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# \$3.8b education shake-up

## Reforms target seven key areas

By FANNY WONG

THE Education Commission will next week unveil a \$3.89 billion package which, if accepted, would mean a complete shake-up of Hong Kong's primary and secondary school systems.

The long-awaited Education Commission Report Number 4, a copy of which was obtained by the *South China Morning Post*, will be officially released next Thursday.

It is the commission's most controversial report and contains 74 key recommendations touching on seven key policy areas.

Should the recommendations be adopted, the changes will have far-reaching effects on the education of primary and secondary students in the coming decade.

Reforms will be introduced in areas such as language in education, students performance assessment, the mode of schooling for primary and secondary students and curriculum development.

One of the sensitive areas in the package is the intro-

In putting together the bold package, the commission applied three principles: retaining the existing policy of providing nine years of free and compulsory education; meeting the varying abilities and interests of the children; and, raising standards over time by promoting improvements in learning and teaching, as well as in the monitoring and assessment of outcomes.

Although it recognises the Government is entering a period of austerity, the commission strongly recommended that the programme be implemented in full.

"Recommendations have not been ranked in any order of priority," it said.

"We believe that they should all proceed in parallel because they all have an important part to play in improving the quality of education in schools.

"We are aware that this programme will be expensive to implement, but it is clear to us that the measures involved will have less impact on improving the quality of education in schools if they are not implemented in parallel.

"The Government would be well advised to de-

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duction of a framework which will allow schools to choose whether they will be English, Chinese or two-medium teaching schools.

If accepted, the proposal would mean a major departure from the common practice at present in which mixed languages are used in classrooms.

The commission believes mixed-language teaching will undermine the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

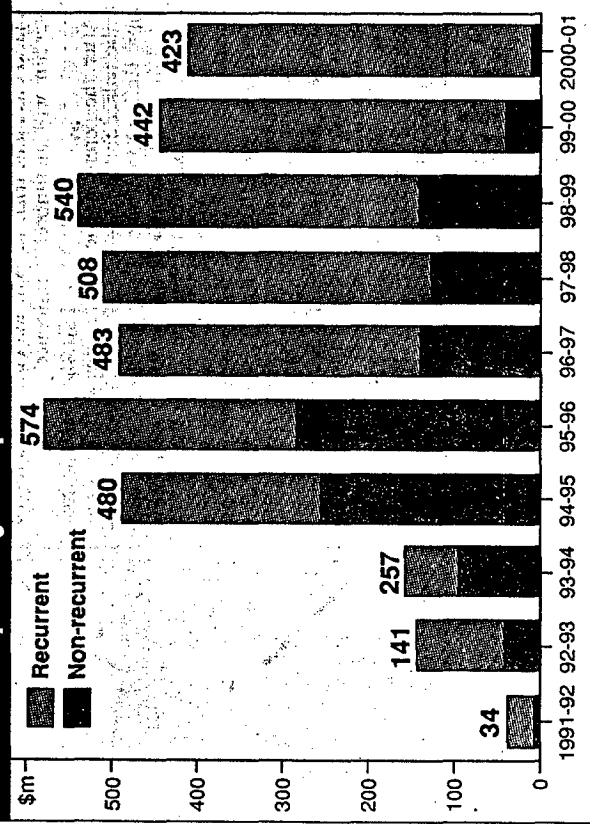
The framework would also provide for students to be streamed into three groups according to their ability to learn in Chinese and English.

A child's streaming would be determined through objective assessments at Primary Six.

Bridging courses helping students to switch to English-medium and Chinese-medium classes are proposed at various stages.

Introduction of vocational English courses are also suggested for Form Five and Form Seven school leavers to help them meet the needs of specific types of occupation.

Additional spending to implement the recommendations



Graphic by Winnie Ho

### Main points at a glance

- **Financial implications**  
Whole package to cost \$3.89 billion in next 10 years
- **Language**  
Allow schools to choose to be English-medium, Chinese-medium or two-medium schools.
- Stream students into three groups: students who learn best in Chinese; those who learn better in Chinese than in English; those who learn effectively in both.
- Provide bridging courses to help students switch between English and Chinese medium classes.
- Introduce special English courses for Form Five and Form Seven students wishing to join the workforce.
- **Student performance**  
Introduce an assessment system to measure students performance in English, Chinese and mathematics.
- Make assessments at Primary Three, Primary Six and Form Three and replace Hongkong Attainment Tests.
- **Whole-day schooling**  
Introduce all-day schooling for Primary Five and Six students before converting all primary classes.  
Provide an extra 713 teachers and 69 new schools for whole-day schooling for Primary Five and Six.
- **Curriculum Development**  
Upgrade the Curriculum Development Council with members being appointed by the Governor.  
Create a Curriculum Development Institute as a division of the Education Department.
- **Special Education**  
Arrange a pilot project for an estimated 20,000 gifted students in ordinary schools.  
Set up a special team to help gifted students.  
Establish special schools for students with severe learning problems to promote skills should a pilot scheme be successful.
- **Triad and Corporal Punishment**  
Step up efforts to combat triad infiltration.  
Abolish corporal punishment.

only provide a better assessment of student performance but also improve their language ability.

Teachers would also benefit as they would be provided with better training.

The implementation of the recommendations on the language policy is expected to cost taxpayers about \$18.69 million between 1991-92 and 1995-96.

Closely related to the medium of teaching is the introduction of the target-related assessments (TRA) which measure students performance in English, Chinese and mathematics.

commission, chaired by Executive Councillor Mrs Rita Fan Hsu Lai-tai.

Members, however, are bracing for a difficult time convincing the community, especially educationists, that the package will be beneficial to Hongkong in improving the quality of education.

A two-month consultation period is planned to solicit public views and a motion debate in the Legislative Council will be held in January.

Should the proposals be adopted, the commission maintains that it will not

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# Package to offer major shake-up

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nese and mathematics in Primary Three, Primary Six and Form Three against some set objectives.

Based on criterion-referencing principles, the TRA is a framework of academic performance attainment targets.

For a language course, the targets relate to being able to process, use and give information in a language.

The report proposed that the TRA should gradually replace the current Hongkong Attainment Tests (HKAT).

However, the commission maintains that the public examinations at Form Five level should not be replaced by the TRA at this stage.

Subject to further research, the Commission estimates the introduction of TRA for the three core subjects in the three educational levels can be completed by 1994.

Another key recommendation is the introduction of whole-day schooling for Primary Five and Six students, which if accepted, would cost public funds about \$2.01 billion up to the year 2003.

The commission suggests phasing-in the proposal, which envisages the need for an extra 713 teachers and 69 new schools.

Another proposal which is expected to draw heated debate is the upgrading of the Curriculum Development Council (CDC), including the recommendation that members be appointed by the Governor instead of the Director of Education.

The move will be seen as an attempt to put the council on an equal footing with the Hongkong Examinations Authority (HKEA).

To strengthen the development of curriculum, the commission suggests the creation of the Curriculum Development Institute in 1992-93 as a division of the Education Department and to serve as the CDC's secretariat.

Another controversial proposal is for a pilot project to develop school-based programmes for the territory's estimated 20,000 gifted students in ordinary schools.

It is suggested a professional be set up with the support of a resource centre to help gifted students with a review of the scheme being made after four years.

To ensure students with severe learning problems are not ignored, the commission suggests that seven skills opportunity schools be established if the pilot scheme currently being conducted is successful.