

For discussion on 29 February 2008

Legislative Council Panel on Education

**The School Development and Accountability Framework –
Planning for the Second Cycle of Implementation**

Purpose

This paper sets out the implementation plan for the second cycle of External School Review (ESR) for public sector schools.

Background

2. The School Development and Accountability (SDA) framework introduced in 2003 places emphasis on schools' self evaluation (SSE) as the school is the centre for improvement. SSE is complemented by ESR to give schools the benefit of a team of reviewers (including teachers/principals from other schools) with perspectives across schools, feedback and suggestions for improvement. The intended outcomes are that rich evidence on school performance is progressively available; there is feedback into schools' priority setting and external professional advice for schools adds value. In this way, schools will be enabled to focus on improved learning of all their students.

3. Systematic and rigorous SSE based on data and evidence is fundamental to genuine educational change and continuous school improvement. Post-ESR questionnaire results and the Impact Study on the Effectiveness of ESR in Enhancing School Improvement in Hong Kong (the Impact Study)¹ indicated that most schools which had undergone ESR considered it had helped promote continuous development and had helped schools devise future goals and development plans with clear priorities for action. More schools are using data and evidence for evaluation and a more reflective culture is being cultivated. ESR also gives impetus to positive change in teaching and learning by contributing feedback on the quality of teaching and learning in each school,

¹ The Impact Study is an independent study conducted by Professor John MacBeath of the University of Cambridge to evaluate the implementation of the SDA framework. It draws on field observations, case studies and teachers' response to a variety of post-ESR questionnaires.

curriculum planning and engagement of students in the process.

4. The Education Bureau (EDB) in LC Paper No. CB(2)2071/06-07(01) in June 2007 reported on the implementation of the first cycle of the SDA framework (2003/08 school year) and the proposed planning parameters for its second cycle of implementation to commence with effect from the 2008/09 school year.

5. While Members did not dispute the benefits of SSE and ESR, concern had been expressed about additional workload and pressure generated on teachers and whether ESR might compromise other reform initiatives. EDB had in place a planned consultation with the key stakeholders on how the proposed refinement for the second cycle of ESR would proceed. It undertook to ensure that planning for the second cycle would balance the interest of all stakeholders, including students, professional staff and parents.

Feedback on ESR and EDB Responses

6. The SDA framework at its outset was anticipated to be developmental and experiential. Hence, EDB has put in place a feedback loop with a view to making improvement to the processes and addressing schools' needs and concerns. EDB has been responsive and has progressively refined and streamlined the SDA process to address teachers' concerns over workload and stress related to SSE/ESR. In 2005, significant modifications were made to the implementation of the SDA in response to over-preparation by some schools and signs of unnecessary diversion of attention from a self-reflecting process to a reporting process. Longitudinal survey data from teachers and principals indicates that these modifications² helped the SSE/ESR process to focus on professional discussion on school level improvement as the first cycle proceeded.

7. To enhance systematic data management for SSE, the E-platform for SDA (ESDA), an online data collection tool, was introduced in November 2005. The ESR arrangements were further streamlined from 2006/07 onwards by refining the Key Performance Measures (KPM), taking into account the evaluative power and ease of collection of information of each of the measures. In addition, pre-ESR briefings for teaching staff of individual schools were

² The modifications included (i) no ratings by schools and the ESR teams on the 14 Performance Indicator (PI) Areas; (ii) cease uploading ESR reports to the EDB website for public access; (iii) 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 and Stakeholder Survey findings, and (iv) as a general yardstick, schools' SSA report should not exceed 20 pages to reduce teachers' workload.

conducted to clarify issues and remind schools to avoid over-preparation for ESR.

Consultations on the second cycle of ESR

8. Evaluation of the implementation of ESR has been conducted continuously, with feedback collected from questionnaires to teachers, principals and school improvement teams (SITs) hitherto in 635 ESR schools from 2003/04 to now with over 32,000 teachers and 203 SITs. Open-ended written comments were invited in addition to responses to specific questions.

9. The 2006/07 administration of the post-ESR questionnaires to schools showed the extent to which school staff members were significantly more positive than in the past. While there remained a concern about workload and pressure, the majority of respondents agreed that ESR had given an accurate judgement on the effectiveness of their self-evaluation mechanism, and had accurately identified the strengths of their school and the areas for improvement. SITs, as those most involved in the process, reported in very positive terms on the impact of SSE/ESR.

10. In sum, the data from questionnaires, case studies, observation and focus groups revealed 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 included encouraging teachers to look for evidence to support their judgment; improving school planning through critical reflection within the school and through feedback and advice from ESR; greater openness by school management 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; and a noticeable trend towards more sharing of leadership by devolving more responsibility to middle managers and SITs.

11. Against this background, further consultation sessions were arranged between October and December 2007 with the Advisory Group on SDA comprising principals, teachers, school supervisors and academics; external reviewers including principals and senior teachers; Hong Kong Subsidized Secondary Schools Council; Subsidized Primary Schools Council; Hong Kong Association of Heads of Secondary Schools; Union of Heads of Aided Primary Schools of Hong Kong; Association of Principals of Government Secondary School; Union of Government Primary School Headmasters and Headmistresses; Hong Kong Special Schools Council; Hong Kong Association of Sponsoring

Bodies of Schools and Committee on Home-School Cooperation.

Outcomes of the consultations

12. There is general acknowledgement of the value of the professional advice given through the ESR process and the impetus given to the schools' improvement strategies. Generally, stakeholders indicate support for the ESR to proceed into its second cycle of implementation, but secondary schools (including special schools) consider that ESR should be withheld in 2008/09 when they will be busy preparing and finalising planning for the new senior secondary academic structure and curriculum (NSS). Schools will be more ready for ESR in 2009/10 when the plan for NSS has been up and running.

13. The major stakeholders support the re-organisation of the Performance Indicators (PI) from 14 Areas to 8 Areas and the revision of the KPM and stakeholder surveys (SHS) to align with the refined PIs. They welcome the proposed arrangements by which schools undergoing ESR in the second cycle need not submit a separate School Self-assessment (SSA) Report, nor specially administer SHS and prepare KPM data for ESR. Schools only need to have the existing School Development Plans, Annual School Plans and School Reports ready for ESR. This will reinforce SSE as a natural process in the school development cycle and its focus on improvement.

14. The stakeholders consider that the second cycle of ESR should focus more on support and dissemination of good practice rather than assessment and evaluation, and hence should be followed up by post-ESR support. Besides, ESR should strengthen the acknowledgement of successes and achievements and ensure unique school context factors be explicitly taken into account in any judgment on performance.

15. Some consider that briefing sessions should be conducted for members of the School Management Committees (SMC)/Incorporated Management Committees (IMC) to enhance their understanding of the ESR objectives and process, and the use of SSE data and ESR findings for strategic school planning. Seminars should be conducted to fully brief teachers on the arrangements for the second cycle of implementation as soon as possible. There is suggestion that ESR and post-ESR support should be contracted out to external professional agencies in the long run.

16. It has also been suggested that EDB should strengthen follow up with schools on the recommendations of the first ESR report and support them for

school improvement, in lieu of rolling out the second cycle of ESR in order to reduce pressure on teachers and anxiety of schools about their relative performance level.

Planning for the second cycle

17. To ensure greater alignment with the work of schools and to address concern about workload, PI would be re-organised from 14 Areas to 8 Areas and KPM and SHS will be revised to support SSE. KPM and SHS data will be collected electronically when schools use such data for reviewing and formulating their School Development Plan which is usually a three-year planning cycle. EDB will continue to provide benchmarked KPM reference data as feedback to schools to assist their evaluation process. Embedding SSE with a sharp focus on teaching and learning is the prime concern for school improvement.

18. For the second cycle of ESR, schools need not submit an SSA report for ESR but only have their School Development Plans, Annual School Plans and School Reports which are already available. In recognition of the different stages of school development, performance and schools' sophistication of SSE, EDB will tailor ESR focuses to suit individual school needs. Building on the findings of the first cycle of implementation, ESR will be school-specific and focused, taking as its starting point the improvements suggested in the first cycle and the schools' stated priority areas for development. The focus of the ESR reports will reflect the objective accordingly.

19. In response to the concern of secondary schools (including special schools), EDB will not conduct ESR in secondary and special schools in the 2008/09 school year but will only start ESR in primary schools starting from the 2nd term of the 2008/9 school year. The second SDA cycle will take six years to cover all public sector schools between 2008/09 and 2013/14 (i.e. the cycle will be six years instead of 4 years). The timing for conducting ESR for individual schools will roughly sequence to the timetable of the first round of ESR.

20. ESR will continue to be improvement-oriented with a view to assisting schools to reflect on school development needs, building in a feedback loop on classroom observation and disseminating good practice. While in the longer term a higher degree of transparency might be appropriate, it is our intention, at this point in time, and consistent with the first ESR cycle, not to upload ESR reports to the EDB website and schools need not accord ratings to performance

areas. Schools will continue to be required to make the ESR report available to the SMC/IMC, teachers and parents for school level accountability, information and feedback for improvement.

21. Education reform at school and classroom level requires a judicious mix of expected changes and support for these changes to facilitate better learning and teaching. Alignment between ESR and post-ESR support will be strengthened and seminars to disseminate good practice and workshops will be conducted to support school personnel, including members of the SMC/IMC on SSE and ESR. Theme-based inspections will continue as needed to support school development in areas deemed important to maintain the momentum of education and curriculum reform.

Advice sought

22. Members' are requested to note the outcomes of consultation and comment on the planning for the second cycle of ESR.

Education Bureau
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