

For discussion  
on 1 February 2019

## **Legislative Council Panel on Education**

### **Planning for the provision of public sector primary and secondary school places in the light of student population and related stabilisation measures**

#### **Purpose**

This paper outlines the planning for the provision of schools places and related arrangements under the existing Primary One Admission (POA) System and Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) System. It also gives an account of the measures implemented by the Education Bureau (EDB) in light of fluctuations in student population with a view to balancing the concerns of various stakeholders and alleviating the impact on schools.

#### **Background**

2. EDB has the responsibility to provide sufficient public sector school places for eligible school-age students. The SSPA and POA Systems aim to allocate school places in an orderly manner. Currently, both systems are divided into two stages: the Discretionary Places (DP) Admission stage and the Central Allocation (CA) stage. The CA stage is also divided into two parts: Unrestricted School Choices and Restricted School Choices. Since the age distribution of population in different districts and school nets is changing and the student population and schools are not evenly distributed, it is not possible to achieve a complete balance between the demand and supply of Secondary

One (S1) and Primary One (P1) places, and there will be changes in each cycle.

3. According to the existing arrangements, the provision of public sector primary school places is planned on a district basis. Under the POA System, the 18 districts in the territory are demarcated into 36 school nets. Due to various factors (including demographic changes, the number of newly arrived children from the Mainland, parental choices (e.g. whether to get admission to public sector schools or other schools, whether to participate in the POA after the deadline for making school choice for the CA, etc.), there are uncertainties about the number of applicant children for POA and demand for school places in each district and school net for every cycle. These year-on-year changes are not fully foreseeable in long-term planning. As such, there are established contingency measures to increase the number of P1 places flexibly in individual school nets at the CA stage according to the need, which include borrowing school places from other school nets and making use of vacant classrooms for operation of additional P1 classes under the POA System.

4. For secondary schools, the provision of public sector school places is planned on a territory-wide basis at present. Under the SSPA System, the whole territory is divided into 18 school nets which are based on the administrative districts. In each SSPA cycle, netting of school places from neighbouring areas will be arranged as and when necessary to meet the demand of individual districts with insufficient school places and to provide more choices to students in districts with a smaller number of schools. When making netting arrangements, EDB takes into consideration a number of factors, such as the demand and supply of school places in different districts, location of schools and the associated transport facilities as well as the general pattern of the established netting arrangements, to ensure a stable supply of school places in each district and to provide parents with more choices. If necessary, EDB will also consider increasing the number of S1 classes in the districts concerned to meet the demand.

## **Measures to cope with the transient changes in demand for school places in recent years**

### *Primary Schools*

5. EDB announced in 2013 that the overall demand for P1 places would increase temporarily to the projected peak<sup>1</sup> in the 2018/19 school year and then progressively decrease to a stable level. However, it was difficult to predict accurately whether the babies born in Hong Kong to Mainland women would return to Hong Kong for P1 education, the actual number of such babies who would settle in Hong Kong and if so, when. Furthermore, some of them would choose to commute to schools in Hong Kong daily as cross-boundary students. Their number and choice of Immigration Control Points for entry to Hong Kong would be subject to significant year-on-year changes due to family factors, distribution of their places of residence and adjustment of relevant policies, etc. Following the implementation of the “zero delivery quota” for Mainland expectant mothers in early 2013, the increase in the demand for P1 places in question was transient in nature.

6. To meet the above-mentioned transient increase in demand for P1 places, EDB and the sector have been maintaining close liaison and have reached a consensus on the related follow-up measures. In this regard, it was agreed that construction of new schools to meet any transient demand for P1 places should be avoided as far as possible to lessen impact on the stable development of primary schools when the demand for school places subsides. Premising on the sustainable development of existing schools, we have adopted flexible arrangements to cope with the transient increase in demand for school places. The flexible arrangements include the adoption of contingency measures mentioned in paragraph 3 (i.e. borrowing school places from other school nets and making use of vacant classrooms), constructing temporary classrooms, deploying vacant school premises and temporarily

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<sup>1</sup> Reasons for the peak demand were two-fold: about 185 000 Type II babies (i.e. babies born to Mainland women in Hong Kong and babies whose fathers were non-permanent residents of Hong Kong) were born between 2006 and 2012, and traditionally more babies were born in the Year of the Dragon (i.e. 2012). Those babies born in 2012 would reach the school age of six, which was considered appropriate for admission to P1, by 2018.

allocating more students to each P1 class (i.e. “temporarily allocating more students”) and providing additional resources<sup>2</sup> to the schools concerned to ensure teaching effectiveness, etc. EDB and the sector (including the representatives of the Subsidised Primary Schools Council and the Hong Kong Aided Primary School Heads Association, and primary schools in the districts concerned) have liaised closely on the flexible arrangements adopted in each POA cycle during the transitional period with a view to achieving synergy of different flexible measures and balancing the concerns of different stakeholders about individual measures.

### *Secondary schools*

7. In light of the decline of S1 student population, EDB has continuously introduced a number of relief measures, with the commitment of a substantial amount of resources, to facilitate the sustainable development of secondary schools and to stabilise the teaching force since the 2006/07 school year. Among others, the major measures included reducing the number of students allocated to each S1 class<sup>3</sup>, relaxing the criteria for approving S1 classes<sup>4</sup> and introducing the Voluntary Optimisation of Class Structure Scheme<sup>5</sup>, etc.

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<sup>2</sup> The additional resources include: when eligible schools are required to be temporarily allocated more students, up to 30 per P1 class, based on the prevailing arrangements for schools maintaining 30 students allocated to each P1 class, they will be provided with a time-limited additional Assistant Primary School Master/Mistress post. The details are in the EDB Circular No. 19/2008. Since the 2013/14 school year, when the number of students allocated to each P1 class exceeds 30, EDB will provide the schools concerned with an additional funding for each additional student starting from the 31<sup>st</sup> student, in each P1 class according to the Headcount in September. The current rate of the additional funding is \$46,124.

EDB has, starting from the 2015/16 school year, provided schools implementing small class teaching (SCT) with the Additional Supplementary Learning Grant (ASLG) when they are temporarily allocated with more students per P1 class, for a period of 6 school years until the cohort of P1 students has completed the six-year primary education in the school. The ASLG would be provided to the 26th student to the cap (i.e. the number of students allocated to each class or 30 students, whichever is smaller, in the year concerned (in which temporarily allocating more students is adopted)). The current rate of the funding for each additional school place is \$14,322. According to the result of the headcount in September, EDB will provide the ASLG when the average number of students per P1 classes of the school reaches 28 or above and capped at the number of students allocated upon temporarily allocating more students.

<sup>3</sup> The number of students allocated to each S1 class reduced from 38 in the 2008/09 school year to 34 in the 2012/13 school year.

<sup>4</sup> For schools having surplus teachers arising from class reduction in the September headcount, the basis for calculating the number of approved S1 classes was gradually relaxed from 35 students per class in the 2006/07 school year to 30 in the 2009/10 school year, and to 25 in the 2012/13 school year.

<sup>5</sup> The Voluntary Optimisation of Class Structure Scheme ("the Scheme") and its enhanced measures were launched in 2010 so that schools operating five S1 classes or more could reduce the number of classes in an orderly manner to facilitate sustainable development of secondary schools under the new senior secondary academic structure, and to alleviate the impact of the decline in student population.

Subsequently, in view of the anticipated transient decline of S1 student population in a few years with the gradual rebound from the 2017/18 school year, starting from the 2013/14 school year, EDB has further implemented a basket of targeted relief measures<sup>6</sup> to help sustain the development of schools, stabilise the teaching force and maintain the quality of education in order to minimize the impact of the decline in student population on the school sector.

8. Taking into account the situation of surplus teachers faced by individual schools, to further stabilise the teaching force and cater for the learning needs of students, EDB further announced in 2017 to allow aided secondary schools with surplus teachers arising from reduction of S1 classes from the 2013/14 to 2017/18 school years to apply for extending the retention period of the surplus teachers concerned up to the 2018/19 school year. The above-mentioned measures have all along been effective in stabilising the whole secondary school sector.

## **Measures to cope with changes in student population in the coming years**

### *Primary schools*

9. According to the current projections of P1 school-age population, the overall demand for P1 places in public sector schools is expected to reach the peak in the 2018/19 school year, and drop in the 2019/20 school year and then progress to a stable level. Based on the situation after the DP Admission stage, it is anticipated that there will be about 51 500 applicant children joining POA in this cycle (2019), which is about 7 500 fewer than last year. The reduction

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<sup>6</sup> The targeted relief measures include:

- relaxing the “not less than three S1 classes” requirement under which schools with two approved S1 classes are accepted not necessary to apply for any school development option; schools could operate two S1 classes if admitted 26 S1 students at the minimum, in other words, the average class size will then be 13 students;
- schools operating one S1 class only can apply for school development option in order to continue their operation;
- schools operating two or less S1 classes can participate in the next SSPA with a cap of three S1 classes;
- on the premise of the number of students in each S1 class reinstating to the level at that time (i.e. 36 students per class including the repeater quota) after the transient decline of S1 population, schools adopted the mode of “2-1-1” or “1-1-1” under a “district-/school-based approach to reduce the number of students allocated to each S1 class from 34 to 30 or 31 students per class progressively in three school years from 2013/14 to 2015/16; and
- from the 2013/14 to 2015/16 school year, extending the retention period of those surplus regular teachers arising from S1 class reduction from one year to three years.

rate (about 12.7%) is similar to the earlier estimation of P1 school-age population in Hong Kong. It is noteworthy that since the P1 enrolment has been increasing in the past few years, despite the decline in P1 school-age population starting from the 2019/20 school year, it is expected that the overall primary student population, the number of operating classes and teaching posts on establishment of public sector primary schools will remain generally stable in the next few years.

10. Following the drop of P1 school-age population, the flexible measures adopted over the past few years will be adjusted or withdrawn in light of the demand as planned. This will effectively alleviate the impact arising from the decrease in student population. Since the demand for school places in individual districts/school nets may be different from the overall situation and the continuous operation of additional classes in individual districts/school nets (so called “partly-enlarged class structure”) in the past years has reduced substantially the number of vacant classrooms, some districts/school nets would still have to continue with the flexible measures in the 2019/20 school year, including temporarily allocating more students per P1 class in 12 school nets in eight districts, to increase the provision of P1 places. Yet, it is anticipated that the number of districts/school nets involved and the magnitude will in general decrease<sup>7</sup> when compared with the last POA cycle.

11. On the premise that vacant classrooms be well utilised, some schools were required to operate “partly-enlarged class structure” in order to meet the demand in the past few years. We understand that the sector is concerned about the situation of operating “partly-enlarged class structure” due to the redundant teachers so arisen when the students of these additional classes promote to P6 and graduate. On the other hand, following the decrease in P1

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<sup>7</sup> It is anticipated that in the current cycle (2019), temporarily allocating more students is required in North Point (School Net 14), Mong Kok (School Net 32), Hung Hom (School Net 35), Sham Shui Po (School Net 40), Kowloon Bay (School Net 46), Kwun Tong (School Net 48), Tsuen Wan (School Net 62), Yuen Long West (School Net 73), Yuen Long East (School Net 74), Tai Wai (School Net 88), Ma On Shan (School Net 89) and Shatin (School Net 91). Apart from School Net 46 which will adopt temporary allocating more students again after POA 2014, the remaining nets have adopted temporary allocating more students in last cycle. The magnitude of temporary allocating more students is lower than that in last cycle in all the nets except School Net 62 which remains unchanged. Apart from School Net 91 in which the magnitude is 31, those of other nets do not exceed 30.

school-age population, a small number of schools may be affected by the diminishing demand for school places in their respective districts and parental choices. In this connection, we met and discussed with the sector including representatives of the Subsidised Primary Schools Council and the Hong Kong Aided Primary School Heads Association the related follow-up measures in January 2018. To maintain a stable teaching force and to facilitate the sustainable development of schools in the coming few years, the aided primary schools concerned, irrespective of whether “partly-enlarged class structure” would be involved, can apply on a yearly basis for retaining up to a maximum of three years the redundant teachers arising from class reduction due to the decrease of P1 population who fail to secure a teaching post or be absorbed through the prevailing mechanism for handling redundant teachers. EDB will keep in view the implementation and review timely. Besides, starting from P1 in the 2019/20 school year, the basis for calculating the number of approved classes will be reduced from 25 to 23 students per class if there are redundant teachers arising from class reduction after the student headcount in mid-September. The basis will be extended progressively to P6 together with that cohort of students. This will further enhance the stability of the number of approved classes and hence the regular teaching posts in schools. The school sectors generally support the above measures and agree they could help schools (including schools with “partly-enlarged class structure”) to stabilise the teaching force.

### *Secondary Schools*

12. The population of S1 students has started to rebound from the 2017/18 school year. As at November 2018, it was estimated that around 53 600 P6 students would participate in SSPA 2019 with an increase of around 3 300 students compared with the same period last year. According to the present projection of S1 school-age population, it is anticipated that the overall S1 student population will gradually rise and reach the peak of around 74 000 students in the 2024/25 school year. To address the projected increase in the demand for S1 school places, EDB and the sector (including the representatives of Hong Kong Subsidised Secondary Schools Council and the

secondary school heads from 18 districts) met and reached a consensus in October 2017 on the framework of direction and strategies for tackling the issue, which include adopting the established arrangements under SSPA, progressively reverting the allocation class size to 34 upon the rebound of the S1 student population (hereafter referred to as “place reinstating”) as pledged by the sector prior to the implementation of the targeted relief measures, and increasing the number of S1 classes in the districts with a shortfall in school places after adopting the netting arrangements and “place reinstating” to meet the demand of each SSPA cycle. Even though “place reinstating” could be implemented in 2018 SSPA cycle according to the projected S1 school-age population, both parties agreed to withhold the “place reinstating” arrangement in SSPA 2018 to facilitate early preparation of the sector. The demand for S1 places in SSPA 2018 would be coped with through netting arrangements and operating 19 additional S1 classes in North and Tai Po districts. An across-the-board “place reinstating” would start in SSPA 2019 when the projected shortfall in S1 places was expected to increase.

13. EDB met with the sector (including the representatives of Hong Kong Subsidised Secondary Schools Council and the secondary school heads from 18 districts) in October 2018 to discuss the arrangements of “place reinstating” and “operating additional S1 classes” for SSPA 2019 according to the latest projection and the framework of strategies previously agreed. Both parties agreed that the anticipated demand for S1 places would be coped with through the established netting arrangements, complemented by an across-the-board “place reinstating” by one school place and operating 35 additional S1 classes in North, Tai Po, Yuen Long and Sha Tin districts.

14. We understand that a small number of secondary schools may not immediately or fully benefit from the gradual increase in the overall S1 student population because of different factors, such as the demand and supply of school places in individual districts, the parental choices and student mobility, etc. Thus, some of the targeted relief measures previously implemented will still continue, including reducing the basis for calculating the number of approved S1 classes to 25 students per class, relaxing the “not less than three S1 classes” requirement under which schools with two approved S1 classes are accepted not necessary to apply for any school



development option, allowing schools with S1 classes reduced to one or two to participate in the next SSPA with a cap of three S1 classes. The above measures will continue to take effect in the coming few years. Meanwhile, we will continue to explore the needs of other coping measures to support individual affected schools when necessary.

15. Against the backdrop of a rising S1 student population, EDB will continue to meet and discuss with the sector the strategies to cope with the increasing demand for school places according to the latest information and data before the start of each SSPA cycle so as to minimise the impact of changes in student population on the school sector, thereby stabilising the learning and teaching environment, and to ensure sufficient S1 places to meet the demand.

## **Conclusion**

16. We understand that changes in student population, and the related planning of school places and measures would have impact on stakeholders (including schools and parents), and different stakeholders have different concerns. We will continue gauging views of the sector and stakeholders, with a view to balancing their concerns and maintaining the quality of education while sustaining schools' stable development and ensuring prudent use of resources.

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