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Panel on Education

Meeting on 13 February 2017

Background brief on issues related to schools operating in matchbox-style school premises

Purpose

This paper summarizes the views and concerns of the Panel on Education ("the Panel") on issues related to schools operating in matchbox-style school premises.

Background

2. There are currently about 900 public sector school premises built in different periods in accordance with the standards at the time of construction. Matchbox-style school premises are cuboidal shaped school premises constructed between mid-1960s and 1980 at public housing estates for primary school use. As compared with the newly built school premises and present-day standards, these schools are considered as sub-standard school premises.

3. In his 2017 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced that the Government will allocate additional resources to improve the facilities of 26 matchbox-style school premises¹ having regard to their unique design features.

Major views and concerns

4. The Panel deliberated on issues related to schools operating in matchbox-style school premises at its meetings on 14 December 2015 and

¹ There are 28 primary schools operating in "matchbox-style school premises" at present. Two of them have been allocated new school premises for reprovisioning purpose. Hence, the current arrangement is only applicable to the remaining 26 primary schools.

22 March 2016, and visited three primary schools accommodated in matchbox-style school premises in April 2016. The major views and concerns expressed by members are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

Enhancement of facilities of matchbox-style school premises

5. Members were worried that the dilapidated conditions at matchbox-style school premises might pose safety and hygiene hazards. Some common problems included poor ventilation, noise interference, rain seeping in through ventilation walls, hollow brick wall and sharing the basketball court with other users in the public housing estate. The lack of space and proper facilities adversely affected teaching and learning, to the detriment of students' development and the quality of education.

6. According to the Administration, various measures had been implemented over the years to enhance the facilities of matchbox-style school premises, such as the School Improvement Programme, redevelopment and re-provisioning ("R&R") programmes and minor improvement projects. The Administration would continue to carry out school premises maintenance works to further improve the facilities of these schools through the established mechanism of major repairs and emergency repairs.

R&R of matchbox-style school premises

7. Some members were of the view that instead of carrying out repair works in a piecemeal manner, the Administration should formulate a clear policy and a timetable to upgrade sub-standard school environment. The Administration explained that re-provisioning of existing schools hinged on the availability of appropriate school sites/premises in the territory, so it was not practicable to draw up a timetable in this regard. As for redevelopment, the relatively small site areas of matchbox-style primary schools had limited their potential and feasibility for in-situ redevelopment.

8. Noting the above limitation, many members still considered that re-provisioning might be the most effective option for some of these schools. They supported the priority allocation of sites/premises to those schools currently operating in sub-standard premises in School Allocation Exercises ("SAE"), and raised concern about the fair assessment of applications under SAE.

9. The Administration explained that the allocation of school premises was generally conducted on a competitive basis through SAE. Applications under SAE were assessed with regard to all relevant factors, which included the quality of education, the physical conditions of the schools' existing premises, schools' vision and missions, etc. The Administration assured members that all

applications would be carefully considered against a set of established criteria to ensure that the allocation was conducted in a fair and just manner.

Follow-up to school visit

10. To follow up the school visit in April 2016 and provide a forum for the Administration and the school sector to explore short-, mid- and long-term improvement measures, two closed meetings were convened in mid-May and mid-July 2016.

11. At the closed meetings, the Administration undertook to visit more matchbox-style primary schools and engage a consultant to examine feasible ways to tackle common problems arising from the design of these school premises. Meanwhile, the Subsidized Primary School Council would coordinate information on the problems faced by individual schools for follow-up by the Administration. Pending reprovisioning and longer-term solutions, the Administration was urged to explore the feasibility of setting up dedicated funds for application by primary schools operating in matchbox-style school premises to carry out necessary repair and improvement works.

Relevant Council questions

12. Members expressed concerns about the learning environment and R&R progress of schools operating in matchbox-style school premises in their questions raised at the Council meetings of 19 March 2014, 29 April 2015 and 29 June 2016.

Latest position

13. The Administration will brief members on the progress of measures on improvement of facilities for matchbox-style school premises at the Panel meeting on 13 February 2017.

Relevant papers

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

List of relevant papers

| Committee | Date of meeting | Paper |
|---------------------|------------------------|---|
| Legislative Council | 19.3.2014 | Official Record of Proceedings Pages 94-101 (Question 11) |
| Legislative Council | 29.4.2015 | Official Record of Proceedings Pages 44-46 (Question 12) |
| Panel on Education | 14.12.2015 | Agenda Minutes CB(4)600/15-16(01) |
| Panel on Education | 22.3.2016 | Agenda Minutes CB(4)773/15-16(01) |
| Legislative Council | 29.6.2016 | Official Record of Proceedings Pages 68-78 (Question 6) |

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