For discussion on 11 June 2007

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Report on the implementation of the
School Development and Accountability and the Planning for Second Cycle

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I. Preamble

This paper reports on the implementation of the first cycle of the School Development and Accountability (SDA) framework (2003/08 school year) and proposes the planning parameters for its second cycle of implementation to commence with effect from the 2008/09 school year.

II. Background

2. A Quality Assurance (QA) framework based on the aims of Hong Kong school education and agreed performance indicators was introduced in 1997. Under that framework, Quality Assurance inspections (QAI)[1] were conducted for 313 schools in the 6 years of implementation up to 2002/03.

3. While QAIs had provided schools with valuable information on their level of performance, the process-focused mode of inspection was considered too resource-demanding. Since 2003, the present SDA framework has sought to ensure sustained school improvement through a combination of internal School Self Evaluation (SSE) by schools and External School Review (ESR) by the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB). The emphasis changed from a process-focused inspection and an externally driven agenda to one that put the school's own self-evaluation as the starting point for the review of its performance, to be validated by the ESR.

4. The SDA framework in its first cycle of implementation aims to :

   (a) promote the implementation of a systematic and vigorous self-evaluation mechanism in schools;

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[1] Compared with the subject-based inspections, QAI adopts a more holistic approach to school inspection to support school improvement and ensure accountability for the quality of school education.

(b)   benefit schools through ESR by complementing their internal evaluation and performance assessment;

(c)   promote the use of readily accessible data on performance measures and evidence as a basis for robust SSE to facilitate professional capacity building;

(d)   create a greater sense of openness, transparency and accountability within schools and provide the system and the public with information on school performance; and

(e)   focus the school community on improved learning outcomes.

III.   Progress of implementation

5.   By the end of the 2006/07 school year, ESR will have been conducted for 622 schools, with the remaining some 100 schools to be covered in the 2007/08 school year. Including those having undergone QAI, all schools in the public sector under normal circumstances will have undergone a QAI or an ESR between 1997/98 to 2007/08.

6.   At the outset, it was anticipated the SDA framework would be developmental and experiential.   Hence, the Quality Assurance Division (QAD) has put in place a feedback loop with a view to making self-improvement and addressing schools' needs and concerns.

7.   In July 2005, significant modifications were made to the implementation of the SDA when there were signs of over-preparation by some schools for SSE and ESR and diversion from a self-reflecting process to a reporting process.   The key changes made included :

(a)   no ratings by schools and the ESR teams on the 14 Performance Indicator (PI) areas to avoid placing too much emphasis on ratings in the evaluation process and to focus the key stakeholders in meaningful and professional discussion on school improvement;

(b)   cease uploading ESR reports to EMB's website for public access having regard to schools' concern that ESR reports might be selectively reported in the media to the detriment of the schools' reputation;

(c)   confining the number of school documents prepared for ESR to three, i.e., School Self-Assessment (SSA) Report on the 14 PI areas, Key Performance Measures (KPM) and Stakeholder Survey (SHS) findings, although the ESR teams do make reference to other documentation routinely available; and

(d)   as a general yardstick, schools' SSA report should not exceed 20 pages to reduce teachers' workload.

8.   The ESR arrangements were further streamlined from 2006/07 onwards by refining the KPM, taking into account the evaluative power and ease of collection of information. In addition, pre-ESR briefings for teaching staff were conducted to clarify issues and remind schools to avoid over-preparation for ESR. To enhance systematic data management for SSE, the E-platform for SDA (ESDA), an online data collection tool, was introduced in October 2005. It facilitates schools in conducting SHS and school-based questionnaires to gauge their own development needs, helps them submit KPM and SHS data online and thereby streamline the SDA process. In October 2006, the "Online Interactive Resource on Enhancing School Improvement through SSE and ESR" was launched to support the implementation of SDA and to disseminate good practices of SSE.

9.   Schools generally welcome the modification of implementation requirements and the various support measures introduced for SSE and ESR. Teachers' concern about workload has been addressed to a large extent. A Post-ESR Questionnaire[2] was issued to all teachers who have gone through ESR during the 2003/04 to 2006/07 school years. Data collected show that teachers in general were satisfied with the ESR process and considered it open and transparent.

IV. Major achievements and observations of the SDA

10.   Through ESR, EMB has built up a body of information and shared it with the wider community through the publication of the annual reports[3] which summarise the

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[2] The Post-ESR Questionnaire, administered to teachers upon their receipt of the draft ESR report, is a reliable source of data on teachers' feedback on the ESR process collected from around **18,000 respondents** who have experienced ESR in the 2003/04 to 2006/07 school years.

[3] Hitherto, the annual reports for 2003/04 and 2004/05 have been published. The compilation of the report for 2005/06 has been completed and will be issued shortly. In these reports, observations on the level of performance of schools in the four domains of "Management and Organization", "Learning and Teaching", "Student Support and School Ethos" and "Student Performance" are depicted.

inspection findings.   Major observations include -

(a)   Giving impetus to nurturing the culture of SSE

- On the whole, SSE mechanisms have been established for self-critical examination of school practices.   SDA has played a significant role in helping schools to develop a more reflective culture through the conduct of rigorous and systematic SSE.   ESR has acted as a catalyst for continuous school improvement.   Schools generally agree that the ESR teams act as "critical friends" to help them identify their achievement and reflect on areas for improvement so as to establish development goals and prioritize their work.

(b)   Promoting the use of data and evidence as a basis for SSE

From our observations, various evaluation tools provided by EMB are being widely used by schools in their SSE.   Some examples are set out below.

- All schools used the PIs to evaluate, in qualitative terms, school performance in four domains, i.e. Management & Organisation, Learning & Teaching, Student Support & School Ethos and Student Performance.   The PIs have become a common platform for the school sector in evaluating school performance.
- A KPM data system providing objective and quantitative data at school level generates benchmark information with which schools can gauge their progress against their own previous performance and in comparison with other schools in the territory.
- Schools Value Added Information System (SVAIS) provides territory-wide and school level information on the value added to academic performance. Schools now use the data regularly in evaluating learning and teaching effectiveness.
- The Assessment Program for Affective and Social Outcomes (APASO) helps schools obtain objective and quantitative data on non-academic aspects of student development, such as emotional well-being, interpersonal relationship and self-image.   Schools are actively using it to evaluate measures for student support.
- Stakeholder Survey (SHS) questionnaires are in place to assist schools in collecting views of parents, students, teachers.   The quantitative data include information on effective teaching strategies, home-school partnership and school culture.

- An E-platform for School Development and Accountability (ESDA) was launched in October 2005 to facilitate schools to submit KPM data to EMB and obtain KPM reference data from EMB. It is a one-stop platform to allow schools to collect and manage data in support of SSE and in preparation for ESR and is intended to enhance effectiveness, whist reducing teachers' workload.

Based on the findings of the Post-ESR Questionnaire, the majority of the teachers agreed that KPM and the SHS are helpful for SSE. As observed during ESR, a self-evaluation culture guided by school data is being steadily built up in schools. Schools have increasingly made the transition from an 'impressionistic' to an 'evidence-based' approach in evaluating school performance.

(c) Creating a greater sense of openness and transparency within schools

The inclusion of a range of stakeholders (including teachers, parents and students) in the SSE process has encouraged schools to view their practices from different perspectives. Stakeholders have access to information on school performance. Teachers are encouraged to participate in the formulation of plans and to address areas of concern. Schools now attach greater importance to school-based management and participatory decision making, and seek ways for school improvement priorities to be shared and owned by all staff. Moreover, there is evidence that classroom teaching is now more open to evaluation by fellow teachers, resulting in a greater sense of professional trust and critique. School principals are also becoming more open to seeking feedback from staff about their leadership and management.

(d) Inducing positive impact on learning and teaching

Student learning outcome is a key focus for SDA. Classroom teaching has become more engaging and student-centered. While it cannot be claimed that change in pedagogy is solely attributable to SSE/ESR, self-evaluation has played a part in helping teachers to be more open with their colleagues. Practices such as peer observation and collaborative lesson planning have been given greater impetus, with ESR recommendations helping school leaders to put in place the structural support to create time and opportunities for reflection and dialogue, such as flexible timetabling and "structured time for collaborative lesson planning".

11.   A study has been undertaken on the SHS data gathered by the 107,800 questionnaires completed by students, teachers and parents in the 2003/04 & 2004/05

school years. This source of information covered fourteen aspects of school life including professional leadership, curriculum, student learning and performance assessment. This study examined how the perceptions of stakeholders compared with the judgments made by inspectors during ESR. It was observed that there was considerable correlation between the views of internal stakeholders of schools and the more objective external judgment of inspectors which suggested that the ESR does generally reflect stakeholders' opinion to a significant degree.

12.   Between 2003/04 and 2006/07, some 330 principals and senior teachers received training as external reviewers and took part in some 300 external school reviews. This has been an important capacity building strategy as school leaders can contribute their practising perspective to the ESR process as well as benchmark their own practice through participation in ESR for other schools.

V.   Impact Study on the ESR

13.   Professor John MacBeath (Cambridge University) has been invited to conduct an "Impact Study on the Effectiveness of External School Review in Enhancing School Improvement through School Self-evaluation in Hong Kong" (IS) since 2004 to evaluate the implementation of the first cycle of ESR, drawing on international experience and findings collected through case studies, focus group meetings and post-ESR questionnaires.   The Phase II report, published in August 2006, was based on data collected from ESR conducted in 2003/04 (99 schools) and 2004/05 (139 schools). Phase III of the project, which analyses data from 2005/06, is in progress.   A brief summary of the study provided by Prof John MacBeath is at **Annex.**

14.   Following the completion of Phases I and II of the IS, the study has made the following recommendations:

(a)   progressively embed SSE at classroom level and as a way of life, rather than as an 'extra';

(b)   continue professional development at all levels both in school and for external reviewers and ESR teams;

(c)   continue to refine ESR procedures and protocols to prevent over-preparation and to address the concerns of teachers; and

(d)   spread good practices to provide compelling evidence that SSE has direct and tangible impact on teachers and students.

VI.   Planning for the second cycle

15.   Upon the near completion of the 1st cycle of ESR and in preparation for the 2nd cycle, it is now opportune to review the implementation of the SDA framework, building on the achievements and experience gained.   The implementation arrangements of the second cycle of SDA are being refined for completion in December 2007 with regard to the following guiding principles -

(a)   the process will continue to be improvement oriented, working under the existing SDA framework;

(b)   focus of the ESR for individual schools will make reference to the findings of the first ESR Report.   ESR for the second cycle should benefit from the experience of the first cycle of implementation;

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(c)   embedding SSE in ongoing school practice for strategic school planning;

(d)   strengthening SSE and ESR as integral parts of the school improvement process; and

(e)   streamlining the SDA process to focus on self reflection and to further reduce teachers' workload.

16.   On the basis of the existing SDA framework, improvements are being considered in the following areas -

Accountability issues
17.   The SDA framework places emphasis on empowering schools to strengthen their SSE for improvement, while enhancing school accountability.   While uploading of the ESR reports for the 1st cycle of ESR has been withheld since July 2005 due to schools' anxiety about publication of ESR findings, we will review this practice in our planning for the 2nd cycle in the context of enhancing school accountability.   In tandem, we will consider asking schools to conduct a more comprehensive review of their 3-year

development plans, similar to the school self assessment prior to ESR, with a view to informing their next cycle of school development. Suitably updated, the school self assessment could be a reference for ESR, and this arrangement may help to dilute the perception that school self assessment is an "extra" to meet the requirement for ESR.

Refinement of PIs, KPM and SHS

18.	Many factors of school performances are inter-related. Based on the data collected from ESR in its first cycle of implementation and the views of frontline school personnel, we have started to work on a simplified PI framework with a view to making it more effective and user-friendly in driving continuous school improvement. Efforts are being made to revise the PIs, KPM and SHS based on the principles of simplification, refinement and reorganization. This refinement exercise aims to support a more focused and holistic evaluation of school performance.

19.	The proposed PI framework will comprise the existing 4 domains of school performance, with the PI areas to be reduced from 14 to 8, and performance indicators from 29 to 23. Focus questions will be introduced for each PI to facilitate schools' collection of evidence and evaluation during SSE. A balanced set of KPM built on the refined PI framework will be provided to support the data-driven approach to SSE, and KPM items will be retained only if they are found to be useful and easy to collect. The stakeholder surveys for different clienteles will be re-organised to correspond more closely to the revised PI framework and for more effective interpretation of data by schools. A pilot study is being conducted to field test the PIs and tools in the context of school self-evaluation in 8 schools. The contents of the PIs and tools will be further refined subject to the comments and suggestions of the pilot schools.

ESR in a more focused and school specific manner

20.	Both EMB and schools have collected essential data on school performance to enable the second cycle of ESR to be conducted in a more focused and school specific manner. While the ESR will continue its validation function on SSE, focus will be also given to track the progress of the schools' action plan on key issues identified for improvement in the previous ESR reports or on specific areas of concern as identified in their school plans. Schools might request for a more in-depth ESR on a particular area in which they wish to make improvement. On the above basis, it is estimated that the number of days the ESR teams will stay in the schools in the 2nd cycle would be from 3 to 5 days. According to the above proposed parameters, the plan is to conduct the next cycle of ESR within a 6-year period to cover some 1100 schools in the public sector.

Accommodating divergent views of the Sector

21.   The embedding of SSE in the ongoing thinking and practice of classroom teachers, continuing anxiety over ESR particularly in the context of declining enrolment, the uploading of the ESR reports and over-preparation are some key issues to be tackled. The modifications already made and work underway should go some way to meet these concerns.   We will seek to address the problems by slimming down the requirement for documents, streamlining of procedures such as shortening the lead time between notification of ESR and the actual events, and strengthening the reciprocity between SSE and ESR.   Subject to further feedback to be collected through focus group discussions with stakeholders, including school sponsoring bodies and school councils, we will advise schools in the first quarter of 2008 of the arrangements for the 2nd cycle which will commence in the 2008/09 school year.

VII. Advice sought

22.   Members are asked to note the above.

Education and Manpower Bureau
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THE IMPACT OF SSE AND ESR
A story of continuous improvement

The Impact Study on the Effectiveness of External School Review in Enhancing School Improvement in Hong Kong (the Impact Study), is an independent study conducted by Professor John MacBeath of the University of Cambridge to evaluate the implementation of the School Development and Accountability (SDA) framework. Phases I to III of the Impact Study cover the implementation of the 1st cycle of ESR, and the objectives of each of the three phases are similar, only drawing on different cohorts of ESR schools. Phase III, in addition, gauges the evaluation of ESR implementation after modifications have been made to the procedures and requirements.

2. The evaluation of implementation of the SDA framework has been extensive and intensive, and indeed one of the most thorough and comprehensive ever undertaken by any government body. The sources of data include:

- questionnaires to teachers, principals and school improvement teams (SITs) in approximately 622 ESR schools in 2003/04 to 2006/07, with over 30,100 teachers and 203 SITs, together with open-ended written comments;
- 17 cross-school interviews with key stakeholder groups;
- in-depth case studies in 16 schools involving principals, teachers, parents and students;
- observations of the process of ESR in 20 schools; and
- feedback from ESR teams.

3. Summary reports of Phases I and II of the Impact Study have been uploaded to the EMB's website for public access, and seminars have been conducted by Professor MacBeath to brief school personnel on the major findings. For schools in Phase I SSE/ESR presented a new kind of challenge and teachers expressed concerns over workload, pressure and classroom observation. Nonetheless, the evidence showed that the SDA framework was essentially sound, moving in the right direction and amenable to further improvement. There was evidence of a deepening understanding of the purposes of ESR and SSE, and increasing use of data and evidence as a basis for more systematic and rigorous SSE. The findings both clearly affirmed the appropriateness

of the twin approach of SSE/ESR, and identified challenges remaining as to the strengthening and embedding of SSE as an integral part of school and classroom life.

4. Phase II findings reveal increasing signs of embedding SSE in daily school practice, notably in the positive impact on learning and teaching through making classroom teaching more engaging and student-centred, and open to critical appraisal by other teaching staff. Evidence also highlights the growing need for differential support to schools. Inevitably schools are at different points in their development in terms of confidence in SSE, their response to external monitoring and their trajectories of improvement. Experiences reported from schools increasingly testify to the importance of school leaders who are knowledgeable and confident in SSE so as to guide the embedding of change within a self-evaluation and improvement framework. The role of SITs in supporting and guiding the process also emerges as a key issue but, as with leadership, reveals disparities of approach from school to school.

5. Based on ongoing review, EMB has been taking steps to respond to school's concerns, to refine procedures to address workload issues, to reduce the weight of documentation and encourage schools to avoid over-preparation for ESR. This is being achieved in part by advice and guidance for senior school leaders and SITs while also enhancing training and professional development of inspectors, external reviewers, and school personnel on aspects of SSE and ESR.

6. Phase III findings, which build on views and experiences scrutinized in the previous two phases, continue to tell a story about ways in which SSE/ESR has proved to be a positive and affirming process for some schools while not so for others. While significant progress has been made in some schools in embedding SSE for sustainable school improvement, there are wide variations across schools, and at system level the challenges clearly remain. By way of concluding the Impact Study, the more salient observations are presented below.

7. The move from a quality assurance or inspection to school self-evaluation complemented by external review has, in every country where it has taken place, resulted in changes which require adjustment by both schools and the system. It takes time to change mind sets and working habits as self-evaluation requires a shift from dependency to ownership of the process by school leaders, teachers and students, and at the same time inspectors and other school supporters. It requires a different way of thinking about practice. It needs teacher-friendly tools, an ability to use them

effectively and the self-confidence to open up practice to colleagues and students. As we know from a substantive body of research, three to four years is a short compass in which to effect systemic change. What the Quality Assurance Division (QAD) has achieved in that time is remarkable but it will take an equal amount of time in the future to fully embed self-evaluation in hearts and minds and in day-to-day classroom practice.

8. SSE/ESR has had a significant impact on practice but one that clearly varies from school to school, in part related to a school's stage of development and expertise. The process of change is wave like and moves from early adopters to late adopters over a sustained period. In implementing SSE/ESR with four cohorts over a four-year period, QAD did three things:

(1) it undertook the most thorough and ambitious study (the Impact Study on ESR) of systemic change of any world country;

(2) it planted the seeds of change and captured the enthusiasm of the early adopters and deployed them as ambassadors;

(3) it demonstrated an ability to respond to the voices of the profession and external consultancy.

9. Subsequent changes that were implemented were not simply to allay the anxiety and pressure on teachers (important though that was) but to make the system more incisive, more evidence-based and more focused on what really matters.

10. It is clear that schools, in general, have responded well. The 2006/07 administration of the post-ESR questionnaire to schools showed the extent to which school staffs were now significantly more positive than in the past. For example, on four of the key questions, teachers' consensus (agree/strongly agree) has shown a marked improvement:

- *I think that ESR has given an accurate judgment on the effectiveness of our self-evaluation process* - from 64.3% in 2003/04 to 70.7% in 2006/07
- *The variety of activities observed by the ESR team was adequate* - from 60.4% to 73.5%
- *ESR accurately identified the strengths of our school and the areas for improvement* 57.8% to 73.8%
- *The entire ESR process was open and transparent* - from 58.8% to 68.1%

11.   The question that received least positive comment was "*ESR did not exert much pressure on me*."   But even here there was a significant improvement – from 22.7% in 2003/04 to 31.2% in 2006/07.   A further 28.l% was in the 'neutral' category, neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

12.   School Improvement Teams (SITs), most involved in the process, and an important mechanism for taking SSE forward, report in very positive terms about the impact of SSE/ESR.   Their individual responses in 2006/07 were overwhelmingly positive as to the impact of SSE/ESR.   There was above 90% agreement from primary, special and secondary schools on the following statements:

- *ESR has been followed by a continuing drive for improvement*
- *Teachers work together to share in the evaluation of learning and teaching*
- *Looking back, the experience of school SSE and ESR has had a positive impact on the school*

13.   ESR teams are widely seen as professional and friendly.   The statement "*The external reviewers were professional in their work.*" was agreed to by 69.2% of school staff in 2003/04 and by 78.6% staff in 2006/07.   Open-ended-comments from school staff show that ESR teams are regarded as diligent and insightful. While some team members come in for criticism, this is particularly in relation to less experienced external school reviewers. Selection, monitoring and professional development remain an ongoing priority.

14.   In sum, the data from questionnaires, case studies, observation and focus groups reveal a generally positive response from schools, with a marked increase in perceived benefit since the inception of SSE/ESR in 2003/04.   A range of tangible benefits include.

- Raising the level of awareness among a school staff as to what makes a good school, and encouraging teachers to look for evidence to support that judgment;

- Improving school planning through critical reflection within the school, and through feedback and advice from ESR;

- Greater openness by school principals to being evaluated by their staff;

- A welcome trend for teachers to share more, to learn more from one another and to collaborate in lesson planning;

- A growing acceptance by teachers of students as evaluators of the quality of teaching and the quality of their schools; and

- A noticeable trend to more sharing leadership through more responsibility for middle leaders and school improvement teams.

15.   However, it has to be pointed out that while SSE/ESA has played its part,   it cannot be claimed that such benefit is solely attributable to it since efforts of curriculum developers and school support professionals are occurring in parallel.

16.   Two key issues remain.

- the embedding of SSE in the ongoing thinking and practice of classroom teachers; and
- continuing anxiety and apprehension over impending visits of ESR teams.

17.   It is safe to say that nowhere in the world has either of these issues been resolved. SSE has neither been a central feature of teachers' repertoire nor integral to their pre-service training, while the legacy of being 'inspected' is greeted with equanimity only by the most self-confident of professionals.   The role of leadership is critical, both in terms of building professional capacity and allaying anxiety and pressure.   These two go hand in hand.   Sharing leadership and planning for succession are keys to embedding and sustainability, supporting the use of tools and evidence on a more systematic basis.   There remains a job still to be done by school leadership, by EMB, by higher education critical friends who support schools, and by a continuing revisiting of SSE/ESR by QAD itself.

A continuing story of improvement

18.   The story of improvement is revealed not only through the quantitative findings of the Impact Study but through extensive consultation with School Sponsoring Bodies, School Management Committees, School Improvement Teams, parents as well as school students and teachers.

19.   With the evidence from the Impact Study and ESR findings, EMB is working on a number of progressive changes to make way for the next cycle of ESR. Performance Indicators (PIs) are being revised and reduced in number, producing a more manageable and coherent articulation of the PI framework. Together with the revised Key Performance Measures (KPM), this has led to a more focused evaluation of school performance and reduced data collection by school staff.   Reducing demands on documentation and earlier and more effective briefings prior to ESR have also played a key role.

20.   In addition to ongoing modification of procedures, PIs/ KPMs and slimming down of requirements for documentation, two key levers of improvement are worthy of mention.

Learning from the leading edge

21.   At the leading edge there are now schools in Hong Kong that are as advanced in self- evaluation as anywhere in the world. Yet, at a system level clearly the challenge remains.   Until all schools have grasped the potential of embedding SSE in daily school practice, with the process of Planning, Implementation and Evaluation (P-I-E) incorporated at different levels of school operations, external school review will continue to raise anxiety and its essential purposes will be compromised by the schools' own unpreparedness and lack of confidence.   This implies the need for a medium and long term strategy on the part of EMB to continue to build on the leading edge schools and the most effective of school leaders through a network system to disseminate innovative and breakthrough practices.   Ways have also to be found to support teachers in attempts to embed SSE as a way of professional life and in enhancing their response to, and welcome for, external school review.

A more focused approach

22.   The general advice from ongoing review and feedback, including the Impact Study, is to move to a more differentiated system for ESR, taking account of schools with well embedded SSE as against those still in need of greater support or intervention. The precise form of this is currently under review. Clearly, because of the work already done and the higher quality evidence base, schools are better placed to know their own needs and point to the most effective ways in which ESR can provide expert

advice, support and challenge.

23.   There is clearly still some way to travel but significant inroads have been made and there is now a strong foundation on which to build.   In the next few years as new recruits enter the school system, new opportunities will arise to revitalize the school community bringing a strengthened commitment to self-evaluation through training, mentoring and preparation for school leaders increasingly conversant with shared leadership practices.

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