

Press Releases

LCQ11: vacant school premises

Following is a question by the Hon Albert Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Michael Suen, in the Legislative Council today (November 30):

Question:

The Government indicated in its reply to my question at the Legislative Council Meeting on January 13, 2010 that from 2007 to 2010 school years, only three school premises had been approved by the Lands Department for other uses by non-profit making organisations. The authorities also indicated that given their sizes and other technical constraints, it was difficult to convert certain vacant school premises into residential care homes for the elderly ("RCHEs"). The authorities later indicated that they would reconsider the suggestion of converting vacant school premises for welfare service purposes. Yet, as far as I understand, there are still quite a number of non-profit making organisations which have applied to the Government for using vacant school premises but their applications were rejected, resulting in quite a number of vacant school premises not being put to good use. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the numbers of additional vacant primary and secondary school premises since January 2010 and their respective gross floor areas (list in table form), with a breakdown by District Council districts; how the authorities plan to deal with such vacant school premises;

(b) of the names of the non-profit making organisations which are now applying for using such vacant school premises, the uses involved and the names of the schools to which such school premises belonged before becoming vacant;

(c) of the number of vacant school premises which had been approved since January 2010 for use by non-profit making organisations, the locations of such school premises and the names of the schools to which such school premises belonged before becoming vacant, as well as the names of the organisations which were given approval for using these premises, the uses and years of use of such school premises; and

(d) whether the authorities will reconsider converting suitable vacant school premises into RCHEs, and letting vacant school premises to ethnic minority groups to set up community halls or religious facilities for themselves; if they will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

(a) From the 2010/11 to 2011/12 school years (up to October 2011), nine primary schools have ceased operation as a result of school consolidation arrangements. Separately, one secondary school has ceased operation during the same period. A breakdown of the ten premises by district is at Annex A. The gross floor areas of the school buildings vary depending on the year of construction, type of school use, size of the site, etc. We do not have information of the gross floor areas of all the school premises.

The Education Bureau has a mechanism for handling vacant school premises. We will consider if the size, location and

physical conditions of the premises would render it suitable for re-allocation for school or other educational uses. Under normal circumstances, for school premises which are considered suitable to be so re-cycled, we will confirm the re-allocation of these premises for further school or other educational uses upon consultation with relevant bureaux and departments. Among the ten premises concerned, two have attained confirmation to be deployed for further educational uses while six are to be re-allocated or earmarked for such uses in the longer term. For vacant school premises which have been confirmed for educational uses, the Education Bureau is discussing with the relevant users on the redeployment of these premises in the short term.

The remaining two premises were confirmed not suitable/required for further educational uses after due consideration. According to the established arrangement, we have informed the Planning Department and returned these two school premises to relevant departments for their consideration on alternative uses. Should individual bureaux or departments indicate interest to use any of these premises on Government land in support of their policy initiatives, they would consult the relevant departments and the Planning Department and apply for use.

(b) Since January 2010, two vacant school premises were considered not suitable/required for further educational use by the Education Bureau and have been returned to relevant bureaux/departments (see Annex B). The bureaux/departments concerned are considering applications for using the site of these two former vacant school premises in accordance with established government policies, relevant land grant conditions and the long term use of the sites. The Administration is not in a position to disclose details at this stage.

(c) Since January 2010, one vacant school premises has been redeployed for other use by a non-profit making organisation as approved by the relevant department. Details are set out in Annex C.

(d) According to the Labour and Welfare Bureau, in view of the growing demand for subsidised residential care places for the elderly, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has been in close liaison with relevant government departments to explore the feasibility of constructing residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) in new development projects or re-development projects (e.g. public housing estates) under their purview, or converting vacant government buildings (e.g. school premises which have ceased operation) into RCHEs.

In exploring the suitability of a particular site or premises for development as an RCHE, SWD will look into various factors, including whether the size of the concerned site or premises allows the construction or re-modelling of an RCHE of a certain scale so as to achieve cost effectiveness, and the accessibility of the site or premises by public transport to facilitate visits by family members of the elders. As places with bad air quality or those affected by noise pollution may not be suitable for elders to reside in, SWD needs to consider the facilities and development projects in the vicinity during the site searching process.

In the past few years, SWD has identified a few vacant school premises and explored the feasibility of converting them into RCHEs. Nevertheless, most of the school premises were subsequently found not suitable for the purpose owing to their relatively small size or other constraints (e.g. lifts or ramps could not be installed or constructed to facilitate access by frail elders because of structural limitations). SWD will continue to identify sites and vacant buildings for development of RCHEs through different means.

At present, there are 95 community halls and community centres under the Home Affairs Department, providing rental facilities for district organisations to hold community activities. Ethnic minority organisations interested in renting the community halls and community centres can contact the respective District Offices. Besides, if any ethnic minority organisation proposes to convert suitable vacant school premises into ethnic minority community halls, the Home Affairs Department will refer the proposal to the departments overseeing the vacant school premises concerned for follow-up and render appropriate assistance. In general, the Home Affairs Bureau provides facilitation in the course of applications on constructing religious facilities by religious organisations. If any religious organisation applies to the Government to use vacant school premises for the construction of religious facilities, the Home Affairs Bureau will consider granting policy support.

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