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Panel on Education

Meeting on 29 November 2015

Background brief on issues related to the implementation of Territory-wide System Assessment

Purpose

This paper summarizes the major views and concerns expressed by Members at various meetings on issues related to the implementation of Territory-wide System Assessment ("TSA").

Background

Overview of TSA

2. The Education Commission published its report entitled "Learning for Life, Learning through Life" in 2000. The report set out proposals for the Basic Competency Assessments ("BCA") in Chinese Language, English Language and Mathematics. Basic Competency ("BC") refers to a minimally acceptance level from which a student should be able to continue to the next key stage of learning without extra learning support. As a component of BCA, TSA was introduced in 2004 as an assessment at the territory level to gauge students' overall attainment of BC in these three subjects. Its main purposes are –

- (i) to provide the Government and school management with information on school standards in key learning areas for the purposes of school improvement and to provide more focused support;
- (ii) to provide teachers with feedback positively so as to enhance the effectiveness of learning and teaching; and

- (iii) to enhance assessment literacy and promote the culture of assessment for learning¹ in schools, especially in basic education (i.e. from Primary ("P") 1 to Secondary ("S") 3).

3. The Education Bureau ("EDB") commissioned the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority ("HKEAA") to administer TSA. TSA was introduced to P3 and P6 in 2004 and 2005 respectively. It has been fully implemented to three key stages of learning (i.e. P3, P6 and S3) since 2006. All P3, P6 and S3 students in subsidized schools have to participate in TSA annually. The design of assessment items is based on BC descriptors at the end of each key stage of learning and the Curriculum Guide prepared by the Curriculum Development Council. All past question papers and marking schemes are available on the HKEAA website.

4. When TSA results are released, each participating school will obtain a TSA report with territory-wide data as well as a school level report. Apart from the school's overall attainment rates on each subject, the school level report also provides the item analysis report, cohort report and other supplementary reports which serve the feedback purpose of TSA. No individual students' results are provided in school level reports. According to EDB, TSA results do not affect schools' appeal in P1 Admission nor students' allocation results under the Secondary School Places Allocation ("SSPA").

5. P6 students used to sit for their internal school examination, TSA and Pre-Secondary One Hong Kong Attainment Test ("Pre-S1 HKAT") within weeks in June and July each year. To alleviate their pressure and preserve the core functions of both assessments, EDB announced in November 2011 to suspend P6 TSA in 2012 and 2014 as well as to suspend Pre-S1 HKAT in 2013. In the years of suspension of P6 TSA, schools could opt to take the assessment on a voluntary basis. In 2012, for example, a total of 51 schools (i.e. 10% of primary schools) participated in P6 TSA voluntarily. At the same time, EDB undertook to review TSA and further examine areas including implementation arrangements, reporting functions, coverage and questions items.

Enhancement measures for TSA

6. In 2013, EDB conducted a series of consultation with various stakeholders with a view to reviewing and enhancing TSA. In April 2014, the Government announced the result of its review and decided to implement the following measures –

¹ Assessment is used to collect evidence of student learning. It is an integral part of the learning and teaching cycle. Assessment results can provide information for students to enhance their learning and enable teachers to review and improve their teaching.

- (i) to continue with the alternate-year arrangement for P6 TSA and Pre-S1 HKAT from 2015 onwards, i.e. conducting P6 TSA in odd-numbered years and pre-S1 HKAT in even-numbered years. The arrangement for administering P3 and S3 TSA would remain unchanged;
- (ii) not to disclose the number and percentage of students achieving BC to individual primary schools;
- (iii) to remove TSA from the Key Performance Measures for primary schools; and
- (iv) to review the coverage and question items of TSA.

7. The Administration has stated that TSA data is neither used to rank or classify schools, nor to serve as an index for imposing measures on schools to cease operation. According to EDB, schools should not over-drill students or change their teaching and assessment methods because of TSA.

Deliberations on issues of concern

8. After commencement of the Fifth Legislative Council, issues related to TSA have been considered by the Panel on Education ("the Panel") and at meetings of the Council. The major views and concerns expressed by Members are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

Concerns about excessive drilling

9. When TSA was discussed at the meeting of the Panel on 13 January 2014, one of the major concerns raised by members was the pressure on students arising from excessive drilling practices which started as early as P1. Some members pointed out that some schools had arranged after-school and holiday classes to prepare students for TSA to be held in the following school year. The teaching and assessment of schools had become increasingly TSA-oriented. There was serious doubt that TSA had deviated from its original purposes and functions.

10. According to the Administration, TSA was a low-stakes assessment. TSA reports on students' performance could provide useful information to schools for drawing up plans to improve the effectiveness of learning and teaching. It also stressed that TSA was intended to serve as an assessment tool but not a selection tool. The crux of the problem was the practices adopted by

some schools to arrange excessive drilling to prepare students for TSA. The Administration also highlighted that the alternate-year arrangement for the P6 TSA and Pre-S1 HKAT was one of the enhancement measures to help alleviate the pressure of TSA on students and teachers.

BC attainment rates

11. Some members were of the view that the Administration should take effective measures to avoid inappropriate comparisons of students' performance in TSA within and among schools, or to put in place a mechanism to prohibit schools from disclosing information on students' BC attainment rates.

12. As explained by the Administration, the purpose of providing individual schools with school level reports was to facilitate their internal reference with a view to understanding the strengths and weaknesses of their students and drawing up plans to enhance learning and teaching. However, although all schools had undertaken not to disseminate the content of their reports, it was noted that some schools and school sponsoring bodies had made comparisons among schools and some had disclosed information on students' performance in their student recruitment exercise. While there was practical difficulty in ensuring the restricted use of the BC attainment-related information by individual schools, the enhancement measure of not disclosing BC attainment rates to primary schools from 2014 onwards could help reduce such inappropriate disclosure and comparison of information.

Whether or not TSA should be abolished

13. Some Panel members opined that the enhancement measures were not sufficient in removing the drawbacks of TSA. They urged that consideration should be given to make bolder and more decisive changes such as considering whether TSA should be abolished at all three key stages of learning. Some members were concerned that the pressure of excessive drilling practices, which started as early as P1, could only be removed if P3 TSA was abolished.

14. Some other members had no objection to keeping TSA under review with a view to improving implementation arrangements and eliminating drawbacks. However, they disagreed that TSA should be abolished totally or in part. These members considered that every education system needed include a mechanism for assessment of students' performance. TSA was a useful assessment tool to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses in the performance of students and should not be abolished altogether because of certain shortcomings in its implementation. They objected to any abolition of TSA prior to any review on the enhancement measures.

15. According to the Administration, learning diversity was likely to widen when students progressed from P3 to P4. Hence, it was necessary to conduct an assessment on students at P3 level so that timely plans could be drawn up to improve the effectiveness of learning and teaching. If P3 TSA had not been carried out, the weaknesses in students' performance might not be ascertained until they reached P6, at which time remedial actions might be too late. It was also not uncommon to students in other jurisdictions to undergo assessment in BC at about the age of attending P3. For tracking purpose of students' performance, the first cohort of students who had sat for P3 TSA had just completed their secondary school education and took the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination in 2013.

16. At the Legislative Council meeting of 5 November 2014, a motion "Returning a happy childhood to students" moved by Hon Michael TIEN and as amended by four Members was passed. The motion urged the Administration to, amongst others, review the assessment contents of TSA to avoid the need for students to undergo mechanical drills on examination questions, and study whether TSA should be abolished so as to reduce students' study pressure.

17. In its progress report in response to the aforesaid motion, the Administration stated that as the enhancement measures had been implemented for only a short-period of time, schools should be given more time to make adaptations and changes accordingly. The Administration would continue to enhance the professional training and support provided for schools to assist them in making better use of students' performance data, and keep existing measures under regular monitoring in the light of actual circumstances.

Recent developments

18. At the Council meetings of 27 May, 4 and 18 November 2015, questions about the implementation and review of TSA were raised by Hon IP Kin-Yuen, Dr Hon Kenneth CHAN and Dr Hon LAM Tai-fai respectively. Information was sought, amongst others, on (i) the Coordinating Committee on Basic Competency Assessment and Assessment Literacy ("the Committee"), (ii) the feasibility of abolishing P3 TSA for the time being, and (iii) the review on the assessment content of TSA.

19. In its replies, the Administration advised that –

- (i) The Committee was set up in October 2014 with members including academics from tertiary institutions, school principals and teachers. The terms of reference of the Committee were to advise on the direction relating to the development of BCA

project (including TSA and Student Assessment) as well as the enhancement of assessment literacy in schools;

- (ii) The Administration would carefully examine the feasibility of different implementation arrangements of TSA, namely cancellation, alternate-year implementation, adoption of sampling approach, so as to ensure that timely feedback could be provided to schools and students; and
- (iii) After the release of TSA results, HKEAA would arrange meetings for the TSA Paper Review Focus Group for each subject and each level to review the assessment content, level of difficulty, types of items, rubrics of assessment, etc. Their comments would be forwarded to the TSA Moderation Committee for the development of TSA papers in the following year.

20. Hon Albert CHAN has given notice to move a motion about TSA at the Council meeting of 25 November 2015. Meanwhile, on account of widespread public concerns from parents and other stakeholders about TSA, in particular P3 TSA which was criticized as exerting excessive pressure on schools and small children, the Panel will hold a special meeting on 29 November 2015 to receive views from deputations on issues related to the implementation of TSA.

Relevant papers

21. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in **Appendix**.

List of relevant papers

| Committee | Date of meeting | Paper |
|---------------------|------------------------|--|
| Panel on Education | 13.1.2014 (Item IV) | Agenda Minutes CB(4)284/13-14(03) |
| Legislative Council | 5.11.2014 | Official Record of Proceedings Pages 71 – 154 Progress Report on Members motion on "Returning a happy childhood to students" |
| | 27.5.2015 | Official Record of Proceedings Pages 35 – 38 (Question 9) |
| | 4.11.2015 | Written response from the Administration (Question 3) |
| | 18.11.2015 | Written response from the Administration (Question 14) |
| | 25.11.2015 | Wordings of the Members' motion |

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