

Action to eliminate exam pressures is welcome

Like the Green Paper on Primary Education and Pre-Primary Services, the Education Action Group believes that eliminating the pressures of primary one entrance examinations is the pre-requisite for the improvement of quality education in kindergartens.

Almost 200,000 pre-primary children are subjected to these entrance examination pressures every year, distorting their development at a very crucial age.

EAG basically supports the Green Paper plan to eliminate primary one entrance examinations and instead allocate primary one places by students' general living areas.

Since without Government allocation of primary one places there is little possibility for most of the other Green Paper reforms to effectively reduce pressures on kindergarten children, EAG feels the regionalisation plan needs careful examination.

EAG feels that many of the fears associated with regionalisation are unnecessary.

1: Some educators claim that regionalisation will result in mediocre schools.

EAG feels the quality of a school is based on a combination of factors: teachers, curriculum, facilities, students. Regionalisation will only change one of these factors. We expect the overall quality of schools to improve as regionalisation will result in a more even distribution of students in terms of socio-economic background and ability to all schools, thereby raising the morale — and thereby effectiveness — of teachers.

The more popular schools should continue to offer quality education; the only difference is they will be offering it to a mixed (background and ability) intake of students.

2: Some reject regionalisation because it denies schools the privilege to choose students.

EAG feels schools choosing children is against the principles of equal opportunity of education to all children and fair use of public funds.

The public must consider the rationale and reliability of the methods of selection used by schools:

● Schools often select children at the age of six for either social or academic elitism — concepts of education EAG rejects. Schools which claim to reject elitism yet claim the necessity to select is forced on them by circumstances, should gladly accept



The Education Action Group joins the debate on the primary school allocation proposal with an article which sets out to show why the advantages of this scheme far outweigh the disadvantages.

This is in response to two earlier articles on the Green Paper on Primary and Pre-primary Services published by the SCM Post.

The first, by an Education Correspondent (SCM Post, May 27) said random selection to primary one constitutes "a remarkable erosion of parental rights..."

The article also examined the potentially damaging effects of the proposal on the grant schools which "represent an area of excellence in a none too inspiring education system."

In the second article (SCM Post, June 16), the head of the La Salle Primary School, Brother Henry, said such a scheme is open to abuse.

"The Government is promising something it will not be able to carry out with equity and justice," Bro Henry said.

He was also concerned with the restrictions on parental choice.

The EAG feels, however, that "many of the fears associated with regionalisation are unnecessary."

regionalisation and be relieved to no longer be faced with elitist and questionable means of selection.

● No testing instrument has yet been developed that can reliably predict for a child of six his/her learning ability at the age of 12. Therefore, any academic or intelligence tests for primary school selection are artificial and pointless methods to select children. Selection by the interview method is even more unreliable and is often used to subtly determine the child's family background.

These methods of examination and evaluation are too unreliable and open to abuse to be allowed in the selection and allocation of publicly financed schools.

3: Some argue that parents are denied freedom of choice under the proposed regionalisation scheme.

EAG rejects this argument because parents have freedom of choice in the plan. For example, in a net where there are 30 primary schools, parents are free to choose whichever school they want in order of preference. In the present system, whether the parents' choice is accepted is determined by a test or interview which is (for a child of six) unreliable, unfair and liable to abuse. In the proposed system, the choice is decided by a computer which is "designed to ensure that the greatest possible number of pupils are allocated to a school high on their parents' preference list." This proposed system eliminates the harmful effects and unfair-

ness of the present system.

It is true that in the proposed system parents cannot choose a certain popular school outside the net of their home. But then neither must they subject their child to persistent pressure and sense of failure. If a place for the child is not available in the first choice school, the computer will painlessly try the parents' second choice and so on.

4: Some argue that regionalisation is Government's attempt to control subsidised schools and will result in schools losing their identities.

EAG counters that Government control isn't necessarily bad. Government regulating classes at a reasonable size or requiring teacher training are just two positive examples of Government control. In fact, lack of Government control may cause confusion as in the present kindergarten situation.

It the case of regionalisation, Government would only control admission procedures, relieving kindergartens of pressures caused by primary one entrance examinations and providing more equality in primary education. This form of control is good.

Subsidised schools will be able to retain their identities because aspects such as establishment of school aims and employment of teachers (trained) will not be controlled by Government, leaving schools free to operate according to their own ideals.

5: A few have worried that the change is too drastic and that we should wait until

schools are standardised.

EAG feels the change isn't drastic and that it is a necessary one. If we wait, consider how many children will suffer in the years it takes schools to be standardised. Government can begin regional allocation and simultaneously concentrate on raising standards of less established schools.

6: Some dislike allocation of primary school places because they claim alumni children should build up the school's tradition.

EAG feels a school's tradition is a living thing. A school should take in new blood from different family backgrounds to enrich that tradition. It doesn't have to be built on qualities related to inheritance of school places from one generation to the next.

The Green Paper proposal to reduce movement of students from one primary school to another will in effect improve the base for school tradition as children will remain enrolled at the same school for six years.

If the feeder system is extended as proposed in the Green Paper, increasing numbers of students will continue from primary school into the associated secondary school, thereby further building up and broadening school traditions.

EAG's criticisms of the Green Paper Proposals for district nets:

1: Discretionary places and alumni privileges — EAG opposes the Green Paper's plan for about 15 per cent discretionary places and priority for applicants with a brother, sister or parent who previously attended the school. A school could, in fact, fill almost all its primary places by using discretionary and alumni privileges. EAG opposes the discretionary and alumni privileges because:

● We believe in equal opportunity in allocation.

● Seats financed by public funds should be open to allocation.

● Discretionary places may be open to corruption.

● Too many discretionary and alumni places can nullify the basic objectives of the allocation scheme.

2: Distribution of schools in district nets — EAG is concerned that when the nets are drawn, the higher quality schools may be clustered together geographically and be unevenly distributed, causing a degree of unfairness in allocation.