

For discussion on 10 November 2014

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 (“Enhanced NET Scheme”) and the NET Scheme in Primary Schools (“Primary NET Scheme”). The Enhanced NET Scheme was introduced to public sector secondary schools in the 1998/99 school year, following the Chief Executive’s Policy Address in 1997. The Primary NET Scheme was introduced to public sector primary schools in the 2002/03 school year and the target of providing each eligible primary school with a NET was achieved in the 2008/09 school year. Under the NET Scheme, every public sector secondary school, and every public sector primary school having six or more classes, is normally allocated one NET post.

3. Through the implementation of the NET Scheme, it is expected that NETs bring into the language classrooms of local schools their professional experience, different teaching styles and ideas, and cultural literacies that can help enrich students’ literacy experiences and the language learning environment. Playing a complementary role as resource teachers, NETs collaborate with our local teachers to enhance the strategies for curriculum development, language instruction and assessment.

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

The Enhanced NET 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.

### The Primary NET 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.

5. To achieve the above, NETs support and collaborate with local English teachers to develop and implement the curriculum and handle subject-related tasks. For instance, they help design the school-based English Language curriculum, develop learning and teaching materials, organise co-curricular activities, foster the professional development of English teachers, and hence enhance schools' overall capacity to improve English language teaching.

6. In the 2014/15 school year, a total of 459 public sector primary schools and 408 public sector secondary schools participate in the NET Scheme, engaging a total of 455 and 403 NETs respectively<sup>1</sup>. The provision for NETs in public sector primary and secondary schools for the 2013-14 financial year was \$345.6 million and \$367.9 million respectively. The corresponding estimated figures for the 2014-15 financial year are \$356.3 million and \$390.3 million.

7. Administrative and professional support for schools under the NET Scheme is provided respectively by the NET Administration Team and the NET Section of the Education Bureau (EDB).

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

## **Regular Monitoring of Implementation and Commissioned Evaluation of the NET Scheme**

### *Regular Monitoring by the EDB*

8. The NET Scheme is monitored by the EDB on a regular basis through the following means:

#### 8.1 at the primary level

- monitoring conducted by the Advisory Teachers (ATs) of the NET Section through school visits and review of their school support plans;
- the Annual Survey (administered online with support from the Centre for the Advancement of Social Sciences Research of Hong Kong Baptist University since the 2012/13 school year); and
- case studies and literacy programme evaluation.

#### 8.2 at the secondary level

- the Annual NET Deployment Survey (administered online with support from the Centre for the Advancement of Social Sciences Research of Hong Kong Baptist University since the 2012/13 school year).

#### 8.3 at both the primary and secondary levels

- school inspection and evaluation of the implementation of the English Language curriculum.

### *Evaluation of the Enhanced NET Scheme Commissioned by the EDB*

9. In addition to the above, there are large-scale commissioned evaluation studies conducted by external experts. In the period from 1998 to 2000 and in 2008, the Hong Kong Institute of Education and the University of Melbourne were commissioned by the EDB respectively to study the Enhanced NET Scheme. In the first study, data were collected 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 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:

- 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 Enhanced NET Scheme helped bring about more communication in English among students, enhance their understanding of different cultures and broaden their global outlook. 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.

10. The above findings are echoed by the results of a recent survey conducted by the EDB. In the annual NET Deployment Survey conducted at the secondary level in the 2013/14 school year, most English panel chair respondents commented favourably on the role of NETs in enriching the English language environment and students' language exposure in their schools.

#### *Evaluation of the Primary NET Scheme Commissioned by the EDB*

11. During the period from 2004 to 2006, the University of Melbourne was commissioned by the EDB to conduct a three-year territory-wide longitudinal and comprehensive evaluation study of the Primary NET 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 point to the value of the Scheme:

- The Scheme helped to facilitate the professional development of primary English teachers. 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 of the NET Section of the EDB, and the adoption of recommended learning and teaching resources and strategies, 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.

12. In a commissioned study conducted by The University of Hong Kong on the implementation of the revised English Language curriculum in the 2009/10 school year, NETs' contribution to local English teachers' professional development and primary students' English learning was also noted. A territory-wide survey on the deployment of NETs in primary schools conducted by the EDB for the 2013/14 school year yielded similar findings.

### **Impact of the Evaluation Studies**

13. The three evaluation studies mentioned in Paragraphs 9 and 11 made various recommendations, which have been instrumental in guiding the recent development of the NET Scheme, as evident in the following:

- As reading is important for children's literacy development in early years and Key Stage 1, a Primary Literacy Programme – Reading and Writing (PLP-R/W) was developed from scratch by the Advisory Teaching Team of the NET Section in 2007 and has since been adopted by an increasing number of schools, from 12 in 2007 to 200-plus in the current school year. The PLP-R/W provides a platform for focused collaboration between the NET and the local English teachers in each programme school to strengthen support for the literacy development of lower primary students, especially those with little family support. The launch of a new phase of the PLP-R/W development in the current school year, which promotes e-learning, teachers' assessment literacy, school self-evaluation and the dissemination of good practices, aims to sustain the impact of the Programme on students' literacy development and teachers' professional growth;
- A greater emphasis has been placed on district- or region-based cluster meetings and sharing sessions to support the professional growth of NETs and local English teachers. To promote innovative practices, a puppetry competition, the first of its kind in Hong Kong, will be organised jointly by the NET Section and a number of School Development Sections in the current school year. Training and resources will be provided for the NET and the local teachers in each participating school so that they can be better equipped to prepare their students for the

- competition and to effectively use the strategies concerned in their daily teaching;
- The deployment guidelines for the Primary NET Scheme have been revised to highlight the critical role of collaboration between NETs and local English teachers in students' language development; and
  - Professional development programmes are designed specifically to cater for the professional growth of NETs and local English teachers, to promote innovative learning and teaching strategies, such as the use of puppetry and technology in the language classroom, and the dissemination of good practices, such as the promotion of formative assessment and effective teaching of reading skills and strategies.

### **A New Round of Commissioned Evaluations of the NET Scheme**

14. A new round of commissioned evaluations of the NET Scheme is currently under way. At the primary level, an evaluation plan for the Primary NET Scheme has been drawn up, focusing on specific areas. These include:

- the impact of the Primary NET Scheme on students' English language learning and the English learning environment in schools;
- the impact of the Scheme on the professional development of, and collaboration between, NETs and local English teachers;
- the impact of the Scheme on English language teaching, including pedagogy and curriculum development; and
- NET deployment.

15. The objectives of this new evaluation are to:

- inform the public of the extent of effectiveness of the Primary NET Scheme as a territory-wide initiative supporting English language education in public-sector primary schools;
- identify areas for improvement and recommend strategies to enhance the impact and effectiveness of the Primary NET Scheme; and
- inform policy making regarding the development and implementation of the Primary NET Scheme.

16. An invitation to bid for conducting the evaluation study of the Primary NET Scheme has been sent to local and overseas academics and a briefing on the study

has been held already. Once the Primary NET Scheme evaluation is under way, planning for an evaluation at the secondary level will be undertaken.

### **Judicial Review Against Non-provision of a NET for a Special School for Children with Intellectual Disability**

17. Since the hearing of the judicial review against the non-provision of a NET for a special school for children with intellectual disability has been adjourned to March 2015, the outcome of the judicial review is not yet available.

### **The Way Forward**

18. The EDB is committed to supporting and monitoring the implementation of the NET Scheme. Apart from the new round of commissioned evaluations of the Scheme, stronger emphasis will be placed on schools following the NET Deployment Guidelines by way of closer monitoring. This is to ensure that the conditions for collaboration between NETs and local English teachers are developed and fulfilled in schools to support students' English language proficiency development. At the same time, the various platforms, including the range of literacy programmes and school-based support services in place, will continue to be refined to foster focused and purposeful collaboration between NETs and local English teachers and to enhance students' literacy experiences.

**Education Bureau  
November 2014**

## References:

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