

12 March 2025

Education Bureau Circular No. 1/2025

Refined Options for Future Planning of Primary Schools

[Note : This circular should be read by –

- (a) School Sponsoring Bodies, Supervisors and Heads of Aided Primary Schools (excluding Special Schools) – for action; and
- (b) Heads of Government Primary Schools, Direct Subsidy Scheme Primary Schools and Special Schools, and Heads of Sections – for information.]

Summary

This circular aims to announce to aided primary schools as well as their respective School Sponsoring Bodies (SSBs) the refined options applicable to them for future planning. This circular supersedes Education Bureau (EDB) Circular No. 7/2024 dated 1 March 2024. It should be read in conjunction with other relevant EDB circulars, letters, or guidelines that are still applicable.

Background

2. In planning the provision of public sector school places and the development of schools, the prime consideration of EDB is the interests of students, ensuring the healthy and sustainable development of the education system in Hong Kong. As the decline in student population is structural rather than transient, the future demand for school places will correspondingly decrease. EDB has been closely monitoring the changes in student population, conducting dynamic assessments of the demand and supply of school places, and continuously reviewing the relevant arrangements and support measures related to class structure. With the aim of “soft landing”, EDB

maintains close communication with SSBs in supporting the sector to plan ahead and adopt appropriate measures and strategies to consolidate resources to respond to the changes in the demand and supply of school places while enhancing the quality of education.

3. Schools are places for nurturing the whole person development of students. They should maintain an optimal size of overall student population and number of classes for creating a conducive teaching and learning environment so as to cultivate students' values of mutual respect to get along with others, and to meet their diverse learning and holistic development needs while ensuring the quality of education and optimising the use of precious public resources.

4. SSBs and schools should act according to circumstances, prepare ahead by taking into consideration the overall situation of Hong Kong, and the district and school circumstances. They should carefully read the various arrangements and measures as set out in this circular, in order to plan for and formulate the direction most suitable for schools' long-term development as early as possible to safeguard the interest of student learning.

Arrangements for operation of subsidised Primary One (P1) classes

5. The number of P1 classes that a school may operate mainly depends on a number of factors, including parental choices and the number of classrooms available. Based on the number of students allocated to a school under Primary One Admission (POA), including the number of students admitted by a school during the Discretionary Places Admission (DP) stage and the estimated number of students to be allocated to a school through computer analysis of the choices made by parents during the Central Allocation (CA) stage¹, EDB will decide the number of P1 classes that a school may operate.

6. Under the existing criteria:

- (i) if the total number of students allocated through POA to a public sector school is 16 or more, the school will be allowed to operate subsidised P1 classes;
- (ii) if the total number of students allocated is fewer than 16 and there are still

¹ After the DP stage, the remaining places of the school will be allocated during the CA stage.

unfilled places in other schools of the same school net under POA, the school, in principle, will not be allowed to operate subsidised P1 classes unless there are special factors for consideration;

- (iii) if the total number of students allocated is fewer than 16 and there are insufficient places to meet the demand in the same school net, the school may still be allowed to operate a subsidised P1 class.

7. Schools that are not approved to operate subsidised P1 classes under POA will not be eligible to participate in the future POA unless special approval is granted by EDB. In general, for schools that cannot participate in POA, EDB will cease providing subsidies to them starting from the third school year (i.e. the N+3 school year) after the first year when the schools are not able to operate subsidised P1 classes (i.e. year N)², and such aided primary schools will cease operation. By then, students who have not completed their primary school curriculum will be provided with placement assistance service by EDB to transfer to other public sector schools to continue their studies.

Refined options for planning the way forward

8. To facilitate schools in maintaining the integrity of overall class structure and stabilising the teaching and learning environment, while ensuring the education quality and the optimal use of precious public resources, EDB has refined the options and the relevant application arrangements for schools which take effect from the 2025/26 school year. All schools are encouraged to plan their way forward as early as possible, taking into consideration the district and school circumstances. Details are setting out at **Appendix**.

9. As for schools that are unable to operate subsidised P1 classes under POA, they should seriously consider their own situations and resources available, and to choose to apply for **one** of the options based on their district and school circumstances. If a school does not choose any option or if the selected option is not approved, EDB will cease providing any form of subsidies to the school starting from the N+3 school year. As stipulated in paragraph 7, students who have not yet

² For example, if a school is unable to operate a subsidised P1 class in the 2025/26 school year, and fails to re-participate in the subsequent POA, EDB will cease providing subsidies starting from the 2028/29 school year.

completed their primary school curriculum by then will be provided with placement assistance service by EDB to transfer to other public sector schools to continue their studies.

10. As Primary 5 (P5) and Primary 6 (P6) are crucial stages before students proceeding to secondary school, in order to ensure the well-being of students and maintain continuity and stability in their learning, EDB reminds schools to make arrangements for students as early as possible to avoid P5 students having to transfer to other schools to continue their P6 studies in the N+3 school year. If schools encounter difficulties in making arrangements, EDB can provide assistance, such as making placement arrangements for students entering P5 in the N+2 school year in advance, allowing them to continue their P5 and P6 studies at other public sector schools.

Other existing measures

Criterion for calculating the number of approved classes in Headcount

11 Every September, EDB collects student data from public sector schools for verifying the actual number of students enrolled to determine whether adjustments are needed in the approved number of classes at different class levels. EDB will keep reviewing the criterion for adopting the threshold of 23 students per class in approving classes at P1 to P5 levels.

Redundant Teachers

12. If the approved number of classes of a school is reduced after the September headcount, the SSB and the school should adopt appropriate measures to resolve the situation of redundant teachers that may arise. Such measures include redeploying redundant teachers to other schools under the same SSB, appointing redundant teachers to fill temporary posts, or arranging job-sharing and teachers taking no-pay leave. In case the SSB/school cannot absorb all of their redundant teachers through the relevant measures, redundant teachers can be tolerated until the end of that school year³. Schools are reminded to rectify the redundant teacher situation as early as

³ The relief measure that aided primary schools are allowed to apply, on an annual basis, for retaining their redundant teachers on the approved teaching staff establishment arising from class reduction for the next

possible. For details of the prevailing arrangements for handling redundant teachers, please refer to the relevant circular memorandum⁴ issued by EDB annually.

The approved number of P6 classes

13. To continue the stable learning environment at the upper primary levels, starting from the 2023/24 school year, the approved number of P6 classes in public sector schools is being carried forward from the approved number of P5 classes of the last school year and will not be affected by the actual enrolment. This arrangement is implemented for a trial period of three school years from the 2023/24 school year to the 2025/26 school year⁵.

Enrolment cap of P1 level

14. Currently, schools may use the number of school places between the enrolment cap and the standard class size⁶ (commonly referred to as “door-knocking places”) to admit students who were not allocated to the school under POA. Starting from the 2023/24 school year, EDB has implemented a trial arrangement of reducing the use of “door-knocking places” in P1 of public sector schools. For primary schools with a standard class size of 25 students, the average number of “door-knocking places” per class is changed from 2 to 1. In other words, the average number of students admitted using “door-knocking places”, who were not allocated to the school under POA, is changed to 1 per class. For primary schools with a standard class size of 30 students, the number of “door-knocking places” is changed from 3 to 2. Adjusting the number of students per class is beneficial for enhancing the quality of learning and teaching. This trial arrangement is implemented for three school years from the 2023/24 school year to the 2025/26 school year⁷.

school year due to the decline of P1 student population, for a maximum of three school years for each cohort will end after the 2024/25 school year as scheduled.

⁴ The relevant circular memorandum for the 2024/25 school year is No. 37/2024 “Arrangements for Redundant Teachers of Aided Primary Schools in the 2024/25 School Year”.

⁵ The details of the trial arrangement were announced by EDB in a letter addressed to aided primary schools on 30 May 2023.

⁶ For schools currently implementing small class teaching (SCT), the standard class size under POA is 25 per class, whereas that for other schools is 30 per class. The enrolment cap of each class is at 10% above the standard P1 class size. In other words, the enrolment cap per class is 27 for primary schools with 25 students as the standard class size and 33 for those with 30 students as the standard class size.

⁷ The details of the trial arrangement were announced by EDB in a letter addressed to aided primary schools on 30 May 2023.

15. Facing the structural decline in school-age population, EDB must make long-term and holistic planning, and act according to the circumstances to reduce the oversupply of school places in a steady and orderly manner according to the actual situations, so as to enhance the healthy development of the education ecosystem. Also, we have to take the opportunities to optimise the use of resources, with a view to enhancing the overall education quality. EDB will keep reviewing the related policies in coping with changes in school-age population and refining related arrangements from time to time, in order to ensure a healthy and sustainable education ecosystem.

Enquiries

16. For enquiries, please contact the respective Senior School Development Officers.

Ms W S LEUNG
for Permanent Secretary for Education

Refined Options and Measures for Aided Primary Schools to Plan their Way Forward

Foreword

1. EDB is committed to enhancing the quality of education, providing students with diversified learning opportunities, promoting their holistic development, and ensuring the optimal use of public resources. Schools are places where students may learn in groups. An appropriate number of students and classes should be maintained in schools so as to provide students with a conducive teaching environment and opportunities for them to learn in groups, to meet their diversified learning and holistic development needs. EDB actively supports SSBs and schools to plan ahead, responding to changes in the demand and supply of school places and enhancing the quality of education in tandem.
2. SSBs and schools should act according to the circumstances, taking into consideration the overall situation of Hong Kong, and the district and school circumstances, to plan for and formulate the directions most suitable for schools' long-term development, safeguarding the interest of student learning.
3. EDB is delighted to receive active responses from some SSBs. Appended below please find the details of the three options provided by EDB.

Option 1: Merger with other schools (available for all aided primary schools to apply)

4. SSBs and schools may consider merging with another school under the same or different SSB to enhance synergy and the quality of learning and teaching, ensuring the well-being of students. Students can continue their studies in the school⁸ after merger. As the concerned schools will no longer receive government subsidies starting from the N+3 school year, they have to complete the merger by the beginning of the N+3 school year at the latest.

⁸ Individual students may request EDB to provide placement arrangements to transfer them to other public sector schools to continue their studies based on their own situations.

5. SSBs and schools must propose to EDB the mode, schedule and all details of the merger for the consideration of whether the application can be approved. They have to obtain consent from the respective SSBs and Incorporated Management Committees (IMCs) / School Management Committees (SMCs). They should also inform the major stakeholders (including teachers and parents) and respond to their views and enquiries.
6. In order to facilitate the smooth implementation and transition of the approved merger:
 - (i) If a school is merged into another school so as to allow the same cohort of students to continue their primary school curriculum in the school after merger, the school operating subsidised P1 classes after merger may be granted **a one-off additional allowance in the amount of at most \$1 million** to cover the additional expenses incurred during the merger.
 - (ii) If, in the year(s) of merger, there are redundant teachers in the school that continues to operate P1 classes, it will be allowed to retain, for three years, the incumbent teachers on the approved teaching staff establishment⁹ related to the levels under merger of the two schools in the school year preceding the merger so that the school may have time to adjust the staff strength¹⁰ through natural wastage and other means.
 - (iii) EDB will discuss individual merger proposals with SSBs and provide facilitation as far as practicable.

⁹ Approved teaching staff establishment is stated in the approval letter on Class Organisation and Staff Establishment for the relevant school year. Teaching staff entitlement derived from the number of approved classes can be retained, while the additional teachers provided under specific improvement programmes will be subject to applicability. Teachers not holding a regular post and supply teachers appointed for temporary replacement (i.e. substituting for teacher on leave) are not included.

¹⁰ Schools have to follow the prevailing arrangement to handle the salary arrangement of redundant teachers and over-ranked teachers. For details of the prevailing arrangement for handling redundant teachers, please refer to the relevant circular memorandum issued by EDB annually. Schools should rectify the situation of redundant teacher before appointing any new teachers.

Option 2: Cessation of operation of school or particular level(s) (available for all aided primary schools to apply)

7. SSBs, taking into account the school's specific circumstances, may consider cessation of operation of the school or particular class level(s) for the sake of students' well-being. This allows students to switch to other schools for studies earlier and adapt to new learning environments. EDB will provide feasible and appropriate support regarding the arrangements for students transferring to other public sector schools. The school has to consult stakeholders, and with the consent of the SSB and the IMC/SMC, submit plans for cessation of operation of the school or particular class level(s) to EDB for approval.

Option 3: Operation of a privately-funded P1 class (Starting from the 2025/26 school year, Option 3 is only applicable for those schools which had not used this option in the past six school years to apply, counted from the school year when they were not approved to operate subsidised P1 classes in POA)

8. In the school year where schools are unable to operate any subsidised P1 classes, schools may apply to operate a privately-funded P1 class which should be run in private mode for students in that cohort to complete their 6-year primary curriculum. The SSB and/or the school must operate the class on a self-financing basis and should not impose course fees on students (if necessary, upon EDB's approval, the school may collect charges from students to cover the costs of teaching materials or related sundries expenses) or incur any additional government resources.
9. The SSB should provide all necessary funding for the privately-funded P1 class, taking into consideration the staff entitlement, required qualifications and professional training of teachers, and subsidies related to supporting students as stipulated in the Code of Aid, ensuring that students of the privately-funded P1 class have access to educational resources no less than students in other publicly-funded class levels.
10. The school should submit detailed plans, data, and justifications (consisting of four domains: management and organisation, learning and teaching, school ethos and student support, and student performance) to demonstrate its

capability to provide quality education to students, while the learning environment and facilities provided by the school should fulfill the requirements for students' holistic development. Since the cohort being privately-funded will not change its mode of operation under any circumstances, the SSB and the school have to submit detailed plans illustrating how the school operates the privately-funded class to provide 6-year primary curriculum to the cohort of students until their completion of the 6-year primary education. The school should inform the concerned parents of the proposal details, including the privately-funded P1 class which will not be subsidised by the government for a period of six consecutive years.

11. If the school is approved to operate a privately-funded P1 class, it can participate in POA again in the subsequent school year. If the school is allocated with sufficient number of students to operate a P1 class under POA in the subsequent school year, the school can then re-operate subsidised P1 class(es) in that school year. However, the originally privately-funded P1 class will continue being run in a private mode until the cohort of students completes the 6-year primary education.
12. However, if the school is not allocated with sufficient number of students to operate a subsidised P1 class in the subsequent POA, EDB will count the school year for which disbursement of subsidies to the school will be terminated (i.e. the N+3 school year) as from the first school year in which the school fails to operate a subsidised P1 class (i.e. the N school year). In addition, EDB will provide placement assistance service for students who have not yet completed their primary school curriculum, including students studying in the privately-funded class, and transfer them to other public sector schools to continue their studies.

Related arrangements for schools not approved to operate P1 subsidised classes under POA for the second time

13. For schools not approved to operate subsidised P1 classes under POA but subsequently approved to operate privately-funded P1 classes, if it fails to be approved to operate subsidised P1 classes under POA for the second time within the upcoming six school years, they cannot apply to EDB for the option of

operating privately-funded P1 classes again¹¹. If such school does not choose another option (i.e. either Option 1 or 2 as stipulated above) or if the selected option is not approved, EDB will cease providing any form of subsidies to the school starting from the third school year after the school is not approved to operate any subsidised P1 classes for the second time. By then, EDB will provide placement assistance service for students studying in the privately-funded classes (if any) and transfer them to other public sector schools to continue their studies.

¹¹ For instance, if a school is not approved to operate subsidised P1 classes under POA in the 2025/26 school year, while the school was approved to operate a privately funded P1 class in the past six school years (i.e. from the 2019/20 school year to the 2024/25 school year), the school concerned cannot choose to apply for Option 3 of operating a privately funded P1 class again in the 2025/26 school year (and so on).