

For discussion  
on 11 May 2015

## **Legislative Council Panel on Education**

### **Pilot Scheme on Promoting Interflow between Sister Schools in Hong Kong and the Mainland**

#### **Purpose**

This paper seeks Members' views on the implementation details of a proposed three-year pilot scheme on promoting interflow between sister schools in Hong Kong and the Mainland (pilot scheme) from the 2015/16 to 2017/18 school years.

#### **Background**

2. Exchanges between Hong Kong and the Mainland in the area of education have become increasingly frequent since the reunification. Individual schools in Hong Kong have started exchange visits with schools in the Mainland while some have indicated their wish for forming sister schools and to have better understanding of the education developments in the Mainland. In light of the developments, the Education Bureau (EDB) has, since 2004, through liaison with the Mainland education authorities, coordinated pairing up primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong with those in Shanghai Municipality, Beijing Municipality, Ningbo Municipality, Sichuan Province, Zhejiang Province and Fujian Province as sister schools. Besides, under the Guangdong-Hong Kong Sister School Scheme implemented since 2005, EDB has started to arrange pairing up primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong and Guangdong Province as sister schools based on schools' preferences, offer advice on exchange activities and organise sharing and briefing sessions. All along, sister schools have been organising exchange visits and activities in accordance with their development needs. As of today, about 300 local primary and secondary schools have formed a total of over 400 pairs of sister schools with their counterparts in various Mainland provinces and cities<sup>1</sup>. Details are at the Annex.

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<sup>1</sup> Individual schools have, on their own initiative and through other means, paired up with schools in the Mainland as sister schools.

3. To further promote Hong Kong-Mainland sister school exchanges, the Chief Executive announced in the 2015 Policy Address to launch a three-year pilot scheme from the 2015/16 school year through which financial and professional support will be provided to public sector or Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) primary and secondary schools (including special schools) that have formed sister school(s) with the Mainland to support the multi-facet development of sister school activities. The number of Hong Kong-Mainland sister schools is expected to increase progressively to about 600 in three years.

### **Proposal**

4. We propose to provide a non-recurrent grant of \$120,000 per annum for three school years, i.e. the 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18 school years, to each public sector or DSS primary and secondary school (including special school) participating in the pilot scheme, to enhance the breadth and depth of cooperation between sister schools with a view to further promoting professional development and enriching the learning experiences of students.

### **Justifications**

5. The number of Hong Kong-Mainland sister schools has increased from some 20 pairs in 2004 to over 400 pairs at present. Sister schools serve as a platform for professional interflow and cooperation between local and Mainland primary and secondary schools, and facilitate schools to organise exchange activities at various levels based on their development needs, including school visits, lesson observation, lesson evaluation, lesson demonstration, variety shows, cultural studies, debate competitions, parent seminars and student pen pal schemes, etc. Feedback collected by EDB through various means (such as surveys, sharing sessions and seminars conducted from time to time as well as day-to-day contacts) from local schools having formed sister schools with the Mainland reveals that participating schools are in general positive towards the sister school scheme and they consider it can help teachers and students to have a better understanding about education in the Mainland. It also helps facilitate Hong Kong-Mainland cultural interflow, expand schools' network, enhance teachers' professionalism and broaden students' horizons. Building on the existing strengths, we consider it appropriate to further support the development of Hong Kong-Mainland sister schools with a view to promoting professional interflow.

6. So far, EDB has primarily played a liaison or coordination role in supporting the pairing up of Hong Kong and Mainland schools as sister schools. No designated funding for sister school exchanges has been provided for schools in Hong Kong. While schools recognise the benefits brought about by sister school exchanges and have accumulated experiences in this respect, many schools can only organise exchange activities on an irregular or one-off basis under resource constraint owing to other competing development needs. The proposed funding will enable sister schools to plan activities systematically and purposefully and engage in more in-depth exploration and diversified collaboration in teaching.

7. Besides, the proposed funding can help address schools' concerns by not only fostering long-term and stable partnership between sister schools, but also assisting them in handling administrative work arising from organising exchange activities, hence facilitating interflows at the school management, teacher, student and parent levels based on school-based needs, and promoting sharing of administrative experiences and conducting pedagogical studies in different subjects. It is anticipated that on the basis of the existing foundation, schools will arrange multi-facet sister school activities and the mode of exchange will be enriched to include, among others, distance learning classroom, video conferencing, project learning, joint school activities, home visits and parent forums, etc. Professional experience sharing and pedagogical studies will also facilitate establishment of learning communities among sister schools, thereby enhancing teaching effectiveness.

8. EDB will assist schools intending to join the pilot scheme to pair up with Mainland primary and secondary schools with special characteristics according to their development objectives. Given the previous experience, pairing at the initial stage will, as far as possible, be arranged for provinces and cities where sister school pairs have been formed, including Beijing Municipality, Shanghai Municipality, Ningbo Municipality, Guangdong Province, Sichuan Province, Zhejiang Province and Fujian Province. Schools may also make their own arrangements to pair up with suitable Mainland counterparts as sister schools. Apart from assisting Hong Kong primary and secondary schools to pair up with Mainland schools, EDB will, through the pilot scheme which aims at enhancing the breadth and depth of cooperation between sister schools, further consolidate experiences and effective practices of exchange activities systematically. Useful information will be disseminated through an online platform to facilitate experience sharing. We will also enhance professional support rendered to sister schools by making reference to effective modes of operation and implementation strategies. Good practices pertaining to sister school exchanges will be consolidated for reference of schools to facilitate continuous professional interflows, and the progress and effectiveness of the pilot scheme will be reviewed.

## **Implementation Details**

### Objectives

9. The pilot scheme aims at promoting professional interflow through enhanced support to the development of Hong Kong-Mainland sister schools on the basis of the existing foundation. Participating schools should use the grant to organise sustainable activities and conduct in-depth professional exploration and multi-facet co-operation so as to enhance teaching effectiveness.

### Eligibility for the Pilot Scheme

10. Public sector and DSS primary and secondary schools (including special schools) having formed sister schools with schools in the Mainland, irrespective of whether the school pair(s) is/are formed through EDB or on their own, may apply for joining the pilot scheme on a voluntary basis. Applicant schools are required to submit an application together with a proposal setting out how the grant will be used for the exchange activities with their Mainland sister schools. Applicant schools should provide a clear action plan in accordance with the objectives mentioned above. Exchange activities should in principle be carried out without affecting regular school activities.

### Use of Grant

11. Participating schools may use the grant to arrange different modes of exchange activities having regard to their specific circumstances. As the grant is a designated funding for the pilot scheme, its use should be confined to sister school exchange activities and related support of relevance to the objectives of the scheme, examples of which include expenses incurred by school managers, principals, teachers and students for visiting sister schools in the Mainland, cost for procuring services/hiring temporary support staff for handling administrative work arising from organising exchange activities with sister schools, expenses for activities jointly participated by sister schools and related expenses incurred in Hong Kong, and cost for video-conferencing facilities, etc. In view of the diversified modes and contents of exchange activities, we propose that schools may flexibly deploy the grant to carry out sister school activities within the parameters mentioned above subject to the approval of their Incorporated Management Committee (IMC)/School Management Committee (SMC).

## Disbursement Arrangements

12. The proposed pilot scheme will be implemented from the 2015/16 school year. In addition to eligible local schools which have already paired up with Mainland schools, eligible local schools which have newly formed sister schools with Mainland schools between the 2015/16 to the 2017/18 school years may also apply for the grant. Upon approval of the application and verification of sister school information, successful applicant schools will be provided with a non-recurrent grant of \$120,000 per annum within the three-year implementation period of the pilot scheme. Schools' deployment of this non-recurrent grant should observe the general principles and requirements on the use of public funds as set out by EDB. These include, for example, procurement of services according to the established procedures, preparation of a separate ledger for recording related income and expenditure, and submission of audited accounts to EDB in accordance with the existing requirements. All unspent grant will be clawed back after the pilot scheme ended in the 2017/18 school year.

## Evaluation and Accountability

13. In line with the existing "Planning-Implementation-Evaluation" work process, schools participating in the pilot scheme should review annually whether the intended objectives of professional exchange activities have been achieved and submit a report to EDB after endorsement of their IMC/SMC. This will facilitate EDB to conduct a comprehensive review of the overall effectiveness of the pilot scheme and consolidate sister school exchange experience for the reference of schools. As the above administrative requirements are familiar to schools as part and parcel of their regular work, it should not create undue workload for the schools concerned.

## Professional Support

14. Through commissioned service, EDB will provide participating schools with professional support, including organising sharing sessions, offering advice on exchange activities, facilitating schools to organise exchange activities, as well as collecting and disseminating good practices. For schools without direct contact with schools in the Mainland, the service provider will offer assistance in the pairing up with Mainland schools according to the schools' preferences and development needs.

## Expected Deliverable

15. It is expected that the provision of resources and support under the pilot scheme will foster more public sector and DSS schools (including special schools) in Hong Kong to form sister schools with schools in the Mainland, and the number of sister schools will increase progressively from about 300 currently to about 600 in the 2017/18 school year. Through experience sharing and learning from each other, the pilot scheme will promote professional interflow between schools in Hong Kong and the Mainland and enhance schools' capacity in management, curriculum leadership and pedagogical studies, which in turn support professional development and teaching effectiveness, as well as strengthen exchange and cooperation between Hong Kong and the Mainland. In the long run, the sister school network is conducive to the building of learning communities, facilitating experience sharing and professional development. At the student level, the pilot scheme can help promote mutual understanding, enhance awareness of their respective strengths, broaden their horizons, and offer them new inspiration. We will review the progress and effectiveness of the pilot scheme in the third year of its implementation.

## **Financial Implications**

16. Making reference to the existing number of local schools which have paired up with Mainland schools as sister schools through the co-ordination of EDB, it is estimated that about 450 schools will participate in the pilot scheme in the 2015/16 school year, and the number will progressively increase to about 550 and about 600 in the 2016/17 and 2017/18 school years respectively. For the provision of an annual grant of \$120,000 for each participating school together with the expenditure for the commissioned service, it is estimated that \$200 million will be required for the pilot scheme<sup>2</sup>.

## **Consultation**

17. We have consulted major school councils and school heads associations on the proposed implementation details mentioned above. The representatives have expressed support to the proposal and considered that the pilot scheme can help promote professional interflow between Hong Kong and Mainland schools, enhance

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<sup>2</sup> Besides, we plan to create a time-limited Education Officer (Administration) post to support and monitor the implementation of the pilot scheme. The relevant expenditure will be subsumed under the recurrent departmental expenditure of EDB.

learning and teaching effectiveness, as well as establish professional learning communities. They have also provided views on the modes of exchange and implementation details.

### **Advice Sought**

18. Subject to the support of Members, we will seek funding support for the proposed pilot scheme from the Finance Committee (FC) of the Legislative Council. With FC's approval, we will inform schools of the details and arrangements of the pilot scheme and start to disburse funding to participating schools in the 2015/16 school year.

19. Members are invited to give views on the proposal set out in this paper.

Education Bureau

May 2015

**Number of Sister School Pairs Formed with Mainland Schools  
in Various Provinces and Municipalities  
through the Coordination of the Education Bureau  
(as at March 2015)**

<b>Province/Municipality</b>	<b>Secondary School</b>	<b>Primary School</b>	<b>Total (Pairs)</b>
Shanghai	6	0	<b>6</b>
Beijing	30	0	<b>30</b>
Ningbo	15	4	<b>19</b>
Guangdong	154	137	<b>291</b>
Sichuan	30	4	<b>34</b>
Zhejiang	35	13	<b>48</b>
Fujian	6	7	<b>13</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>441</b>