

**立法會**  
**Legislative Council**

LC Paper No. CB(4)321/15-16(02)

Ref : CB4/PL/ED

**Panel on Education**

**Meeting on 14 December 2015**

**Background brief on the fine-tuning  
of the medium of instruction for secondary schools**

**Purpose**

This paper summarizes the deliberations and concerns of the Panel on Education ("the Panel") on the fine-tuning of the medium of instruction ("MOI") for secondary schools.

**Background**

MOI for secondary schools

2. The Administration promulgated in 1997 and implemented in 1998 the Medium of Instruction Guidance for Secondary Schools ("the MOI Guidance"). According to the MOI Guidance, the mother tongue should primarily be adopted as the MOI for secondary schools. Schools wishing to adopt English as MOI must demonstrate their fulfilment of three prescribed criteria, namely, students possessing the ability to learn through English ("student ability"), teachers possessing the capability to teach through English ("teacher capability") and schools having adequate support strategies/measures ("support measures").

3. In December 2005, the Education Commission issued the Report on Review of Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools and Secondary School Places Allocation ("the Report") which set out its recommendations on the long-term MOI arrangements for secondary schools. The Report re-affirmed the policy direction as set out in the MOI Guidance to uphold mother-tongue teaching and enhance English proficiency concurrently. It recommended to

maintain the bifurcation approach (i.e. secondary schools were streamed as schools using English ("EMI") or Chinese ("CMI") as the MOI at junior secondary levels), and proposed specific standards for the three prescribed criteria for schools wishing to adopt English as MOI. The Government accepted the recommendations in the Report and announced that the relevant MOI arrangements for secondary schools would be implemented with effect from September 2010.

#### Fine-tuning of the MOI arrangements for secondary schools

4. Since the publication of the Report in 2005, stakeholders had raised the following concerns –

- (a) The bifurcation of schools into CMI schools and EMI schools might not fully meet the needs of individual students.
- (b) Students learning in their mother tongue had limited exposure to English during lesson time and this might affect their bridging over from junior to senior secondary levels and/or post-secondary levels where EMI was more often adopted.
- (c) The labeling of secondary schools as CMI and EMI had created an adverse effect on the schools and students alike.
- (d) The review mechanism under which existing EMI schools failing to meet the "student ability" criterion would become CMI schools would have a destabilizing effect on the development of schools.

5. In view of the above, the Administration had proposed to fine-tune the MOI arrangements set out in the Report with a view to allowing secondary schools to devise the appropriate school-based MOI arrangements with regard to students' learning ability, interests and aspirations as well as circumstances of individual schools including teachers' capability and readiness. The proposed fine-tuned MOI framework was endorsed by the Executive Council on 26 May 2009 for implementation from September 2010. The key arrangements were as follows -

- (a) There would no longer be pure bifurcation of schools into CMI schools and EMI schools. If a school could satisfy the student ability criterion, i.e. the average proportion of Secondary 1 ("S1") intake belonging to the top 40% group in the previous two years under a six-year review cycle made up 85% of the size of a class, the school would be given full discretion to determine the MOI

arrangements in the class concerned. This was generally known as the "by class" arrangement.

- (b) In order to increase the exposure to English during lesson time for students learning content subjects in their mother tongue, schools might increase the percentage of total lesson time allowed for extended learning activities ("ELA") conducted in English<sup>1</sup> from the original 15%, 20% and 25% for S1, S2 and S3 respectively (the percentages referred to the proportion of lesson time for ELA to the total lesson time for subjects other than English Language subject) to a uniform proportion of 25% for each of the junior secondary levels. This was generally described as the "by session" arrangement.
- (c) In order to provide students with more motivation to learn English in content subjects and to facilitate them to progress to senior secondary levels at which EMI teaching might be adopted, schools would be allowed to adopt the "by subject" arrangement by transforming the 25% ELA time into the adoption of EMI in individual subjects (up to a maximum of two content subjects).

6. The fine-tuned MOI arrangements would start with S1 level and progress each year to a higher level of the junior secondary forms. The Education Bureau ("EDB") would adhere to a six-year review cycle to facilitate schools to develop teaching and learning under a more stable environment. EDB would provide schools with information on the average proportion of their S1 intake belonging to the top 40% group in the previous two years for devising school-based MOI arrangements for the first six-year cycle starting from September 2010 (i.e. 2010-2011 to 2015-2016 school years). In the sixth year of the first review cycle (i.e. 2015-2016 school year), EDB would provide schools with relevant information of their S1 student profile, based on the S1 allocation results of 2014 and 2015, for devising school-based MOI arrangements for the second six-year cycle, starting from 2016-2017 school year, as part of the S1 school places application process.

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<sup>1</sup> ELA in English might be conducted in various teaching modes including: conducting cross-curricular English enrichment programmes through the collaboration of non-language and English Language subject teachers; allocating some lesson time of individual non-language subjects to go through in English the concepts and contents that had been taught in the mother tongue; teaching individual modules or themes in English in non-language subject concerned; using EMI with regard to the nature of the learning materials (e.g. English-written learning materials downloaded from the Internet); strengthening the bridging programmes of the non-language subjects to facilitate a smooth transition for students who chose to switch to EMI learning at senior secondary levels, etc.

## **Major issues and concerns**

7. At the special meeting held on 29 May 2009, the Panel was briefed on the arrangements for fine-tuning the MOI for secondary schools as announced by the Administration on the same day. The Panel also received views from deputations on the subject at its special meeting on 11 July 2009.

### Diversification of MOI arrangements

8. Some deputations submitting views to the Panel had expressed reservation and objection to the fine-tuned MOI arrangements. They considered that the changes were quite substantial and not merely "fine-tuning". Hence, the Administration should have consulted more widely to gauge the views of parents and frontline teachers. Pending further consultation, there was a suggestion that the fine-tuned MOI arrangements should be suspended in order that the secondary school sector could focus effort on preparation for the implementation of the New Senior Secondary curriculum in the 2009-2010 school year.

9. Some members shared the deputations' views, and expressed grave concern that under the fine-tuned MOI framework, the adoption of different MOI arrangements for different classes, groups, subjects or sessions within the school would create confusion.

10. According to the Administration, the fine-tuning proposal would be implemented with effect from the 2010-2011 school year with the objective of allowing schools to exercise professional judgement on the appropriate MOI arrangements for their students, having regard to teachers' capability, students' ability and schools' support measures. The fine-tuned arrangements were not mandatory for schools and they could exercise their professional judgment to choose to continue with mother tongue teaching for all non-language subjects, or implement their school-based fine-tuned MOI arrangements in an incremental manner. At the meeting held on 29 May 2009, the Panel was informed that under the fine-tuned MOI policy, around 5% of schools, mostly existing schools adopting EMI<sup>2</sup>, could continue to adopt full EMI for all content subjects. About 20% of schools in-between would have a wider choice in adopting EMI or CMI for teaching in individual classes or subjects.

11. The Panel noted that deputations held diverse views on the fine-tuned MOI arrangements. There was a view that the arrangements were in conflict with basic educational beliefs, as mother-tongue teaching should be upheld to

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<sup>2</sup> These schools had 85% or more of their S1 intake belonging to the top 40% student group.

enhance teaching and learning effectiveness. Those who supported the fine-tuned arrangements considered that they were student-centred, and could enhance students' biliterate and trilingual proficiency at junior secondary level progressively.

### Monitoring the implementation of the fine-tuned MOI arrangements

12. Some members supported the fine-tuning arrangements to give greater flexibility to schools in deciding the appropriate MOI. Some members, however, were concerned that the transformation of the 25% ELA time into the adoption of EMI for not more than two content subjects (i.e. "by subject" arrangement) was a substantial change to the prevailing MOI policy, which had not been widely discussed and agreed to in the school sector. They were also concerned that some schools might adopt EMI for Mathematics and Integrated Science at junior secondary levels under the "by subject" arrangement regardless of the readiness of their teachers and the ability of students in order to boost their appeal to parents in their choice of schools for their children. There was also concern about the mechanism, if any, to monitor compliance by schools with the prescribed criteria for adopting EMI.

13. The Administration explained that schools adopting the "by subject" arrangement had to consider whether this would fit into the overall curriculum plan and to ensure consistency and integrity of the whole school curriculum throughout the secondary levels. In line with the School Development and Accountability Framework, schools should include in their school development plans the whole-school language policy, the school-based MOI arrangements and the rationale for the arrangements adopted. The Administration would examine the school plans and circumstances to ensure that the overall curriculum plan of a school adopting the "by subject" arrangement was consistent at different secondary levels and conducive to students' transition from junior secondary to senior secondary and/or post-secondary education.

14. To facilitate the implementation and monitoring of the fine-tuned MOI arrangements, EDB informed the Panel that it would continue to conduct external review and step up focused inspections under the existing mechanism to help schools review the effectiveness of their MOI arrangements. EDB would also plan to set up an advisory panel drawn from the education sector to consider observations and findings made at the focused inspections and make recommendations to EDB on follow-up actions with individual schools, such as modifications or re-planning of the relevant MOI arrangements. In case of schools' non-compliance with the prescribed criteria for EMI teaching, EDB would consider issuing warning letters to the schools concerned, disclosing their names, and taking other follow-up actions as required.

### Transparency of information on MOI arrangements

15. Members noted that under the fine-tuned framework, schools were allowed to adopt MOI arrangements in the form of the "by class", "by subject" and "by session" arrangements. They highlighted that parents might not be conversant with the fine-tuned MOI arrangements, and considered it necessary for the Administration to enhance parents' understanding in this regard.

16. As advised by EDB, the school profiles updated on a yearly basis could enhance parents' understanding of individual schools including their MOI arrangements. In addition, EDB would continue to work with the Committee on Home-School Cooperation to conduct parent briefings on S1 admission and the MOI arrangements for secondary schools. The school development plan would also incorporate information on the detailed arrangements of the school's MOI plan, and be uploaded onto the school's website for public access. EDB would encourage schools to consult parents on any changes to MOI arrangements through their parent-teacher associations.

### Support for schools and teachers

17. Members considered that the successful implementation of the fine-tuning arrangements would hinge on the capability of teachers to teach in English. They shared some deputations' concern that if the "by subject" arrangement under the fine-tuned MOI framework was adopted by the school, some content subject teachers, who had all along taught in Chinese, might need to use EMI. There was also concern about the additional workload on teachers as they might have to prepare bilingual teaching materials and assessment papers.

18. According to the Administration, it would provide the necessary training and professional support for content subject teachers who might be required to switch their MOI from CMI to EMI. Supply teachers would be made available to enable them to take part in professional development courses. Learning and teaching resources would be further produced for modules/topics in Key Learning Areas where ELA could be effectively used to provide useful exposure to English.

### English proficiency of students

19. The English proficiency of students was an issue of concern to the Panel. In the context of the discussion on the implementation of the Native-speaking English Teacher ("NET") Scheme at the meeting of the Panel held on 10 November 2014, some members sought updates on the English proficiency of

students. According to the Administration, the percentage of Primary 3 students achieving English Language Basic Competency in the Territory-wide System Assessment had risen from 75.9% in 2004 to 80.3% in 2014. As for Primary 6, the relevant percentage had improved from 70.5% in 2005 to 72.4% in 2013. As each primary school was currently provided with only one NET who would serve the entire school, there was a suggestion that the Administration should provide an additional NET to each primary school. According to the Administration, the idea of providing an additional NET to each primary school would be included on the agenda of the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research.

20. In the Fifth Legislative Council, Hon Paul TSE and Hon Starry LEE had expressed concern about English proficiency of Hong Kong people in their questions raised at the Council meetings of 3 December 2014 and 25 November 2015 respectively. As advised by the Administration in its reply to Hon Starry LEE's question, over the past four Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examinations (i.e. 2012 to 2015), the performance of secondary students in the English Language subject was stable, with more than 77% of them attaining Level 2 or above (i.e. one of the minimum requirements for the application of civil service posts and sub-degree programmes). The percentage of students attaining Level 3 or above (i.e. one of the minimum requirements for admission to local undergraduate programmes) had increased from 50.1% in 2012 to 52.4% in 2015.

### **Latest position**

21. The Administration will brief the Panel on the implementation and review, if any, of the fine-tuning of the MOI for secondary schools at the meeting to be held on 14 December 2015.

### **Relevant papers**

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

**Relevant papers**

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>Paper</b>
Panel on Education	29.5.2009 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Education	11.7.2009 (Item III)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Education	10.11.2014 (Item IV)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a> <a href="#">CB(4)357/14-15(01)</a>
Legislative Council	3.12.2014	<a href="#">Official Record of Proceedings</a> <a href="#">Pages 162 – 169 (Question 22)</a>
Legislative Council	25.11.2015	<a href="#">Administration's reply to a question raised by Hon Starry LEE (Question 4)</a>

Council Business Division 4  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
 8 December 2015