

*LegCo Panel on Welfare Services
Meeting on 13 November 2000*

Response to views/concerns raised in the meeting (para. in minutes of meeting)

Q.1 Whether the policy of “One School Social Worker for each Secondary School” could be lifted for schools which had more cases in need of service or lower banding schools? (paras. 10, 12 and 14(d))

A.1 The provision of one school social worker for each secondary school has the benefit of ensuring that each school has a full-time stationing social worker, which enables closer collaboration with school personnel as well as enhances accessibility of support services for the school, students and parents. The school social worker is also expected to coordinate and mobilize community-based services including services from both casework and young people services (i.e., services from family services centres, family life education officers, children and youth centres, integrated teams, outreaching social work teams, clinical psychologists, educational psychologists [under the Education Department], and so on). It is believed that a stationing school social worker together with flexible use of community resources will be able to provide more comprehensive support services for the schools, students and parents.

For the 7 large academically-low achiever (ALA) schools with a student population of over 1,300, a Panel to Review School Social Work Support was formed to assess the effectiveness of community-based services in complementing school social work service and the actual service need. The overall findings indicated that the provision for school social work service for these 7 schools had been increasing in the past three years and all schools concerned showed their readiness to make use of community-based services in meeting the needs of their students. As the provision of more than 1 school social worker to the above 7 schools was given prior to the implementation of the “one-

school social worker for each secondary school” policy and in view of the large demand for social work service by these 7 schools, the Panel recommended and the Administration has taken a conscious management decision to retain the former level of provision for these 7 schools as a grandfathering arrangement with effect from 1 April 2001. The Panel supports the arrangement. An additional \$1.36 Mn per annum has been identified within the SWD vote to cover a total provision of 3.3 ASWOs for these schools.

Q.2 Concern over whether the new provisions of integrated teams (ITs) could adequately cope with the needs of young people as some districts were no longer provided with centre-based services. The Administration should not lose sight of community-based children and youth services. (para 11)

A.2 The redeployment of resources to improve school social work service only involves resources from over-provided/under-utilized children and youth centres (CYCs) and staffing provision of study and reading (SR) rooms. Subsequent to the redeployment exercise, provision of CYCs is maintained at 98% of service demand. All 18 administrative districts are still provided with centre-based children and youth services.

The Administration is committed to working in partnership with NGOs to regularly review service demand and working out effective means to meet the demand. In the past years, several reviews had been conducted on CYC service (one each in 1994 and 1997) and school social work service (one each in 1986, 1990 and 1999). At district level, the Local Committees on Services for Young People under the auspices of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) are responsible for coordinating relevant professionals and service units to continuously assess the needs of local youth and devise effective strategies to meet those needs.

Q.3 More comprehensive long and medium-term plans on children and youth services will be needed. (para 11)

A.3 The Administration recognizes the need to develop long-term strategies and a planning mechanism for youth welfare policy taking into

consideration district needs and characteristics. The Health and Welfare Bureau and SWD will work together on this.

Q.4 Concern over disrupting trust and rapport as well as protection of clients' information upon swapping and transfer of schools between operating organizations. (para 13)

Schools should have the right to change the NGOs providing them with school social work service. (para 13)

School principals should have the say in retaining the NGOs providing them school social work service. (para 16)

A.4 The principles of swapping and transfer of schools between school social work operating organizations are clearly laid down in the Report on Review of School Social Work Service of April 1999. In brief, when considering swapping and transfer of schools, the circumstances of all parties concerned will be taken into account and adequate notification will be given to avoid disruption of service and to minimize any negative impact on students.

To safeguard the privacy of clients during transfer of cases, clear guidelines on adherence to the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance have been stipulated in "A Guide on Multi-disciplinary Collaboration in School Social Work Service" released in July 2000 and widely circulated among NGOs providing school social work service. There is similar requirement on measures to safeguard clients' privacy under the Service Quality Standards of the Service Performance Monitoring System implemented by the welfare sector.

With regard to the issue of request from schools to change NGOs providing school social service, SWD will consider well-justified requests on case-by-case merits. So far, SWD has not received such request.

Q.5 SWD should conduct a yearly review on the implementation of the policy of "One School Social Worker for each Secondary School" to ensure that it would continue to meet students' needs. (para 13)

A.5 The Steering Committee on School Social Work Service under the auspices of SWD was set up in August 1999 with representatives from ED, schools, parent-teacher association, NGOs and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS). The key function of the Steering Committee is to follow up on the implementation of the recommendations of the Report on Review of School Social Work Service and to monitor and advise on the overall service delivery of school social work service to ensure that the service can meet with the changing needs of the students.

Q.6 SWD should consider extending its psychological and psychiatric services to secondary schools. (para 13)

A.6 Services provided by SWD and NGO clinical psychologists are available to the general public. If any student requires the service, referrals can be made through the school social worker. On the other hand, though SWD does not provide any direct psychiatric services, students could have access to these services through appropriate referrals if necessary. In addition, the Department of Health provides comprehensive Student Health Service which will screen cases and make referral to Hospital Authority for follow up when necessary.

Q.7 Allow individual schools and NGOs to decide between themselves the caseload to be handled annually by the school social worker. [para 14 (a)]

A.7 The output indicators for school social work service are worked out in collaboration with NGOs and HKCSS in the context of the Funding and Service Agreement in the Service Performance Monitoring System. The indicators are set as minimum requirements on the output of school social work service. The current practice is that annual service plan for individual schools are worked out by the schools and school social workers taking into consideration the different needs of individual schools.

Q.8 Clerical support provided by schools to school social workers was generally not adequate and should be improved. [para 14(b)]

A.8 Clerical support has already been included in the provision of school social worker unit. Individual NGOs can make flexible deployment of manpower according to the need and circumstances of individual school social workers. In addition, NGOs can enlist the assistance of school principals to provide clerical support to facilitate service operation.

Q.9 Schools should provide independent offices equipped with basic office equipment and designated telephone line to the school social workers. [para 14 (c)]

A.9 The Administration has appealed to all secondary schools to provide an independent room and necessary facilities to facilitate the work of school social workers. A survey conducted by the HKCSS in 1999/2000 school year indicated that school social workers in 432 schools (95.6%) had an independent office and 405 schools (89.6%) had a designated telephone line. A similar survey on the provision for the current school year (2000/01) indicated similar findings. While the situation as reflected in the survey is generally acceptable, the Administration will continue to encourage the remaining schools to provide an independent room and other necessities to school social workers as far as possible. If they encounter any difficulties, the Administration is ready to assist as appropriate. In July 2000, the Education Department has issued a circular to heads of secondary schools encouraging them to provide an easily accessible, independent room for school social workers. For new schools with 30 classes or more, a room for school social worker has been included as a standard provision.

Q.10 A system should be established to provide temporary staff to substitute the school social worker on maternity leave. [para 14(e)]

A.10 Under the existing Subvention Guide, NGOs can use the flexibility of mid-point provision to meet the requirement for relief staff. Under the new Lump Sum Grant subvention mode, which is to be implemented from 2000-01, the flexibility for NGOs to deploy resources to suit operation/service needs will be even greater.

Q.11 There should be a balanced development in the services provided by ITs and the school social work service. [para 14(f)]

A.11 The 1994 Report on Review of Children and Youth Centre Service suggests that the effective and efficient way to meet the changing needs of our young people is to adopt an integrated, holistic approach. Such an approach can prevent the fragmentation and compartmentalization of services and facilitate the provision of services that are targeted at meeting the needs of young people. Through flexible deployment of manpower and resources under more coordinated management of services and provision of a great variety of youth programmes to meet the multifarious needs of young people in a specific catchment area, ITs can respond more actively to the needs of young people in the community. School social work service is an integral part of ITs. In fact, more and more NGOs are ready to form ITs in order to have more flexibility to provide service to meet with the dynamic needs of young people. The Administration will continue the effort to form integrated teams.

Q.12 Where necessary, additional resources should be allocated to the provision of CYCs and SR rooms [para 14(g)]

A.12 Even after the redeployment of resources from CYCs and SR rooms to improve school social work service, the overall provision of CYCs is maintained at 98% of the total demand. SWD will continue to monitor provision of youth services to ensure that the needs of young people are met.

Q.13 Students of opposite sex to the school social worker might feel embarrassed to discuss their problems relating to love / sex with the school social worker. (para 15)

A.13 All school social workers are trained professionals and are equipped to deal with problems of students of both sexes. In addition, NGOs can make flexible deployment of manpower to the schools according to the needs of individual schools or students. This is particularly true when

more and more schools are being served by ITs.

Q.14 Whether the service of SR rooms had been adversely affected as a result of redeploying resources from SR rooms to school social work service. (para 17)

A.14 In redeploying resources to improve school social work service, only the staff cost of SR rooms have been pooled. NGOs can still retain the premises and the other charges of the SR rooms. Under the circumstances, NGOs can engage staff of CYCs and volunteers to maintain the SR room service according to local needs.

Response to views/concerns raised in submission from the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union (HKPTU) not covered in the meeting (para. in submission from the HKPTU)

Q.1 There should be clear guidelines on time for school social workers to interview students (para 6)

A.1 The suggestion for schools to set down clear guidelines for school social workers and teachers on when the former can conduct interview with students is welcomed. In fact, in "A Guide on Multi-disciplinary Collaboration in School Social Work Service", school social workers are encouraged to work closely with school principals and other school personnel in developing mutually-agreed arrangements for effective delivery of service.

Q.2 While school social workers station at school, they would need support from parent organization in their service delivery. (para 8)

A.2 As the welfare of the students is of our paramount concern, both NGOs and SWD will make every possible effort to facilitate and support service delivered by school social workers in serving the changing and multifarious needs of students.

Q.3 As school social workers may be required by schools to be

involved in various school activities, there should be mutually-agreed principles. (para 11)

- A.3 The suggestion that schools and school social workers should develop mutually-agreed principles on the latter's involvement in the various school activities is welcomed. To facilitate cooperation and collaboration, roles and responsibilities as well as division of labour among related professionals serving students have been laid down in "A Guide on Multi-disciplinary Collaboration in School Social Work Service" released in July 2000. The Guide has been widely distributed among NGOs providing young people services and schools among others. More importantly, as pointed out in the submission from HKPTU, the professional ethics of school social workers must be upheld in developing any such principles. The prime responsibility of school social workers is to provide welfare service to students and their families.