

200 in protest against mixed-mode schooling

ABOUT 200 school principals and teachers demonstrated yesterday against the Education Commission's fourth report amid cries for unity by union leaders.

The protest was organised by the Professional Teachers' Union whose leaders had, until recently, supported recommendations in the controversial report.

Shouting "fight for whole day schooling" and "scrap mixed-mode system", the demonstrators marched from Chater Garden to the Secretariat to express their anger.

Twenty demonstrators, including union vice-chairman Szeto Wah, who is also a commission member, walked up to Government House to petition the Governor.

At issue is the proposal to introduce different modes of schooling to primary students as an in-

terim measure leading to whole-day schooling for all students.

Under the proposal, primary students in their fifth and sixth years would receive whole-day schooling while the others would continue to receive half-day education.

But educationalists, particularly those working in primary schools, say it would only complicate school administration without obvious alternative benefits.

"The administration should allocate more resources to make whole-day schooling as early as possible," PTU chairman Cheung Man-kwong said.

He said that unless the schools wanted to, the administration should not impose the proposal on them against their will.

The PTU had been the first to announce support for the report before reversing its position under

pressure from its members.

Union sources said 60 principals had signed a letter demanding that PTU leaders call an emergency meeting to review their position.

But at a meeting on December 24, the sources said, the PTU leadership persuaded them to drop the demand and promised to call a consultative meeting instead.

The consultative meeting was held on January 13 with more than 200 school principals and teachers turning up, the sources said.

They said executive officials of the PTU reversed their position at the meeting and "pledged to do something to oppose the report".

In a move to regain members' confidence, the PTU leadership publicised their opposition in a special edition of the

union's official publication.

Speaking before the demonstration started, Szeto defended that the "mixed-mode system" was not proposed by the Education Commission.

"It was decided by the Executive Council back in 1989. The Education Commission was only told to work on its outline," he said.

He said he did not see the PTU's change of position as a setback to him although he was a member of the commission.

As the demonstration came to an end, PTU chairman Cheung called on members to voice their opinion freely to the union.

"Speak up your mind," he told the audience, assuring them that views based on reasonable grounds would be considered.