



# Oversight of school textbooks and supplementary teaching materials in selected places

FS02/20-21

## 1. Introduction

1.1 The content of school textbooks and supplementary teaching materials, if developed in an appropriate manner<sup>1</sup>, can guide and stimulate good pedagogy in the classroom and thereby makes the learning process more interactive and fruitful<sup>2</sup>. In particular, textbook content must be accurate, appropriate and impartial for student learning<sup>3</sup>. In Hong Kong, the Education Bureau ("EDB") administers a review mechanism for textbooks to be included on the **Recommended Textbook List** ("RTL") for kindergartens, primary and secondary schools. Meanwhile, the oversight of supplementary teaching materials is school-based under the purview of the school management.

1.2 Some overseas places have also put in place mechanisms governing the review of school textbooks<sup>4</sup> and the oversight of supplementary teaching materials used in class<sup>5</sup>. These places include Japan, Singapore, as well as some provinces in Canada and states in the United States ("US"), which have established dedicated textbook review bodies with members comprising teachers, subject experts and/or university academics.<sup>6</sup> They have also entrusted local school districts<sup>7</sup> to oversee the use of supplementary teaching materials in a proper manner.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Education Bureau (2020b), quality textbooks and learning and teaching resources should be designed in line with the aims and learning objectives set in the curriculum guidelines as well as students' age, abilities and learning needs, among others.

<sup>2</sup> See Smart et al. (2018) and Education Bureau (2020b).

<sup>3</sup> See Education Bureau (2018).

<sup>4</sup> There are also places such as Australia which has no textbook review mechanism.

<sup>5</sup> Among the overseas places, supplementary teaching materials are generally understood as materials other than textbooks which supplement and support student learning, including but not limited to readers, references, workbooks, films and videos.

<sup>6</sup> The composition of membership is to ensure that the textbooks adopted by schools are appropriate, accurate and aligned with the curriculum. See California Department of Education (2014) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2005).

<sup>7</sup> In the overseas places such as the US and Japan, public schools in adjacent areas are grouped into a single school district governed by a school board comprising local representatives.

1.3 At its work plan meeting on 2 December 2020, the Subcommittee to Study the Development of Textbooks and Teaching Materials for Kindergartens, Primary and Secondary Schools requested the Research Office to study the textbook review mechanisms and oversight of supplementary teaching materials in overseas places. This fact sheet studies California of the US<sup>8</sup> and Japan, in view of their established procedures to review the content of textbooks, as well as clear guidelines to ensure that supplementary teaching materials are appropriate and aligned with the school curriculum<sup>9</sup>.

1.4 This fact sheet begins with mechanisms governing the oversight of textbooks and supplementary teaching materials in Hong Kong. It is followed by a discussion of similar regimes in California and Japan, covering the salient features such as (a) dedicated review bodies; (b) standards and guidelines; (c) review mechanisms; and (d) handling of complaints (for the US only).

## **2. Oversight of textbooks and supplementary teaching materials in Hong Kong**

2.1 Under the existing arrangement, EDB maintains the Recommended Textbook List which provides a point of reference for schools in their selection of appropriate textbooks for students.<sup>10</sup> Schools may also use textbooks that are not on RTL if they can meet the learning needs of their students.<sup>11</sup> In order to be included on RTL, a textbook must be assessed by the relevant subject review panel of EDB to ascertain whether it is accurate in content, in line with the curriculum, of good quality and fit for student learning. At present, EDB

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<sup>8</sup> According to the Education Commission of the States (2013) and Bieber (1984), some US states allow local school boards or schools to choose textbooks. There are also other states, known as textbook adoption states, which choose at the state level what textbooks can be used in schools. California is one of the key textbook adoption states in the US.

<sup>9</sup> In Singapore, the Ministry of Education prepares an Approved Textbook List to assist primary and secondary schools with selecting suitable textbooks for their students. However, there is scant information in the public domain for understanding Singapore's textbook review mechanism. In Canada, provinces such as Ontario and Quebec have implemented textbook review mechanisms by and large similar to those of the US states. As such, this fact sheet does not cover Singapore and Canada.

<sup>10</sup> See Education Bureau (2020a).

<sup>11</sup> However, teachers should exercise their professional judgment in choosing such materials. EDB has also advised schools to set up a textbook selection committee for individual subjects and make reference to the Quality Textbook Guidelines in setting up relevant school-based criteria. See Education Bureau (2020b & 2021b).

accepts textbooks submitted by publishers for most subjects in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools for review<sup>12</sup>.

### Review of textbooks

2.2 In order to ensure that textbook reviews are fair and impartial, members of the **subject review panels** are drawn from both within and outside EDB. Internal reviewers are members of the relevant subject sections of EDB, while external reviewers include serving principals, teachers, academics and other professionals experienced in the subjects concerned. External reviewers are appointed by EDB based on the recommendation of its relevant subject sections for a term of two years, and they take turns to review different textbooks.<sup>13</sup>

2.3 EDB has issued both **general and subject-specific guidelines** for the drafting, review and selection of textbooks. The Guiding Principles for Quality Textbooks are general guidelines specifying the criteria which cover textbook content, learning and teaching, structure and organization, as well as language and layout.<sup>14</sup> For example, the content of all textbooks should be accurate, precise and unbiased, and able to provide multiple perspectives and balanced viewpoints. As for subject-specific guidelines, EDB has issued over 20 Textbook Writing Guidelines for the primary, junior secondary and senior secondary levels.<sup>15</sup>

2.4 A **textbook submitted for review** is assessed by the relevant subject review panel comprised of around five reviewers. Individual reviewers examine whether the textbook meets the aims and objectives of the curriculum, learning objectives of the topics, and the needs of student

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<sup>12</sup> According to Education Bureau (2021b), textbooks for all subjects except Liberal Studies in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools are accepted for review. In September 2019, EDB introduced a special measure to provide one-off professional consultancy service for publishers of senior secondary Liberal Studies "textbooks", with the aim of reviewing their quality to achieve the curriculum aims and objectives. EDB also plans to strengthen quality assurance measures for the senior secondary Liberal Studies subject, including the submission of textbooks for review. See Education Bureau (2020a & 2021b).

<sup>13</sup> For the 2019-2021 term, a total of about 1 400 external reviewers have been appointed in 32 review panels. See Education Bureau (2021b).

<sup>14</sup> See Education Bureau (2016).

<sup>15</sup> To facilitate publishers to write textbooks, EDB has issued "Guidelines on Submission of Textbooks for Review" and "Textbook Writing Guidelines" for publishers' reference. EDB has also issued one Textbook Writing Guideline specifically for kindergartens. See Education Bureau (2020d & 2021b).

learning, teaching and assessment. The subject review panel then considers the comments given by each reviewer in detail, and decides whether to classify the textbook as "recommended" on RTL. The panel also provides a review report to the publisher which serves as a point of reference for revising its textbook.<sup>16</sup>

2.5 According to EDB, the textbook review including identity of reviewers must be kept **confidential** for ensuring that the process is free from interference, pressure and bias. Moreover, EDB can **reject** the review of textbooks under, but not limited to, any one of the following circumstances:

- (a) the textbooks submitted have been classified as not to be included on RTL twice;
- (b) the textbooks fail to comply with the submission requirements or provide the necessary documents; or
- (c) the content and organization of the textbooks bear great similarities to another set of textbooks of the same subject and Key Stage<sup>17</sup> currently on RTL.

### Oversight of supplementary teaching materials

2.6 Under school-based management, the selection and development of teaching materials other than textbooks is under the purview of individual schools. EDB has issued a number of guidance documents to ensure that school-based supplementary teaching materials are aligned with the curriculum, and that their content is correct, complete and objective. Specifically, members of the school management (including subject chairpersons) should **set out school-based criteria** for selecting supplementary teaching materials and **devise a review mechanism** to evaluate and monitor their use in school.<sup>18</sup>

2.7 EDB has stated that, owing to the considerable amount of school-based supplementary teaching materials, it is not practical for the Bureau to review the resources of every subject from every school.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> If the publisher fails to follow up on the amendment, EDB may take such titles off RTL. See Education Bureau (2020b).

<sup>17</sup> RTL lists the textbooks which users can choose for each of the four Key Stages, namely Primary 1 to 3, Primary 4 to 6, Secondary 1 to 3, and Secondary 4 to 6.

<sup>18</sup> See Education Bureau (2020a & 2020c).

<sup>19</sup> See Education Bureau (2020a & 2021b).

Notwithstanding this, EDB regularly monitors the quality of school learning and teaching through External School Reviews and Focus Inspections.<sup>20</sup> The reviewers or inspectors will determine, among others, if teachers are able to adopt the appropriate learning and teaching materials for their students. The inspection findings and suggestions are also provided to schools so that they can undertake follow-up actions.

### Handling of complaints against textbooks and supplementary teaching materials

2.8 At present, the public can submit complaints regarding the appropriateness of textbooks and/or teaching materials to EDB.<sup>21</sup> Upon receiving complaints about textbooks, the EDB will review the contents and contact the publisher concerned for follow up if necessary.<sup>22</sup> As for complaints against school-based teaching materials, EDB will assess the nature of the case and decide whether to conduct a direct investigation or request the school concerned to follow up. EDB may pursue remedial actions if the school is found to be negligent in its management and/or monitoring of teaching.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, if a teacher is found using inappropriate teaching materials<sup>24</sup> and such action constitutes professional misconduct, EDB may issue an advice, warning or reprimand and, for serious cases, consider cancelling the registration of the teacher concerned.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> External School Review is an ongoing measure that complements school self-evaluation, under which EDB officials and external reviewers appraise the performance of primary and secondary schools and provide specific professional advice to enhance their continuous development. Meanwhile, Focus Inspection is another form of quality assurance inspection covering different Key Learning Areas and/or subjects. See Education Bureau (2019).

<sup>21</sup> The public may also submit complaints to the individual schools concerned. Currently, all public and direct subsidy scheme schools are required to establish a school-based complaint-handling mechanism, namely the "Enhanced School Complaint Management Arrangements", for handling complaints relating to their daily operation and internal affairs lodged by parents, students or members of the public. See Education Bureau (2021a).

<sup>22</sup> According to Education Bureau (2021b), it is the professional duty of publishers to provide appropriate contents and learning activities when writing textbooks according to the relevant guidelines issued by EDB. EDB may also require publishers to make amendments if necessary.

<sup>23</sup> EDB's investigation of schools is in accordance with Sections 79 to 83 of the Education Ordinance (Cap. 279). See Hong Kong e-Legislation (2018).

<sup>24</sup> According to Education Bureau (2021a), under no circumstances should teachers bias their teaching with their political stance or mislead their students and impart negative values.

<sup>25</sup> The cancellation of teacher registration is in accordance with Section 47 of the Education Ordinance. EDB has recently cancelled the registration of two teachers on the respective grounds of (a) preparing lesson plans and learning materials involving the dissemination of "Hong Kong independence"; and (b) presenting wrong content and confusing right and wrong when teaching a number of historical events. See GovHK (2020) and News.gov.hk (2020).

### 3. Oversight of textbooks and supplementary teaching materials in California

3.1 In the US, **textbook adoption** describes the process of reviewing textbooks according to state-issued guidelines to provide a list of approved textbooks for school districts to choose from. The first textbook adoption laws were enacted as early as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to ensure that textbooks used in schools achieved uniformity in content and price.<sup>26</sup> At present, there are around 20 textbook adoption states in the US, including California, Florida, Idaho, Mississippi and Texas.

#### Review of textbooks

3.2 California is a key textbook adoption state in the US, attributable to its large public education system and substantial local textbook market. Under Sections 60200-60206 of the California Education Code, the State Board of Education ("SBE")<sup>27</sup> has authority to adopt textbooks in core subject areas<sup>28</sup> for kindergartens and grade one to eight ("K-8") schools.<sup>29, 30</sup> Local school districts in California are **generally required** to select textbooks from the SBE-approved list, unless the district concerned conduct their own reviews<sup>31</sup>.

3.3 The **Instructional Quality Commission** is a dedicated advisory body set up by SBE to evaluate and recommend textbooks for state adoption, as well as develop relevant criteria for textbook review. The Commission consists of

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<sup>26</sup> See Bieber (1984).

<sup>27</sup> SBE is California's governing and policy-making body for academic standards, curriculum, instructional materials, assessments and accountability from kindergarten to grade 12. Members of SBE are appointed by the Governor of California. See California State Board of Education (2020).

<sup>28</sup> Core subject areas include the language arts, mathematics, history/social science and science. SBE does not adopt textbooks for physical or career technical education. See California Department of Education (2020b).

<sup>29</sup> Grade eight is roughly equivalent to the final year of lower secondary school. In California, the textbooks for grade nine to 12 are reviewed and selected by local school boards themselves.

<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, private schools are not required to use state-adopted content standards and/or textbooks. As at 2015-2016, private school enrolment accounted for 7.4% of total student enrolment in California. See California Department of Education (2020c).

<sup>31</sup> Pursuant to Section 60210 of the California Education Code, a school district may only utilize non-SBE adopted textbooks if (a) the textbooks are aligned to state standards; and (b) a majority of the participants of any review process conducted by the district are classroom teachers who are assigned to the subject area or grade level of the textbooks being reviewed. See California Department of Education (2020b).

the following 18 members drawn from the public as well as the state legislature:

- (a) 13 public members appointed by SBE, with the requirement that
  - (i) at least seven members shall be current K-12 teachers; and
  - (ii) at least seven members shall be persons who are recognized authorities in specific subject matter fields;<sup>32</sup>
- (b) three public members respectively appointed by the Governor of California, Speaker of the Assembly, and Senate Rules Committee;
- (c) one State Assembly Member appointed by the Speaker of the Assembly; and
- (d) one State Senator appointed by the Senate Rules Committee.

3.4 SBE has formulated state-wide curriculum frameworks to guide the **educational content** of school textbooks. The frameworks outline the scope and sequence of the knowledge and skills that students are expected to master by grade level and/or subject matter. A state-adopted textbook must also meet the criteria specified in the subject-specific framework, covering areas such as alignment with the content standards, programme organization, assessment, universal access, and instructional planning and support.<sup>33</sup>

3.5 In terms of their **social content**, state-adopted textbooks are required by law to reflect the diversity and plurality of the US and California. Reflecting this, SBE has issued a general guideline<sup>34</sup> to ensure that textbooks portray gender identities, ethnic and cultural groups, religion and other diversity issues accurately and equitably. In particular, the guideline includes specific provisions which provide that state-adopted textbooks **should not contain** any (a) adverse reflections upon persons;<sup>35</sup> (b) doctrine or propaganda against the law; or (c) inappropriate references to brand names or logos.

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<sup>32</sup> See California State Board of Education (2020).

<sup>33</sup> See California State Board of Education (2014 & 2020a).

<sup>34</sup> Textbooks are evaluated for whether, among others, they appropriately project the cultural diversity of society, demonstrate the contribution of minority groups, and enable students to become aware of religious diversity. See California State Board of Education (2013).

<sup>35</sup> This includes any matter reflecting adversely upon persons on the basis of race or ethnicity, gender, religion, disability, nationality, sexual orientation or occupation. See California State Board of Education (2013).



3.6 Similar to the case of Hong Kong, **textbooks submitted for adoption** in California are first reviewed by SBE-appointed subject teachers/experts<sup>36</sup>, who are recruited from across the state and provided with requisite training. The reviewers independently evaluate the textbook's educational and social content, before assembling to discuss and prepare a report of findings. The Instructional Quality Commission will consider the reviewers' report, together with publisher responses and public comments, before making its final recommendation<sup>37</sup> to SBE. A flow chart of the textbook review process in California is set out in **Appendix I**.

3.7 Meanwhile, California contrasts with Hong Kong in providing **opportunities for public review and comment** throughout the textbook adoption process. For instance, textbook samples are put on public display prior to their consideration for adoption by SBE. Public hearings are also held at different stages<sup>38</sup> of the textbook review, and members of the public may also submit written comments to be considered by the Instructional Quality Commission and SBE.

### Oversight of supplementary teaching materials

3.8 In California, supplementary teaching materials such as readers, workbooks, films and videos are under the purview of individual schools and/or local school boards<sup>39</sup>. School boards provide direction and oversight on the daily operations of California's public schools, and its members are elected by registered voters of the school district.<sup>40, 41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> A small number of reviewers may also be administrators, parents, local school board members and/or members of the public. See California Department of Education (2014).

<sup>37</sup> The Commission can make one of the following recommendations for each textbook: (a) adopt; (b) adopt with minor edits and corrections; (c) adopt for a narrower range of grade levels than requested by the publisher; or (d) do not adopt.

<sup>38</sup> Public hearings are held on at least three occasions, including (a) after the issuance of the reviewers' report; (b) at the meeting held by the Instructional Quality Commission; and (c) during the meeting held by the SBE. See California Department of Education (2014).

<sup>39</sup> The California public school system operates within districts governed by locally elected school boards and Superintendents. The Superintendent is employed by the school board concerned as the full-time administrator of the district.

<sup>40</sup> There are over 5 000 school board members and more than 1 000 school districts and county offices of education in California. See California School Boards Association (2007).

<sup>41</sup> In general, private schools in California are not under the purview of local school boards. See US Department of Education (2014).



3.9 School boards in California have issued **policy documents** which govern the appropriate use of supplementary teaching materials to enrich student learning. Prior to using supplementary materials in class, a teacher should **preview** the materials and ensure that they align with curriculum objectives, accord with the maturity level of students, and supplement rather than supplant the primary textbooks. Where necessary, the teacher should confer with the school principal and/or management staff of the school district.<sup>42</sup>

3.10 Furthermore, some school districts have introduced **approval procedures for videos and films** to ensure they are appropriate for student viewing. For instance, **controversial media that contain propaganda messages** and/or require parental guidance has to be previewed by the responsible teaching staff to determine their suitability. **Parental consent must also be obtained before such media may be shown in class.**<sup>43</sup>

3.11 As a further means to afford **parental oversight**, the California Education Code requires teachers to compile and store all teaching materials used in class. Upon a parent's request, the teaching materials are to be made available for inspection.<sup>44</sup>

#### Handling of complaints against textbooks and supplementary teaching materials

3.12 There are also established procedures in local school districts to ensure proper consideration of complaints against the content of textbooks and supplementary teaching materials. A **formal complaint**<sup>45</sup> is first lodged with the school principal, who must notify the relevant teacher(s) and Superintendent of the school district (the full-time administrator of the district). The Superintendent then decides whether to (a) consider the complaint on his or her own; or (b) appoint a review committee comprising the school principal, other staff members and community representatives to investigate the matter.

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<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Modesto City Schools (2019), Oroville City Elementary School District (2015) and Santa Barbara Unified School District (2010).

<sup>43</sup> See Oroville City Elementary School District (2015) and Natomas Unified School District (2000).

<sup>44</sup> Pursuant to Section 49091.10 of the California Education Code.

<sup>45</sup> Parents and residents of the school district may request that a teaching material be reconsidered or withdrawn. See Wright School District (2014) and Larkspur School District (2004).

3.13 When considering a complaint, the Superintendent and/or review committee base their decisions on the **education suitability** of the teaching materials, and should not be influenced by a desire to suppress information or deny student access to ideas.<sup>46</sup> If a complainant is dissatisfied with the Superintendent or review committee's decision, he or she may **appeal** to the school board whose decision will be final.<sup>47</sup>

#### 4. Oversight of textbooks and supplementary teaching materials in Japan

4.1 In Japan, the School Education Law (学校教育法) was enacted as early as in 1947 to establish a nation-wide textbook review mechanism, in a move to maintain uniformity amongst textbooks prepared by different publishers. Currently, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology ("MEXT") (文部科学省) administers a review and revision mechanism to ensure that the textbooks used in elementary, junior high and senior high schools are objective, impartial, and aligned with education standards.

##### Review of textbooks

4.2 In Japan, textbooks submitted to MEXT for review are appraised by experts, teachers and/or officials appointed by the Ministry. In general, schools **are required** to use MEXT-approved textbooks, except when there are no other appropriate textbooks available.<sup>48</sup> The decision on which MEXT-approved textbooks to use rests with the local boards of education (教育委員会),<sup>49</sup> which comprise five or more members appointed by the local government to oversee matters related to education.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> See Larkspur School District (2004).

<sup>47</sup> In some other US states, members of the public can also request state-adopted textbooks to be re-evaluated. For instance, the Idaho State Department of Education provides an online form where any citizen can submit such a request. The relevant textbook review body considers all requests and maintains the rights to either recommend continued adoption or remove any materials from the state adoption list. See Idaho State Department of Education (undated).

<sup>48</sup> This condition only applies to junior and senior high schools. Elementary schools must use MEXT-adopted textbooks. See e-Gov 法令検索 (2020).

<sup>49</sup> Private schools may decide which MEXT-approved textbooks to use on their own.

<sup>50</sup> The appointment by the local government requires the consent of the local legislature.

4.3 Textbooks submitted for MEXT's approval are examined for their compliance with the **Textbook Examination Standards** (教科用図書検定基準). The Standards sets out the general requirements and subject-specific criteria for the review of textbooks. In order to be approved by MEXT, textbooks are required to be (a) aligned with the content prescribed by the school curriculum<sup>51</sup>; (b) appropriate for the developmental level of students; and (c) presented in a balanced and impartial manner<sup>52</sup>. As a further requirement, publishers should indicate clearly in their textbooks any material that is beyond the scope specified in MEXT's curriculum.

4.4 According to the existing **procedure**, textbooks submitted for review are first evaluated by experts who are full-time officials or outside reviewers appointed by MEXT based on their teaching experience. The experts' evaluation provides the basis for deliberation by the **Textbook Authorization Research Council** (教科用図書検定調査審議会).<sup>53</sup> After careful screening, the Council may decide<sup>54</sup> to (a) recommend that a textbook be approved; (b) withhold its decision and request revisions; or (c) recommend that a textbook be rejected.<sup>55</sup>

4.5 For textbooks which require **revision**, the Textbook Authorization Research Council prepares an evaluation report listing the points to be addressed by the publisher. In general, the required amendments are concerned with inaccuracies, vague expressions and/or factual errors. Subject to the publisher's satisfactory revision, the textbook is re-considered by the Council for approval. As for textbooks that are rejected, the publishers will be notified of the decision and may file an appeal to MEXT against the Council's decision. A flow chart of the textbook review process in Japan is set out in **Appendix II**.

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<sup>51</sup> MEXT issues a set of curriculum guidelines, known as Courses of Study (学習指導要領), for different subjects and grade levels.

<sup>52</sup> For example, no part of a textbook should support or criticize a specific political party, religious sect, or its corresponding ideology or beliefs. See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2005).

<sup>53</sup> The Council is a dedicated body which evaluates the content of textbooks and advises MEXT on matters related to textbook approval. It comprises 30 regular members appointed by the Minister of Education, the majority of which are university academics and teachers with the requisite experience. See e-Gov 法令検索 (2015).

<sup>54</sup> It is rare for MEXT to overturn a decision by the Council. See Hiroshi (2012).

<sup>55</sup> Only a small percentage of textbooks are rejected. In its latest review in 2020, MEXT approved 106 out of 110 submitted textbooks. See Japan Times (2020).

## Oversight of supplementary teaching materials

4.6 In Japan, supplementary teaching materials such as workbooks, newspaper articles, and audio-visual materials are under the purview of individual schools and local boards of education. Generally speaking, teachers have flexibility to choose from various types of materials to supplement their lessons. Nevertheless, MEXT has issued **circulars** to clarify that supplementary materials used in schools should comply with the curriculum, and align with the developmental stage of students. One-sided ideas, such as **content that is biased towards a specific political party or religion**, should also be avoided.<sup>56</sup>

4.7 In 2015, following some controversies<sup>57</sup> on the use of supplementary teaching materials, MEXT issued an updated circular to strengthen the oversight of supplementary teaching materials. Among others, the directive specified that it is the **school principal's responsibility** to ensure the appropriate use of supplementary materials in school. Furthermore, before adopting any supplementary material that is used for a particular grade, class or group of students, schools are required to **notify and obtain approval** from the local board of education. Notwithstanding this, MEXT has stated that the above mechanism does not amount to a pre-screening of all supplementary materials, as doing so might affect their effective use in school.<sup>58</sup>

## 5. Concluding remarks

5.1 Similar to the case of Hong Kong, there are established procedures in California and Japan to ensure that school textbooks and supplementary teaching materials are appropriate, accurate and aligned with the curriculum. As regards textbook review, Japan has a relatively strict mechanism as schools at large are only allowed to select MEXT-approved textbooks. In terms of textbook content, publishers are required to **maintain impartiality and avoid political or religious biases**. If a textbook contains any content that is beyond the scope specified by MEXT, it must be clearly indicated accordingly. In comparison, California has a more comprehensive process which covers

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<sup>56</sup> See 文部科学省 (1974).

<sup>57</sup> The first case involved teachers showing students the images of Japanese hostages being killed by soldiers of the Islamic State. The second case involved a Japanese teacher referring to the "Sea of Japan" as the "East Sea". While both names refer to the same mass of water, the name "East Sea" is used in South Korea. See Japan Times (2015).

<sup>58</sup> See 文部科学省 (2015).

both the educational and social content of textbooks. As to the latter, there are specific provisions against the inclusion of **adverse reflections upon persons** and/or **doctrine or propaganda against the law**. Furthermore, public comments are solicited and considered by the relevant authorities throughout the review process. For example, public hearings are held at different stages of the textbook review, textbooks samples are put on public display for 30 days before adoption, and the public may submit written comments on the textbooks to be adopted.

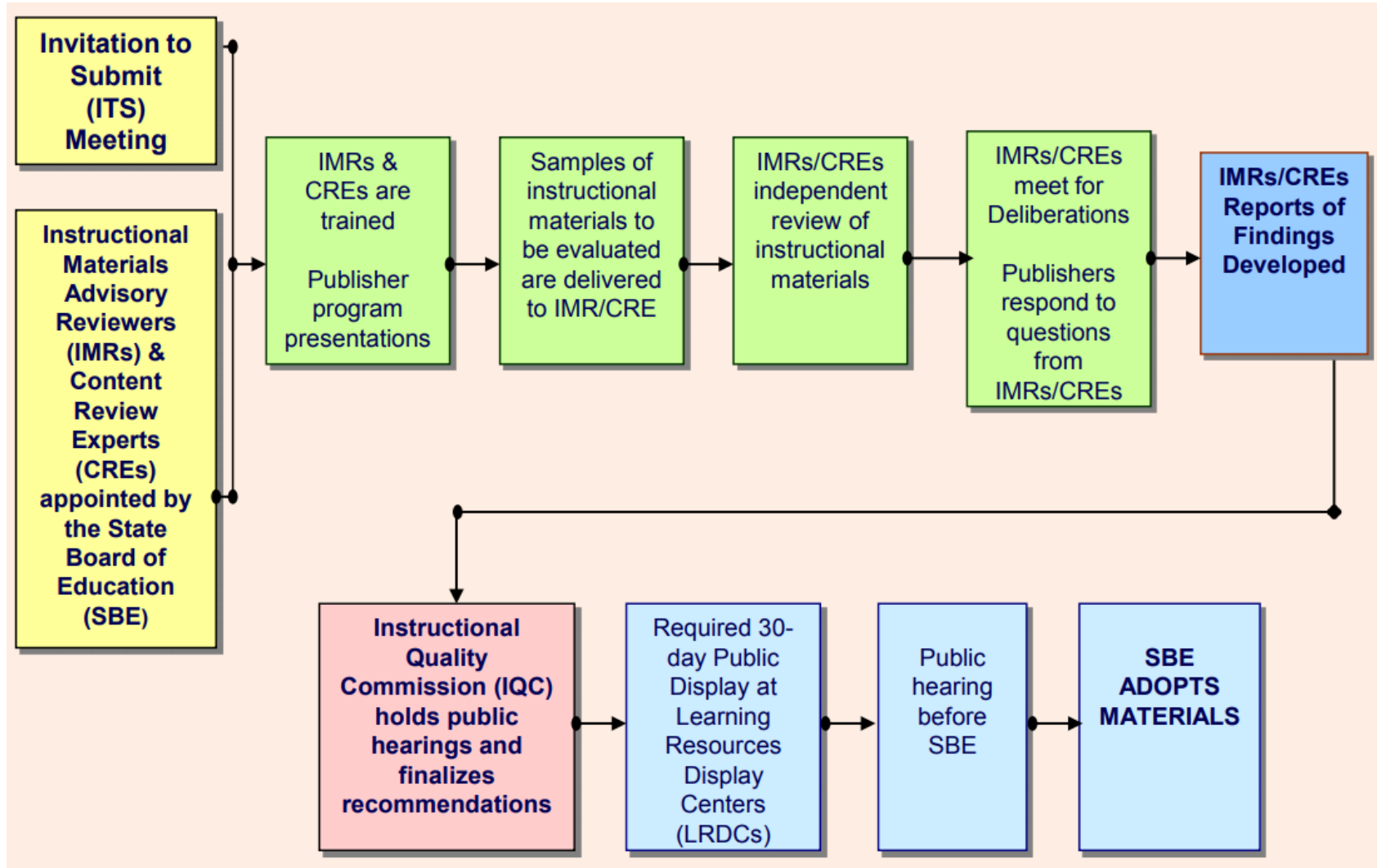
5.2 While supplementary teaching materials are under the purview of individual schools in Hong Kong, they are also managed by local education boards in California and Japan. In California, prior to using teaching materials, **teachers** are required to preview and ensure their compliance with district and state criteria. **School principals and management staff in local school boards** may also be involved in the preview. There are also procedures in place to (a) screen out the inappropriate use of controversial films and videos; and (b) afford **parents oversight** on the teaching materials used in class. On the other hand, in Japan, teachers and school principals are responsible to ensure the appropriate use of teaching materials. For materials that are used for a particular grade, class or group of students, schools are required to **notify and obtain approval** from the local board of education.

5.3 In Hong Kong, members of the public can submit **complaints** regarding the appropriateness of textbooks and/or teaching materials to EDB. The public may also submit complaints to the individual schools concerned. In California, complaints against the content of textbooks or supplementary teaching materials are handled by local school boards, where a **review committee** comprising the school principal, management staff and community representatives may be formed to investigate the matter. Substantiated complaints may result in the teaching materials being withdrawn from use. As for Japan, there is a lack of information in the public domain about the handling of complaints against textbooks or supplementary teaching materials.<sup>59</sup>

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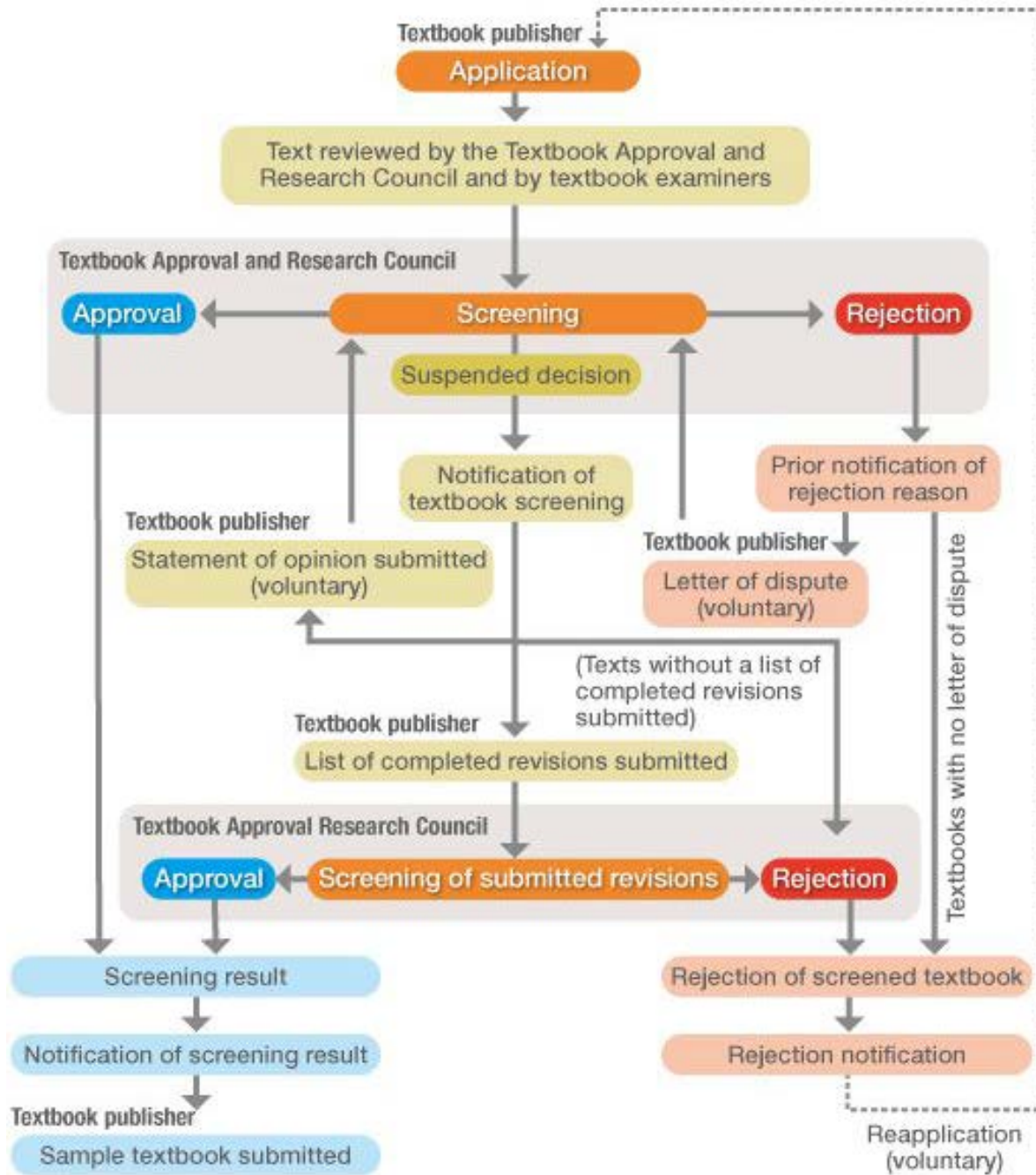
<sup>59</sup> The Research Office has written to MEXT seeking further information. As at the publication of this fact sheet, MEXT has not yet replied to the information request.

Flow chart of textbook adoption process in California



Source: California Department of Education (2020b).

Flow chart of textbook review process in Japan



Source: Hiroshi (2012).



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### Hong Kong

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