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2 August 2013

Miss Polly YEUNG,
Clerk to Panel on Education
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central
Hong Kong

Dear Miss YEUNG,

Legislative Council Panel on Education
Follow-up to the special meeting on 22 June 2013

At its special meeting on 22 June 2013, the Panel on Education passed the following motions:

- (1) Moved by Hon IP Kin-yuen: "That this Panel urges the Administration to review expeditiously how to improve the teacher establishment of schools and report to this Panel the results or progress of the review by the end of this year"; and
- (2) Moved by Hon Cyd HO and amended by Dr Hon Helena WONG: "That this Panel considers that the Administration should continue to provide not less than \$160,000 a year to each school for implementing Liberal Studies so as to alleviate the adverse condition of the class-to-teacher ratio and that it should expand expeditiously the permanent establishment of teachers to improve the ratio".

Our response is set out below:

Motion (1) in the above

We understand that in the implementation of the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum, the school sector is concerned about the resources for teaching and learning and the teaching manpower of schools. In this connection, as mentioned in the Progress Report on the New Academic Structure Review published in April this year, we will implement measures to fine-tune the curriculum content, curriculum time and assessment requirements of the NSS subjects in order to reduce the workload of teachers and students. Some recommendations put forward in the Report will be implemented immediately in the 2013/14 school year.

We must emphasise that the teaching staff resources available in a school are not confined to those calculated by the class-to-teacher ratios, but they should also include the additional regular teachers provided for specific programmes, and the additional teachers and ancillary staff to support teaching and learning, who are employed by different cash grants (such as the Capacity Enhancement Grant, Senior Secondary Curriculum Support Grant (SSCSG) and Learning Support Grant, etc.). In sum, we should not measure the teaching staff resources deployed by the Government solely by the class-to-teacher ratios.

In fact, with the implementation of various education initiatives, the teaching manpower in secondary schools has been improved in recent years, which has been reflected in the student-to-teacher ratio. The overall student-to-teacher ratio in public sector secondary schools has improved gradually from 18.0:1 in the 2005/06 school year (i.e. the school year after the release of the report “The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education – Action Plan for Investing in the Future of Hong Kong”) to 14.5:1 in the 2012/13 school year. We consider that when calculating the student-to-teacher ratio, we should also take into account the teaching staff employed by various cash grants so as to fully reflect the current situation of schools. The relevant data indicate that the overall student-to-teacher ratio in public sector secondary schools is no worse off than other countries.

Moreover, starting from the 2013/14 school year, most schools will benefit from an improving student-to-teacher ratio brought about by various relief measures which are put in force to address the decline of Secondary One student population in recent years. We will continue to keep in view all relevant factors, including the overall financial position of the Government, the prioritisation of competing demands for resources, and the progress and effectiveness of relevant measures which have been put in force in recent years or to be

implemented in the near future. Simultaneously, we will keep in close contact with the school sector and provide professional support for enhancing the financial management of schools so as to put the annual funding to good use to support teachers. Although we do not have a plan to set up a dedicated committee, we will report and discuss the progress of the issue in the Education Commission and the Panel on Education of the Legislative Council.

Motion (2) in the above

In the 2010/11 school year, we released the one-off non-recurrent Liberal Studies Curriculum Support Grant (LSCSG) which provided a \$0.32 million for each of the public sector secondary schools and secondary schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS). The grant enables schools to create, at the initial stage of implementing the new academic structure, favourable conditions for the introduction of Liberal Studies (LS). We have informed schools of the nature and duration of the grant when it was disbursed.

In mid-2012, after giving due consideration to the utilisation of the LSCSG in schools, we extended the tenure of the grant for one more year and disbursed additional LSCSG amounting \$160,000 to some schools to meet their individual needs. Besides, as the tenure of the Enhanced SSCSG is about to expire and considering that many schools still had unspent balance in the said account, the EDB has extended the tenure of the grant for one year to cover the 2013/14 school year.

Moreover, we will continue to disburse the SSCSG (in the 2012/13 school year, schools with 12 senior secondary classes would receive around \$0.57 million) to schools on a recurrent basis every year. Bearing in mind factors such as their specific situations and the learning needs of students, schools are encouraged to consult their teachers and seek the approval of their School Management Committees or Incorporated Management Committees to flexibly use the SSCSG to duly support the NSS curriculum, including the implementation of LS, for example, by deploying additional manpower and resources to alleviate teachers' workload and conducting group teaching. In parallel, we will continue to provide schools with an array of support measures, including professional development programmes for teachers, the up-to-date Web-based Resource Platform for LS, and the establishment of the LS School Network Scheme, to assist schools to implement the subject smoothly. Therefore, we consider there are insufficient justifications to support the continuous disbursement of the LSCSG to schools at the present stage.

All in all, we are happy to maintain dialogue with the school sector on the above issues. We would also like to work together with the sector to develop effective strategies

and mechanisms to enhance schools' financial management and assist schools in effective and flexible deployment of manpower resources so as to put annual funding (including SSCSG) to good use to support teachers and improve the effectiveness of learning and teaching.

Yours sincerely,



(Ms Teresa CHAN)
for Secretary for Education