

For discussion on
9 July 2013

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Secondary School Places Allocation System Challenges Arising from Fluctuation in Secondary One Student Population

Purpose

This paper outlines the basket of relief measures to be implemented from the 2013/14 school year by the Education Bureau (EDB) with a view to maintaining the stability and strengths of the schools as well as the teaching force amidst the temporary decline in Secondary One (S1) student population in the coming few years and the situation of public sector secondary schools in general under the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) System in 2013.

Background

2. According to the 2012 Hong Kong Population Projections released by the Census and Statistics Department, the EDB anticipates a temporary decline in S1 student population in the coming four school years (2013/14 to 2016/17 school years) by about 10 800 students, which represents a drop of about 17% from 64 800¹ in the 2012/13 school year to 54 000 in the 2016/17 school year. However, the number of S1 students will rebound steadily and annually from the 2017/18 school year onwards, surpassing the level of the current school year (please refer to Annex 1 for the school-aged population projections aged 12).

3. Prior to the 2013/14 school year, the number of students allocated per S1 class was 34. Notwithstanding the further relaxation of the criterion for approving S1 classes from 30 to 25 per class since the 2012/13 school year, schools were still required to meet the “not less than three S1 classes” requirement for continual operation. The decline in the number of S1 students will unavoidably affect the number of S1 classes to be operated by public sector secondary schools. As such, it is of paramount importance to maintain the overall stability of public sector secondary schools. Hence, to stabilise the teaching force and sustain the development of schools during the transient

¹ Actual number of S1 students in the 2012/13 school year.

period, the EDB announced last year a basket of relief measures with a view to maintaining the stability and strengths of the schools as well as the teaching force. In brief, to stabilise and sustain schools' development, we have relaxed the "not less than three classes" requirement. To further capitalise on the relaxation of the criterion for approving S1 classes to 25 per class, secondary schools are allowed to operate two S1 classes with a minimum intake of 26 students, i.e. 13 students on average per class. In parallel, schools operating only one S1 class may apply for various development options to continue operation. Besides, schools operating two S1 classes or less are allowed to participate in the following SSPA cycle with a cap of three S1 classes. Furthermore, the retention period for surplus teachers arising from any packing of S1 classes will be extended from one year to three years.

SSPA 2013

4. While we note that some schools have concerns over the possible reduction of S1 classes, we appreciate some parents' concern over the dampening of their children's chance of admission to schools of their choice upon reduction of school places per S1 class. To balance the needs and interests of different stakeholders, we have put in place the district-/school-based approach to reduce the number of students to be allocated per S1 class ("adjustment of students to be allocated per class"). For school years from 2013 to 2015, we will adopt a district-/school-based approach under the SSPA to adjust the number of students to be allocated to each S1 class to cater for the differences among districts and schools, as well as the demand and supply of different districts. The adjustment as mentioned above is premised on the condition that the number of students per class should progressively be reverted to the current level (36 students per class inclusive of two repeaters) after the transient drop of S1 student population. The number of schools adopting the adjustment of students to be allocated per class is set out in Annex 2.

5. Based on the projection in mid-June 2013, the number of Primary 6 students participating in SSPA 2013 is about 52 000, representing a decrease of about 5 200, vis-a-vis the earlier estimation of 5 400, when compared with the previous year. It is estimated that the overall surplus places under SSPA 2013 will be about 3 200. Please refer to Annex 3 for details.

6. To assess the impact of the decline in the overall S1 student population and/or the surplus places on public sector secondary schools, some stakeholders in the sector tend to estimate the number of S1 classes to be reduced and schools

to be affected simply by dividing the overall decrease in the number of S1 students and/or the number of surplus places by the number of students to be allocated to each class. We wish to reiterate that this is not a reflection of the actual situation. The fact is that not every S1 class has an intake of about 32 students² (excluding the two repeater places). Hence, we should not work out the number of classes to be reduced and schools to be affected simply by dividing the estimated decrease in the number of students and/or the number of surplus places by the number of students to be allocated to each class. Take for instance, some stakeholders of the sector, based on calculations as mentioned above, came up with an estimated reduction of over 150 S1 classes in 2013/14 (i.e. $5\,400 \text{ students} \div 32 \text{ students per class} = 169 \text{ classes}$) and thereby asked for a further reduction of the number of students to be allocated per class. By the same token, in those districts with relatively more surplus places in SSPA 2013 such as Tuen Mun, the Eastern District and the Southern District, the actual impact of the decline in the number of S1 students on schools in the respective district cannot be assessed simply by dividing the number of surplus places in the district by the number of students to be allocated to each class.

7. Based on experience in similar situations in the past, we expect that surplus places will be spread among some schools in a district. It is worth noting that we have relaxed the criterion for approving S1 classes from 30 to 25 per class in the 2012/13 school year and the “not less than three classes” requirement in 2013/14. A school which operates two S1 classes with an intake of a minimum of 26 students, i.e. 13 students on average per class, is able to sustain their development. On the basis of the enrolment cap of about 34 students per class (32 places for allocation plus 2 repeater places per class), the number of surplus places that can be “accommodated” by each class will be 21 ($34 - 13 = 21$). In other words, while a school will continue operation with two classes having an intake of only 26 students, it can accommodate 42 surplus places ($21 \times 2 = 42$).

8. Generally speaking, the impact of the temporary S1 student population drop on individual schools varies depending on school-based circumstances and other factors. For a school which has carried relatively more surplus places in the past few years due to the decline in S1 student population and is located in a district with a relatively larger number of surplus places in SSPA 2013, it is likely for the school to continue to be affected by the temporary student

² In SSPA 2013, the number of students allocated per S1 class is about 32 in general upon public sector secondary schools’ adoption of the district-/school-based adjustment of the number of students to be allocated per S1 class.

population drop. As a matter of fact, schools will admit students as usual during the summer holiday and hence the actual impact arising from the decline in S1 student population on schools will not be fully realised until the mid-September headcount of the school year. We anticipate that, during the period from the release of SSPA results in early July till the mid-September headcount of 2013/14, the basket of relief measures as mentioned in paragraph 3 above will bring out various desired effects and help stabilise the overall situation and some individual schools.

9. SSPA 2013 is still underway and the results will be released on 9 July 2013. We will brief Members on our latest observations of the overall situation at the meeting on 9 July 2013.

10. The EDB will continue to closely monitor the situation of individual schools and render professional support to schools as appropriate. We will continue to engage the sector to ensure the stability of public sector secondary schools with a view to embracing the challenges brought about by the fluctuation in S1 student population.

Education Bureau
July 2013

**Projected School-age Population Aged 12 Residing in Hong Kong
from 2013/14 to 2027/28 School Years**

School Year	Aged 12
2013/14	57 800
2014/15	51 200
2015/16	50 900
2016/17	48 400
2017/18	50 800
2018/19	55 200
2019/20	56 700
2020/21	62 700
2021/22	65 200
2022/23	69 900
2023/24	75 000
2024/25	75 800
2025/26	65 500
2026/27	59 300
2027/28	60 000

Notes:

- (1) Children aged 12 are normally considered appropriate for admission to S1.
- (2) The figures are the projected numbers of local children aged 12 residing in Hong Kong (i.e. Hong Kong usual residents), excluding cross-boundary students.
- (3) The projections are compiled based on the 2011-based population projections released by the Census and Statistics Department in July 2012.
- (4) The figures refer to the position as at September of the respective school years, rounded to the nearest hundred.

**Overview of the District-/School-based Adjustment to the
Number of Students Allocated per S1 Class under SSPA 2013
with breakdown by the number and category of schools**

Number of students allocated per S1 class	Number of public sector schools		
	Government schools	Aided and Caput schools	Total
34	15	15	30
33	3	44	47
32	12	299	311

SSPA 2013
Estimated Supply and Demand of School Places by School Nets
under Central Allocation (Part B)
(As at mid-June 2013)

District	Estimated demand for school places	Estimated supply of school places after netting arrangement	Surplus/Shortfall
	(a)	(b)	(b) - (a)
Central & Western	900	950	50
Wan Chai	1 300	1 350	50
Eastern	1 700	2 100	400
Southern	500	900	400
Total for Hong Kong Island	4 400	5 300	900
Yau Tsim Mong	1 000	1 150	150
Sham Shui Po	1 700	1 750	50
Kowloon City	2 600	2 700	100
Wong Tai Sin	1 500	1 750	250
Kwun Tong	2 600	2 650	50
Total for Kowloon	9 400	10 000	600
Kwai Tsing	2 400	2 450	50
Tsuen Wan	1 300	1 300	0
Tuen Mun	2 100	2 750	650
Yuen Long	2 600	2 700	100
North	1 800	1 800	0
Tai Po	1 000	1 200	200
Sha Tin	2 400	2 700	300
Sai Kung	1 000	1 300	300
Islands	300	400	100
Total for the New Territories	14 900	16 600	1 700
Overall Total	28 700	31 900	3 200

Notes:

- (1) The above projection with approximate figures is as at mid-June 2013.
- (2) The estimated demand for school places has excluded those in respect of the Jockey Club Ti-I College, the Direct Subsidy Scheme secondary schools which have not participated in the SSPA, the Discretionary Places Admission stage as well as Part A “Unrestricted School Choices” of the Central Allocation stage, but included the estimated number of participants before July such as newly arrived students.
- (3) The figures are rounded to the nearest 50. There may be a slight discrepancy between the sum of individual items and the respective totals owing to rounding.