教育局
Education Bureau

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13 February 2008

Miss Odelia LEUNG
Clerk to Panel
Legislative Council
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road
Central, Hong Kong
(Fax No. 2509 0775)

Dear Miss Leung,

Third Strategy on IT in Education
Responses to Suggestions Raised at the Panel on Education
Special Meeting on 31 January 2008

I refer to your letter dated 1 February 2008 and provide our responses to the suggestions raised at the special meeting on 31 January 2008 below.

Information Technology Coordinators (ITCs)

There have been calls from the school sector for IT co-ordination support, some for a permanent post to take up the IT co-ordination responsibility. As explained in our supplementary information paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)959/07-08(01)), we consider that in the initial development stage, there may be a need for a staff in a school to assume the co-ordinating role of building up the most suitable IT infrastructure to support the learning programme, and support the principal in overseeing the integration of IT into learning and teaching activities. The co-ordinating work should diminish gradually in later stages as the infrastructure has been put in place and more teachers and subject panels take responsibility. Accordingly, school leaders will make

adjustments and use their resources flexibly to focus on their current priorities in IT in education. EDB will continue to disseminate models of good practice, and monitor any emerging needs arising from the implementation of the Third Strategy. The proposed central technical support team, which comprises seconded teachers experienced in implementing IT in education, to be set up by the Education Bureau should also lessen schools' burden on IT co-ordination in the course of implementing IT in education development plans.

It is suggested in your summary of views raised at the special meeting that the Operating Expenses Block Grant and the Capacity Enhancement Grant (CEG) are not intended to use for the employment of ITCs. We have to reiterate that in line with the spirit of school-based management, schools can use the balances of block grants flexibly according to their needs and priorities. As explained in the supplementary information paper, it is clearly stated in the ambit of CEG, as extracted below, that it is intended to cover the integration of information technology in teaching:

> "the basic provision of CEG in general provides the necessary funds to schools to relieve teachers' workload so that teachers will have enhanced capacity to concentrate on the following three critical tasks in the education reform -
> (i)   curriculum development, including the integration of information technology in teaching;
> (ii)   enhancing students' language proficiency; and
> (iii) coping with the diverse and special learning needs of students with varied abilities, ranging from the gifted ones to those with learning difficulties."

Regarding the suggestion of sharing an IT Co-ordinator among several schools, we welcome and facilitate schools' collaboration in pooling their resources to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of IT in education. The proposed central support team will sound out schools' interest in pooling their resources for such collaboration and provide necessary assistance to schools in establishing such a support network if schools are interested.

With regard to the IT technician, provision is available from the recurrent Composite IT Grant (CITG) to hire a technician or equivalent services to see to the day to day operation of IT infrastructure in schools. We recognized recently there is high turnover of these staff in schools owing to a high demand of such human resource in the market. To tackle this problem, we undertake to conduct a review of the ambit and amount of CITG by auditing schools' pattern of spending on IT-related items and assessing the market rates of these items, in particular the salary of IT technicians. Though we are not convinced that the creation of a permanent post can solve the problem as permanent post means rigidity

in the pay package, we will remain open-minded in addressing this issue with the result of the review.

Review of CITG

Notwithstanding that schools are able to utilize the various grants available to them to support integration of IT into education, we acknowledge that schools consider that IT related expenses should be covered by CITG. Therefore we undertake to conduct a review of the CITG as outlined above. The review will cover all government and aided schools, including special schools. We aim to revert to the Panel on Education on the outcome of the review in July 2008.

Central technical support team

The central technical support team will comprise about 30 seconded teachers drawn from the Information Technology Section of EDB and Centres of Excellence on IT in Education1. The support cycle usually will start with an IT audit of the hardware, software and IT capacity of school leaders and teachers by the team. Based on the audit result, they will assist the school management in drawing up a realistic IT development plan and recommend solutions to ensure that the IT system can support the development plan. After finalising the plan, the team will visit the school regularly to assist it in implementing the plan. Emphases will be placed on adoption of best practices in integrating IT in education by teachers. At the technical level, the team may be able to assist the school in improving the efficiency, reliability, and security of the IT system.

Depository of teaching modules

Like similar depositories in other jurisdictions, the proposed depository of curriculum-related teaching modules will consist of lesson plans with links to recommended digital resources for teachers' reference. The digital resources will include on-line open source materials and self-developed or acquired digital materials. We will only select open source materials hosted by websites that authorise or license (for example, through Creative Commons licences) users to use the materials for educational purposes free of charge.

Our primary consideration in developing the depository is the interest of students and teachers. We will actively involve teachers in

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[1] Centres of Excellence on IT in Education are schools which excel in using IT to enhance learning. Extra resources are given to these schools to create capacity for two or three teachers from these schools to engage in supporting other schools on IT in education.

developing the depository to ensure that the deliverables meet their needs. We welcome publishers' contribution to the depository and opportunities of cooperation with publishers for them to develop contents complementary with those in the depository. The Hong Kong Education City will play a facilitative role and build partnerships so that the depository is valuable to teachers and students.

Replacement and upgrading of hardware facilities

Given the rapid development in IT, we would, at appropriate time, review the need to replace and upgrade IT facilities in public sector schools, having regard to the financial implications and the progress of integration of IT in Education.   Under the Third Strategy, we will set aside $200 million for a one-off grant to replace and upgrade schools' IT facilities.   We firmly believe that good planning reduces the workload of school principals and teachers and maximises the impact of given resources.   To ensure that resources are used effectively, schools should prioritise their initiatives and critically examine the ways existing facilities are used and the genuine needs to acquire necessary IT facilities. In this connection, one of our focuses under the Third Strategy is to assist schools in formulating and implementing school-based IT in education plan.

Digital divide among students

As explained in the papers submitted to the Panel on 14 January and 31 January 2008, we will work with the Environmental Protection Department to provide students in need with recycled computers.   We will step up our communication effort through schools to ensure needy students can benefit from the scheme.   Students in receipt of the recycled computers will be provided with one year free Internet connection service. We will negotiate with Internet Service Providers to continue the service to the students at a concessionary rate after the initial year of free service.

We are fully aware of difficulties encountered by some families in accommodating a computer at home.   Many schools have already made arrangements to open up rooms with access to computers after school for those students who do not have a computer at home. Students can also have access to computers at community youth centres and public libraries.   As revealed in the finding of the household survey on the usage and penetration of information technology in Hong Kong conducted by the Census and Statistics Department from July to September 2007 as quoted in the supplementary information paper, 27.9% of those households which do not have a computer at home

indicated that "had access to a computer at other places" was one of the reasons for not having a computer at home.

Information literacy of parents

We are delighted with the strong support to our proposed action to raise parents' information literacy and assist them in guiding children to use IT at home. We agree to the views on involving teachers in activities to raise parents' information literacy and providing greater support to disadvantaged parents.

Use of IT in education for students with special educational needs

All students, including those with special educational needs, will benefit from the various measures to integrate IT into education to improve their learning outcomes. The review of CITG will cover special schools and identify any particular barriers to acquisition of assistive technologies for students with special educational needs.

Yours sincerely,

(Chris WARDLAW)
for Secretary for Education

c.c.   AA/SED