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**Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to the Provision of
Boarding Places, Senior Secondary Education and Employment
Opportunities for Children with Special Educational Needs**

Residential respite service for persons with disabilities aged under 15

On behalf of the Subcommittee, I convey to you the views and suggestions of members about the provision of residential respite service for persons with disabilities (PWDs) below the age of 15.

The Subcommittee has been following up the provision of boarding services for students with special educational needs since its formation in January 2005. Members are disappointed that neither the Education Bureau nor the Social Welfare Department (SWD) are currently providing residential respite service for PWDs aged under 15. In this regard, I had written to the former Chief Secretary for Administration (CS) on 28 February 2007. In his reply dated 12 June 2007, the former CS considered that residential respite service was by nature a social service. The former CS also indicated that the then Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food would examine whether it was possible to enhance or extend the existing services to help fill the service gap with the existing resources allocated to him, and would explore different service options and the merits of fee charging.

Following the former CS's reply, SWD has examined the feasibility of extending the residential respite service in its various residential homes for PWDs. The Subcommittee has been informed at its meeting on 30 November 2007 that so far, seven non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have agreed to extend the service to PWDs below the age of 15 in 35 residential care homes for PWDs, and the total number of respite places provided will be 86.

While members welcome a breakthrough in the provision of residential respite service for PWDs below the age of 15, they consider the arrangement under preparation not ideal. Members do not share the former CS's view that residential respite service is a social service. Members consider that residential respite service for PWDs below the age of 15 is part and parcel of education, which is evident from the fact that a number of special schools are providing boarding service for their students. Members have put forth the following views and suggestion for your consideration:

- (a) without jeopardizing the work currently undertaken by SWD concerning the implementation of a scheme to extend the existing residential respite service provided by NGOs to accommodate PWDs below the age of 15, the merits and feasibility of special schools providing residential respite service should be reconsidered;
- (b) even if residential respite service for PWDs below the age of 15 falls within the purview of the Labour and Welfare Bureau, this should not be provided within the existing resources allocated to the Bureau, as indicated in the former CS's letter; and
- (c) upon the implementation of the extension scheme, the Education Bureau should be responsible for arranging residential respite service for PWDs below the age of 15 who have been certified as genuinely requiring such service but who cannot be accommodated under the extension scheme.

As the Subcommittee intends to conclude its deliberation work in the first quarter of 2008, I should be grateful for your early response.

I have copied this letter to the Secretary for Education and the Secretary for Labour and Welfare and would appreciate their separate responses on the matter.

Yours sincerely,

(Dr Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung)
Chairman of Subcommittee

c.c. Secretary for Education
Secretary for Labour and Welfare