

LCQ22: 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 (October 24):

Question:

Regarding the impacts of the decline in the population of school-aged Primary One (P1) students as well as the supply of and demand for P1 places on schools, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the annual numbers of students applying for P1 discretionary places in the last, current and next school years, and the percentages of such numbers in the populations of school-aged P1 students in the territory, with a tabulated breakdown by school district and school net;

(2) of the respective annual actual/provisional numbers of P1 places and classes provided/to be provided by (i) government, (ii) aided, (iii) Direct Subsidy Scheme and (iv) private schools in the last, current, and next school years, with a tabulated breakdown by school district and school net; the criteria adopted by the Education Bureau (EDB) for determining the provisional number of P1 classes in the next school year;

(3) as the population of school-aged P1 students will decline continuously from the next school year onwards, of the impacts of such a situation on schools in the next school year as projected by EDB, including the respective numbers of (i) classes and (ii) teaching posts which need to be cut; the measures to be taken by EDB to alleviate such impacts, and whether such measures will include lowering the threshold for operating P1 classes and comprehensively implementing small class teaching; and

(4) given that quite a number of schools operated additional primary classes (i.e. the so-called "partly-enlarged class structure") over the past few years in response to the shortage of primary places at various grades, and as the students of such classes will graduate from the next school year onwards, these schools will have a decline in the total number of classes and thus surplus teachers, of (i) the number of schools which will cut their number of classes, (ii) the total number of classes to be cut, and (iii) the total number of teaching posts which need to be cut, in each of the next five years as projected by EDB (with a tabulated breakdown by school district and school net)?

Reply:

President,

The Primary One Admission (POA) System, which is school net-based, is divided into two stages: Discretionary Places (DP) and Central Allocation

(CA). During the DP stage, parents may apply to any public sector primary schools without restriction on districts. Children who cannot secure a discretionary school place may participate in CA which also 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 address. Certain school nets may cover different districts.

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

(1) The respective numbers of children who applied for a public sector Primary One (P1) place at the DP stage of POA 2017 and 2018 (i.e. for admission to P1 in 2017/18 and 2018/19 school years respectively) are 57 823 and 58 965, both of which were around 90% of the P1 school-age population in Hong Kong (i.e. aged 6 population who are residing in Hong Kong). A total of 55 880 and 56 648 children participated in and were allocated P1 places in POA 2017 and 2018 respectively. A breakdown of successful applicant children by school net and allocation stage (i.e. DP and CA stages) is tabulated at Annex 1.

The relevant figures for POA 2019 are not available as information on the applicant children at the DP stage is still being collated.

(2) According to the annual Student Enrolment Survey, the number of operating P1 classes and places by district and school type for the 2017/18 school year is tabulated at Annex 2. Information collected from the Student Enrolment Survey of the 2018/19 school year is being collated. The number of approved P1 classes of public sector primary schools by district for the 2018/19 school year is set out at Annex 3, and the provisional number of P1 classes of public sector primary schools for the 2019/20 school year will not be available until March 2019.

To optimise the use of public resources, EDB has established the criteria for operation of classes since the implementation of the POA System. In accordance with the principle of fairness, the criteria are applicable to all schools participating in the system. EDB has, where circumstances permit, implemented small class teaching in public sector primary schools by phases starting from P1 since the 2009/10 school year. Since P1 places of small class teaching schools are planned on the basis of 25 students per class under the POA, the threshold for operation of a P1 class has been lowered to 16 students. The number of P1 classes to be operated by public sector schools in a given school net in each school year is determined by factors such as the projected demand for P1 places, the number of classrooms available, the class structure and parental choices, etc. Upon completion of registration of successful DP applicant children in early December every year, EDB works out the "provisional number of places for CA" for each school based on the number of remaining applicant children anticipated to participate in the CA and the situation of individual schools (such as availability of classrooms) to prepare for CA. Under the existing mechanism, a school going to have an intake of less than 16 students may not be allowed to operate a P1 class if there are still unfilled P1 places in other schools of the same school net. In such circumstances, EDB will take into account special factors, such as

whether the school is located in a remote area where there is no appropriate alternative school, to determine whether there is a need to operate a P1 class in that school. In addition, EDB confirms the number of approved classes of each aided school by verifying their actual student enrolment every September.

(3) and (4) According to the current projections of P1 school-age population, the overall demand for P1 places is expected to reach the peak in the 2018/19 school year, and drop significantly in the 2019/20 school year and then progress to a stable level. Since the P1 enrolment has been increasing in the past few years, it is expected that the overall number of primary students, operating classes and teaching posts on establishment of public sector primary schools will remain generally stable in the next few years. The projected primary school-age population for the 2018/19 to 2023/24 school years (i.e. aged 6 – 11 population who are residing in Hong Kong) is tabulated at Annex 4.

Over the past years, EDB has implemented flexible measures based on the consensus reached with the school sector to increase the provision of P1 places, which include borrowing school places from neighbouring school nets, using vacant classrooms to operate additional classes, operating time-limited schools in vacant school premises and temporarily allocating more students per P1 class, to meet the transient increase in demand and to mitigate the impact on schools when such demand subsides. With the drop of P1 school-age population, these flexible measures will be adjusted or withdrawn in light of the demand as planned. We believe that this will effectively alleviate the impact arising from the decrease in student population. It is noteworthy that the demand for school places in individual districts/school nets may be different from the overall situation. Based on current projections, it is expected that some districts/school nets may still have to continue with the flexible measures mentioned above to increase the provision of P1 places in the 2019/20 school year to meet the transient demand. EDB will keep in view the situation of different districts and liaise closely with the schools concerned to ensure the provision of sufficient school places for all eligible applicant children under the POA.

Following the decrease in P1 school-age population starting from the 2019/20 school year, individual schools may be affected by the diminishing demand for school places in their respective districts and parental choices. Regarding the decrease in P1 school-age population, we have earlier had meetings with representatives of the Subsidised Primary Schools Council and the Hong Kong Aided Primary School Heads Association, and have reached consensus on the related follow-up actions and measures to address the concerns. Among them, the schools concerned can apply for retaining up to a maximum of three years redundant teachers arising from class reduction due to the decreasing P1 population who fail to secure a teaching post or be absorbed under the prevailing mechanism for handling redundant teachers. EDB will keep in view the matter and review timely. Besides, starting from P1 in the 2019/20 school year, the threshold for approving classes will be reduced from 25 to 23 students per class if the number of classes in a school has to be reduced in light of the enrolment in the student headcount in mid-

September, so as to enhance the stability of the number of approved classes and hence the regular teaching posts in schools.

In tandem, small class teaching has been implemented in public sector primary schools by phases where circumstances permit starting from P1 since the 2009/10 school year (i.e. schools are allocated 25 students per class under the POA System for planning of school places). As at the 2018/19 school year, almost 80% of public sector primary schools have already implemented small class teaching. With the decrease in overall projected demand for P1 places from the 2019/20 school year, both the school sector and EDB consider that this will provide conditions for more schools to implement small class teaching. As such, EDB has issued letters to invite all schools which have not yet implemented small class teaching to plan and make early preparation so that they can implement small class teaching as soon as practicable where the supply and demand of school places allow.

We will continue to maintain communication with the school sector and strive to provide a stable learning and teaching environment for schools.