

**For discussion on  
25 November 2017**

**Legislative Council House Committee  
Subcommittee on Children's Rights**

**Rights of Children Amid Examination and Schoolwork Stress**

**Purpose**

This paper briefs members on the formulation of assessment policies in schools and the relevant measures to support children's learning and healthy development in both physical and psychological aspects.

**Student-centred Curriculum and Assessment**

2. The Education Bureau (EDB) attaches great importance to the provision of quality school education. One of the major aims of education is to foster students' balanced and whole-person development in the moral, intellectual, physical, social and aesthetic domains, thereby allowing them to realise their potential and promote their healthy development in both physical and psychological aspects. In this connection, helping students develop a healthy lifestyle is instigated as one of the seven learning goals of the school curriculum.

3. Assessment of students' learning performance or outcomes during the learning process so as to understand students' learning progress and teaching effectiveness is an integral part of learning and teaching. Assessment is not equivalent to examination and examination is only one of the different modes of assessment. Depending on its purpose, assessment may take different modes. Assessment which facilitates learning can be an on-going process that takes place in the course of learning and teaching. It is conducted in diversified ways with due regard to knowledge, skills and attitude of students, for instance, writing assignments with scoring rubrics for students' self-assessment; peer assessment in project learning; understanding students' behaviour and attitudes at home through assessment by parents. Assessment helps teachers and schools gauge the learning progress of their students and identify the latter's strengths and weaknesses in learning. Through this process, teachers and schools can

revise the learning targets, curriculum design, teaching strategies and activities to better meet the needs and abilities of their students. Assessment enables teachers to adjust their expectations, and provide specific feedback and suggestions for students to improve their performance, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of learning and teaching. Despite the reference value of assessment results and ranking, more and more parents are aware that it is far more important to understand how well their children are learning through the assessment information available and draw up reasonable expectations on their children. It is also important for parents to communicate and collaborate with schools to help their children do better in their studies.

4. The EDB has all along emphasised that assessment should be student-centred and explicitly stipulated that schools should formulate their school-based assessment strategies flexibly and in the best interest of students to cater for learner diversity, enhance students' motivation to learn, and create space for students to achieve the learning goal of having a balanced development in both physical and psychological aspects.

### **Formulating School Assessment Policy to Facilitate Assessment for Learning**

5. In Chapter 5 “Assessment” of the updated “Basic Education Curriculum Guide – To Sustain, Deepen and Focus on Learning to Learn (Primary 1-6)” (the Guide) published in 2014, the EDB sets out key concepts, principles and various measures relating to assessment for reference by primary schools so as to facilitate enhancement of their overall assessment policy. These include, among others, deepening teachers' understanding of the functions and modes of assessment; helping teachers understand how to make effective use of assessment to improve student learning; for example, adopting different assessment modes to align with the curriculum/ assessment objectives; marking, analysing and utilising assessment data effectively. On one hand, teachers provide suitable feedback and comments helping students understand how to improve. On the other hand, teachers adjust their teaching strategies by making good use of the assessment information to enhance student learning. We encourage teachers to adopt diversified modes of assessment as well as to avoid excessive assessment and over-reliance on written tests so that students of different abilities and learning styles could have opportunities to demonstrate their learning outcomes. In this connection, schools are recommended to review the purposes, frequency and scope of tests, tightly restrict the number of the tests to avoid over-reliance on written tests and mechanical drilling as well as extremely difficult and rote-learning type of assessments that induce excessive pressure on students.

6. Along with the implementation of “The Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme” in the 2017/18 school year and updated curriculum guides for different key stages, the 15-year school curriculum provides students with opportunities for nurturing their whole-person development and lifelong learning capabilities. Students only have to sit for one public examination under the New Academic Structure (NAS) implemented since 2009, which has helped relieve pressure on students and create space for them to develop diverse interests.

7. The EDB, the Curriculum Development Council, and the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority conducted the NAS review from 2012 to 2015, with recommendations that include the streamlining / fine-tuning / updating of curriculum contents, streamlining of School-based Assessment (SBA) and not implementing SBA in 10 subjects. All these aim to reduce the workload of teachers and students in order to create space for improving learning and teaching. As one of the essential components of the Senior Secondary Curriculum under the NAS, Other Learning Experiences continue to provide senior secondary students with important learning experiences in the areas of physical and aesthetic development, moral and civic education, community service and career-related experiences for enhancing students’ whole-person development.

8. The aim of assessment is to facilitate student learning. Schools should cultivate students’ interest in acquiring knowledge and guide them to develop a positive learning attitude towards homework and assessment as indispensable components in their learning process. Students also need to be aware that appropriate assessments could help them understand their learning targets, learning progress as well as their own strengths and weaknesses. Appropriate level of stress can be a motivating force for making improvements. Students should not aim at achieving good results in assessment as the only or ultimate goal in learning. On the contrary, they should identify how to further improve their learning from assessment results and take progressive steps to become self-directed learners.

### **Formulating School Homework Policy – Quality over Quantity**

9. Homework, which comes in different forms outside lesson time, enables students to consolidate their learning in class, stimulate thinking, enhance their understanding of lesson topics and construct knowledge. Meaningful homework can cultivate students’ interest in learning, encourage proactive self-motivated learning and exploration of daily life problems as well as extend their learning. Throughout the years, the EDB has emphasised that it is the quality rather than the quantity of homework that matters. Teachers should have specific objectives and expected learning outcomes in mind when

designing homework. Diversified types of homework are to be provided based on the abilities, learning needs and interests of their students so as to help them consolidate their knowledge, apply what they have learned or develop self-learning capability. Homework is by no means equivalent to supplementary exercises, rote learning, excessive mechanical copying or drilling.

10. In the Guide published in 2014, the EDB reiterated that schools should attach great importance to the whole-person development of their students. Schools should ensure that their students have sufficient time for rests and leisure time to participate in other beneficial social or extra-curricular activities, such as reading, doing physical exercises or playing, pursuing their interests and establishing good relationship with family members, peers and friends, and developing a healthy lifestyle. In Chapter 8 “Meaningful Homework” of the Guide, it sets out a set of guiding principles and suggested measures for formulating and implementing a school-based homework policy. Schools are continually advised to strike a balance between the quality and quantity of homework. Schools are reminded to take into account students’ needs to engage in other activities after school when setting the types and amount of homework for different classes and class levels of students.

11. Given the diverse learning needs and abilities of students, it is definitely unprofessional to set a daily maximum amount of homework load on an across-the-board basis. Such an arrangement is not beneficial as it can neither cater for the needs of less able students nor develop the potential of gifted students. The EDB sets out guidelines clearly that schools should formulate an appropriate school-based homework policy in the light of learning diversity of the students. Schools should coordinate the efforts of different subject teachers to review regularly the frequency, quantity, type and quality of homework as well as take into consideration parents’ views to ensure that all homework assignments are appropriately set and meaningfully designed to meet the abilities and interests of students. In addition, the setting of a homework policy should allow students sufficient time for rests, enjoying the company of family members, playing games or doing physical exercises, pursuing personal interests, and developing a healthy lifestyle. Based on our understanding, many schools have adopted diversified forms of homework and reduced the amount of written assignments; coordinated the daily homework load of different class levels; and adjusted the homework policy by taking into account the views of parents collected through questionnaire surveys. Schools also communicate with parents on their homework and assessment policy in a timely manner.

12. Based on the findings of the questionnaire surveys commissioned by the EDB in 2015 and 2016 with about 7 000 parents from nearly 100 primary schools participating, the time spent daily on homework by students varies significantly (from less than 0.5 hours to over 3 hours) even under similar homework arrangements for students of the same grade in the same school. This

indicates that homework load is not the only, if not major, factor in determining the time spent by students on homework. The factors behind whether a student would feel that there is pressure from homework are even more complicated. If one concludes that there are faults in education policies and systems merely because individual schools give undue weight to students' academic results or fail to develop proper assessment or homework policies, or a small number of students feel pressure from homework and assessments, it is oversimplifying the issue and mistaking learner differences, views of individual schools on teaching with system level problems.

13. Whether teachers/schools can firmly grasp the concept and practices of “assessment for learning” is most crucial. To assist teachers in catering for learner diversity in their internal assessments, the EDB organises professional development programmes on assessment for principals, curriculum leaders and teachers every year. These programmes aim at deepening teachers' understanding of assessment through explaining the concept of assessment policy, school experience sharing and group discussions with a view to enhancing whole-school assessment policy and the quality of learning and teaching. It is expected that with assessment serving its original purpose of enhancing student learning, pressure of assessment on students would thus be alleviated.

### **Life-wide Learning and Additional Support for Underprivileged Children**

14. The EDB has been promoting students' participation in life-wide learning (LWL) activities so as to help them develop a healthy lifestyle and achieve whole-person development. LWL refers to student learning in real contexts and authentic settings. Such experiential learning enables students to achieve certain learning goals that are more difficult to attain through learning in the classroom alone. LWL activities take care of the students' different needs such as their sense of moral values and attitudes, skills and creativity. Through their participation in diversified learning activities, students can learn to communicate, to cooperate with other people and in addition to enrich their life experiences. If students are given the opportunities to organise these activities, they will gain experience in programme planning and leadership, thus enabling them to show their potential and gain opportunities to develop themselves. Thus, apart from classroom learning and appropriate homework and assessment, LWL is also an indispensable part of school education.

15. The EDB does not wish to see students from families with financial difficulties being deprived of opportunities for all-round development and healthy growth as they grow up. As such, we provide additional support to disadvantaged children. The EDB has implemented the School-based After-school Learning and Support Programmes (Programme) since the 2005/06 school year for providing public sector schools (including special schools) as

well as schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with the School-based Grant (SBG) and the Community-based Project (CBP) Grant respectively to organise school-based and community-based after-school activities. A wide spectrum of activities are organised under the Programme, including tutorial service, learning skills training, language training, art and cultural activities, sports activities, visits, voluntary work, development of self-confidence, social skills training, leadership training and adventure activities, etc., to enable needy students to have greater variety of learning experiences and get to know more about the society, with a view to facilitating their whole-person development and personal growth. Apart from the Programme, the Government has launched various funding schemes (e.g. The Hong Kong Jockey Club Life-wide Learning Fund<sup>1</sup>, the After-school Care Programme under the Social Welfare Department, the Child Development Fund under the Labour and Welfare Bureau, etc.) to support schools and NGOs to organise after-school activities to cater for the diverse needs of needy students. We encourage schools to deploy and consolidate the various grants flexibly and to collaborate with NGOs, and make good use of community resources to meet the different needs of disadvantaged students. The total provision of the Programme in the 2017/18 school year is about \$240 million.

### **Supporting Children’s Comprehensive Development**

16. To foster the healthy development and instill positive values among students, the EDB encourages schools to adopt a ‘Whole-School Approach’ to guidance and discipline. With the concerted efforts of teachers and professional personnel (including school social workers, student guidance personnel and school-based educational psychologists, etc.), schools deliver multifarious teaching strategies and remedial, preventive and developmental guidance services to cater for students’ different abilities and aptitudes, with a view to helping students cope with their learning difficulties and solve their behavioural problems. If the problems of individual students persist after receiving the above-mentioned services, schools may refer them to outside professionals, such as clinical psychologists, social workers of social welfare units or psychiatrists, for in-depth assessment and follow-up.

17. The EDB has all along been promoting a caring and harmonious school culture, strengthening the relationship between teachers and students and enhancing peer support in helping students engage in their learning and school life. A variety of development programmes, such as the “Understanding Adolescent Project” for primary schools, the “Enhanced Smart Teen Project” in

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<sup>1</sup> Rolled out since 2002, the Fund supports financially needy students in primary and secondary schools to participate in life-wide learning activities organised or recognised by schools with a view to developing their potential and achieving the aims of whole-person development.

collaboration with different disciplinary forces and uniform groups for secondary schools, and the “Pupil Ambassador Scheme on Positive Living”, are vigorously promoted to enhance students’ resilience and cultivate their sense of dignity, self-discipline, responsibility and the courage to make changes and take on challenges through adventure-based, team-building and problem-solving training. In recent years, the EDB has also introduced student guidance projects based on positive psychology concepts to help students develop a positive self-image and learn how to respect and cherish life.

18. To enhance students’ well-being and mental health, the EDB, in collaboration with relevant bureaux/departments, NGOs and schools, has launched various supportive measures and programmes to enhance students’ awareness and understanding of mental health, raise their awareness of help-seeking, reduce the stigma associated with help-seeking behaviour and strengthen their ability to cope with adversity. The EDB and the Department of Health jointly hold the Joyful@School Campaign in all primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong with a view to further promoting three key messages of the Campaign - "Sharing", "Mind" and "Enjoyment" in schools<sup>2</sup>. In supporting students with mental health needs, starting from the 2017/18 school year, the Learning Support Grant that the EDB provides for public sector ordinary secondary and primary schools has covered students with mental illness so that schools would have additional resources to cater for these students.

## **Concluding Remark**

19. The EDB attaches great importance to quality education that fosters the balanced and healthy development of students. As regards assessment policy and system level issues, we are committed to promoting an assessment (including homework) policy that enhances students’ learning effectiveness. We will continue to convey messages on the aims of assessment, the principles and policy of meaningful homework and disseminate good practices through various

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<sup>2</sup> To provide additional resources for schools and NGOs to implement suitable activities relating to mental health, the Quality Education Fund Steering Committee has, starting from April 2017, waived the quota for collaborative mini applications under the "Joyful@School" Campaign and raised the grant ceiling for mini applications to \$200,000. To provide mental health support services for students, the Food and Health Bureau, in collaboration with the EDB, the Hospital Authority and the Social Welfare Department, has launched a two-year pilot scheme “Student Mental Health Support Scheme” based on the medical-educational-social collaboration model in 17 schools by two phases in the 2016/17 and 2017/18 school years. Moreover, the EDB has invited the Department of Psychiatry, the University of Hong Kong to launch the “Mindshift+ Educational Programme” for promoting and developing students’ mental health in collaboration with schools. To enhance teachers’ awareness on mental health and to strengthen their professional capacity to identify and support students with mental health needs, the EDB has arranged “Professional Development Programme for Mental Health” for teachers starting from the 2017/18 school year. The programme includes elementary courses for teachers at large and in-depth courses for designated teachers.

channels, including circulars, curriculum guides and professional training for teachers. In helping schools formulate their school-based assessment policy effectively based on students' abilities, interests and needs, the EDB conducts school visits, focus inspections and external school reviews to understand more about the school implementation work of assessment policy and provide feedback to schools.

20. Parents play an important role in influencing the development of their children. Home-school cooperation is essential to the healthy development and effective learning of students. The EDB will step up efforts to explain to parents the positive meaning of assessment for learning, with a view to changing the situation of parents' excessive emphases on assessment results which induce much pressure on their children. The Committee on Home-School Cooperation (CHSC) takes an active role in promoting the "Happy Kids Charter" to schools and parents. The CHSC's work foci in the 2016/17 school year included enhancing parents' efficacy in nurturing their children, assisting them in early identifying their children's emotional problems and fostering positive thinking in their children. The EDB will actively encourage the Federations of Parent-Teacher Associations of different districts and schools' parent-teacher associations to organise activities based on the contents of the Charter to enhance students' mental health and well-being.

21. There are always hurdles in the process of learning and growing up. As long as schools and parents work together to support our students to face and overcome difficulties progressively, they will eventually grow up with confidence, perseverance and positive values. We hope that the whole community can work together to stem the unhealthy culture of excessive boosting arising from the fear of lagging behind at the starting line and let young children learn happily and effectively.

**Education Bureau**  
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