

Legislative Council
Subcommittee on Children's Rights

Response to motions of the Meeting on 25 November 2017

Urges the Education Bureau to review the homework guidelines and their effectiveness, and to consider: (1) setting maximum home time; (2) requiring schools to assign same amount of homework on Fridays and other school days; and (3) requiring schools to arrange a least one long holiday homework-free so as to let students have the right to learn in a truly self-directed way.

Homework is an important component in the learning and teaching in schools. It comes in different forms outside lesson time, enables students to consolidate their learning in class, stimulates thinking, enhances their understanding of lesson topics and the construction of knowledge. In Chapter 8 “Meaningful Homework” of the “Basic Education Curriculum Guide” and the “Secondary Education Curriculum Guide” updated in 2014 and 2017 respectively, as well as the Education Bureau Circular “Guidelines on Homework and Tests in Schools – No Drilling, Effective Learning” issued in 2015, the Education Bureau (EDB) further emphasised on the rationale of the all-round development of students, which encompasses their physical and psychological well-being, and reiterated that schools should attach the greatest importance to foster in their students a balanced development and a healthy lifestyle. In tandem with nurturing students’ lifelong learning capabilities, schools should refrain from unduly overburdening their students with homework so as to ensure that they have sufficient time for rest and leisure to pursue their personal interests, participate in various physical and art activities, and develop a good relationship with family members, peers and friends after school.

2. The EDB has reiterated all along that under the principles of school-based management, transparency and effective communication, schools and parents can strengthen communication on homework matters through regular channels to ensure that an appropriate school-based policy is formulated and implemented. To further enhance such a policy, parents may directly put forward their views and propose improvements in respect of their children’s homework matters to schools. To enhance schools’ capabilities in the formulation, implementation and review of school-based homework policy, the EDB organises professional development programmes related to homework for principals, curriculum leaders and teachers every year. These programmes

cover topics such as the importance of striking a balance between the quality and quantity when setting the types and amount of homework for students, and the need for regular reviews and communication with parents on homework arrangements with a view to enhancing the whole-school homework policy as well as the quality of learning and teaching. In addition, the EDB urges schools to formulate an appropriate homework policy and gains an understanding of such policies through external school reviews, focus inspections, school development visits, curriculum development visits and daily contacts, etc. Professional advice and support on school practices and specific suggestions on enhancing student learning are also provided to facilitate schools' self-improvement and sustainable development. If complaints from parents about the homework arrangements or excessive drilling practices of individual schools were received, we would take appropriate follow-up actions accordingly.

3. There are diverse learning needs and abilities among students, and the factors behind whether a student would feel that there is pressure from homework are multifaceted and complicated. The expectations of parents on the quality and quantity of homework given to their children may be different even in the same school. If parents have any views on their children's learning in schools, including both the quantity and quality of homework, they should have more communication with the respective schools. For children with special learning needs, the parents concerned could discuss with the schools about how to adjust the amount of homework for their children. Setting a daily/weekend/long holiday maximum amount of homework load or time on an across-the-board basis can neither cater for the needs of less able students nor develop the potential of gifted students. Such an arrangement is not conducive to catering for learner diversity and is disrespectful to the professionalism of the school management and teachers.

In response to the views raised by the deputations/individuals and concerns raised by attendees at the aforementioned meeting, our reply is as follows:

Kindergarten Admission and School Places Allocation for Primary and Secondary Schools

4. Under the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme (Scheme), each student eligible to receive Kindergarten (KG) education in Hong Kong will only be issued with one registration document. This is to avoid the same student taking up more than one place, or attending both morning and afternoon sessions at kindergartens. In practice, a Registration Certificate (RC) will be issued to children who will be eligible to receive subsidy under the Scheme, while children eligible to receive KG education in Hong Kong but not eligible to receive subsidy will be issued with an Admission Pass (AP). As all KGs

joining the Scheme could only admit students with a valid registration document, and each student will only be issued one registration document, i.e. either RC or AP, parents will be unable to arrange their children to attend concurrently two KGs or both morning and afternoon sessions of the same KG.

5. The present Primary One Admission (POA) System has been widely consulted and has taken care of the interests of different stakeholders as far as possible. The POA System is implemented with a view to allocating public sector Primary One places to eligible children in an orderly manner and is generally accepted by parents and the school sector. The POA System is divided into two stages, namely the Discretionary Places Admission (DP) Stage and the Central Allocation (CA) Stage. At the DP stage, parents are not subject to any restrictions on district and may apply to any one public sector school. Public sector primary schools are also not allowed to use applicant children's academic results (such as any learning certificates/awards, etc.) or individual performance (such as interviews or any forms of assessment, etc.) as selection criteria. Children who have not secured a DP place will participate in the Central Allocation, and will be allocated a public sector Primary One place on a random basis.

6. The purpose of setting up a Points System at the DP stage is to provide a set of objective criteria which could take into account various situations and needs as far as possible and a basis for schools to allocate school places. The Points System can eliminate the pressure imposed on young children by avoiding the taking of children's ability as an admission criterion. It also balances the interest of parents, schools and school sponsoring bodies and to allow primary schools a certain degree of autonomy in maintaining their own characteristics.

7. The Education Bureau (EDB) has revised the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) mechanism in 2001 by abolishing the Academic Aptitude Test (AAT), which was used to scale the internal assessment results and thus affecting the allocation bands of students, in order to avoid distorting the curriculum and affecting students' balanced learning due to drilling for the AAT. The number of allocation bands has also been reduced from five to three with a view to reducing the labelling effect and maintaining appropriate mixed ability teaching to enable students to complement and learn from one another, thus fostering their self-confidence, tolerance and ability to work in groups.

8. Starting from 2007, the SSPA has adopted the Pre-Secondary One Hong Kong Attainment Test as the scaling tool, and the average of the results sampled in the two most recent even years is used to scale the internal assessment results of the coming cohort of students in the primary schools who

are proceeding to Secondary 1 (S1) for determining the allocation bands of students in the territory/same school net. In addition, to further respect the school choices of parents and students, and provide secondary schools with greater autonomy in admitting students in accordance with their own education philosophy and characteristics, the maximum number of Discretionary Places (DP) that each secondary school can reserve at the DP stage has been increased from 20% to 30%; and the number of secondary schools which students can apply to at that stage has also been increased from one to two. Students who are unsuccessful in their applications at DP stage will be allocated an S1 place in the Central Allocation (CA) stage. In the CA stage, students can also choose a maximum of three secondary schools from any school nets.

9. With a view to reducing undue pressure on students, the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) mechanism has been aimed at avoiding, as far as possible, students' own academic performance having a direct bearing on their allocation results that may hamper their basic learning. The mechanism has been widely consulted and implemented smoothly for years. It is generally accepted by stakeholders, and also ties in with the actual operation of schools.

Whole-day Primary Schooling and Students' Learning Time

Whole-day Primary Schooling

10. Improving the quality of education in Hong Kong is the objective of the EDB, and whole-day education is one of our measures to enhance basic education and improve the quality of education. Whole-day primary schools can plan their curriculum more flexibly and provide more time and opportunities for students to experience group life, take part in extra-curricular activities, enhance teacher-student communication and give students more comprehensive care. Through regular visits to schools, external school reviews, inspections and communication with school councils, the EDB understands that stakeholders in the education sector generally recognize the merits of whole-day primary schooling in creating a better learning environment.

11. The guidelines on operation of whole-day primary schools issued by the EDB set out the practical arrangements for whole-day primary schools for their reference. As the circumstances of schools and needs of students vary, schools could flexibly arrange their time-tables and formulate an appropriate school-based homework policy in the light of school-based circumstances. If parents have any opinions on the amount of homework, the arrangement of recess and lunch break or their children's learning situation at school, they should maintain good communication with schools and reflect their opinions so that schools can make adjustments as appropriate. We will continue to remind

schools through various channels to ensure that students are allocated appropriate time to study, rest and have leisure activities for a healthy growth.

Students' Learning Time

12. Students' learning time includes classroom learning, different modes of after-class activities/activity day, reading etc. Schools should arrange students' learning time to facilitate their whole-person development in an organised and flexible manner in the light of the school context, curriculum requirements in different subjects and parents' expectations etc. It would be difficult to cater for individual schools' needs if a standard school/learning time were set for all schools. The current practice allows schools to have more flexibility to conduct whole-school planning on lesson time for effective learning time arrangement, including different timetables in the first/second term, different lengths for different lessons or learning periods, flexible grouping etc. Schools are now adopting some appropriate/good practices, for example, adding/extending homework lessons to create space for students.

13. At the secondary level, given the diverse learning progress and abilities of individual students, schools should duly consider students' learning needs and whether they have sufficient time for rests when arranging extra lessons after school or during the school holidays, as well as maintain communication with parents. When planning the learning and teaching contents of different subjects, schools should use lesson time effectively and make flexible arrangements in terms of pre-lesson preparations, self-study, and study groups, etc. to foster students' self-directed learning and reduce unnecessary extra supplementary lessons. Schools should attach great importance to the whole-person development of their students. Other than academic studies, schools need to ensure that students have sufficient time to rest, participate in other beneficial social/co-curricular activities and pursue personal interests.

Homework

Primary and Secondary

14. Throughout the years, the EDB has emphasised that it is the quality rather than the quantity of homework that matters. Homework load is not the only or 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 multifaceted and complicated. Given the diverse learning needs and abilities of students, setting a daily/weekend/long holiday maximum amount of homework load on an across-the-board basis is not beneficial as it can neither cater for the needs of less able students nor develop the potential of

gifted students. Such an arrangement is also disrespectful to the professionalism of the school management and teachers.

15. Schools should formulate an appropriate school-based homework policy in response to the learner diversity among students. Schools should coordinate the efforts of different subject teachers to review regularly the frequency, quantity, type and quality of homework; provide feedback on learning and teaching by utilising homework data effectively and take into due consideration parents' views, to ensure that all homework and assessments are appropriately set to meet the abilities and interests of students, as well as to promote students' self-directed learning and inquisitiveness.

16. Meaningful homework can cultivate students' interest in learning. Teachers should design interesting and different types of homework to cater for students' learning diversity. Excessive homework, mechanical copying, and drilling should be avoided. For Primary 1 students in particular, schools should flexibly arrange and appropriately adjust the frequency of dictation as well as the amount and scope of assessment to ensure these are not excessive. For the Primary 1 students who are admitted for a few months, there should not be an over-emphasis on pen-and-paper assessment or accuracy in dictation.

17. Under the principles of school-based management, transparency and effective communication, schools and parents could have more communications on homework matters through regular channels to ensure that an appropriate school-based policy is formulated and implemented. Parents could also voice out their opinions and make suggestions on their children's homework matters to schools direct with a view to further enhancing the school-based homework policy.

18. The EDB will continually acquire an understanding of schools' homework policies and urge schools to formulate an appropriate homework policy through different means. Professional advice and support on school practices is also provided to facilitate schools' self-improvement and sustainable development. If complaints from parents about the homework arrangements or excessive drilling practices of individual schools were received, follow-up actions would be taken accordingly.

Kindergartens

19. For kindergartens, the EDB is now refining the Performance Indicators (PIs) under the Quality Assurance Framework to further enhance the quality of KG education. In the refined PIs, the EDB will clearly request KGs that homework assigned should not be excessive, too frequent or too difficult

for children, and KGs should not ask K1 children to hold a pencil and write, or ask K2 and K3 children to do mechanical copying or calculations. During KG Quality Review, inspectors from the EDB would make judgement based on the overall school performance in all the domains including implementation of the school curriculum. For KGs found not complying with the requirements concerned, we would request the school to improve and cease such malpractices immediately.

Support for Students with Special Educational Needs

20. In supporting students with special educational needs (SEN), the EDB has been providing public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools with additional resources, professional support and teacher training to facilitate their implementation of the Whole School Approach (WSA) to align school policies, culture and practices in rendering support to students with SEN through the 3-Tier Intervention Model. Schools should flexibly deploy various resources and make professional judgement to render appropriate support together, such as the design and implementation of individual education plan (IEP), and with related strategies in the daily teaching and learning activities for students based on their needs. Schools would regularly review students' progress, adjust the level of support for the students when necessary and arrange the most appropriate support services for the students.

21. Under the principle of "one curriculum framework for all", students with SEN follow the mainstream school curriculum and are offered essential learning experiences to unleash their potentials like their able counterparts. The EDB has stipulated in the Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach (WSA) to Integrated Education and the information leaflet on the WSA – Principles and Strategies for Setting Homework that schools should provide homework accommodation for students according to their SEN. The EDB has also published the guidelines on Special Arrangements for Internal Examinations for Students with Special Educational Needs and information leaflet on the WSA – Assessment Principles and Strategies, which set out the general principles and strategies on special arrangement in internal assessment for students with different types of SEN. Schools need to provide special examination arrangements for students with SEN to ensure that they are fairly assessed. The EDB updates the relevant guidelines periodically as appropriate and organises talks/workshops for schools on a regular basis to assist schools in further fine-tuning their school-based special examination policies and measures. To enhance the effectiveness of integrated education (IE), the EDB will review its implementation and listen to the views of different stakeholders on an on-going basis, and introduce improvement measures whenever necessary and practicable.

Student Support

22. The EDB has actively promoted diversified development programmes, such as the “Understanding Adolescent Project” for primary schools, the “Enhanced Smart Teen Project” in collaboration with disciplinary forces and uniform groups for secondary schools, and the “Pupil Ambassador Scheme on Positive Living”, to enhance students’ resilience and cultivate their sense of dignity, self-discipline, responsibility and 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.

23. In terms of student guidance and discipline, the EDB has gradually improved the resources and the mode of funding for primary schools. Apart from the teachers responsible for discipline and guidance, there are student guidance officers, student guidance teachers or student guidance personnel (including registered social workers) employed under the Student Guidance Service (SGS) Grant, providing guidance services to students. To further enhance student guidance service, a top-up SGS Grant has been provided to all public sector primary schools starting from the 2012/13 school year. It is noticed that the vast majority of schools can make good use of the new resources to increase manpower, arranging one or more school-based student guidance personnel. Over 90% of the schools have employed registered social workers as student guidance personnel. The EDB is aware of the request in the community for ‘one school, one social worker’ for primary schools. Taking into consideration the needs of schools with regard to guidance service, the EDB will explore the future development with the Labour and Welfare Bureau with an open mind, and make suitable resource provision correspondingly. For secondary schools, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has, since the 2000/01 school year, implemented the policy of “one school social worker for each secondary school” by subventing the non-governmental organisations to provide school social work service in secondary schools with a focus on supporting the youth in schools. School social workers collaborate closely with schools and their guidance and discipline teachers to understand the needs of students. Through various activities and counselling services, the school social workers help needy students resolve their academic, social and emotional problems. Besides, through working with their service organisations and other relevant service units in the community, including Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres and Integrated Family Service Centres, collaborating closely with stakeholders as well as making good use of community resources and timely referral services, school social workers can assist and support the

needy students to handle their problems. SWD will regularly review the demand for school social work service in secondary schools. The EDB will continuously keep in view schools' need for guidance services and review the resource provision from time to time with consideration to such factors as policy prioritisation and government's affordability.

24. In order to early identify and render timely support to students with emotional distress, we encourage schools to adopt the 3-Tier Intervention Model to provide different levels of support by teachers, guidance personnel and professional staff respectively. School guidance personnel (including social workers), educational psychologists would understand and analyse students' emotional and behavioural problems, such as depression, anxiety, interpersonal relationships, etc. from multiple perspectives through various means on a need basis. If needed, they would be referred to medical professionals such as psychiatrists and clinical psychologist for further evaluation, diagnosis and treatment.

25. In addition, the EDB has been enhancing teachers' awareness and professional capacity to identify and support students with mental health needs through various means. The "Teacher's Resource Handbook on Understanding and Supporting Students with Mental Illness" jointly developed by the EDB and the Hospital Authority was issued in August 2017 for teachers' reference. Apart from theme-based talks and workshops, from 2017/18 onwards, the EDB conducts the "Professional Development Programme for Mental Health" which includes an Elementary Course for teachers at large and an In-depth Course for designated teachers. Starting from the 2017/18 school year, the Learning Support Grant that the EDB provides for public sector ordinary secondary and primary schools to support students with SEN will cover students with mental illness so that schools will have additional resources to enhance their support to cater for these students' learning, social, emotional and behavioural needs.

26. The EDB has been introducing various improvement measures to support schools in implementing integrated education. For instance, from the 2016/17 school year, School-based Educational Psychology Service has covered all public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools; the ratio of educational psychologist to school has gradually been improved to 1:4 for schools with a great number of students with SEN, in order to support the schools to provide more comprehensive and regular follow-up and intervention services to the students, and to strengthen preventive and developmental work. At present, two local universities provide two-year full time Educational Psychology (professional practice) training courses. We will continue to liaise with local universities to increase the number of training places as far as feasible.

Applied Learning Courses

27. Effective from the 2018 Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination, the reporting of student performance in Applied Learning (ApL) courses is refined to “Attained”, “Attained with Distinction (I)” and “Attained with Distinction (II)”. Performance of “Attained with Distinction (II)” is comparable to Level 4 or above of Category A subjects of the HKDSE Examination. This enables tertiary institutions to have a better understanding of student performance and abilities. Besides, some ApL courses are registered in the Qualifications Register (QR) as certificate programmes at Qualifications Framework Level 3. In the 2018-20 cohort, 31 ApL courses are registered in the QR.

28. The EDB maintains close communication with tertiary institutions which generally value the learning experiences that students have acquired in ApL. Students may use their HKDSE Examination results (including ApL subjects) in the application for local associate degree and higher diploma programmes. For undergraduate programmes, ApL subjects can be used as elective subjects, or considered for award of extra bonus or additional information, varying by individual institutions, faculties or programmes. The Civil Service Bureau also accepts students’ ApL subject results in the HKDSE for civil service appointment purposes.

Basic Competency Assessment

29. Assessment is an integral part of curriculum that cannot be separated from learning. The objective of implementing Basic Competency Assessments (BCA) is to obtain assessment information to provide feedback to learning and teaching, thereby enabling students to learn more effectively and informing learning and teaching.

30. Among them, Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA) only provides objective reference data on students’ overall performance in Basic Competencies and thus helps the Government and schools to formulate related follow-up measures. TSA, as a low-stake assessment, is not used to assess the performance of individual students and schools. The Basic Competencies assessed in BCA/TSA form part of the curriculum and are included in everyday teaching. Hence, extra drilling is not required. With or without TSA/BCA, teachers follow the curriculum to help students acquire the Basic Competencies and consolidate their learning through everyday lessons and assignments, building a solid foundation for students to proceed to the next learning stage.

31. The Coordinating Committee on Basic Competency Assessment and Assessment Literacy (the Committee) submitted two review reports in 2016 and recommended a number of enhancement measures. Stakeholders generally agreed that the measures could effectively address public concerns about TSA. Based on the experience of the 2016 Tryout Study and the 2017 BCA Research Study as well as the feedback from participating schools, schools did not arrange any drilling for BCA/TSA. This indicated that the enhancement measures could effectively eliminate the incentives for over-drilling induced by BCA/TSA.

32. At present, the Committee is following up and reviewing the views and recommendations from the education sector and various stakeholders collected through different channels (including focus groups, seminars, etc.). It is also following up and reviewing the 2017 BCA Research Study and subsequent arrangements. Upon completion of the review, the Committee will submit a report to the Education Bureau. The Education Bureau will then consider the recommendations in the Committee's report and decide on the Primary 3 assessment arrangements for 2018 and beyond.

Performance Indicators for Hong Kong Schools and External School Review

33. Performance Indicators for Hong Kong Schools (PI) is an important tool in support of the implementation of the School Development and Accountability framework. PI serves to assist schools in reviewing systematically their development priorities and the effectiveness of major tasks conducted for schools' sustainable development and enhancement of the effectiveness of learning and teaching. PI covers four domains, namely "Management and Organisation", "Learning and Teaching", "Student Support and School Ethos" and "Student Performance". Under "Student Performance", there are two areas, namely "Attitude and Behaviour" and "Participation and Achievement", which consider the affective development, attitude and social development, as well as the academic and non-academic performance of students, so as to comprehensively review students' whole-person development. PI are interlocking, with mutual impact on each other. In this regard, when conducting school self-evaluation (SSE) through PI, schools are recommended to adopt a holistic approach in evaluating their major tasks, in order to enhance the effectiveness of SSE, provide appropriate support for the development of students, foster their positive values and attitudes, and facilitate whole-person development. The EDB also provides "Stakeholder Survey" and "Assessment Program for Affective and Social Outcomes (2nd version)" for schools to collect views from various stakeholders (including parents), so as to assist schools to identify the learning and development needs of students, and provide

them with timely and appropriate support. In addition, external school review teams also validate the performance of SSE and provide concrete suggestions for schools' further improvement. Through SSE, schools can promote sustainable development and accountability, and enhance students' learning.

Teaching Staff Resources

34. The Government is committed to enhancing the quality of education in Hong Kong. Over the years, the EDB has improved the provision of teaching staff resources on a need basis and implemented a number of measures to enhance the status and professional standards of teachers. Starting from the 2017/18 school year, the teacher-to-class (T/C) ratio for public sector schools (including special schools) is increased by 0.1 across-the-board to stabilise schools' teaching manpower to take forward various education initiatives and enhance the quality of education for the benefit of our students.

35. Starting from the 2017/18 school year, the EDB will, by phases in three years, provide each public sector ordinary primary and secondary school with an additional graduate teacher in the teaching staff establishment to facilitate the school's assignment of a designated teacher to take up the role of special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) to support IE. The SENCO is required to lead the student support team and assist the principal and the vice-principal(s) in planning, coordinating and implementing the WSA to IE in order to further cultivate an inclusive school culture and enhance the effectiveness of the support given to students with SEN.

36. Currently, teaching staff resources provided to public sector schools are not limited to regular teacher establishment calculated according to T/C ratio but also include additional regular teaching posts provided under various initiatives and cash grants featured by their deployment flexibility for meeting specific policy objectives. Schools can utilise the grants to hire additional teaching staff and/or procurement of services according to their own needs. Taking into account the genuine needs and prioritisation of resource deployment, the Government would consider allocating additional resources where necessary with the aim of attaining quality education.