

For discussion
On 13 April 2018

Legislative Council Panel on Education
Policy on “One Social Worker for Each School’ in Primary Schools

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the implementation of “one social worker for each school” in primary schools by the Education Bureau (EDB) in the 2018/19 school year.

Background

2. When the Government first provided student guidance service for primary schools, the then Education Department deployed Student Guidance Officers (SGO) to provide guidance service to students in need in primary schools. Later, the then Education Department created Student Guidance Teacher (SGT) posts in aided primary schools to provide school-based student guidance service while the government primary schools continued to have school-based SGOs to provide student guidance service. The EDB implemented the Comprehensive Student Guidance Service (CSGS) in all primary schools starting from the 2002/03 school year. Starting from that school year, public sector primary schools can choose to receive the Student Guidance Service (SGS) Grant in place of SGTs or SGOs. Since then, schools may choose to appoint SGTs or receive the SGS Grant to employ student guidance personnel on their own or to purchase service from non-governmental organizations (NGO) to provide guidance service to students. To further enhance the student guidance service in primary schools, a Top-up Student Guidance Service Grant (Top-up Grant) has been provided for all public sector primary schools with 5 or more classes as from the 2012/13 school year.

3. In the 2017/18 school year, 7 public sector primary schools (which are all government primary schools) are served by SGOs. While 119 schools opt to appoint SGTs, 328 schools opt to receive the SGS Grant to employ student guidance personnel on their own or hire services from

the NGOs.

Details of the New Measure

New Funding Mode

4. Starting from the 2018/19 school year, public sector ordinary primary schools can choose the new funding mode in place of the old funding mode. All schools, regardless of the number of classes, can choose to create a graduate social worker post or receive an equivalent subsidy to employ a school-based registered graduate social worker or hire service of a school-based registered graduate social worker from a social work service provider. Under the New Funding Mode, schools can choose to create a regular Assistant Social Work Officer (ASWO) post on the approved staff establishment and employ the ASWO on their own. The salary of this ASWO is linked to that of ASWOs in the civil service. Schools may choose to receive the School Social Work Service Grant (SSWSG) to employ a school-based registered graduate social worker on their own or hire service of a school-based graduate social worker from a social work service provider. Schools choosing to hire service of a school-based graduate social worker from a social work service provider may draw up a contract with a longer period (e.g. 5 years). The EDB would remind schools about the points to note when drawing up a longer contract period. The SSWSG is determined in accordance with the mid-point salary of the ASWO. The grant amount will be adjusted annually according to the salary of the ASWO.

5. The EDB understands that some of the public sector primary schools now receiving the SGS Grant may have already signed contracts with duration more than one year with the student guidance personnel or social work service providers. Therefore, the EDB will provide a three-year transitional period for schools to switch to the New Funding Mode before the 2021/22 school year. The 7 government primary schools currently being served by SGOs are also required to switch to the New Funding Mode within the three-year transitional period. In case schools are not able to switch to the New Funding Mode after the three-year transitional period owing to the need for more time to handle personnel matters in respect of their serving student guidance personnel, including

retaining their serving student guidance personnel due to special needs, they may discuss with the EDB separately.

6. For schools currently choosing to employ an SGT, the EDB will not require schools to replace the SGT with a social worker. Having regard to their own needs, these schools can continue with the current arrangements including the appointment of SGTs, the regrading of existing non-graduate SGTs, and the transfer of existing of SGTs under the same sponsoring body. The EDB has not set a deadline, requiring these schools to switch to the New Funding Mode within a specified period of time.

Revision of the Top-up Grant Arrangement

7. For schools that have switched to the New Funding Mode, there will be a new arrangement for the Top-up Grant. Under the new arrangement, schools with 12 classes or above will be provided with the Top-up Grant. A Top-up Grant will be provided for each class starting from the 12th class to let all schools get more student guidance resources on the whole.

Provision of Additional Consultation Service Grant

8. Starting from the 2018/19 school year, each school choosing the New Funding Mode will be provided with a Consultation Service Grant (CSG) to purchase consultation, supervision and other support services for school social workers, such as casework consultation, urgent support for crisis, regular review and professional training. The subsidy is equivalent to one-eighth of the mid-point salary of a Social Work Officer (SWO), which will be adjusted in accordance with the salary of the SWO.

Benefits of Enhanced Funding Mode

9. Under the New Funding Mode, the qualification of social workers will be upgraded to degree level. Schools using social work service will be provided with sufficient resources to appoint a registered graduate social worker or hire service of a registered graduate social worker. Some small-sized schools without sufficient resources to employ a full-time

social worker in the past can now have adequate resources to employ a full-time registered graduate social worker.

10. Overall speaking, the guidance resources provided for all schools will be increased under the new measure. As such, schools currently using other resources (including the Top-up Grant) to employ more than one student guidance personnel can continue to employ additional student guidance personnel/social worker in the future based on their own needs.

11. Under the new measure, schools can choose to create a graduate social worker post. For schools opt to hire service of a school-based registered graduate social worker from a social work service provider, they may draw up a service contract with a longer period (e.g. 5 years). These measures can enhance the stability of the social work service in school.

Collaboration between Student Guidance and Social Work Service

12. Currently, the majority of primary schools are employing student guidance personnel (including social workers) or hiring social work service instead of employing SGTs. Under the CSGS, guidance work is not only the responsibility of social workers or student guidance personnel. In facing the increasingly complicated student and family problems, teachers should provide students with comprehensive and extensive guidance service in collaboration with guidance personnel, social workers or other professionals. Under this mode of service, primary schools not employing SGTs have always been effective in supporting students and helping them to grow. Student guidance and social work services are complementary to each other. We believe that even if schools adopt the New Funding Mode, the quality of social work and guidance services in schools can be further enhanced with the concerted efforts of teachers and social workers as well as more sufficient resources under the CSGS.

Consultation Process

13. To ensure that the implementation of the “one school social worker for each school” policy can cater for the needs of schools, various

primary school councils/ associations/ bodies have been consulted on the implementation details. They include the Subsidized Primary School Council, Hong Kong Aided Primary School Heads Association, Union of Government Primary School Headmasters and Headmistresses, Student Guidance Association (Primary School) and Hong Kong Association of Sponsoring Bodies of Schools. The primary school councils/ associations and Hong Kong Association of Sponsoring Bodies of Schools have expressed their support to the arrangements. We have arranged meetings with SGTs and the social work sector to understand their concerns and listen to their views. Some of their suggestions have been adopted.

Way Forward

14. After the implementation of the “one school social worker for each school” policy in the 2018/19 school year, the EDB will remind schools to ensure that the qualification of social worker appointed should meet the basic requirements of the EDB through circulars, guidelines, briefing sessions and visits to schools. We will review the Top-up Grant arrangement for schools which still engage SGTs in the 2021/22 school year and thereafter with reference to situation in respect of adoption of the New Funding Mode in schools. Furthermore, the EDB will review the mode of collaboration between student guidance and social work services, and explore with the education sector various feasible proposals, including the suggestion of “one social worker plus one guidance teacher”, so as to enable schools to adopt the best way to provide social work and guidance services for supporting students.

15. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Education Bureau

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