

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(4)632/15-16
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB4/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 14 December 2015, at 4:30 pm
in Conference Room 1 of the Legislative Council Complex

Members present : Dr Hon LAM Tai-fai, SBS, JP(Chairman)
Hon IP Kin-yuen (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, GBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, GBS, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, BBS, MH
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, GBS, JP
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan, JP
Hon Starry LEE Wai-king, JP
Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG Mei-fun, SBS, JP
Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che
Hon IP Kwok-him, GBS, JP
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Hon WONG Yuk-man
Hon Michael TIEN Puk-sun, BBS, JP
Hon NG Leung-sing, SBS, JP
Hon Steven HO Chun-yin, BBS
Hon Gary FAN Kwok-wai
Hon MA Fung-kwok, SBS, JP
Hon Charles Peter MOK, JP
Hon CHAN Chi-chuen
Dr Hon Kenneth CHAN Ka-lok
Hon Dennis KWOK
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Dr Hon Helena WONG Pik-wan
Hon Martin LIAO Cheung-kong, SBS, JP
Dr Hon CHIANG Lai-wan, JP
Hon Christopher CHUNG Shu-kun, BBS, MH, JP

Member attending : Hon Claudia MO

Members absent : Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon CHAN Hak-kan, JP

Public Officers attending : Agenda item III

Mr Eddie NG, SBS, JP
Secretary for Education

Ms Jessie WONG Hok-ling, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education (2)

Dr K K CHAN
Deputy Secretary for Education (5)

Ms IP Ling-bik
Principal Assistant Secretary
(Education Commission and Planning)
Education Bureau

Mr Stephen YIP
Principal Assistant Secretary
(Curriculum Development)
Education Bureau

Agenda item IV

Mr Eddie NG, SBS, JP
Secretary for Education

Mrs Elina CHAN
Principal Assistant Secretary
(Infrastructure & Research Support)
Education Bureau

Mr LEE Kam-kwong
Principal Education Officer (New Territories)
Education Bureau

Agenda item V

Mr Kevin YEUNG, JP
Under Secretary for Education

Miss Hera CHUM
Principal Assistant Secretary
(Special Education and Kindergarten Education)
Education Bureau

Mr CHAN Fu-man
Principal Education Officer
(Special Education and Kindergarten Education)
Education Bureau

Agenda item VI

Mr Kevin YEUNG, JP
Under Secretary for Education

Dr K K CHAN
Deputy Secretary for Education (5)

Mr Stephen YIP
Principal Assistant Secretary
(Curriculum Development)
Education Bureau

Clerk in attendance : Miss Polly YEUNG
Chief Council Secretary (4)4

Staff in attendance : Mr KWONG Kam-fai
Senior Council Secretary (4)4

Miss Mandy NG
Council Secretary (4)4

Ms Sandy HAU
Legislative Assistant (4)4

Action

I. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting

(LC Paper No. CB(4)303/15-16(01) -- Information paper provided by the Education Bureau on the latest progress in implementing the Hong Kong Scholarship for Excellence Scheme

LC Paper No. CB(4)348/15-16(01) -- Joint letter dated 25 November 2015 from Hon WONG Kwok-hing, Hon Alice MAK Mei-kuen and Hon TANG Ka-piu concerning the issues related to the progress on the development of special school in Tung Chung

LC Paper No. CB(4)348/15-16(02) -- Administration's written response dated 11 December 2015 to the joint letter dated 25 November 2015 from Hon WONG Kwok-hing, Hon Alice MAK Mei-kuen and Hon TANG Ka-piu concerning the issues related to the progress on the development of special school in Tung Chung)

Members noted the above papers issued since the last meeting.

II. Items for discussion at the next meeting

(Appendix I to LC Paper No. CB(4)321/15-16 -- List of outstanding items for discussion

Appendix II to LC Paper No. CB(4)321/15-16 -- List of follow-up actions)

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2. The Chairman informed members that the Administration had proposed to discuss the following items at the next regular meeting to be held on 11 January 2016 at 4:30 pm –

- (a) progress report of the Hong Kong Scholarship for Excellence Scheme; and
- (b) progress report on the implementation of life planning education.

3. The Chairman recalled that the agenda item on "Issues related to the appointment of Chancellor and the composition of the governing bodies of University Grants Committee-funded institutions" had not been dealt with at the last Panel meeting held on 9 November 2015. He informed members that after the meeting, he had written to the Secretary for Education ("SED") inviting him to confirm his availability if the captioned item was to be discussed at one of the regular meetings in the coming months. After considering SED's reply and the timing for discussing the item, he had decided to include the item on the agenda of the next regular meeting to be held on 11 January 2016. Members had been notified of the arrangements vide LC Paper No. CB(4)223/15-16.

4. Dr Kenneth CHAN suggested that the Panel should follow up the latest development regarding the implementation of the Territory-wide System Assessment ("TSA") at the next regular meeting. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan considered that the Panel should further discuss the implementation of vocational education in this session.

5. The Chairman took note of members' suggestions and views, and said that he would finalize with the Deputy Chairman the items to be discussed at the next regular meeting. Members would be notified accordingly in due course.

(Post-meeting note: Upon finalization by the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman, the agenda for the meeting to be held on 11 January 2016 was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)405/15-16 on 24 December 2015.)

6. The Chairman further informed members that the Panel would hold a meeting on 15 January 2016 at 8:30 am to receive a briefing by SED on the Chief Executive's 2016 Policy Address in respect of the policy initiatives on education. Members would be notified of the meeting arrangements in due course. Members had no objection to the aforesaid meeting arrangements.

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7. Before proceeding to the discussion items, the Chairman drew members' attention to Rule 83A of the Rules of Procedure which provided that a Member shall not move any motion or amendment relating to a matter in which he had a pecuniary interest, whether direct or indirect, or speak on any such matter, except where he disclosed the nature of that interest. He reminded members to declare interests, if any, in the matter under discussion.

III. Issues related to the Chinese and English proficiency of students and the policy on fine-tuning of the medium of instruction for secondary schools

(LC Paper No. CB(4)321/15-16(01) -- Paper provided by the Administration

LC Paper No. CB(4)321/15-16(02) -- Background brief entitled "The fine-tuning of the medium of instruction for secondary schools" prepared by the LegCo Secretariat)

8. Members noted the background brief prepared by the Secretariat [LC Paper No. CB(4)321/15-16(02)].

Briefing by the Administration

9. At the invitation of the Chairman, SED briefed members on the issues related to the Chinese and English proficiency of students and the policy on fine-tuning of the medium of instruction ("MOI") for secondary schools, as set out in the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(4)321/15-16(01)].

Discussion

Enhancing the language proficiency of students

10. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan considered that in learning a language, the language environment was very important. She observed that people in Hong Kong mostly used Chinese in their daily life and students had fewer opportunities to communicate in English. She was also concerned that students did not have time to read as they were fully occupied by the drilling exercises to prepare for TSA and examinations.

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11. On the language environment, Ms Cyd HO criticized the Government for taking the lead in mis-using Chinese and English expressions under the pretext of creativity. She referred to hybrid expressions such as "築福香港" instead of "祝福香港", "續 fun teen 地" instead of "繽紛天地". Ms HO considered that such gimmicks were hardly conducive to enhancing bilingual proficiency. She enquired about the measures, if any, to promote reading among young people. Mr WONG Yuk-man was gravely concerned about the deteriorating language standard among the people of Hong Kong, in particular students' poor writing skills.

12. Dr Fernando CHEUNG noted that according to the results of international assessments such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study ("PIRLS") in 2011, Hong Kong was among the top-performing places in terms of students' reading ability, but was ranked the lowest in respect of students' motivation to read. Dr CHEUNG opined that the Administration should take steps to promote students' interest in reading and their language proficiency.

13. SED stressed that the Administration was committed to promoting young people's interest in reading. Deputy Secretary for Education (5) ("DS(Ed)5") advised that "Reading to Learn" was one of the key tasks to promote learning to learn under the Education Reform. In 2014, the Basic Education Curriculum Guide was updated to further encourage schools to broaden and enrich students' reading experiences by promoting reading across the curriculum.

14. Dr Kenneth CHAN considered that the performance of Hong Kong students in some local and international assessments could not necessarily reflect their ability to master the languages in question. He said that the declining language standard among young people might be due to the increasing use of computer presentation software such as PowerPoint, in which the contents were often truncated and set out in point form instead of in coherent text. Noting the brief information about the Administration's initiative to conduct research studies, including longitudinal research and comparative studies on language learning in local and international settings, Dr CHAN doubted whether these research studies could help raise the language standard of the people of Hong Kong. He pointed out that since Hong Kong was an international city, the Administration should take measures to encourage students to learn other foreign languages, such as French and German.

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15. In this regard, SED advised that in addition to Chinese Language and English Language which were the core subjects under the New Senior Secondary curriculum, students could choose one from six other foreign language subjects as their elective subject.

Issues related to TSA

16. The Deputy Chairman noted from the Administration's paper that Primary 3 students' bilingual proficiency as reflected in their performance in TSA had improved over the last decade from 2004 to 2014. However, he was concerned that the students' attainment of basic competencies in TSA had been the result of excessive drilling. Ms Claudia MO cautioned that excessive drilling for TSA had not only distorted and undermined the reliability of students' attainment rates, but had also dampened students' interest in reading and learning. Mr WONG Yuk-man pointed out that the prevailing assessments including TSA emphasized performance in speed reading, rather than testing students' ability to appreciate and understand the writing skills of the authors.

17. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan expressed concern about excessive drilling by schools to prepare students for TSA. She was pleased to note that the Education Bureau ("EDB") had issued guidelines to schools recently reminding them to formulate an appropriate school-based homework and assessment policy.

18. The Chairman shared the view that the improvement in attainment rates in TSA was the result of intensive drilling. Referring to the guidelines and letters issued by EDB to remind schools not to adopt drilling practices, he urged the Administration to address concerns about the immense pressure brought about by TSA instead of passing the responsibility to schools and school sponsoring bodies and accusing them of drilling their students. The Chairman noted that the Subsidized Primary School Council and Hong Kong Aided Primary School Heads Association had expressed their strong views in a joint statement issued earlier today. They considered that the Administration's recent reminders had damaged the rapport between the school sector and EDB and the mutual trust between schools and parents. The Chairman asked whether the Administration had made any assessment on students' performance in TSA if they had not been intensively drilled at schools.

19. SED said that the basic competency of students assessed by TSA was already part of the curriculum and therefore drilling was not necessary.

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The Administration opposed excessive drilling by schools. The pressure on students would be eased if they did not need to take part in drilling exercises. Teaching and learning efficiency could also be enhanced.

Teaching and learning of Chinese language and English language

20. Ms Claudia MO was concerned that the Administration had introduced the "Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework" in schools instead of developing a "Chinese as a Second Language" curriculum for non-Chinese speaking ("NCS") students. She considered it helpful to teach NCS students the different radicals of Chinese characters so as to facilitate them to learn written Chinese. Ms MO objected to the policy of using Putonghua as the MOI for teaching the Chinese Language subject ("PMIC") in primary and secondary schools. Ms Cyd HO and Mr WONG Yuk-man questioned the usefulness of PMIC in enhancing the Chinese proficiency of students.

21. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan however supported the use of PMIC in primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong. She remarked that Cantonese was more colloquial in nature; the use of Putonghua was conducive to improving students' literacy in written Chinese.

22. Ms Claudia MO noted with concern that the annual expenditure for implementing the Native-speaking English Teacher ("NET") Scheme amounted to some \$800 million, and that the total remuneration package of NETs was much higher than that of local teachers. Ms MO queried the cost-effectiveness of the NET Scheme and the justification for providing an additional NET for public-sector primary schools as suggested by some members.

23. SED advised that having regard to the feedback from stakeholders, the Administration was studying the possibility of providing an additional NET for public-sector primary schools. A pilot scheme would be worked out in due course.

24. Mr Michael TIEN suggested that to allow sufficient time for discussion, the Chairman should consider allocating a minimum of 45 minutes for discussion of each agenda item. SED should also make available a copy of his speaking note for members' perusal. Mr TIEN said that Members of the New People's Party had been advocating the provision of an additional NET for each primary school. He was pleased to note that EDB was studying the possibility of providing an additional NET for public-sector primary schools operating a greater number of classes.

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25. Given the importance of a rich language environment, Mrs Regina IP sought further information on the progress in providing an additional NET for each primary school. She also enquired whether NETs would be required to take up a more active teaching role in addition to that of a resource teacher, and be deployed to assist in lesson planning, organizing reading activities etc. Mrs IP said that some NETs had requested to meet with EDB. However, their request had not been acceded to as EDB had indicated that it would only meet with the association representing NETs. She urged the Administration to improve communication with NETs instead of restricting dialogue with a particular group only.

26. DS(Ed)5 advised that a study was being conducted in 10 primary schools. The Administration planned to seek funding from the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research to provide an additional NET under a pilot scheme in the 2016-2017 school year. All along, EDB had been encouraging greater collaboration among NETs and local teachers, and would maintain close communication with different stakeholders in the implementation of the NET Scheme.

Issues related to the fine-tuning of MOI for secondary schools

27. The Deputy Chairman said that under the fine-tuning arrangements, some secondary schools using Chinese as MOI ("CMI schools") might be able to adjust their MOI policy and become schools using English as the MOI ("EMI schools") at junior secondary levels upon the completion of the first six-year cycle. He noted from the Administration's paper that EDB had decided to maintain the policy goal and overall MOI arrangement for the second six-year cycle starting from the 2016-2017 school year. He sought clarification on whether the Administration had consulted stakeholders about it.

28. On whether the labeling effect on certain schools could be removed under the fine-tuned MOI arrangements, Mr WONG Yuk-man remarked that under the prevailing arrangements, those schools using Chinese as MOI for most of their classes were still labeled as CMI schools. Dr Fernando CHEUNG opined that instead of specifying complicated criteria and arrangements for MOI, the Administration should consider allowing schools to decide their own MOI policy having regard to their school circumstances and the ability of their students.

29. SED pointed out that since the implementation of the fine-tuning arrangements from 2010-2011 school year, schools were no longer

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bifurcated into CMI schools and EMI schools. Deputy Secretary for Education (2) explained that under the fine-tuning arrangements, schools were allowed to make school-based MOI arrangements at junior secondary levels taking into account their specific situation with reference to the three prescribed criteria, namely student ability, teacher ability and support measures provided by the schools. The policy goal and overall arrangement of MOI fine-tuning for the second six-year cycle starting from the 2016-2017 school year in this regard would remain unchanged.

30. Mr Michael TIEN noted that CMI schools were allowed to transform the extended learning activities in English into a maximum of two content subjects using English as MOI. He was concerned that schools might still decide to teach the two content subjects in English even though they could not meet the "student ability" criterion. He opined that this arrangement might not be in the best interest of students. He suggested that EDB should conduct a tracking study to gauge the change, if any, in attainment rates of Mathematics by the same cohort of students who were taught in Chinese at P6 and subsequently taught in English at Secondary 3. Mr TIEN considered that the Administration should provide targeted training for teachers who taught content subjects in English in those schools which did not meet the "student ability" criterion.

31. SED took note of the views and concerns raised by members and said that the Administration would consider them carefully.

IV. Issues related to the policy and programme on reprovisioning and redevelopment of sub-standard school premises

(LC Paper No. CB(4)321/15-16(03) -- Paper provided by the Administration)

Briefing by the Administration

32. At the invitation of the Chairman, SED briefed members on the policy and programme on improvement of the teaching and learning environment of public sector schools, as set out in the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(4)321/15-16(03)].

Discussion

Reprovisioning of public sector primary schools

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33. Mr WONG Kwok-hing noted with concern that 28 public sector primary schools were still operating in "matchbox-style school premises" at present. These cuboidal shaped school premises had been constructed for decades and their facilities had become outdated. Given their poor teaching and learning environment, these schools were not preferred by parents and might have difficulty in recruiting students. Mr WONG expressed appreciation for the teachers and students of these schools for working and studying in such an adverse environment. He enquired whether the Administration had formulated any timetable for reprovisioning and/or redevelopment of these public sector primary schools, such as the ELCHK Faith Love Lutheran School ("Lutheran School") which was the last school located on Hong Kong Island with sub-standard "matchbox-style school premises".

34. Principal Assistant Secretary (Infrastructure & Research Support) ("PAS(IRS)") advised that among these 28 public sector primary schools, two of them had been allocated new premises for reprovisioning earlier in 2015. Most of the remaining schools had undergone school facilities improvements to different extent under the School Improvement Programme ("SIP") implemented between 1994 and 2006. For various consideration such as vision and mission, development plans, etc. of individual schools, eight of these schools had not indicated intention for reprovisioning. The Administration would keep liaising with these schools to understand and follow up their development needs as appropriate. Mr WONG Kwok-hing suggested that the Panel should obtain more information from the Administration on the schools concerned.

35. Regarding the Lutheran School located at Yue Wan Estate in Chai Wan referred to by Mr WONG Kwok-hing, PAS(IRS) explained that Yue Wan Estate had once been included under the redevelopment plan of the Housing Department ("HD"), but HD had subsequently shelved this redevelopment plan. EDB would follow up with HD on this case.

36. Dr Kenneth CHAN referred to the dilapidated conditions of the Lutheran School which posed a serious threat to the safety of students and other users. He said that the Lutheran School had been requesting the Government to improve its school premises but to no avail. Noting that only some 200 schools were built according to the standards prevailing at the time of construction, accounting for less than one-fourth of the existing 850 ordinary public sector primary and secondary schools, Dr CHAN considered that the Administration should take action proactively and expeditiously to improve their teaching and learning environment and formulate a firm timetable for their reprovisioning and/or redevelopment.

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37. SED assured members that the Administration would not compromise on safety. Individual schools with sub-standard premises could benefit from the enhancements under SIP. The EDB would keep these schools informed of the conduct of School Allocation Exercise ("SAE") for reprovisioning purpose so that the school sponsoring bodies ("SSBs") concerned might consider making an application. Since reprovisioning of existing schools hinged on the availability of appropriate school sites/premises in the territory, it was not practicable for EDB to draw up a timetable in this regard.

38. Dr Fernando CHEUNG did not subscribe to the Administration's explanation. He opined that the Administration had only acted in response to SSBs' request for reprovisioning, instead of initiating action in the interest of students. Noting that between 1994 and 2006, about 700 ordinary public sector schools built according to the planning standards when the schools were constructed had their school facilities enhanced through SIP, Dr CHEUNG enquired how many of them had been upgraded to meet present-day standards.

39. In reply, PAS(IRS) advised that about half of these schools had participated in the last two phases of SIP and had their facilities enhanced to the prevailing standard of the Schedule of Accommodation at that time as far as practicable. The remaining schools had undergone various improvements having regard to their site-specific constraints.

40. Dr Helena WONG was of the view that the Administration should steer the reprovisioning and redevelopment of the 28 public sector schools operating in sub-standard premises. She requested the Administration to provide details of these schools, including their names, addresses and the date when their existing school premises were built, etc. Dr WONG also considered that SED should pay a visit to schools in sub-standard premises to acquire first-hand understanding of their conditions. SED said that he was aware of the conditions of these schools and had in fact visited the Chi Yun School.

41. To address members' concerns, the Chairman said that the Panel would write to the Administration and request it to provide further details in respect of the 28 public sector primary schools that currently operated in "matchbox-style school premises". The Chairman also considered that the Administration should provide a timetable for reprovisioning and/or redevelopment of these schools. If no timetable was available, the reasons should be provided.

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(Post-meeting note: The Administration's written reponse was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)600/15-16(01) on 15 February 2016.)

Reprovisioning of special schools

42. Dr Fernando CHEUNG pointed out that some special schools could not meet present-day standards in terms of area, design and facilities, and therefore could not cater for the special needs of students with disabilities. He referred to the Hong Chi Morninghill School in Tuen Mun and enquired about the progress, if any, of its reprovisioing. Ms Cyd HO also sought the latest update on the reprovisioning of the SAHK Ko Fook Iu Memorial School in Shatin. In this connection, the Chairman requested the Administration to provide the requisite information in writing after the meeting.

(Post-meeting note: The Administration's written reponse was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)600/15-16(01) on 15 February 2016.)

43. The Deputy Chairman made his observation that in the allocation of school premises through SAE in recent years, priority had often been given to international schools, instead of local special schools and public sector schools. As such, he expressed concern about the operation of SAE. Noting that the School Allocation Committee ("the Committee") would take into account many factors with the quality of education being the prime consideration, the Deputy Chairman enquired how the Committee or the Administration could ensure that the assessment of applications was conducted in a fair and just manner.

44. PAS(IRS) advised that under the existing arrangements, EDB would inform all eligible SSBs in the territory of the conduct of SAE so that they could consider applying for reprovisioning of existing schools. Each application would be carefully considered by the Committee. When assessing the quality of education, the Committee would give due consideration to all relevant factors including the operation track record of the SSBs and the school plan submitted. In evaluating the school's plan, the Committee would consider the school's vision and mission, management and organization, school ethos, support for students, performance targets, self-evaluation indicators, etc. Under SAE in 2014, new school premises were allocated for use by three ordinary primary and secondary schools.

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Allocation of vacant school premises

45. Mr Albert HO criticized the Government for not making proper use of vacant school premises ("VSPs") which had not been in use for a long time. He considered that EDB should not return VSPs to the Government lightly. Otherwise, the site in question would likely be used for housing development purposes. He was of the view that the Administration should make use of VSPs for reprovisioning and redevelopment of public sector schools operating in sub-standard school premises so as to safeguard the well-being of students and other users.

46. SED reiterated that the Administration would not compromise on safety. He explained that among 29 VSPs under EDB's purview, seven VSPs had been earmarked for specific use by EDB; four had been returned to the Government; and 14 VSPs would be used as decanting premises. The remaining four VSPs were located on private land and EDB would need to follow up the matter with the Lands Department. SED said that as the Public Accounts Committee ("PAC") would conduct a hearing on issues related to VSPs very shortly, he would provide more details when testifying to PAC.

V. Issues related to teaching and non-teaching manpower in special schools

(LC Paper No. CB(4)321/15-16(04) -- Paper provided by the Administration)

47. Members noted a submission from the Deputy Chairman tabled at the meeting [subsequently issued vide LC Paper No. CB(4)360/15-16(01)].

Briefing by the Administration

48. At the invitation of the Chairman, Under Secretary for Education ("US(Ed)") briefed members on the provision of teaching and non-teaching staff in aided special schools, as set out in the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(4)321/15-16(04)].

Discussion

Non-teaching manpower

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49. Dr Fernando CHEUNG noted with concern that 57 students with severe intellectual disability had passed away in the past three years. He pointed out that these students required intensive support, but most special schools were not staffed with specialists such as physiotherapists and occupational therapists. Some special schools had to acquire these specialist services from the market with their own funding. Dr CHEUNG also said that there were insufficient nursing staff in many special schools as currently, each aided special school was provided with only one nurse regardless of the number of disabled students admitted. In addition, many special schools did not have sufficient clerical staff to provide administrative support. Dr CHEUNG enquired how the Administration would address the shortage of non-teaching manpower in special schools.

50. In reply, US(Ed) stressed that the Administration was mindful of the need to provide aided special schools with the necessary manpower and resources. For students with severe intellectual disability, it should be noted that they might also have other medical problems and were in weaker health. In view of the students' need for intensive care, the actual teacher and specialist staff-to-student ratio was at 1:2.3. This improved ratio could enhance the capacity of special schools in catering for them. Principal Assistant Secretary (Special Education and Kindergarten Education) ("PAS(SE&KG")) supplemented that special schools for children with severe intellectual disability and those for children with physical disability were provided with occupational therapist(s) and physiotherapist(s). As for students with mild and moderate intellectual disability, they could make use of the specialist service provided by clinics under the Hospital Authority ("HA").

51. Dr Fernando CHEUNG referred to the pilot scheme of Advanced Practice Nurse ("APN") launched by HA in its Kowloon East cluster, and opined that HA should expand it to all other clusters to benefit more special schools across the territory. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung concurred with the need to provide more resources to special schools for acquiring specialist services. In this connection, the Chairman was concerned whether there was an adequate supply of trained specialist manpower, and enquired whether special schools had difficulties in recruiting specialist staff.

52. US(Ed) advised that the Administration would keep in view the supply of trained specialist manpower and where necessary, would take steps to increase the number of places of the relevant undergraduate programmes. Regarding the pilot scheme of APN, PAS(SE&KG) would relay Dr CHEUNG's views to HA.

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53. The Deputy Chairman noted that while the teacher-to-student ratios in special schools had been improved in the past year or so, the ratio of social worker to student had remained unchanged at 1:70. As services provided by social worker was vital, he considered that the ratio of social worker to student should be adjusted correspondingly so that at least one social worker was provided for each special school. Dr Fernando CHEUNG shared the Deputy Chairman's view. In addition, the Deputy Chairman pointed out that as the class size of schools for social development had been reduced from 15 to 12 students per class, the ratio of social worker to students should also be improved to ensure that students could receive requisite services such as counseling and life skills training.

54. US(Ed) advised that the Administration would continue to communicate with stakeholders and collect feedbacks from them with the aim to further improve the services in special schools. It would keep in view the ratio of social worker to student of special schools and propose improvement as necessary. PAS(SE&KG) further explained that the Administration would take into account the total number of students of all the special schools run by the same school sponsoring body in the provision of social workers. At present, each special school had at least one social worker on its staff establishment.

55. Dr Helena WONG sought information about the school-based support available for special schools. PAS(SE&KG) advised that a Tripartite Support Model had been adopted, under which EDB collaborated with tertiary institutions with a view to enhancing the learning effectiveness of students in special schools. The provision of school-based support was threefold. It comprised the provision of intensive support for individual schools through specific projects; provision of network support in the form of learning circles; and identification and dissemination of good practices among special schools.

Teaching manpower

56. Dr Fernando CHEUNG noticed that special schools often adopted a school-based curriculum having regard to the learning capabilities and specific needs of their students. As such, the curriculum leader played a very important role. However, he expressed concern that only about half of the special schools were entitled to an additional post of curriculum leader. In response, US(Ed) informed members that under the existing policy, special schools operating six classes or above were entitled to an additional post of curriculum leader while those schools operating less than six classes were provided with a Curriculum Leadership Grant. Schools could make use of

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other grants disbursed to them for engaging additional manpower according to their needs.

57. Dr Kenneth CHAN was gravely concerned about the wastage rate of teachers in special schools. As supporting students with disabilities was a highly demanding and challenging task, he was worried that it might be difficult for special schools to attract new blood and retain experienced teachers. He sought information on the wastage rate of teachers in special schools in the past three school years and the measures, if any, to reduce the wastage rate.

58. US(Ed) said that the wastage rate of teachers in special schools had remained at a stable level. The Administration would provide the requested information after the meeting. He highlighted that the teacher-to-student ratios of special schools had been improved with a view to enhancing the capacity for teachers to cater for students with disabilities. Although there were challenges, special school teachers were dedicated to their work. The Administration would continue to offer professional development programmes and structured training to further enhance their professional capacity in catering for students with disabilities.

(Post-meeting note: The Administration's written reponse was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)600/15-16(01) on 15 February 2016.)

59. Dr Helena WONG queried whether top government officials were aware of the difficulties and pressure faced by special schools and their teachers. In response, US(Ed) said that he had visited certain special schools and exchanged views with the principals and teachers. The Administration was aware of the difficulties faced by frontline teachers and had introduced a number of support measures over the years including the reduction in class size and the provision of additional teacher assistants.

Teacher-to-student ratios at special schools

60. Dr Helena WONG enquired how the existing teacher-to-student ratios of local special schools compared with those in overseas jurisdictions. US(Ed) explained that it might not be appropriate to make a direct comparison of the teacher-to-student ratios of special schools in different places due to the differences in school systems and environment. For instance, in some jurisdictions, students with a more severe level of disability were placed in ordinary schools due to geographical distances.

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In Hong Kong, the Administration would focus effort on supporting students with disabilities under the existing policy of implementing special education under a dual-track mode.

61. Mr Abraham SHEK concurred that strict comparison between Hong Kong and overseas jurisdictions might not be appropriate or necessary. Instead, he considered that the Administration could make reference to the effective practices adopted by some local special schools, such as the Jockey Club Sarah Roe School under the English Schools Foundation, in supporting students with disabilities.

62. The Chairman enquired how the Administration could evaluate the existing teacher-to-student ratios and formulate targets for continuous improvement. US(Ed) said that the Administration would maintain close liaison with special schools to understand their manpower and operational needs. He also pointed out that while there were merits in lowering the number of students in a class, it was equally important to maintain a critical mass of students in each class to bring about interaction in teaching and learning.

VI. Promotion of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Education

(LC Paper No. CB(4)321/15-16(05) -- Paper provided by the Administration)

Briefing by the Administration

63. At the invitation of the Chairman, US(Ed) briefed members on the consultation about the promotion of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics ("STEM") education launched by the Curriculum Development Council ("CDC") in early November 2015 and the initial feedback from stakeholders, as set out in the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(4)321/15-16(05)].

Discussion

Strategies to promote STEM education

64. Dr Kenneth CHAN sought further explanation on the Administration's objective of promoting STEM education. US(Ed) said that the promotion of

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STEM education in Hong Kong aligned with the worldwide education trend of equipping students with the capability to meet the changes and challenges in society and around the world with rapid economic, scientific and technological changes. The promotion of STEM education was introduced as one of the key emphases under the ongoing renewal of the school curriculum. It aimed to strengthen the Science, Technology and Mathematics Education as Key Learning Areas ("KLAs"), to nurture diversified talents in the science and technology fields for enhancing the international competitiveness of Hong Kong.

65. Mr Martin LIAO noted that Hong Kong students had performed well in science, technology and mathematics as revealed from international studies assessments (such as the Programme for International Student Assessment) and competitions. Both Mr LIAO and Mr Charles MOK were concerned about the measures taken by the Administration to enhance students' interest in STEM.

66. US(Ed) said that in promoting STEM education, CDC had proposed to adopt a holistic approach to strengthen students' ability to integrate and apply knowledge and skills across different disciplines. DS(Ed)5 explained that the Administration would encourage students to gain hands-on experience in applying their knowledge and skills by participating in STEM-related activities. With the implementation of life planning education, students would better understand different STEM-related areas and ascertain their interest in STEM. Engineering-related courses were offered under the Applied Learning subjects at senior secondary level. Principal Assistant Secretary (Curriculum Development) ("PAS(CD)") supplemented that students would be encouraged to solve daily life problems with practical solutions and innovative designs.

67. Mr Charles MOK said that STEM-related professional bodies were prepared to participate and assist in the promotion of STEM education. Noting that there was no engineering subject under the New Senior Secondary curriculum, he was concerned about the articulation from secondary level to tertiary level in engineering studies. He also sought information on measures to support students who were gifted in STEM-related areas.

68. DS(Ed)5 advised that the Administration would work with different partners, including the Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education, to promote STEM education. On articulation to tertiary education, PAS(CD) advised that the Administration would work with tertiary institutions and

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organizations which provided career guidance and counselling services for students. EDB would organize an education fair for students to showcase and celebrate a wide range of achievements in STEM-related areas on a regular basis. Development in different STEM areas of Hong Kong and further study opportunities would also be showcased in the event.

69. The Chairman remarked that there was a general bias in the community in favour of finance and business-related education and training to qualify as professionals. Very little attention was being paid to STEM education. He considered that under the existing education system, students' performance was usually assessed in terms of their language and conceptual skills. The importance of STEM-related knowledge and learning of practical skills had been largely neglected. He sought information on the targeted measures, if any, to promote STEM education.

70. US(Ed) reiterated that CDC had proposed to adopt a holistic approach through six strategies focusing on strengthening students' ability to integrate and apply knowledge and skills of different disciplines in school education so as to unleash their potential in innovation. One of the proposed strategies was to strengthen partnerships with key community players. EDB would strengthen liaison with academics and practitioners who specialized in various STEM fields, as well as professional bodies and other government and non-government organizations such as the Hong Kong Science Park, Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups etc. in fostering synergy within the community for the promotion of STEM education among schools.

71. The Chairman observed that the pursuit of studies and careers in STEM-related subjects was often regarded as a lesser option than studying to qualify as professionals. In his view, the effectiveness of STEM education would hinge on the community's perception of the value of STEM. The Administration should therefore step up efforts to promote public understanding of STEM with a view to enhancing its acceptance and recognition among different sectors of the community. Mr Charles MOK concurred with the Chairman that it was important to take action to nurture a positive view on STEM in the community at large.

72. Noting members' views, US(Ed) said that efforts to promote STEM in the society and to nurture students' interest in STEM were complementary and could be taken forward in parallel.

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Issues related to the curricula of relevant subjects

73. Dr Kenneth CHAN noted that the contents of the primary General Studies curriculum would be updated to put more emphasis on the relevance of science and technology to daily life (e.g. low carbon living, global warming). He doubted whether these contents were comprehensible to primary students. Mr Charles MOK was pleased to note that the Technology Education KLA (Secondary 1-3) curriculum would be updated so that at least 30% of curriculum time under Information and Communication Technology ("ICT") would be allocated to the learning and teaching of programming concepts (including coding).

74. The Deputy Chairman noted that apart from the allocation of at least 30% of curriculum time under ICT to the learning and teaching of programming concepts, the Science (Secondary 1-3) curriculum would also be updated to include topics related to recent developments in science and technology, especially in the field of life sciences. He was concerned that the existing curriculum time for the Science and Mathematics curricula at junior secondary level could not accommodate the increase in curriculum contents. The Deputy Chairman sought clarification on whether the Administration would increase the overall curriculum time for individual STEM KLAs at junior secondary level to cater for additional topics, or to adjust the proportion of curriculum time allocated to different topics.

75. PAS(CD) said that some STEM components had already been included in the existing Science and Mathematics curricula at junior secondary level. However, there were suggestions that some topics such as science process skills, programming, probability and data processing etc. should be strengthened. Views from stakeholders would be sought during the two-month consultation period.

76. DS(Ed)5 further explained that to facilitate school-based planning, schools were given the flexibility to allocate the total lesson time for each science-related subject within a permissible range. This flexibility in the allocation of curriculum time should be able to accommodate the enrichment of curriculum contents. Schools could also work out their school-based arrangements such as collaboration projects among subject teachers to cater for learning needs across different disciplines.

77. Mr Martin LIAO said that robotics education had been implemented in western countries since 1990s. It had also gained popularity in Singapore and Taiwan in recent years. Mr LIAO enquired whether additional resources would be deployed to promote robotics education in Hong Kong.

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78. In reply, DS(Ed)5 said that Hong Kong students had performed well in some local and international competitions which featured the design and application of robotics technology. The Government was prepared to strengthen support for schools and collaboration with key community players on the promotion of various STEM-related areas including robotics education. Consideration might be given to including robotics education as one of the priority themes for application of funding from the Quality Education Fund.

VII. Any other business

79. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 7:05 pm.

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