立法會
Legislative Council

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

LegCo Panel on Education

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Wednesday, 15 September 1999 at 10:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

Members Present	**:**	Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung (Chairman) Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung Hon SIN Chung-kai Hon CHOY So-yuk
Members Absent	**:**	Prof Hon NG Ching-fai (Deputy Chairman) Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-yee, JP Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP Dr Hon YEUNG Sum Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP Hon SZETO Wah
Public Officers Attending	**:**	Item I Mr Joseph Y T LAI Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower Mr Patrick LI Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower Mrs Fanny LAW, JP Director of Education Mr K C NG Assistant Director of Education (Information Systems)

Mr MA Siu-leung
Acting Principal Education Officer (Information Systems)

Mr Ronald CHIN
Assistant Director of Architectural Services (Building Services)

Mr UY Tat-ping
Assistant Director (Engineering Branch Manager) of Electrical
and Mechanical Services

Clerk in Attendance	:	Mrs Constance LI Chief Assistant Secretary (2) 2

Staff in Attendance	:	Mr Stanley MA Senior Assistant Secretary (2) 6

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I.   **Delays in computer installation works in primary and secondary schools**
[Paper No. CB(2)2808/98-99(01)]

The Chairman welcomed representatives of the Administration to the special meeting.   He said that the special meeting was convened at the request of Hon SIN Chung-kai to discuss the delays in computer installation works in schools.

2.   At the invitation of the Chairman, Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (DS(EM)) highlighted the salient points in the Administration's paper [Paper No. CB(2)2808/98-99(01)].   He said that the Administration aimed at completing site preparation works for all public sector schools (around 1000 in number) by the end of August 2000.   In view of the large number of schools which looked to the Government to carry out site preparation works and the need to minimize disruption to the schools concerned, the necessary works would have to be conducted by phases.   According to the present progress, about 500 schools would have their site preparation works completed by the end of September 1999, while the remainder was scheduled to be completed by end of August 2000, if everything went on smoothly.   He stressed that the responsible departments would closely monitor the progress of works carried out by the contractors. DS(EM) also informed members that to provide for flexibility, schools could choose to receive a cash grant and appoint their own contractors to carry out the necessary works.   So far, only 13 schools had opted for self-arrangement.

Progress of site preparation works

3.   Noting that only 342 schools had their site preparation works completed up to 10 September 1999, Mr SIN Chung-kai asked about the timetable for completion of works for the remaining schools and the average duration of such works.   He was concerned that some schools might lag behind others in information technology education given the lead time for site preparation works and installation of computers.   To speed up the work progress, he enquired whether the Architectural Services Department (ASD) and Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) could make use of the long school holidays during Christmas and Easter to complete works for more schools.

4.   Assistant Director of Architectural Services (Building Services) (AD OF AS) responded that ASD would complete works for about 250 schools by the end of September 1999 and another 65 by the end of 1999.   Works for the remaining 135 schools were scheduled for completion during January-August 2000.   As regards the average time required for site preparation works, AD OF AS said that it would depend on the complexity of works required in each school and the time contractors were allowed to carry out such works.   As contractors had become more familiar with the procedures on school sites, the normal time span for completion of works was about 3-4 weeks.   However, a longer period would be required for the remaining 135 schools as more complicated works were involved.   For example, some 20-30 schools would require the construction of a transformer room to provide the necessary electricity supply and the works might take as long as six months to complete.

5.   Assistant Director of Electrical and Mechanical Services (AD of EMS) said that EMSD was responsible for 500 school sites requiring less complicated works and the target date for completion was the end of August 2000.   For the straightforward cases, the works could be completed in about 3-4 weeks.   However, as most schools could only allow the works to be carried out after school hours and during weekends, works in these schools would take about eight weeks to complete.   EMSD was liaising with the schools on the possibility of making use of the long school holidays to conduct more works.

6.   Mr SIN Chung-kai inquired whether the contractors could deploy additional manpower during Christmas and Easter holidays.   He also suggested that schools be consulted as to whether they would be willing to tolerate a short period of nuisance in return for early completion of the site preparation works. He considered that some schools might find this worth pursuing as their teachers and students could then use computers and IT facilities months earlier.   Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong echoed Mr SIN's view and said that such arrangement would be of advantage to both the schools and contractors.

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7.   <u>AD OF AS</u> said that ASD had already requested schools to consider allowing contractors to carry out the works after school and during school holidays, and response from the schools was awaited. <u>Director of Education (D of E)</u> added that Education Department (ED) would continue to coordinate with ASD/EMSD and schools to work out the priorities and work schedule to facilitate early completion of the site preparation works. As regards deployment of additional manpower by contractors, she pointed out that contractors would normally prefer a stable workforce throughout the contract period for cost-effectiveness. She agreed however that efforts should be made as far as practicable, in consultation with schools and contractors, to enable more works to be carried out during long holidays. Barring unforeseen circumstances, it was envisaged that the site preparation works in all schools would be completed before commencement of the next school year.

8.   Noting that only 13 out of 1 000 schools had opted to appoint their own contractors for site preparation works, <u>the Chairman</u> asked about the reasons for the low percentage. He also enquired about the progress of work in these schools and whether more schools should be encouraged to opt for the self-arrangement mode.

9.   <u>D of E</u> responded that many schools did not have the necessary technical knowledge to supervise the works of contractors by themselves. Since schools which had opted for self-arrangement would still need to consult ED and ASD/ EMSD on the project duration and contract procedures, many schools preferred to entrust the entire project to government departments. With regard to the progress in the 13 schools, <u>Assistant Director of Education (Information Systems) (AD of E)</u> said that so far only one school had completed the works while works in the other 12 schools were in progress. <u>AD OF EMS</u> supplemented that the project costs for individual schools were usually higher than that under a bulk contract, and the higher costs might have deterred some schools from taking the self-arrangement option.

10.   <u>Mr SIN Chung-kai</u> remained concerned about the timetable for completing site preparation works in all schools and requested the Administration to provide a breakdown of the estimated number of schools which would have the works completed by the end of 1999, before Easter 2000 and before summer 2000. <u>AD OF AS</u> and <u>AD OF EMS</u> undertook to provide the information after the meeting.

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11.   In response to <u>Mr SIN's</u> further enquiry, <u>Acting Principal Education Officer (Information Systems)</u> clarified that ASD and EMSD were responsible for 451 and 500 schools respectively. In addition, 20 schools had participated in the pilot scheme and 13 schools had appointed their own contractors.

Multi-media learning centres

12.   Referring to the Appendix in the Administration's paper, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed concern that only 103 secondary schools would be equipped with a multi-media learning centre (MMLC). In view of the public concern about the need to enhance the English proficiency among students, he considered that all secondary schools should be provided with MMLC as soon as possible to facilitate language learning in schools. While acknowledging that the number of MMLCs was set in 1998 having regard to the financial constraints and readiness of schools to use IT at that time, he pointed out that more schools were ready to use IT nowadays. He therefore urged the Administration to review the policy in the light of increased demand and readiness of schools.

13.   DS(EM) acknowledged the concern about enhancing the English standard of students and the benefits of providing a MMLC for language learning in schools. He advised that the provision of 103 MMLC was only one of the various measures to improve the language ability of students. He added that schools could also apply to the Quality Education Fund (QEF) for funding support to establish a MMLC and that about 40 such applications had been received so far. D of E added that due to accommodation and resource constraints, it was not possible for all schools to be provided with a MMCL. She stressed that ED supported the provision of MMCLs and the QEF secretariat would seriously consider these applications and ways to meet the demand.

14.   Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong reiterated his concern that more schools should be provided with MMCLs as more teachers and students were now ready to use multi-media facilities in learning and teaching. Mr SIN Chung-kai shared Mr CHEUNG's view and urged the Government to re-deploy resources for the provision of MMLCs in schools.

15.   DS(EM) acknowledged members' concerns and advised that QEF provided an alternative source of public funding support for the provision of MMCLs in schools. D of E also assured members that the QEF secretariat had discussed the issue and agreed to support the applications if the schools could meet the requirements.

Cash grants

16.   Noting that schools were provided cash grants for procurement of computer equipment and that 30% of the cash grants (about $260 million) had been disbursed to schools in June 1999, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed concern that the grant had not been put to effective use pending completion of the computer installation works.

17.   <u>AD of E</u> responded that ED had consulted schools on the amount of cash grant required in the initial stage and some schools had indicated that 30% of the grant would initially be needed for procurement of stand-alone and notebook computers. He pointed out that the cash grants were deposited directly into the bank accounts of schools which could arrange for short-term fixed deposits if no immediate use was planned for the money.

18.   <u>Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong</u> said that aided schools might not be aware that they were allowed to place the money on fixed deposits. <u>AD of E</u> responded that a circular had been issued to schools in 1988 about the arrangements for fixed deposits. In addition, schools were allowed flexibility in the use of the grant for procurement of computer and IT facilities. <u>D of E</u> supplemented that schools had been encouraged to exercise discretion to utilize the resources allocated to them for the best benefits of the school. She said that ED would reinforce communication with schools to clear any misunderstanding about self-management of schools.

<u>IT Coordinators</u>

19.   <u>Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong</u> noted that due to resource constraints, only 250 IT coordinators had been budgeted in the first two years for schools which were more IT-ready. He expressed much concern about the timetable for providing the remaining 750 schools with IT co-ordinators and the support to be given to these schools in the interim. He said that those schools not provided with IT co-ordinators had expressed strong feelings that the arrangement was unfair.

20.   <u>DS(EM)</u> responded that a review would be carried out to evaluate the effectiveness of the scheme in the 2000-2001 school year. The Administration would consider seeking additional resources for the provision of IT coordinators if the scheme was found successful and worthy of extension to other schools. In the meantime, ED had established an Information Technology Education Resource Centre (ITERC) to provide technical support to those schools which were not provided with IT coordinators.

21.   <u>Acting Principal Education Officer (Information Systems)</u> added that the ITERC provided support to schools in the design of educational software and the use of IT for the school curriculum. As regards day-to-day operation and maintenance of computers and IT systems, ED would invite tender for the appointment of qualified contractors to provide technical support services to schools. The initial thinking was that the appointed service providers should send a technician to provide on-site routine support services to each school about 20 hours a week in addition to 50 hours a year for meeting specific requirements of schools such as reconfiguration of hardware and software items.

22.   Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong remarked that the level of support from a technician was different from that of an IT coordinator.   To enable more schools to have the service of IT coordinators at an early stage, he suggested that apart from the 120 IT coordinators already assigned to schools, the second batch of 130 IT coordinators could be allocated to schools on a shared-use basis.   The proposed arrangement was similar to that of school social workers.

23.   D of E responded that the willingness of schools in sharing the use of IT coordinator and their experience with other schools was one of the selection criteria in the allocation of IT coordinators.   To promote the use of IT in education, ED was taking a number of initiatives concurrently, for example, the Curriculum Development Institute was developing educational software for use by schools.   She envisaged as more teachers would have received IT training and acquired more experience in the use of computers and IT facilities in teaching, there was a possibility that the first batch of 120 IT coordinators could be re-deployed to other schools or other uses at a later stage.   ED would keep the deployment of IT coordinators under review.

24.   Mr SIN Chung-kai commented that to maintain the competitiveness of Hong Kong in an IT age, Government should give priority to allocating extra resources for the use of IT in education.   He suggested that as a transitional measure to help those schools not allocated an IT coordinator, ED could consider deploying IT coordinators to work in each school for a fixed period, say, one to two years.   He considered that the Panel should closely monitor the implementation progress of the various initiatives under the five-year IT strategy plan in education.

25.   In response, D of E said that substantial progress had been made since the publication of the five-year IT in education strategy document in November 1998. Teachers had become more open and receptive to using computers and software in teaching, and many of them had demonstrated much enthusiasm and dedication in promoting the use of IT among schools and teachers.   In this connection, ED played a facilitating and supportive role and would continue providing assistance in enhancing the use of IT in schools.

II.   Any other business

26.   There being no other business, the meeting ended at 11:50 am.

Legislative Council Secretariat
26 January 2000