

Financial Market  
Ed policy

# \$400m plan to improve education

MORE than \$400 million will be allocated for the improvement of the quality of education in the next three financial years, as recommended in the third and fourth Education Commission reports.

So far, \$300 million has been secured and the remainder will have to come from more cost-saving measures such as combining classes which are not filled to capacity.

The improvements include strengthening counselling support in secondary schools, the provision of "skills opportunity schools", new equipment and classroom conversions for Sixth Form subjects.

The Secretary for Education and Manpower, Mr John Chan Cho-chak, said he hoped the programmes would begin within the next academic year, if not by September.

The \$300 million in funding for the programmes came from revised student number projections for the tertiary sector.

Last year's census update resulted in a reduction of 500 in the number of

first-year, first-degree places considered to be needed by 1994-95.

The figure dropped from 15,000 to 14,500.

Mr Chan said: "After consulting the chairman of the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee (UPGC), who has in turn discussed with the heads of the tertiary institutions, it has now been confirmed that \$300 million out of the \$18.2 billion previously allocated to the UPGC can be made available for re-allocation."

"The Financial Secretary has most helpfully agreed that these funds should be deployed in their entirety to the schools sector."

Mr Chan believed the shortfall could be filled by redeployment of existing resources without harming the quality of education.

About \$200 million was expected to be released by combining classes that were not filled to capacity, he said yesterday.

The total budget appropriated for the education sector did not include funding for mixed-mode primary schooling.

"We have not yet taken

a view on the recommendation on mixed-mode primary schooling, but I expect a decision to be made soon," Mr Chan said.

But legislator Mr Cheung Man-kwong said he was disappointed that the Government had failed to give extra money, on top of the amount allocated in the Budget, to improve primary and secondary education.

"There is absolutely nothing new in Mr Chan's proposals," he said.

Mr Chan confirmed that the withdrawal of the repeater allowance would not be applied at Form Four level.

Explaining the move, he said the Government felt it would be undesirable for parents and students to face increased uncertainty when entering senior secondary education as a result of the proposed scheme.

Abolishing the repeater allowance would affect about 200 teachers, but officials said this would not mean redundancies as natural wastage would allow for the redeployment of these teachers to fill vacant posts.