

For discussion
on 11 June 2007

LEGCO PANEL ON EDUCATION

Strengthening Support in Language Education at Primary and Pre-primary Levels

PURPOSE

This paper reports on the use of the \$500 million injection into the Language Fund and the progress in implementing professional development programmes to strengthen support in language education at primary and pre-primary levels.

BACKGROUND

2. In March 2005, the Finance Committee approved an injection of \$500 million into the Language Fund, \$300 million of which were allocated for the continued operation of the Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme for Language Teachers (PDIGS) to support the professional development of at least 10 000 serving secondary and primary school language teachers. The remaining \$200 million were injected to strengthen support in language education at primary and pre-primary levels.

3. At the meeting of the Panel on 9 May 2005, the Chairman requested the Administration to arrange for the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) to brief members on the use of the \$500 million injection and the progress in implementing professional development programmes to strengthen support in language education at pre-primary and primary levels.

PROGRESS

Professional Development Incentive Grant Scheme

4. In 2004, SCOLAR launched PDIGS to encourage serving language teachers to upgrade their professional qualifications in the subject that they teach¹. Under PDIGS, a participating teacher receives a cash grant up to a maximum of \$30,000 to meet 50% of the tuition fee upon successful completion of any approved programme for qualification upgrading. At first, \$225 million was allocated from the Language Fund to provide incentive grants for supporting at least 7,500 serving language teachers. With the injection of an additional \$300 million in March 2005, the total allocation for implementing PDIGS has been increased to \$525 million which can support at least 17,500 serving language teachers to pursue professional development.

¹ Starting from the 2004/05 school year, new language teachers are required to be holders of a Bachelor of Education degree majoring in the relevant language subject or both a first degree and a Postgraduate Diploma or Certificate in Education majoring in that language subject. Those who do not possess the specified qualifications are required to acquire them within three to five years after their entry into the profession.

5. As at the end of April 2007, 7,404 applications for grants from teachers had been approved and 244 applications were being processed. The total amount of fund committed was about \$210 million. 68.5% of the approved applications are from primary school teachers, 24.8% from secondary school teachers, and the remaining 6.7% from two special groups of students who are also eligible for grants under PDIGS² and teachers in special schools or through-train schools. Based on the 2003/04 and 2006/07 Teacher Surveys, we estimate that about 22,000 serving language teachers have been serving in the teaching profession since the 2003/04 school year or before, which is the basic eligibility criterion for grants under PDIGS. As such, there should be over 14,000 language teachers who are eligible to apply for grants under PDIGS but have not yet done so.

6. Since the launch of the PDIGS, there has been noticeable improvement in the overall qualification of serving language teachers. In the group of serving teachers who have been teaching language subjects since the 2003/04 school year or before, about 2,300 teachers have successfully attained the recommended professional qualifications between the 2003/04 and 2006/07 school years, thus increasing by 10%

² Other than teachers serving before the beginning of the 2004/05 school year, two special groups of full-time students may also apply for grants under PDIGS. They are: (i) Chinese or English-major students who have been admitted to full-time Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) / Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PCEd) programmes offered by local tertiary institutions in the 2003/04 academic year but do not hold a degree in the relevant language subject; and (ii) Full-time Bachelor of Education (BEd) students of local tertiary institutions who have chosen Chinese or English Language as their minor and are in their third or fourth year of study in the 2003/04 academic year.

the number of serving teachers in this group who possess the qualification both in subject knowledge and teacher training in the relevant language. If new language teachers who joined the profession and serving ones who left the profession since the 2004/05 school year are taken into account, the overall percentage of teachers possessing the qualifications has increased from 27% in 2003/04 to 43% in 2006/07.

Measures to Strengthen Support in Language Education at Primary and Pre-primary Levels

Overseas Immersion Programmes for Primary School English Teachers

7. Currently, all student teachers of the English Language subject in local teacher education institutes (TEIs) are required to participate in a compulsory overseas immersion programme lasting for eight to ten weeks before graduation. There is no similar training for serving English teachers who did not have the opportunity of participating in an immersion programme.

8. SCOLAR launched in the 2006/07 school year a pilot scheme to provide serving primary school English teachers with training in an authentic English language environment overseas. The main purposes of the scheme are to introduce participants to innovative learning and teaching methods, materials and curricular activities in English as a second language (ESL), deepen their knowledge of the

English language and understanding of the culture of English-speaking countries, and build up their confidence in using English.

9. Under the pilot scheme, six overseas immersion tours to Australia or Canada were organized by local TEIs in collaboration with tertiary institutions overseas. SCOLAR sponsored each participant 85% of the fee of the immersion tour and the participants would pay for the remainder themselves (i.e. between \$8,625 to \$10,734 depending on the tour). Local primary schools were invited to nominate up to two English teachers to join one of the tours. Participating teachers were required to undertake to devise and implement an action plan to improve English teaching and/or curriculum development of the English Language subject in his or her school after returning from the tour. Teachers of government and aided schools participating in the scheme were granted paid study leave. The schools would also be reimbursed the cost of hiring supply teachers to take up the duties of the participating teachers during the immersion tour.

10. Each immersion tour included academic programmes offered by the host overseas institute, coupled with visits and placement in local primary schools, cultural visits and activities, and home-stay accommodation arrangement. The academic programmes included seminars and workshops on curriculum design, methods and strategies of ESL teaching and learning, teaching activities and materials development, teaching evaluation, and practice sessions on using reflective and enquiry-based teaching methods. Visits and placement in local primary

schools included class observation, team teaching or assisting in teaching, participation in curriculum and lesson planning, and organization of extra-curricular activities.

11. The pilot scheme was well received by schools and teachers. A total of 150 English teachers from over 100 primary schools had joined the scheme. According to the evaluation reports on the first two immersion tours, all respondents were satisfied with the programme and considered that the programme had enhanced their knowledge of English and teaching skills.

12. The pilot scheme costs \$8.8 million. In the light of the positive feedback from teachers, SCOLAR is considering a proposal to continue the immersion programme in the next four school years, as well as to provide follow-up school-based support to improve English teaching in schools based on the improvement plans devised by the participating teachers upon their return. If the proposal is endorsed by SCOLAR, \$60 million will be allocated from the Language Fund to implement it.

Overseas Immersion Programmes for Pre-primary Teachers

13. On a trial basis, SCOLAR also allocated \$1.7 million from the Language Fund to sponsor 20 serving kindergarten teachers to participate in an immersion programme in Canada. The main objectives are to improve teachers' English language proficiency, boost their self-confidence in using English, widen their horizon by introducing them

to innovative pedagogical skills in exposing young children to English as a second language, and provide them with an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the English-speaking culture. The structure of the programme is similar to that of the immersion tours for primary teachers outlined above. The overall feedback of participants is positive. Given the difference in qualification requirements, and hence the needs in professional development between pre-primary and primary school teachers, SCOLAR will further assess the cost-effectiveness of the immersion programmes for pre-primary teachers before suggesting the way forward.

Structured Support in English Education at Pre-primary Level

14. SCOLAR considers that the development of a child's mother tongue should take precedence over the acquisition of other languages at the early childhood stage. Nonetheless, early exposure to English has positive impact on young children's learning of the language at a later developmental stage provided that the teachers are proficient in English and competent in introducing the language to young children in an authentic English environment through enjoyable and stimulating means (e.g. through stories, games, songs and real-life experiences, etc.)

15. According to the findings of a survey of kindergartens and teachers carried out by SCOLAR in April 2006, the qualifications and language standards of pre-primary teachers are diverse. In parallel, to better understand the training needs of pre-primary teachers, SCOLAR

launched a research-based pilot support scheme in September 2005 in seven selected kindergartens. Under the scheme, a consultant team was formed to organise topical workshops on basic techniques of exposing children to English as a second language. It also provided on-site support and training to teachers of the selected kindergartens by conducting diagnostic class observations, offered assistance in preparing lesson plans based on each selected kindergarten's own programme and selection of learning and teaching materials to suit their pupils' needs and interest, and conducted class observation and providing feedback.

16. All seven selected kindergartens opined that after the pilot scheme, teachers' knowledge of English and confidence in conducting activities with children in English had been enhanced. Also, children were more attentive in lessons and able to better understand and follow simple instructions in English.

17. In the light of the success of the pilot scheme, SCOLAR has decided to set up a dedicated team on English Language education to provide structured support to English teachers at pre-primary level. The dedicated team comprises native English-speaking teachers and experienced teachers qualified in the English education at pre-primary or early-primary level. It is responsible for –

- (a) conducting topical workshops for kindergarten teachers on effective means to provide quality exposure of English to children. Topics to be covered include exposing young

learners to English through stories (including reading aloud, shared reading, and story-telling), games, songs and rhymes, real-life experiences, show-and-tell activities and drama. Other topics such as teaching of phonics will also be included;

- (b) working closely with kindergartens to identify areas requiring support, as well as developing a school-based English lesson year plan. The team will assist kindergartens in developing lesson plans, selecting and developing learning and teaching materials, applying skills acquired from the topical workshops. The team will visit kindergartens to observe classes, conduct demonstration and evaluation as appropriate; and
- (c) disseminating useful resources and experience to kindergartens.

18. SCOLAR has originally allocated about \$37 million from the Language Fund to support about 150 to 200 kindergartens in four years. In the light of positive feedback from kindergartens, SCOLAR is considering a proposal to extend the scope of support to about 500 kindergartens. If the proposal is finally endorsed by SCOLAR, the revised budget for providing support to kindergartens on English Language education will become \$85 million.

19. After assessing the effectiveness of the support team, SCOLAR will further fine-tune the longer-term support to English education at pre-primary level. We have to stress that the goal of the support measures is not to hone the English skills of pre-primary children. Rather, the criteria for our assessment are teachers' capability of exposing children to a quality English environment, teachers' confidence in using English in lessons, and children's interest in learning English.

Interface with Professional Upgrading under the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme

20. Under the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme, the Government will provide all kindergarten principals and teachers with financial support for further professional upgrading from the 2007/08 school year to the end of the 2011/12 school year. Serving principal and full-time teachers teaching the full curriculum of nursery, lower and upper classes in kindergartens in the 2007/08 school year and onwards are eligible for reimbursement of course fees of any approved Certificate in Early Childhood Education or Bachelor of Education Degree in Early Childhood Education courses. We will further examine how best to use the Language Fund to complement the overall professional upgrading of pre-primary teachers under the Voucher Scheme, including measures to enhance their language proficiencies.

WAY FORWARD

21. According to the results of the Territory-wide System Assessment and Hong Kong Attainment Test, primary students' proficiencies in Chinese and English have been improving steadily. Details of these tests and study results are set out at **Annex**.

22. Nevertheless, there is no complacency in strengthening support in language education at the primary and pre-primary levels. EMB and SCOLAR will continue to work closely with educators to identify further measures to strengthen support in this respect.

Education and Manpower Bureau
June 2007

(I) Examination Results**Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA)**

- TSA provides schools, school management and the Government information on pupils' competency in three key learning areas (i.e. English Language, Chinese Language and Mathematics) for the purpose of improving learning and teaching. It was first introduced at Primary 3 (P3) level in 2004, and extended to Primary 6 (P6) and Secondary 3 (S3) levels in 2005 and 2006 respectively.
- Percentages of pupils who have achieved basic competency in Chinese Language and English Language at P3 and P6 in TSA since 2004 are as follows –

Subject and Level		Percentage of pupils achieving Basic Competency		
		2004	2005	2006
Chinese Language (Listening, Reading and Writing)	P3	82.7	84.7	85.2
	P6	--	75.8	76.5
English Language (Listening, Reading and Writing)	P3	75.9	78.8	79.4
	P6	--	70.5	71.3

- The results show a steady improvement in pupils' competency. But we need at least the data of five years for a valid analysis of the trend in terms of performance.

Pre-Secondary One Hong Kong Attainment Test (Pre-S1 HKAT)

- The Pre-S1 HKAT is conducted in all secondary schools in July every year to assess the performance of pupils newly admitted to S1 in Chinese Language, English Language and Mathematics. The information helps facilitate schools' design of teaching strategy,

remedial teaching and support measures to cater for the needs of students. Some secondary schools also use the test as reference for streaming and group teaching purposes. It is a centrally-administered assessment conducted in secondary schools annually after the announcement of the Secondary School Place Allocation results.

- The average scores (in a scale of 0-100) of the Pre-S1 HKAT in Chinese Language and English Language since 2001 are as follows –

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Chinese Language	53.7	55.8	56.7	58.4	60.3	62.1
English Language	50.6	51.0	52.6	54.1	56.6	58.3