

**Extract from the minutes of meeting of the
Panel on Education held on 30 January 2004**

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IV. Planning and provision of public sector school places

Meeting with deputations

4. Members noted the submissions from Mr WONG Fu-wing [LC Paper No.CB(2)1106/03-04(06)], Professor CHENG Kai-ming [LC Paper No.CB(2)1135/03-04(03)], Ms CHEUNG ANG Siew-mei [LC Paper No.CB(2)1135/03-04(04)], and Cooperation Scheme of School and Social Work which was tabled at the meeting [LC Paper No.CB(2)1135/03-04(06)].

5. The Chairman welcomed representatives of the deputations to the meeting. At the invitation of the Chairman, representatives briefed members on their views on the planning and provision of public sector school places as detailed in paragraphs 6 to 36 -

Hong Kong Professional Teachers Union (HKPTU)
[LC Paper No.CB(2)1135/03-04(01)]

6. Mr CHAN Kwok-kuen briefed members on the main points of HKPTU's submission which was tabled at the meeting. He stressed that HKPTU suggested that the Administration should -

- (a) review the provision of public sector school places and suspend the construction of new schools which were not built for re-provisioning or redevelopment of existing schools, provision of whole-day primary schooling (WDPS), the needs of new towns and developments, and the needs of students with special learning difficulties; and
- (b) with provision of appropriate training to teachers, implement small class teaching in suitable primary and secondary schools, with a minimum class size of 23 students and without increasing the number of classes, in districts with a declining student population. The implementation should start from primary one (P1) and secondary one (S1) classes and extended to P2 and S2 classes in the following school year and so on. The objectives were to improve teaching and learning effectiveness in classes, enhance relationship between teachers and students, and upgrade quality of basic education in the long run.

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Subsidized Primary Schools Council

7. Mr LEE Siu-hoi said that Subsidized Primary Schools Council suggested that the Administration should proactively provide information on the number of public sector schools, school places and enrolment in districts to the public; and formulate a policy and timetable for implementation of small class teaching as soon as practicable.

The Association of Hong Kong Chinese Middle School

8. Sr WONG May-may of AHKCMS said that the Association of Hong Kong Chinese Middle School supported the construction of schools for the provision of WDPS and re-provisioning and redevelopment of existing schools equipped with substandard space and facilities, subject to availability of public resources.

Hong Kong Special Schools Council

9. Ms Louise KWAN said that Hong Kong Special Schools Council suggested that the Administration should -

- (a) provide sufficient schools and places for children with special educational needs;
- (b) implement small class teaching and provide sufficient funding support for special education; and
- (c) reprovision or redevelop special schools which were built more than 30 years ago or had a site area of less than 3 000 square metres.

Hong Kong Grant School Council

10. Mr TAM Siu-ping said that Hong Kong Grant Schools Council supported the allocation of resources for the construction of new schools. It also suggested that the Administration should make use of the unfilled school places in districts to implement WDPS and review the appropriate percentage of Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools and private independent schools (PI) for the school sector.

Sheng Kung Hui Primary Schools Council Principal Conference
[LC Paper No.CB(2)1106/03-04(01)]

11. Mr WONG Chi-kin presented the views of Sheng Kung Hui Primary Schools Council Principal Conference as detailed in the submission. The

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Conference suggested that the Administration should regularly publicize the number of schools and places, the student enrolment situation and the projected change of student population in districts for public information. It also requested the Administration to balance the demand and supply of public sector school places, and formulate a policy and timetable for implementation of small class teaching in schools.

Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui

12. Mrs Jannie CHAU said that Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui requested the Administration to formulate a policy and timetable for implementation of small class teaching in both the primary and secondary school sectors.

The Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China
[LC Paper No.CB(2)1106/03-04(02)]

13. Mr SOO Yee-yau introduced the submission of the Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China. He highlighted that the Council suggested that the class sizes of primary and secondary schools should be reduced to 30 students. It also suggested that the Administration should allow School Sponsoring Bodies (SSBs) to merge their schools located at the same school net where appropriate.

The Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China Primary School Heads Association
[LC Paper No.CB(2)1106/03-04(03)]

14. Mr CHAN Chi-tuen presented the views of the Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China Primary School Heads Association as detailed in the submission. He highlighted that the Administration should not increase the number of DSS schools since the supply of secondary school places in aided schools had already exceeded the demand. The Association considered that the Administration should implement small class teaching with class sizes of 20 - 25 students in schools with substandard premises and facilities.

Tai Po District Primary School Heads Association

15. Mr LEE Fu-sing said that Tai Po District Primary School Heads Association strongly opposed the provision of surplus school places to create competition in student enrolment and subsequently force the under-enrolled schools to phase out. The Association also urged the Administration to improve utilization of unused classrooms and unfilled places in existing schools, and implement small class teaching in districts where the primary student population had decreased. He stressed that if all other factors were the same, implementation of small class teaching on an incremental basis would definitely improve the quality of education in schools.

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Southern District Joint Schools Conference

16. Ms TAO Chee-ying said that the Administration should review the number of new schools to be constructed under the School Building Programme (SBP) in Southern District in view of the unfilled school places in the district. She pointed out that in the situation of unfilled school places as a result of under-enrolment, some schools might suffer from reduction of classes and surplus teachers. She stressed that the Administration should make better use of the existing resources in the school sector and implement small class teaching as soon as practicable.

*Sha Tin District Secondary School Heads Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1119/03-04(01)]*

17. Mr HO Kuen-fai presented the views of Sha Tin District Secondary School Heads Association as detailed in the submission. He highlighted that the Administration should stop constructing new primary, secondary and senior secondary schools in Sha Tin to improve under-enrolment and reduce the number of surplus teachers and classes in existing schools. In addition, the Association considered it unfair to provide DSS schools with the discretion on adoption of the medium of instruction and to allow senior secondary schools to operate junior secondary classes. He added that under-enrolment was not necessarily a reflection of unsatisfactory quality of education and should not be taken as the only assessment for phasing out schools.

Hong Kong Association of Sponsoring Bodies of Schools

18. Mrs Jannie CHAU said that Hong Kong Association of Sponsoring Bodies of Schools requested the Administration to formulate a policy and the timetable for implementation of small class teaching in primary and secondary schools.

The ISE Academy/the Independent Schools Foundation Limited

19. Dr Filicia TSANG highlighted the merits of DSS and PI schools in the provision of diversity and choice in the school system. She also pointed out that the need to develop diversified curricula, for example with emphasis on sports, vocational training or media and art, to cater for the different learning needs and capabilities of students.

20. Ms CHOW Chun-yin said that as a parent, she considered the incorporation of PI schools in the school system necessary for meeting the different needs of parents and students. She suggested that the Administration should continue implementing its policy on development of PI schools to provide diversity and choice for students in the education system.

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Hong Kong University Graduates Association Education Foundation

21. Mr YEUNG Pak-sing said that the Hong Kong University Graduates Association Education Foundation supported the policies on planning and provision of public sector school places as detailed in the Administration's paper. He agreed to the benefits of small class teaching but pointed out that given the fiscal deficits, the Administration should identify the effective strategies for implementing small class teaching in primary schools first. He highlighted that the development of a DSS sector could attract parents to share a part in provision of funding support to education, which would help enrich the diversity and quality of school education without the need for the Government to provide additional funding support.

Hong Kong University Graduates Association Primary School

22. Mr NG Kwok-hung said that the Hong Kong University Graduates Association Primary School supported the development of more DSS schools to enhance diversity and provide choice for parents and students in school education. Ms CHAN Suk-ling highlighted that DSS schools operated under market forces and would have to provide quality education in order to survive in the long run.

Po Leung Kuk

23. Mr MAK Kwai-po said that Po Leung Kuk supported the policies to redevelop and reprovision schools accommodated in sub-standard premises, provide diversity and choice in the education system, provide non-mainstream and diversified curriculum in school education, and promote the adoption of through-train mode in school operation. He pointed out that there were both static and dynamic factors affecting the planning and provision of public sector school places. He also pointed out that only a few aided schools had switched to operate on a DSS mode since the DSS was introduced a few years ago.

Victoria Shanghai Education Foundation Limited

24. Ms Maggie KOONG described the features and operation of the Victoria Shanghai Education Foundation School to illustrate the role and functions of PI schools in enriching diversity in the school system. Dr Lilian HUI described her expectations in education for her child as a parent of a family returning to Hong Kong after residing in an overseas country for many years. She appealed members to support the development of PI schools to enrich diversity of school education to meet the needs of different families.

Direct Subsidy Scheme Schools Council

25. Mr CHAN Wai-kai said that Direct Subsidy Scheme Schools Council

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supported a review of SBP in the light of the current supply and demand of school places in individual districts. The Council also supported that the Administration should construct new schools to facilitate implementation of WDPS, reduce the number of floating classes in public sector schools, and re-provision existing public sector and DSS schools with meritorious performance and sub-standard facilities. Mr CHAN considered that DSS and PI schools were well accepted by the community as they provided parents and students with choice in pursuit of quality education. He added that the operation of DSS and PI schools was regulated by market forces.

Wanchai District Headmasters' Conference

26. Mrs POON LEUNG Hok-yin said that the Wanchai District Headmasters' Conference strongly requested the Administration to implement WDPS. The Conference also considered that the Administration should re-provision or redevelop the existing 400 schools which had a site area of less than 3 000 square metres or were built more than 30 years ago as soon as practicable.

Hong Kong Aided Primary School Heads Association

27. Mr TANG Siu-hung said that the Hong Kong Aided Primary School Heads Association considered that the Administration should give priority to re-provisioning and redevelopment of the existing 400 schools which were built more than 30 years ago or had a site area of less than 3 000 square metres. The Association agreed that DSS and PI schools could enrich diversity in education and provide choice to parents and students, but considered that they were more resourceful and hence enjoyed a competitive advantage over public sector schools in recruitment of students.

North District Secondary Schools Headmasters Conference

28. Ms KWOK Yin-mei said that North District Secondary Schools Headmasters Conference supported full implementation of small class teaching in primary schools, and progressive implementation in secondary schools starting with 30 – 35 students for S1 – S5 classes. Given a 50% decrease in birth rate between the years 1990 and 2003, she urged the Administration to review SBP, suspend the construction of new secondary schools, and convert the reserved secondary school sites into primary school sites to facilitate full implementation of WDPS. She also suggested that the Administration should expand the North District school net to cover Yuen Long in order to enhance choice for students to select schools, make plan for the implementation of the new junior and senior secondary school structure, and provide diversity in education and choice to parents and students in the planning and provision of public sector school places. Lastly, she urged the Administration to consider the views of District Councils and Heads of schools in the process of the planning

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and provision of public sector school places.

The Alliance for Small-class Learning and Teaching to Promote Quality Education

[LC Paper No.CB(2)1135/03-04(02)]

29. Mr CHOW Shek-fai presented the views and suggestions of the Alliance for Small-class Learning and Teaching to Promote Quality Education as detailed in the submission. He urged the Administration to implement small class teaching as soon as practicable. He also cited the shortfall in the supply of whole-day primary school places (161 classes) and secondary school places (47 classes) to illustrate the Alliance's reservations about the accuracy of the forecast demand and supply of public sector whole-day primary school places and secondary school places by District in the 2004 school year as detailed in Annex B of the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(2)1058/03-0(01)].

Hong Kong Institute of Contemporary Culture

[LC Paper No.CB(2)1106/03-04(05)]

30. Ms Ada WONG and Ms May FUNG presented the views of the Hong Kong Institute of Contemporary Culture as detailed in the submission. They highlighted the merits of DSS schools in providing diversity in school education and enabling students to develop their potentials and creativity. Ms WONG also urged the Administration to review the current policies on education and enhance the learning environment by reducing class sizes in schools in the light of a declining birth rate.

North District Primary School Heads Association

[LC Paper No.CB(2)1119/03-04(02)]

31. Mr FUNG Chin-choi presented the views of the North District Primary School Heads Association as detailed in the submission. He urged the Administration to reduce primary and secondary school class sizes by two students, formulate a long term policy for the implementation of small class teaching and construct more new primary schools for full implementation of WDPS in the 2007 school year. He added that the construction of more DSS and PI schools should be considered after full implementation of WDPS.

Parent-Teacher Association of GT (Ellen Yeung) School

[LC Paper No.CB(2)1135/03-04(07)]

32. Mr FUNG Po-chun presented the views of the Parent-Teacher Association of GT (Ellen Yeung) School as detailed in the submission which was tabled at the meeting. She stressed the importance of small class teaching and teaching based on the needs of students in enhancing quality of school education. She expressed support for the development of DSS schools to cater for individual needs and through-train schools to provide students with

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continuity of learning experience throughout the primary and secondary schooling.

Wong Tai Sin District Secondary School Heads Association

33. Mr LEUNG Kam-bor said that Wong Tai Sin District Secondary School Heads Association considered that the Administration should implement small class teaching in the light of a decreasing primary student population. He pointed out that small class teaching was essential for successful implementation of curriculum reform which stressed the provision of all-round education to students. He added that since secondary student population would increase in the next few years but decrease after the 2007-08 school year, and a three-year senior secondary school structure might be adopted, heads of secondary schools were willing to operate larger classes during the transitional period without a substantial increase in resources allocation.

Wong Tai Sin District School Liaison Committee

34. Mr LEE Pun-cho said that Wong Tai Sin District School Liaison Committee considered that the merits of small class teaching were indisputable and the Administration should take the opportunity to formulate a long-term policy for progressive implementation of small class teaching in schools. He added that small class teaching would help teachers teach based on students' needs.

Hong Kong Chinese Christian Church Union Logos Academy

35. Mr Paul YAU said that aided schools and DSS schools were not interchangeable in that they had different merits and served different roles in the provision of school education. He pointed out that DSS schools were generally more resourceful in the recruitment of quality teachers. He cited overseas experience to illustrate the importance of allowing flexibility in school management and suggested that the flexibility enjoyed by DSS schools should be extended to public sector schools. He anticipated that the Administration would continue to construct DSS and PI schools to provide wider choice to parents and students. He also suggested that the Administration should conduct a research into the appropriate proportion of public sector, DSS and PI schools in the community.

Pegasus Philip Wong Kin Hang Christian Primary School

36. Mrs LEUNG LUNG Chung-po said that most parents would select a school which provided an all-round education to their children. She considered that access to DSS schools were not restricted to higher income families and pointed out that parents were willing to share a part in the provision of quality education to their children. She urged the Administration to continue the

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development of DSS schools to provide parents and students with choice in school education.

Administration's response to the views and concerns of deputations

37. In response to the deputations' views and suggestions, PSEM made the following responses -

- (a) As highlighted in the consultation document for education reforms in 1999, the key to enhancing quality of education was to construct a diverse school system to cater for the needs of different families, parents and students;
- (b) The central theme of education reform was to transform the existing teacher-led teaching into student-focused learning in a classroom setting, and to provide choice for parents;
- (c) The provision of education should largely be guided by parental choice and to facilitate assessment of parental choice, school management should be made more transparent and accountable;
- (d) The development of DSS and PI schools was a move towards promoting quality of education, providing choice to parents and students and enhancing transparency and accountability in school operation. A new mechanism for allocation of new schools was established in 1999, under which a vetting committee was responsible for considering and recommending the allocation of new schools to sponsors. Since 1999, only 11% of the 166 new schools were allocated to DSS and PI schools. In addition, another 12 senior secondary schools were established to provide continuing education to S3 school leavers who were willing and able to continue study;
- (e) Allocation of new schools to sponsors was based on the quality of their proposals with emphasis on their contribution to providing diversity in school education and not on a pre-determined ratio for aided, DSS, PI or through-train schools;
- (f) Development of through-train schools aimed at providing a coherent curriculum and continuity of learning experience which was conducive to effective learning, and smoothing the transition from primary to secondary education for the students. However, only a few public sector schools had switched to operate in a through-train mode;
- (g) Planning of school places was done on a macro basis with regular

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reviews and updating to meet the various policy initiatives. Given that Population Census was conducted at a 10-year interval, the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) would have to plan the SBP in accordance with the available data on student population, parental choice, and forecast demographic changes. In fact, contrary to previous forecast, the number of newly arrived children from the Mainland had started to decrease from 2000;

- (h) To provide diversity and choice, there must be a reasonable degree of surplus supply of school places to facilitate student movement. However, the Administration was not in a position to forecast the turnover in individual schools when planning the provision of school places in different districts;
- (i) DSS schools could recruit students on a territory wide basis and parental choice would affect the proportion of students from and outside the district in which a DSS school was located;
- (j) The size of school nets was under review in the light of improvements in the transport infrastructure in Hong Kong;
- (k) The Administration gave equal weight in support of aided schools and DSS schools, and in particular had allocated substantial resources for the professional development of the teaching workforce in aided schools in the past three years;
- (l) DSS schools, while enjoying certain competitive advantages in recruitment of students over aided schools, were subject to fierce competition in the market. They were more responsive to the demands of parents and the community;
- (m) By intuition, small class teaching was commonly accepted to be better than large class. This was true only if the necessary supporting conditions were in place. Learning from the experience of the implementation of WDPS, which was initially criticized by some teachers and parents as not cost-effective, the Administration considered it necessary that major policy decisions should be based on research evidence. A professor of education at the Harvard University had commented that the implementation of small class teaching in the United States of America (USA) was remarkably expensive with questionable impact. He pointed out that hiring more teachers would dilute the quality of the workforce which might negate the gains from small class teaching, and that the intuitive relationship between class size and teachers' effectiveness might not actually hold true; and

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- (n) The Administration did not object to small class teaching, but considered it necessary to provide professional development for teachers at the same time and to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of small class teaching in local schools.

38. Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (2) (DS(EM)2) clarified that the demand and supply of whole-day primary and secondary school places by district in the 2004 school year as set out in Annex B of the Administration's paper was a correct assessment based on the established planning parameters and the latest population forecast. The difference between the projection and the surplus/shortfall of school places in a certain district following the completion of the school places allocation exercise was largely due to parental choice. School places allocation mechanism provided for a certain amount of discretionary places which were not school-net bound. Parents might opt for schools not in the district where they were residing. In addition, some parents also chose to seek places in schools other than those that their children had been allocated. As an illustration, in the last allocation exercise, while there were some 60 200 and 82 000 students participating in the central allocation for P1 and S1 places respectively, around 10 000 P1 and 11 000 S1 students had subsequently given up their allocated places. Parental choice needed to be respected but was something that defied reliable forecast.

39. PSEM further said that the provision of a certain percentage of surplus school places was necessary to facilitate student movement and stimulate competition, which would as a result drive performance and enhance the quality of education. While some deputations from the aided school sector had expressed concern about the inevitable consequence that the less popular schools would be under-enrolled and subsequently replaced or phased out, a representative from the DSS sector considered such competition positive in promoting quality of education. PSEM cited the comments of a Mainland educationalist that the education system in Hong Kong should incorporate an element of competition and performance evaluation on the basis of which schools and teachers with good or bad performance should be commended or disciplined as appropriate.

40. Referring to the report entitled "Nation at risk" which summarized the experience of USA after implementing education reforms for some 20 years, PSEM said that the three key elements to successful education reform were, namely, providing choice to parents, improving transparency of school operation, and upholding accountability in school performance. She stressed that the success of education reforms in Hong Kong depended on the establishment of a fair and transparent system for evaluation of performance, and enhanced transparency and accountability in school operation and management. The Administration would, by progressive and strategic development of DSS and PI schools in the school system, provide choice and enhance transparency and

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accountability.

Flexibility in school management

41. Ms Emily LAU asked whether public sector schools would like to enjoy similar flexibility in school management as given to DSS schools. Mr TAM Siu-ping of the Hong Kong Grant School Council said that public sector schools would be able to improve performance if they were not required to participate in the “central allocation” under the Primary One Admission and the Secondary School Places Allocation system on a compulsory basis.

42. PSEM responded that in line with the spirit of school-based management, public sector schools were now given more autonomy in school management. They were encouraged to establish a school management committee comprising representatives from parents, teachers, alumni and independent persons to manage the school in the best interests of students. She added that the Administration was considering grouping the non-salary grants into a lump sum so as to give schools more flexibility in the use of funds. If schools so wished, the Administration would also be prepared to consider suggestions to provide more flexibility in teachers’ salaries.

Meeting with the Administration

Construction of new schools

43. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong stressed that the meeting should focus on the planning and provision of public sector school places in the light of a decreasing student population, i.e. whether new schools should continue to be built and how these new schools should be utilized in the most cost-effective way. He expressed disappointment that the discussion at the meeting had focused on the merits and demerits of aided, DSS or PI schools, instead of the need to review the SBP to ensure a balanced supply and demand of school places. He considered it unnecessary to shift the focus of the discussion to the provision of diversity in education system in order to avoid discussing the surplus supply of school places which was largely a mistake in planning.

44. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong pointed out that there were some 40 000 new births and some 57 000 students participating in the Primary One Admission in 2003, which indicated that the student population would continue to decline. He queried why the forecast demand and supply of whole-day primary school and secondary school places provided by the Administration had only included figures up to 2008. He also pointed out that if the construction of the new schools under the current SBP was to continue as planned, there would be a substantial increase of surplus secondary school places in the 2007-08 school year when the secondary student population would start to decline. He asked whether the Administration would suspend the construction of new secondary

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schools scheduled under SBP if the construction work of which had not been started. He also asked how the Administration could ensure cost-effective utilization of new secondary schools which would be completed in the 2007-08 school years and afterwards as a more rapid decline in secondary student population beyond 2007 was forecasted.

45. PSEM explained that due to the volatility of demand, there were limitations in planning the provision of public sector school places. She pointed out that the Population Census was only conducted every 10 years, and the number of newly arrived children from the Mainland had started to decline since 2000. Depending on the annual reviews of the demand and supply, the Administration could allocate any new schools surplus to demand for reprovisioning existing schools with meritorious performance and sub-standard facilities. She pointed out that at the meeting in March 1999, the Panel had urged the Administration to collaborate with the Planning Department to reserve sufficient sites for the construction of more schools. She added that, compared with the commercial sector, a 4% marginal surplus in the number of classrooms as reported by the Audit Commission was acceptable. She added that schools would use their surplus classrooms for other learning and teaching purposes.

46. DS(EM)(2) also explained that there were some 33 000 immigrants within the schooling age range from the Mainland in 1998. Many of them had just reached or would shortly reach the secondary school age. Although it was forecast that secondary student population would start to decline after the 2007-08 school year, the Administration had a duty to provide sufficient and proper school places to accommodate these young immigrants as and when their turn for secondary education came. To halt the SBP meant either denying them of school places or cramming them into existing schools either against their wish or beyond the limit of 40 students per class. It was not a responsible act to sacrifice the interest of these students solely because of a forecast drop in demand a few years later especially given the volatility of demographics as witnessed in the last 10 years. Due to site availability, it was not always possible to achieve a perfect match between districts with shortfall and districts with new sites for school construction.

47. Ms Emily LAU said that as a member of the Public Accounts Committee, she fully understood that public money should be used in a cost-effective manner. She stressed that in view of the importance of education to the future development of the community, she had all along supported the reservation of suitable sites for the construction of new schools.

48. Mr Tommy CHEUNG expressed support for the construction of new schools planned under the SBP, and expressed reservations about the suggestion to suspend the construction of new schools in districts where there were unfilled places in schools. He pointed out that the construction of new schools under the

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SBP would provide more school places to pave the way for implementation of small class teaching in 2008, if adopted.

49. PSEM said that the Administration was aiming to provide a more diverse senior secondary curriculum and would consult the public shortly on the proposed three-year senior secondary structure in early 2004. She considered that not building new secondary schools would affect the implementation of the proposed three-year senior secondary structure in the future. She added that with the development of more DSS and PI schools, Hong Kong could become an education hub for recruitment of Mainland and overseas students.

Diversity, parental choice and competition in school system

50. PSEM stressed that the policy to provide diversity in the school system had been recommended by the Education Commission and supported by the Executive Council, Legislative Council (LegCo) and the community at large. The Administration had encouraged existing public sector primary and secondary schools to switch to the DSS mode or form through-train schools. Since the response was unsatisfactory, the Administration would have to achieve the policy objective by way of allocating new schools to SSBs who were interested to operate DSS or through-train schools. She pointed out that there were now 51 DSS schools comprising about 3.5% of the total school places, and the proportion would increase to 6.4% if all the new DSS schools to be completed up to the 2007-08 school year were taken into account.

51. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered it unacceptable that some senior secondary schools had operated junior secondary classes and competed with local secondary schools in student recruitment. He asked about the justifications for the provision of a buffer in the supply of school places to create competition in student enrolment. He also asked how the Administration would assist the less popular schools in student recruitment, given that these schools mainly engaged in teaching the less successful students. He pointed out that as reflected by the value-added performance indicators, these schools had demonstrated improvements in performance.

52. PSEM responded that senior secondary schools would only be allowed to operate S1 classes if the supply of such places was insufficient in the district concerned. She agreed that not all schools which were under-enrolled were poor in performance. She pointed out that apart from student enrolment, EMB had developed a set of academic value-added indicators as well as other student performance indicators to enable schools to evaluate more objectively the performance of their students as a whole in both academic and non-academic domains. PSEM added that the Administration would suggest some of these under-enrolled secondary schools to consider switching to operate as senior secondary schools and hence enrich diversity of school education in the districts.

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53. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong remarked that the Administration had decided not to allocate a P1 class to schools on the ground that they had failed to enrol 23 P1 students in the 2004-05 school year.

54. Ms Emily LAU expressed support for the provision of a buffer in the supply of school places to stimulate competition in student enrolment among schools. She considered competition an effective means to enhance quality of education in schools and anticipated that serving teachers would pursue lifelong learning to enhance their professionalism in school education. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that he shared the view of Ms Emily LAU and said that healthy competition would enhance quality of education.

55. Ms Emily LAU expressed support for the development of DSS and PI schools to enrich diversity in the school system. She pointed out that most parents anticipated that their children could enrol in a school providing quality education at affordable costs. She considered it unfair to give DSS schools the discretion to adopt different mediums of instruction for different subjects, but allow only 114 aided secondary schools to use English as the medium of instruction.

56. PSEM responded that many DSS schools charged less than \$10,000 a year and only a few DSS schools charged high fees. She considered that parents who were willing to invest in the education of their children should be given the opportunity. She also pointed out that, like public sector schools, DSS schools were required to meet the three basic requirements for using English as the medium of instruction. EMB would monitor whether the students in DSS schools could benefit from English medium teaching. PSEM added that she did not believe parents would be attracted to a school solely because it adopted English as the medium of instruction.

57. Dr YEUNG Sum considered that public sector schools should be given the autonomy and flexibility in school management enjoyed by DSS schools and that all children, regardless of their family background, should have equal opportunities to enrol in a public sector or DSS school.

58. Mr SZETO Wah said that the provision of diversity in education by DSS schools which comprised only 3% to 6% of the total number of schools would not improve the overall quality of education. He advised that public sector schools and DSS schools should collaborate to provide quality education to students, instead of arguing on their strengths and limitations in the provision of education.

Small class teaching

59. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that deputations had the consensus that small class teaching should be implemented in schools operating under different modes in the light of a decreasing student population. He considered that if the

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Administration was willing to implement small class teaching, the problems of an excessive supply of school places arising from the construction of new schools under SBP would be resolved. Ms Emily LAU also expressed support for implementing small class teaching in schools.

60. Dr David CHU expressed disappointment that judging from PSEM's comments at the meeting, the Administration had no intention to implement small class teaching. He considered the current primary and secondary school class sizes too large and the workload of teachers too heavy. He asked whether the Administration considered the existing class sizes too large. Dr CHU also considered that the Administration should formulate a policy to implement small class teaching in the light of a declining student population.

61. PSEM stressed that she personally did not object to the adoption of small class teaching in schools. She pointed out that while the merits of small class teaching were accepted intuitively by the public at large, the Administration had the responsibility to articulate a professional stance based on overseas studies and experiences, and advise caution in the face of the fiscal deficits. The Administration would present to the Panel at its February meeting a study on the effective strategies for implementation of small group and class teaching in primary schools.

62. Dr YEUNG Sum said that when all other factors were equal, small class teaching should be implemented in schools. In view of the fiscal deficits, Dr YEUNG urged the Administration to adopt a more proactive approach to implement small class teaching on an incremental basis in the light of a declining student population.

63. Mr SZETO Wah considered that small class teaching was the best way to enhance quality of education in school education and incremental implementation of small class teaching would require more new schools in the long run. He expressed disappointment that PSEM so far had not mentioned about the benefits of small class teaching at meetings of LegCo committees. He pointed out that a bad teacher should not teach and that a good teacher would be more effective in teaching small classes than large classes.

64. Mr Tommy CHEUNG considered that small class teaching, if adopted, should be implemented in all schools and not in schools with insufficient enrolment first. He added that Hong Kong compared favourably with other nations in terms of the student-to-teacher ratio in schools.

Funding approval for construction of schools

65. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong referred to paragraph 8 of the Administration's paper which stated that since 1999, the Administration had introduced an open, competitive process for allocation of new schools to SSBs.

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Since the allocation exercise was carried out several years in advance of the target operation date of the new school, the Administration would, in so doing, have allocated new schools to SSBs without obtaining the approval of LegCo beforehand. He expressed concern that LegCo Members would be blamed if they voted down the funding applications for construction of new schools that had been allocated to SSBs. He queried why the Administration did not follow the prescribed procedures for seeking funding support from LegCo for the construction of new schools.

66. PSEM explained that the practice of allocating new schools to SSBs several years in advance of the target operation date of the new schools was to enable the selected SSBs to get involved in the design of the school building to suit their school plans and to allow more time to prepare for the opening of the new schools. She added that she was not aware of any opposing views when the mechanism for allocating new schools to SSBs was discussed by LegCo in 1999.

67. DS(EM)2 supplemented that the selected SSBs would be informed in writing that the allocation of new schools to SSBs would be subject to, among other things, the approval of LegCo in due course. In fact, LegCo had disapproved the proposal to construct a primary and a secondary school in Sheung Shui in October 2003.

Way forward

68. PSEM invited members to comment on the Administration's suggestion to proceed with seeking funding approval from the Public Works Subcommittee (PWSC) for three categories of school projects, namely, WDPS, reprovisioning and redevelopment projects, and schools, including DSS and PI schools, which had already been allocated to SSBs.

69. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that he would support the construction of new schools for implementation of WDPS, reprovisioning and redevelopment of existing sub-standard schools, coping with increase in student population in the district, and provision of special education programmes which were not provided in the mainstream schools.

70. Ms Emily LAU expressed support for the Administration to submit their school building proposals to PWSC for consideration, in particular proposals to reprovision and redevelop existing sub-standard schools. She stressed that to facilitate members' deliberation at PWSC meetings, the Administration should submit their proposals for construction of new schools with detailed background information including the supply and demand situation and the views of the school heads in the districts concerned, etc.

71. The Chairman expressed support for Ms Emily LAU's views. He considered that parents should be provided with choice in selection of schools for their children. He also supported reprovisioning and redevelopment of

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existing sub-standard schools and construction of new DSS schools which had already been allocated to SSBs.

72. Mr WONG Sing-chi expressed support for the construction of new schools to implement WDPS and reprovision or redevelop existing sub-standard schools. He added that he would consider proposals of other categories on a case by case basis.

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