

S.A.M.

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# 120 schools without students, fear

Every principal's nightmare - classes without students - may well become a reality for about 120 private schools not included in the Education Department's bought place scheme.

With the abolition of the Secondary School Entrance Examination and the provision of subsidised Form One places for all who want it by next year, these schools will be left with no source of new students.

The threat of closure looms large as the eventual result.

"Our biggest hope now is for the Education Department to include us in the bought place scheme," said the Vice-Principal of the Saints' Co-educational College, Miss Dorothy Chen.

A spokesman for the Education Department said yesterday that 38 schools had applied to join the scheme and 10 had been accepted, bring-

ing the total number of participating schools to 105.

However, the schools say they have not yet been informed of the decision and have urged the department to take a clear stand on its future attitude and policy towards them.

"Inclusion in the bought place scheme is a vital issue," said the Chairman of the Action Committee of the Hongkong Private Anglo-Chinese Schools Association, Mr M. T. Cheng.

As the 120 schools represent more than half the total number of private schools in Hongkong the association is determined to keep a close watch on the situation.

Mr Cheng explained: "In the past these schools were not overly concerned about their exclusion from the scheme whereby the Government buys places from

existing private schools."

As long as the Government was unable to provide subsidised places for all Primary Six leavers and the Secondary School Entrance Examination had to be held to select students for the limited number of subsidised Form One places this type of private school had no trouble finding students.

Their students came mainly from those who had failed the SSEE and were therefore not allocated places by the Education Department.

But with the abolition of the SSEE and sufficient places in the public sector for all the situation will change drastically.

"The Government will have full control of student allocation and unless these schools are included in the bought place scheme they will not be assigned any students at all," Mr Cheng said.

With the growing number of places in the public sector (Government and aided schools as well as bought places in private schools) a correspondingly larger number of Primary Six leavers have been allocated places in Form One.

The number of pupils not allocated places by the Education Department dropped from 38,000 in 1975 to 20,000 last year.

It is estimated that the number will fall to 10,000 this year and by next year all pupils will be allocated school places.

"We believe in the theory of equal suffering," said Mr Cheng.

In other words, he said, the number of places that are bought from private schools should be spread out evenly and no school should be excluded from the scheme altogether.

It should not, as at present, be restricted to only some private schools.

Mr Cheng said that schools applying to join the scheme and rejected by the department were usually told that they were not up to standard. No specific reason was ever given to these schools as to why they were found to be unsatisfactory.

Mr Cheng pointed out that all private schools are registered with the Education Department and are regularly inspected.

"So if they are not up to standard as the department claims then they should not be allowed to continue operating in the interests of students.

"However, since the department has taken no steps to close them down they obviously have some educational value and should therefore be given a part to play in the education system."

Mr Cheng feels that as many schools as possible should be included in the scheme to enable parents to have as wide a choice as possible of secondary schools.

Commenting on the possibility that many private schools which are not included in the scheme may have to close, the education spokesman said: "No such suggestion has been made to the department."

Among the general factors which are taken into consideration when assessing applications are that the school has security of tenure of the premises in which it operates, that it offers a full secondary course and that it operates to a standard satisfactory to the Director of Education.

Private schools will be held an emergency meeting this afternoon on the situation.