



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部教育局
Education Bureau
Government Secretariat, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

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14 December 2012

Clerk to Panel
Legislative Council Panel on Education
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central
Hong Kong
(Attn: Ms Polly YEUNG)

Dear Ms YEUNG,

Legislative Council Panel on Education
Follow-up to Special Meetings on 2 and 3 November 2012

Thank you for your letters dated 2 and 5 November 2012. Written response to the issues arising from the special meetings is enclosed at Annex 1 and 2 for Members' reference.

Yours sincerely,

(Miss P L WU)

for Secretary for Education

Panel on Education

Issues arising from special meeting on 2 November 2012

1. The Education Bureau ("EDB") is asked to explain the reasons for issuing a full-page newspaper advertisement today stating its stance, instead of engaging the stakeholders in mutual discussion.

EDB's response:

With regard to the temporary decline in Secondary One (S1) student population, EDB has been deliberating on measures and exchanging views with the education sector. We have also met with parents' organisations so that we could gather views of different stakeholders.

Various targeted relief measures were put forward by the Secretary for Education in the reply to the Legislative Council oral question No. 4 on the decline in S1 population on 17 October 2012, which have caused public concern and discussion about the issue thereafter. We thus published a newspaper supplement on 2 November 2012, informing the stakeholders and public of the temporary decline in the number of S1 students in the coming few years and the package of relief measures proposed by EDB; such that the public would have a clearer and more comprehensive understanding about the crux of the problem and the specific content of the new relief measures.

This is not the first time the Government has explained its policies and initiatives through newspaper supplements or advertisements. Newspaper supplements had been placed for other topics previously. Subsequent to the release of the newspaper supplement, EDB has continued to meet with different stakeholders to exchange views on many occasions.

2. Please advise how EDB will deal with the succession gap arising from the departure of experienced teachers joining the Early Retirement Scheme for Aided Secondary School Teachers ("ERS"); and whether EDB has assessed the possible impact on the feeling of students.

EDB's response:

The ERS (the Scheme) is not a new initiative. It has been implemented from the 2006/07 to 2012/13 school years upon the support of the Panel on Education and the approval of the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council. The objectives of the Scheme are to facilitate schools to resolve the subject mismatch of teachers arising from the implementation of the new senior secondary curriculum, alleviate teacher redundancy and maintain a healthy turnover in schools. In the past, there was an annual average of more than a hundred teachers participating in the Scheme, which accounted for about 0.6% of more than 20 000 aided secondary school teachers. The percentage is small as compared with the approximate 5% annual wastage rate of teachers. Besides, the teachers' application for the Scheme is on a voluntary basis and schools are requested to consider the operational needs when making recommendations on individual applications. In this regard, the early retirement of the teachers nominated should not have any adverse impact on school operation and feeling of students.

EDB fully understands the importance of stabilising the teaching force. Thus, we have been formulating targeted relief measures actively to alleviate the impact of population decline on the teaching force. The package of measures include reducing the number of S1 students allocated to each class, allowing schools to operate two classes with admission of 26 students, and extending the retention period of surplus teachers arising from the reduction in S1 classes from one year to three years. We believe that the problem of surplus teachers can be largely alleviated with these various measures.

3. Please advise on EDB's view on the impact which will result if certain "band 3" secondary schools that have enabled students to deliver better performance are to be closed due to the decline in secondary student population.

EDB's response:

As a matter of fact, there are no so-called "Band 3" secondary schools in the education system of Hong Kong. The streaming of students into three bands is only a part of the allocation process of S1 places to students under the Secondary School Places Allocation System. EDB believes that all schools should shoulder the same important responsibility of nurturing our students. Regardless of the general banding of their student intake, all schools have to provide appropriate guidance and care for the development of students having regard to their ability and needs. Therefore, we value the experience of each school in delivering its education service and would not like to see the closing of any schools due to the decline in S1 student population. We put forward the package of targeted measures with an aim to sustain school development and the stability of the teaching force during the transitional period of temporary decline in S1 student population, and in turn preserving the capacity of the education sector.

4. Given the drop of secondary student population, EDB is asked to advise whether the Administration will provide more opportunities for teachers to receive professional training on the preparation of teaching resources and on how to cater for students with special education needs.

EDB's response:

To improve the quality of education, we have all along been promoting teachers' continuous professional development. At all times, we are dedicated to maintaining a team of committed teaching profession with high quality. During the transitional period of temporary decline in secondary student population, the package of relief measures we put forward also aim at stabilising the teaching force in order to sustain the capacity of the education sector. The Secretary for Education has announced that during the transitional period from the 2013/14 to 2015/16 school years, when schools have surplus teachers arising from a reduction in the number of S1 classes, the retention period of surplus teachers is to be extended from one year to three years. We advise schools and school sponsoring bodies to make good use of the surplus manpower to facilitate sharing of and studies on learning and teaching, such as forming quality circle among schools under the same school sponsoring body or region. With teachers sharing their experience in learning and teaching and school management, students' learning effectiveness could ultimately be enhanced. Apart from this, the surplus manpower could allow experienced teachers to take up the roles of mentors to provide guidance to novice teachers in other schools under the same school sponsoring body.

EDB will continue to provide secondary school teachers with professional development programmes to enhance their understanding of and skills on development, adaptation and effective use of learning and teaching resources and strategies to cater for learner diversity.

Besides, to enhance teachers' capacity in catering for students with special educational needs (SEN), EDB launched a teacher professional development framework on integrated education (the Framework) in the

2007/08 school year. Under the Framework, structured training courses on catering for students with SEN are conducted for serving teachers. To facilitate teachers' participation in the courses, regular teachers of public sector schools will be granted paid study leave for attending the courses. Supply teachers are also provided for their schools accordingly.

Apart from the above courses, EDB has also been organising seminars, workshops and experience-sharing sessions on topics related to SEN for teachers and other school personnel on a need basis.

5. EDB is asked to advise whether the number of places at the Hong Kong Institute of Education would be adjusted if ERS is implemented.

EDB's response:

When planning the training places of the teacher education institutions for the coming few years, we have taken into account the change of school age population in the following 10 years and made adjustment to the quota of teacher training for primary and secondary schools. Since teacher education training lasts for four to five years, the prospective teachers, who will graduate in the corresponding years, have already been admitted into the teacher education institutions. Besides, the training places for the coming few years have already been approved. Thus, we will not adjust the number of training places of the institutions no matter the ERS is extended or not.

6. EDB is asked to advise on the plan, if any, to retain serving teachers during the transitional drop in secondary student population; and whether the Administration will consider reducing the number of teaching sessions for each teacher.

EDB's response:

During the transitional period of temporary decline in secondary student population, EDB will take timely and proportionate relief measures with a view to facilitating the development of the schools and maintaining the stability of the teaching force in order to preserve the capacity of the education sector. One of the relief measures is the extension of the retention period of surplus teachers from one year to three years so that teachers holding a permanent post would not be laid off as a result of the decline in S1 student population in the coming three school years.

Meanwhile, we will discuss with schools and school sponsoring bodies on how the surplus manpower could be effectively deployed for the long-term improvement of the quality of school education.

All along, we are committed to providing different types of resources for schools to help them offer a good working environment for teachers in which they can focus more on teaching and catering for the needs of students. Schools can flexibly deploy their resources to procure services or appoint additional staff to support teachers in their teaching and non-teaching duties. Teachers will then have more capacity to exert their professional for enhancing the teaching quality. Over the years, in addition to the existing teacher-to-class ratio, we have been providing schools with a lot more resources through a variety of initiatives resulting from which the student-to-teacher ratio has been gradually improved from 18.0:1 in 2005/06 to 15.3 in 2011/12. In other words, schools are free to arrange the number of teaching sessions for teachers according to their school-based situation.

7. On "small class teaching", EDB is requested to provide information on the teacher-to-student ratio and the average class size of secondary schools in European countries, the United States, Australia and New Zealand.

EDB's response:

Referring to “the average class size of secondary schools in Hong Kong is generally similar to those of other developed economies in Asia” as stipulated in the discussion paper, we are of the view that a comparison of the situation of Hong Kong with that of other developed economies in Asia should be more appropriate as we share similar cultural background, social development, and parental aspirations for the education of their children. Regarding the Panel’s request for the teacher-to-student ratio and the average class size of secondary schools in European countries, the United States, Australia and New Zealand, it is worth noting that we have picked the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Finland out of the approximately 50 countries of Europe in compiling the relevant information below. Please refer to the “Education at a Glance 2012” published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development for details:

Country	Teacher-to-student ratio	Average class size
United Kingdom	1:14.5	21.1
Germany	1:14.4	24.7
France	1:12.1	24.3
Italy	1:12.0	21.3
Spain	1:8.6	23.7
Finland	1:13.2	20.2
United States	1:14.9	23.7
Australia	1:12.3	22.8
New Zealand	1:15.4	Not provided

Furthermore, the figures in footnote 2 of the LC Paper No. CB(2)74/12-13(01) are hereby updated as follows:

<u>Country / Region</u>	<u>Teacher-to-student ratio</u>	<u>Average class size</u>
Hong Kong	1:15.3	33.4
Taiwan	1:13.7 (junior secondary)	31.6 (junior secondary)
Singapore	1:14.8	36.3
South Korea	1:18.0	34.9 (junior secondary)
Japan	1:13.1	32.8 (junior secondary)

Note:

- Hong Kong Information obtained from the School Education Statistics Section of the Education Bureau. The figures reflect the position of public secondary schools in Hong Kong in the 2011/12 school year.
- Taiwan “2012 Educational Statistical Indicators” issued by Ministry of Education, Republic of China (Taiwan) (The figures reflect the position of junior secondary schools in Taiwan in 2011)
- Singapore Ministry of Education Singapore – Education Statistics Digest 2012 (The figures reflect the position of secondary schools in Singapore in 2011)
- South Korea & Japan Education at a glance 2012, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Indicators (The figures reflect the position of public secondary schools in South Korea and Japan in 2010)

Panel on Education

Issues arising from special meeting on 3 November 2012

1. Notwithstanding its advice that from 2006-2007 to the current year, only eight secondary schools have been or will be closed upon their own decision for various reasons (paragraph 3 of LC Paper No. CB(4)74/12-13(01)), the Education Bureau ("EDB") is requested to provide information, if any, on the estimated number of secondary schools (including Chinese secondary schools) that will be closed as a result of the decline in Secondary One ("S1") student population in the three school years after 2012-2013.

EDB's response:

When the number of S1 student population reduced by about 22 000 in total from the 2006/2007 to 2012/13 school years, with the relief measures put in place, only eight secondary schools have been or will be closed out of their volition for various reasons.

As to the situation in the coming three years, we should take note of the relief measures to be implemented, which includes the relaxation of the "not less than three classes" requirement for secondary schools; and schools will be approved to operate two classes with an admission of only 26 students. For schools not able to operate two S1 classes, they can still apply for development options and continue their operation. Coupled with the district-based and school-based yearly progressive reduction in the number of students allocated for three years, we believe that the host of relief measures could help sustain school development and stability during the transitional period of temporary decline in S1 population.

We would like to reiterate that EDB does not adopt any school consolidation policy for secondary schools. In other words, whether an individual secondary school will choose to close is subject to various reasons including their own volition, outcome in their applications for development options, etc. Hence it is not easy to estimate the number of secondary schools which will be closed in the future.

2. Regarding the education sector's "3-2-1" proposal of progressively reducing the number of students allocated to each S1 class across-the-board in the three years starting from the 2013-2014 school year, and adopting a mechanism which allows the upward and downward adjustment in the longer term with regard to the change in S1 student population, EDB is asked to advise on the following -
 - (a) whether the proposal, if implemented, will be cost-neutral; and
 - (b) details of the "substantial financial commitment" as stated in paragraph 16 of Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(4)74/12-13(01)).

EDB's response:

The Administration has informed the Legislative Council in 2005 that the implementation of the initiatives under the new academic structure relies on the re-deployment of savings arising from the decline in student population. Notwithstanding this, the Government has been deploying additional resources, as appropriate, to implement a series of support measures to maintain the stability of school development and the teaching force, including the reduction of number of students allocated to each S1 class in phases from 38 to 34 since 2008 and the implementation of the Voluntary Optimisation of Class Structure Scheme in 2010 and 2011. Should we introduce further measures to alleviate the impact of drop in S1 student population, additional resources would be required.

Over the past five years, the recurrent government expenditure on secondary education has increased by 19% from \$18,860 million in 2008-09 to \$22,410 million in 2012-13. The unit cost per secondary student has increased at a faster pace of 23% from \$39,485 in 2008-09 to \$48,550 in 2012-13.

Subventions to public sector schools are generally dispensed by class. Adopting the "3-2-1" proposal will reduce the number of S1 classes that would otherwise be packed under the prevailing allocation class size and the reduction of the allocation class size for one cohort will last for six years

from S1 to S6. On the basis that the subvention for each secondary class in 2012/13 school year would be about \$1.8 million, the total subvention required to continue maintaining one S1 class for one cohort of six years would be about \$10.8 million, while 10 S1 classes would be \$108 million and 20 S1 classes for \$216 million and so forth.

We are unable to provide the exact financial commitment of the “3-2-1” proposal at this stage as the exact number of classes packed would depend on the actual S1 enrolment of the schools in September headcount. The actual enrolment, in turn, is affected by a basket of factors, including the parental choice, the results of the Secondary School Places Allocation, and the transfer of students among schools after allocation, etc. This is especially the case when after relaxation of the class packing threshold from 30 to 25 students, the size of an S1 class could range from as low as 13 to as high as 36 students.

3. EDB is requested to –

- (a) maintain dialogue with stakeholders and to give an early response to the education sector's proposal (namely, progressively reducing the class size in the next three school years and adopting a mechanism which allows upward and downward adjustment with regard to changes in secondary student population) as a more immediate measures to cope with the decline in S1 student population; and
- (b) to advise the Panel in due course its medium- and longer-term plans to improve basic education (including a proposal to reduce the class size of the senior secondary levels to 30 students, which was the typical class size of Forms 6 and 7 prior to the implementation of the New Academic Structure).

EDB's response:

- (a) The Bureau has all along been keeping a dialogue with the school sector and parents on issues regarding the decline in S1 student population. Subsequent to the special meeting of the Panel on Education held on 3 November, EDB continued to meet with different stakeholders. After thorough deliberation and discussion with the education sector and parents, we announced in a letter to all secondary schools on 27 November 2012 that we would adopt a district-based and school-based approach to reduce progressively the number of students allocated to each S1 class by year from the 2013/14 to 2015/16 school year. We strongly believe a flexible district-based and school-based approach on adjusting the allocation class size would best balance the needs and interests of school sponsoring bodies, school principals, teachers, parents and students.
- (b) To improve basic education, we will continue to provide resources to schools, explore and take strategic measures to strengthen the support provided for teachers and disadvantaged students, and to enhance the effectiveness of learning and teaching. Policy-wise, we will continue to enhance the management capability and accountability of schools, and to provide them with an appropriate degree of freedom and flexibility in

the use of resources so as to enable them to properly address their students' needs in various aspects and to develop quality school education. We will inform the Panel of our relevant plans where necessary.