

LCQ10: Arrangements for primary schools to cease operation

Following is a question by the Hon Cheung Kwok-kwan and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (June 2):

Question:

It has been reported that with the population of school-aged students in the Primary One (P1) school net to which the Island Road Government Primary School (IRGPS) belongs decreasing continuously in recent years, the Education Bureau (EDB) has decided that IRGPS will cease operating P1 classes starting from the 2022-2023 school year and cease operation fully in the 2024-2025 school year. For those students currently studying P1 and Primary Two in IRGPS as well as those to be admitted to IRGPS in the 2021-2022 school year, arrangements will be made for such students to transfer to other schools in the same district in the 2024-2025 school year. Regarding the arrangements for primary schools to cease operation, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has assessed (i) the supply and demand figures for P1 places in each District Council (DC) district (set out in a table), and (ii) if there will be a surplus in such school places, in each of the coming six school years; if it has assessed and the outcome is that there will be, until when such trend will last;

(2) of a list of the government/aided primary schools which ceased/will cease operating classes of all/certain grades in the past six school years, the current school year and the coming six school years, and set out in the table below the relevant information by the DC district to which such schools belonged/belong;

DC district	Name of school	School type (Government/aided)	School year in which operation ceased/will cease, and the grade(s) involved	Reason for cessation of operation

(3) of the justifications for the EDB not waiting until all students of IRGPS have graduated before closing down the school; whether the EDB has assessed what difficulties in study and adaptation to be faced by IRGPS students during school transfer in the future, as well as the support to be provided for them in this regard;

(4) of the time when the EDB learnt of a surplus in school places in the P1 school net to which IRGPS belongs; why the EDB had not made the relevant

arrangements at an earlier time so as to obviate the need for IRGPS students to change school for completing their primary school education;

(5) whether the EDB will consider, when making a decision on whether or not to cease the operation of a school in the future, making the following its prime consideration: allowing all students to graduate from their original school so as to spare them facing the difficulties arising from changing school; and

(6) of the compassionate and job transfer arrangements to be made by the EDB for teachers and staff of those primary schools that will soon cease operation?

Reply:

President,

The reply of the Education Bureau (EDB) to the question raised by the Member is as follows:

(1) With reference to the "Hong Kong Population Projections 2020-2069" 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, it is projected that the school-age population aged six residing in Hong Kong in the next six years (from 2022 to 2027) will decrease from 58 500 to 48 500. The projected mid-year school-age population by district is at the Annex. Those age groups are considered appropriate for Primary One (P1) education from the 2022/23 to 2027/28 school years.

Under the Primary One Admission (POA) System, the 18 districts in Hong Kong are currently demarcated into 36 school nets. Regarding the demand for school places, the number of applicant children for POA and the demand for school places in each district and each school net for every cycle will be affected by a number of factors such as the demographic changes, number of newly arrived children and parental choices (e.g. whether to get admission to public sector schools or other types of schools). The EDB will continue to keep in view the changes in student population, maintain close communication with the sector and encourage the sector to plan ahead, with a view to sustaining the overall development of the school sector and ensuring prudent use of resources while maintaining the quality of education.

(2) In the school years between 2014/15 to 2020/21, an aided primary school in Kowloon City District ceased operation in the 2019/20 school year. In the coming six school years (i.e. from the 2021/22 to 2026/27 school years), apart from the Island Road Government Primary School (IRGPS), five other public sector primary schools will cease operation. They include one aided primary school in the Eastern District on Hong Kong Island ceasing operation in the 2021/22 school year; two time-limited aided schools in Kwun Tong District and one time-limited aided school in Yuen Long District ceasing operation in the 2023/24 school year; and one time-limited aided school in Tai Po District ceasing operation in the 2026/27 school year.

(3) to (5) According to the EDB's earlier projection, the overall demand for public sector P1 places would reach its peak in the 2018/19 school year and then decline gradually. Given the declining trend in the population of school-aged primary students in the Southern District (School Net 18) on Hong Kong Island, there will be an excessive supply of primary school places over demand in the district.

Being the school sponsoring body (SSB) of government schools, the EDB, having carefully considered various factors including government policies, demographic changes, demand and supply of school places, overall development needs of government schools and utilisation of government resources, has decided to cease the operation of IRGPS in an orderly and gradual manner. The EDB has already explained the background and related arrangements to the stakeholders in different occasions and will continue to provide support to the related parties as needed.

The interest of students is the prime concern of the EDB. From an educational point of view, an exceedingly low number of students will affect the effectiveness of students' learning and development through group activities. The provisions of manpower and other resources will decrease following the reduction in the number of classes. Therefore, a school will normally cease operation in three years from the school year it stops operating P1 classes.

To minimise the impact on students currently studying at IRGPS, the school will officially cease operation in the 2024/25 school year to allow its current P3 to P6 students to finish their primary stage of school education at the school. In the coming three school years, IRGPS will continue to cater for the needs of its students in relation to curriculum, extra-curricular activities and other aspects as far as practicable and make sure that the students will not be affected. As for P1 and P2 students, the school and the EDB will provide appropriate assistance to refer them to other primary schools in the same school net, i.e. the Southern District (School Net 18), to continue their study. Their new schools will also provide necessary support to help the students adapt to their new school life as soon as possible.

Besides, for students who have been allocated to IRGPS under the POA System in this school year, if their parents wish to seek admission of their children to other primary schools in the same school net, they may first register with IRGPS and then approach the School Places Allocation Section of the EDB from June 11 to August 31, 2021. The EDB will re-allocate the students concerned to schools with vacant P1 places in the Southern District (School Net 18). Parents may also apply to their preferred schools for admission by themselves.

(6) Being the SSB of government schools, the EDB has a mechanism in place for the deployment of teachers to cater for the development needs of its schools. Regarding IRGPS, the EDB will arrange suitable staffing to cater for the learning and development needs of students, having regard to the operational

needs and actual circumstances of the school in the next few years. When the school ceases operation in the 2024/25 school year, the EDB will redeploy the teaching and non-teaching staff appointed on civil service terms to other government schools. As for contract staff, the school will make appropriate arrangements according to the terms of their contracts.

For aided primary schools, according to the EDB's guidelines, SSBs operating more than one school should in the first instance arrange to redeploy surplus staff of a school which will cease operation to fill the available vacancies in other schools under their sponsorship, including teaching posts within and outside the approved staff establishment. Besides, the EDB will also upload information of teaching vacancies reported by aided primary schools on its website for general information of interested teachers. In fact, there will be a certain number of teaching vacancies arising from natural wastage every year, which can help absorb the affected teachers.