

(Translation)

Questions raised by the Hon Chan Yuen-han on 15 November 2000

- 1) The ratio of school social workers to students in large schools :
For large schools with a student population of 1 300 or above, the policy of “one SSW for each secondary school” is in effect trimming down their SSW support. How can one SSW possibly serve 1 300 students, and will the quality of service be thus affected?

Reply : The policy of “one SSW for each secondary school” is to provide every secondary school with one full-time stationing SSW, with community-based youth services as support services. We believe that SSW service backed up by community-based services can cater for the various needs of schools, students and their parents, irrespective of the nature and student population of the school. This policy has the wide support of the community. At present, with the co-ordination of District Social Welfare Officers, schools and community-service units are linked up to provide the necessary support. Taking into account the special needs of the 7 ALA schools, the Administration has, as a transitional measure, maintained the school social work service provision of the 7 ALA schools with a student population of 1 300 or above at the level of 1:1000 in 2000/01. A review panel has been set up to examine whether these 7 ALA schools still have a need to maintain this SSW staffing level with the introduction of community-based services as back-up services. If the outcome indicates the need to continue to do so, the Administration will consider, subject to availability of resources, allocating additional resources to meet the needs of these 7 schools.

- 2) There should also be more social workers for primary schools : As the youth problem is getting worse, with the age of problem youth getting lower and lower, we think it is imperative for us to implement the policy of “one SSW for each school” in primary schools, so as to address our youth problem. In what way will the Administration tackle the problem? Will it be carried out immediately; if not, when?

Reply : The Committee on the Review of School Social Work Service set up in 1999 under the Social Welfare Department agreed to the recommendation of its Working Group that the guidance service for primary school students be provided by student guidance officers/teachers.

At present, the ratio of student guidance officers/teachers to students is 1:1680. In 2000/2001 school year, there are about 300 student guidance officers/teachers serving over 800 primary schools in the territory. Student guidance service is a school-based service, covering mainly preventive and developmental work, and its aim is to help primary school students face their developmental problems. Moreover, student guidance officers/teachers will help schools in creating a happy learning environment conducive to the development of students.

As the student population varies with schools, some of the student guidance officers/teachers have to serve more than one primary school. The Government is going to look at the adequacy of this support service for students in the context of a review of the ratio between student guidance officers/teachers and students, and will further improve the existing ratio, subject to availability of resources.

In addition, children and youth centres and integrated teams will provide services for primary school students in accordance with the special needs of individual schools.

- 3) Problems with reducing the number of youth centres : The Administration has introduced “integrated teams” to improve the school social work service, but there is a corresponding reduction of 39 district youth centres. The effect of the latter is that the youth in need cannot get such a support service. How is the Administration going to tackle the problem?

Reply : This resource redeployment exercise for improved SSW service is merely redeployment of existing resources for more effective use, that is, redeploying the resources of children and youth centres in oversupply or with low utilisation rate and redeploying the manpower resources of study and reading rooms. Hence, there is no reduction in the Government’s financial provision for youth services. Under this redeployment exercise, there will be 21 additional integrated teams and expansion of the existing 21 integrated teams. These teams will provide a wide range of services for young people in different districts to meet their needs. With a new management approach, the integrated teams should be able to redeploy manpower and resources flexibly and thus play a more effective role in catering for the needs of youth in the community.