

For discussion
on 16 July 2014

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Follow-up to policy on small class teaching in primary schools and issues related to increasing the number of students allocated to each Primary One class

Purpose

Further to Paper No. CB(4)645/13-14(01) on the Primary One Admission (POA) System 2014 discussed at the meeting on 12 May 2014, this paper informs Members of our earlier meeting with the school sector to deliberate further, capitalising on the experience of the current POA cycle, on the challenges of the projected transient increasing demand for Primary One (P1) places in the coming few years, including the policy on small class teaching (SCT) and the temporary arrangement for allocating more students to each P1 class to increase the supply of P1 places in the districts concerned.

Background

2. The demand for public sector P1 places is projected to reach its peak between the 2016/17 and 2018/19 school years and then progressively decrease to a stable level. To meet the transient increase in demand for P1 places in the 2014 cycle, we have, in five school nets of three districts (i.e. school nets 46 and 48 in Kwun Tong, school nets 73 and 74 in Yuen Long and school net 84 in Tai Po), adopted the arrangement for temporarily allocating more students to each P1 class. This is mainly because the number of remaining classrooms and/or other rooms for changing into additional classrooms is not sufficient to make up for the total shortfall of school places in the districts/school nets concerned. On the other hand, an across-the-board increase in the number of school places to 30 for each P1 class in schools implementing SCT in the districts/school nets concerned would generally address the

concerns of stakeholders and avoid unnecessary labelling. When working out the “provisional number of places for the Central Allocation (CA)” on the basis of 30 for each P1 class for the schools concerned, the Education Bureau (EDB) will provide these schools with a time-limited additional Assistant Primary School Master/Mistress post¹ according to the existing arrangements for schools maintaining 30 students per P1 class.

Latest Development

3. The results of the CA were released on 7 June 2014 and students completed registration at schools allocated on 11 June 2014. The EDB met with the school sector upon the release of the allocation results. We appreciate schools’ concerted efforts in putting in place the arrangements for POA 2014 including allocating more students to each P1 class in five school nets of the three districts concerned and the complementary support.

4. Besides, premised on meeting the increasing demand for P1 places in the transitional period, the school sector has agreed, for planning for POA 2015, to continue to adopt the flexible measures, including allocating more students to each P1 class. The EDB has, in parallel, reiterated to the school sector that the existing policy for public sector primary schools to progressively implement SCT where circumstances permit will remain unchanged. The EDB will continue to adopt 25 students per class as the planning parameter for provision of public sector school places. In the light that the projected demand for school places would decrease to a stable level after the transitional period, the school sector and EDB have reached a consensus that construction of new schools to meet any transient demand for P1 places should be avoided as far as possible. The use of land, which is a valuable resource, should tie in with the long-term and sustainable development of the districts concerned. This will also help relieve any impact on the stable development of primary schools when the demand for school places subsides. Against the above, allocating more students to each P1 class is

¹ There are only nine schools in school net 73. The demand for P1 places is relatively greater in this school net under POA 2014 and the number of students allocated per class has been increased to 31. The EDB will provide the schools concerned with an additional funding for each additional student above 30 in each P1 class.

a contingency measure out of absolute necessity. The EDB has undertaken to further explore, based on prioritisation of public resources utilisation and relevant existing arrangements, to provide the schools concerned with supplementary support to help them continue small class teaching in a professionally pedagogical learning and teaching manner.

5. While the number of applicant children in each POA cycle is substantial, the POA System consists of two stages, viz. the Discretionary Places (DP) Admission stage and the CA stage aiming to allocate a public sector P1 place to all applicant children in an orderly manner. At the DP Admission stage, parents may apply to any public sector school. Applicant children who have not been offered a DP may participate in the ensuing CA stage. Hence, the process and relevant procedures of the POA System, in particular the calculation of the demand for school places and corresponding “provisional number of places for the CA” of individual schools, are very tight. Due to various factors (including the number of newly arrived children from the Mainland, parental choices, etc.), there are uncertainties about the actual demand for P1 places and the situation in different districts or school nets in each allocation cycle may vary. These year-on-year changes are not fully foreseeable in long-term overall planning. Hence, the “provisional number of places for the CA” has to be adjusted in light of the actual demand for school places from January (school choice making) to May (computer-processing for CA) every year. We have reviewed the process of the POA System and are exploring with the school sector on the feasibility of postponing the school choice making exercise of the CA stage from mid-January to early February to allow us more time to listen to schools’ views on arrangements for temporarily increasing the supply of school places before finalising the “provisional number of places for the CA” for issue of the Choice of Schools List by School Net for the CA.

6. As mentioned in paragraph 4 above, the school sector has agreed to continue to adopt various flexible measures to cope with the transient increase in demand in each POA cycle in the coming years. The flexible measures include borrowing school places from neighbouring school nets, making use of remaining classrooms and changing use of other rooms² to additional classrooms, temporarily allocating more students to each P1

² Excluding the special rooms of schools.

class and recycling vacant school premises. Both the EDB and the school sector, acknowledging the concerns of different stakeholders over individual flexible measures, appreciate that should a multi-pronged approach be adopted, the synergy effect so achieved would help alleviate the impact of individual flexible measures on stakeholders. For instance, on borrowing school places from neighbouring school nets, we will work together with the school sector to promote parent education, specifically in the implementation of the revised arrangements under CA for cross-boundary students (CBS) with a view to diverting CBS to other districts so as to alleviate the shortfall of school places in a particular district, and to ensure that all eligible applicant children will be allocated a P1 place in an orderly manner. As regards the use of remaining classrooms and/or the change of other rooms into additional classrooms, noting schools' general expectation for a symmetrical class structure as their normal development, we will keep an open mind to explore with schools, as and when appropriate in the future, ways to alleviate the surplus teacher arising from student population fluctuation. On the other hand, we have recently launched a school allocation exercise to recycle two vacant school premises in Kwun Tong for temporary school extension or operation of a school. We will continue to proactively explore the feasibility of recycling vacant school premises and expansion of individual schools for more temporary classrooms in districts with a tight supply of school places with a view to increasing the supply of school places.

7. The prerequisite for effectively putting into force the afore-mentioned flexible arrangements to increase temporarily the supply of P1 places in the transitional period is enhanced communication and transparency. This would help schools in the relevant school nets/districts grasp the situations in different stages of the POA cycle to facilitate their consideration of the appropriateness of various flexible measures in individual school nets/districts. The EDB attaches great importance to engaging the school sector. Further to the meeting with the school sector in mid-June, we will also meet with schools of various districts this month to explore refinement to the implementation details as appropriate, including the flexible measure of temporarily allocating more students to each P1 class, so as to plan for the coming POA cycle the earliest possible.

8. While appreciating the implications of changes in student population on stakeholders (including schools and parents), the EDB will continue to liaise with major stakeholders with a view to formulating pragmatic measures, having balanced different concerns, and to alleviating the impact of changes in student population. We will collaborate with the sector to embrace the challenges arising from student population changes.

Education Bureau
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