

(English translation)

Secretary for Education: Fine-tuning the Medium of Instruction for
Secondary Schools – Support for Schools Progress in Partnership

Following is the speech entitled “Fine-tuning the Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools – Support for Schools Progress in Partnership” by the Secretary for Education, Mr Michael Suen, at the luncheon meeting of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals today (October 21):

Dr Lee, Members of the Board and Heads of Schools,

In May this year, I announced that the arrangements for fine-tuning the medium of instruction (MOI) would be implemented starting from the 2010/11 school year at Secondary One (S1) level. Since then, there has been general consensus on the aim and direction of fine-tuning among the education sector and the community at large. Here, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all of you for your trust and support.

As schools are now gearing up for the fine-tuning initiatives, we have a facilitating role to play on our part. We are going to put in place a monitoring system which is primarily “support-based”. In other words, while we will strive to help schools to make good use of the room for flexibility under the fine-tuning, we will be decisive in guarding against serious irregularities for its smooth implementation. Today, I am glad to have this opportunity to tell you more about our support measures and the planned monitoring system.

Room for Diversified Arrangements under Fine-tuning

The aim of fine-tuning is to improve the ability of students to learn in English by providing each and every one of them with more opportunities to expose to and to use English at junior secondary levels under the policy objective of “upholding mother-tongue teaching while enhancing students’ proficiency in both Chinese and English”. The

essence of fine-tuning lies in the student-centred approach whereby students are taught in a progressive manner to their aptitudes, thus enabling them to lay a good foundation in language and content subjects, and to realise their potential to the full.

Earlier this year, we provided schools with data on their respective intake of the past two years so that they could design school-based MOI arrangements according to the criterion of “student ability”, including whether and how the “by class” arrangement would be implemented. Some schools requested us to consider more flexibility in applying the “student ability” criterion. I would like to take today’s opportunity to point out that the diversified fine-tuning arrangements enable schools to be flexible in combining different modes of teaching. The “by class” arrangement is only one of the many options available. For students learning in their mother tongue, schools may adopt English as the MOI for content subjects up to 25% of the total lesson time, excluding the lesson time for the English Language subject. Alternatively, they may allocate the relevant lesson time to the teaching of one or two non-language subjects in English. Schools will indeed be provided with more room and flexibility to put in place the best possible MOI arrangements for their students.

Besides, the “student ability” criterion only serves as a planning parameter for schools in the first six-year planning cycle. It is not static. With enhanced English teaching and learning in primary schools, we are confident that students will achieve a higher standard of English. Therefore, we do not rule out the possibility of reviewing the “student ability” criterion within the six-year planning cycle.

Upholding Credibility and Supporting Schools

To ensure smooth implementation of the fine-tuning, we need tripartite collaboration among schools, teachers and parents. I have to stress that we are not going to act as “language police” whose duty is to “focus on law enforcement”. Instead, we will provide comprehensive support to facilitate school development on the principle of helping schools to make the most of the fine-tuning arrangements. However, we will not

hesitate to take follow-up actions to stop unprofessional or misleading practices.

Schools are strongly advised to incorporate their MOI arrangements into the whole-school language policy for coherence with other teaching strategies and curriculum development. To assist schools in doing so, we organised 16 workshops in the past few months, involving as many as 200 schools. I myself also attended the workshop. It was nice to note that school heads and teachers engaged in active discussions and were eager to share their views and experience with others. Some school heads even told me that their schools were well prepared for the move. The professionalism and enthusiasm of our educators are really encouraging.

Looking forward, we will organise more sharing sessions at half-yearly intervals for schools to exchange experience in different MOI arrangements. The first session will be held on 28 November this year with an experienced language expert as our guest speaker to deliver the keynote speech. I will also attend the event to learn about good practices through exchange and sharing with our educators. Should they have problems, we will do our best to help.

Meanwhile, we are planning various professional development programmes for teachers, including training courses for non-language subject teachers using English as the MOI and school-based support programmes on whole-school language policy. These programmes are expected to roll out progressively around March to April next year.

To date, nearly all schools have submitted their MOI plans to the Education Bureau. I am impressed by the professionalism the vast majority of them have demonstrated in drawing up the plans. In the course of vetting, we will take into consideration schools' capacity to cater for students' learning diversity, the coherence between the junior and senior secondary curricula, etc. In case of doubt about the teaching effectiveness of the plans, especially the "by subject" arrangement, we will appoint a core team to conduct professional dialogues with schools. With the aim to facilitate school development, the core team will work with the schools to

review the rationales and preparations for the proposed arrangements, and will offer advice, as appropriate, on teacher training, school-based support, assessment methods, etc.

All professional dialogues are expected to be concluded before March 2010 for schools to report the core team's recommendations to their School Management Committees and parents in line with the spirit of the School Development and Accountability Framework. Schools are urged to consult all stakeholders thoroughly and decide before May whether they will revise their initial plans. Any revision should be brought to the notice of the applicants for their S1 places in the middle of May. If schools decide to follow their initial plans, we will revisit the additional reasons and rationales provided. For those requiring in-depth observations and evaluations of teaching effectiveness, we will put them on our list of focused inspections.

Focused inspections will commence from January 2011 for the purpose of facilitating schools to review teaching effectiveness at the initial stage of fine-tuning. Upon completion of focused inspections, there will be evaluation reports with recommendations for schools to draw up follow-up plans accordingly. As for other schools, inspections will be conducted under the established quality assurance mechanism on a need basis.

As mentioned earlier, I have full confidence in the professional MOI arrangements of the education sector. Nevertheless, we cannot rule out the possibility of isolated cases of non-compliance. To secure the confidence of parents and the public in the fine-tuning and to uphold the credibility of the entire set of arrangements, we will not hesitate to take immediate follow-up actions on those plans apparently not in conformity with the fine-tuning framework and will demand timely rectification by schools so that the relevant information can be included in the Secondary School Profiles to be published in November. Regarding publicity and promotion of misleading information, we will issue warning letters to the schools concerned or even disclose the cases, as required for those of a serious nature. Irregularities will neither be connived at nor condoned.

To safeguard parents' right to know, schools are required to spell out their MOI arrangements for each non-language subject in the Secondary School Profiles for parents' reference. They should also specify their MOI arrangements in their School Development Plans. We hope that when schools provide information for parents, they will act in a professional and responsible manner in presenting a detailed account of their MOI arrangements for parents to select a school that best suits the abilities and interests of their children. To tie in with the start of the S1 admission cycle 2010 in December this year, we will organise more district-based parent briefings to explain the fine-tuning arrangements and share with them the experience in making well-informed choices of schools.

Same Hearts and Minds

Next year will see the implementation of the fine-tuned MOI arrangements for secondary schools. In the run-up period of less than one year from now, it is likely that schools will have many challenges to face. However, I do believe that with concerted efforts and the interest of students in mind, we will surely be embracing the opportunities presented by the fine-tuning and help each and every student to develop his or her potential to the full.

Thank you.

Ends/Wednesday, October 21, 2009
Issued at HKT 16:40