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Panel on Education

Meeting on 11 May 2015

Background brief on issues related to education for cross-boundary students

Purpose

This paper summarizes the major views and concerns expressed by Members on issues related to education for cross-boundary students.

Overview of cross-boundary students

2. According to the information provided by the Administration in February 2013, the number of Type II babies (born to Mainland women in Hong Kong and whose fathers are non-permanent residents of Hong Kong) born in Hong Kong from 2006 to 2011 was nearly 160 000 and the number of Type II babies born during the period January to October 2012 was about 23 000. According to the findings of the surveys conducted by the Census and Statistics Department between 2007 and 2012, together with an analysis of the actual movement records travelling on Re-entry Permits in respect of Type II babies born between 2003 and 2011 with appropriate statistical adjustment, the *Hong Kong Population Projections 2012-2041* anticipates that about 50% of these Type II babies will return to Hong Kong for settlement before reaching 21 years of age. Like other children born locally, they are eligible for education in Hong Kong.

3. Some of those Type II babies who do not return to Hong Kong for settlement will cross the Shenzhen boundary to attend schools in Hong Kong every day as cross-boundary students. It should be noted that cross-boundary students also include children of Hong Kong residents living in Shenzhen, as well as Type I babies (born to Mainland women in Hong Kong and whose fathers are permanent residents of Hong Kong). As informed by the Education Bureau ("EDB"), in 2012, there were about 6 800 cross-boundary students

studying in public sector primary schools¹ in Hong Kong. Following the implementation of the "zero delivery quota" for Mainland expectant mothers in early 2013, the Administration anticipates that the demand for school places from locally born children whose parents are not Hong Kong residents returning to Hong Kong for kindergarten and primary education will reach its peak between the 2016-2017 and 2018-2019 school years and then progressively decline to a stable level.

Major views and concerns

4. The upsurge in cross-boundary students over the past few years, coupled with their propensity to choose schools located in districts close to the boundary control points, had posed considerable challenges to the supply of and demand for school places in these districts.

5. After commencement of the Fifth Legislative Council, the Panel on Education ("the Panel") had discussed issues related to the shortfall in Primary One ("P1") places in the North District under the Primary One Admission ("POA") System², the temporary arrangements for allocating more students to each P1 class in five school nets of three districts (i.e. Kwun Tong, Yuen Long and Tai Po) in POA 2014, as well as the provision of kindergarten places, particularly in the North District and Tai Po. These issues were also the subject of a number of questions raised by Members at meetings of the Council.

Provision of P1 places in the North District

6. At the meeting of the Panel held on 7 February 2013, members noted with grave concern that there was an increase in demand for P1 places in the North District from school-age children including cross-boundary students, resulting in an estimated shortfall of less than 1 400 places which was anticipated to last at least up to 2018. They considered it highly unfair that local parents and students were disadvantaged by the shortfall in school places. Some members also urged EDB to take measures to address the worries of parents that

¹ Based on the EDB's research on schools in the New Territories (including Tung Chung) and therefore not reflecting the situation of other districts.

² Introduced in the 1982-1983 school year, the POA System consisted of two stages. At the Discretionary Places Admission stage, parents may apply to any public sector school without restriction on school nets. Children who have not been offered a Discretionary Place may participate in the Central Allocation stage arranged by EDB in which their parents will make school choices under two Parts, viz Unrestricted School Choices from any school nets and Restricted School Choices from the school net of their resident district.

due to insufficient school places in the North District, their children might be allocated P1 places in Tai Po, resulting in cross-district schooling for children of tender age.

7. While indicating that all eligible children, including cross-boundary students holding Hong Kong resident status, were entitled to apply for admission to public sector primary schools under the POA System, EDB informed members that it would implement special measures after the release of the POA allocation results in June 2013 to address the concerns of local parents about the provision of P1 places in the North District. In gist, for students residing in the North District and had chosen a school net in the North District during their POA application but had been allocated P1 places in Tai Po in the Central Allocation stage, if they wanted to give up the allocated P1 places and study in their home district, EDB would meet their wish by increasing the number of P1 places in the North District.

8. Some members were concerned that the Administration might allocate more students to each P1 class in primary schools in the North District in an attempt to increase the supply of P1 places. They considered this not conducive to effective teaching and learning. According to EDB, it would explore with primary schools in the North District the feasibility of operating additional P1 classes by making use of vacant classrooms, converting rooms for other purposes into additional classrooms etc. The allocation of more students to P1 classes would only be the last resort, in the event of which the Administration would support schools with additional resources.

9. On the timing for implementing the special measures, some members considered that it might be too late as schools required ample lead time to make preparation such as recruitment of teachers and conversion of facilities to cope with the increase in student intake in the new term. As explained by EDB, it could only ascertain the number of students who would give up their allocated places in Tai Po to take up P1 places in their home district after the release of POA results in June 2013. The Administration assured members that they would provide assistance to the students concerned. It also took note of members' concern that there should be sufficient teaching support in those schools in the North District providing additional P1 places. Members noted that additional resources in the form of a time-limited grant would be provided to the schools concerned for flexible deployment.

10. At the meeting held on 7 February 2013, some members sought clarification on whether it was EDB's plan to convert primary schools in the North District to half-day operation in order to increase the supply of P1 places.

They were concerned that this arrangement would adversely affect the delivery of quality primary education. EDB confirmed that there was no plan to do so and the idea of half-day operation had been raised by some schools during discussions with EDB. As pointed out by a member, many parents of cross-boundary students might have chosen to attend primary schools in the North District as they did not have information on schools in other districts. As a result of cross-boundary students seeking admission, some schools in the North District were able to enroll sufficient students to continue operation despite the drop in local student population.

Designating school net(s) for cross-boundary students

11. At present, there are 36 school nets in Hong Kong and children are assigned a school net according to their place of residence. Regarding cross-boundary students, their parents could previously choose from one of the eight relevant school nets in districts close to and directly accessible from boundary control points (i.e. Tuen Mun, Yuen Long, North District and Tai Po) as their school net. Having regard to the demand for P1 places from eligible cross-boundary students, some members enquired whether the Administration would designate a school net for these students. As advised by EDB in February 2013, it would explore practicable options to meet the demand for P1 places from cross-boundary students and local students.

12. In August 2013, EDB informed the Panel of the revised arrangements for Central Allocation under the POA System for applicant children residing in the Mainland, which would be implemented starting from POA 2014. In gist, parents of these children will not be asked to choose any school net under the Central Allocation stage. After the Discretionary Places Admission stage (i.e. in November each year), EDB will estimate the provision of P1 places for the Central Allocation stage and the number of applicants not having been offered a discretionary place, and then compile a separate Choice of Schools List for Central Allocation for applicant children residing in the Mainland. The said List includes the eight school nets in Tuen Mun, Yuen Long, North District and Tai Po which are close to the boundary control points, as well school nets in some other districts having cross-boundary students; and will be provided to parents of cross-boundary students in January each year for making school choices³. In practice, the revised arrangements will operate like a "dedicated school net" for cross-boundary students.

³ Details of the revised arrangements can be found in LC Paper CB(4)950/12-13(01).

Temporary arrangement for allocating more students to each P1 class under POA 2014

13. At its meeting held on 12 May 2014, the Panel was briefed on the temporary arrangements to increase the number of students allocated to each P1 class of schools implementing small class teaching ("SCT") in five school nets of three districts (i.e. Kwun Tong, Yuen Long and Tai Po) in order to meet the demand for P1 places. As explained by EDB, this was the last resort as it had been confirmed with schools in the school nets concerned that neither sufficient remaining classrooms nor other rooms suitable for conversion to classrooms were available for operating more P1 classes.

14. One of the major concerns of members and deputations was the impact of an enlarged class size on teaching and learning, contrary to the spirit of SCT. Some members considered that the Administration should first review the effectiveness of the arrangement of allocating more students to P1 classes in the North District before extending it to other districts. In this regard, EDB informed members that in the 2013-2014 school year, the number of students allocated to each P1 class for all schools in the North District was increased to 32 across the board, and additional resources had been provided to schools. At the meeting held on 12 May 2014, the Panel passed a motion which, amongst others, opposed EDB's adoption of the temporary arrangement of allocating more students to each P1 class to address the shortage of P1 places.

Provision of education in the Mainland for children born in Hong Kong

15. To cater for the educational needs of cross-boundary students and to alleviate the demand for places in local schools, there was a suggestion that the Government should set up schools offering the Hong Kong curriculum in Shenzhen. The EDB was also urged to collaborate with the Mainland authorities in the provision of education based on the local curriculum in the Mainland. For instance, in his question raised at the Council meeting of 13 November 2013, Hon LEUNG Che-cheung enquired about the steps that EDB would take in assisting cross-boundary students to receive education which followed the local curriculum, such as buying places from the schools in Shenzhen offering the Hong Kong curriculum and establishing similar schools in the Mainland⁴.

16. In his reply, Secretary for Education ("SED") informed Members that there were two schools for Hong Kong children and four schools operating

⁴ See Question No. 11 of the Council meeting on 13 November 2013.

classes for Hong Kong children. These schools/classes followed the Hong Kong curriculum and were self-financed. Their eligible P6 students could participate in the Hong Kong Secondary School Places Allocation System. The Shenzhen Municipal Education Bureau was responsible for monitoring these schools while EDB provides appropriate professional support to these schools to facilitate their integration with the Hong Kong curriculum. The Administration considered that the suggestion of buying places from such schools would involve the policy of welfare portability which would lead to far-reaching implications requiring thorough study.

17. On the suggestion of establishing schools for Hong Kong children in the Mainland, the Administration reiterated its concerns about the implications of welfare portability. According to EDB's analysis, the tight supply of P1 school places notably in the North District was transient and would ease by 2018. Hence, it was necessary to consider carefully the impact on the stable development of such schools, if established, when the number of cross-boundary students dropped.

18. Regarding the suggestion by the Hong Kong Deputies to the National People's Congress to establish government schools on the Mainland, SED informed Members that according to the reply from the Mainland Ministry of Education, the Ministry would study its feasibility in conjunction with the departments concerned. At the time of the reply, EDB had not received further information in relation to this matter.

Longer-term planning

19. Referring to the shortfall of P1 places in the North District and the implementation of temporary measures to address the problem, some members considered it necessary for the Administration to formulate longer-term plans to meet the educational needs of cross-boundary students and local students, as well as to assess the future developments, such as the consequential rise in Secondary One students as these students progress from primary to secondary education in Hong Kong.

20. While highlighting that the increase in demand for P1 places from cross-boundary students would only be transient and would stabilize by the 2018-2019 school year, the Administration took note of members' concerns and informed the Panel at its meeting on 7 February 2013 that an inter-departmental committee had been set up to study holistically how to address the impact of the increase in the number of cross-boundary students in the next few years. The Panel noted from the Policy Agenda of the 2015 Policy Address that the

Administration would continue to monitor the impact of demographic changes on the long-term planning for the provision of public sector school places, including the transient impact on primary and secondary education caused by Type II babies.

21. The need to project the demand for school places at various levels from cross-boundary students and ways to meet the demand without compromising the interest of local students was highlighted in the question raised by Hon Frankie YICK Chi-ming at the Council meeting of 6 February 2013⁵. In his reply, SED explained that the number of cross-boundary students as well as the boundary control points where they entered Hong Kong were subject to year-on-year changes depending on family factors, distribution of their places of residence etc. Hence, it was difficult to make an accurate projection. The Administration would take into account the year-on-year progression of cross-boundary students already attending schools in Hong Kong and the prevalent number of POA applicants when estimating the number and planning school places. Nevertheless, the Administration would closely monitor the future demand for education and changes in the supply of and demand for school places in individual districts. In the event that certain districts faced a shortfall of public sector school places in the next few years, EDB would consider adopting different options to increase the supply of places.

Kindergarten ("KG") places

22. The number of Type II babies who would settle in Hong Kong and cross-boundary students receiving education in Hong Kong would also have an impact on the supply of and demand for KG places. At a special meeting held on 28 October 2013, the Panel reviewed with EDB issues related to the provision of KG places in the light of the panic of parents over securing KG places for their children, particularly in the North District and Tai Po where there was a higher demand from cross-boundary students.

23. As informed by EDB at the said meeting, in the 2014-2015 school year, the estimated demand for KG places was about 168 000, which could be fully met by the projected supply of about 241 000 places (including the number of places in vacant classrooms of KGs) across the territory. As regards the situation in Tai Po and the North District, EDB advised that there were sufficient KG places to cater for the demand of local and cross-boundary students, while the demand in the North District was relatively close to the supply. The panic of

⁵ See Question No. 6 of the Council meeting on 6 February 2013.

parents had mainly arisen from limited application forms distributed by some KGs, possible keen competition for places, multiple applications filed by some parents and the involvement of intermediaries in queuing up etc. After discussion with the KG sector, the Administration implemented six special temporary measures in Tai Po and the North District with a view to improving the KG admission procedure and better utilizing the KG places within the districts⁶.

24. The Administration had highlighted the flexibility and responsiveness of the KG sector in meeting parents' demand for places. The Committee on Free Kindergarten Education appointed by EDB to study the practicable implementation of free KG education shared a similar view that the present flexible mode of operation was conducive to fostering the supply of school places to meet the demand, including in districts facing the transient problems of cross-boundary students⁷.

Latest position

25. The Panel will discuss with the Administration issues related to the provision of education for cross-boundary students at the upcoming meeting on 11 May 2015.

Relevant papers

26. A list of relevant papers on the website of the Legislative Council is at the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
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⁶ The six measures were online application forms, unlimited supply of application forms, principle of vicinity, additional places to be provided by KGs by ways such as conversion of rooms, each child holding only one KG place and support for parents.

⁷ See LC Paper No. CB(4)840/14-15(01).

List of relevant papers

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Legislative Council	6.2.2013	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 70-81 (Question 6)
Panel on Education	7.2.2013 (Item V)	Agenda CB(4)380/12-13(03) Minutes CB(4)950/12-13(01)
Legislative Council	29.5.2013	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 8-18 (Question 1)
Legislative Council	23.10.2013	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 51-67 (Question 4)
Panel on Education	28.10.2013	Agenda CB(4)80/13-14(01) Minutes CB(4)210/13-14(01) CB(4)245/13-14(01)
Legislative Council	13.11.2013	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 93-96 (Question 11)
Panel on Education	12.5.2014 (Item IV)	Agenda CB(4)645/13-14(01) Minutes CB(4)778/13-14(02)
Subcommittee to Study the Implementation of Free Kindergarten Education	28.4.2015 (Item III)	Agenda CB(4)840/14-15(01)