Study on the Provision of International School Places in Hong Kong

Executive Summary

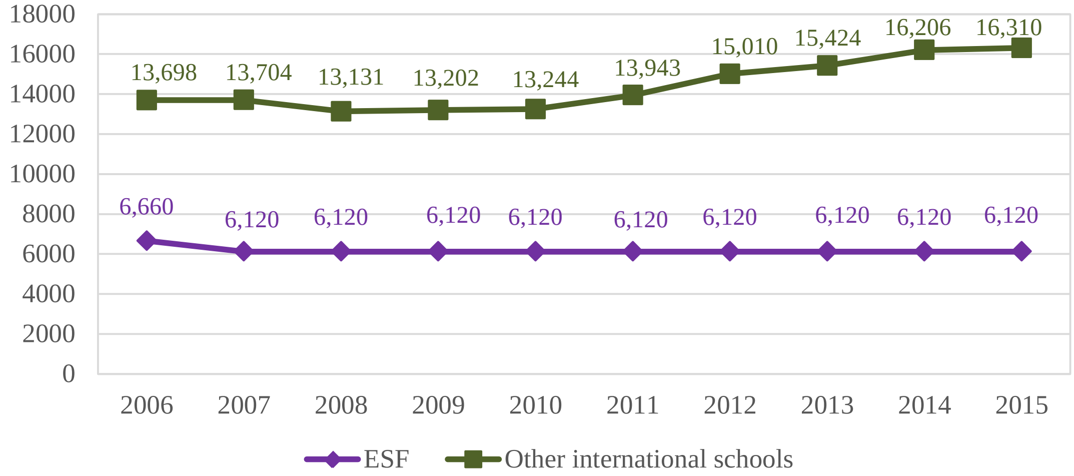
1. Following the first study on the Provision of International School Places completed in end-2012 (2012 Study), the Education Bureau (EDB) of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) commissioned the Policy 21 Limited (Policy 21) to conduct a new round of study (the current Study) to stocktake the latest position of the provision of international school places (i.e. situation of the 2015/16 school year), to project the future demand and supply of such school places from 2016/17 to 2022/23 (all similar expression in the Executive Summary refers to the relevant school year), and to collect information on the provision of special education services in international schools.

2. Under the current Study, Policy 21 had conducted a school survey, a parent survey and a business survey to collect quantitative data, as well as supplementary in-depth interviews with stakeholders to collect qualitative data. A total of 35 international schools, 454 parents and 3 077 business establishments participated in the surveys. In-depth interviews were conducted with principals of nine international schools, representatives from three consulates, the European Union Office to Hong Kong and Macau, five large business establishments and three chambers of commerce. Two focus group discussions with a total of 17 parents were also conducted. The major findings and recommendations by Policy 21 are summarised in the ensuing paragraphs.

Provision of International School Places

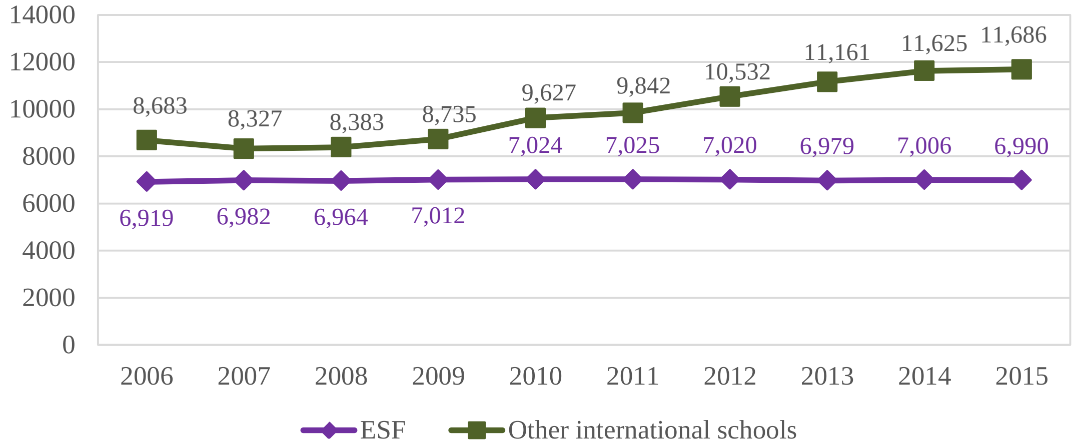
3. In 2015/16, there were 6 120 and 16 310 primary schools places provided in schools operated by the English Schools Foundation (ESF) and other international schools respectively, with respective take-up rates of 99.1% and 88.1%. For secondary schools, there were 6 990 and 11 686 places provided respectively in schools operated by ESF and other international schools, with respective take-up rates of 96.7% and 83.6%. Chart A and Chart B below show the provision of primary and secondary school places respectively in schools operated by ESF and other international schools from 2006/07 to 2015/16.

Chart A: Provision of primary school places in schools operated by ESF and other international schools from 2006/07 to 2015/16



Note: The year in the chart refers to the relevant school year. For example, "2015" represents the 2015/16 school year.

Chart B: Provision of secondary school places in schools operated by ESF and other international schools from 2006/07 to 2015/16



Note: The year in the chart refers to the relevant school year. For example, "2015" represents the 2015/16 school year.

Projection of Demand and Supply for International School Places

4. The number of non-local students enrolled in international primary schools is projected to increase from 16 281 from 2015/16 to 16 376 in 2022/23 (+1%); and from 13 599 in 2015/16 to 14 312 in 2022/23 (+5%) for international secondary schools. For local students, the number of students enrolled in international primary schools is projected to increase from 4 158 from 2015/16 to 4 984 in 2022/23 (+20%); and from 2 931 in 2015/16 to 6 012 in 2022/23 (+105%) for international secondary schools.

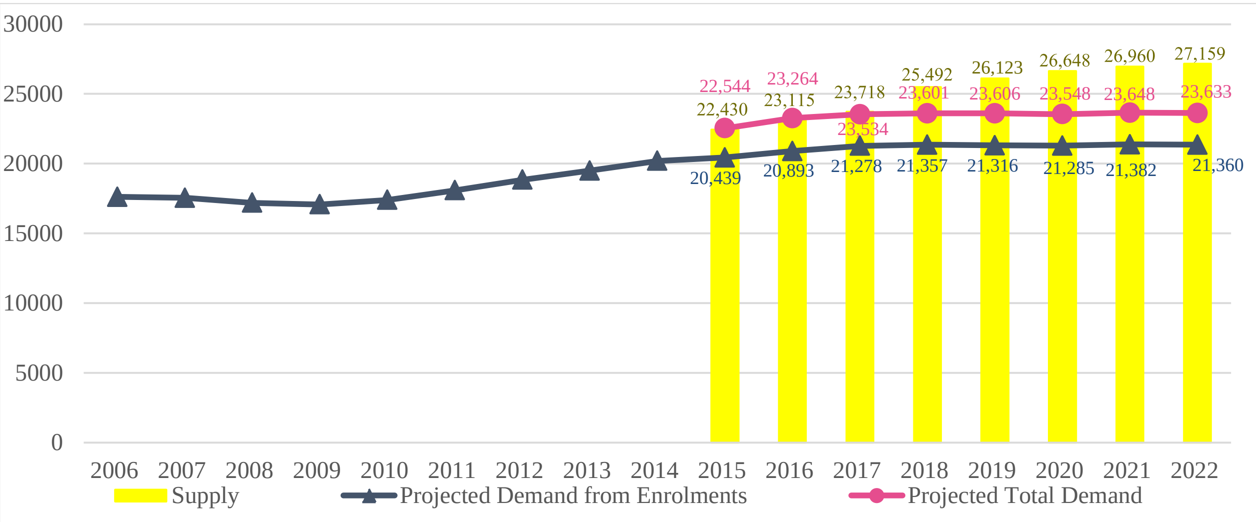
5. After factoring in the adjusted waiting list statistics of international school places to estimate the so-called “unmet demand” (from 2 105 in 2015/16 to 2 273 in 2022/23 (+8%) for international primary schools and from 333 in 2015/16 to 374 in 2022/23 (+12%) for international secondary schools), the total demand for international primary school places is projected to increase from 22 544 in 2015/16 to 23 633 in 2022/23, representing an increase of 5%. For international secondary school places, the total demand is projected to increase from 16 863 in 2015/16 to 20 698 in 2022/23, representing an increase of 23%.

6. The supply of international primary school places is projected to increase from 22 430 in 2015/16 to 27 159 in 2022/23 (+21%). For international secondary school places, the supply is projected to increase from 18 676 in 2015/16 to 20 717 in 2022/23 (+11%).

Adequacy of International School Places

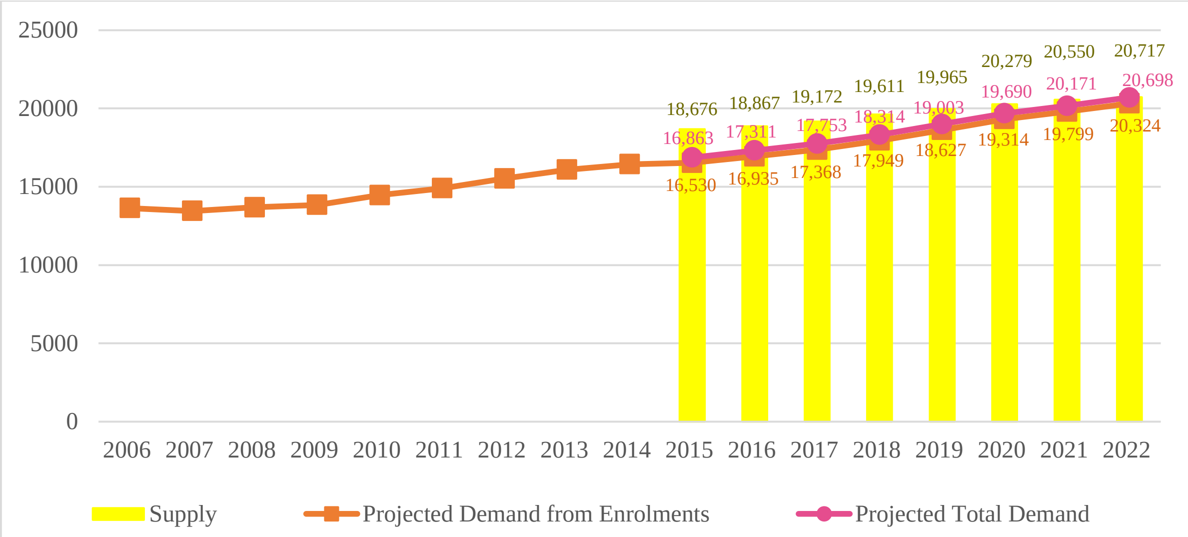
7. Based on the projections, in 2016/17, there will be an overall shortfall of 149 places for international primary schools and an overall surplus of 1 556 places for international secondary schools. The shortfall in primary school places will turn into surplus from 2017/18 while surplus in secondary school places is projected during the whole period of 2016/17 to 2022/23. In 2022/23, there will be an overall surplus of 3 526 places for international primary schools and 19 places for international secondary schools. Chart C and Chart D below show the projected demand and supply for international primary and secondary school places up to 2022/23 respectively.

Chart C: Projected demand and supply for international primary schools places



Note: The years in the chart refer to the relevant school years. For example, “2015” represents the 2015/16 school year.

Chart D: Projected demand and supply for international secondary schools places



Note: The years in the chart refer to the relevant school years. For example, "2015" represents the 2015/16 school year.

Provision of Special Education Services

8. The current Study collected some information on the provision of special education services in international schools through surveys. 85.7% of the enumerated schools had provided special education services to children with special educational needs (SEN). 19.4% of the enumerated schools that had admitted students with SEN collected additional fees from students receiving special education services provided by the schools.

9. The majority (93.5%) of the enumerated schools responded that they had encountered difficulties in providing special education services, such as difficulties in financing the cost involved in providing such services, as well as the need for intensive support services for some students with SEN require for which the school might not be able to fully meet the cost. 82.9% of the enumerated schools considered "funding specifically for special education services" the most important factor in order to encourage them to accept students with SEN, followed by "if parents are willing to pay additional service charge for the special education services required by their children" and "(more) staff with training in special education could be employed".

10. Only 24.7% and 4.9% of the parents with SEN children studying in mainstream international primary and secondary schools respectively preferred or highly preferred the ESF special school at the time of application, whereas the corresponding percentage for parents with SEN children studying in the ESF special school is 90.9%. This indicates that most of the current students with SEN can be accommodated by mainstream international schools.

11. For parents with SEN children studying in the ESF special school who have indicated that both international and local schools are viable options[1], the main reasons for their not sending their children to local schools were "SEN services provided by international schools are better" (69.8% of parents concerned), "studying at international schools will offer better prospect for my child" (50.0% of parents concerned) and "difficulties envisaged after admission to a local school" (50.0% of parents concerned). For parents with SEN children studying in mainstream international primary or secondary schools who have indicated that both international and local schools are viable options[2], one of the main reasons was "studying at international schools will offer better prospect for my child" (40.8% and 81.4% of parents concerned respectively). Besides, about 59.2% and 18.6% of them respectively pointed out that being non-Hong Kong Permanent Resident (HKPR) was the reason for not sending their children to local schools.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

12. Since no shortfall in both primary and secondary international school places is projected by 2022/23, the Government should closely monitor the supply and demand of international school places while facilitating the development of the international school sector.

Recommendation 2:

13. In the findings of the current Study, tuition fee does not stand out to be an important factor affecting parents' choice of school. However, from the perspective of business establishments, lower fee level will help staff recruited or relocated from outside Hong Kong find international school places for their children. It is therefore recommended that amongst other factors, considerations also be given to the proposed fee level in future allocation of green field sites and/or vacant school premises for development of new international schools.

Recommendation 3:

14. The current Study is not able to provide a comprehensive picture regarding the provision of special education services in international schools in Hong Kong, while it is noted that there were some concerns in this aspect. It is therefore recommended that the Government should conduct a further study on the provision of special education services in international schools in Hong Kong.

[1] In the parent survey, 4 parents with SEN children studying in the ESF special school considered both international schools and local schools viable options. Caution should be taken care in interpreting the figures due to the small sample size.

[2] In the parent survey, 6 and 7 parents with SEN children studying in mainstream international schools at primary and secondary levels respectively considered both international schools and local schools viable options. Caution should be taken care in interpreting the figures due to the small sample size.

Recommendation 4:

15. Given that the provision of special education services in international schools may influence the decision of some non-local families on whether to come to / stay in Hong Kong, it is recommended that the Government should continue to encourage the provision of special education services by existing and new mainstream international schools to cater for students with mild to moderate SEN in an integrated setting.

Recommendation 5:

16. Some parents with SEN children studying in mainstream international schools may find both international and local schools viable options, and findings of the current study showed that being non-HKPR was the reason for not sending their children to local schools (including local special schools) though in actual fact, eligible non-local non-HKPR residents in Hong Kong (e.g. non-HKPR children holding a dependent visa) are eligible to study in local schools. Hence, it is recommended that the Government should consider publicising the admission policy of local schools so that parents of non-local children may consider sending their children to local schools as an option.

February 2017