

**For discussion
on 13 February 2017**

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Measures to Improve Facilities at the “Matchbox-style School Premises”

PURPOSE

This paper reports the progress on the follow-ups by the Education Bureau (EDB) with regard to improving “matchbox-style school premises”¹, and briefs Members on the proposed arrangements and measures for enhancing facilities at these school premises.

BACKGROUND

2. The Education Panel (the Panel) discussed the policies and issues related to the enhancement of teaching and learning environment of public sector schools and reprovisioning of such schools respectively at its meetings on 14 December 2015 and 22 March 2016². Among the issues discussed, Members were particularly concerned about the conditions of the 28 public-sector primary schools operating in the so-called “matchbox-style school premises”. With a view to following up and exploring practical options to improve these premises, EDB together with the Panel and representatives of the Subsidised Primary Schools Council (SPSC) held two closed-door tripartite meetings in May and July 2016 respectively and had constructive discussions on the matter concerned. Consensus was reached and it was agreed to focus on addressing the common problems attributed to the unique design features of “matchbox-style school premises” first.

¹ The so-called “matchbox-style school premises” refer to those cuboidal shaped school premises constructed between mid-1960s and 1980 at public housing estates for primary school use.

² Please refer to LC Paper No. CB(4)321/15-16(03) and CB(4)729/15-16(01) for relevant information.

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENT MEASURES AND PROGRESS MADE

3. Based on the consensus reached at the tripartite meetings, EDB has been maintaining close communication with the schools concerned and SPSC. Through reallocation of internal resources, we have also promptly arranged our consultants to visit all the 26³ “matchbox-style school premises” last summer to conduct on-site review for formulating improvement suggestions pertaining to the unique architectural design of these school premises. In parallel, based on the wish of the schools concerned, we would also explore, from the technical perspective, possible rooms for expanding the existing school premises and better utilising the existing space through means such as enhancement of the flexibility of internal partitioning, construction of extra floor or classrooms, etc. In addition, we have also reflected the schools’ requests for improving the arrangements of their using public recreation facilities at housing estates and the related daily management issues to the Housing Department (HD).

(A) Addressing common concerns arising from the unique design features of matchbox-style schools premises

4. Having reviewed the situation of the 26 “matchbox-style school premises” and discussed with the schools, our consultants summarised the major problems resulting from the unique architectural design of these school premises and devised the following five improvement measures –

- replacement with sound-proof doors and double-glazed window system in classrooms to mitigate noise interference due to the internal corridor design in between classrooms;
- installation of mechanical ventilation system to improve ventilation along internal corridors;
- installation of openable windows at staircase landings to prevent rainwater ingress from grille walls;
- installation of acoustic panel wall system with metal frame for internal partitions of classrooms to allow mounting of modern teaching aids, such as electronic whiteboards; and
- installation of moveable partitions on both sides of covered

³ Among the existing 28 public-sector primary schools operating at “matchbox-style school premises”, two of them have been allocated with new school premises for reprovisioning through earlier school allocation exercises. Hence, the current improvement scheme is only applicable to the remaining 26 primary schools.

playgrounds to prevent rainwater ingress, as well as provision of mechanical ventilation system.

5. EDB have earlier on met with representatives of the 26 schools concerned and SPSC to introduce the above proposed improvement works items and explain the related arrangements. The schools and SPSC have indicated support for the improvement proposals and the overall approach of the follow-up plan. Given the conditions and needs of these 26 primary school premises vary, EDB and our consultants are scheduling meetings with individual schools for in-depth discussions regarding the details of the improvement arrangements, including the works items to cover, priority of such works items and the works programme, in order to finalise the particulars of the works project for individual schools as soon as possible and to commence the improvement works concerned during the 2017 summer break. Depending on the available time slots to be offered by each school for the works, it is estimated that a minimum of two school years would be required for the five improvement measures listed in paragraph 4 above.

(B) Addressing inadequate space within existing school premises

6. Owing to their architectural design, “matchbox-style school premises” in general also lack activity areas. Relevant schools have expressed wish for expansion or better utilisation of current school premises if possible so as to enhance their teaching and learning environment and cope with the present teaching needs. In this relation, our consultants will seek to identify, from the technical perspective, potential scope for campus expansion and other flexible uses of space within the existing school premises. Examples include construction of additional floor above the roof, internal conversion within the current school premises, installation of moveable partition walls within existing facilities to create ad-hoc special rooms, etc. The purpose is to enhance the teaching and learning environment of the schools within the scarcity of space and existing building design of the premises.

7. In view of the age of “matchbox-style schools premises”, it is the prerequisite to assess the technical feasibility before embarking on any additions or expansion works for the existing school premises, including whether the existing building structural loading is sufficient to support additional floors or expansion areas. Besides, with “matchbox-style

school premises” built in public housing estates, expansion of these school campuses (regardless of whether the expansion area is beyond the existing school boundary) would affect the overall gross floor area (GFA) of the housing estates concerned. According to HD’s suggestion, allocation or increase of GFA of the housing estates concerned for school premises expansion works would require prior consultation with and consent from the Housing Authority and stakeholders of the relevant housing estates. This process would be relatively lengthy, and the schools have expressed understanding over this at our earlier meeting with them. EDB will continue to follow up on the matters.

(C) Management of shared facilities at housing estates

8. Located in public housing estates, schools operating in “matchbox-style school premises” need to share public facilities such as ball courts and car parks with local residents of the housing estates concerned. Some schools have raised with EDB that there were rooms for improvement in the arrangements for using such facilities, such as time allocation, cleaning, security measures, daily management, etc., and hoped that EDB could assist in liaising with the departments concerned.

9. In this connection, EDB have reflected the concerns and views on management of estate facilities raised by individual schools to the Transport and Housing Bureau and HD. Since the management arrangements of individual housing estates and the demand for various facilities by local residents varied, HD suggested exploring pragmatic improvement measures at the district level to fit the specific circumstances of individual housing estates. Our respective Regional Education Offices are following up with the estate management offices of HD in this regard and have organised liaison meetings for relevant schools with management officers of their respective housing estates to enhance understanding. EDB will continue to collaborate with HD and help facilitate schools in identifying practical solutions.

(D) Reprovisioning or extension to vacant school premises in the longer term

10. The Panel has raised the option of in-situ redevelopment of “matchbox-style school premises” for a complete upgrading of school facilities before. However, given that the site area of the majority of

“matchbox-style school premises” is small, the potential and feasibility for a full-scaled in-situ redevelopment is rather limited. To fully address the issues of insufficient space and facilities in the long run, , these schools need to be reprovisioned or expanded to suitable vacant school premises (VSP) or school sites.

11. We have reviewed the VSP and reserved school sites under EDB and shortlisted those which could potentially be allocated for the purpose of reprovisioning or physical extension of existing schools through the School Allocation Exercise this year. That said, there are only limited number of new school sites and VSP, and they are distributed in different districts. Suitable new sites or VSP available for such purpose are not found in all the districts where “matchbox-style school premises” are situated. EDB will expedite the relevant allocation process through the existing school allocation mechanism. Schools may take into account their school-based considerations and consider if they would like to apply for the sites/premises concerned.

WAY FORWARD

12. The Government attaches great importance to the teaching and learning environment of schools. EDB has all along paid close attention to the teaching and learning needs of schools and endeavoured to provide infrastructural support and necessary equipment where feasible for enhancing teaching effectiveness. The Chief Executive announced in his Policy Address on 18 January 2017⁴ the initiative to improve facilities for the 26 “matchbox-style school premises”, demonstrating the Government’s commitment in continuous enhancement of hardware support for schools. EDB is actively taking forward the improvement works elucidated above for the 26 “matchbox-style school premises” and will continue to work in close collaboration with relevant departments to follow up on other aforementioned suggestions on improving the teaching and learning environment for the schools.

13. Apart from “matchbox-style school premises”, we understand that Members and the sector would also like to improve other school premises constructed according to past planning standards (or the so-called “sub-standard school premises”) progressively for the betterment of the

⁴ The relevant contents are at paragraph 209 of Policy Address 2017.

teaching and learning environment. We hope to gain experience through the “matchbox-style school premises” improvement scheme, thereby acquiring valuable references to our formulating further enhancement plans for other types of school premises. The sector may also, based on their consensus reached, put forward proposals.

14. Furthermore, while exploring and progressively implementing the above improvement arrangements for “matchbox-style school premises”, we will continue to enhance school facilities and their teaching and learning environment through various existing measures (including reprovisioning and redevelopment, as well as the annual major repairs exercise and the emergency repairs mechanism) having regard to the needs of individual schools (including those operating in “matchbox-style school premises”).

Education Bureau
February 2017