SCT on the basis of alleviating poverty. He considered that implementing SCT in schools with some 40% of students receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) or full grant under the Student Financial Assistance (SFA) Scheme might require different teaching pedagogies to maximise the benefits of SCT, give rise to adverse labelling effects on participating schools, and evoke resentment from middle class families which were financially incapable of sending their children to private schools or ineligible for any financial assistance. On space and arrangements for implementing SCT, Mr IP pointed out that if selected schools did not have sufficient classrooms for implementing SCT, their P1-P3 students would be required to receive SCT in different classrooms on a regular basis.

Kowloon Bay St. John the Baptist Catholic Primary School

15. Ms SO Wan-hang said that the Kowloon Bay St John the Baptist Catholic Primary School was grateful for being selected to participate in the Study. She stressed the importance of teachers' dedication and professionalism in optimising the benefits of SCT. She pointed out that students attending small classes in the school had demonstrated improvement in affective domain such as self-concept and learning motivation. Ms CHANG Chi-kuen supplemented that teacher-student relationship was more harmonious in small classes and parents' response to SCT was favourable.

Fanling Assembly of God Church Primary School

16. Mr HUNG Wai-shing said that the Study had provided opportunities for teachers to practise their skills and knowledge in group teaching pedagogies and strategies. He anticipated that more schools could participate in the Study, but expressed reservation about the proposal of extending SCT to schools with a high concentration of disadvantaged students as a measure to alleviate poverty. He considered that SCT should aim to enhance quality of education and students' motivation and self-concept in learning, and not to alleviate inter-generational poverty.

17. Ms WONG Lai-ming supplemented that P1 students in small classes had demonstrated more confidence to express themselves and engage in classroom activities. She added that teachers were motivated as they found their students more responsive and willing to express opinions in classroom learning.

Sun Fong Chung Primary School (morning session)

18. Mr CHIU Lam-shing said that the Sun Fong Chung Primary School (morning session) had participated in the Study with the aim of validating the benefits of SCT in school education. The School had recently conducted a questionnaire survey on parents' opinion about the effects of SCT on student

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learning outcome, and respondents in general indicated that their children had exhibited improvement in affective domain. Mr CHIU considered that the benefits of SCT were apparent, but expressed reservation about extending SCT mainly to schools with a high concentration of disadvantaged students as it would create adverse labelling effects on parents and selected schools.

19. Miss FUNG Shui-lan said that according to the annual report on external school reviews conducted by EMB, most teachers had performed their roles and duties conscientiously in school education and 90% of students had displayed good learning attitudes and behaviour in schools. However, EMB did not consider the overall teaching and learning outcome encouraging. She pointed out that SCT would facilitate achievement of education reform objectives including development of students' higher order thinking and problem solving skills. She added that an effective teacher would be more effective if he taught in small class than in large class. She requested EMB to suspend further reduction of classes in schools with under-enrolment and provide sufficient time for participating schools to validate the benefit of SCT in the local context.

Wai Chow Public School (Sheung Shui) (afternoon session)

20. Mr CHOW Hin-yu said that the Study had provided Wai Chow Public School (Sheung Shui) (afternoon session) with the necessary resources to implement SCT and resolve the problem of under-enrolment. He pointed out that students in small classes had demonstrated improvement in both academic and affective outcomes. They were in general more proactive and communicative in learning. Ms WONG Mui-yung supplemented that SCT could enhance implementation of curriculum reform in schools as it facilitated teacher-student interaction and catered for individual differences in learning in classroom settings.

Buddhist Wing Yan School (afternoon session)

21. Ms LI Yuk-chi said that SCT had enhanced teacher-student interaction in classes and helped teachers take care of individual difference in learning. Students in small classes in general had demonstrated improvements in both academic and affective domains. In language learning, students in small classes had communicated with teachers and peers more frequently and confidently. Ms SO Wing-fung supplemented that students in small classes had improved in self-confidence and generic skills including co-ordination and communication abilities. The Buddhist Wing Yan School (afternoon session) supported implementation of SCT in all aided schools as soon as practicable.

*Pok Oi Hospital Chan Kwok Wai Primary School
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1866/04-05(02)]*

22. Mr LI Wing-hing presented the views of the Pok Oi Hospital Chan Kwok

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Wai Primary School as detailed in its submission. He highlighted that EMB should arrange more training on SCT for teachers after school hours and provide a platform for teachers to practise various pedagogies for SCT in classroom settings. Mr LI expressed support for extending SCT to cover more schools, but considered that students who were not eligible for CSSA or full grant under the SFA Scheme should also be provided with opportunities to receive SCT. He then cited a few examples to illustrate that students from middle class families would also benefit from SCT. He suggested that given the declining student population, the Administration should implement SCT in all schools from P1 and extend it to P2 to P6 on a progressive basis.

*S.K.H. Lui Ming Choi Memorial Primary School (afternoon session)
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1897/04-05(01)]*

23. Mr YEUNG Choi-kit presented the views of the SKH Lui Ming Choi Memorial Primary Schools (afternoon session) as detailed in its submission. He highlighted that SCT would enhance quality of education and create space for teachers to take care of individual difference in learning. SCT should be implemented from P1 level in all schools as soon as practicable, instead of being extended to schools with a high concentration of disadvantaged students as it would create unnecessary labelling effects. Mr YEUNG considered it unnecessary to wait for the completion of the Study to identify appropriate pedagogies for full implementation of SCT in the local context. He considered that schools which were ready to implement SCT should be provided with the resources and support to implement SCT in a school-based manner so that they could adopt the most appropriate pedagogies to suit their students' needs and interests.

Wai Chow Public School (Sheung Shui) (morning session)

24. Mr CHAN Siu-hung said that implementation of SCT in Wai Chow Public School (Sheung Shui) (morning session) had in general enhanced teacher-student relationship and student learning outcome. He requested EMB to implement SCT in all schools as soon as practicable.

S.K.H. Yat Sau Primary School

25. Mr LAM Seung-wan said that EMB should arrange more experience-sharing sessions and workshops for teachers in participating schools to enhance their skills and knowledge in SCT. He pointed out that SCT would create more room for teachers to take care of individual difference in learning and students' development needs, and benefit both low and high academic achievers in learning. He suggested that EMB should conduct regular opinion survey among principals, teachers and parents on the implementation of SCT, promote teacher-parent communication on students' learning outcome, and provide adequate and flexible support to teachers and schools under the Study.

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Mr LAM also suggested that in the light of the declining student population, the Administration should plan the progressive implementation of SCT in all schools on the basis of available resources to upgrade the quality of human capital in the long term.

The Administration's response to the views of academics and deputations

26. At the invitation of the Chairman, SEM briefed members on the progress of the Study on SCT as detailed in his briefing note which was tabled at the meeting [LC Paper No. CB(2)1933/04-05(01)]. He highlighted that the Study had only been conducted for one year and EMB had yet to assess the benefits of SCT on two cohorts of students over a period of time, and whether there was any lasting impact on students' attitude to and ability of self-learning. He pointed out that the initial response of participating schools in the first year was too early to conclude the cost-effectiveness of implementing SCT in the local context. However, in support of the Government's pledge to alleviate inter-generational poverty, the Administration planned to extend SCT to a number of selected schools which had a high concentration of disadvantaged students. The proposal was made with reference to overseas research findings that SCT had more significant effects on students with weak family support and in their early years of schooling.

27. Professor GALTON explained that the evaluation of the Study would take into account students' academic attainments as well as their attitudinal dispositions including self-esteem and learning motivation. He pointed out that there were no special pedagogies for SCT but only good and effective pedagogies for teaching that were easier to implement in small classes. It usually took a few years for teachers to effectively master these teaching pedagogies. On the need to enhance sharing of experience among teachers and schools, Professor GALTON said that on the basis of his preliminary observations of lessons in some schools participating in the Study, classroom teaching was exceptionally effective and highly interactive in several schools which had enlightened school management. He pointed out that a strong leadership in a school would facilitate the development of a strong collaborative culture. This was essential if participating schools and teachers participating in the Study were to progress.

28. Professor GALTON further said that he started with an open mind and enjoyed full independence in his evaluation of the Study. He pointed out that the collected data for evaluation purpose would be analysed by his colleagues in England. He would closely monitor the data collection process and ensure that the data were generalisable in respect of validity and reliability, and would decide the forms of analysis and the presentation of the data in the yearly interim reports between 2005 and 2007 and the final reports of the Study as appropriate. He added that the research team would need to accumulate more experience and make further systematic observations before it was in a position to delineate the

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teaching strategies which best complement a small class setting.

29. Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower (PSEM) added that the Study was strategically planned to ensure that the participating schools would maximise the benefits of the small class setting. There was no question of an intention to manipulate the result of the Study to defer or decline the implementation of SCT in school education.

Full implementation

30. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that according to feedback from participating schools under the Study, P1 students in small classes had improved in both academic and affective domains. They all supported that SCT should be implemented progressively in schools starting from P1. He considered that the Administration should plan the implementation of SCT in the long term. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung expressed a similar view.

31. Dr Fernando CHEUNG pointed out that overseas research studies on SCT were conducted with class sizes of 15-20 students. He considered it a waste of time and resources to conduct the Study to assess the effects of SCT with a class size of 25 students. He suggested that the Administration should work out the estimates for full implementation of SCT in all subjects and let schools decide the optimal class sizes for implementing SCT.

32. SEM responded that the purpose of the Study was to assess the benefits of SCT in the local context in terms of both academic and affective outcomes; and to identify the teaching strategies and support necessary for maximising the benefits of SCT. The findings of the Study would provide useful reference for the Administration to consider the way forward for SCT in the long term. In consideration of the huge long-term financial commitment and scarcity of local experience, the implementation of SCT should be strategically planned to ensure that the benefits would be fully realised. He added that it would not be convincing to ascertain the benefits of SCT in the local context without the support of research findings.

Professional support and resources

33. Ms Audrey EU noted that participating schools in general expressed appreciation for being selected by EMB to join the Study, but considered that EMB should provide them with sufficient support and resources to implement SCT for all subjects, instead of for the subjects of Chinese, English and Mathematics only. In view of Mr IP Kin-yuen's concern about the arrangement for P1 and P2 students to receive SCT in different classrooms in schools which did not have sufficient classrooms, she suggested that participating schools should plan their class schedules with a view to minimising interruptions on student learning.

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34. PSEM responded that there were divided views on the need for professional development of teachers in participating schools as there were individual differences in teachers' knowledge and experience in SCT. She pointed out that the two participating schools with the best performance had practised SCT in teaching Chinese, English and Mathematics only. EMB was aware that some schools had used other funds such as the Capacity Enhancement Grant to teach other subjects in small classes. EMB would not interfere with schools' discretion in this respect. In addition to existing school-based support provided to schools, EMB had consulted participating schools on provision of appropriate professional support. She pointed out that the provision of professional support was also subject to availability of resources. PSEM added that as with other aspects of school effectiveness, the performance of a school in SCT was dependent on the leadership of the principal, the establishment of a collaborative culture, and an effective and transparent governance structure.

35. Ms Audrey EU invited deputations to respond to EMB's observation that serving teachers should learn and develop their teaching strategies for teaching in small classes. She also asked whether and how principals and teachers of participating schools had been trained to teach in small classes.

36. Mr HUNG Wai-shing responded that during his second and third years of studies in the former College of Education in the early eighties, he had been arranged to observe activity approach classes which involved the conduct of small group teaching and activities. He added that the implementation of target oriented curriculum in 1995 also provided teachers with opportunities to cater for individual differences among students. He considered that teachers should be provided with opportunities to practise their skills and knowledge in SCT for different subjects.

37. Ms Emily LAU said that the Administration and Professor GALTON considered it too early to conclude on the benefits of SCT at this stage. However, many deputations had affirmed the benefits of SCT and suggested full implementation of SCT as soon as practicable. She asked whether deputations considered it necessary for teachers to attend relevant professional training before implementation of SCT in all schools.

38. Mr CHIU Lam-shing responded that most in-service teachers had acquired the basic skills in SCT during their pre-service studies in HKIEd. He, however, agreed that in-service teachers who had little practical experience in SCT should receive relevant refresher training on teaching in small classes.

39. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung asked about the arrangements for provision of professional support to schools under the Study. PSEM responded that schools submitted their plans when they applied to join the Study. They were then selected to participate in the Study on the basis of their experience and readiness

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in implementing SCT. Hence, they were supposed to have the capacity to implement SCT, though the provision of professional support would certainly be helpful to the schools during implementation. However, schools were given the discretion to seek support from the EMB's professional support team consisting of some 14 professional staff who were deployed either on a part-time or full-time basis. As the demand for professional support would gradually increase, the professional support team with its current establishment would not be able to cope with the increasing demand. EMB would reinforce the provision of professional support in the next school year.

40. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung asked whether the Administration would consider requesting the 37 participating schools to share their experiences and help other schools to implement SCT, and hence reduce the workload of the professional support team as well as the manpower needs on the part of EMB. Dr CHAN So-kuen added that the implementation of SCT in more schools should not be delayed just because of a manpower shortage in provision of professional support to participating schools.

41. PSEM replied that the professional team would have to provide professional support to P1 and P2 classes in the 37 schools under the Study, and possibly another 37 schools under the extended SCT scheme in the 2005-06 school year. She pointed out that the provision of professional support to participating schools involved class observation and demonstration of pedagogies to capitalise on the benefits of small classes. For the 16 participating schools which had requested more intensive on-site support, the professional support team had been working together with the teachers concerned in collaborative lesson planning and had run school-based workshops on cooperative learning for the teachers. She added that Professor GALTON had also visited some of the schools to gather first-hand information on the implementation of SCT, share his observations with schools and discuss with teachers their current pedagogical practices.

Evaluation

42. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung asked about the research findings on the effects of class sizes on student learning in England. Professor GALTON replied that the average primary class sizes in England ranged from 30 to 32. According to the research conducted by Professor BLATCHFORD of the University of London on SCT, the effect of SCT with class sizes of about 15 to 25 for children aged five (the reception year) was most significant and the effects decreased and became insignificant as the class size increased to more than 25. He, however, added that the gains during the reception year were not maintained by the time students were aged seven.

43. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked whether the Steering Committee would agree that as schools participated in the Study on a voluntary basis, the reliability

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of the findings of the Study would be affected. He also asked Professor GALTON to confirm whether the Steering Committee would assess the possible deviation in the findings, and if not, explain why the Steering Committee did not agree to the possibility of such deviation.

44. Professor GALTON responded that there were different factors affecting the outcome of this kind of research study in education. He acknowledged that selecting only schools that had volunteered to participate could have positive effects in the assessment of the benefits of SCT under the Study. However, teachers and principals who volunteered to join the Study were subject to greater pressure and tension which could also have the opposite effect on the results. He emphasised that the main purpose of the Study was to identify both the effective and ineffective teaching strategies for implementing SCT under different situations in the local context so that the Administration could decide the best way forward for implementing SCT within budgetary constraints. From this perspective, it did not matter whether the participating schools under the Study were selected on a voluntary basis or not.

45. Dr Thomas TANG supplemented that the Steering Committee had discussed the implications of voluntary participation in the Study. He considered that voluntary participation would not affect the reliability of the findings of the Study.

46. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that there were views that the cost-effectiveness of SCT would vary depending on student age and subject being taught. He asked whether the Steering Committee considered it necessary to extend the duration and scope of the Study to cover P4-P6 classes and other subjects so that the evaluation of the Study in respect of the optimal class sizes for different levels and subjects would be more reliable.

47. Professor GALTON responded that most research studies on SCT had focused on language teaching and other countries had directed their resources to this aspect of the curriculum. P1-P3 levels had been selected as a starting point to assess the effects of SCT because according to overseas research findings, the effect of SCT on students was more significant at their early years of schooling. He pointed out that the Study covered some 170 small classes at P1 level among the 37 participating schools in the first year and involved the collection of voluminous data. He considered it unrealistic to expand the scope of the Study to cover more levels and subjects at this stage.

48. Dr Thomas TANG shared the view of Professor GALTON that the scope of the Study was already wide. He pointed out that further extension of the Study to cover P4-P6 and different subjects would have impact on the provision of professional support. He added that the Study would incorporate students' academic performance and their disposition including self-esteem and learning motivation, as well as pedagogical practices in the assessment of the relationship

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between class size and learning effectiveness.

49. Mr TOMMY CHEUNG asked whether the research team would quantify the cost-effectiveness of SCT in terms of student learning outcome under the Study. He hoped that the Study would come up with some quantified measurements on students' achievements and learning attitudes in dollar terms.

50. Professor GALTON responded that for a large-scale research project in education like this Study, what was important was to assess student learning outcome under specific conditions. To quantify student achievements in terms of monies spent, the research team could compare the learning progress of students at different levels of expenditure. Professor GALTON added that apart from academic attainment, the benefits of SCT in terms of affective outcome were equally important. He pointed out that during his class observations, he could see that P1 students learning English in small groups had begun to develop their self-esteem and social relationship with peers.

The extended SCT scheme

51. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that many deputations had expressed reservations about the extension of SCT to schools with a high concentration of disadvantaged students. He queried the rationale for extending SCT on the basis of alleviating inter-generational poverty. He considered that all students had an equal right to quality education and should be provided with equal opportunities to learn in small classes. He added that all parents would prefer their children to learn in small classes.

52. SEM responded that the proposed extension of SCT to schools with a high concentration of disadvantaged students was planned in the light of the Government's policy pledge to alleviate inter-generational poverty. If the Panel had reservations, the Administration could review the move and defer implementation of the extended SCT scheme to a later date.

53. PSEM supplemented that the Administration considered it appropriate to provide additional support to schools with a large enrolment of students with weak family support. The Administration would not disclose the names of the selected schools to avoid unnecessary labeling effect. Moreover, as Mr LAM Seung-wan had pointed out in an open discussion forum, some 60% of the students in the selected schools were not receiving CSSA or full grant under SFA Scheme. She added that the Administration would, in collaboration with the education sector, endeavour to assist students from the vulnerable social groups, and remove possible misconceptions about the selected schools and their students.

54. Ms Emily LAU said that LegCo had established a Subcommittee under the House Committee to study the effective measures to combat poverty and

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many members of the Subcommittee held the view that the provision of fair and equal opportunities to children from low-income families in education was one of the most effective ways to alleviate inter-generational poverty. Given the budgetary constraints, the Administration proposed to operate an extended SCT scheme to help students from low-income families. Ms LAU asked whether deputations would accept the proposed criteria for selecting schools to join the extended SCT scheme or suggest other criteria for such purpose.

55. Ms SO Wan-hang described the implementation of SCT at P1 and P3 levels in the Kowloon Bay St John the Baptist Catholic Primary School to illustrate the importance of planning and readiness of a participating school to implement SCT and improve student learning outcome. She pointed out that the School had consulted the parents and considered the possible labelling effects on students before deciding to implement small group teaching in English language for selected P3 students who were low achievers in the subject. She pointed out that the selected students had improved in English learning under small group teaching. The School would continue to organise small group teaching for English language at P4-P5 levels. She added that she considered it inappropriate to select schools to join the extended SCT scheme on the basis of alleviating poverty.

56. Mr IP Kin-yuen considered it more appropriate to review the standard class sizes for school education in the light of the education reform, than to discuss whether students from low-income families should be given priority in receiving SCT. By way of an example, Mr IP explained that since teaching Liberal Studies as a new subject in senior secondary education had been set as a new education objective, there was a need to reduce class size and provide sufficient resources to achieve the objective, regardless of whether teachers were ready or other contextual factors were favourable for teaching Liberal Studies in senior secondary classes.

57. PSEM responded that participating schools under the Study were provided with flexibility in the use of the additional resources for implementing SCT in the light of the varied needs and circumstances of the schools. She considered that SCT should be flexibly implemented in different schools, and there was no need to fix a standard class size for implementing SCT. She added that the standard class size in Shanghai and Singapore was 30 students. The current class size in primary schools in Hong Kong was 32 students. The average class size might well decrease to 30 in the light of declining student population.

58. Mr IP Kin-yuen clarified that he was suggesting the Administration to review the standard class sizes as the basis for resources allocation to schools. The actual class sizes in individual schools would depend on enrolment and class structure. He added that he did not object to giving reasonable priority to disadvantaged students in implementing SCT.

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59. Professor HAU Kit-tai pointed out that given the lack of local experience, the Steering Committee had designed the Study in the light of the findings of overseas research studies which indicated that the effects of SCT were more significant on students with weak family support and in their early years of schooling, and should better be assessed over a period of sufficient duration and with a significant reduction of class size.

60. Miss FUNG Shui-lan said that the proposed extended SCT scheme was unfair because it would deprive students from middle class families, and students receiving CSSA of full grant under SFA who were not studying at schools with a high concentration of disadvantaged students, of the opportunities to receive SCT. She considered that the extension of SCT to schools with high concentration of disadvantaged students for the purpose of alleviating poverty would increase divisiveness in the community. She suggested that within budgetary constraints, the Administration should plan the extension of SCT to cover more schools in the light of the declining student population, the education reform and the economic outlook. She considered that like the implementation of the new academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education, the Government should allocate additional resources to implement SCT in the provision of basic education.

61. Mr HUNG Wai-shing said that there were divided views on the proposed extension of SCT to schools with a high concentration of disadvantaged students. He suggested that the Administration should consider other factors such as the vision and quality of education, the teaching pedagogies and student enrolment, etc in the selection of schools for the extended SCT scheme.

62. Mr Patrick LAU said that in the face of an increasingly knowledge-based economy, the long-term competitiveness of Hong Kong rested with the development of quality human resources through the provision of quality education. He considered that the reliability of the Study would depend on whether the selected schools represented a wide spectrum of the school sector. He suggested that the Administration should allocate more resources for implementing the extended SCT scheme.

63. The Chairman pointed out that assuming half of the 75 eligible schools would join the extended SCT study and operate one additional class each at P1 to P3 levels, a recurrent expenditure of \$32 million would be required per annum. He invited Professor GALTON to comment on the provision and the scope of the extended SCT scheme.

64. Professor GALTON responded that according to research findings in England, the benefits of SCT in schools with more students from low-income families was more significant than in schools with more students from middle class or high-income families. In view of the fact that some schools would

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receive more private support than others, the Government in England would allocate more resources to schools with less private assistance in order to create a level-playing field among schools.

65. Professor GALTON added that the Study aimed to identify the effective strategies for SCT and the kinds of support required for maximising these benefits under different circumstances in Hong Kong schools. The analysis would use relevant statistical techniques to identify the most effective strategies and necessary pre-conditions for implementing SCT in different categories of schools. He added that as resources were always limited, any allocation of education resources in a community such as the allocation of funds for implementing SCT was a political decision that the Government would have to make in the light of the prevailing socio-economic situation.

66. Dr Thomas TANG pointed out that the extended SCT scheme would not form part of the Study comprising the 37 schools which represented a wide spectrum of primary schools in the local context. As an education worker, he supported strategic allocation of education resources to accord priority to students from vulnerable social groups in receiving SCT. He believed that the Administration would take necessary steps to minimise possible labeling effects against the selected schools and their students.

67. Mr Patrick LAU said that when proposing the extension of SCT to schools with a high concentration of disadvantaged students, the Administration should have considered that SCT was beneficial to students. He considered that given the huge budget approved by the Finance Committee for implementing other proposals, the Administration should consider increasing the scope of the extended SCT scheme to cover more primary schools.

68. PSEM responded that the selected schools under the extended SCT scheme would be provided with additional resources and professional support in assessment of student learning in both academic and non-academic domains. She pointed out that the Administration would encourage selected schools to conduct action research on SCT and deploy the additional resources according to the needs of students. The Administration had planned the budget for the extended SCT scheme from the perspective in the light of the constraint in the supply of professional expertise for school-based support.

69. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung asked why the Administration agreed to the overseas research finding that the effect of SCT was more significant on students from families of low socio-economic level, given the inconclusive findings of overseas studies on the effects of SCT on student learning. He added that according to feedback from deputations, schools with students from families of different socio-economic levels had benefited from SCT.

70. SEM replied that a summary of research findings on the effects of SCT on

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disadvantaged children was in Annex B to the Administration's paper, which indicated that SCT had more significant effects on students with weak family support and in their early years of schooling. He reiterated that the Administration had taken into account these overseas research studies in proposing the extended SCT Scheme.

71. Ms Audrey EU asked whether schools with one P1 class of 25 students or less would be eligible for joining the extended SCT scheme. PSEM replied that the same criteria for selection of participating schools for the pilot Study would apply to the extended SCT scheme.

V. Any other business

72. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 7:50 pm.

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