

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(4)1030/15-16
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB4/PL/ED

Panel on Education

**Minutes of the special meeting
held on Monday, 21 March 2016, at 5:00 pm
in Conference Room 1 of the Legislative Council Complex**

- Members present** : Dr Hon LAM Tai-fai, SBS, JP(Chairman)
Hon IP Kin-yuen (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, BBS, MH
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, GBS, JP
Hon Starry LEE Wai-king, JP
Hon CHAN Hak-kan, JP
Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG Mei-fun, SBS, JP
Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che
Hon WONG Yuk-man
Hon Michael TIEN Puk-sun, BBS, JP
Hon NG Leung-sing, SBS, JP
Hon Steven HO Chun-yin, BBS
Hon Gary FAN Kwok-wai
Hon MA Fung-kwok, SBS, JP
Hon Charles Peter MOK, JP
Dr Hon Kenneth CHAN Ka-lok
Hon Dennis KWOK
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Dr Hon CHIANG Lai-wan, JP
Hon Christopher CHUNG Shu-kun, BBS, MH, JP
- Member attending** : Dr Hon Elizabeth QUAT, JP

Members absent : Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, GBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, GBS, JP
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan, JP
Hon IP Kwok-him, GBS, JP
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-yee, GBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Hon CHAN Chi-chuen
Dr Hon Helena WONG Pik-wan
Hon Martin LIAO Cheung-kong, SBS, JP

Public Officers attending : Agenda item I

Education Bureau

Mr Eddie NG , SBS, JP
Secretary for Education

Mrs Marion LAI, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education

Mrs Michelle WONG, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education (3)

Miss Sharon KO
Principal Assistant Secretary (Higher Education)

Dr Verena LAU
Senior Specialist
(Education Psychology Service/Kowloon)

Mr Joe NG
Principal Education Officer
(Curriculum Development) 1

Social Welfare Department

Mr Peter NG
Assistant Director (Youth and Corrections)

Department of Health

Dr Thomas CHUNG
Consultant Community Medicine
(Student Health Service)

Hospital Authority

Dr Linda YU
Deputising Chief Manager
(Integrated Care Programs)

Mr Kenny WONG
Manager (Integrated Programs)

Clerk in attendance : Miss Polly YEUNG
Chief Council Secretary (4)4

Staff in attendance : Mr KWONG Kam-fai
Senior Council Secretary (4)4

Miss Mandy NG
Council Secretary (4)4

Ms Sandy HAU
Legislative Assistant (4)4

Action

I. Issues related to student suicide

(LC Paper No. CB(4)740/15-16(01) -- Paper provided by the Administration)

Briefing by the Administration

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Secretary for Education ("SED") briefed members on the existing measures, services and support as well as measures in response to the recent occurrence of student suicidal cases, details of which were set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(4)740/15-16(01)). He informed members that in addition to the five measures announced on 10 March 2016, the Education Bureau ("EDB") had decided, as a special measure, to reserve \$5 million for disbursement of a special Home-School Co-operation Grant ("HSC Grant") of \$5,000 to each public sector primary and secondary school and school under the Direct Subsidy Scheme so as to provide schools with additional resources to carry out measures for promoting home-school co-operation to support students' healthy mental development.

Action

2. The Assistant Director (Youth and Corrections) of the Social Welfare Department ("AD/SWD") briefed members on the services for children and youth provided by non-government organizations ("NGOs") under government subvention. He highlighted that enhancement had been made to school social work ("SSW") service in recent years and there were 561 school social workers providing services in the 2015-2016 school year. In the light of the spate of student suicide cases, SWD had encouraged NGOs providing SSW service to step up their efforts to disseminate messages of positive attitudes through school assemblies and parent seminars.

3. The Consultant Community Medicine (Student Health Service) of the Department of Health ("CCM/DH") briefed members on the Student Health Service which promoted the health, including psychosocial health, of primary and secondary students and increased their resilience and ability in facing adversity and managing stress.

4. The Deputising Chief Manager (Integrated Care Programs) of the Hospital Authority ("DCM/HA") gave a brief account of the Early Assessment Service for Young People ("EASY"), in which schools could contact the respective EASY service centres direct for expert advice and support.

Discussion

5. The Chairman said that he had received the wording of two motions under this agenda item to be moved by Dr Fernando CHEUNG and Mr Michael TIEN respectively. The wording of the motions was tabled (and subsequently issued vide LC Paper Nos. CB(4)755/15-16(01) and (02)). The Chairman said that he would deal with the motions after members' deliberations. As the views expressed by members in the ensuing discussion would be relevant to the motion, he would not arrange a separate debate on the motion. Members noted and raised no objection.

6. The Chairman drew members' attention to Rule 83A of the Rules of Procedure which provided that a Member shall not move any motion or amendment relating to a matter in which he had a pecuniary interest, whether direct or indirect, or speak on any such matter, except where he disclosed the nature of that interest. He reminded members to declare interests, if any, in the matter under discussion.

Action

Concerns about pressure on students under the existing education system

7. Dr Kenneth CHAN said that in the light of the spate of student suicides, the Administration should critically review the existing education system so as to relieve the pressure of studies and examinations on students. However, he noted that SED had refused to receive petitions when leaving a school last weekend, which appeared that the Administration was unwilling to listen to public views. The Deputy Chairman concurred that the Administration should listen to the views and concerns of stakeholders and improve the education system, instead of adopting a resistant attitude when being criticized.

8. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che considered that the five measures announced by EDB could not tackle the problem of student suicide at its root. He was deeply concerned that the education system placed excessive emphasis on academic excellence and failed to provide choices of curriculum and diversified pathways to cater for the different needs and aspirations of students.

9. Mr Michael TIEN stressed the importance of a happy childhood. He referred to the implementation of the Territory-wide System Assessment ("TSA") and opined that the Administration should consider maintaining the anonymity of candidates and participating schools to help eliminate over-drilling and alleviate the pressure on students.

10. Dr Fernando CHEUNG noted that according to the Children Fatality Review Report, pressure at schools was one of the main reasons of student suicide cases. He urged for the suspension of the implementation of TSA. Mr Gary FAN said that the number of student suicide cases that had occurred since the commencement of this academic year was an alarming signal of the pressure of the existing education system on students. Mr WONG Yuk-man opined that apart from imparting knowledge, education should also provide guidance to students and strengthen their positive values. Mr FAN and Mr WONG called for the abolition of TSA.

11. The Chairman noted with concern that of the 60 student suicide cases since the 2012-2013 school year, more than 20 cases occurred in the current school year. He called on the Administration to critically review the existing education system with a view to making improvement and alleviating pressure on students.

12. Regarding concerns about TSA, SED advised that drilling had never been part of the intended arrangements for implementing TSA. The Coordinating Committee on Basic Competency Assessment and

Action

Assessment Literacy ("Coordinating Committee") had recognized the functional use of TSA data in providing feedback to learning and teaching and enabling the Administration to identify priorities and directions for implementing measures to support learning. The Coordinating Committee took the view that TSA should continue to be carried out to retain the functions. SED re-affirmed that the Government had all along monitored the development of the education system and had taken appropriate measures to address various concerns. He further said that during his visit to a school last Saturday, he had exchanged views with different stakeholders of the school, including its students and teachers.

13. Mr Michael TIEN recalled that when whole-day primary schooling was implemented, it was intended that students would stay at school for about seven hours each day and complete their homework at schools. However, the current situation was that students often had to stay at school for up to 10 hours each day and took home seven to 10 items of homework. He was gravely concerned about too much homework being assigned to students and requested the Administration to issue strict guidelines to ensure that most of the students could complete their homework at schools. Mr TIEN also considered it necessary to formulate a set of happiness assessment indicators for gauging students' levels of satisfaction with school life. He said that he would move a motion to this effect. Dr Elizabeth QUAT said that according to her understanding, it was common that primary students were given eight to nine items of homework everyday.

14. SED advised that EDB had issued guidelines to schools in late October 2015 urging them to formulate an appropriate and transparent school-based homework policy. As reflected by school councils and school principals, the amount of homework assigned to students had been reduced since the issuance of the guidelines by EDB. SED said that he was aware of some cases in which relatively more items of homework had been assigned before the start of a long school holiday. EDB would follow up with the schools concerned in cases where students had been given excessive homework. The Administration would provide copies of circulars/letters issued by EDB to the school sector in respect of the homework policy in primary schools.

(Post-meeting note: The Administration's written information was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)979/15-16(01) on 12 May 2016.)

15. Mr Gary FAN was of the view that the Administration should increase the provision of subsidized first-year-first-degree places in order to relieve keen competition among secondary students for university places.

Action

Mr Christopher CHUNG was concerned that young people had become more vulnerable nowadays. Nevertheless, he considered that in the light of concerns about study-related pressure on students, the Administration should review the education system to provide more diversified pathways to cater for different needs of young people.

16. SED explained that the Administration had increased the opportunities of subsidized higher education in recent years. For example, the Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors was launched to subsidize about 1 000 students per cohort pursuing self-financing programmes. The University Grants Committee-funded senior year intake places had been increased from 4 000 to 5 000 per year by phases. The Administration would continue to provide multiple and flexible study pathways for students through the promotion of vocational and professional education and training. SED concurred that it was important for students to learn how to manage stress and cope with adversity. The tertiary institutions had strengthened peer support for their students.

17. Ms Starry LEE declared that her child was studying the local curriculum. She said that according to her observation, an increasing number of parents would seek to enrol their children in schools that offered non-local curricula, such as the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme. Ms LEE enquired whether the Administration would review the breadth and depth of the subjects under the New Senior Secondary ("NSS") curriculum and whether consideration would be given to allowing more local schools to offer non-local curricula. The Deputy Chairman was concerned about the pressure of the implementation of the NSS curriculum and assessment on students which might lead to suicidal behaviour.

18. On concerns about examination-related pressure on students, SED pointed out that in the past, secondary students had to sit for two public examinations, i.e. Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination and Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination. With the implementation of the NSS curriculum under the New Academic Structure, there was only one public examination, i.e. Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination, for secondary students. To address the concern on the workload of students, the Administration had conducted reviews on the NSS curriculum and assessment from 2012 to 2015 and introduced various improvements by stages. SED said that upon the completion of the Medium-term Review of the New Academic Structure in 2015, all senior secondary subjects would be reviewed and improved on a regular basis taking into consideration their regular curriculum and assessment development cycle. Regarding members' views on non-local curricula, SED said that whether more local schools should be

Action

allowed to offer non-local curricula on top of the local curriculum would require careful consideration.

19. In this connection, the Deputy Chairman requested the Administration to provide further information on its plan, if any, on the next stage of the review of the NSS curriculum.

(Post-meeting note: The Administration's written information was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)979/15-16(01) on 12 May 2016.)

Workload of teachers

20. The Deputy Chairman noted that under the Tier-1 support of the Three-tier Support Model, individual schools would rely heavily on teachers to identify students with mental health needs and at risk of suicidal behaviour. He was gravely concerned whether teachers would be able to provide the requisite support when they were already overloaded with teaching and non-teaching duties. Mr MA Fung-kwok and Mr Gary FAN were also concerned about the heavy workload of teachers. Mr FAN further urged the Administration to enhance the prevailing student-to-teacher ratio.

21. SED advised that as announced in 2016 Policy Address, starting from the 2016-2017 school year, secondary schools would be allowed to turn the Senior Secondary Curriculum Support Grant and the Career and Life Planning Grant into regular teaching posts. It was anticipated that about 1 000 additional teaching posts at the Graduate Master/Mistress rank would be provided. SED further said that over the past few years, the student-to-teacher ratio of secondary schools had been improved to 11.9:1. Upon implementation of the recommendations arising from the review of the NSS curriculum and assessment, the lesson time for certain subjects had been reduced and the school-based assessment of a number of subjects had been streamlined or abolished. The Principal Education Officer (Curriculum Development)1 ("PEO(CD)1") supplemented that EDB would strengthen professional development programmes for teachers to better equip them to provide appropriate support to students in facing adversity and managing stress.

22. The Deputy Chairman said that the student-to-teacher ratio cited by SED was applicable to schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme only. The ratio in aided schools was about 14:1. He noted that notwithstanding some improvement in the overall student-to-teacher ratio, about 5 000 teachers were employed on time-limited contracts which could not provide job security. An unstable teaching force would not be conducive to the development of

Action

rapport between teachers and students. In this regard, the Chairman requested the Administration to provide further information on the student-to-teacher ratios of schools.

(Post-meeting note: The Administration's written information was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)764/15-16 and tabled at the meeting on 22 March 2016.)

23. The Deputy Chairman urged the Administration to consider introducing a "School Retreat Day" ("學校休整日") in schools so as to create room for listening to students' voices and needs. SED said that some schools were exploring the feasibility of making arrangement for reserving a half-day school day for similar purposes.

Cross-sector services and support

24. Mr WONG Kwok-hing opined that the Administration should take a student-centred approach in providing services and support for students. Consideration might be given to encouraging primary and secondary students to form student groups to provide peer support through various means, such as sharing sessions and hotline service. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che was concerned that under the existing arrangement, SSW service for primary schools was outsourced to NGOs by way of tender. The continuity of service would be disrupted if the incumbent NGO was not awarded the tender upon expiry of its service contract. Noting that according to the Administration, there were 561 school social workers for secondary schools, the Chairman enquired about ways to enhance the provision of manpower and quality of SSW service.

25. In reply, AD/SWD said that school social workers had disseminated positive energy to students through group activities to strengthen their capacity in managing stress. SWD would continue to work closely with NGOs and explore ways to enhance SSW service and support for students.

26. Mr Albert HO recalled that a secondary student who suffered from mental illness committed suicide in a school in Tung Chung several years ago. He was concerned that under the prevailing policy on integrated education, schools and teachers might not be able to provide timely and effective assistance to students with mental health needs. Sharing Mr HO's view, Dr Fernando CHEUNG highlighted his concern that at present, mental illness was not one of the specified special educational needs for which schools could receive additional resources from EDB under the integrated education policy. Mr HO and Dr CHEUNG urged the Administration to provide additional resources to enable schools and teachers to support students with mental illness.

Action

27. The Deputy Secretary for Education (3) ("DS(Ed)3") advised that EDB encouraged schools to adopt the Three-Tier Support Model under the existing integrated education policy to provide appropriate support for students with mental illness. The school professional team, such as educational psychologists, student guidance teachers, etc. would provide appropriate support for students with mental/emotional problems. The Administration would continue to study ways to enhance support for students with mental health needs.

28. To enhance professional support, Dr Fernando CHEUNG and Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che suggested that the ratio of educational psychologist-to-school should be improved to 1:4 and 1:2 respectively. In this regard, SED said that currently, one educational psychologist provided service for six to 10 schools. The Administration would further enhance the ratio to 1:4 progressively for public sector schools with a large number of students with special educational needs from the 2016-2017 school year.

29. In response to Mr Albert HO's enquiry about the psychological service for students at risk, Senior Specialist (Education Psychology Service/Kowloon) of EDB said that when teachers identified students at risk, they could refer the students to educational psychologists for consultation and further assessment. If necessary, referral would be made to HA psychiatrists and/or clinical psychologists for in-depth assessment, diagnosis, treatment and follow-up. DCM/HA advised that in general the referrals were received within a week's time.

30. Dr Elizabeth QUAT expressed concern about the long waiting time for adolescent psychiatric service in public hospitals. She requested the Administration to provide information on measures, if any, to enhance the collaboration between the public and private sectors in the provision of adolescent psychiatric service.

(Post-meeting note: The Administration's written information was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)979/15-16(01) on 12 May 2016.)

31. The Deputy Chairman said that according to a media report, the number of psychiatric patients aged below 18 receiving treatment in psychiatric units of HA had increased from 15 400 in 2010 to 26 500 in 2014. He requested the Administration/HA to provide information on the respective number of psychiatric patients aged 15 to 17 and those aged 18 to 22 (broadly the respective age brackets for senior secondary students and university students). Regarding the Deputy Chairman's enquiry about the number of teachers

Action

seeking psychiatric treatment, CCM/DH and DCM/HA said that there was no information on the occupation of patients.

(Post-meeting note: The Administration's written information was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)979/15-16(01) on 12 May 2016.)

32. Mr MA Fung-kwok was of the view that the mass media should be prudent in reporting news about suicide as the widespread news coverage might trigger more suicidal behaviour through imitation. He saw a need for the Administration to enlist support from various mass and social media to avoid disseminating negative messages which could affect those who were emotionally vulnerable.

33. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan noted that the government of Cross Lake in Canada had declared a state of emergency after the occurrence of a spate of suicides and attempted suicides in recent months. As she was aware, poverty was the main reason for the suicidal cases. She was concerned that some suicidal cases might be the outcome of the "contagious effect" of suicides committed earlier on. Dr CHIANG said that according to her understanding, when reporting suicide cases, the media in Taiwan were required to disseminate information on support or hotline services for people at risk. She urged the Administration to draw reference from overseas practice and formulate appropriate guidelines for local media.

34. SED said that the Administration was fully aware of the need for greater cross-sector collaboration to address the problem of student suicide with a positive and caring attitude. In this regard, the Administration would continue to work closely with different sectors to tackle the problem from all fronts.

Life education

35. Dr Priscilla LEUNG took the view that the Administration should step up life education so as to nurture students' positive values and strengthen their ability to cope with adversity. The Administration might make use of social media and mentorship programmes to disseminate positive values to young people.

36. Dr Elizabeth QUAT cautioned that currently, some negative values and messages prevailed in the community, which might cause young people to form a pessimistic view of life. She enquired about the measures to help young people develop a positive outlook on life, and suggested that consideration

Action

should be given to arranging life experience programmes for them. In this regard, PEO(CD)1 said that life education was incorporated in the curricula of General Studies and other related subjects of primary education.

37. The Chairman sought further information on the implementation of life education at schools and the information kits to be developed by EDB for teachers, parents and students. In reply, DS(Ed)3 said that EDB had issued a letter to schools on 15 March 2016 to encourage them to enhance their life education through school-based activities according to their own circumstances and needs. EDB had also informed schools that the teaching materials for life education had been compiled and were available from EDB's website. It was anticipated that the information kits would be available in April 2016. SED agreed to provide further information in writing on the implementation of life education at schools for members' reference.

(Post-meeting note: The Administration's written information was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)979/15-16(01) on 12 May 2016.)

Special Home-School Co-operation Grant

38. Regarding the disbursement of a special HSC Grant of \$5,000 per school to all public sector schools, the Deputy Chairman said that the provision of a special grant might not be welcomed by teachers as they would need to undertake additional duties arising from organizing home-school activities by making use of the grant. Dr Kenneth CHAN shared the Deputy Chairman's view and considered that action should be taken to ensure that the provision of the special grant would not create additional workload for teachers.

39. Mr Gary FAN noted that on one hand, the Government had proposed to introduce the Hong Kong Scholarship for "Belt and Road" Students by injecting \$1 billion into the HKSAR Government Scholarship Fund; on the other hand, the Government only reserved \$5 million for disbursement of a special HSC Grant of \$5,000 per school to all public sector primary and secondary schools for the benefit of local students. He questioned the rationale for the great difference in allocation of resources by the Government.

40. Dr Elizabeth QUAT expressed concern that teachers and Parent-Teacher Associations ("PTAs") might not have ample time and capacity to organize additional activities by using the special HSC Grant. She opined that the Administration should also take the lead to launch activities to promote positive attitudes among young people and to strengthen home-school cooperation.

Action

41. Given the limited amount of \$5,000 per school, Ms Starry LEE questioned the usefulness of the special HSC Grant in promoting home-school cooperation. She was concerned about the possible increase in teachers' workload arising from the use of the special HSC Grant to organize activities, and enquired whether the Administration would provide schools with guidelines on using the special HSC Grant. She also enquired whether EDB would organize territory-wide parent education activities in collaboration with local experts of parents education. Dr Elizabeth QUAT expressed support for inviting experts to participate in parent seminars. Mr Michael TIEN concurred that parent education should be strengthened.

42. SED said that the disbursement of the special HSC Grant was a one-off special measure in addition to the five measures already announced to support students' development in mental health. Schools could make use of the special grant to arrange parent seminars/talks by experts. It was expected that individual schools would use the special HSC Grant to subsidize PTAs in organizing parent talks or activities to facilitate parents to support the healthy mental development of children. He reiterated that it was not the intention of the Administration to require teachers to take up the work of organizing programmes or activities to be funded by the grant.

43. In view of the questions and concerns raised by members on the special HSC Grant, the Chairman requested the Administration to provide supplementary information to explain further details of the special HSC Grant.

(Post-meeting note: The Administration's written information was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)764/15-16 and tabled at the meeting on 22 March 2016.)

Committee on prevention of student suicides

44. Regarding the committee on prevention of student suicides ("the Committee") to be set up by EDB, Dr Fernando CHEUNG and Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che sought information on its membership and terms of reference. Noting that the Committee was tasked to submit a report to SED in six months, Mr CHEUNG enquired whether the Panel would be updated of the progress of work of the Committee or be provided with an interim report.

45. SED advised that the Committee would comprise representatives of different stakeholders. The Administration had invited Professor Paul YIP Siu-fai of the University of Hong Kong, an expert in suicide research and prevention, to join the Committee. It was expected that the membership of the Committee would be finalized in two weeks' time. The Administration would update the Panel in due course.

Action

46. Mr WONG Kwok-hing expected that the Committee would study the possible causes of student suicides by analyzing the past cases and put forward recommendations on preventive measures. Ms Starry LEE opined that the Committee should include in its study whether students studying the local curriculum were subject to greater stress, as well as measures to strengthen parent education.

47. SED advised that a significant number of students who had committed suicide after commencement of the current school year were studying Secondary 1 and Secondary 4, both being the start of a new key learning stage. He assured members their views would be conveyed to the Committee for consideration when taking forward its work.

Motions

48. Owing to insufficient time, members agreed with the Chairman's suggestion that the two motions to be moved by Dr Fernando CHEUNG and Mr Michael TIEN would be carried forward to be dealt with at the next meeting to be held on the following day, i.e. 22 March 2016. The Chairman advised that under the agenda item of "Matters arising" at the next meeting, he would call upon Dr CHEUNG and Mr TIEN to speak on their respective motion, followed by the Administration's response. Thereafter, he would direct that a vote be taken on each of the motions.

49. In reply to Ms Starry LEE's enquiry on whether she could propose to move another motion, the Chairman recapitulated that the two outstanding motions would stand over to the next meeting as "matters arising" from today's meeting. He said that he would not consider any further motion from members, the wording of which was not yet available.

50. The Chairman invited SED to attend the next meeting when the Panel dealt with the motions under the agenda item of "Matters arising". SED said that he would confirm his attendance after checking his schedule.

(Post-meeting note: The two motions were voted on and passed at the Panel meeting on 22 March 2016.)

51. Concluding the discussion, the Chairman requested the Administration to provide supplementary information regarding the special HSC Grant and the student-to-teacher ratios of schools for members' reference before the next Panel meeting to be held on the following day.

Action

(*Post-meeting note:* The Administration's written information was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)764/15-16 and tabled at the meeting on 22 March 2016.)

II. Any other business

52. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 7:35 pm.

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
24 May 2016