



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部教育局
Education Bureau
Government Secretariat, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative
Region
The People's Republic of China

本局檔號 Our Ref.: (44) in EDB(SB) 445/B/396/80 Pt. 8
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13 December 2022

Clerk to Public Works Subcommittee
Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road, Central
Hong Kong
(Attn: Ms Connie HO)

Dear Ms HO,

Re: Hon Lillian KWOK's letter of 5 December

I refer to Hon Lillian KWOK's letter dated 5 December to Ir Dr Hon LO Wai-kwok, Chairman of the Public Works Subcommittee (PWSC) of the Legislative Council (LegCo), raising questions about Paper No. PWSC(2022-23)32 on 359EP submitted by the Education Bureau (EDB). Notwithstanding that most of the questions raised were policy-related, we hereby furnish our reply as requested by the PWSC Chairman, and take this opportunity to further elaborate on the policy concerning school building projects for LegCo Member's information.

Questions (1), (3), (7) and (8)

School-age population projections and school building plans

2. Generally speaking, the provision of public sector primary school places is planned on a district basis. Under the principle of vicinity adopted by the Primary One Admission (POA) System, the 18 districts in the territory are demarcated into 36 school nets. As for public sector secondary schools, the provision of school places is planned on a territory-wide basis. Under the Secondary School Places Allocation System, the whole territory is divided into 18 school nets based on the administrative districts.

3. The Government seeks to make early planning of school building projects by taking into account the school-age population projections, which are compiled and updated based on the latest information from the Census and Statistics Department and the Planning Department (PlanD), as well as the development needs of individual districts. On the whole, the projections have broadly reflected the relatively large-scale population changes arising from planned new development areas (NDAs) or large-scale redevelopment projects. The projected mid-year school-age population aged 6 to 11 residing in Hong Kong by district from 2022 to 2029 is tabulated at Annex.

4. According to the prevailing mechanism, when PlanD formulates town plans and plans for large-scale residential developments, sites will be reserved for school development in NDAs having regard to the planned population intake and the needs for community services in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines. The Education Bureau (EDB) will be consulted during the process. Given that land resources are scarce and the construction of primary and secondary schools involves substantial public expenditure, the Government will prudently weigh up the pros and cons of setting up new schools or reprovisioning existing schools when planning school building projects. Major considerations include students' well-being (e.g. ease of access to schools for young children, the learning and teaching environment, etc.) and whether the projects are commensurate with the long-term development needs of the respective districts.

5. EDB is adopting a multi-pronged approach to address the challenges posed by the structural changes in student population in the long term. One of the measures is to re-provision schools in districts with a relatively sizeable surplus of school places to districts with excessive demand for school places or expected to have a greater demand for school places in the future.

6. As far as POA School Net 66 in Kwai Tsing District is concerned, it has a relatively sizeable surplus of school places. Even if Father Cucchiara Memorial School (FCMS) is relocated to other districts, there are still sufficient school places provided by three neighbouring primary schools which are within walking distance of about 550 to 1 100 metres from the existing premises of FCMS. Moreover, Cheung Tsing Estate was built in 1977. With an ageing population, out of its current total of about 13 600 residents, only around 3.4% (about 460) are school-age children aged 6 to 11. And among the Primary 1 to 3 students currently studying in FCMS (who will be upper primary students by the time the school is relocated), only around 40 are residing in Cheung Tsing Estate.

7. Small class teaching is yet to be fully implemented in Primary schools in Sham Shui Po District. As we mentioned at the PWSC meeting held on 23 November, the proposed project will increase the number of classrooms in Sham Shui Po District, thereby creating the conditions for further implementation of small class teaching, which will enhance the quality of learning and teaching as well as rationalise the demand for and supply of school places.

8. Question (3) concerns 362EP (i.e. re-provisioning of Baptist Rainbow Primary School to Kowloon City District). Similarly, small class teaching is yet to be fully implemented in Kowloon City District, where there are three school nets, viz. Net 34, Net 35 and Net 41. To rationalise the demand for school places, it is still necessary to build new school premises in school nets where there is a NDA (e.g. Kai Tak).

Questions (4) and (5)

Improving the standards of existing school premises

9. Alongside the establishment of new schools, the Government has also been allocating resources to improve the standards of existing school premises. At present, there are about 900 public sector schools in the territory. They were built in different periods according to the building standards prevailing at the time of construction, and facilities in the premises substantially vary. As at November 2022, only about 200 of them were built according to the current standards. While the building standards have been changing over the years, school premises in operation are required to comply with the current statutory requirements.

10. Given the limited resources, the Government has to set priorities according to the actual circumstances in response to schools' requests for improvements to school premises. Based on the consensus reached with the sector earlier on, the Government first focused on addressing the problems arising from the unique architectural design of "matchbox-style school premises"¹. The improvement works had commenced progressively from summer 2017 and were completed in 2019, with a total expenditure amounting to \$70 million.

11. Meanwhile, with the valuable experience gained from the "matchbox-style school premises" improvement programme and taking into account the views of stakeholders, the Government earmarked \$1 billion for a two-year minor works programme. Under the programme, minor works would be carried out at some 600 aided school premises which were built according to the standards prevailing at the time of construction, with a view to facilitating a more flexible use of existing school space, thereby enhancing the environment and efficacy of learning and teaching. A total of 2 065 works items were approved under the programme, most of which have been completed with the remaining scheduled for completion in 2023-24.

¹ Cuboidal-shaped premises constructed between mid-1960s and 1980 in public housing estates for primary school use are generally referred to as "matchbox-style school premises". There are 23 public sector primary schools operating in such premises as at November 2022.

12. Furthermore, the government will, in light of the needs of schools, continue to enhance school facilities through various existing improvement measures, including the annual major repairs and emergency repairs mechanism. Premised on school-based management, schools may alter the use of some school facilities as necessary to meet students' needs and complement the overall school development.

13. To fully address the issues of insufficient space and facilities of schools in the long run, it requires reprovisioning or physical extension of existing schools to suitable vacant school premises (VSP) or new school premises. Yet, there are only a limited number of suitable new school sites and VSP, and they are distributed in different districts. While the Government is actively identifying suitable sites and VSP for reprovisioning use to enhance the learning and teaching environment of existing schools, the school sector should also look out for opportunities for reprovisioning of schools within the same district or cross-districts.

14. Take for example Pak Tin Catholic Primary School. Formerly operating in a “matchbox-style school premises”, the school was allocated for reprovisioning to a new school premises in the same district, i.e. Shum Shui Po District. It came into operation in the new school premises in the 2021/22 school year and was renamed Cheung Sha Wan Catholic Primary School. As for FCMS, the school chose to compete for cross-district reprovisioning in 2019. With a pragmatic and progressive mindset, FCMS and its school sponsoring body (SSB) have manifested in their proposal the commitment to seeking a better learning and teaching environment for students. Currently occupying a site area of 540 m², FCMS does not have any visual arts room, computer assisted learning room, language room, music room, guidance activity room, conference room, multi-purpose areas and basketball court, which significantly undermines the flexibility of teaching. The school envisages that, with much enhanced facilities and space in the new school premises, they will be able to promote positive education to create a caring campus, working all-out to develop STEAM curriculum, and keep up with implementing small class teaching, thereby nurturing students to become responsible citizens who show dedication to community service and care for society.

Question (2)

Parents' preferences and transport arrangement

15. FCMS conducted a parent survey on its application for reprovisioning of the school premises. The results showed that 84% of the students agreed to the relocation. The current Primary 1 to 3 students of FCMS were well informed of the school's reprovisioning programme during the school admission briefings before enrolment. Most of the parents opined that one of the reasons for choosing FCMS was its prospective relocation to the new school premises in Sham Shui Po District with a much better learning environment. Furthermore, the school has updated parents on the progress of the relocation through regular parent meetings and home-school activities in the past three years. Many parents hope that the school can be relocated soon so that their children can study in a spacious environment. In addition, by the time of the relocation, if there are any FCMS parents who would like their children to continue studying in Kwai Tsing District, EDB will assist them in transferring their children to other primary schools in the same district.

16. The proposed new school premises at Lin Cheung Road, Sham Shui Po is located at Lai Ying Street, with an MTR station, bus and minibus stops as well as pedestrian crossing facilities in the vicinity. In this connection, FCMS has consulted parents during parent meetings and admission briefings. It is expected that majority of the teachers and students will go to the new school premises on foot or by public transport. The school will continue to arrange school bus service for students on a need basis, and is exploring with the alumni association and SSB the possibility of providing financial assistance to students with financial difficulties.

Question (6)

The to-be-vacant school premises of FCMS

17. The to-be-vacant school premises of FCMS is a “matchbox-style school premises”, of which the size and facilities are far below the

prevailing standards. EDB considers it undesirable to continue using the school premises for independent school use, and the neighbouring schools also have no need for the school premises for in-situ expansion. In November 2021, EDB confirmed that the to-be-vacant premises was no longer required for reallocation for school use. The site was then released for PlanD's consideration of suitable alternative long-term uses in accordance with the Central Clearing House mechanism. Thereafter, PlanD has designated the site for residential use for long-term public housing development. EDB will return the school premises to the Housing Department after FCMS vacates the premises.

Questions (9) and (10)

School allocation mechanism

18. The government has put in place a well-established mechanism for allocation of school sites/school premises. To enable the selection of the most suitable applicant bodies, EDB has set up the School Allocation Committee (SAC) comprising EDB directorates and non-official members since 1999. Non-official members come from a wide range of sectors and are able to help recommend the most suitable applicants to EDB.

19. When it is confirmed a new or vacant school premises is required for allocation for reprovisioning or physical extension of existing school(s), or setting up of a new school, the government will in general openly invite all eligible SSBs to apply through a School Allocation Exercise (SAE) on a fair and competitive basis. In assessing the applications, quality of education is the prime consideration of the SAC. Considerations will also be given to the proposed school plan submitted by the applicant, operation track records of the SSB and the condition of the existing school premises (where applicable). In the proposed school plan, the applicant should, in accordance with the EDB's selection criteria, provide for the SAC's consideration such information as the school's vision and mission, management and organisation, learning and teaching, school ethos and support for students, students' performance targets and self-evaluation indicators. For application of reprovisioning of existing schools, applicants are required to provide the SAC with information

regarding the condition of the existing school premises in the application form, while EDB will provide supplementary information for the SAC's reference. EDB will conduct preliminary scoring of each application according to the published selection criteria and provide comprehensive information to facilitate detailed assessments by the SAC. Interviews will then be arranged for shortlisted applicants.

20. The membership list and terms of reference of the SAC, the eligibility requirements and selection criteria of school allocation, as well as the information on the past and latest SAEs are available on the EDB's webpage:

<https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/sch-admin/sch-premises-info/allocation-of-sch/index.html>

21. EDB is responsible for formulating, overseeing and implementing education policies. Its various professional sections monitor the operation of all schools in the territory pursuant to the Education Ordinance (Cap. 279) and hence keep track of the actual situation of each applicant body and school. The SAC must, of course, comprise members from EDB who are familiar with the education system and its situation in Hong Kong. According to the records of EDB, no applicant has ever challenged the SAE results on the grounds of unfairness in the school allocation policy. It is indeed unjust to question the impartiality of the SAC.

22. According to the existing school allocation mechanism, the Government will allocate school sites/school premises to SSBs through direct allocation under the following exceptional circumstances:

- (a) reprovisioning of special schools: each special school has its own mode of operation, target students and catchment area and is therefore not directly comparable;
- (b) in-situ expansion: this is applicable to cases in which a vacant school premises is allocated to the only suitable school in its vicinity for in-situ expansion;

- (c) whole-day conversion of primary schools: there is one public sector primary school in Hong Kong still operating in bi-sessional mode due to space constraints; and
- (d) government schools: as the government is the SSB of government schools, the school allocation mechanism is not applicable.

23. In light of the policy considerations set out above and with due regard to a host of factors, including the long-term development needs of the districts concerned, the school-age population projections, the actual number of existing students and school places available at various grade levels, the prevailing education policies and other factors affecting the supply and demand of school places, the Government decided to launch the Third SAE 2019 in August 2019 and openly invited applications from eligible SSBs. As with previous applications, the SAC gave detailed consideration to, among other things, the proposed school plans submitted by the SSBs, their operation track records and the physical condition of the existing school premises. The SAC concluded that the application of FCMS outperformed the other applicants in all aspects and hence recommended that the new school premises be allocated to FCMS for reprovisioning use.

24. All proceedings of the SAC is confidential. The Government will not disclose the names and scores of applicants as well as the reasons for allocating/not allocating the school premises. For details of the Third SAE 2019, please refer to the EDB's webpage:
https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/sch-admin/sch-premises-info/allocation-of-sch/sae_2019_3rd/sae2019_3rd.html.

25. The policy for school allocation has been keeping pace with the times. In the latest SAE, given the new demand for school places in individual districts with large-scale new housing developments despite a long-term downtrend in the overall school-age population in Hong Kong, we invited eligible SSBs to apply for two new primary school premises under planning in the Northern Metropolis development for reprovisioning of existing aided primary schools instead of setting up new schools.

Conclusion

26. Having secured the support for 359EP (i.e. the reprovisioning of FCMS) from the LegCo Panel on Education on 14 June 2022 and the PWSC on 23 November 2022, the Government plans to seek funding approval from the LegCo Finance Committee at its meeting on 16 December 2022.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'P' followed by a horizontal line and a small flourish.

(Philip HAR)

for Secretary for Education

c.c.

Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury (Attn: Ms Margaret HSIA)

Annex

Projected mid-year school-age population aged 6 to 11 residing in Hong Kong by district from 2022 to 2029

District	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Central & Western	8 300	8 000	7 900	7 800	7 600	7 500	7 700	8 100
Wan Chai	6 000	5 700	5 500	5 500	5 400	5 400	5 600	5 700
Eastern	25 100	23 800	22 300	21 300	20 300	18 500	17 600	16 800
Southern	12 900	12 300	11 500	10 900	10 200	9 700	9 600	9 200
Yau Tsim Mong	13 200	13 300	12 800	12 500	12 200	11 900	12 100	12 000
Sham Shui Po	25 100	24 300	23 700	23 200	22 200	21 300	20 100	19 100
Kowloon City	19 400	18 800	17 900	17 700	17 900	17 600	17 500	17 500
Wong Tai Sin	19 400	18 900	18 600	18 100	17 900	17 000	16 700	15 900
Kwun Tong	36 500	35 200	33 700	32 400	32 200	30 700	28 800	27 600
Sai Kung	23 400	22 800	21 800	22 000	21 600	20 600	20 100	20 000
Sha Tin	34 800	33 300	31 500	30 100	28 900	27 000	25 400	24 000
Tai Po	14 000	14 800	15 000	15 000	15 000	15 000	14 800	14 300
North	18 500	18 400	18 100	18 200	18 400	19 600	20 700	20 700
Yuen Long	33 000	31 900	30 400	29 500	28 800	27 700	27 700	28 000
Tuen Mun	24 600	25 300	25 100	24 900	25 200	25 000	24 700	23 700
Tsuen Wan	14 300	13 800	13 300	12 900	12 300	11 400	11 000	10 700
Kwai Tsing	25 400	25 400	25 000	25 000	24 800	23 500	21 800	20 000
Islands	11 100	11 200	10 600	12 400	12 300	12 500	13 700	14 900
All districts	365 100	357 000	344 800	339 500	333 100	321 900	315 500	308 100

- Note: (1) The projected figures on school-age population **residing in Hong Kong** are compiled with reference to the 2019-based Population Projections released by the Census and Statistics Department in September 2020 and the “Projections of Population Distribution 2021-2029” released by the Planning Department in March 2021. The projections have taken into account a number of factors and assumptions. Any deviations in the assumptions from the eventual situation may render the projected figures different from the actual turnout figures.
- (2) School-age population aged 6 to 11 are considered suitable for primary education (i.e. Primary 1 to 6).
- (3) Figures refer to the projected number of local children (i.e. Hong Kong usual residents) aged 6 to 11 residing in the districts concerned. The projected figures should not be taken as the projected number of students attending schools in the districts concerned. The latter would be affected by the prevailing distribution of school places, demand for school places and parental choices. Students under the age of 6 or over 11 may also enrol for primary education.
- (4) Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred and may not add up to the respective totals due to rounding.