

For discussion on 9 July 2013

Legislative Council Panel on Education

**The Latest Development of  
the Native-speaking English Teacher (“NET”) Scheme**

**Purpose**

This paper briefs Members on the latest development of the Native-speaking English Teacher (“NET”) Scheme.

**Background**

2. The NET Scheme comprises the Enhanced NET Scheme in Secondary Schools (“ENET Scheme”) and the NET Scheme in Primary Schools (“PNET Scheme”). The ENET Scheme was introduced to public sector secondary schools in the 1998/99 school year, following the Chief Executive’s Policy Address in 1997. The PNET Scheme was introduced to public sector primary schools in the 2002/03 school year. Under the NET Scheme, every public sector primary school having six or more classes and every public sector secondary school is normally allocated one NET post.

3. NETs are introduced as resource teachers for enhancing the learning and teaching of English at the school level. They mainly support and collaborate with local English teachers in facilitating the implementation of the curriculum and the development of subject-related tasks, which include assisting in the design of the school-based English Language curriculum, developing learning and teaching materials, establishing resource banks, enriching the English language environment in school, enhancing the professional development of English teachers and organising co-curricular activities.

4. In addition to providing administrative support for schools under the NET Scheme, such as coordinating the recruitment exercise for schools which entrust the Education Bureau (EDB) with recruiting a NET on their behalf, we provide professional support for the implementation of the NET Scheme through the NET Section of the Curriculum Development Institute.

5. The objectives of the NET Scheme are as follows:

The PNET Scheme

- To provide an authentic environment for children to learn English;
- To develop children's interest in learning English and establish the foundation for life-long learning;
- To help local teachers develop innovative learning and teaching methods, materials, curricula and activities suited to the needs of children in public sector schools; and
- To disseminate good practices in language learning and teaching through region-based teacher development programmes, such as experience-sharing seminars/workshops and networking activities.

The ENET Scheme

- To enrich the English language learning environment in schools;
- To enhance the learning and teaching of English with linguistically and culturally authentic materials and resources; and
- To strengthen teaching capacity through school-based professional development and collaboration between NETs and English Panel Members.

6. In the 2012/13 school year, a total of 459 public sector primary schools and 411 public sector secondary schools participate in the NET Scheme, engaging a total of 457 and 405 NETs respectively<sup>1</sup>. The provisions for NETs in public sector primary and secondary schools for the 2012-13 financial year were \$323.8 million and \$363.6 million respectively. The corresponding figures for the 2013-14 financial year are \$325.8 million and \$355 million.

**Evaluation of the NET Scheme**

*The ENET Scheme*

7. In the period from 1998 to 2000 and in 2008, the Hong Kong Institute of Education and the University of Melbourne were commissioned respectively by the EDB to conduct an evaluation study of the ENET Scheme. In the first study,

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<sup>1</sup> The NET posts of some eligible schools are not filled temporarily owing to various reasons, such as the appointed NETs failing to report for duty as scheduled.

data were collected mainly through a variety of sources, including language proficiency assessments of students supplemented by Hong Kong Attainment Test scores, case studies of schools and questionnaires for students, school personnel and parents. In the second study, data were collected mainly through an online questionnaire for school personnel, case studies of schools and focus groups made up of school personnel, parents and graduate students. The following are the main findings of the two studies:

- According to the first study, the NETs were able to fulfil their role as a resource teacher by, for example, designing and developing learning and teaching materials, introducing a range of teaching strategies and providing more opportunities for students to use English as a tool for classroom learning and daily communication.
- The second study revealed that the ENET Scheme induced students to communicate more in English and enabled them to know more about different cultures and have their global outlook broadened. As can be expected, students tended to communicate more in English with NETs than with the local English teachers. In addition, NETs were able to help students develop a positive attitude towards learning English, and they played a vital role in enriching the English learning environment in schools.

### *The PNET Scheme*

8. During the period from 2004 to 2006, the University of Melbourne was commissioned by the EDB to conduct a three-year territory-wide longitudinal evaluation study of the PNET Scheme. The data of the evaluation study were collected mainly through questionnaires for school personnel, students and parents, school personnel interviews and student language assessments. The following conclusions were arrived at:

- The Scheme helped to facilitate the professional development of English teachers at the primary level. Co-planning and co-teaching between the NET and local English teachers had become a common practice in schools. The majority of local English teachers were appreciative of the opportunity to be exposed to a different style of teaching which co-teaching provided. Through their professional exchange and collaboration with the NET and the Advisory Teachers (ATs) of the NET Section of the EDB, as well as the use of learning and teaching resources and strategies recommended by the ATs, the capacity of local English teachers to raise students' language proficiency was enhanced.



- The introduction of NETs helped to nurture students' positive attitudes towards learning English, which in turn had a positive impact on students' language proficiency and development.

9. In a study on the implementation of the revised primary English Language curriculum, it was also found that NETs had contributed to the English language learning of primary students and the professional development of English language teachers. The study was conducted in the 2009/10 school year by the University of Hong Kong and was commissioned by the English Language Education Section of the Curriculum Development Institute. Data were collected through a questionnaire administered to, and interviews conducted with, both students and school personnel. It was noteworthy that, while the PNET Scheme was not a focus of the evaluation study, during the interviews, some teacher respondents volunteered information about their NETs' contribution to English language learning and teaching. These respondents were keen to acknowledge the benefit of their collaboration with NETs and NETs' role as a companion for professional dialogue in co-planning and co-teaching. They also made complimentary comments on NETs' contribution in those areas of the curriculum where local English teachers were less experienced and on opportunities to learn from NETs' expertise.

### **Development of the NET Scheme Following the Evaluation Studies**

10. The three evaluation studies mentioned in Paragraphs 7 and 8 made various recommendations to help improve the NET Scheme to bring about greater gains in students' English language proficiency and more positive attitudes towards English language learning. These recommendations, which addressed issues such as opportunities for professional dialogue within and among schools, collaboration between NETs and local English teachers, deployment of NETs, professional development, etc., have been instrumental in guiding the recent development of the NET Scheme, as evident in the following:

- a greater emphasis on district- or region-based cluster meetings and sharing sessions for primary schools through developing a partnership between the NET Section and the Regional Education Offices, and the use of online sharing circles for secondary schools participating in a research and development project to exchange ideas and experience;
- the development of literacy programmes across the first three Key Stages, e.g. the Primary Literacy Programme on Reading and Writing for Key Stage 1 [PLP-R/W (KS1)], Key Stage 2 Integration

Programme, Strategies for English Learning through Language Arts and Reading (Key Stage 3), as enhanced platforms for engaging the NETs and local English teachers in focused and purposeful collaboration and professional discussions on pedagogy-related issues, and for building a favourable environment and a strong foundation for upgrading students' literacy development;

- the revision of the guidelines for NET deployment in the PNET Scheme (1) to highlight the critical role of collaboration between NETs and local English teachers in students' English language proficiency development; (2) to reinforce the role of NETs as resource persons, performing duties such as preparing and developing activities, materials and resources and contributing to the schools' cultural and English language environment; and (3) to acknowledge that there is a role for NETs to play in Key Stage 2 students' literacy development; and
- a more robust centralised professional development programme that comprises workshops, seminars and cluster meetings for the dissemination of good practices and innovative learning and teaching strategies to facilitate students' English language development.

## **Responses to Recent Concerns over the PNET Scheme**

### *PNET Deployment and the Importance of Collaboration*

11. Positive collaboration between NETs and local English teachers was identified in the *Evaluation of the Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme for Primary Schools in Hong Kong 2004-06* (EMB, 2006) as a critical factor contributing to students' English language proficiency development. It was found that, where the NET Deployment Guidelines (PNET Scheme) were followed in schools to ensure collaboration between NETs and local English teachers, the PNET Scheme was effective in transforming the English Panel culture and consequently supporting the development of students' English language proficiency. Conditions that contributed to such collaboration included NETs interacting with local English teachers to collaboratively effect change in learning and teaching strategies; sharing messages, materials and strategies from professional development activities; attending English Panel meetings; and generally acting as an integrated member of the school community. With the support provided for schools by the ATs of the NET Section, the majority of the



primary schools in Hong Kong are now found to have been following the NET Deployment Guidelines and collaboration has become the cornerstone for the success of the PNET Scheme.

12. It was also reported in the evaluation study that the impact of NETs on students' English language learning was mediated through local English teachers' responsiveness to collaboration, co-teaching and co-planning with NETs. In the actual classroom context, local English teachers "are the major contact for the children learning English and form the most influential role model in the schools" (EMB, 2006, p. xiv). *NETs alone would, therefore, not be able to produce the desired learning outcomes unless the pivotal role of local English teachers in co-planning and co-teaching is well-defined and recognised.* In this connection, if NETs were deployed to teach at one single year level, such as P1, it would severely compromise NETs' role as a resource person and opportunities for collaboration between NETs and local English teachers would greatly diminish. Should NETs be deployed to teach all P1 English lessons by themselves, they would not have adequate opportunities or practical knowledge of the primary English Language curriculum to support local English teachers through co-planning, co-teaching and organising professional development activities. As stressed in the evaluation study report, such collaboration is critical to the success of the Scheme.

#### *NETs' Role in Curriculum Development and Implementation*

13. The English Language Curriculum Guide (P1-6) (2004) recommends that a Reading Workshop component be included as an integral part in the school-based English curriculum. Constituting up to 40% of the allocated time for English, the Reading Workshop component provides the impetus for the NET Section to develop a variety of literacy programmes to serve as a platform for engaging NETs and local English teachers in collaborative work and for cross-fertilisation of ideas to foster primary students' literacy development. At Key Stage 1, where there is a pressing need to help students build a solid foundation in English language learning, the Primary Literacy Programme – Reading for Key Stage 1 [PLP-R (KS1)] and the PLP-R/W (KS1) have been implemented to maximise the role of NETs and to provide a vehicle for collaboration between NETs and local English teachers. In the current school year, the PLP-R (KS1) and the PLP-R/W (KS1) are implemented in a total of 228 schools, representing about 50% of public sector primary schools under the PNET Scheme. Apart from this, the growth in the number of schools joining the PLP-R/W (KS1) from 12 in the 2007/08 school year to 172 in the current school year, is testimony to the increasing prevalence and awareness of the importance of the collaborative practice between NETs and local

English teachers in delivering the literacy programmes and enhancing students' literacy experience.

14. NETs' role as a resource person supporting school-based curriculum development cannot be stressed strongly enough. In addition to classroom teaching, NETs are assigned other duties that complement their teaching work. These duties include supporting the professional development of local English teachers, promoting innovative learning and teaching strategies in collaboration with them and delivering parents' workshops. NETs also contribute to the development of an authentic English language environment for students by planning and conducting co-curricular activities, such as drama, campus TV, debating and educational excursions, which help spark and sustain students' interest in learning English. Monitoring of the deployment of NETs is performed by the ATs through regular visits and discussions with the school personnel concerned. As of the current school year, based on the ATs' observation, a vast majority of the primary schools have been observing the Guidelines. For schools that experience difficulty in following the Guidelines, support is provided by the ATs.

15. It is stated in the evaluation study of the PNET Scheme that, as role models to their students, "[t]he local English teachers must speak English in front of the students at every opportunity and make sure that the quality of language demonstrates an appreciation and enthusiasm for speaking English" (EMB, 2006, p. xv). With the introduction of the PNET Scheme and the subsequent implementation of various literacy programmes, a platform has been created to generate plentiful opportunities for local English teachers to use English as they co-teach and co-plan with NETs. The achievement of one NET for each school in 2008, in particular, marks a noticeable increase in such opportunities. The professional dialogue and social and cross-cultural exchanges engendered from collaboration are especially valuable experiences for local English teachers. Alongside other EDB initiatives that support English language education, these experiences play an important part in building local English teachers' capacity for school-based curriculum development, in addition to supporting them as role models to their students.

### **The Way Forward**

16. The EDB is committed to supporting and monitoring the implementation of the NET Scheme. In this connection, a more focused territory-wide evaluation will be planned for both the PNET Scheme and the ENET Scheme to review the

effectiveness of the NET Scheme and to inform the future development of the Scheme.

**Education Bureau**  
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