

LCQ14: Reprovisioning or redevelopment of school premises

Following is a question by the Dr Hon Priscilla Leung and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (June 9):

Question:

Regarding the reprovisioning or redevelopment of the premises of primary, secondary and special schools, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective current numbers of (i) primary schools, (ii) secondary schools and (iii) special schools whose premises have a site area of less than 3 000 square metres and are over 30 years old, and the facilities in which are below the current standards;

(2) of the following information on those schools the premises reprovisioning or redevelopment works for which (i) were completed within the past five years and (ii) are currently in progress:

- (a) name of school,
- (b) type of school (i.e. government, subsidised, Direct Subsidy Scheme and private),
- (c) name of school sponsoring body (SSB) (if applicable),
- (d) year of completion of the original school premises,
- (e) date on which the School Allocation Committee (SAC) under the Education Bureau (EDB) received the application concerned,
- (f) date on which the Finance Committee of this Council approved the funding application of the project concerned,
- (g) approved project estimates, and
- (h) actual project expenditure (if applicable); and

(3) as it has been reported that there has been a wave of students dropping out in this school year, whether SAC will, when considering applications from SSBs in future, take into account the overall change in the school-age population in Hong Kong; whether the EDB has reviewed from time to time the school premises reprovisioning or redevelopment projects which are scheduled to commence, so as to avoid an oversupply of school places?

Reply:

President,

At present, there are about 900 public sector schools in the territory. Their premises covering various facilities were built in different periods in accordance with the building standards at the time of construction. Since

1997, the Government has designed and built new public sector schools in accordance with the prevailing standards, and has updated such standards from time to time in response to implementation of new policies and initiatives (such as the New Senior Secondary academic structure).

In response to Dr Hon Priscilla Leung's questions on the reprovisioning and redevelopment of school premises, our reply is as follows:

(1) As at May 2021, about 200 public sector schools were built according to the prevailing standards. Based on the information from the Education Bureau (EDB), among the remaining approximately 700 public sector schools, over 130 ordinary primary schools and 10 ordinary secondary schools are with a site area of less than 3 000 square metres and premises over 30 years old. That said, most of these schools have enhanced their premises and facilities through the School Improvement Programme, minor improvement works projects and the annual Major Repairs exercise. In addition, based on school-based management, schools may alter the use of some school facilities to meet students' needs and suit the overall school development. All existing school premises in operation comply with the prevailing statutory requirements.

In respect of special schools, since there are different types/scales of special schools with varying facilities to meet the diverse needs of their target students, the requirement on school site area is different. Unlike ordinary public sector primary and secondary schools, the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines have not set a reference site area for different types of special schools. Provision of facilities for newly built special schools (including boarding section) would be vetted on a case-by-case basis. The EDB will regularly review the reprovisioning or redevelopment needs of special schools.

(2) Information on schools that have completed reprovisioning or redevelopment in the past five years (2016 to 2020) and those that are undergoing redevelopment or reprovisioning are at Annexes 1 and 2 respectively.

(3) Land resources are valuable, and the construction, redevelopment or reprovisioning of primary and secondary schools involves substantial public expenditure. The EDB has all along been prudent in its development of public sector school building projects so as to meet overall and district-specific needs, ensure the steady development of the school sector, and at the same time enhance schools' learning and teaching environment.

The EDB has been closely monitoring the changes in student population. Generally speaking, it is not unusual to observe student mobility within or after the start of a school year. In addition, the development of the COVID-19 epidemic has also affected the number of newly-arrived students and cross-boundary students joining local schools. According to the prevailing mechanism, the EDB will make reference to the school-age population projections, which are compiled based on the population projections updated regularly by the Census and Statistics Department, and take into account the actual number of students at various levels as well as the latest demographic

changes (including the number of newly-arrived children from the Mainland) in estimating the future demand for school places and related resources. The EDB will consider factors such as the latest projections, other factors that may affect the demand for school places in certain districts, different options to increase the supply of school places in particular districts, the prevailing education policies (including to enhance teaching and learning environment through reprovisioning) before deciding whether it is necessary to allocate school premises (including suitable vacant school premises) for setting up new school(s) or reprovisioning of existing school(s) or to carry out in-situ redevelopment. The EDB will continue monitoring the projected supply of and demand for public sector school places in Hong Kong as a whole and in different districts, and will carefully consider all relevant factors to plan for school building projects as needed.

Most school premises built in recent years have been used for reprovisioning schools built in accordance with past standards, in order to provide them with a better learning and teaching environment. For in-situ redevelopment projects, when considering the suitability of an individual school for in-situ redevelopment, apart from the quality of education provided and sustainability of the school concerned, factors such as the size of the existing school, age and facilities of the school premises, technical feasibility of the redevelopment, availability of decanting premises, as well as acceptance, commitment and readiness of the school (including parents and teaching staff) shall also be taken into consideration.

In view of the latest downward trend of school-age population in the medium to long term, the needs of different districts vary. Apart from continuing to primarily consider reprovisioning use when launching new school premises for allocation in the future, the EDB will also actively encourage school sponsoring bodies to apply for cross-district reprovisioning of public sector schools in areas with surplus school places, in order to meet the demand for school places in new development areas, as well as to improve the learning and teaching environment of public sector schools.

The EDB will continue to maintain close communication with stakeholders, and encourage the sector to plan ahead to maintain the overall quality of education while ensuring sustainable development of the school sector as a whole and effective use of resources.