

International Business Committee

Provision of International Education in Hong Kong

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the provision of international school places in Hong Kong.

Background

Policy

2. The Government is committed to supporting the development of a vibrant international school sector, mainly to meet the demand for school places from non-local families living in Hong Kong and families coming to Hong Kong for work or investment. This policy objective is crucial in attracting and retaining talent in support of Hong Kong's development as an international centre on finance, business, innovation and technology, education and culture, and reinforcing Hong Kong's role as an international cosmopolitan with global connectivity.

International schools

3. International schools are the main provider of international education at the school level. International schools are private schools¹ in Hong Kong's education system. Unlike publicly-funded schools (including aided, government and Direct Subsidy Schools), international schools operate on a self-financing and market-driven basis. They are allowed flexibility to design and adopt the curricula that they consider the best for their target students. That notwithstanding, as with all other schools, international schools have to be registered and governed under the Education Ordinance (Cap. 279), and act in accordance with the advice and circulars to be issued by the Government from time to time.

¹ Owing to the scarcity of land resources in Hong Kong, the Government does not provide land resources for establishing private schools in general.

4. At present, there are 54 international schools (including one special school) in Hong Kong. Their teaching quality and diversity is well recognised. They offer a wide range of non-local curricula from major economies including Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Korea, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as the International Baccalaureate programme.

5. In the previous (2023/24) school year, these international schools (excluding one special school) provided about 46 500 school places and admitted around 42 100 students, accounting for around 90% of the total places provided. In the 2024/25 school year, while the latest student enrolment data of a few international schools are still outstanding, we see a mild increase of about 3.5% in the enrolment. Non-local students², from more than 30 different nationalities, account for almost 70% of the total enrolment in international schools.

6. The provision of international school places is planned on a territory-wide basis, rather than a district-specific one. There are no geographical restrictions on the admission of students in international schools. Parents and students are free to enroll in the schools that they prefer, having regard to a host of factors, typically including the curricula, location, reputation and tuition fees of such schools, as well as the support being offered to students with various education needs. It is worth noting that, from the results of parent survey conducted under a latest consultancy study³ by the Education Bureau (EDB), “location” is of a lesser concern to most parents, as compared to “curriculum”, “quality of teacher staff”, and “reputation” of schools.

Other schools offering non-local curricula

7. Apart from international schools, Hong Kong has 7 Private Independent Schools (PIS)⁴ and nearly 30 private schools⁵ offering

² For the purpose of admission to international schools in Hong Kong, local students refer to those who are Hong Kong permanent residents (with the right of abode in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR)) and do not have any valid passport other than HKSAR Passport. Students not covered by this definition are all regarded as non-local students.

³ Study on the Provision of International School Places in Hong Kong, at here – [https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/about-edb/publications-stat/research-report-abstracts/Study%20on%20the%20Provision%20of%20International%20School%20Places%20in%20Hong%20Kong%20\(January%202024\).pdf](https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/about-edb/publications-stat/research-report-abstracts/Study%20on%20the%20Provision%20of%20International%20School%20Places%20in%20Hong%20Kong%20(January%202024).pdf)

⁴ For details on PIS, please refer to: <https://internationalschools.edb.gov.hk/en/schools/pis.html>

⁵ In the 2023/24 school year, these private schools offer around 5 700 school places.

non-local curricula⁶. PISs primarily serve the demand for school places from local families seeking an alternative to public sector schools and are required to maintain at least 70% of the student population being Hong Kong Permanent Residents. In the 2023/24 school year, the 7 PIS provided about 12 600 school places and admitted around 12 000 students.

8. A list of the 54 international schools and 7 PIS is at the **Annex**.

Provision of international school places

9. EDB regularly takes stock of the provision of international school places by conducting enrolment surveys⁷, and projects the future demand and supply by commissioning consultancy studies once every few years. When there is a projected shortfall of international school places, EDB would allocate greenfield sites or vacant school premises (VSPs) for international school use via an open and competitive bidding process called the School Allocation Exercise (SAE)⁸.

10. Since 2007, the Government has already allocated **16 sites** (involving 9 VSPs and 7 greenfield sites) via four SAEs (in 2007, 2008, 2012 and 2014 respectively) for the establishment of new international schools or expansion of existing ones. In the 2023/24 school year, the international school sector provided about 46 500 school places, representing a **33% increase** when compared with some 35 000 in 2007.

11. While earlier consultancy studies indicated a shortfall, the study report released in 2017 concluded that there would be no shortfall in international school places at primary and secondary levels until the 2022/23 school year. In January 2024, we concluded another round of consultancy study, which forecasts that by the 2028/29 school year Hong

⁶ In addition, around 17 Direct Subsidy Schemes (DSS) secondary schools, which are publicly-funded schools, also offer a small stream of non-local curriculum at the senior secondary level to provide students with multiple pathways for further studies.

⁷ EDB used to call an annual return from the international schools on their student enrolment situation, usually at the beginning of the school year. To monitor the student enrolment in a closer manner, we have now been calling half-year returns to observe the change in enrolment during a school year.

⁸ Interested applicants would first be invited to express interest, then submit a detailed school proposal on their plan to set up an international school at the to-be allocated vacant school premises or greenfield sites. A School Allocation Committee, comprising both official and non-official members, would advise the Permanent Secretary for Education on whether and to which applicant the land should be allocated.

Kong would have some 4 400 surplus school places (about 3 300 school places at primary level and about 1 100 school places at secondary level) among international schools.

12. While the recent consultancy does not point to any pressing need to allocate greenfield sites for any large-scale increase of school places in the next few years, it highlights that there are uncertainties related to the future demand for international school places, in particular those from non-local students owing to the Government's strong policy initiatives and measures for attracting talents to come to and stay in Hong Kong. In this connection, the Chief Executive's Policy Address in three consecutive years (2022, 2023, 2024) underscored the importance for Hong Kong to continue to create strong impetus for growth and be more proactive and aggressive in "competing for enterprises" and "competing for talents". Indeed, we see positive response to the new talent admission regime in place since late 2022. As the Chief Executive indicated at his 2024 Policy Address, the various talent admission schemes received over 380 000 applications in total, and around 160 000 talents have arrived in Hong Kong with their families.

13. We note that some of the families of the talents are not only focusing on the international school sector but also exploring options in both the public and private local school sectors. While we have yet to see any surge in student enrolment in the entire education sectors over the past two school years (i.e. 2022/23 and 2023/24), in the light of the overwhelming response to the Government's efforts to trawl for talents and attract enterprises, we see merits of conducting an SAE offering some 1 000 school places in meeting any possible surge in education needs of dependant children of incoming talents, in a short-to-medium term.

14. EDB invited expression of interest for allocation of two vacant school premises/school sites for international school development, one at North Point, Hong Kong Island, and the other at Kowloon Tong, Kowloon. We received a positive response. Respondents who have met the prescribed requirements have been invited to submit detailed school proposals for further consideration. We are now going through the established mechanism whereby EDB and the School Allocation Committee vet the school proposals. Shortlisted candidates would be invited to attend interviews. We plan to announce the results of the current exercise in the first quarter of 2025.

Facilitation to the international schools sector

15. Fully recognising the role of international schools in attracting and retaining talents for Hong Kong, and the fact that international schools are market-driven, the Government has all along been adopting a facilitating role in the regulation and monitoring of these schools. We have been lending support to the international school sector through various means ranging from providing advice, policy support and liaising with other government departments, to day-to-day assistance on operational matters.

Flexibility and assistance during the COVID-19 epidemic

16. During the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic, the Government did exercise much flexibility in handling the situation of individual schools. As early as in the initial stage of the outbreak, in February 2020, the former Chief Executive met with the international schools sector, and readily agreed to temporarily relax the requirement on the percentage of non-local students in the 2020/21 and 2021/22 school years for a few newly-established international schools, during which EDB would not take student-mix non-compliance follow up actions as stipulated under the Service Agreement⁹. The epidemic has subsided. And with the Government's huge efforts in attracting and retaining talents, the international schools' role in addressing the demand of non-local families should be brought back to the forefront and international schools would be able to increase their intake of non-local students.

17. At the same time, to ease the potential cash flow concerns of non-profit-making international schools, we sought the Legislative Council Finance Committee (FC)'s approval in February 2022 for extending the interest-free deferral of loan repayment for two years to the seven non-profit-making international schools (including the three schools with payment deferral approved in 2020) with loans approved by FC. Seven schools were benefited from the two-year loan repayment holiday.

⁹ As background, since 2007, school sponsoring bodies allocated with school premises or sites for international school development have been required to allocate at least 50% of the school places to non-local students, and the percentage has been raised to 70% since 2009. Some schools in bidding for the premises or sites committed to achieve an even higher proportion of non-local students. All these international schools with allocated premises/sites are required to enter into a Service Agreement with EDB, the terms of which include a requirement on the percentage of non-local students to be enrolled as committed.

Promotion of international schools

18. We note that international schools have been employing a host of measures to take up more non-local students, say, by giving processing priority to non-local passport holders over local applicants, increasing ties with student recruiting organisations, relocation agents, the chambers of commerce, and enhancing their publicity and marketing strategy to promote their reputation. Some schools are also offering priority to entrants from talent attraction schemes, and introducing bilingual programmes to cater for their needs. We would encourage schools to continue their efforts on this front.

19. From time to time we have received requests from international schools for increasing school places in a short-to-medium term, from changing the registered uses of special rooms to classrooms, to campus expansion of various scales. We will continue to provide facilitation as necessary.

Way Forward

20. To commensurate with the plan in attracting and retaining global talents, as well as the development of the Northern Metropolis, the Chief Executive has announced in his 2023 Policy Address that the Government has reserved sites in the Northern Metropolis for the development of international schools to meet the education needs of non-local families. EDB would continue to closely monitor the supply and demand of international school places and consider conducting SAEs when necessary.

Education Bureau
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Key Providers of International Education in Hong Kong

International schools

1. American International School
2. American School Hong Kong
3. Australian International School Hong Kong
4. Canadian International School
5. Carmel School (Borrett Road Campus and Shau Kei Wan Campus)
6. Chinese International School
7. Christian Alliance International School
8. Christian Alliance P.C. Lau Memorial International School
9. Concordia International School
10. Discovery Bay International School
11. DSC International School
12. (ESF) Beacon Hill School
13. (ESF) Bradbury School
14. (ESF) Clearwater Bay School
15. (ESF) Glenealy School
16. (ESF) Island School
17. (ESF) Jockey Club Sarah Roe School
18. (ESF) Kennedy School
19. (ESF) King George V School
20. (ESF) Kowloon Junior School
21. (ESF) Peak School
22. (ESF) Quarry Bay School
23. (ESF) Shatin College
24. (ESF) Shatin Junior School
25. (ESF) The South Island School
26. (ESF) West Island School
27. German Swiss International School (English) (Peak Campus and Pokfulam Campus)
28. German Swiss International School (German) (Peak Campus and Pokfulam Campus)
29. Harrow International School (Hong Kong)
30. Hong Kong Academy
31. Hong Kong International School (Repulse Bay Campus and Tai Tam Campus)
32. Hong Kong Japanese School
33. International College Hong Kong (New Territories)
34. International College Hong Kong Hong Lok Yuen (Primary Section)
35. Japanese International School (English)

36. Japanese International School (Japanese)
37. Kellett School (Kowloon Bay Campus and Pokfulam Campus)
38. Kiangsu & Chekiang Primary School and Kiangsu-Cheking College (Braemar Hill Road Campus and Ching Wah Street Campus)
39. Kingston International School
40. Korean International School (English)
41. Korean International School (Korean)
42. Lantau International School (Cheung Sha Campus, Pui O Campus and Tong Fuk Campus)
43. Lyc'ee Francais International (French International School) (English) (Blue Pool Road Campus, Chai Wan Campus, Jardine's Lookout Campus and Tseung Kwan O Campus)
44. Lyc'ee Francais International (French International School) (French) (Blue Pool Road Campus, Chai Wan Campus, Jardine's Lookout Campus and Tseung Kwan O Campus)
45. Malvern College Hong Kong
46. Nord Anglia International School, Hong Kong (Lam Tin Campus and Kwun Tong Campus)
47. Norwegian International School
48. Sear Rogers International School
49. Shrewsbury International School Hong Kong
50. Singapore International School (Hong Kong) (Nam Long Shan Road Campus and Police School Road Campus)
51. The Harbour School (Ap Lei Chau Centre, The Garden Campus and Ap Lei Chau Estate, The Grove Campus)
52. The International Montessori School - an IMEF School (Aldrich Bay Campus, Mid-Levels Campus, South Horizons Campus and Stanley Campus)
53. Think International School
54. Yew Chung International School (11-13 Kent Road Campus, 2 Kent Road Campus and Somerset Road Campus)

Private Independent Schools (PIS)

1. (ESF) Discovery College
2. (ESF) Renaissance College
3. International Christian School
4. Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School
5. The Independent Schools Foundation Academy
6. Victoria Shanghai Academy
7. Yew Chung International School - Secondary