

LEGCO QUESTION No. 11
(Written Reply)

Date of sitting: 6 June 2001

Asked by: Hon David CHU

Replied by: SEM

Question:

It was reported that the Hong Kong College of Management was closed in mid-May. As at 17 May, the Consumer Council had received a total of 144 complaints from students of the College, involving prepaid tuition fees amounting to \$1.3 million. With regard to the Education Department's ("ED") supervision of private schools, will the Government inform this Council of:

- (a) the total number of complaints received by the ED against the College since January 1999, together with a breakdown by subjects of complaint; how ED followed up such complaints, and the reasons for the failure of such follow-up actions to rectify the College's malpractices at an earlier stage and reduce the students' losses; and
- (b) the measures the ED takes, apart from instituting prosecutions, to prevent private schools from overcharging fees and mismanaging their affairs?

Reply:

Madam president,

- (a) From January 1999 to August 2000, the Education Department (ED) received eight written complaints against the Hong Kong College of Management. From the commencement of the 2000/01 school year to

the end of April 2001, ED received a total of 159 complaints, including those referred by the Consumer Council, against the school.

From January 1999 to August 2000, complaints filed were mainly about collection of school fees not in accordance with the approved number of instalments, running unapproved courses and poor teaching quality etc. Except for two anonymous complaints where ED could not get in touch with the complainants for further action, all cases were settled.

From the commencement of the 2000/01 school year to April 2001, complaints filed were mainly about termination of courses due to closure of schools, improper class arrangement/failure to operate courses as originally scheduled, collection of school fees not in accordance with the approved number of instalments and poor teaching quality etc.

ED and the Police are now investigating the complaints filed from the commencement of the 2000/01 school year to April 2001. Legal advice is that it is not appropriate at this stage to disclose details of the complaints and the follow-up actions, pending completion of investigation and possible legal proceedings.

- (b) At present, the Education Ordinance (Cap. 279) requires that school fees have to be approved by the Director of Education (DE). The Ordinance also empowers DE to cancel the registration of a school or a school manager, appoint additional managers to sit on the school management committee or direct remedial measures to be taken within a specified

period, if a school is found not to be managed satisfactorily.

Apart from enforcing the Ordinance, ED also takes the following measures to prevent schools from overcharging fees and mismanaging their affairs -

- (i) organising briefing sessions for school operators to draw their attention to the relevant provisions of the Education Ordinance and the importance of complying with these provisions;
- (ii) launching publicity e.g. API and radio broadcast, to alert parents and students of possible malpractices of private schools; and
- (iii) publishing approved school fees on ED's website for public information.