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Panel on Education

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 12 February 2007

Workload of teachers

Purpose

This paper summarises the discussions of the Panel on Education (the Panel) on issues relating to the workload of teachers.

Background

2. In his Policy Address in 1997, the Chief Executive asked the Education Commission (EC) to conduct a comprehensive review of the education system in Hong Kong. The review undertaken by the EC covered all stages of education from early childhood education to continuing education, but its main focus was on the academic structure, the curricula, the assessment mechanisms and the interface between different stages of education.

3. The EC submitted a report entitled the "Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong" to the Government on 28 September 2000. In his Policy Address on 11 October 2000, the Chief Executive announced that the Administration had accepted all the reform proposals put forward by the EC. The three tasks which had been identified as critical in the education reform were -

- (a) curriculum development, including the integration of information technology in teaching;
- (b) enhancing students' language proficiency; and
- (c) catering for the diverse and special learning needs of students with varied abilities, ranging from the gifted ones to those with learning difficulties.

4. To reduce teachers' workload so that they would have enhanced capacity to concentrate on these tasks, the Administration proposed and the Finance Committee approved on 21 November 2000 the introduction of a new recurrent grant, namely, Capacity Enhancement Grant (CEG), to all government and aided schools from the 2000-2001 school year onwards to hire personnel or services. In the 2000-2001 school year, the rates of the CEG were initially set at \$550,000 and \$300,000 respectively for primary and secondary schools with 19 or more classes. For schools with less than 19 classes, the rates were \$450,000 and \$250,000 respectively. In the 2001-2002 school year, the CEG rates for secondary schools were increased by 50% in order to further enhance the capacity of secondary school teachers to cope with the changes in the education system.

5. In January 2006, there were several cases of teachers committing suicide. On 22 January 2006, some 10 000 teachers participated in a rally to voice their grievances on issues relating to education. The participants urged the Administration to review its policies on allocation of primary one classes on the basis of minimum enrolment of 23 students in each school year, implement small class teaching, increase staff establishment in schools and provide paid leave for serving teachers in pursuit of professional development.

6. The Administration proposed to provide a special provision of the CEG for government and subvented schools, by increasing the existing rates by 150% for secondary schools, and 100% for primary schools, from the 2005-2006 school year for a period of three years. The Administration also set up in February 2006 the Committee on Teachers' Work (the Committee) to look into teachers' work and related issues in Hong Kong. The Committee presented its interim report to the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) in August 2006, and the Final Report in December 2006. The Final Report identified the sources and factors affecting teachers' workload and stress and put forth 18 recommendations to meet the identified critical needs in the following areas -

- (a) policy initiatives;
- (b) school accountability system;
- (c) teaching staff establishment and stability of the workforce;
- (d) enhanced administrative support;
- (e) school leadership;
- (f) student diversity;
- (g) stress management and healthy workforce;

- (h) teachers continuing professional development; and
- (i) professional image.

Deliberations of the Panel

7. The proposals to introduce and enhance the rates of the CEG were discussed by the Panel at its meetings on 31 October 2000 and 19 November 2001 respectively. The Panel convened a special meeting on 26 January 2006 to discuss the Administration's proposal to provide a special provision of the CEG for government and subvented schools for three years to further relieve teachers' workload. The areas of concern raised by members about the CEG in relation to teachers' work are set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

Accountability for use of the CEG

8. While supporting the disbursement of the CEG to schools to hire additional personnel to relieve teachers' work, members were concerned about the availability of mechanism to ensure the use of the fund for the designated purpose.

9. The Administration explained that while schools were allowed to deploy flexibly the allocated resources under the spirit of school-based management, they were required to put up detailed proposals on the use of the funds and ensure that there would not be any conflict of interest. Schools should incorporate the proposed usage in their annual school plans for endorsement by the school management committees. In addition, schools were required to report to parents annually the progress of implementing the plans, and to submit to the EMB an annual report covering, among other things, an evaluation of the achievement against the performance targets. The EMB would work in partnership with schools in developing and implementing the school plans.

Effectiveness of the CEG

10. Members noted that 2 225 full-time and 2 806 part-time school personnel had been employed through the CEG in the 2000-2001 school year. They sought information on their qualifications and experience and how they had helped relieve teachers' workload.

11. The Administration pointed out that the additional full-time and part-time teachers employed under the CEG should follow the standard requirements. Teaching assistants were also employed to assist teachers in teaching and learning activities, as well as other non-teaching duties and

activities such as school administrative work. These staff could offer a wide variety of teaching and supporting services for schools, teachers and students, including language training, student counseling, information technology application and other non-teaching work.

12. Members also raised concern about the effectiveness of the CEG in assisting schools in providing quality education to students with the relief of teachers' heavy workload.

13. The Administration responded that the CEG enabled schools to hire additional staff or outside services to relieve teachers' workload so that they could focus more on curriculum development, improving students' language proficiency, and catering for students' diverse needs, including devoting more time to interact with students and parents. Schools were given the flexibility to make effective use of the resources according to their needs and circumstances.

Special provision

14. Members expressed support for adding a special provision of the CEG for government and subvented schools for a period of three years from the 2005-2006 school year to the 2007-2008 school year. They sought information on the mechanism to ensure the use of the special provision to employ additional staff to relieve the workload of teachers instead of funding new activities to further increase their workload.

15. The Administration explained that in order to monitor the expenditure of the special provision of the CEG, schools were required to submit their proposals to the EMB for scrutiny. Schools were also required to consult their teachers on the use of the CEG and indicate the consultation process in the submissions. EMB would vet the proposals to ensure the use of the allocation mainly to employ additional teachers and supporting staff to relieve teachers' workload. Schools could also use the CEG to hire professional services which would help reduce teachers' workload. The EMB would monitor the use of the allocation on an on-going basis.

Review on special provision of the CEG

16. Noting that the special provision would last three years only, members urged the Administration to consider providing the provision on a recurrent basis.

17. The Administration pointed out that the purpose of the CEG was to relieve teachers' workload and enhance student learning in schools. In view of the favourable feedback from schools and teachers, the Administration had undertaken to continue the special provision of the CEG for the 2005-2006 to

the 2007-2008 school years. The Administration would monitor and evaluate the popularity and effectiveness of the CEG during the period to decide the way forward. The Administration informed members that in a recent survey, some 28% of teachers had indicated that the provision of the CEG had increased the workload of teachers in schools. The Administration would review the special provision of the CEG before the end of the 2007-2008 school year. Subject to the review results and the availability of resources, the Administration would consider whether the special provision should become recurrent.

Long-term measures to relieve teachers' workload

18. Members considered that while the special provision of the CEG could relieve teachers' workload for a short period of time, the longer term solutions were to increase the staff establishment in schools, improve the teacher-to-student ratio, and implement small class teaching.

19. The Administration responded that it reviewed the manpower needs of schools on an on-going basis and would continue to encourage schools to make cost-effective use of manpower resources. In recent years, the teacher-to-student ratios in primary schools and secondary schools had improved from 1:22 to 1:19 and 1:19 to 1:18 respectively.

20. The Administration further advised that while it supported small class teaching, successful implementation of small class teaching depended on the adoption of appropriate teaching strategies and pedagogies and hasty implementation might create unnecessary workload and put extra pressure on teachers. Moreover, many principals and teachers considered it more important to increase staff establishment and reduce the teaching load of teachers than to implement small class teaching insofar as relieving teachers' workload was concerned.

Relevant papers

21. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in the **Appendix**.

Relevant papers on the workload of teachers

Meeting	Date of meeting	Agenda/Paper/Minutes
Legislative Council	5.4.2000	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 32 - 33 (Question)
Finance Committee	17.11.2000	FCR(2000-01)43
Panel on Education	19.11.2001 (Item V)	Minutes Agenda
Finance Committee	7.12.2001	FCR(2001-02)45
Panel on Education	17.3.2003 (Item VI)	Minutes Agenda
Finance Committee	30.5.2003	FCR(2003-04)13
Panel on Education	21.6.2004 (Item VI)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	20.10.2005 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda
Legislative Council	7.12.2005	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 76 - 78 (Question)
Legislative Council	18.1.2006	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 94 - 179 (Motion)
Panel on Education	26.1.2006 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda
Finance Committee	17.2.2006	FCR(2005-06)42
Legislative Council	22.3.2006	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 24 - 26 (Question)
Legislative Council	17.5.2006	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 64 - 68 (Question)