

For Information

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON EDUCATION

Provision of Places in International Schools

PURPOSE

This paper provides information on the provision of places and the enrolment situation in our international schools.

BACKGROUND

2. Hong Kong operates a highly diversified education system. As far as international education is concerned, the demand for such services has traditionally been met by “international schools” which generally refer to those schools offering full non-local curricula designed primarily for non-Chinese speaking students and foreign nationals most of whom would eventually return to their home countries for education.

3. The Administration supports the development of a vibrant international school sector to underpin our aspiration to be Asia’s World City and an education hub for the Region. To this end, we have provided various forms of assistance including land grant, interest-free loan for school building, and nominal rent for the leasing of government premises. At present, we have 56 international schools in Hong Kong offering curricula of the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea, Germany, France, Singapore and the International Baccalaureate Organization.

THE CURRENT PROVISION

4. The Administration conducts annual surveys on the provision of international school places and the actual enrolment. Through these annual surveys, we also gather information on students’ nationalities. In the 2004/05 school year, the international school sector as a whole offered a total of about 34,000 primary and secondary school places. The enrolment of the year was about 29,000 students spreading across 55

nationalities. About 14% of the students are “local children”, who are defined for the purpose of the annual surveys to mean those not holding any foreign passports. The relevant statistics in the past three school years are set out at the **Annex**.

5. The survey for the 2005/06 school year is underway. While the majority of the international schools have already responded, the returns from a few schools are either outstanding or incomplete. With the benefits from the responses received so far (which should have covered over 90% of the provision of places in the international school sector) and information from other sources, our preliminary observations on the provision situation are as follows –

- (a) For the sector as a whole, there are vacancies for all levels of studies with an average in the region of 500 places for each primary grade and 310 places for each secondary grade. Even if we are to focus just on the vacant places in the more “popular” schools, i.e. schools with an occupancy rate over 90%, the overall vacancy for each grade ranges from some 30 to 80 places at the primary level and from some 10 to 180 places at the secondary level;
- (b) At the school level, the average occupancy rates for the primary schools and secondary schools stand at 84.4% and 85.7% respectively; and
- (c) International schools are open to local children. For example, as revealed in a survey conducted by the English Schools Foundation, which is the biggest international education service provider in Hong Kong, about 40% of its students come from Chinese-speaking families¹. Based on returns received so far, the percentage of students who do not hold any foreign passports stand at around 15.7% at primary levels and 11.6% at secondary levels. It should be noted, however, that the figures have not yet reflected the cases of those local, Chinese-speaking students who have acquired foreign nationalities.

¹ Source: <<http://www.esf.edu.hk/download/parents/Data%20on%20ESF%20Students.pdf>> – (Last visited on 30 November 2005).

WAY FORWARD

6. Following the recovery of the local economy, the business sector and the expatriate community have expressed concerns about the adequacy of international school places. While our annual surveys reflect the supply of places and the enrolment situation, it has always been difficult to forecast the potential demand which hinges to a large extent on the movements of the expatriate community in and out of Hong Kong. Although the latest survey results do not suggest any saturation or shortfall in supply, we will continue to liaise with the interested parties to assess the potential demand and take necessary measures to expand the capacity of the international school sector.

7. We are trying to ensure an adequate supply of school places for meeting the needs of the expatriate community from different fronts –

- (a) Without prejudice to a proper student mix in the international school sector, we will continue to encourage international schools to review their admission policy, giving appropriate priority to those who could not otherwise receive education in the local system;
- (b) Since figures show aggregate surplus at school level, international schools may explore the scope for re-organising classes to meet the shortfall in specific grades;
- (c) We are exploring with relevant departments the feasibility of allocating suitable vacant school premises to private school operators for the operation of international schools;
- (d) We will suitably open up the local school sector to the expatriate community so as to provide them with more choices and to encourage cultural integration. Specially, with their operational autonomy in terms of medium of instruction and curriculum design, individual schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme and the Private Independent School (PIS) Scheme may complement the international school sector. Indeed, some of them have already been admitting students from the expatriate community, and at least six of the PISs under planning / in operation have devised firm plans to offer non-local curricula. Meanwhile, individual local schools offering the local curriculum and adopting English as the medium of instruction have also

indicated their readiness to admit a restricted number of expatriate students who wish to immerse in the local culture. The Administration will support these schools in offering a second or third language option for these students; and

- (e) Should individual families encounter problems, we will continue to offer placement services.

**Education and Manpower Bureau
December 2005**

Annex

Statistics Relating to the Provision of School Places in International Schools

School Year	Primary School				Secondary School				Overall			
	Number of Places	Total Enrolment	Occupancy Rate (%)	Local Students (%)	Number of Places	Total Enrolment	Occupancy Rate (%)	Local Students (%)	Number of Places	Total Enrolment	Occupancy Rate (%)	Local Students (%)
2002/03	18256	16038	87.9%	13.99%	13818	11842	85.7%	11.75%	32074	27880	86.9%	13.03%
2003/04	18347	16050	87.5%	14.65%	14235	12069	84.8%	12.30%	32582	28119	86.3%	13.64%
2004/05	19371	16741	86.4%	15.71%	14604	12717	87.1%	11.81%	33975	29458	86.7%	14.01%

Note: “Local students” refer to those students not holding any foreign passports.