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20 September 2011

Ms Amy YU
Clerk to Education Panel
Legislative Council Building
Jackson Road, Central
Hong Kong

Dear Ms Yu,

**Legislative Council (LegCo) Panel on Education
“Voluntary Optimisation of Class Structure Scheme”**

At the LegCo Panel meetings on 8 November 2010 and 11 April 2011, Members discussed the implementation of the “Voluntary Optimisation of Class Structure Scheme” (the Scheme) to stabilise the overall development of secondary schools amid the steady and notable decline of student population. The Administration has been requested to provide:

- (i) the estimated number of Secondary One (S1) students who have to attend schools in other districts in the 2011/12 school year upon the implementation of the Scheme;
- (ii) a projection of the secondary student population up to 2030 and the expenditures incurred if class size is to be kept at 25 students; and
- (iii) calculations of the estimated cost of \$40 billion for implementing small class teaching (SCT).

Provision of public sector secondary school places is planned on a territory-wide basis. Given that the demand and supply of school places in individual districts may have year-on-year changes, it is an established practice for us to arrange, in consultation with the Secondary School Places

Allocation (SSPA) Committee, the netting of S1 places among school nets under the Restricted School Choices at the Central Allocation (CA) stage so as to ensure an adequate supply of school places and to provide parents with more school choices in each school net. Notwithstanding the implementation of the Scheme, the netting arrangement has been continued in accordance with the established principles and approaches. In brief, the SSPA System comprises two stages, namely, the Discretionary Places (DP) stage and the CA stage with Unrestricted and Restricted School Choices. Since applications during the DP stage and the CA stage with Unrestricted School Choices could be made to any school in other districts according to individual students' own preference, students who have been allocated a school place under these two stages are not considered to fall within the category of cross-district schooling. Besides, there are schools that admit students throughout the territory on a "no-choice-no-allocation" principle. As such, those students who have chosen and then been allocated to those schools in districts other than their own districts during the CA stage are also excluded. According to the afore-mentioned calculation basis, about 2,500 students, as similar to the prevailing trend, have been allocated to schools in other districts under the Restricted School Choices of the CA stage in the 2011 allocation cycle.

We have compiled projections of S1 students from the 2011/12 to 2016/17 school years by making reference to the updated population projections released by the Census and Statistics Department and taking into account the actual numbers of students at various levels at present and the latest demographic changes (including newly-arrived children from the Mainland). The projected figures are as follows:

School year	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Overall total	69 200	64 300	64 900	59 700	57 000	55 000	53 900

- Notes: (1) The figure of the 2010/11 school year is actual figure. Figures of other school years are projected figures.
- (2) The figures above cover students enrolled/to be enrolled in government, aided, caput, Direct Subsidy Scheme, private, English Schools Foundation and other international schools, but exclude special schools.
- (3) The above projections have taken into account a number of factors and assumptions. Amongst those assumptions, of particular relevance are those related to the newly-arrived children from the Mainland and babies born in Hong Kong to Mainland women. This is because the actual numbers of such children/babies who would arrive or settle in Hong Kong are difficult to predict accurately. Any deviations of the assumptions from the actual situation may render the projected figures different from the actual figures.

We cannot provide accurate projections of S1 students beyond the 2016/17 school year, which have to rely on more up-to-date population projections to be released by the Census and Statistics Department.

With regard to the feasibility of implementing SCT as raised by the school sector, we have made it clear at the meetings that SCT is, in essence, a teaching strategy and should not be treated as a relief measure to stabilise the development of secondary schools under notable student population decline. In fact, it has generally been accepted during our consultation with the school sector that the Scheme would serve to stabilise the overall situation in schools in the upcoming one to two years. When the situation stabilises and more accurate data on student population are available, we will be happy to continue to explore with the school sector appropriate measures to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in secondary schools. Hence, we have not conducted any cost estimation for implementing SCT in secondary schools. However, in order to alleviate the possible impact of the student population decline on public sector schools, we have conducted a scenario under the assumptions of maintaining the number of schools and classes at the current level and the enrolment of popular schools remaining stable. It is estimated that in the worst case scenario of student population drop, the number of students per class in the majority of public sector schools would roughly be reduced by half (i.e. dropping from the existing allocation number of 34 students per class to below 20 students per class). Based on the above assumptions and estimation and coupled with the fact that subvention to public sector schools (excluding schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme) are dispensed by class, the corresponding estimated unit cost for each student would likely be doubled.

For enquiries on the above issues, please contact the undersigned on 2892 6621.

Yours sincerely,



(Ms L B Ip)
for Secretary for Education