

LCQ4: Provision of schools for the new public rental housing developments on Anderson Road

Following is a question by the Hon Ip Kin-yuen and a reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (July 11):

Question:

Located in the Anderson Road Development Area (Development Area), On Tat Estate, the intake of which was completed in 2016, and On Tai Estate, the intake of which will be completed within this year, can accommodate a total of 50 000 residents. While the authorities have planned to provide four kindergartens, three primary schools and one secondary school within the Development Area, so far only one half-day kindergarten has been completed and commissioned. This has resulted in quite a number of newly moved-in residents scrambling, for several months, for places in nearby schools for their children. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the authorities' projection on the population of children in the aforesaid estates who are of ages for attending kindergartens and primary and secondary schools; the criteria adopted for planning the number of kindergartens and primary and secondary schools within the Development Area; the original and latest schedules for the commissioning of those school premises, and the number of places to be offered to new students at each of the levels;

(2) of the specific measures to be put in place to assist the students concerned in obtaining school places pursuant to the "principle of vicinity"; the number of applications made by residents in the Development Area for change of schools for their children and the outcome of them; and

(3) of the reasons why the construction progress of the school premises within the Development Area is lagging behind; whether it will review the relevant arrangements and expedite the progress of the works; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Under the prevailing mechanism, the Planning Department will reserve sites for kindergarten (KG) and 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. In the process, the Education Bureau (EDB) will be consulted.

When there are KG premises in public housing estates available for use, the EDB will take into account the supply and demand of KG places of the areas concerned and other relevant factors, and launch school allocation exercises (SAEs) as appropriate upon receipt of request from the Housing Department. Relevant factors include the demand and supply of KG places in the district and the "Tertiary Planning Units" (TPUs) concerned, school-age children population projections, reprovisioning needs of existing KGs, and provision of Government-owned quality KG premises to increase the number of KGs that need not charge school fees to defray rental expenses. For the four six-classroom estate KG premises at the Anderson Road Development Area, two are in On Tat Estate. One of them has already been in operation and the other one will commence operation in the 2018/19 school year. The remaining two premises are in On Tai Estate. According to information available to the EDB, the total KG places available in the TPU in which On Tai Estate is located and its neighbouring TPU are sufficient in meeting the demand of the KG student population. Nevertheless, having considered the above-mentioned factors on provision of premises, we would launch the relevant SAE shortly.

Insofar as planning of public sector primary and secondary school building projects is concerned, land is a scarce resource and construction of new secondary and primary school premises involve immense resources. We have to consider with prudence if addition of a new operating school would be commensurate with the long term sustainable development of the district concerned so as to avoid negative impacts on the steady development of the school sector as a whole. As far as reserved school sites at a public housing development are concerned, the EDB has to consider factors including the planned development of the area concerned, the school-age population projections which are compiled based on the population projections updated regularly by the Census and Statistics Department and the projection of population distribution released by the Planning Department, the actual number of existing students and school places available at various levels, the prevailing education policies, other factors which may affect the supply and demand of school places, etc., in order to decide if a premises should be used for operating a new school or reprovisioning an existing school, and when to kick-start the relevant school building programme. Furthermore, a new school building project, from planning to completion, involves various stages. Variations and uncertainties may come into play during the process.

The EDB has reserved four 30-classroom school sites at the Anderson Road Development Area, including three for primary school use and one for secondary school use. The building works for one of the primary school premises are expected to complete by December 2018. The secondary school building project is undergoing the detailed design stage, and we will seek funding approval for it as soon as practicable. Regarding the remaining two reserved primary school sites, we have launched an SAE in end-2017 to allocate one of the sites for reprovisioning purpose. The allocation result will likely be announced by the end of this month. We have also commenced the preliminary preparatory works for the project at the other primary school

site, and we plan to launch the SAE in 2019.

The EDB has the responsibility to provide sufficient public sector school places for all school-age students. At present, the provision of public sector secondary school places is planned on a territory-wide basis. Under the Secondary School Places Allocation mechanism, netting of school places from neighbouring areas would be arranged as and when necessary to ensure a stable supply of school places in each district and to provide parents with more choices. As far as the Kwun Tong district is concerned, there are still a considerable number of secondary school places available at present.

The provision of public sector primary school places is planned on a district basis. Under the Primary One Admission (POA) System, allocation of primary one (P1) places is school net-based. Under each POA cycle, the supply and demand of P1 places in individual districts/school nets are subject to changes due to various factors, e.g. whether parents would choose to apply for public sector schools, the number of newly arrived children, the timing of new housing estates intake (including the school-age population concerned and parents' willingness to change schools), leading to possible year-on-year changes. In accordance with the consensus reached with the sector, the EDB has been adopting flexible measures to increase the provision of places to meet the projected transient demand for school places so as to minimise the impacts on schools when the demand subsides. Such measures include borrowing school places from neighbouring school nets, using vacant classrooms to operate additional classes, operating time-limited schools in vacant school premises, temporarily allocating more students to each P1 class, etc.

On Tai Estate and On Tat Estate are situated in School Net 46 and School Net 48 respectively in the Kwun Tong district. Over the past few years, school places were borrowed from School Net 46 to School Net 48 in order to provide enough school places and choices in accordance with the aforementioned established arrangements. Under such arrangements, both school nets are not required to borrow school places from other districts.

With the gradual intake of the public housing estates in the Anderson Road Development Area, the EDB has distributed through various channels information leaflets about schools in the Kwun Tong district and the procedures about transfer of school to residents who are going to move into the district for reference. We have also been discussing with the schools concerned to make good use of their vacant school places to cater for the needs of students newly moved into the district. For parents who wish to arrange transfer of school for their children, they may either approach the EDB or contact their preferred schools direct.

In POA 2017, there were about 40 and 70 new applications for admission to P1, including requests for change of school net due to change in residential address and late applications from new arrivals, from the residents in School Net 46 (including On Tai Estate) and School Net 48 (including On Tat Estate) respectively. All the children concerned have been allocated public sector P1 places in the district. As regards POA 2018, the

EDB has received 60 and 40 such new applications from the residents in School Net 46 and School Net 48 respectively during the period between the school choice-making for central allocation in February and June 2018. All the applicant children concerned have also been allocated public sector P1 places in the district. There are still surplus public sector P1 places in Kwun Tong. The EDB would keep in view the situation and provide timely assistance to parents as needed.

Regarding applications for transfer to schools in the Kwun Tong district, the EDB has arranged 160 primary students newly moved to On Tai Estate or On Tat Estate to change to schools in the district in the 2017/18 school year. As at end-June this year, the EDB has received a total of about 200 applications from students residing in On Tat Estate or On Tai Estate applying for transfer to Primary 2 (P2) to Primary 6 (P6) classes of the schools in the Kwun Tong district in the 2018/19 school year. As the situation in respect of school places available and vacant classrooms has only become clearer by early July, the EDB is working with the schools concerned on the additional P2 to P6 classes to be operated and has started to inform parents of the school placement arrangements of individual levels for their children. All the students could be referred to schools in the district for admission. As regards the transfer to KGs and secondary schools, in the current school year the EDB has received only a few cases seeking placement assistance for the 2018/19 school year. All these cases have been handled in accordance with our prevailing practice and applicants have been provided with information on the vacancies of the KGs and secondary schools in the district. The EDB will provide referral support if needed.

In sum, the EDB has to take into account various factors before initiating a school building project. Hence, the commencement date of a new estate school may not necessarily tie in with the population intake schedule of the new public housing estate concerned. We will continue to provide necessary assistance to parents who need to seek transfer of school for their children as a result of moving home.