

**For discussion on
28 September 2017**

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

Support Services for Non-attendance Students

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the support services for non-attendance students.

Background

2. The Government aims to uphold children's right to education by providing 9-year free and universal basic primary and junior secondary education in public sector schools. According to the Education Ordinance, parents have the legal responsibility to ensure that their children aged between 6 and 15 who have not completed secondary three education attend school regularly.

3. According to the Education Bureau Circular No. 1/2009 "Upholding Students' Right to Education", schools must comply strictly with the requirements of reporting students' non-attendance to Education Bureau (EDB), regardless of their age, class level, sex, ethnicity or reasons of absence. Schools should report the cases without delay to EDB on the 7th day of the student's continuous absence in order to uphold student's right to education.

Support for non-attendance students

4. At present, the non-attendance cases from primary schools are handled by Student Guidance Officers, Student Guidance Teachers or Student Guidance Personnel. These professionals, with counselling related training, provide necessary support to non-attendance students

through “Comprehensive Student Guidance Services” in primary schools. Through telephone contacts, home visits, interviews, case conferences with relevant stakeholders (including teachers, multi-disciplinary professionals and parents), etc., the needs and difficulties of the non-attendance students are identified for formulating appropriate follow-up plan. Schools would refer the non-attendance cases to relevant service organizations for support services to facilitate their resumption to school where necessary.

5. The non-attendance cases of junior secondary levels are handled by Student Guidance Officers of Non-attendance Case Team (NACT) of EDB. Officers of NACT adopt casework approach to handle non-attendance cases by conducting case analysis, collaborating with non-attendance students and their parents, schools and relevant service organizations to help non-attendance students resume schooling, and follow up their adjustment after school resumption.

6. For non-attendance students of senior secondary levels (those aged 15 or above), NACT would arrange school resumption for them or make referrals for them to participate in short courses organized by non-governmental organizations according to the choices of parents and students, with a view to preparing them for school resumption, joining vocational training or engaging in employment.

7. At present, in handling non-attendance cases, including those cases where the parents are difficult to approach, EDB would assess the nature and situation of non-attendance cases and collaborate with schools to contact non-attendance students and their parents proactively through various possible channels, including home visits, making contact with their relatives or communicating with other government departments as needed such as Social Welfare Department (for cases concerning family or parenting problems), Immigration Department (for students who may depart from Hong Kong), the Housing Department (for students residing in public housing estates), to provide them with necessary services as

soon as possible. The reasons for students' non-attendance are complicated and involve various factors including adjustment in learning and social interaction, personal development, family and parenting problems as well as physical, mental and psychological problems, etc. Based on the needs of non-attendance students and/or their families, EDB officers and Student Guidance Personnel would refer these cases to Social Welfare Department or relevant social services agencies including Hospital Authority, Integrated Community Centre for Mental Wellness, non-governmental social services organizations for professional support services to facilitate their school resumption.

8. EDB would regularly review the progress of non-attendance cases and follow up accordingly. For those parents who insist not to cause their children to attend school without reasonable excuse, EDB may issue attendance order to them according to the Education Ordinance and request them to cause their children to attend school.

Way Forward

9. We will listen to the views from various sectors, review the prevailing approach to handling non-attendance cases and explore how we could further strengthen the collaboration and communication with other relevant government departments so as to uphold the students' right to education.

10. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.