

## LCQ8: Transient increase in demand for Primary One places

Following is a question by the Hon Ip Kin-yuen and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (June 5):

Question:

The Education Bureau (EDB) advised in 2013 that the overall demand for Primary One (P1) places was expected to increase temporarily and substantially and to peak in the 2018-2019 school year. To cope with a transient increase in demand for P1 places, the EDB has, in recent years, adopted a number of measures under the Primary One Admission System, including borrowing P1 places among school nets, making use of vacant classrooms, constructing temporary classrooms, deploying vacant school premises, temporarily allocating more students to each P1 class and operating time-limited primary schools. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective justifications and criteria for adopting the aforesaid measures, and the priorities accorded to the adoption of the various measures;

(2) of the following details of each of the three school nets in the Sha Tin district in each of the past three school years:

(i) the population of school-aged P1 children, the numbers of P1 places and P1 students in schools of each funding mode, as well as the number of places borrowed from/lent to other school nets (set out by school net number);

(ii) in respect of the standard classrooms in primary school premises, the total number that were vacant, and the overall usage rate;

(iii) the number of primary schools which completed works to extend or convert standard classrooms on the EDB's requests; the costs incurred by each school for the relevant works; the time generally taken for the relevant works to complete; the number and the average usage rate of the new classrooms, as well as the number of places that could be/were actually provided; the number of new classrooms which were used, on average daily, for less than half of the lesson time in a day; the number of new classrooms that had/had not been used as additional P1 classrooms; and

(iv) the details of temporary allocation of more students to primary schools which had/had not implemented small class teaching respectively; the number of primary schools in respect of which the number of P1 classes was cut even after they had been allocated more students temporarily, and set out by name of schools the number of classes cut and the reasons for that; and

(3) as it is learnt that there have all along been vacant classrooms in some schools (including those which have completed works to extend or convert standard classrooms) in the three school nets in the Sha Tin district, whether the EDB, in the past three years, accorded priority to using such classrooms to cope with the transient demand for P1 places in the district; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that, and whether it will consider doing so in future?

Reply:

President,

The Education Bureau (EDB) had projected back in 2013 that the overall demand for Primary 1 (P1) places would increase temporarily to the peak in the 2018/19 school year, drop significantly in the 2019/20 school year and then progress to a stable level. To meet the transient increase in demand for P1 places, the EDB and the sector have been maintaining close liaison in the past years and have reached a consensus on the related follow-up measures. In this regard, it was agreed that construction of new schools to meet the transient demand for P1 places should be avoided as far as possible to lessen the impact on the stable development of primary schools when the demand for school places subsides. Premising on the sustainable development of existing schools, flexible arrangements to cope with the transient increase in demand for school places, including borrowing school places from other school nets and making use of vacant classrooms, converting other rooms into temporary classrooms and/or constructing temporary classrooms, deploying vacant school premises and temporarily allocating more students to each P1 class (i.e. "temporarily allocating more students"), etc. will be adopted when necessary.

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Ip Kin-yuen is as follows:

(1) and (3) As mentioned above, to meet the transient increase in the demand for P1 places, the EDB has adopted flexible arrangements to increase the provision of P1 places in individual school nets when necessary. In general, the EDB will, as far as possible, first make use of vacant classrooms in the school net and borrow school places from neighbouring school nets to meet the demand of individual school nets with insufficient school places. In addition, based on the projected demand, the EDB will prudently consider deploying vacant school premises (if any) and explore proactively with individual schools in the respective school nets the feasibility of converting other rooms and/or constructing temporary classrooms in individual schools for operating additional P1 classes. "Temporarily allocating more students" will be implemented as a measure out of absolute necessity (especially when the classrooms in the school nets and neighbouring school nets are nearly fully utilised) and additional resources (Note 1) will be provided to the eligible schools concerned to ensure teaching effectiveness. Stakeholders may have different concerns about the flexible arrangements adopted. On the premise of ensuring the provision of sufficient public sector school places for all eligible applicant children participating in Primary One Admission (POA), the EDB and schools in the districts/school nets

concerned will maintain close liaison on the flexible arrangements to be adopted with a view to achieving synergy of different flexible measures and balancing the views and concerns of different stakeholders. From POA 2016 to POA 2018, we followed the afore-mentioned mechanism and arrangements to determine the need to make use of the vacant classrooms in individual districts/school nets (including the three school nets in Sha Tin district) to operate additional P1 classes. However, the actual number of P1 classes approved for and operated by a school is determined according to the actual demand and the number of students.

(2) (i) The POA System is divided into two stages: the Discretionary Places Admission stage and the Central Allocation (CA) stage. The CA stage comprises two parts, namely unrestricted school choices and restricted school choices. For applicant children residing in Hong Kong, their school nets are determined by their residential addresses. The P1 school nets are only applicable to the restricted school choices at the CA stage under POA and provide a basis for the respective allocation of school places. According to the existing arrangements, the provision of public sector primary school places is planned on a district basis. Statistics on the number of school places and students have all along been collected on a district basis and a breakdown of the relevant figures by school net is not readily available. The total number of P1 places and students in Sha Tin district by school type from the 2016/17 to 2018/19 school years is tabulated at Annex 1.

Under POA, the supply and demand of P1 places in individual school nets may vary across years. Borrowing places from school nets that have surplus places in order to provide sufficient school places for parents' selection is a long-established arrangement which proves to be effective. When borrowing school places, the EDB will follow the established mechanism, which includes thoroughly considering the situation of the schools in the school nets concerned, the locations of the schools and the transportation available to facilitate students travelling to and from the schools as far as possible, etc. The provisional number of CA places offered by schools, including those offered by schools in other school nets, is set out in the Choice of Schools List for CA in each POA cycle for parents' reference. The actual number of school places borrowed from the districts/school nets concerned is affected by various factors, including the unrestricted school choices made by parents during the CA stage. Relevant statistics on individual school nets are not readily available.

(ii) There are 11, 11 and 17 public sector primary schools in School Nets 88, 89 and 91 of Sha Tin district respectively in the 2018/19 school year. The number of vacant classrooms in the public sector primary schools in Sha Tin district from the 2016/17 to 2018/19 school years is tabulated below:

Number of vacant classrooms			
School year	School Net 88	School Net 89	School Net 91
2016/17	12	27	7
2017/18	4	6	4

2018/19	2	4	19 (Note 2)
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Note 2: The figure includes 15 vacant classrooms of a new school which has started operating in advance in a vacant school premises since the 2018/19 school year.

The overall usage rate of classrooms in the public sector primary schools in Sha Tin district from the 2016/17 to 2018/19 school years is tabulated below:

Overall usage rate of classrooms			
School year	School Net 88	School Net 89	School Net 91
2016/17	95.7%	91.0%	98.3%
2017/18	98.6%	98.0%	99.0%
2018/19	99.3%	98.7%	95.7% (Note 3)

Note 3: The figure includes all classrooms of a new school which has started operating in advance in a vacant school premises since the 2018/19 school year.

(iii) A total of 19 schools in School Nets 88, 89 and 91 of Sha Tin district obtained the EDB's approval for converting/constructing 30 temporary classrooms in total in the 2017/18 and 2018/19 school years for operating additional P1 classes according to the actual demand in CA. The duration and cost of works varied depending on the scope of the conversion/construction works of individual schools and its complexity. In the two respective POA cycles, seven and 23 temporary classrooms built were deployed respectively to provide P1 places (about 1 000 places in total) to meet the projected demand. In the 2016/17 school year, the EDB had not converted/constructed any temporary classrooms in schools of the above school nets for operating additional P1 classes. Relevant statistics on the average usage rate of the new classrooms in question and the number of these classrooms which were used, on average daily, for less than half of the lesson time in a day are not available.

(iv) In the 2016/17 school year, the arrangements of "temporarily allocating more students" were not adopted in the schools of Sha Tin district. Adoption of the arrangements in School Nets 88, 89 and 91 of Sha Tin district under POA 2017 and POA 2018 is tabulated in Annex 2. The arrangements of "temporarily allocating more students" are adopted according to the above-mentioned mechanism, i.e. when the demand cannot be fully met after all the available vacant classrooms for operating additional P1 classes have been deployed in the relevant POA cycle, to ensure sufficient provision of public sector school places to all eligible applicant children participating in POA. However, the actual number of P1 classes approved for and operated by a school and whether the relevant vacant classroom(s) will be eventually used is determined according to the actual demand and the number of students.

Every year, after the release of allocation results, some students may

apply to other schools due to different reasons. The actual number of P1 classes of all public sector primary schools is determined according to the established criteria and the actual number of students. The EDB will verify the actual number of students studying in schools in September every year to confirm the number of P1 classes operated by the schools. From the 2016/17 to 2018/19 school years, only one of the schools in School Nets 88, 89 and 91 of Sha Tin district was required to reduce one P1 class after the headcount in September in the 2018/19 school year.

Note 1: The additional resources include: when eligible schools are required to be temporarily allocated with 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 set out in the EDB Circular No. 19/2008. From the 2013/14 school year onward, when the number of students allocated to each P1 class exceeds 30, the EDB will provide the schools concerned with additional funding for each additional student starting from the 31st student in each P1 class according to the headcount in September. The current rate of the additional funding is \$46,124. The 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 six school years until the cohort of P1 students has completed the six-year primary education in the school. The ASLG will be provided from the 26th student up 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, the EDB will provide the ASLG when the average number of students per P1 classes of the school is 28 or above and capped at the number of students allocated upon "temporarily allocating more students".