

Speech by Mr Raymond H C Wong, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education
at the Opening Ceremony of the Reading Fair 2010
on Saturday, 24 April 2010

(English translated version)

Dear guests, school heads and teachers,

Good morning. Today, I have much pleasure in attending the Opening Ceremony of the Reading Fair 2010.

2. Yesterday was the twenty-third of April. It marked the anniversary of the decease of the great English writer William Shakespeare. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has specially designated this day every year to be the World Book Day to encourage the world to promote the culture and explore the fun of reading. Reading, in fact, not only brings boundless joy, but also strengthens students' language ability and enhances their overall learning performance. The Reading Fair organised by the Education Bureau (EDB) also aims at providing a platform for sharing of experience and exchange of ideas among the education sector to foster professional development in this area.

3. To enable students to enjoy the fun and benefits of reading, the EDB has always encouraged students to read more and read widely so as to nurture the interest of reading extensively. Students must master the skills of "Reading to Learn" in order to enhance their overall capacity for life-long learning and whole-person development.

4. The education sector has been working together wholeheartedly to promote reading culture over the past few years. The *Basic Education Curriculum Guide* issued by the Curriculum Development Council in 2002 identifies “Reading to Learn” as one of the four key tasks in the Curriculum Reform. To this end, the EDB has put in substantial resources to encourage schools and society to develop a reading culture. Many schools have included “Reading to Learn” as a key area of development and formulated school-based reading plans to offer diversified reading activities. It is really encouraging to see that these schools have inspired their students to cultivate an interest in reading and make reading their habits with the support of parents and the community.

5. Let me take some recent studies as an example. In the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Hong Kong students’ reading literacy advanced from the tenth in 2003 to the third in 2006. Our Primary 4 students also did very well in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). Their overall performance in reading improved by leaps and bounds from the fourteenth in 2001 to the second in 2006. The Second Study of Chinese and English Reading Literacy of Primary School Students in Hong Kong published in July 2008 also showed that our Primary 4 students had made continuous improvement in Chinese and English reading literacy. Twenty-four percent of students participated in the Study had their results exceeded the international English mean score. In other words, they reached the reading level of using English as the mother tongue. Among them, 9% even got scores in English higher than the mean score in Chinese. The excellent performance of our students shows the effectiveness of the various curriculum reform measures.

6. Although Hong Kong students' reading literacy ranks high in many international studies, we still need to make continuous efforts in promoting language education, cross-curricular reading and home-school co-operation in order to facilitate life-long learning for our students.

7. "Reading to Learn" is crucial to enhancing language ability. In the course of promoting reading culture, schools need the concerted efforts of teachers to help students turn reading into a tool for constructing knowledge. In this regard, this year's Reading Fair features two themes – "whole-school language policy" and "cross-curricular reading". Following the Reading Fair 2009 last April and the Knowledge Fair 2009 last November, today's event is the second sharing session we organise to support schools and teachers in taking forward the fine-tuned medium of instruction (MOI) arrangements.

8. The fine-tuned MOI arrangements will be implemented starting from the 2010/11 school year at Secondary 1 level. Schools may, having regard to students' abilities and schools' circumstances, make professional judgements on the appropriate MOI arrangements for junior secondary students in line with their whole-school language policy. Possible options include using the mother tongue to teach all subjects, using the mother tongue or English to teach different subjects and providing total English immersion.

9. MOI arrangements are only part of the whole-school language policy, which includes other complementary arrangements and support measures. The whole-school language policy should focus not only on the amount of English teaching, but also on the overall curriculum planning and language education under the New Senior Secondary Academic

Structure, with reading strategies included. Schools must offer a coherent and holistic curriculum to ensure learning effectiveness and nurture students to become proficient in both Chinese and English.

10. To support primary schools, we have introduced the English Enhancement Grant Scheme for Primary Schools and invited applications from them at an earlier time. In parallel, we are planning to seek approval from the Legislative Council for funding injection into the Language Fund so that secondary schools can launch or refine their school-based measures under the English Enhancement Scheme to tie in with their fine-tuned MOI arrangements to further enhance cross-curricular English learning. I hope that schools participating in today's event will draw experience from each other in preparing for the implementation of school-based plans according to individual school circumstances.

11. I would also like to take this opportunity to talk about our support to facilitate schools' implementation of the fine-tuned MOI arrangements. We will continue to provide schools and teachers with diversified professional support. To start off, seminars and workshops will be held in early May to increase teachers' awareness of using English to teach non-language subjects. Other programmes such as in-service training courses for teachers will also be rolled out from June onwards.

12. Sharing is a shortcut to professional development. I am most grateful to the twelve schools today for sharing with us their successful experience in promoting reading culture which is accumulated through years of hard work so we can learn and grow together.

13. Lastly, I wish our fellow educators a fruitful day here at the Reading Fair 2010. I also hope that you will bring back others' successful

experience to your schools for colleagues who cannot be here today. Let's work together to develop reading strategies across the curriculum in support of our diversified MOI arrangements. Thank you.