

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(4)651/12-13
(The minutes have been seen by the
Administration)

Ref : CB4/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Thursday, 7 February 2013, at 4:30 pm
in Conference Room 1 of the Legislative Council Complex

- Members present** : Dr Hon LAM Tai-fai, SBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon IP Kin-yuen (Deputy Chairman)
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, SBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
Hon Starry LEE Wai-king, JP
Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG Mei-fun, JP
Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-yee, GBS, JP
Hon Paul TSE Wai-chun, JP
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Hon WONG Yuk-man
Hon Claudia MO
Hon MA Fung-kwok, SBS, JP
Hon Charles Peter MOK
Dr Hon Kenneth CHAN Ka-lok
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Dr Hon Helena WONG Pik-wan
Hon Christopher CHUNG Shu-kun, BBS, MH, JP
- Member attending** : Hon Alice MAK Mei-kuen, JP
- Members absent** : Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon IP Kwok-him, GBS, JP

Public Officers : Agenda item IV
attending

Mr Eddie NG, SBS, JP
Secretary for Education

Dr K K CHAN
Deputy Secretary for Education (5)

Ms Jenny CHAN
Principal Assistant Secretary (Education Infrastructure)
Education Bureau

Mr Stephen YIP
Acting Principal Assistant Secretary (Curriculum
Development)
Education Bureau

Ms Condyl WAN
Acting Chief Curriculum Development Officer
(Information Technology in Education)
Education Bureau

Agenda item V

Mr Eddie NG, SBS, JP
Secretary for Education

Ms Jessie WONG
Deputy Secretary for Education (2)

Mrs Michelle WONG
Deputy Secretary for Education (4)

Ms IP Ling-bik
Principal Assistant Secretary
(Education Commission and Planning)
Education Bureau

Agenda item VI

Mr Kevin YEUNG
Under Secretary for Education

Mrs Michelle WONG
Deputy Secretary for Education (4)

Miss WU Po-ling
Principal Assistant Secretary (School Development)
Education Bureau

Clerk in attendance : Miss Polly YEUNG
Chief Council Secretary (4)4

Staff in attendance : Mr KWONG Kam-fai
Senior Council Secretary (4)4

Ms Esther CHEUNG
Council Secretary (4)4

Ms Sandy HAU
Legislative Assistant (4)3

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I. Confirmation of minutes

(LC Paper No. CB(4)378/12-13 -- Minutes of meeting on
11 December 2012

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2012 were confirmed.

II. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting

(LC Paper No. CB(4)322/12-13(01) -- Letter dated 14 January 2013
from Dr Hon Kenneth CHAN
addressed to the Secretary for
Education regarding the
Chinese name of Savannah
College of Art and Design

2. Members noted the above paper issued since the last meeting.

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III. Items for discussion at the next meeting

(Appendix I to LC Paper No. CB(4)380/12-13 -- List of outstanding items for discussion

Appendix II to LC Paper No. CB(4)380/12-13 -- List of follow-up actions)

3. The Chairman referred members to two letters, tabled at the meeting, from Dr Hon Kenneth CHAN and the Deputy Chairman respectively expressing their concerns about issues arising from the recent incidents of sites originally earmarked or used for education purpose being used or planned for other purposes. The Chairman suggested and members agreed that the issues relating to the existing policy on the use of land for education purposes should be discussed at the next regular meeting to be held on 11 March 2013.

4. The Chairman informed members that he had received at very short notice the Administration's proposal to discuss the item of "Student guidance service in primary schools" at the next regular meeting scheduled for 11 March 2013. Whilst he considered that the Administration should have responded to the Secretariat's request in a timely manner and put forward its proposed agenda item(s) at an earlier time, he would nevertheless agree to include the item on the agenda of the next meeting. He also advised members that to allow sufficient time for discussion, the Deputy Chairman had agreed to defer his proposed agenda item on "Measures to address issues arising from the drop in secondary student population" to the next regular meeting to be held in March 2013.

5. Members agreed that the following items would be discussed at the next regular meeting scheduled for 11 March 2013 at 4:30 pm –

- (a) Issues relating to the existing policy on the use of land for education purposes;
- (b) Measures to address issues arising from the drop in secondary student population – Follow-up to meetings on 2, 3 and 12 November 2012; and
- (c) Student guidance service in primary schools.

6. Ms Claudia MO said that she had just received the Administration's written reply to her query about the changes to be made in the arrangements of the Joint University Programmes Admission System in 2014, which would adversely affect the candidates sitting the Other Languages examinations. She considered that the

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Administration's written reply had not addressed her concern. The Chairman said that he and the Deputy Chairman would consider the matter.

(Post-meeting note: The letter from Hon Claudia MO and the Administration's written response were circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)406/12-13 on 7 February 2013.)

7. Dr Kenneth CHAN referred members to his letter dated 14 January 2013 (listed under agenda item II) expressing concern about the Chinese name of the Savannah College of Art and Design, and sought the Administration's response. The Chairman said that if time allowed, he might ask the Administration to provide its response under agenda item VIII – Any other business.

8. In response to Dr Kenneth CHAN's suggestion to follow up the items on self-financing post-secondary education and the Moral and National Education ("MNE") subject, the Chairman advised that following the recent discussion of self-financing post-secondary education at the meetings on 11 and 14 January 2013, the Administration had been requested to revert to the Panel on various issues, including the motion passed by the Panel. He said that issues related to MNE had been included on the Panel's "List of items for discussion".

IV. Progress of implementing the E-Textbook Market Development Scheme (EMADS) and the use of E-platforms to facilitate teaching and learning

(LC Paper No. CB(4)380/12-13(01) -- Paper provided by the Administration

LC Paper No. CB(4)380/12-13(02) -- Background brief on issues related to the development of e-learning and e-textbooks)

9. Members noted the background brief on the subject prepared by the Secretariat [LC Paper No. CB(4)380/12-13(02)].

10. The Chairman drew members' attention to Rule 83A of the Rules of Procedure which provided that a Member shall not move any motion or amendment relating to a matter in which he had a pecuniary interest, whether direct or indirect, or speak on any such matter, except where he disclosed the nature of that interest. He reminded members to declare interests, if any, in the matter under discussion.

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Briefing by Administration

11. At the invitation of the Chairman, Secretary for Education ("SED") briefed members on the progress of implementing the E-textbook Market Development Scheme ("EMADS") and the development of e-platforms to further promote e-learning by highlighting the salient points in the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(4)380/12-13(01)]. Regarding the progress on implementing EMADS, SED said that a total of 86 applications for the development of e-textbooks had been received and subsequently, 30 applications were approved in November 2012. The Administration had recruited 89 partner schools to field-test the e-textbooks by three stages during their development period of about 15 months until the first quarter of 2014. Having gone through the stringent quality assurance process including field-testing, the e-textbooks developed under EMADS would be recognized for inclusion into the Recommended Textbook List for e-Textbooks ("e-RTL") and would be launched in the market for use in the 2014-2015 school year.

Discussion

Participation in EMADS

12. Mr Charles MOK expressed his support for the Administration's initiatives to promote e-learning and development of e-textbooks. However, he was concerned about the possible unfair competition in the e-textbook market. As the resources available for small and medium e-textbook developers were limited while most of the non-profit-making ("NPM") organizations were well-resourced tertiary institutions, he considered that the former category of developers might have been disadvantaged. Mr MOK was of the view that those organizations that had not participated in EMADS should be given equal opportunity to seek the inclusion of the e-textbooks developed by them in the future e-RTL.

13. Mr MA Fung-kwok shared Mr MOK's concern, and remarked that EMADS was tilted in favour of NPM organizations which could benefit from the seeding grant of the Government to develop their e-textbook business. He enquired whether the NPM developers would be required to sell their e-textbooks at cost. He considered that the Administration should safeguard against unfair competition and ensure the sustainability of e-textbook publishers and the quality of e-textbooks in the long run.

14. Dr Helena WONG was of the view that the Government should examine the market situation and understand the difficulties encountered by different groups of e-textbook developers, including both successful applicants and unsuccessful applicants under EMADS, and other developers that had not participated in

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EMADS.

15. Deputy Secretary for Education(5) ("DS(Ed)5") advised that EMADS did not operate to restrict any developers from entering the market, but to provide an impetus for the development of a diverse range of e-textbooks in line with the existing local curricula. The majority of successful applicants under EMADS were not NPM organizations. NPM developers in receipt of the seeding grant under EMADS must maintain their NPM status throughout the project period. After the quality assurance criteria for e-textbooks were established, it was envisaged that after 2014, all e-textbook developers could submit e-textbooks for review and for inclusion into the future e-RTL. Regarding the sustainability of NMP e-textbook developers, DS(Ed)5 said that while these developers would be required to commit to the sales price of the e-textbooks produced under EMADS for four years, they could derive an income from the sale of the e-textbooks. They also owned the intellectual property right of the e-textbooks and could further develop them in the light of market conditions.

Evaluation process of EMADS

16. Dr Kenneth CHAN stressed the importance of maintaining the transparency of the evaluation process and vetting criteria under EMADS. Dr Helena WONG shared Dr CHAN's view, and said that the vetting criteria, in particular the quality requirements for e-textbooks, should be made known to the public.

17. Mr MA Fung-kwok said that the publication sector was one of the sectors of his Functional Constituency. He noted from some publishers that the current evaluation mechanism of e-textbooks lacked transparency.

18. Regarding the evaluation of applications under EMADS, DS(Ed)5 advised that in addition to fulfilling the quality criteria applicable to printed textbooks, e-textbooks were required to meet additional requirements on e-features to enhance learning and teaching effectiveness. To ensure impartiality and fairness, the Subject Vetting Panel for each set of e-textbook comprised two external reviewers and the identity of the e-textbook developers concerned was not disclosed during the vetting process. DS(Ed)5 further informed members that under the existing arrangements applicable to printed textbooks, publishers might submit textbooks for review within 12 months after the issuance of the respective curriculum guide. Information on the vetting criteria of printed textbooks was posted on EDB's website.

19. In response to members' concern about the transparency of the evaluation process under EMADS, DS(Ed)5 advised that the vetting criteria had been made known to potential applicants. The Administration expected that the e-textbooks

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developed under EMADS and field-tested in partner schools would be launched in the market for use in the 2014-2015 school year. They would comprise a complete set of e-textbooks from primary to junior secondary levels. By that time, an evaluation mechanism and a complete set of vetting criteria for e-textbooks would be formulated. The relevant information would be posted on EDB's website for reference by interested parties.

Pricing of e-textbooks

20. Noting from the Administration's paper that the e-textbooks to be developed under EMADS were generally priced lower than those of their printed counterparts on the same subject with the largest difference being over 60%, the Deputy Chairman enquired about the factors leading to the reduction in cost. Mr MA Fung-kwok was concerned that out of the 30 successful applications under EMADS, the prices of the e-textbooks under eight applications were much higher than those of printed textbooks.

21. In reply, DS(Ed)5 advised that a consultant had been engaged to study the pricing of e-textbooks before the launch of EMADS. It was found that on average, the cost of developing e-textbooks would be around 80% of that for printed textbooks. Reference had been made to such findings when applications under EMADS were vetted. DS(Ed)5 added that while the greatest difference could be up to 60%, which might be due to various factors such as lower costs for storage, there were cases in which the prices of e-textbooks were comparable to those of printed textbooks. The focus should be on the quality of the e-textbook.

Support measures for e-learning

22. Noting that under the Partner Schools Scheme, each partner school would be provided with a maximum of 16 tablet computers, Dr Kenneth CHAN questioned whether this level of provision was sufficient. In response, DS(Ed)5 advised that the tablet computers were for use in test-out in classes in a group discussion setting. Hence, it might not be necessary for each student to be provided with a tablet computer. Moreover, most students had their own computers at home.

23. Dr Fernando CHEUNG raised concern about the low participation rate of the Internet Learning Support Programme ("ILSP"), and said that if timely and adequate assistance was not available to needy students, the problem of digital divide would become more serious. Dr CHEUNG enquired on the Administration's plan, if any, to assist needy families in this regard.

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24. In response, SED advised that the Administration had collected data on the general usage of Internet in teaching and would continue to collect data in different aspects of the use of e-learning platforms. The implementation of ILSP would be taken into account when formulating the next IT in Education Strategy. Regarding financial assistance to needy students, DS(Ed)5 said about 47% of students were in receipt of textbook subsidies through the School Textbook Assistance Scheme or the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme.

25. Noting that the development of e-textbooks was one of the measures to deal with the rise in textbook prices, Dr Fernando CHEUNG was concerned about the slow progress in the development of the e-textbook market, and enquired about the timetable, if any, when e-textbooks would be widely adopted to replace printed textbooks. Dr Kenneth CHAN shared the view that the development of the e-textbook market should be expedited.

26. In response, DS(Ed)5 said that the Government had all along adopted a two-pronged approach. Through the participation of potential and aspiring e-textbook developers in EMADS, a diverse range of e-textbooks covering the primary to junior secondary curricula were expected to be available by the 2014-2015 school year. The EDB had also developed the Depository of Curriculum-based Learning and Teaching Resources through the website of Hong Kong Education City. Relevant learning and teaching materials were available for teachers from this e-platform. An assessment tasks database to provide teachers with assessment-related reference and resources to facilitate learning and teaching was being developed.

The way forward for e-learning

27. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che was concerned about the Administration's vision on the future direction and ultimate objective of e-learning. He said that e-textbooks and micro-movies were just instruments under the overall trend of e-learning. Mr CHEUNG considered that to promote the wide adoption of e-learning, adequate hardware support was needed. Relevant training should also be provided to teachers while the study programmes at university level should also be dovetailed with the development of e-learning. Mr CHEUNG enquired about the long-term objective of the Government's e-learning policy, as well as the plan and measures, if any, for implementation.

28. Dr Helena WONG shared similar concern, and stressed that e-learning was not confined to the replacement of printed textbooks by e-textbooks, nor the mere driving down of textbook prices. Considerable resources and planning foresight were required on the part of the Administration. Referring to the case of Taiwan, Dr WONG said that the Taiwanese Government had deployed a huge amount of

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resources on the development of e-textbooks on the two subjects of Chinese Language and Mathematics in their pilot scheme. She was concerned that under EMADS, only 30 applications for development of e-textbooks had been approved, with NPM organizations being subsidized up to only 50% of the development cost for e-textbooks. She considered this level of support inadequate for taking forward e-learning on a notable scale.

29. Ms Claudia MO concurred with the view that e-learning should not be confined to the development of e-textbooks. The Deputy Chairman shared Ms MO's view and enquired whether the Administration had any plan to develop e-learning in a broader perspective.

30. In response, SED agreed that the development of e-textbooks was but one of the many initiatives to promote e-learning. The effective use of information and communication technologies would enable e-textbooks to harness the benefits of interactive e-features to bring about a completely different learning experience which could not be derived from viewing the electronic version of a printed textbook in PDF format. On the dynamics of e-learning, SED said that micro-movies could impart knowledge on Liberal Studies while multi-media messages could be disseminated via smart phones.

31. DS(Ed)5 added that the Administration was working towards developing a rich depository of e-learning resources which included e-textbooks, e-platforms and open-source materials. This would enable self-directed learning on the part of students, eventually leading to the formation of an interactive learning community comprising teachers, students and professionals.

32. Ms Claudia MO said that in teaching subjects such as General Studies and Liberal Studies, teachers often needed to conduct on-line search for relevant information on topics of current affairs. She was keen to ensure that there would not be any censorship of the contents of teaching materials based on political considerations.

33. In this connection, SED advised that under the current school-based management system and within the existing curriculum framework, individual schools could decide on the format and contents of their teaching/learning materials. SED did not envisage any special circumstances which required monitoring or vetting of school-based teaching materials by EDB.

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V. Issues related to the shortfall in primary school places in the North District

(LC Paper No. CB(4)380/12-13(03) -- Paper provided by the Administration

LC Paper No. CB(4)353/12-13(01) -- Letter dated 22 January 2013 from Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung to the Chairman of Panel on Education)

Briefing by the Administration

34. At the invitation of the Chairman, SED briefed members on the Administration's measures for diversion of cross-boundary students and measures to ensure sufficient Primary One ("P1") places for eligible students in the North District under the Primary One Admission System ("POA System") by highlighting the salient points in the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(4)380/12-13(03)]. He stressed that the Government attached great importance to alleviating the impact of the increase in the number of cross-boundary students on the allocation of P1 places in the North District. The major measures to ensure sufficient provision of P1 places in the North District for the 2013-2014 school year included the following:

- (a) making use of surplus or unused classrooms in the North District;
- (b) converting rooms originally designed for other uses into additional classrooms;
- (c) carrying out extension projects in four primary schools in the North District; and
- (d) allocating more students to each class.

35. SED advised that special measures would be implemented after the release of POA results in June 2013 to assist students who were residing in the North District and had chosen a school net in the North District during the POA but had been allocated P1 places in Tai Po in the Central Allocation stage, and who wanted to give up the allocated P1 places to study in their home district instead. Besides, the Government would explore to revise the arrangement for 2014-2015 and subsequent school years so as to minimize the number of students of the North District who needed to study in other districts due to the impact of cross-boundary students. In addition, the Education Bureau ("EDB") would work in collaboration

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with other bureaux and departments for more effective diversion of cross-boundary students to other districts with surplus P1 school places.

Discussion

The POA System

36. Dr Fernando CHEUNG expressed his strong view that the principle of "schooling within the district", which was in the best interest of children, should be adopted as the overriding principle of the POA System. The current arrangement under the Discretionary Place Admission stage ("DPA stage") allowing parents to choose any schools had deviated from this overriding principle. Dr Priscilla LEUNG opined that cross-boundary students travelled a long way from Shenzhen to Hong Kong, which was not schooling within the vicinity.

37. In reply, Deputy Secretary for Education (2) ("DS(Ed)2") clarified that the operation of the POA System was not to ensure "schooling within the district". During the DPA stage and up to three choices in the Central Allocation stage, parents might apply for any public sector primary schools within or outside the school net of where they resided. This arrangement was underpinned by parental choice and the need to cater for different needs of children. For example, parents might wish to choose schools located in the vicinity of their workplace instead of their residence.

38. The Deputy Chairman said that while the wish of parents to choose a school outside their home district should be respected, consideration should be given to adopting the principle of "schooling within the district" or in the vicinity of their residence for children of tender age. He considered that the Government had the responsibility to ensure that students who wished to attend schools in their home districts could be allocated school places accordingly. In this connection, DS(Ed)2 recapitulated that P1 places would be borrowed from the adjacent school net (i.e. Tai Po) to make up for the shortfall in the North District to enable children who had not been allocated P1 places in the North District to attend schools in the nearby district.

Provision of P1 places in the North District and related measures

39. Miss Alice MAK expressed the concern on behalf of the New Territories East offices of the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions that local children at a tender age had to compete with cross-boundary students for P1 places. She urged the Administration to ensure adequate provision of school places for local students in the North District. Miss MAK enquired whether the Administration had assessed the number of students who would be allocated P1 places in Tai Po and

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wished to attend schools in the North District instead.

40. Mr WONG Yuk-man noted from the Administration's paper that according to its preliminary count, the shortfall of P1 places in the North District this year should be less than 1 400, but shortfall was anticipated to last at least up to 2018. Mr WONG considered it highly unfair that local parents and students were disadvantaged by the shortfall in school places. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung said that the Government had merely proposed measures to meet the immediate need without devising any long term plan. He asked whether there were additional school premises in the North District to address the shortfall of P1 places in subsequent school years.

41. In response, SED stressed that the Government attached great importance to addressing the concern over the shortfall of P1 places in the North District, and would make the best endeavour to ensure that sufficient P1 places would be made available for take-up in September 2013. Regarding the special measures as mentioned by him earlier on (paragraph 35 above), SED explained that the Government would only be able to ascertain the number of students who would give up their allocated places in Tai Po to take up school places in their home district after the release of POA results in June 2013. At this juncture, it was difficult to estimate the total number of students who might need assistance under the special measures.

42. Ms Claudia MO expressed her concern about cross-district schooling for local students and queried whether the Government had made any mistake in devising the POA System. She was of the view that among cross-boundary students, a distinction should be made between those students whose parents were not Hong Kong residents and those students whose parents were Hong Kong residents.

43. Noting members' concerns, SED pointed out that the POA System had been operating smoothly with the number of P1 places in the North District being able to meet the local demand. The current shortfall of P1 places in the North District was mainly due to the increase of cross-boundary students, most of whom had chosen to attend schools in the district. SED added that another factor which might have aggravated the shortfall in the North District was the recent change in education policy in Shenzhen that children born in Hong Kong were no longer eligible for admission to public schools there.

44. Mr TAM Yiu-chung said that he had heard about the change of education policy in the Mainland for quite some time. He considered that the Administration should have been aware of the change and taken action to formulate plans well in advance to deal with the possible impact on Hong Kong.

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45. Dr Helena WONG considered that if EDB adopted the measure of allocating more students to a class with a view to increasing the supply of P1 places in the North District, the increase in class size would mean a deviation from the policy of small class teaching. The Deputy Chairman shared her concern and enquired on the estimated number of students to be added to each class.

46. In response, SED and DS(Ed)2 said that EDB had been maintaining active dialogue with school heads in the North District to explore the feasibility of increasing P1 places by operating more classes. Allocation of more students to a class would only be adopted as a last resort. In such circumstances, the Administration would provide additional resources to the schools concerned to enable teachers to maintain the quality of teaching strategies and the quality of education despite the increase in the number of students to be allocated to each P1 class.

47. SED said that during the discussion with schools, there was a consensus that the special measures should not be applied across-the-board.

48. Regarding the implementation of special measures after the release of POA results in June 2013 as set out in paragraph 10 of the Administration's paper, Dr Fernando CHEUNG considered that the timing for implementing special measures would be too late, as schools required ample lead time to make preparation such as recruitment of teachers and conversion of facilities to cope with the increase in the number of students admitted or number of classes. There would also be insufficient time for students and parents to get prepared if cross-district schooling was required.

49. Mr TAM Yiu-chung said that he had learnt from some parents that EDB's announcement of the measures to address the shortfall of P1 places was too late as they had already submitted their POA applications. DS(Ed)2 reiterated that after the release of POA results in June 2013, if the students of the North District were allocated P1 places in Tai Po but wanted to study in their home district instead, EDB would provide assistance to address their wish.

50. Mr TAM Yiu-chung remarked that most parents of cross-boundary students might have chosen to attend primary schools in the North District as they might not have information on schools in other districts. Mr TAM noted that some schools in the North District had organized exhibitions and seminars in the Mainland to publicize the schools. Subsequently, these schools had enrolled sufficient students including cross-boundary students and were able to continue operation despite the drop in local student population.

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51. On the implementation of special measures, Dr Priscilla LEUNG was concerned that there should be a sufficient number of teaching personnel in the North District to cope with the addition of classes or number of students allocated to a class. Dr LEUNG considered that surplus teachers in other districts should be deployed to the North District, and special training should be provided to these teachers to enable them to handle cross-boundary students who might have difficulties in adapting to the local culture and learning environment.

52. SED concurred that the capacity of the teaching profession was an important factor. He advised that in the course of discussion with schools on the special measures, the Administration was fully aware that there should be sufficient teachers to tie in with the implementation of special measures. There was a suggestion that retired teachers might be a possible source of manpower.

53. DS(Ed)2 pointed out that the Administration would continue to strive to increase the number of classes in primary schools in the North District. Currently, EDB was collecting information from schools in the North District on the number of additional classrooms upon conversion of other rooms and use of vacant classrooms. If the additional classes could not fully meet the demand, EDB would consider increasing the number of students allocated to each class. Additional resources would be provided to support the schools concerned.

54. Regarding the provision of additional resources to support schools to undertake the special measures, the Deputy Chairman pointed out that both teaching activities and school administration would require additional support. DS(Ed)2 said that discussion between EDB and schools in the North District would continue. There was a suggestion that flexibility should be given to individual schools in deciding how the additional resources should be used. As such, the additional resources would be in the form of a time-limited grant which might be deployed for recruiting additional teachers, defraying expenses for administrative work and carrying out minor works for converting school facilities into additional classrooms, etc.

55. The Deputy Chairman said that according to what he had been informed, EDB would consider converting all primary schools in the North District to the half-day mode in order to cope with the increase in students. He sought the Administration's confirmation on whether this would be the way forward, and expressed his grave concern that if this approach was to be adopted, the quality of education would be compromised. The Chairman shared similar concern that the Administration should not overlook the impact on the quality of teaching and learning when considering within such a tight timeframe the implementation of special measures.

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56. In respect of the primary schools in the North District, DS(Ed)2 confirmed that the Administration had no plan to revert to half-day operation. She clarified that it was in the course of discussion with the schools that some schools had suggested exploring the idea which might meet the needs of cross-boundary students as they had to spend long travelling time everyday. Other suggestions included allowing individual schools to operate half-day or whole-day classes for cross-boundary students.

57. The Chairman considered that the Administration should gauge more accurately the number of cross-boundary students in planning for the deployment of resources properly, including the recruitment of additional teachers. Ms Claudia MO said that a more accurate projection of the future Secondary One student population could be made if local secondary schools would only admit students whose parents were residents of Hong Kong. Dr Priscilla LEUNG considered that if the cross-boundary students born in Hong Kong were entitled to the same rights of local residents, they should not be deprived of the right of receiving education in Hong Kong.

58. Noting members' concerns and in response to the Chairman's request for more concrete information, SED said that the Administration would update the Panel on the provision of P1 places in the North District as and when appropriate.

Designating school nets and schools for cross-boundary students

59. Dr Kenneth CHAN said that according to some media reports, SED had raised the idea of designating a school net for cross-boundary students. He sought SED's elaboration on the matter, and cautioned that if such an approach was to be considered, the Administration should take into account the possible labeling effect on certain schools which admitted a large number of cross-boundary students, as well as its implications on the existing POA System. Dr Helena WONG was of the view that the Government should consider setting up a separate school net for cross-boundary students.

60. SED clarified that his remarks had been made in response to media enquiry and it was not a concrete proposal put forward by the Administration to designate a school net exclusively for cross-boundary students. SED further said that if this approach was to be adopted, the schools in this school net might not necessarily belong to the same geographical areas, but might be from different school nets. On other options to cater for cross-boundary students, SED said that he was aware of other suggestions such as setting up specific schools for cross-boundary students similar to the recognised schools in Shenzhen for Hong Kong students. The Administration would continue to explore the feasibility of different options.

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61. Mr MA Fung-kwok said that in the long run, the Government should consider the feasibility of collaboration with the Shenzhen Government to allow schools offering the Hong Kong curriculum to operate in the frontier area/Shenzhen so that the students would no longer need to cross the boundary to attend local schools and compete with local students for school places. Dr Priscilla LEUNG considered that schools for Hong Kong students in Shenzhen would be a possible choice for parents of cross-boundary students.

62. Deputy Secretary for Education (4) ("DS(Ed)4") advised that currently, there were two schools for Hong Kong students and four other schools running classes for Hong Kong students in Shenzhen. These schools/classes adopted the Hong Kong curriculum. The Administration and the Shenzhen authority had agreed to strengthen the exchange of information and sharing of experience as well as co-operation in teacher training. Primary Six ("P6") students of the schools for Hong Kong students in Shenzhen could participate in the Secondary School Places Allocation ("SSPA") system in Hong Kong. In the past three years, about 100 students who had completed P6 in these schools had been admitted to secondary schools in Hong Kong through SSPA.

63. Mr MA Fung-kwok enquired whether the schools for Hong Kong students in Shenzhen were in receipt of any financial support from the HKSAR Government. Mr TAM Yiu-chung remarked that providing government funding to schools for Hong Kong students in the Mainland would involve a significant change in policy. DS(Ed)4 took note of the members' views and said that the matter, which had policy implications, would require careful consideration. It should also be noted that the use of public funding would also entail the need for monitoring to ensure effective use of such resources.

Longer-term planning

64. Dr Kenneth CHAN noted that the increase in the number of cross-boundary students had imposed considerable pressure on the supply of P1 places in the North District this year. He said that this would eventually result in an increase in Secondary One student population six years later, and enquired on the longer-term plan, if any, of the Administration to cope with the consequential rise in Secondary One students by that time.

65. Mr WONG Yuk-man shared similar concern and stressed the need for a long-term plan. He drew the Administration's attention to the experience in recent years that primary schools had been closed due to insufficient enrolment, and the knock-on effect on secondary schools facing a decline in secondary student population. The increase in cross-boundary students would pose a real challenge to the provision of primary school places at the present stage and to the provision of

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secondary school places in a few years' time.

66. Dr Priscilla LEUNG said that in addition to taking measures to address the immediate problem of the shortfall of P1 places in North District, the Administration should take the opportunity to also review the existing arrangements and formulate measures that could best meet the education needs of Hong Kong in the long run.

67. Dr Helena WONG was of the view that the Administration should accord priority to addressing the wish of parents of local students for "schooling in the district". With a view to providing better coordination and more effective steer, Dr WONG asked whether the Administration would set up a working group to take on board issues related to cross-boundary students, ranging from the provision of school places, planning for school buses, to collecting data to ascertain the number of cross-boundary students who would pursue their future education in Hong Kong.

68. SED took note of members' views and concerns on long-term planning. He informed members that apart from the proposed measures to provide sufficient P1 places in the North District for 2013-2014 school year as set out in the Administration's paper, the construction of a new primary school in the district would be completed in 2016. SED further advised that an inter-departmental committee had been set up to study in a holistic manner how to address the impact of the increase in number of cross-boundary students in the next few years. For example, if the diversion of cross-boundary students to schools in other districts was to be implemented, facilitation measures to ensure safety when crossing the boundary control points and school busing services had to be put in place. Hence, collaboration among different government departments was required. Given the basket of targeted relief measures and the anticipated increase in S1 student population, it was unlikely that secondary schools would need to be closed in the coming years unless there was insufficient intake of students in individual schools. The Administration was also exploring the feasibility of allowing secondary schools to offer primary education to meet the shortfall during the transient period.

69. The Deputy Chairman stressed the importance of a longer-term plan on the provision of P1 places in the North District, as well as the need for inter-departmental collaboration. The Administration took note of his views.

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VI. Pilot Project on Revised School Complaints Handling Arrangements

(LC Paper No. CB(4)380/12-13(04) -- Paper provided by the Administration)

Briefing by the Administration

70. At the invitation of the Chairman, Under Secretary for Education ("US(Ed)") briefed members on the purpose and details of the Pilot Project on Revised School Complaints Handling Arrangements ("the Pilot Project") by highlighting the following salient points:

- (a) Under the Revised School Complaints Handling Arrangements ("Revised Arrangements"), while EDB would take up complaints relating to the Education Ordinance, education policies and services directly provided by EDB, schools should take up complaints relating to their daily operations and internal affairs directly. Under the existing school-based management approach, EDB would continue to exercise its monitoring role over schools and assist schools in setting up or improving the school complaints handling mechanism.
- (b) The Revised Arrangements would not result in additional workload for frontline teaching staff as most school-related complaints were handled by the school management. EDB would also organize training to enhance the complaint handling skills of school personnel. On average, 209 schools were involved in complaint cases each year during the past three years. Among them, about 190 received one to two complaints, 11 schools received three to five complaints and a few had six or more complaints. Training on complaint handling skills would be provided to responsible school staff to facilitate better prevention and proper handling of complaints.
- (c) EDB had set up the Review Board on School Complaints ("the Review Board") comprising independent persons from the education and non-education sectors to be responsible for reviewing complaint cases that had been handled by schools.

Discussion

Statistics on school-related complaints

71. Mr TAM Yiu-chung considered that the number of schools involved in complaint as mentioned by the Administration (i.e. 209 schools each year) might

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have been under-reported. He sought information on the number of cases in which the complainant was not satisfied with the outcome of EDB's investigation of the complaint. Dr Helena WONG shared similar concern and referred to the sharp difference between the number of school-related complaints recorded by EDB and that received by Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union ("HKPTU").

72. In this regard, DS(Ed)4 explained that last year, about 274 complaint cases had been filed with EDB. Some complainants would withdraw their cases after explanation or clarification by EDB, resulting in an average of 209 schools being involved in complaint cases every year. EDB would only close a case after completion of investigation and necessary follow-up action. Principal Assistant Secretary (School Development) ("PAS(SD)) supplemented that in accordance with existing practice, upon receipt of a complaint, EDB would conduct investigation and take appropriate follow-up action afterwards. The complainant would be informed of the outcome of EDB's investigation. If the complainant was not satisfied, he could approach EDB for further clarification or assistance.

73. Noting that 80 schools had taken part in the Pilot Project in the 2012-2013 school year, the Deputy Chairman enquired whether any of these participating schools were among the 209 schools which were involved in complaint cases. DS(Ed)4 undertook to provide the information to the Panel after the meeting.

(Post-meeting note: The Administration's written response was circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)461/12-13(01) on 5 March 2013.)

The monitoring role and responsibility of EDB

74. Dr Fernando CHEUNG noted that under the Revised Arrangements, schools should take up complaints relating to schools' daily operations and internal affairs. He was concerned about the lack of impartiality for a school under complaint to conduct investigation into the complaint in which it was involved. Dr Helena WONG noted the Administration's effort to strengthen the existing mechanism of handling school-related complaints. However, Dr WONG raised concern about objectivity and fairness, especially in situations such as a teacher making a complaint related to the school principal of the same school.

75. In response, US(Ed) advised that the Revised Arrangements were not applicable to complaints lodged by school staff, as such complaints would continue to be handled by EDB according to the current practice. To enhance the objectivity of complaint handling, EDB had also suggested to schools to invite independent person(s) to participate in the tasks of investigation or handling appeal on a need basis. US(Ed) further said that where necessary, EDB would assist schools to set up clear and transparent school-based complaints handling mechanism and

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procedures to ensure that complaints from parents and the public could be handled in a fair and just manner.

76. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that neither the Legislative Council nor the Ombudsman was in a position to monitor the performance of individual schools. This was the responsibility and mandate of EDB. Dr CHEUNG was concerned that upon implementation of the Revised Arrangements, EDB would eventually shirk its responsibility in monitoring schools, including the handling of school-related complaints.

77. In response, US(Ed) advised that premising on the basis of school-based management, EDB would continue to exercise its responsibility to monitor the performance of schools. Under the Revised Arrangements, EDB would monitor schools in handling complaints by requiring them to send EDB a copy of their reply to the complainant for reference after completion of investigation. EDB would ensure that the complaints had been handled in accordance with the established procedures of schools.

78. The Deputy Chairman said that the Pilot Project might have made good progress with the participation of 80 schools. However, he was of the view that EDB should take forward the Revised Arrangements in a more gradual manner by, for example, first equipping school personnel with the necessary knowledge and skills in handling complaints and enhancing the capability and capacity of schools in dealing with complaints. The Deputy Chairman questioned why EDB was trying to withdraw its role in handling school-related complaints in such haste.

79. In reply, US(Ed) reiterated that EDB was not seeking to withdraw its monitoring role over schools. However, in line with the spirit of school-based management, individual schools should shoulder the responsibility of handling schools affairs, including the handling of school-related complaints. Under the Revised Arrangements, EDB would continue to monitor the handling of complaints by schools as they were required to copy to EDB their replies to the complainants upon completion of investigation. Schools could also seek advice from EDB in the process of handling complaints. EDB would intervene and conduct direct investigation if the complaint involved serious incidents or maladministration on the part of the school management. The Ad Hoc Committee on Complaints Handling in Schools would also continue to monitor the implementation of the Revised Arrangements in schools.

The Review Board and the appeal mechanism within schools

80. Noting that EDB had set up the Review Board, Dr Fernando CHEUNG was of the view that the Review Board should accept all applications for independent

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review of complaint cases instead of imposing a requirement that sufficient reasons or new evidences should be provided to support the applications. Dr Helena WONG also questioned the representativeness of the Review Board because its membership did not include relevant stakeholders such as parents and frontline teachers. Dr WONG further suggested that the Review Board should be set up on a standing, instead of an ad-hoc, basis. Regarding the school-based complaint handling mechanism, Dr Fernando CHEUNG considered that lay members should be included on the appeal system set up in individual schools under the Revised Arrangements.

81. Noting the members' concern, US(Ed) responded that under the Guidelines for Handling School Complaints ("the Guidelines"), schools were recommended to invite lay members to sit on the appeal panel under their respective school-based complaint handling mechanism. Whether this arrangement should be made mandatory would be considered in the light of the experience gained in the Pilot Project.

82. The Deputy Chairman was concerned about the frequency of convening Review Board meetings and the future caseload of the Review Board. In response, US(Ed) advised that the Review Board would convene meetings upon receipt of requests for review of complaint cases from the complainants or the related organizations (e.g. schools or the school sponsoring bodies). Under the Revised Arrangements, the Review Board would inform EDB of the results of its review of the case concerned. The Review Board's reply to the complainant or the school/SSB would also be issued through EDB.

83. Regarding the Deputy Chairman's concern about the caseload of the Review Board, PAS(SD) supplemented that as the Pilot Project had only been launched since January 2013, it was not feasible at this stage to ascertain the number of complaint cases which required independent review by the Review Board. Nevertheless, the Administration would keep in view the implementation and effectiveness of the Pilot Project, and conduct an overall review by end of 2013.

Workload on teachers and school personnel

84. Referring to the short paper provided to the Panel by the Administration introducing the Pilot Project, Dr Kenneth CHAN remarked that the Administration had not presented a full picture of the operation of the Revised Arrangements and the immense workload to be borne by school personnel. He drew members' attention to the Guidelines published by EDB which consisted of 34 pages, as well as the need for school personnel to attend training sessions, all of which would impose a heavy burden on school personnel, including frontline teaching staff. Dr CHAN was concerned that the real intention of the Administration was to shift the

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responsibility arising from handling complaints to frontline staff at schools. Given the wide scope of school-related complaints and the time-consuming process in preparing documentation under the Revised Arrangements, Dr CHAN said that the Administration should seriously consider simplifying the relevant arrangements.

85. In response, US(Ed) advised that the Revised Arrangements did not seek to introduce a new mechanism but to streamline the current complaint-handling procedures to enable schools to properly and speedily follow up and respond to views or complaints received on a day-to-day basis under a school-based management approach. He informed members that the 80 places under the Pilot Project had been fully subscribed shortly after its launch, which was proof that the Pilot Project was well-received among schools.

86. DS(Ed)4 remarked that at present, schools needed to handle complaints although some schools might not have an established complaint handling mechanism and their staff might lack relevant skills. The Guidelines served as comprehensive reference for schools in handling school-related complaints under the Revised Arrangements, and provided a chance for them to examine their current system for further improvement. DS(Ed)4 informed members that requests had been received from some schools which did not participate in the Pilot Project to take part in the training programmes organized by EDB as they were also required to handle complaints from time to time. She reiterated that EDB would monitor the outcome of the Pilot Project before planning for further implementation of the Revised Arrangements.

87. Dr Kenneth CHAN queried whether the Pilot Project had been well accepted among frontline teachers, as he had received a lot of grievances from teachers in a sharing session organized by HKPTU. He reminded the Administration to adopt an open mind, and collect and analyze views both for and against the Revised Arrangements.

VII. Any other business

88. Referring to his letter dated 14 January 2013, Dr Kenneth CHAN reiterated his concern about the Chinese name of the Savannah College of Art and Design which contained the term "大學". He noted that under the current legislation, the names adopted by non-local educational institutions were not subject to regulation as their local counterparts. The Chairman asked the Administration to take note of Dr CHAN's concern and reminded the Administration to revert in writing to Dr CHAN as soon as possible.

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(Post-meeting note: A copy of the Administration's written reply to Dr CHAN dated 18 January 2013 was circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)421/12-13(01) on 18 February 2013.)

89. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:45 pm.

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
16 May 2013