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**Forum on Fine-tuning the Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools and
Enhancing the Teaching of English in Primary Schools
hosted by the Secretary for Education for Heads of Primary Schools**

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Secretary for Education

(Translated from Chinese)

Dear School Heads and Teachers,

Preamble

I am delighted to be here with our primary school heads and teachers to share my thoughts on fine-tuning the medium of instruction (MOI) for secondary schools and exchange views on how to enhance the teaching of English in primary schools.

2. Hong Kong is an Asian international city as well as a global financial centre. To maintain and strengthen this role, we must equip our students with high proficiency in both Chinese and English. Fine-tuning the MOI for secondary schools will undoubtedly increase students' exposure to English in classroom at junior secondary levels, but what is more important is how to help them acquire a good command of English at primary levels.

3. Before sharing with you my thoughts on fine-tuning the MOI for secondary schools, I would like to talk about the drug problem on campus first. The recent incidents of drug abuse in schools serve as a timely reminder for us to step up our efforts in tackling this problem.

4. I call upon everyone in the education sector to work together with the Education Bureau (EDB) in fostering a drug-free culture under the "Healthy Campus" policy for students to develop healthy living habits. I also call upon schools to integrate discipline and guidance to enhance all-round development of our students.

5. The EDB, the Narcotics Division of Security Bureau and other related government departments will support and work with you. Our colleagues in the

regional education offices will join hands with local organisations and schools to promote preventive drug education and fight against youth drug abuse at district level.

6. Now, let me return to the subject of fine-tuning the MOI for secondary schools. In the course of fine-tuning, the prime concern is the learning effectiveness of all students. In this connection, there are six crucial factors for me to consider as follows:

- (a) Any arrangement made must be in the best interest of students.
- (b) Mother-tongue teaching has borne fruits. “Upholding mother-tongue teaching and enhancing proficiency in Chinese and English” is a correct policy objective.
- (c) To cater for student diversity and learning effectiveness, we should uphold the basic criteria of “student ability”, “teacher capability” and “support measures for schools” for adopting English as the medium of instruction (EMI) at junior secondary levels as recommended in the “Report on Review of Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools and Secondary School Places Allocation” published by the Education Commission in 2005.
- (d) Schools are in the best position to keep track of students’ learning progress and teach according to diverse abilities. Accordingly, schools meeting the above criteria should be allowed to determine their professional school-based MOI arrangements.
- (e) Schools must maintain high transparency in their school-based MOI policy so that parents are well-informed of the MOI arrangement for each subject and have their right to know protected.
- (f) Upon implementation of the fine-tuning arrangements, the EDB will monitor students’ learning effectiveness under the current “School Development and Accountability” (SDA) framework.

7. The existing policy has laid the foundation for mother-tongue teaching which is effective in facilitating students’ learning of content subjects. Over the last decade, many schools adopting Chinese as the medium of instruction (CMI) have done an excellent job in enhancing the teaching efficacy, thus improving students’ learning ability and promoting their all-round development. However, primary schools mainly adopt CMI at present whereas EMI dominates senior secondary and post-secondary education. So, while promoting mother-tongue teaching, we hope to enable each and every junior secondary student of all individual schools to have more exposure to

English inside the classroom for a smooth transition to senior secondary and post-secondary education.

MOI Options Available for Schools

8. Under the fine-tuning arrangements, we will adopt a six-year planning cycle based on schools' Secondary 1 (S1) intake data in the Secondary School Places Allocation exercise over the previous two years to facilitate schools to formulate school-based MOI arrangements upon S1 admission with regard to the learning progress and needs of their new entrants. Schools may determine the suitable modes of MOI arrangements with reference to the abilities, interest and expectations of students (such as learning daily conversational English, practical workplace English or academic English) as well as circumstances of the school (including students' learning effectiveness, teachers' capability, school's language policy and other support measures, etc.)

9. According to the fine-tuning arrangements, all schools are allowed to conduct English-medium extended learning activities (ELA) up to a proportion of 25% of the total lesson time while teaching primarily in the mother tongue.

10. Besides, with students' learning effectiveness as the prime concern, schools may adopt EMI teaching for key learning areas or subjects up to a maximum of 25% of the total lesson time, depending on the availability of teachers and other support measures. This is known as the "allocation of time to subjects" arrangement.

11. In addition, according to the "differential teaching and student-focused" principle, if schools have admitted a critical mass of students capable of learning in both the mother tongue and English, they will have more options to use the mother tongue or English in teaching subjects other than Chinese Language and English Language.

Diversified MOI Arrangements and Well-informed School Choices

12. Under our proposed fine-tuning arrangements, there will be no more bifurcation of schools into CMI and EMI schools. Instead, there will be diversified options and combinations of MOI arrangements. MOI is a teaching strategy in essence. Schools meeting the prescribed criteria for fine-tuning still have to teach according to the abilities, interest and expectations of their students as before. For schools with similar enrolment profile, they should take into account their own circumstances and students' needs before deciding their teaching strategies to cater for student diversity

such as making adaptation in teaching contents, designing different tasks and assessment methods as well as giving different feedback. If schools pursue EMI-dominant teaching without considering the essence of MOI, they are putting the cart before the horse. They should not present an account of their school-based MOI arrangements only by providing rough figures or general names of the classes they are allowed to operate. Neither should these be used as student recruitment slogans which may lead to unhealthy competition. Similarly, it will not be practical to use the number of EMI subjects as the only yardstick to compare different schools while ignoring their uniqueness.

13. Diversified MOI arrangements at junior secondary levels will provide each and every junior secondary student with a wide spectrum of English learning opportunities. Parents will not judge a school merely by its MOI when making their school choices. Instead, they will consider more thoroughly whether the schools' ethos, characteristics, facilities and support measures will suit their children's abilities and interest to facilitate their all-round development.

14. All of you, as primary school heads, know the best of the learning needs and progress of your Primary 6 students. Parents also have confidence in schools' professional advice. I would like to call upon every one of you to help parents adopt an open and impartial attitude in making their school choices with your professional knowledge. On this basis, our proposed fine-tuning arrangements will be more meaningful and school-based MOI decisions of our secondary schools will surely be more suitable.

15. To safeguard parents' right to know, secondary schools will be required to make known their education philosophy and characteristics (including MOI arrangements and details) so that parents can understand how schools educate students into good citizens and then make an informed school choice for their children. We are liaising with the Committee on Home-School Co-operation to devise a standard template in their Secondary School Profiles to specify the choice of CMI or EMI of each school in each subject, including the lesson time for ELA in subjects taught in CMI, so as to provide clear information for parents.

Assuring Teaching Effectiveness through Professional Judgement and Accountability

16. It is natural for parents to be concerned about the learning outcome of their children. While assuring teaching effectiveness, we should also allow schools to

exercise professional judgement. Upon implementation of the fine-tuning arrangements in schools, the EDB will monitor students' learning effectiveness under the current SDA framework. Taking into account the time for schools to devise and implement their teaching plans and the need for sustainable development of their language policy, we will provide various entry points for the purpose of quality assurance.

17. First, secondary schools will need to submit basic information on their planned MOI arrangements (e.g. the MOI adopted for each subject in each class) to the EDB for reference. Besides, under the SDA framework, schools are required to provide their language policy, proposed MOI arrangements and justifications to their stakeholders and to facilitate the stakeholders of the school to take part in decision-making as far as possible. Moreover, schools are required to review the effectiveness of their MOI through a self-evaluation mechanism of "Planning-Implementation-Evaluation" and present the findings in school reports. The EDB will continue to conduct external assessment and focused inspection on schools under the established mechanism to review their work and effectiveness and give suggestions for improvement. Here, I would like to call upon every one of you, as school heads and teachers, to help parents understand better the SDA framework and the rationale for our school monitoring. It is the collaboration of all stakeholders that forms the monitoring basis for the fine-tuned MOI in secondary schools.

Guiding Principles for ELA and "Transferring ELA time to Subjects" Arrangement

18. The MOI adopted by a school should be in line with its school-based language policy. We plan to organise a series of workshops for schools in the coming one or two months to enable them to maintain a coherent and holistic curriculum in line with their overall learning and teaching objectives when determining the MOI at junior secondary levels. We are particularly concerned about the implementation of ELA in schools and the relevant lesson time (i.e. 25% of the total lesson time excluding the lesson time for the English Language subject) allocated to EMI teaching in individual content subjects. We will conduct a large-scale study inviting about 200 schools to participate. Support will be provided for them to develop teaching materials and evaluate modes of ELA so as to disseminate good practices to other schools.

19. To safeguard learning effectiveness, secondary schools should consider the following guiding principles in deciding whether and in which subject(s) they will adopt the "transferring ELA time to subjects" arrangement:

- (a) As the MOI is inseparable from the holistic curriculum, secondary schools must consider whether the adoption of EMI in no more than two subjects will be consistent with their overall curriculum and whether they can maintain a coherent and holistic curriculum before making any decision.
- (b) Being student-focused, schools should give careful consideration to students' abilities (including their needs, interest and expectations) in addition to school-based circumstances (including teachers' capability and workload, prevalence of a culture of lesson observation and cross-panel collaboration, experience in EMI arrangements by class / group streaming at senior secondary levels, students' learning effectiveness, etc.).
- (c) Schools should develop clear indicators to evaluate academic and language learning performance so that students will be able to bridge over to senior secondary and post-secondary education and prepare themselves for future careers. With reference to these effectiveness indicators, schools can also conduct self-evaluation and review to build up a challenging and interactive classroom environment favourable to students' learning under the "allocation of time to subjects" arrangement.

As you are aware, schools are allowed to adopt this arrangement for no more than two content subjects under the current proposal.

20. We will arrange for professional discussion with schools based on the above-mentioned information they have submitted to see if they need to modify their plans. We will also share with schools effective teaching practices and exemplars. We plan to hold sharing sessions at a half-yearly interval for schools to exchange their experience. In addition to monitoring, we aim to foster school development with the support of a variety of services. In order to optimise the fine-tuning arrangements, we will deploy resources to provide training programmes for serving subject teachers of secondary schools and make supply teachers available.

Enhanced Support for Primary Schools in English Teaching

21. I believe that every school head agrees that besides fine-tuning the MOI for secondary schools, we must strive to convince parents that teaching all content subjects in English may not be suitable for every student. To enhance students' English proficiency, we have to start from the basics.

22. Years of good efforts by our primary schools have proven to be fruitful with a rising trend in our students' learning effectiveness. According to the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2006, the Chinese reading literacy of Hong Kong Primary 4 (P4) students ranked the second in the world. Based on the PIRLS, the University of Hong Kong proceeded with the Study of Chinese and English Reading Literacy. It was found that 24% of P4 students attending the study reached the same reading level of those using English as their mother tongue. The result represented a significant improvement when compared with that of the same study in 2004 (i.e. 8%).

23. As we can see, a culture of "Reading to Learn" has taken root under the curriculum reform. Not only have students improved their mother tongue, they have also performed very well in English reading. However, we are concerned about the differences among individual students in learning English. Therefore, while proposing the fine-tuning, we will strengthen our support for primary schools to further enhance the teaching and learning of English. We will do our best to strengthen students' language foundation, develop their language proficiency, enhance their confidence in using English and improve their self-learning ability.

24. Language learning must start with reading. "Reading to Learn" is therefore one of the "Four Key Tasks" of the curriculum reform. I am glad to see that schools have included "Reading Workshops" in developing their school-based English Language curriculum. By strengthening training in reading strategies, students will have more exposure to different types of reading materials, enrich their English vocabulary, and broaden their horizons and life experience. We can encourage teachers to prompt students with more open-ended questions to stimulate their higher-order thinking and cultivate their ability in critical thinking as well as creativity.

25. As the cognitive mind and ability of students continue to develop, we suggest that teachers provide different types of training in reading (including some reading materials with more complicated contents) at different stages so that students will be able to combine different reading strategies to figure out the meanings of new vocabulary, grasp the main theme, comment on and appreciate the contents as well as the style of writing. I am sure that with the support of a variety of post-reading activities (such as group discussions, presentations, drama, role-play and writing), students will be able to further consolidate their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills.

26. I believe that we all agree that there are difficulties in learning English as a second language and mistakes are unavoidable. We hope that English teachers will give students more encouragement to keep trying and practising. As long as students are not afraid of making mistakes and can learn from their mistakes, they can certainly overcome the difficulties.

27. During classroom observation, I was deeply impressed by the importance of teacher quality. English Language teachers with a good command of subject knowledge, spoken English and flexible teaching methods are undoubtedly able to motivate students to learn English in a more lively and effective manner. Their timely feedback can help students understand their own learning performance and build up their confidence. In order to attract more talents to become English Language teachers, we plan to set up a scholarship to encourage secondary students with a good English standard to join the teaching profession after graduation from university. Scholarship holders must pursue a relevant degree and teacher education programmes, and undertake to teach in local schools for a minimum of 3 years after graduation. Priority will be given to applicants aspiring to become primary school teachers.

28. We understand that the increasing workload of teachers may dampen their desire for professional development. We will therefore put in place appropriate measures to encourage serving English Language teachers to enrich their subject knowledge, master effective teaching methods and enhance their professional qualifications through relevant training as early as possible. As an incentive for teachers to pursue professional excellence, paid study leave will be granted with supply teachers made available. I must emphasise that we fully respect individuals' decisions on personal enhancement. We also understand that schools have to consider their teacher development plans with reference to their own circumstances. As such, the measures will be introduced as incentives and are by no means mandatory.

29. We have learned from recent exchanges with the education sector that some schools have difficulties in arranging teachers' study leave. Of equal importance is the general recognition among the education sector of the need to create an English-rich environment for students. I am grateful for their views and suggestions. We will take all these into consideration and see how resources can be better deployed to facilitate the implementation of school-based programmes to improve the environment and enrich the resources for English learning.

30. Furthermore, we will provide the synergy for schools to make the best use of community resources through the network to be formed by working and retired

professionals, professional organisations, parent-teacher associations, etc. to support English learning activities in schools.

31. In future, we will monitor the effectiveness of various measures for better deployment of resources to enhance the English proficiency of primary students.

Conclusion

32. In the course of fine-tuning the MOI arrangements, we have to work from two perspectives. First, “from a macro perspective”, we have to adhere to the education principles whereby the learning interests of all students are the prime concern. Second, “from a micro perspective”, we have to cater for schools’ circumstances in order to respond to and balance the demands of different parties. After a series of discussions with school sponsoring bodies, the school management, teachers and parents, I have confidence that the fine-tuning will be accepted eventually because we all share the common goal of keeping students’ learning interests as our prime concern.

33. Thanks to your years of hard work, we have seen remarkable improvements in the overall effectiveness of primary school teaching. We sincerely hope that by adopting a two-pronged approach, i.e. enhancing the teaching of English in primary schools and fine-tuning the MOI for secondary schools, our students will be highly proficient in both Chinese and English and better equipped for the challenges of the 21st century.

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