

LCQ18: Planning for primary and secondary school places

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Chow Man-kong and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (May 31):

Question:

Regarding the planning for public sector (including government and aided) and Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) primary and secondary school places, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of public sector and DSS primary and secondary schools which have ceased or will cease operation, have been or will be merged or reprovisioned in each of the past three school years and the coming school year, and set out in Table 1 the following information of such schools by the three regions, namely Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories, as well as District Council district: (i) name, (ii) school sponsoring body, (iii) school's founding year, and (iv) their (a) number of classes, (b) total number of students and (c) total number of teachers and school staff in the school year preceding the cease of operation, merger or reprovisioning;

Table 1 Year:

Region	District Council district	(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)		
					(a)	(b)	(c)
Hong Kong Island							
Kowloon							
New Territories							

(2) of the respective numbers of public sector and DSS primary schools operating only one Primary One class in each of the past three school years and the coming school year, and set out in Table 2 the following information of such schools by the three regions, namely Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories, as well as District Council district: (i) name, (ii) school sponsoring body, (iii) school's founding year, and (iv) their (a) number of classes, (b) total number of students and (c) total number of teachers and school staff in the past school year;

Table 2 Year:

Region	District Council district	(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)		
					(a)	(b)	(c)
Hong Kong Island							
Kowloon							
New Territories							

(3) whether it has assessed the respective demands for secondary school places in various districts in each of the coming three school years; if so, of the figures concerned; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) regarding the students affected by schools which have ceased operation or merged, whether a mechanism is in place to arrange for their transfer to other public sector or DSS primary and secondary schools in the same district to continue their studies; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(5) regarding the teachers affected by schools which have ceased operation or merged, whether a mechanism is in place to assist them in transferring to other public sector or DSS primary and secondary schools to continue working as teachers, thereby retaining talents for the sector; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(6) whether a mechanism is in place to assist the public sector and DSS primary schools which have failed to receive public funding to operate Primary One classes in transforming into vocational training centres designed for persons with special educational needs, community education centres for providing employees retraining courses, or universities' learning centres in urban areas; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Based on the population projections, it is anticipated that the continuous decrease in future school-age population is structural rather than transient. Therefore, with top priority accorded to the interests of students and aiming for a "soft landing", the Education Bureau (EDB) will adopt long-term measures in planning for public sector primary and secondary school places. We encourage and support school sponsoring bodies (SSBs) and schools, in the interest of the society at large, to make early plans and to consolidate resources in an orderly manner, so as to ensure a healthy and sustainable education ecosystem. In the meantime, we have to take account of the pace of development in different communities in a holistic manner and

grasp the opportunity to redeploy and optimise resources, focusing on enhancing the overall education quality in meeting the various educational needs of students.

Our reply to Dr the Hon Chow Man-kong's question is as follows:

(1) and (2) In the 2020/21 to 2023/24 school years, the details of schools which ceased operation, merged or reprovisioned are set out at Annex 1. The number of public sector primary schools operating one class at Primary 1 (P1) level in the 2020/21 to 2022/23 school years is tabulated at Annex 2, while the number for the 2023/24 school year is subject to the actual student enrolment in the student headcount in September 2023.

Since the number of classes, total number of students and total number of staff members in the previous school year of a school ceasing operation, merging, being reprovisioned or operating one class at P1 level does not reflect the general situation of the school, it is not appropriate to provide such information to avoid misunderstanding. Besides, the EDB does not keep information on the year of establishment of schools.

(3) As the fertility rate in Hong Kong is decreasing continuously in recent years, a structural decline in the overall school-age population in the territory has been shown. The annual demand for public sector secondary school places is affected by a number of factors, including the number of cross-boundary students, the number of school-age newly-arrived children, the impacts of various talent admission schemes and initiatives, as well as the wastage of students between school years (such as students transferring to private schools or pursuing studies overseas or in the Mainland), etc. According to the latest projected demand for school places, including by referencing the number of primary school students in the corresponding school years (i.e. the number of Primary 4 to Primary 6 students this year who will progress to Secondary One (S1) in the next three school years), the demand for S1 school places is expected to increase slightly in 2024, and to decrease continuously starting from 2025. The provision of public sector secondary school places is planned on a territory-wide basis, and the age distribution of population in different school nets is uneven. Based on past experience, there is movement of people between districts from time to time, the demand for school places will fluctuate between school years, and even within the same school year. We will closely monitor the demographic changes in student population and conduct dynamic assessment of the demand and supply of S1 school places. Please see Annex 3 for the number of students in primary schools by region, District Council district and grade in the 2022/23 school year.

(4) The EDB has kept reminding parents through different channels that when choosing a school for their children, they should first identify children's characteristics, personalities, abilities and interests, and then consider various factors such as the sponsoring body, location, characteristics, etc, of a school. Parents may obtain information of schools and be updated on the latest school news through the school websites and the Primary School Profiles or Secondary School Profiles in order to help them choose a suitable

school for their children.

In respect of primary schools not being able to operate subsidised P1 classes, the EDB will take the initiative to contact the parents whose children have been offered a P1 place by these schools at the Discretionary Places Admission Stage to explain the situation and arrange an alternative P1 place for their children. Parents may select another school from the school lists provided by the EDB or participate in the Central Allocation for their children. During the process, the EDB will maintain close communication with the parents concerned and provide appropriate and timely assistance to cater for the special circumstances and needs of individual parents as far as practicable.

When a public sector school ceases operation, the EDB will also provide placement service for current students to let them complete their primary or secondary education in other public sector schools. Students who have completed Secondary 3 could pursue senior secondary education in other subvented schools through participating in Central Placement.

(5) The EDB has all along been committed to maintaining a stable teaching profession of high quality. Schools would employ teachers according to established mechanism to fill the teaching vacancies arising from retirement, pursuing further studies, changing schools, taking up employment outside the teaching profession, and leaving the post due to other personal reasons. If there are redundant or surplus teachers arising from changes in the development planning of or the numbers of classes in aided primary and secondary schools, we will encourage sponsoring bodies and the schools concerned to absorb these teachers as far as possible to fill teaching vacancies in schools under the sponsorship of the same sponsoring bodies and the schools. In tandem, to facilitate redundant teachers to find teaching posts in other aided primary schools, primary schools are required to report all vacancy information to the EDB for dissemination through the EDB's homepage for the reference of redundant teachers, so that they can apply to related schools for the posts. The EDB will continue to closely monitor the manpower situation of teachers in public sector schools to ensure the delivery of quality school education and continuous development of teachers.

(6) Under the established Central Clearing House mechanism for vacant school premises sites, the EDB will review the vacant or to-be-vacant school premises' suitability for school use having regard to factors including the size, location, physical conditions, etc, of the premises, as well as the educational needs and relevant policy measures. Upon confirming that such school premises are not required to be retained for school use, the EDB will, in accordance with the mechanism, release the sites for the Planning Department's consideration of suitable alternative long-term uses. The Planning Department will regularly update the list of vacant school premises sites reviewed on its website. Non-governmental organisations or social enterprises may apply to the Lands Department or the departments managing the sites for use of the sites for community, institutional or non-profit making purposes on a short-term tenancy.

In the past, there have been cases that certain vacant school premises sites were converted to other uses such as tertiary education and vocational training after being reviewed under the mechanism. Examples include the former school premises of North Point Methodist Primary School and Pui Shing Catholic Secondary School, which were allocated to the Education University of Hong Kong and the Vocational Training Council for operating an educational centre and a vocational training centre respectively.