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Academic attacks all-day schooling

By VIOLA LEE

AN academic has challenged the Government's recently announced policy of phasing in all-day schooling for all senior primary classes, describing it as a costly decision which may not produce much benefit.

Dr Mark Bray, senior lecturer at the University of Hongkong's Department of Education, said there was little objective evidence to support a widely-assumed view that such schooling was qualitatively better than half-day schooling.

"In practice, much policy-making is based on 'gut reactions' rather than reasoned analysis of costs and benefits," he said.

Primary schools used to operate whole-day teaching, but in the early 1950s half-day schooling was introduced as a "temporary measure" so provision could be doubled to meet the educational needs of the post-war baby boom.

Half-day schooling has

been criticised as educationally undesirable because pupils spend only the morning or afternoon in school under a tight timetable, which leaves little time for extra-curricular activities.

The policy of converting all senior primary classes to whole-day operation was announced by the Governor, Sir David Wilson, in his policy address in October. It was intended to be a step towards the long-term objective of providing whole-day schooling for all primary classes.

Up to September 1988, 119 out of a total of 608 primary schools had converted to all-day teaching.

The Government estimated that it would cost \$2.3 billion to build 100 more primary schools if all primary schools changed to all-day operation, while turning senior classes to all-day teaching would need 35 additional schools.

Dr Bray said that because the Government will have spent so much money on converting to whole-day



Sir David Wilson

teaching it would have less money available for other goals, such as reduction of class size, improvement of English teaching, and expansion of tertiary education.

The Secretary for Education and Manpower, Mr Yeung Kai-yin, earlier said that the benefits of putting Primary Five and Six pupils in school for longer hours included increasing teacher contact at a stage when pupils' performance would

begin to be assessed for placement in secondary schools.

It would also mean more time for extra-curricular activities.

Mr Yeung said "mixed-mode" operation will allow greater curricular flexibility, for example, increased attention to language learning in the last two years in the primary school.

"It will also provide social benefits, in that children will be engaged for more of the day in useful activity, at an age when they are perhaps liable to go astray if left unsupervised."

He said it would cost a lot to start whole-day teaching and added that benefits were not certain.

Dr Bray said he was unconvinced by arguments based on educational benefits or that whole-day schooling would be the best way to keep difficult children off the streets.

He said the role of teachers should not be as baby-sitters.