

For discussion
on 15 January 2009

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Fine-tuning the Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the proposed framework of fine-tuning the medium of instruction (MOI) for secondary schools after consultation with stakeholders.

Background

2. On 17 July 2008, the Education Bureau (EDB) reported to this Panel on the progress of fine-tuning the MOI arrangements for secondary schools. At the meeting, we shared with Members and deputations our preliminary views on the direction of the fine-tuning and received general support from the deputations in attendance. Since then, EDB has been engaging various stakeholders in discussing the proposed fine-tuning framework. The implementation details will be worked out upon finalization of the framework.

Objectives of Fine-tuning

3. Hong Kong needs to enhance its position as a modern international city and a global financial centre for sustained economic growth. Hong Kong also has a key role to play in contributing to the prosperity and development of our country. For these, we must equip

our students with the requisite proficiency in both Chinese and English. Further, we are entering a new era as globalization has taken hold, and our younger generation will meet unprecedented challenges of the ever-changing environment. Our education system, including the curriculum and pedagogies, has to progress in tandem. The New Senior Secondary academic structure to be implemented this September will provide a wide and broad curriculum so as to enable our students to achieve all-round development and to lay the foundation for life-long learning. To learn how to learn, our students must master the skills to collate information, identify and analyze the issues involved, and articulate their opinions. All these require a good command of both Chinese and English.

4. The success of acquiring a high proficiency in a foreign language hinges upon two important elements, namely motivation and language-rich environment. Schools provide a very suitable environment to expose our students to the English language. Against this background, we propose to fine-tune the MOI for secondary schools and give students more opportunities of exposure to English in the classroom so as to provide the environment for English learning.

5. Our aim is not to overturn the MOI policy. The policy has laid the foundation for mother-tongue teaching, which is effective in facilitating students' learning of content subjects. What we hope to achieve is to enable each and every student of all secondary schools to have more opportunities to use English to learn subject knowledge in a progressive manner that best suit their learning needs and ability, thus

increasing their exposure to English. Specifically, the objectives of our fine-tuning of the MOI policy are as follows -

- (a) while promoting mother tongue teaching, to increase the exposure of junior secondary students to English inside the classroom, so as to facilitate their transition to senior secondary and/or post-secondary education for which EMI is primarily adopted;
- (b) while ensuring effective learning of students, to allow secondary schools greater autonomy and room for development in selecting the appropriate MOI with regard to students' learning ability, teachers' capability and the requirements of individual subjects; and
- (c) to minimise the labeling effect arising from the classification of secondary schools into Chinese-medium schools ("CMI schools") and English-medium schools ("EMI schools"), with a view to ensuring that all students are motivated and confident in learning English and facilitating the steady development of mother-tongue teaching in an environment free of negative labeling.

Proposed Fine-tuning Framework

6. To safeguard students' interests and ensure teaching and learning effectiveness, we will uphold the three prescribed criteria of "student ability", "teacher capability" and "support measures for schools" for adopting EMI teaching as recommended under the Education Commission Report of 2005 on Review of Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools and the Secondary School Places Allocation ("the 2005 Report"). Under the prescribed criteria, the proposed fine-tuning

MOI framework is as follows -:

- (a) There will no longer be pure bifurcation of schools into CMI and EMI schools. If the average proportion of Secondary (S)1 intake of a school admitted to a class belonging to the “top 40%” group in the previous two years reaches 85% of the size of a class, we plan to provide the school with full flexibility in determining the MOI arrangement in the class concerned. The School may exercise such flexibility in the form of “by class”, “by group”, “by subject” and “by session” arrangements, having regard to its own circumstances, including those of the needs of students, the capability and readiness of their teachers and school-based support measures. In other words, the spectrum of MOI arrangements could be the widest possible, including total CMI, EMI in a few subjects and EMI by immersion.
- (b) For other classes, students will mainly learn in their mother-tongue. In order to enhance the English learning environment for those students, our intention is to increase the percentage of total lesson time (excluding the lesson time for the English Language subject) allowed for English-medium extended learning activities (“ELA”) from the original 15%, 20% and 25% for S1, S2 and S3 respectively as recommended in the EC Report to a uniform proportion of 25% for each of the three levels. With this increase in ELA time, and taking together the lesson time of English Language subject which normally makes up about another 25% of the total lesson time, the English learning environment of schools will be significantly enhanced.
- (c) In order to provide students in those classes mentioned in (b)

above with more motivation to learn English in content subject and to facilitate them to progress to English-learning at senior secondary levels, we are prepared to allow schools to transform the above-mentioned 25% ELA time into the adoption of EMI in individual subjects. In considering whether such “by-subject” arrangement should be adopted, schools should take into account the needs and learning progress of their students, the readiness and capability of teachers to ensure that the arrangement would not undermine the interest of students in learning.

Ensuring the proper delivery of the fine-tuning arrangements

Teacher capability

7. We will adhere to the English qualification requirement for content subject teachers adopting EMI in teaching as set out in EC’s Report of 2005. Teachers’ capability in teaching through EMI is crucial in ensuring teaching and learning effectiveness. The Working Group of the Review of SSPA and MOI has had this fully deliberated and made a vehement recommendation in the Report. The requirement to uphold the quality of teaching has been generally supported by the school sector and unanimously supported by parents.

Monitoring

8. Under the proposed framework, schools will be held accountable for their MOI arrangements in relation to the learning outcomes of students. In line with the School Development and Accountability (SDA) Framework, schools will be required to include in their school development plan their MOI policy and rationale for the arrangement(s) adopted, teachers’ readiness in adopting EMI and school-based support

measures to facilitate teaching and learning of content subjects in English if there is a change of MOI arrangements.

9. In terms of monitoring, the EDB will continue to conduct external assessment and step up focused inspections under the existing mechanism in order to help schools review the effectiveness of their MOI arrangements. It is planned to set up an advisory panel drawn from the education sector to consider observations and findings made at the focused inspections, and then make recommendations to EDB on follow-up actions. In case of schools' non-compliance, we will issue warning letters to the schools concerned and make it known to the public.

Transparency of information

10. Schools will be required to report their MOI arrangements to EDB and to keep parents and the public well-informed of their choice of MOI for teaching individual content subjects and whether ELA will be conducted for individual content subjects. Should a school claim to adopt EMI for a content subject, the medium for delivering the content materials in the lesson, the basic textbook(s), assignments for learning reinforcement and assessment / evaluation for learning should primarily be in English. Similarly, for schools adopting CMI for a content subject, the medium for delivering the content subjects in the lesson, the basic textbook(s), assignments for learning reinforcement and assessment/evaluation for learning should primarily be in Chinese. In devising the School Profile for S1 admission, we will require all schools to release such information in a standard template to ensure consistency and transparency, so as to facilitate parents in making informed choices of schools. That said, we stress that MOI is only one of the many considerations that parents should take into account in making school

choices; schools' measures and vision in supporting teaching and learning and student development should be the key factors.

Consultation with stakeholders

11. The MOI issue has always been controversial, both within and across stakeholder groups. In order to better understand the practicality and acceptability of the fine-tuning proposals at the school level, we have conducted wide consultation with different groups of stakeholders since we last reported to this Panel in July 2008. It is encouraging to see that most of the stakeholders agree that there is a need for fine-tuning. Many support the objectives and the overall direction of the refinement. Notwithstanding this, we are aware that stakeholders hold diverse views on some of the implementation details of the fine-tuning arrangements. In attempting to gain consensus over the fine-tuning arrangements, we must not compromise students' learning effectiveness. The key issues are outlined in the following paragraphs.

Multi-labeling on schools

12. During our discussion with stakeholders, some school councils have voiced concerns on how to address the possible labeling effect over the so-called "by class" arrangement as mentioned in paragraph 5(a) above. We have deliberated over these concerns thoroughly and have addressed them in the current proposed framework. The proposed arrangement does not call for a simple segregation of classes using either CMI or EMI within a school as envisaged by the EC in 2005. We are

only proposing to give a school more flexibility in using EMI for one or more subjects for different classes. Schools meeting the criteria for EMI teaching may make reference to their own circumstances and students' needs to put in place the appropriate MOI arrangements in a flexible manner. In other words, the choice and number of subjects taught in EMI is likely to vary between classes within individual schools as well as among schools. This is particularly so when we are also encouraging schools to strengthen ELA for those classes which are adopting mother-tongue teaching. As a result, there would be diversified MOI arrangements across the school sector, rendering any crude labeling impracticable. Hence, it will not be meaningful to conduct comparisons among schools purely based on the number of classes with content subjects taught in English.

Within-school labeling

13. Similarly, the concerns expressed by some over the issue of within-school labeling should be addressed under the current proposed flexible arrangement. All along, it is not uncommon for schools to practise some form of class streaming according to students' academic ability upon their entrance to S1. In fact, the number of content subjects a school offers and the content of a subject to be taught are subject to school-based decision. It is generally accepted that the content/programme of the content subjects as well as the teaching strategies including deployment of resources to support students may vary among classes of the same level. We do not envisage significant transfer of students between classes upon their progression to S2 and S3 purely on the ground of MOI given that S1 to S3 is a continuous learning stage for students. Indeed this is supported by the small incidence of transfer between classes adopting different MOI across senior secondary levels at

present. Hence, providing schools with flexibility in the choice of the teaching and learning medium should make little difference to schools' existing practice of class streaming.

Student ability requirement

14. In order to facilitate school planning and to provide schools with certainty in mapping out school-based MOI arrangements irrespective of any possible changes of the S1 intake across the years, we will adhere to the student profile of individual schools to be adopted at the point of implementation of fine-tuning for a period of six years. Noting the view of individual schools that there may be a possible change in the student intake in future and with the anticipation of improvement in English proficiency of our primary students following our efforts in enhancing the learning and teaching of English at the primary level (as detailed in paragraphs 19 to 23 below), we do not rule out the possibility to review the "student ability" criterion within the six-year period if proven necessary by the education sector.

Teachers' workload

15. Without an energetic, dedicated and professional force of teachers, the fine-tuning would not yield its expected benefits. While teachers may have concern on the possible increase in workload, it is not uncommon for teachers to adopt diverse different teaching pedagogies and support measures for different classes/groups, particularly when different MOI has already been adopted by schools for different classes at senior secondary levels. Teachers of junior secondary levels teaching

content subjects have been preparing students to bridge over to the senior secondary curriculum in English in one form or another including ELA while teaching primarily in CMI. We should emphasize again that under the proposed fine-tuning framework, schools should decide on their MOI arrangements with due regard to their school circumstances including teachers' capability and capacity.

16. In order to enhance the quality of learning and teaching in the classroom, we will continue to accord priority to teachers' capacity-building. We plan to provide the necessary training and professional support for content subject teachers who are switching from the teaching in Chinese to English in order to strengthen their teaching strategies. Supply teachers will be made available to encourage content subject teachers to participate in courses designed for their professional development.

17. With diversification of MOI arrangements, we are also contemplating another longitudinal study, in addition to the current study on ELA, to analyze the effectiveness of and collect data on different teaching modes. This will be a large-scale study to develop effective teaching resources and provide professional support to about 200 schools and their teachers.

18. We envisage that a total of about \$640 million will be set aside during the five-year period from 2010 to 2014 for the measures set out in paragraphs 16 and 17 above.

Improvement of students' English proficiency

19. We note the concern of the community about the English proficiency of our students. It is therefore of paramount importance to enhance the teaching and learning of English in primary schools so as to build a solid foundation for our students. Meanwhile, building on the success of schools in promoting Reading-to-Learn in the curriculum reform, Reading across the Curriculum has been recommended as one of the key tasks for the 2nd 5-year curriculum reform plan. In-service professional development courses have been regularly organized to encourage the collaboration of language teachers, librarians and content subject teachers in taking forward reading across the curriculum as well as aligning the teaching of language curricula with those of relevant content subjects. Whole-school language policy and leadership are conducive to successful fine-tuning of MOI in schools. There would also be in-service courses targeted at school principals and/or senior teachers who are assigned the responsibility to co-ordinate the changes.

20. Teachers' professional development is an indispensable component to make our endeavor a success. To attract suitable candidates for the teaching profession, we plan to establish a scholarship for qualified school graduates planning to pursue a relevant degree and teacher training in English Language and undertake to teach in a local school, preferably primary schools, for at least three years. For serving primary school teachers not yet attaining the qualifications set out by the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR)¹, we propose to offer courses on pedagogy and subject knowledge for them.

¹ A language teacher should hold a Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree majoring in the relevant language subject; or both a first degree majoring in the relevant language subject and a Postgraduate Diploma or Certificate in Education (PGDE or PCEd) majoring in the same language subject.

Supply teachers will be provided to enable schools to release them for the training.

21. We will also draw upon the experience of the Secondary English Enhancement Scheme and propose similar measures at the primary level. Schools will be encouraged to formulate their school-based proposals in enhancing the English environment. We plan to invite the Quality Education Fund to incorporate English enhancement as one of its priority areas.

22. Further, in order to capitalize on the enthusiasm of working or retired professionals in promoting English and to maximize students' exposure to English in schools, we propose to set up a network of volunteers to conduct English activities with students. EDB will coordinate existing efforts of individual schools to embrace other schools within the same district or school sponsoring body and collate efforts currently made under different platforms (e.g. the Reading Ambassador Programme of SCOLAR, the community service programmes of individual organizations, etc.). Relevant training in equipping the parents and voluntary workers with the necessary skills will be provided.

23. The scholarship mentioned in paragraph 20 above is estimated to incur a recurrent cost of \$14 million per annum. As regards the above measures to promote professional development of teachers to enhance learning and teaching of English in primary schools, we envisage that around \$310 million will be incurred during the five-year period from 2010 to 2014.

Way forward

24. Our goal is to “uphold mother-tongue teaching and enhance

proficiency in Chinese and English”. We believe that the fine-tuned MOI policy framework is a positive step towards this goal in our pursuit of quality education. The successful implementation of the fine-tuned arrangement requires the collaborative efforts of the Administration, the education sector, parents and the public at large. We appeal to the parents and the community to give their support to our schools in making school-based professional MOI arrangement for the betterment of our students. Subject to further discussion with stakeholders on the implementation details, it is planned that the fine-tuned MOI arrangements will take effect from the 2010/11 school year. Bearing in mind that schools should be given sufficient time to consult their own stakeholders on the school-based MOI arrangements under the prescribed criteria and that parents should be informed of the arrangements for the purpose of S1 admission for the 2010/2011 school year, we plan to finalize the fine-tuned MOI framework by end-May 2009.

Education Bureau

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