

(Information Paper)

**Progress Report of the 22nd Meeting of
the Kowloon City District Council**

Purpose

This paper aims to report on the major issues discussed at the 22nd meeting of the Kowloon City District Council (KCDC) on 23 May 2007.

Discussing the Educational Work in Hong Kong with the Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower (PSEM)

2. The PSEM briefed Members on the development of the educational work in Hong Kong over the past decade and the future work of the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB). In response to the various issues raised by Members, the PSEM replied as follows:

- (1) Dishonest Parents Using False Addresses to Gain Primary One Places of the Schools They Desired – viewing that precaution was always better than punishment, the EMB enhanced its inspection work to verify the information contained in the applications. Since the verification work would inevitably cause inconvenience to the applicant families, the EMB considered it inappropriate to waste all applicant families' time on the verification just for a handful of black sheep. The EMB would carefully handle suspected cases reported by the public and would not tolerate any applicants who deliberately attempted to gain primary one places by fraud;
- (2) Random Change of Edition of Textbooks and Unjustified Price Increases – the EMB had issued guidelines to the publisher stating that they shall not change the edition of textbooks within three years under normal circumstances. If there were minor alterations to the textbooks, the publishers should provide schools with free supplementary information sheets or upload the information to their own websites for users to download;
- (3) Small Class Teaching – the EMB had to think twice before pursuing small class teaching because it was a road of no return and involved substantial government resources. The EMB had commissioned a consultancy study and invited 37 schools to be the pilot schools for small class teaching. Under the timetable, a preliminary consultancy report was due to release by the end of 2008;

- (4) School Closure – since resources would be wasted on schools with insufficient students to continue to operate, the EMB had actively encouraged such schools to merge in recent years. The rumour that the EMB attempted to close schools while at the same time allowing the setting up of new schools in fact stemmed from a misunderstanding. These so-called “new” schools were mostly schools redeveloped on the former sites or bisessional schools branching into two whole-day schools;
- (5) Impacts of the Educational Reform on the Teacher – to gain an in-depth understanding of the impacts of the educational reform on the teacher, the EMB commissioned a survey by Professor Edmond KO in December last year to examine whether teachers worked longer hours with heavier workloads and find effective ways of easing the pressures of work on teachers. The EMB had implemented 16 improvement recommendations put forward by Professor KO and was currently studying how to better implement the remaining two;
- (6) 334 New Senior Secondary Academic Structure – the new 334 Structure was a fundamental reform, involving all three levels of primary and secondary schools and universities. The EMB was now working on the hardware and software of the 334 Structure. It would maintain close contact with all tertiary institutions through the University Grants Committee and help them get additional teaching staff and facilities. Meanwhile, it would review and improve the school curricula of all levels to cater for the needs of the new 334 Structure;
- (7) Education Voucher System – education vouchers were originally not meant to subsidise private kindergartens because these vouchers were paid by public money and it was deemed inappropriate to turn public subsidies into private profits. However, students already enrolled in private kindergartens would be adversely affected if this arrangement took immediate effect. To prevent students from switching to eligible non-profit-making nurseries abruptly, the EMB, therefore, responded to the requests of parents and granted a three-year transitional period during which education vouchers could be used for both private and non-profit-making nurseries; and
- (8) Teaching the Modern History of China – the EMB would only define the syllabus of history for students with no intention of taking any stance on historical events. Teachers in Hong Kong proved to be very professional in guiding students to analyse history objectively from various perspectives so that

they could make correct judgment for themselves.

Development of the Funeral Industry in Hung Hom

3. Members were concerned that there was a growing number of shops related to funeral services in Hung Hom. They often occupied the road to perform funeral rites or display their goods, which caused residents great distress and reduced the prospect of other developments in Hung Hom. To ensure that the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) would fully take into account residents' views before issuing the Undertakers of Burials Licence for the Hung Hom district, Members passed a motion requiring that the FEHD conduct district consultation through the Kowloon City District Office before granting licences. In the long term, the Government should review the existing policies and plug any legal loopholes to clamp down on unlicensed undertakers, and should strictly regulate licensed operators to forbid them from providing services outside the scope of their operating licences.

4. The FEHD explained that under the current policies, even if the proposed new shops were to be located in the four districts of Sheung Wan, Mong Kok, Yau Ma Tei and Hung Hom where similar shops already existed, it was still not required to consult the residents within a 500-metre radius of the location concerned in normal cases. Nevertheless, the FEHD would, depending on circumstances, take the initiative to collect residents' views through the district office for consideration. The FEHD always exercised extreme caution in handling applications for the Undertakers of Burials Licence and would attach additional conditions to the licences if they were finally granted. For instance, it was not allowed to perform religious rites or store coffins in shops, and shop signs could not indicate or imply funeral activities etc. so that the outer appearances of newly licensed funeral shops would be no different from any other commercial offices. The Planning Department added that it was currently assisting the funeral industry in moving out to more remote areas such as Tuen Mun and Sha Tin for long-term development.

Law Enforcement Problems Arising from Anti-smoking Legislation

5. Members urged the Government to make legislative amendments at an early date to impose fixed penalty on people who broke the law. In addition, the authorities should also address the problem of restaurants flagrantly flouting the law and affecting pedestrians by putting tables and chairs outside their shops to cater for smoking customers. In response, the Department of Health said that the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau had already begun the study of the relevant legislative

amendments with a view to introducing fixed penalty for people who did not comply with the smoking ban in indoor places. The FEHD remarked that it had stepped up inspection and spot check, which resulted in the prosecution of 57 restaurants for illegally occupying public areas for business between January and April this year.

Requests for Legislating Against Objectionable Publications to Safeguard the Rights of Women and Children

6. In view of the fact that a magazine, which always boosted circulation by publishing something sensational, had not been convicted by court for publishing sexy photographs of a teenage singer in wet clothes, Members urged the Government to review the existing legislation which governed publications on the market and prohibit them from carrying sexy photographs which would corrupt youngsters' minds. The Security Bureau (SB) said in response that since the Department of Justice had already appealed against the case, which was prosecuted under the Prevention of Child Pornography Ordinance, it was not appropriate to make further comments on the case. The SB, however, would closely monitor the implementation of the legislation, and pay particular attention to the views of various sectors of the community and the court rulings on the relevant provisions. The Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority added that the Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau was currently reviewing the Control of Obscene and Indecent Articles Ordinance and would take into account public views on the Ordinance. The SB would conduct public consultation once the direction for legislative amendment was set.

Improving the Telephone Booking Service of General Out-patient Clinics

7. Members reflected that since the launch of the telephone booking service, some people still could not enjoy the service due to busy phone lines or the complicated booking procedures. In response, the Hospital Authority said that two new measures were introduced to further improve the service in May this year. These included the reserved "Elderly Appointment Quota" and the 24-hour "Anytime Advance Booking" system. In addition, "Tips Cards" detailing the telephone booking

procedures were widely distributed to the public to familiarise them with the correct way of using the service.

Requesting the Social Welfare Department to Make Payments Through Post Offices

8. Given that there were fewer bank branches these day, Members suggested that the Social Welfare Department (SWD) make social security assistance and social security allowance payments through the post offices. The SWD pointed out that while many bank branches were closed, recipients could switch to other banks for collecting their monthly social security assistance and social security allowance payments. In special cases, the SWD would make arrangements for cash payments to be delivered by hand to the home of the recipients or their family and friends. Since the scope of services of the Hongkong Post did not cover cash withdrawal and deposit services on behalf of the bank, and the security and human resources of the post offices were inadequate to cope with these two services, the SWD was not able to make social security assistance and social security allowance payments through the post offices at present. The SWD, however, would consider Members' suggestions in the hope of improving the existing services.

Kowloon City District Office

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