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Panel on Education

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 18 March 2010**

Education for young drug abusers

Purpose

This paper summarizes the issues raised by the Panel on Education (the Panel) concerning the provision of education for young drug abusers.

Background

Prevalence of drug among youth

2. In the past few years, Hong Kong had seen a significant rise in the number of young people under the age of 21 abusing psychotropic substances. The increase reversed the trend of overall decline in the total population of drug abusers in the past decade. The total number of reported young drug abusers increased from 2 578 in 2006 to 3 430 in 2008, representing an increase of 33%, and the mean age of first-time abusers under the age of 21 was 15.

3. According to the findings of the recently released "2008-2009 Survey of Drug Use among Students" conducted by Narcotics Division of the Security Bureau, drug prevalence among secondary students for the age group of 12 or below was 4.6 %, compared with 2.4% in the 2004-2005 survey. The percentage of lifetime drug-taking secondary students increased from 3.3% in 2004-2005 to 4.3% in 2008-2009, and that of drug-taking secondary students in the last 30 days of the survey increased from 0.8% in 2004-2005 to 1.5% in 2008-2009. The survey also confirmed the trend on the lowering of age of drug abusers.

4. In his 2007-2008 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced the appointment of the Secretary for Justice to lead a high level inter-departmental Task Force on Youth Drug Abuse (the Task Force) to tackle the youth drug abuse problem. The Task Force, set up in October 2007, released its Report on

11 November 2008. The Report contained some 70 recommendations spanning the five prongs of the anti-drug policy, namely, preventive education and publicity, treatment and rehabilitation, law enforcement and legislation, external co-operation and research. In terms of treatment and rehabilitation strategy for young drug abusers, the Task Force recommended, among other things, enhancement of downstream programmes in terms of capacity and sophistication, as well as reintegration of young drug abusers into society. The strategy had been further developed and taken forward in the context of the Fifth Three Year Plan on Treatment and Rehabilitation Services in Hong Kong (2009-2011) released in April 2009. The recommendations put forward by the Three Year Plan regarding student drug abusers are in **Appendix I**.

Existing services for youth drug abusers

5. Under the existing mechanism, when students are found to be abusing drugs, schools are advised to notify the parents concerned, consult the respective Police School Liaison Officers and refer the case to school social workers and the student guidance personnel of schools for counselling and follow-up services.

6. High risk or confirmed cases will be referred to counselling centres for psychotropic substance abusers (CCPSAs), which are cluster-based, designated units providing preventive education services and community-based treatment and rehabilitation support to psychotropic substance abusers. There are currently seven CCPSAs operated by non-government organizations (NGOs), as well as two centres run by Caritas Lok Heep Club, that serve the whole territory. Students can continue their education in their original schools while receiving treatment and rehabilitation.

7. In cases where students wish to seek voluntary residential treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration through a medical or non-medical model (such as gospel affiliation), they may consider residential drug treatment and rehabilitation centres and halfway houses (DTRCs) operated by NGOs. Since 1995, the Education Bureau (EDB) has been providing subvention for non-profit making voluntary agencies running DTRCs to operate educational programmes for young drug abusers aged 18 or below, preparing them for continuation of schooling or employment upon full rehabilitation. The educational programme is funded at a rate of \$320,000 per annum for each unit of 10 students. In June 2009, 18 such educational programmes were operated in nine centres run by five NGOs. In addition, Christian Zheng Sheng College (CZSC) operates a private school co-located with two DTRCs to provide complementary services comprising both counselling and educational programmes to school-aged drug abusers.

8. The drug treatment programmes in DTRCs subvented by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) normally last for about 12 months. Students after receiving drug treatment may resume schooling in mainstream schools or pursue other programmes, such as courses run by the Vocational Training Council. If there are difficulties in placing students back to mainstream schools, EDB will offer

placement service and adopt a low profile approach so as to avoid labelling effect on the one hand and to assist the students to integrate into normal school life on the other.

9. Should students continue to have behavioural, emotional or family problems, they may be placed to Schools for Social Development (SSDs) through a central referral mechanism. SSDs provide intensive counselling and education guidance for the students with a view to helping them tide over their transient development difficulties and strengthening their life skills. Students with improvement will be reintegrated into mainstream schools. Currently, there are seven aided SSDs providing about 1 000 school places under the subvention of EDB. SWD also provides subvention for on-site residential care for students of six of these schools, including two for girls and four for boys.

10. For students who have committed drug-related or other crimes, professional intervention and support may be rendered through the Community Support Service Scheme and the Family Conference Scheme for those subject to the Police Superintendent's Discretion Scheme.

Deliberations of the Panel

11. In the 2008-2009 session, the Panel held four meetings to discuss issues relating to youth drug abuse and invited deputations to present views at two of these meetings. The provision of education for young drug abusers was one of the major concerns raised by the deputations and members. The relevant issues are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

Christian Zheng Sheng College

12. Members noted that CZSC was currently the only educational institution in Hong Kong dedicated to helping reform young drug abusers. CZSC was established in 1985 as a drug addiction treatment centre, and registered as a private school in 1998. About 90% of its students were admitted to CZSC by court order, and most of them were drug addicts. In addition to undertaking education programmes, students also received vocational training.

13. The designed capacity of CZSC was to accommodate 30 students. However, its students had reached 120 in 2010. The facilities in CZSC were considered below the acceptable standard. To relieve its overcrowding and unsatisfactory conditions as well as to address the safety concern of its present site in Chi Ma Wan, CZSC submitted a relocation application to the Administration in 2007. The Administration had agreed in principle to relocate CZSC to the former New Territories Heung Yee Kuk Southern District Secondary School (SDSS) in Mui Wo on Lantau Island. However, the relocation plan was opposed by some Mui Wo residents who considered that the SDSS site should be used as a secondary school for local children as many of them had to travel long hours to go to schools

outside Mui Wo.

14. Although members had expressed diverse views on whether SDSS was a suitable permanent site for relocation of CZSC, they agreed on the need for its relocation. Some members considered SDSS not an ideal site as it had only 24 classrooms and could not accommodate the boarding facilities of CZSC. Moreover, the structural requirements of classrooms and boarding facilities were very different. Members criticized the Administration for taking a passive attitude on the relocation of CZSC. They urged the Administration to consult the Heung Yee Kuk, Islands District Council and Mui Wo residents to resolve the matter. Members stressed that the need of Mui Wo residents for local school places should not be overlooked. As an interim measure, it was suggested that CZSC be relocated to SDSS for three years and, in the meantime, the Administration should review whether the site was suitable for CZSC for long. It was hoped that in the three-year period, the behaviour of CZSC students could impress upon the Mui Wo residents for a change in their attitude.

15. The Administration acknowledged the need for CZSC's relocation to a bigger site to accommodate its growing number of students, and stressed that it was in full support for the relocation of CSZC to SDSS which was considered an appropriate site for the purpose. The Administration explained that the Security Bureau had taken the lead in coordinating the relocation of CZSC with the participation of EDB. Some vacant rural school premises in the North and Yuen Long districts had been identified but were found unsuitable for the purpose. The Administration clarified that there were sufficient public sector primary schools in Mui Wo to meet the demand of local students. Mui Wo School offered 29 primary school places and Bui O Public School offered 28, and the primary student population of Mui Wo had been stable in recent years. At the secondary level, about 50 Primary 6 students in Mui Wo took part in the Secondary School Places Allocation System every year and this student number had remained stable for the past eight years. There were five secondary schools in Tung Chung, two in Cheung Chau and more than 10 on Hong Kong Island. As only 50 students required secondary school places in Mui Wo, such a small number of students could not sustain the operation of a secondary school with at least three classes at each level, a scale marginally viable to offer a broad and balanced curriculum under the new senior secondary academic structure. The Administration assured members that it would continue to consult Heung Yee Kuk and the Islands District Council to address the relevant issues of CZSC's relocation.

16. Apart from the relocation issue, the provision of resources for CZSC was another area of concern to members. Members were given to understand that the students of CZSC were recipients of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme, and their CSSA payments were used for settlement of their school fees and boarding and living expenses. Members expressed serious concern about the Administration's inaction in providing appropriate assistance to CZSC. Members considered that the current subsidy policy was confined to grammar schools and the role of special schools, such as rehabilitation centres-cum-schools,

had not been duly recognized. As CZSC was currently operated with a private school licence, members sought clarification on whether the Administration supported the operation of CZSC as a school or a DTRC in SDSS.

17. The Administration indicated that it fully supported CZSC's relocation together with its existing private school registration. There were currently no policies or prescribed procedures regarding the provision of resources to rehabilitation centre-cum-schools such as CZSC. The Administration acknowledged the need to explore new services to meet the specific needs of young drug abusers. Being the only rehabilitation centre-cum-school, CZSC served as an example to develop complementary services comprising drug treatment and rehabilitation programmes as well as education programmes to school-aged youngsters. Since rehabilitation centre-cum-school was a new model, the Administration considered it important to consider the matter from a holistic and integrated manner and examine the relocation plan and the future mode of operation of CZSC in allocating resources to it.

18. Members called on the Administration to formulate long-term strategies and subvention for rehabilitation centres-cum-schools and to promote public understanding of the services provided by CZSC.

Education for young drug abusers during rehabilitation

19. Members stressed the importance of providing formal education to young drug abusers while they were receiving rehabilitation treatment. Members pointed out that like other school-aged children, drug abusers were entitled to 12-year free education. Some deputations also opined that the Administration had not respected the educational needs of young drug abusers and deprived them of the right to education.

20. The Administration clarified that the service mode adopted by CZSC, i.e. treatment and rehabilitation centre-cum-school, did not fall within the category of special schools. The main function of treatment and rehabilitation centre-cum-school was to provide drug treatment and rehabilitation services to youth drug abusers instead of providing formal education. Nevertheless, the Administration acknowledged that formal study in mainstream schools might not be appropriate for youth drug abusers while receiving treatment and rehabilitation, and would look into new ways to expand the existing support measures.

21. The Administration also advised that since 1995, NGOs running DTRCs could apply for subvention from EDB to operate education programmes, i.e. Chinese, English and Mathematics, plus other complementary education activities, for young drug abusers aged 18 or below, preparing them for continuation of schooling or employment upon full rehabilitation. Students aged 14 or above who had committed drug-related offences would receive education at drug addiction treatment centres operated by the Correctional Services Department.

22. Members pointed out that some youth drug abusers chose to stay in CZSC to finish education after drug rehabilitation. As such, the Administration should not regard the provision of education in CZSC as transient in nature, and should enhance the provision of education programmes to students in CZSC.

Education for young drug abusers after rehabilitation

23. Members were given to understand that students after drug rehabilitation had difficulties in resuming normal schooling. It was reported in the media that only 5% of the rehabilitated students were able to reintegrate into normal school life.

24. According to the Administration, DTRCs had all along been provided with resources to organise educational programmes for school-aged young drug abusers. Upon the completion of the educational programmes, the respective DTRCs would, having regard to the interest and ability of the students, plan for their future exit paths. Some students might choose to resume mainstream schooling while others might prefer undertaking vocational training or starting an employment.

25. As of June 2009, 140 young drug abusers were receiving educational programmes as well as vocational training at various DTRCs. Of these, more than 90% were above the age of 15. For those who preferred mainstream schooling, the respective NGOs would contact the schools and arrange for the students to return to normal school life. The respective NGOs would seek assistance from the Administration where the rehabilitated students encountered difficulties in resuming mainstream schooling. To enhance the referral mechanism, the Administration was promoting the formation of a network of schools which shared the same belief in helping rehabilitated students. The Administration stressed that the low percentage of rehabilitated young drug abusers returning to normal schooling might be due to their preference for vocational training.

26. Some members suggested reinstating the operation of practical schools to cater for the specific needs of at-risk students who might not be suitable for the mainstream school curriculum. The Administration clarified that although the curriculum and academic structure of practical schools had been aligned with those of the mainstream schools, their specific role in catering for at-risk students still remained. Practical schools maintained its referral mechanism and the related manpower of school social workers were also transferred to the respective NGOs designated by the schools concerned. These schools continued to maintain a small class size and offer boarding services to needy students.

27. The Administration also advised that Regional Education Offices and the Non-Attendance Team of EDB would follow up every student aged below 15 leaving school and ensure that the student concerned would return to normal schooling. In recent years, follow up services to students aged 15 or above had also been stepped up.

Latest development

28. It was reported in the media in August 2009 that the school funds of CZSC might have been funnelled to CZSA, which allegedly had been making some questionable investments in the Mainland and Japan. According to the media, CZSC received about \$1 million of CSSA payments each month from SWD for payment of school fees and boarding and living expenses of around 100 students. The Board of Directors of CSZA and CZSC issued a joint declaration on 24 August 2009 stating that they had resolved to appoint an independent accountant to separate the previous audited financial information of CZSA and CZSC into independent financial reports and the operation of CZSA and CZSC such that CZSC should be independently registered as a charitable organization.

Relevant papers

29. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in **Appendix II**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
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**Recommendations on treatment and rehabilitation services
for student drug abusers in
The Fifth Three Year Plan on Treatment and Rehabilitation Services
in Hong Kong (2009-2011)**

- (a) EDB should, apart from increasing service capacity, encourage development and advancement of new or proven service models that would better address the needs due to the changing drug scene. Quoting the Christian Zheng Sheng Association as an example, one idea is to develop more complementary services comprising drug treatment and rehabilitation programmes as well as educational programmes to school-aged youngsters. Another idea is providing shorter-term treatment and rehabilitation programmes for young psychotropic substance abusers which may cause less disruption to their work or schooling, help break the vicious cycle of those early experimenting with drugs, and can better motivate them to seek assistance;
- (b) EDB should continue to provide subvention for non-government organizations running residential drug treatment and rehabilitation centres and halfway houses to operate educational programmes for young drug abusers aged 18 or below and keep reviewing the programme operation to meet the changing needs of young drug abusers;
- (c) EDB and SWD should take into account the special educational needs of students rehabilitating from drug problems when they consider the service demand and enhancement for Schools for Social Development; and
- (d) The placement services by Regional Education Offices and Non-Attendance Team of EDB should continue to help rehabilitated students return to normal schooling.

Source: Extracted from the Administration paper [CB(2)2058/08-09(01)] provided in July 2009.

Relevant papers on education for young drug abusers

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Legislative Council	29-30.4.2009	Motion on "Concern about the youth drug problem" Hansard (English) (page 35-112) Progress report
Panel on Education	25.5.2009	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	17.6.2009 (Agenda item II)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	2.7.2009	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	8.9.2009	Minutes Agenda

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