



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

By fax and by post

Dear Ms YEUNG,

**Legislative Council Panel on Education
Follow-up to Meeting on 12 November 2012**

With regard to the motion of Hon IP Kin-yuen passed at the meeting of the Legislative Council Panel on Education on 12 November 2012 which urges the Government to reduce the class size of secondary schools, to implement progressively small class teaching (SCT) in secondary schools across the territory, to increase the number of regular teaching posts and to improve both the teacher-to-student ratio and the class-to-teacher ratio amidst the declining secondary student population, our response is set out below.

Reducing Class Size of Secondary Schools and Progressively Implementing SCT

To address the temporary decline in the number of school-age Secondary One (S1) students in the next three to four years, we have put in place a basket of targeted measures to preserve the stability and strength of the schools and the teaching force, after taking into account the views of stakeholders in the education sector. These measures include, among others, lifting the “not less than three classes” requirement;

relaxing the criterion for approving S1 classes to 25 students per class so that schools can operate two S1 classes even with an intake of 26 S1 students (i.e. 13 students per class); and extending the retention period for surplus teachers.

To balance the needs and interests of school sponsoring bodies, school principals, teachers, parents and students, we have adopted a district- and school-based approach to reduce the number of students allocated to each S1 class, having given due consideration to the differences among districts and schools. In the light that we are tackling a transient matter, we will not and should not make hasty decisions on class size that has far-reaching implications. In fact, public sector secondary schools have agreed that upon rebound of the S1 student population, we will increase the number of students allocated to each S1 class progressively until it returns to the present level; the pace of increase will correspond to the level of reduction in the number of students allocated to each S1 class adopted on a district/ school basis amidst the S1 student population drop.

As regards SCT, its effectiveness in secondary schools is in fact inconclusive from international studies. Besides, SCT is a method of teaching. Based on international studies, it is most effective when students are small and its effectiveness tends to wane as students age. Celebrated educators have commented that the cost of SCT is high while its effectiveness is uncertain. Conceptually speaking, SCT is in fact a kind of teaching setting or grouping underpinned by teaching considerations. The size of grouping should not be fixed across-the-board, but adjusted according to the learning objectives and students' needs.

In considering whether to implement SCT in secondary schools, we must take into account the existing conditions of secondary schools, the teaching and learning environment as well as provision of support to secondary schools, overseas experience and resource allocation. We should also draw on the experience of SCT in primary schools and analyse whether secondary schools should, as in primary schools, reduce the class size across-the-board so as to make SCT practicable and sustainable in secondary schools. It is worth noting that the number of school-age S1 students is projected to rebound steadily on a year-on-year basis from the 2017/18 school year onwards to the extent that it will exceed the level of this school year. An across-the-board reduction in class size will surely increase the pressure on the demand for school sites when the S1 population rebounds. Further, with the adoption of subject grouping at senior secondary levels, the actual number of students in each teaching class/ group is much smaller than the number of students allocated per S1 class. We cannot commit ourselves to implementing SCT in secondary schools

simply for the sake of meeting the demand for SCT, or for releasing the pressure arising from student population decline, without a thorough consideration of different aspects from the education perspective.

Increasing number of regular teaching posts and improving the teacher-to-student and the class-to-teacher ratios

Over the past few years, the Education Bureau has already reduced the number of students allocated to each S1 classes from 38 to the present 34. With the implementation of a number of measures to enhance the quality of education, the student-to-teacher ratio in public sector secondary schools has improved significantly from 18.0:1 in the 2005/06 school year to 15.3:1 in the 2011/12 school year. Schools are adequately staffed to cater for learner diversity, and raise teaching effectiveness.

In addition, we have increased the teacher-to-class ratio for senior secondary levels from 1.9 to 2.0 teachers per class from the 2012/13 school year onwards in accordance with established policies. We will also continue to implement targeted measures to provide schools with additional regular teaching posts and cash grants for the appointment of teaching staff. For example, around 600 additional teachers have been provided to schools in the 2012/13 school year to support academic low achievers.

We have also implemented a number of new measures to address the temporary decline in S1 student population, which include, among others, relaxing the criterion for approving S1 classes to 25 students per class (i.e. schools may operate two classes even by admitting just 26 students) and extending the retention period for surplus teachers to three years. These measures serve to reduce the teacher-to-student ratio. Moreover, we will adopt a district- and school-based approach to reduce the number of students allocated to each S1 class flexibly in a progressive manner during the transitional period when there is a decline in S1 student population. This initiative will lead to further reduction in the teacher-to-student ratio.

We will keep under review the effectiveness of these measures.

Yours sincerely,



(Miss S H YU)

for Secretary for Education