

For discussion
on 25 February 2021

Legislative Council Panel on Education
Policy and Support Strategies on Preventing and Handling School Bullying

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the policy and support strategies on helping schools prevent and handle school bullying, including the relevant basic principles and methods, support measures and professional development for teachers.

Relevant Policy

2. School is a place where care, concern, support and mutual respect are practised. All along, the Education Bureau (EDB) has been adopting a “zero tolerance” policy on any act of discrimination, bullying and violence in schools. Any bullying act, irrespective of the forms or for whatever reasons, is unacceptable. The EDB regularly reminds schools to pay attention to the performance and behaviour of their students. No one should treat others with hostility, bullying or violence because of differences in stance, political view, or occupation and background of their family members.

3. The EDB adopts a multi-pronged approach to implement the policy of prevention and handling of school bullying through different aspects. These include further nurturing students’ positive values and empathy for others through school curriculum, learning and teaching resources and diversified student learning activities, as well as cultivating in students a sense of mutual trust, inclusion and friendship through various student guidance programmes/activities. The EDB requires schools to adopt a Whole School Approach in formulating and implementing anti-bullying strategies, which should include a clear stance on “zero tolerance”, reporting mechanism and handling procedures, highly transparent monitoring and an attitude to handle each school bullying incident proactively and seriously. In addition, we continuously organise professional development programmes with different themes for teachers to enhance their professional knowledge and capability of preventing and handling bullying in schools.

Prevention of School Bullying

4. The EDB continues to adopt different strategies from both policy and support perspectives to encourage schools to promote values education. Our objective is to nurture

in students the spirit of mutual respect and caring from an early age to help prevent school bullying.

(1) School curriculum and learning and teaching resources

5. All along, the EDB has been actively promoting values education through school curriculum, teacher training, learning and teaching resources and life-wide learning activities. These measures instil in students positive values and attitudes such as respect for others, embracing inclusion and friendship, gratitude and cherishing, proactiveness and optimism. Currently, learning elements related to personal growth, responsibility and resilience in facing temptations are covered in the Key Learning Areas, relevant subjects and the curricula of moral and civic education of primary and secondary schools. Recently, we have announced the addition of “law-abidingness” and “empathy” to the existing seven priority values and attitudes (i.e. perseverance, respect for others, responsibility, national identity, commitments, integrity and care for others) to enable students to understand that law-abidingness is the basic responsibility of citizens for the benefit of the community. Students can also learn to empathise and put themselves in others’ shoes, respect different opinions and in turn help create a harmonious and caring society. The EDB develops learning and teaching as well as promotional resources, as well as organises professional development programmes for teachers and student activities (e.g. “My Pledge to Act” activity series) to support the implementation of the initiatives in schools on an on-going basis. Schools should help students uphold positive values, and establish peaceful and friendly interpersonal relationships continuously through subject learning and diversified life-wide learning activities (e.g. seminars, visits, volunteer services).

6. We attach importance to nurturing students’ information literacy so that they will use information and communication technology effectively and ethically, and refuse to engage in any improper acts such as cyber-bullying. We actively co-operate with other government departments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to strengthen information literacy education. For example, we have been helping promote the relevant student activities and competitions organised by the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF), the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer, Hong Kong Computer Emergency Response Team Coordination Centre and teacher associations to enhance information literacy and awareness of cyber security among students. We also collaborate with the HKPF to produce animations for primary and secondary students on how to handle cyber bullying. Besides, we assist schools in conducting parent education activities to help parents develop proper attitudes of their children in using information technology. A telephone hotline has also been set up to provide individual support for parents, teachers and students in need. To further support teachers in developing students’ information literacy and proper attitude in using information technology, the EDB

produced the “Smart e-Master” Information Kit on e-Learning and Learning and Teaching Resource Pack on Information Literacy, covering topics such as how to handle cyber-bullying.

(2) Student guidance programmes/activities

7. The EDB continuously organises diversified student guidance programmes/activities for schools for the purpose of promoting the spirit of caring, respect and self-discipline through adventure-based, team-building and problem-solving training as well as parent-child activities. Examples of such include the following:

- Understanding Adolescent Project (UAP): The UAP is a support programme of personal growth for primary students which aims at helping students acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes for facing adversities. Under the UAP, the Universal Programme is a guidance curriculum on resilience which covers competence, optimism and sense of belonging for all Primary Four to Six students, while the Intensive Programme is a series of small group, adventure-based and parent-child activities, targeting upper primary students identified to have a greater need for guidance.
- Enhanced Smart Teen Project (ESTP): The ESTP is a support programme of personal growth for secondary students. In collaboration with various disciplinary forces such as the HKPF, the Fire Services Department, the Customs and Excise Department and the Correctional Services Department, training on discipline, physical fitness and team building has been provided for secondary students to enhance their self-discipline, self-confidence, team spirit, resilience and relationship with teachers.
- “WE” Positive Dynamic Scheme: Adopting positive psychology as a blueprint, the EDB implements the scheme on a trial basis in recent years. Through classroom management activities, school activities on promoting an appreciation culture and the like, it is hoped that students will feel that they are “being seen”, “being recognised” and “being wanted”. The objective is to enhance teacher-student relationship, build up an appreciation atmosphere and rapport among peers, as well as reduce negative emotions and enhance positive energy of students.

8. We encourage schools to actively participate in student guidance programmes, covering different themes with the aim of enhancing students’ resilience, positive thinking and the spirit of caring and respect, so as to nurture students’ positive values and good moral character, as well as to create a positive school climate gradually and imperceptibly.

(3) Establishing a caring school culture

9. To encourage schools to establish a caring school culture, the EDB and a relevant NGO jointly organise the Caring School Award Scheme. The Scheme introduces a range of grand awards for promoting related themes such as care, respect and equality. By featuring “Caring School in Adversity” as the theme this year, the Scheme gives public recognition to schools that are actively dedicated to implementing caring school measures. To better facilitate the integration of students who are in a greater need of guidance support (including students in poverty, those with special educational needs and non-Chinese-speaking students) into school life, we encourage schools to adopt a Whole School Approach to integrated education. Through strategically organised peer support programmes, circles of friends, study groups and collaborative teaching, etc., students can get to know and accept one another. This will also enable teachers and students to respect individual differences and jointly cultivate an inclusive school culture.

10. Furthermore, the EDB is committed to promoting the Harmonious School – Anti-bullying Campaign. Teaching resources, an anti-bullying charter, etc. are provided to schools for organising their own Anti-bullying Day/Week, with the aim of establishing a safe school environment and raising students’ anti-bullying awareness, as well as encouraging students to “say no” to messages and activities that involve bullying and verbal violence. The EDB also provides training to students to enable them to get familiar with peer mediation skills through the Peer Mediation Project, so that they can assist in resolving campus conflicts. We have also launched the Harmonious School Net for training students to foster a harmonious school culture, and the Wise NET School Recognition Scheme for inter-school sharing of successful experience, with a view to minimising the occurrence of incidents involving discrimination, bullying and violence.

(4) Allocating resources for supporting students continuously

11. Schools are staffed with professionals, including guidance personnel, school social workers and school-based educational psychologists etc., to provide students in need with necessary support and mediation. To enable schools to better cater for the needs of students, the Government has enhanced student guidance service in primary schools since the 2018/19 school year through a new funding mode to implement the policy of “one school social worker for each school”. A school may, having regard to its own circumstances, employ at least one school-based registered graduate social worker with professional qualifications to further enhance the overall quality of guidance services. In the 2020/21 school year, over 80% of public sector primary schools are served by school-based registered graduate social workers, with a total of around 480 registered graduate social workers being employed by the schools. As for secondary schools, the Social Welfare Department has implemented the measure of “two

social workers for each school” in more than 460 secondary schools in Hong Kong since the 2019/20 school year, with the addition of about 370 school social workers. The number of school social workers for each secondary school is increased from 1.2 to 2 and there is an increase of about 46 posts of Social Work Officer concomitantly to enhance supervisory support for school social workers in handling complicated cases. The above enhancement measures enable schools to provide more remedial, preventive and developmental guidance services for students, with the aim of preventing and minimising the occurrence of bullying incidents.

Handling of Bullying Incidents in Schools

(1) Basic principles of handling bullying incidents in schools

12. Schools have all along adopted a Whole School Approach for guidance and discipline in supporting students in need. All school personnel should adopt a “zero tolerance” policy on school bullying where bullying act in any forms (including verbal, physical and cyber-bullying) or on any grounds (including physical build, ability and religion) is unacceptable. If there are bullying incidents, schools should immediately intervene, taking safety of their students as their prime concern. Teachers should stop the act of bullying as soon as possible by making concerted efforts to promptly dissuade the students from conducting the violent acts in accordance with the school-based crisis management mechanism. Teachers should interview the students involved, including the bullies, the victims and the bystanders, on the day when bullying occurs to get a clear picture of the incident. They should also formulate measures and follow-up actions to prevent the recurrence of such incidents. In handling school bullying incidents, schools should uphold the principle of educating, guiding and protecting their students, and provide necessary support and mediation to students in need in order to achieve reconciliation by mending the relationship of the parties concerned. Schools should also relate the whole incident objectively and sensibly to the parents and seek their cooperation to reach consensus in handling the incident, with a view to rectifying the misbehavior of the students involved.

(2) Relevant guidelines

13. As set out in the relevant guidelines on handling of bullying cases in the School Administration Guide, the EDB has requested schools to formulate and implement anti-bullying policy, including a clear stance on “zero tolerance”, reporting mechanism and handling procedures, highly transparent monitoring and an attitude to handle each school bullying incident proactively and seriously. If there are school bullying incidents, schools should take immediate action to stop the bullying according to the guidelines issued by the EDB, taking education, guidance and protection of their students as the prime concern, and then assess the

condition of the students concerned (including whether they are injured or emotionally unstable) so as to provide appropriate assistance.

14. In handling school bullying incidents, schools should guide their students to have self-reflection and work on ways to solve the problem, with the aim of preventing the recurrence of such incidents. Schools will, if necessary, arrange guidance personnel to offer assistance to the bullied or further enlist the help of professionals, such as social workers and psychologists, to provide support and mediation services, or even refer the students to the necessary professional service (e.g. support for those who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder), so as to safeguard their psychological health while preventing them from being hurt again. When dealing with the students who bullied others, schools should help them understand the mistakes they have committed and the moral values involved in accordance with the guidelines on disciplinary procedures and school rules. Schools should also work with parents to help the students involved rectify their misbehavior. If necessary, arrangements should be made for guidance personnel to take up the cases for thorough follow-up by providing individual/group counselling or referring the students to relevant professional service outside school.

15. In addition, the EDB has clearly pointed out to schools that teachers should never perform any acts of bullying to students. As employers, schools have to monitor their teaching staff, remind them of the behaviours and role expected of them from time to time, and take the initiative to follow up on cases of misconduct involving their teaching staff.

Professional Development for Teachers and Learning and Teaching Resources

16. To support and equip schools in handling school bullying, the EDB continuously organises professional development programmes for teachers to enhance their capability of preventing and handling bullying and improper behaviours in schools. The EDB commissions tertiary institutions to organise certificate courses on student guidance and discipline for teachers of primary and secondary schools with “school bullying” as a compulsory component. In addition, the EDB regularly conducts relevant seminars, sharing sessions and workshops for teachers, guidance personnel and school social workers on topics including “Serious Impact of School Bullying on Students and Support Measures for Prevention”, “Managing and Resolving Conflict in a Positive Way”, “Preventing, Handling and Following up Cyber Bullying”, etc. Experts/academics, relevant institutions and school personnel with successful experience are invited to share their insight so as to enhance the capability of school personnel in preventing and handling bullying acts in schools.

17. The EDB has also provided schools with diversified learning and teaching resources as well as relevant information to enhance teachers’ understanding of the problem of school bullying and help schools formulate strategies on preventing, handling and follow-up on school

bullying. To support schools in implementing the anti-bullying measures, the EDB has produced three resource packages on the prevention of school bullying and made them available on the EDB website for providing schools with ways, teaching materials and demonstrations of activities on preventing and handling school bullying, as well as introducing how to establish an anti-bullying policy and develop the strategies in implementing relevant activities through a Whole School Approach, with a view to further enhancing the anti-bullying work in schools. We have also provided a Peace Ambassador Training Manual, a leaflet on “Help Your Child Develop a Harmonious Peer Relationship in School” for parents and various relevant resources on other issues such as cyber security for access and use by schools, parents and the public.

Further Enhancement of Relevant Support Measures

18. To further enhance schools’ capability of preventing and handling bullying in schools, the EDB will enhance the promotion of further exchange and sharing of good experiences among schools in taking forward their measures on preventing and handling bullying in schools, so as to assist schools to implement anti-bullying measures for creation of a harmonious and caring school environment. Professional guidance officers of the EDB will continue to offer appropriate assistance to schools through professional consultation, school visits and school-based training activities in light of their actual needs. We firmly believe that with the concerted efforts of schools, teachers and other stakeholders, as well as further co-operation among different sectors in the community, we can build a harmonious and caring school environment under which our students can grow up healthily. The EDB will continue to keep in view the situation of schools and provide support in a timely manner, for the purpose of preventing bullying incidents in schools and safeguarding the well-being of our students.

Advice Sought

19. Members are invited to note and comment on this paper.

Education Bureau
February 2021