

LCQ17: Shortage of school places in the Kai Tak Development Area

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 (November 11):

Question:

Some residents of the Kai Tak Development Area (KTDA) have relayed that the population of the district is growing continuously, but there are only two primary schools and one secondary school in the district. Due to a shortage of school places, many school-age children have to travel to other districts to attend schools. As a number of residential developments in the district will be completed for intake in the coming few years, such residents are worried that the shortage of school places will be aggravated. Although the Government has reserved three school sites in the district, it has not announced any concrete plan for the construction of the schools. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective current numbers of school places of (a) secondary schools and (b) primary schools within the areas covered by the Primary One Admission School Net 34, which are located in (i) KTDA and (ii) the area outside KTDA within the Kowloon City District; whether it has assessed if all school-age children in KTDA can be admitted to the schools in these two areas;

(2) whether the Education Bureau (EDB) has drawn up concrete plans and implementation timetables for the construction of the schools on the aforesaid sites; if not, of the reasons for that; whether EDB has put in place any measures to expedite the construction plans; and

(3) given that the Assessment Committee for the Funding Scheme to Support Transitional Housing Projects by Non-government Organisations under the Transport and Housing Bureau is scrutinising an application submitted by a charitable organisation for constructing and operating transitional housing on one of the aforesaid school sites, whether the Committee will consult the Legislative Council, the Kowloon City District Council, the EDB and local residents on that application?

Reply:

President,

Under the established mechanism, the Planning Department will reserve sites for school development, when preparing town plans and planning large-scale residential developments having regard to the planned population intake and on the basis of 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. In accordance with the relevant mechanism, the EDB has reserved school sites in the Kai Tak Development Area (KTDA) for the development of four primary schools and two secondary schools to accommodate the demand for school places in the district.

In planning the building works of public sector primary and secondary schools, whilst noting that land is a valuable resource and the construction of new primary and secondary school premises involves immense resources, we need to carefully consider the timing of initiating the school building projects so as to commensurate with the long-term sustainable development of the districts concerned, including the steady development of the school sector. Generally speaking, the provision of public sector primary school places is planned on a district basis and the public sector secondary school places is on a territory-wide basis. With respect to the six school sites reserved in the KTDA, the school building works on three of the sites were completed and the schools on the related sites have already commenced operation. They include two public sector primary schools located at Kai Ching Estate and Tak Long Estate (both have come into operation since September 2016) respectively, and one public sector secondary school located at Kai Ching Estate (which has come into operation since September 2019).

The reply to the question raised by the Dr Hon Priscilla Leung, in consultation with relevant bureau, is as follows:

(1) The EDB has been closely monitoring the supply and demand of public sector school places in various districts and liaising with schools to ensure the sufficient provision of public sector school places for school-aged children under the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) System and the Primary One Admission (POA) System. Both SSPA and POA Systems are divided in two stages, namely, "Discretionary Places Admission" stage and "Central Allocation" stage. Parents are free to apply for school places for their children in any public sector schools across the territory, irrespective of school nets/districts, during the "Discretionary Places Admission" stage. At the "Central Allocation" stage under the POA System, Primary One places are allocated on the basis of the assigned school nets in accordance with the residential address of respective applicant children. In the annual POA exercise, the demand for Primary One places in a school net is subject to various factors such as parental choices, the number of new arrival children, the resident intake schedule of new housing developments and the consequential movement in the school-aged population. Regarding the SSPA, the allocation of Secondary One places at the "Central Allocation" stage is based on the districts where the children's primary schools are located. Similarly, the demand for Secondary One places in a district is subject to various factors including the school-aged population and parental choices. For the aforementioned reasons, the demand for school places in individual school nets/districts varies year on year.

The EDB, in accordance with the consensus reached with the school sector, has been adopting flexible measures at the "Central Allocation" stage of the POA System to flexibly increase the supply of school places in individual school nets as necessary so as to avoid affecting schools when the

rising demand subsidies. These measures include borrowing school places from neighbouring school nets and using vacant classrooms to operate additional classes. For the SSPA System, when there is a shortage of school places in a particular net at the "Central Allocation" stage, it has been a long established practice to make netting arrangements with neighbouring districts having regard to various factors including the demand and supply of school places in each district, the locations of schools and the availability as well as accessibility of transportation means among school nets, and the established netting pattern, etc. The objectives are to ensure a stable provision of school places in each of the school nets/districts, increase parental choices, as well as balance and address the concerns and needs of different stakeholders as far as possible. In the POA and SSPA 2020 (for admission to Primary One or Secondary One in 2020/21 school year), Primary School Net 34 in Kowloon City District provided a total of 902 Primary One places (and Primary School Nets 35 and 41 in the same district provided 451 and 623 school places respectively); whereas the Secondary School Net in Kowloon City District provided a total of 2 895 Secondary One places, including the surplus school places in adjacent districts/school nets which were deployed under the netting arrangement to meet the demand in the district. As the allocation of school places is based on school nets, we do not have specific statistics on the number of school places in the KTDA.

(2) Regarding the remaining three sites reserved for the construction of schools in the KTDA, one of the sites reserved for public sector primary school development was allocated last year for the reprovisioning of Baptist Rainbow Primary School located in Wong Tai Sin, for increasing the supply of school places in Primary School Net 34. Currently, the EDB is following up on the related school building project. Upon completion of the preparatory works of the project and subject to the funding approval from the Legislative Council, construction works will commence and the school premises is expected to be completed in 2025 at the earliest. As for the other two reserved school sites, they were planned for the construction of a private independent school (secondary-cum-primary) back in the earlier years. The school building programme in the KTDA has been implementing in an orderly manner in the past few years. The EDB, having considered various factors including the demographic trends of school-aged population in Hong Kong, the district development and needs, as well as the sustainable development of schools in the territory as a whole, has decided to deploy these two school sites for public sector school development. The EDB will continue to closely monitor the population projections and the supply and demand of school places in the Kowloon City District, and will review and initiate the school building works on the two school sites in due course, according to the actual schooling situation and education policy.

(3) Relevant government departments have been actively identifying land to address the urgent need for implementing transitional housing projects. In this connection, the EDB was consulted in early 2020 whether a reserved primary school site at the KTDA could be put to other temporary use. Generally speaking, building a new school campus takes six years or more from preparation to completion, of which about three years is required on the pre-construction preparatory works (which normally include site investigation,

technical feasibility studies, design and preparation of tender documents), and also funding approval has to be obtained from the Legislative Council. As mentioned above, the EDB will review and initiate the remaining school building projects in the Kowloon City District in due course. According to the current estimation, on-site construction works will not commence until a few years later. Given that land is a valuable resource, and to address the strong housing needs of low-income families in society, the EDB does not object to the proposed temporary use of the site on the condition that it will not affect the future school building programme in the KTDA. The Transport and Housing Bureau (THB) advised that, in the implementation of various transitional housing projects proposed by community organisations, relevant stakeholders would be consulted in the process. The organisation proposing the transitional housing project at Muk On Street in Kai Tak is conducting a feasibility study and preparing the preliminary design for the project. The THB, in collaboration with the related organisation, consulted the Housing and Development Planning Committee of the Kowloon City District Council on the project on September 15, 2020. The Assessment Committee of the Funding Scheme to Support Transitional Housing Projects by Non-government Organisations will consider holistically the stakeholders' views and other relevant important factors when vetting the various applications.