

# 立法會 *Legislative Council*

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## **Panel on Education**

**Meeting on 18 October 2021**

### **Updated background brief on the provision of public sector primary and secondary school places in light of student population**

#### **Purpose**

This paper summarizes the major views and concerns of the Panel on Education ("the Panel") about the provision of primary and secondary school places.

#### **Background**

2. The Secondary School Places Allocation ("SSPA") System and Primary One Admission ("POA") System aim to allocate public sector school places for eligible school-age students in an orderly manner. The two systems are divided into two stages: the Discretionary Places Admission stage and the Central Allocation ("CA") stage. CA stage consists of two parts: Unrestricted School Choices and Restricted School Choices.

3. The provision of public sector primary school places is planned on a district basis. Under POA System, the 18 districts in the territory are demarcated into 36 school nets. According to the Administration, 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 POA after the deadline for making school choice for 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.

4. For secondary schools, the provision of public sector school places is planned on a territory-wide basis at present. Under 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.

## **Major views and concerns**

5. In the Sixth Legislative Council, the Panel was briefed on the planning for the provision of school places under POA and SSPA systems, and measures implemented by the Education Bureau ("EDB") in the light of fluctuations in student population on 1 February 2019. The major concerns raised by members are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

### Changes in students' population

#### *Primary schools*

6. According to the Administration, the overall demand for Primary One ("P1") places in public sector schools would increase temporarily to the projected peak in the 2018-2019 school year, and progressively decrease to a stable level. Some members were of the view that measures taken to cope with the declining demand for P1 places should preserve the stability and strengths of schools and the teaching force. The Administration should also seize this opportunity to take forward the implementation of small class teaching ("SCT") in all primary schools. A motion was passed to urge the Administration to fully implement SCT policy in primary schools and commence promoting SCT in secondary schools so as to improve the quality of teaching and learning as soon as possible.

7. The Administration explained that due to the transient increase in demand for P1 places in the previous years, many schools were not able to implement SCT. In view of the decrease in overall projected demand for P1 places, EDB had been proactively discussing with schools in school nets with sufficient supply of P1 school places their plan of implementing SCT. Schools in school nets with an anticipated shortfall of school places still could not implement SCT for the time being. For secondary schools, with the adoption of subject streaming and small group teaching according to elective subjects at senior secondary levels, the actual number of students in each teaching class/group is rather small. Therefore, there was no plan to implement SCT in secondary schools at present.

#### *Secondary schools*

8. As advised by the Administration, the population of Secondary One ("S1") students had started to rebound from the 2017-2018 school year and would reach the peak in the 2024-2025 school year. To cope with the rebound, an arrangement

of progressively reverting the allocation class size to 34 ("place reinstating") would be implemented across the board for SSPA 2019. Some members considered that the implementation of an across-the-board place reinstating would result in a mismatch between the demand for and supply of S1 places in some districts. The pressure of student enrolment of secondary schools with insufficient intake would be aggravated. The Administration was urged to allow flexibility for schools in adopting place reinstating with regard to the actual student enrolment and varying circumstances among districts and schools, and to undertake measures to alleviate the impact of across-the-board place reinstating on schools in the East, South, Islands and Kwai Tsing Districts. A motion was passed at the meeting to urge the Administration to adopt a district-based approach by maintaining the original number of students per class in districts where there was a surplus of S1 places.

9. The Administration advised that the provision of public sector secondary school places was planned on a territory-wide basis. To address the transient decline in S1 student population in past years, EDB adopted the district-based approach to reduce the number of students allocated per S1 class on the understanding that it would be reverted when the student population rebounded. However, as the rise in demand for S1 school places in the coming years was not of transient nature, there was a need to implement place reinstating across the board. Meanwhile, EDB would closely monitor the supply of and demand for school places in individual districts and where necessary, provide assistance to the schools concerned.

#### Planning and allocating of school places

10. Members opined that in planning for the provision of school places, the Administration should conduct comprehensive studies on Hong Kong's changing demographic structure brought about by the One-way Permit scheme, cross-boundary children and so on in the coming five years and share the findings with the school sector. Long-term plans, such as a three-year plan for tackling the fluctuations in student population, should be formulated on the basis of population projections to allow schools to make advance planning. In this regard, a motion was passed at the meeting, urging the Administration to set up a committee comprising representatives of principals and teachers to explore a systematic adjustment mechanism to stabilize the school system through proper planning and adjustment.

11. The Administration advised that EDB had all along been monitoring the impact of the population changes on the demand for and supply of public sector school places. In view that the tight supply and demand of P1 school places arising from the increasing number of non-permanent resident children in past years was only transient in nature and would ease after the 2018-2019 school year, flexible arrangements such as borrowing school places from other districts/school nets were adopted to temporarily increase the supply of school places to meet the transient increase in demand. Due to various factors, the actual demand for school places

and the situation in different districts in every allocation cycle might vary. In order to strike the right balance between the steady development of schools and the needs of various stakeholders, EDB would meet and discuss with the school sector the strategies to cope with the changing demand for school places according to the latest information and data before the start of each allocation cycle.

12. Some members urged the Administration to review POA and SSPA systems and publish statistics that were of public interests to enhance transparency of information. The Administration advised that EDB had all along been sharing relevant statistics relating to the planning for provision of school places with school heads associations and councils. Such information was not released publicly to avoid possible labelling effects. EDB would release information if there was consensus with the school sector. On POA and SSPA systems, EDB would keep an open mind to explore the feasibility of reviewing the allocation systems, which needed to strike a proper balance between the diverse needs of different stakeholders.

### **Latest position**

13. The Administration will brief the Panel on issues related to the planning for the provision of public sector primary and secondary school places in light of changes in student population at the meeting on 18 October 2021.

### **Relevant papers**

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

## List of relevant papers

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>Paper</b>
Panel on Education	18.3.2014	<a href="#">Agenda Minutes</a>
Panel on Education	14.4.2014	<a href="#">Agenda Minutes</a>
Panel on Education	12.5.2014	<a href="#">Agenda Minutes</a>
Panel on Education	16.7.2014	<a href="#">Agenda Minutes</a>
Panel on Education	1.2.2019	<a href="#">Agenda Minutes</a>
Legislative Council	2.11.2016	<a href="#">Official Record of Proceedings Pages 53-61 (Question 11)</a>
Legislative Council	9.5.2018	<a href="#">Official Record of Proceedings Pages 69-73 (Question 15)</a>
Legislative Council	24.10.2018	<a href="#">Official Record of Proceedings Pages 187-197 (Question 22)</a>

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