

LCQ7: Medium of instruction arrangements for secondary schools

Following is a question by the Hon Michael Tien and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (June 16):

Question:

The Education Bureau (EDB) has, since the 2010-2011 school year, implemented at junior secondary levels the fine-tuned medium of instruction (MOI) arrangements for secondary schools under six-year cycles. Under such arrangements, schools are no longer categorised as Chinese-medium secondary schools and English-medium secondary schools, and schools may exercise professional discretion on MOI for individual classes or groups, having regard to their school-based circumstances. If the average proportion of Secondary One (S1) intake of a school admitted to a class belonging to the "top 40 per cent" group in the previous two years reaches 85 per cent of the size of a class (i.e. 29 students, calculated on the basis of the S1 allocation class size of 34 in 2010), the school will be deemed to have satisfied the "student ability" criterion and, having regard to other prescribed criteria, may then exercise professional discretion on MOI for the class concerned. As announced by the EDB in April this year, starting from the 2022-2023 school year, "S1 allocation class size" will be replaced by the "secondary school average class size" in the 2020-2021 school year as the parameter for determining the number of places for which schools will be given professional discretion to determine the MOI arrangements according to the student ability criterion. As the "secondary school average class size" in the 2020-2021 school year is 27 students, 85 per cent means 22 students. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the aforesaid change in the parameter has lowered the threshold for schools to use English as MOI; if so, whether it has estimated if the total number of English-medium classes offered by schools will increase as a result, thereby causing more students with difficulties of learning in English to be misallocated to English-medium classes; and

(2) given that the EDB formulated the current calculation method for the student ability criterion based on a report of the Education Commission released in as early as 2005, whether the EDB will review the various parameters of such calculation method, so as to ensure that the method can effectively reflect students' ability for making appropriate MOI arrangements?

Reply:

President,

The fine-tuned medium of instruction (MOI) arrangements for secondary schools have been implemented at junior secondary levels since the 2010/11 school year, with a view to providing students with more opportunities to be exposed to and use English in schools progressively in preparation for further studies and work in future. Under the fine-tuned MOI arrangements, all schools have the discretion with varying degrees to make professional judgment having regard to their school circumstances to devise MOI arrangements in each of the school years within a six-year cycle. In the implementation of the fine-tuned arrangements, the Government continues to adopt the three prescribed criteria of "student ability", "teacher capability" and "school-based support" as recommended in the "Report on Review of Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools and Secondary School Places Allocation" published by the Education Commission in 2005. Schools fulfilling the "student ability" criterion (i.e. the average proportion of Secondary One (S1) intake of a school admitted to a class belonging to the "top 40 per cent" group (territory) in the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) of the previous two years under a six-year cycle reaches 85 per cent of the size of a class) may, having regard to other prescribed criteria, exercise professional discretion to determine the MOI arrangements in the class(es)/group(s) concerned. Schools may choose to use up to 25 per cent of the total lesson time (excluding the lesson time for the English Language subject) in class(es)/group(s) adopting Chinese as the MOI (CMI) to conduct extended learning activities (ELA) in English, or transform all 25 per cent or a smaller percentage of the ELA lesson time into the adoption of English as the MOI (EMI) in up to a maximum of two subjects.

Since the implementation of the fine-tuned MOI arrangements in the 2010/11 school year, schools are no longer bifurcated into schools adopting CMI and schools adopting EMI. Under the fine-tuned MOI framework, all schools have the discretion with varying degrees to make professional judgment having regard to their school-based circumstances to devise MOI arrangements. They may flexibly devise teaching arrangements "by class", "by group", "by subject", "by session" or by adopting a mixed mode so that the most appropriate MOI is used to ensure students' learning efficacy and enrich the English learning environment in schools. In view of the diversified school-based arrangements mentioned above, it is neither appropriate nor proper to generally bifurcate classes, lessons or subjects of individual schools into those adopting CMI and those adopting EMI.

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Michael Tien is as follows:

(1) The fine-tuned MOI arrangements are approaching the third cycle, which will last from the 2022/23 school year until the 2027/28 school year. After reviewing the implementation in the past two cycles, the Education Bureau (EDB) considers that schools in general have professionally capitalised on the flexibility accorded by the fine-tuned arrangements and enabled students to benefit from diversified MOI arrangements, under which schools offered their students more opportunities for exposure to and use of English, while ensuring their efficacy in learning non-language subjects. To ensure the learning effectiveness of students, schools adopt suitable teaching strategies to cater for the learner diversity among students, or track and

analyse students' academic performance in order to devise appropriate MOI grouping arrangements. Therefore, the EDB has decided to take forward the existing fine-tuned framework into the third cycle. Schools' discretion on MOI arrangements in the third cycle will continue to be determined by the three prescribed criteria of "student ability", "teacher capability" and "school-based support", so that students can continue to benefit from the merits of fine-tuned arrangements.

After reviewing the prevailing mechanism, the EDB has decided to refine some of the implementation details in response to the changes in the teaching environment. One of the refinements is the replacement of the "S1 allocation class size" under the SSPA mechanism with the "secondary school average class size" as the parameter for determining the number of places for which schools will be given professional discretion to determine the school-based MOI arrangements in the third cycle according to the current "student ability" criterion. In fact, the "secondary school average class size" has decreased from 34 students in the first school year of the first cycle (i.e. the 2010/11 school year) to 27 students in the 2020/21 school year. The refinement will more accurately reflect the criterion of 85 per cent of students belonging to the "top 40 per cent" group in a class and help minimise the impact of changes in recent years in S1 population on the stable environment for MOI arrangements.

Schools' discretion on school-based MOI arrangements in the third cycle will be based on the SSPA results in 2020 and 2021. If schools fail to meet the prescribed criterion of "student ability", their MOI discretion will be subject to change and they will be required to adjust their school-based MOI arrangements accordingly under the prevailing mechanism. A professional support mechanism will be introduced to help the schools concerned work out appropriate arrangements. Should individual schools intend to carry on with their existing MOI arrangements, they may submit an application under the mechanism. With students' learning efficacy as the primary concern, we will scrutinise each case in a professional and rigorous manner and carefully review the circumstances of each applicant school, including the experience accumulated under fine-tuned arrangements and their teaching effectiveness, before deciding whether an application should be approved.

(2) In the third cycle of the fine-tuned MOI arrangements, the EDB will continue to maintain close partnership with schools, and provide various kinds of school-based support and teacher training programmes to consolidate the experience gained and promote professional exchange, so as to ensure the quality of classroom learning and teaching. In parallel, to keep pace with the times, the EDB will conduct in the third cycle a comprehensive review of the fine-tuned MOI policy for secondary schools, which includes reviewing the "student ability" criterion as well as students' learning efficacy under different MOI arrangements, with a view to timely refining the policy according to review findings around the end of the third cycle.