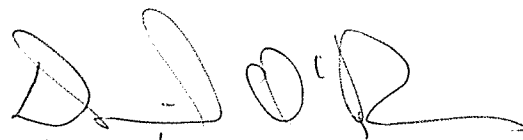


The Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce is encouraged by the government's policy to create some 5,000 additional international school places in the next few years. We share the deep concern expressed many times over the years by our colleagues in other chambers, and in our own submissions, about the need to provide education for international families.

The lack of school places has been one of the key factors discouraging international executives from bringing their families to Hong Kong; the other one, cited time and again, is the poor air quality. On both issues, we are concerned about the apparent lack of long term planning.

The Education Bureau's three-pronged approach of allocating vacant school premises, providing greenfield sites for the development of international schools, and facilitating *in situ* expansion of existing schools is an important temporary solution. What is required is a forecast of the demand for international education over medium-to-longer term, and clear steps toward addressing the shortcomings.

International education is a strong preference for many native Hong Kong parents, too. This results in local students taking places in schools intended to serve an international market. When local families prefer to send their children to expensive private schools, rather than to our public schools, we should ask ourselves why it is that we cannot provide the quality of education that parents want.


David O'Rear
Chief Economist

13 February, 2012