

**Report on
Review of Implementation and Operation of
Incorporated Management Committees**

Policy 21 Limited
The University of Hong Kong

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Executive Summary

Background

1. The aims of the review are as follows:
 - a) To evaluate the operational procedures for Incorporated Management Committees (IMC) (e.g. election of school managers, resource management arrangements, accountability measures, etc.) and collate good practices;
 - b) To examine the adequacy of the support for IMC (e.g. training for managers, operational guidelines, etc.) to see if additional measures are required;
 - c) To assess the impact of IMC to see if the principles and objectives of school-based management (SBM) are fully realized and if not, what the problems are and what additional measures are needed.
2. This report presents findings of a three-phase study conducted in 2005/06, 2006/07 and 2007/08, covering schools that have established IMC (or the IMC schools), schools that have pledged to establish IMC (pledged-IMC schools) and schools that have not yet pledged to establish IMC (non-IMC schools) during the period under review.
3. The review was conducted using the following research tools, designed to collect both quantitative and in-depth qualitative information from different groups of stakeholders. Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire survey of supervisors, principals, teacher representatives or managers, parent representatives or managers, alumni managers and independent managers of schools covered in the study. In addition, qualitative information was gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with principals, teachers, parents, alumni and independent managers and representatives of School Sponsoring Bodies (SSBs).

Impact of IMC on schools

Expectations

4. Stakeholders of IMC and pledged-IMC schools, including supervisors, principals, teacher managers, parent managers, alumni managers and independent managers, were in general optimistic of achieving the benefits of IMC on schools. As regards non-IMC schools, supervisors, principals and teacher representatives were in general not certain about the benefits of IMC on schools, especially with regard to teaching and learning and school management. Nevertheless, their views were more favourable with regard to the impact on school's ability in leveraging support from stakeholders and the community. For parent representatives, on the other hand, their expectations of IMC schools achieving the benefits of SBM were much higher.

Actual impact

5. Most stakeholders including supervisors, principals, teacher managers, parent managers, alumni managers and independent managers of IMC schools were of the view that IMC had helped to increase transparency in school management, school's sense of accountability over teaching and learning effectiveness and flexibility in resource deployment, and had led to more active participation in school's work by teachers, parents and stakeholders in the community. More than half of them were also of the view that school had more space in the development of school-based curriculum. It is worth noting that the majority of them were of the view that SSB continued to retain its role in the management of the school.

6. In addition, most supervisors, parent managers, alumni managers and independent managers of IMC schools were of the view that the establishment of IMC had resulted in positive outcomes in respect of teaching and learning effectiveness, efficiency in school management, sense of commitment and job satisfaction of teachers, and schools being able to develop school-based curriculum and obtain support from teachers, parents and other stakeholders in the community.

Concerns of stakeholders

7. While stakeholders of non-IMC schools were worried that their schools might deviate from the original vision of SSB in running the schools, the great majority of stakeholders of IMC schools did not consider that the relationship between their schools and SSB deteriorated and their schools had deviated from the original mission of SSB in running the schools. Indeed, the majority of them were of the view that there was basically no change in operation of the schools.

8. Nevertheless, stakeholders of IMC schools confirmed the worries of those non-IMC schools as regards the additional workload and work pressure generated from IMC, including more paper work, which would increase administrative workload of and put additional pressure on teachers and staff due to increased transparency.

9. It may also be worth noting that parents and supervisors of non-IMC schools were more supportive of IMC. A higher proportion of parent representatives and supervisors supported the establishment of IMC, as compared with teacher representatives and principals.

Administrative arrangements related to establishment of IMC

10. Pledged-IMC and IMC schools in general had not encountered much difficulty in establishing IMC. Managers were elected according to the laid down procedures, though inevitably much efforts were made by the school staff, including the principals in particular, in encouraging teachers, parents and alumni of the right caliber and dedication to stand for election.

11. From views expressed by teacher, parent, alumni and independent managers, they did not experience any problems in their participation in the IMC. Nevertheless, it is noted that a significant proportion of schools were still using their existing committees related to teacher and staff recruitment and promotion, internal auditing systems, financial guidelines,

procurement procedures and personnel management guidelines. Probably, the schools believe that the current systems are running smoothly and they need time to review their existing procedures and mechanisms. Also, for obvious reasons, schools need to try out the new IMC operation before introducing changes.

Support measures of EDB

12. It is almost the unanimous views of principals interviewed in the questionnaire survey that the support provided by EDB is highly satisfactory. Such a support has greatly helped remove uncertainties and reduce workload arising from the establishment of IMC, which are uncharted territories for school personnel. Undoubtedly, this has helped increase the willingness of schools to establish IMC.

Satisfaction with work of IMC

13. Feedback from stakeholders in IMC schools indicates that the great majority of them were satisfied with their work in the IMC. The great majority of supervisors were satisfied with their work in IMC, especially with regard to “explaining clearly to school the vision of SSB in establishing the school” and “providing advice at the macro level on school policies”. The great majority of principals were also satisfied with their work in IMC, especially with regard to “managing school according to educational regulations and instructions from IMC” and “providing information and options to IMC”.

14. For teacher managers, more than half were satisfied with their work in IMC, especially with regard to “functioning as a bridge in the communication between IMC and teachers”. For parent managers, the great majority of them were satisfied with their work in IMC, especially with regard to “functioning as a bridge in the communication between school management and parents”.

15. For alumni managers, the majority of them were satisfied with their work in IMC, with regard to “providing advice to IMC on how to enhance students’ learning and school management” and “providing views on school-related and educational issues”. For independent managers, the great majority of them were also satisfied with their work in IMC, with regard to “providing advice to IMC on how to enhance students’ learning and school management” and “providing views on school-related and educational issues”.

Observations and recommendations

Managing the transition

16. What may be noted from the above discussions is that the transition to, and establishment and implementation of IMCs were smooth. Nevertheless, it is noted that a significant proportion of IMC schools were still using their existing committees related to teacher and staff recruitment and promotion, internal auditing systems, financial guidelines, procurement procedures and personnel management guidelines, which is understandable given time is required for schools to experiment with the IMC operation before introducing changes.

17. Given the large number of schools that are or will be establishing IMC, there appears room for reducing the workload through better liaison with government departments involved in the registration process and banks in the transfers of accounts. It is recommended that efforts should be stepped up to brief relevant government departments and banks on matters related to the IMC and to explore if there is room for modifications in the regulatory and documentary requirements by relevant government departments and banks, in the spirit of facilitation.

18. It is noted that IMC is different from previous mode of operation of schools and there are certainly merits in actively reviewing the adequacy of existing mechanisms, rules and procedures in coping with heightened expectation from relevant stakeholders and the community after the establishment of IMC. It is recommended that EDB should work closely with schools to help them review their mechanism relating to staff matters, internal auditing systems and financial guidelines, following the establishment of IMC, especially for those schools that have not done so.

Continued support from Education Bureau

19. Schools were highly satisfied with the various support measures provided by EDB to help them prepare for the establishment of IMC, as opined by principals and teachers during in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Nevertheless, the establishment of IMC is the start and not the end of the process. There is obviously a need to look beyond, in exploring how the spirits of SBM could take root and be reinforced, and how through the IMC, schools could leverage more support from parents, alumni and the community. Besides, there should also be a change in mind-set on the part of school staff, viewing the establishment of IMC as an opportunity for change.

20. The support of EDB should not be diluted or stopped, but should be stepped up, after schools have established IMC, to help schools make the best use of the funding flexibility provided to IMC schools and the new governance structure to engage and leverage the support of teachers, parents, alumni and the community at large.

Enhancing the impact of IMC

21. The study shows that stakeholders had high expectations of the benefits of IMC. They were also of the view that the establishment of IMC had not affected the relationship between schools and SSB. It is noted that SBM involves decentralization of decision-making from EDB to schools on personnel, resource and instructional policies, subject to government regulatory requirements and external audit. Furthermore, SBM involves building new relationships with stakeholders, helping schools leverage support from teachers, parents and the community.

22. It is recommended that more support should continue to be provided to IMC schools, through such measures as training and experience sharing sessions for stakeholders concerned and in particular support to principals who are shouldering the bulk of additional workload arising from IMC, to help schools achieve the intended objectives of SBM.

23. The Teacher Relief Grant (TRG) was introduced as a support measure for IMC schools. TRG is to enhance funding flexibility and administrative efficiency, with no intention of compromising teachers' sick leave entitlement. It is recommended that EDB should

strengthen its support measures to schools and help schools better utilize resources provided under TRG, in the spirit of SBM. Though we note a surplus of TRG in many schools, in case schools have incurred or on the verge of incurring TRG deficit, sufficient flexibility should be provided to schools in deploying surpluses from other funding provisions or by advancing disbursement of TRG on a need basis. The TRG fund level should also be reviewed periodically, taking into account requirements of different types of schools, in order to make TRG provision more geared to the needs of teachers.

24. Apart from the EOEBG, it is recommended that consideration should be given to further decentralize decision-making to schools in the spirit of SBM though some accountability measures were necessary. This will not only reduce workload but also help foster stronger sense of accountability and facilitate development of management skills and accumulation of experience in self-evaluation by school staff. Funding flexibility should not be limited to the EOEBG, but also cover other grants and funding support provided to schools, in order to enable schools more effectively utilize all resources that are at their disposal.

25. The establishment of IMC calls for a change of mind-set on the part of school staff as well as staff of EDB. In the spirit of SBM, EDB should gradually steer away from its role of supervisory and regulatory oversight to advisory support and facilitation.

Responding to expectations of parents

26. The study findings show that while supervisors, principals and teacher representatives of non-IMC schools were in general not certain about achieving the benefits of IMC on schools, parents' expectations were high. It may also be of interest to note that parent representatives of non-IMC schools in general were more optimistic, as compared with supervisors, principals and teacher representatives of non-IMC schools, and did not think that the relationship between schools and SSB would deteriorate nor schools would deviate from the original mission of SSB in running the school.

27. Views and expectations of parents should be respected and properly addressed. For non-IMC schools, the school management and SSB should be aware of the fact that parents in general are supportive of IMC and should positively respond to such expectations.

28. For IMC schools, school management should also be informed of the high expectations of parent managers. Every effort should be made to manage such expectations and make the best of their contributions, over and above participation in school activities as volunteer workers. EDB should provide more training to parent managers to help them perform their respective roles in IMC, striking a proper balance between providing strategic advice on school management and micro-managing the day-to-day operations of schools.

Addressing concerns of IMC schools

29. It is worth noting that despite the perceived benefits of IMC, most stakeholders considered that there was more paper work in school, and increased administrative workload of and additional pressure on teachers and staff due to increased transparency. In particular, as evidenced from discussions with principals and teachers, the bulk of the additional workload fell on principals.

30. It is recommended that additional support such as allowing more funding flexibility should be provided to schools so that they could deploy funding to upgrade a clerical staff

member to an administrative assistant, to help schools and the principals in particular, cope with the additional workload generated from IMC. Consideration should be given to enhance the capacity of the existing complement of supporting staff in schools, through such measures as training and recruitment of more qualified staff by re-grading of posts (say from a clerical to an executive position), so that they could provide the necessary administrative and secretarial support to IMC.

Alleviating concerns of non-participating schools

31. Given that the mere establishment of IMC does not automatically help schools realize the benefits of SBM, it is essential that IMC is established with the fullest possible support from stakeholders, including principals, teachers and parents. As pointed out by representatives of SSB of IMC schools, it took time for SSB to adapt to changes brought about by the establishment of IMC. Providing schools with more money alone was not sufficient. Schools and SSB need more time to experiment with the new management structure to realize the benefits of the SBM. SSB and stakeholders of IMC schools obviously have to devote more time and effort to develop and try out their own modus operandi most suited to their school culture and environment in the operation of the IMC.

32. It is also noted that more than 400 schools have not yet established IMC. Obviously time is running short for this group of schools. In the circumstances, it is recommended that EDB should consider the provision made in the Education Ordinance to extend the deadline for all aided schools to submit their draft IMC constitutions in order to establish their IMC.

Re-affirming the role of SSB in IMC schools

33. SSB has long provided much support to schools, financially and professionally. During discussions with SSB's representatives, it was pointed out that SSB had in the past played an important role in the management of schools, especially in the training of school personnel. SSB's role was also pivotal in facilitating sharing among schools of the same SSB.

34. It is important that SSB should be encouraged and facilitated to continue to play its useful role, after IMC schools become an independent, legal entity, ensuring stability in staff management and continuity in school operations. With their intimate knowledge of school personalities and school operations, SSB clearly has a vital and continuing role to play in the management of IMC schools, helping schools leverage support from stakeholders and realize the potential benefits of SBM.

35. At times, SSB might find it difficult to comply with the requirement on the maximum number of schools an SSB representative is allowed to serve. Given the concern of SSB, EDB is recommended to be more flexible in handling requests for a manager to serve on more than five schools, especially when SSB could demonstrate its willingness and ability to provide sufficient support to SSB managers, enabling them to serve more than 5 schools. In other words, subject to possession of requisite qualifications and experience and proof that a SSB manager has sufficient time devoted to IMC work, he/she should be allowed to work for more than 5 IMC schools.