

Allocation for students under attack

By CATHERINE BECK

MORE than 1,300 Form One students from Hongkong Island are forced to travel to Kowloon and further to study because of government inaction in providing additional secondary places, educators and politicians claimed yesterday.

Principals of seven schools in Hongkong, along with 35 district board members from four Island districts, said the spaces were available but the current "biased" allocation system and government policy meant students still had to travel too far from home.

The group called on the Education Department to reconsider its present Secondary Schools Allocation Scheme, which is conducted on a territory-wide basis, and build about five schools

on the island to cater for these students.

Mr Terence Tang Tsoi-tai, principal of Lingnan Secondary School and district board member, also called on the Government to reconsider its re-provisioning of existing Hongkong schools to New Towns where the population growth is fastest.

"We understand there are reasons behind these changes, because maybe the old schools are outdated," Mr Tang said. "But there should be a balance struck between relocating schools and providing adequate places for the children who are here."

An Education Department spokesman yesterday refused to comment on the issue until the group sent a formal letter of protest about the situation.

But department sources have pointed out that space

was precious on Hongkong Island, and Kowloon was not a gruelling distance for the children to travel to anyway.

"It's not like China where some of the children climb mountains and walk a long way to get to school. Hongkong is a fairly small place, and we allocate according to public transportation," the source said.

Mr Tang did not feel this to be the case.

"You have the time spent on travel, the money spent in the process, and the quality of education these students are actually receiving over there to consider," he said.

Many of the students sent to Kowloon were low achievers, so-called Band Five, who are placed in private schools under the present Bought Place Scheme, he said.