



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部教育局
Education Bureau
Government Secretariat, Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

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8 May 2018

Ms Angel WONG
Clerk to Panel
Legislative Council Panel on Education
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong

Dear Ms WONG,

Panel on Education
Follow up to the meeting on 5 January 2018

I refer to your letter dated 12 January 2018. Our response in respect of the agenda item of “Implementation of whole-day schooling/homework policy and School-based After-school Learning and Support Programmes” is set out in the Annex for Members’ reference.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sheridan Lee', written over a white background.

(Sheridan LEE)
for Secretary for Education

Encl.

Panel on Education
Response from the Education Bureau
to the agenda item of “Implementation of whole-day schooling/homework
policy and School-based After-school Learning and Support Programmes”
at the meeting on 5 January 2018

a) Response to the five motions passed at the meeting

Wording of the Motion

The Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong encourages schools to formulate clear policies and adopt appropriate measures to develop students’ multiple abilities and meet their diverse needs. The existing homework policies of some schools fail to cater for learning diversity among different students in an effective way, and quite a lot of parents do not know how to fulfill the learning needs of their children. In this connection, this Panel urges the Administration to draw up concrete guidelines on the responsibilities of schools and parents in handling learning diversity, so that the two parties will not be thrown into confusion.

(Moved by Hon Michael TIEN Puk-sun)

Response

The Education Bureau (EDB) has all along emphasised that schools should cater for learner diversity. In Chapter 4 “Effective Learning and Teaching” and Chapter 8 “Meaningful Homework” of the updated “Basic Education Curriculum Guide – To Sustain, Deepen and Focus on Learning to Learn (Primary 1-6)” (the Guide) in 2014 and in the EDB Circular No.18/2015 “Guidelines on Homework and Tests in Schools – No Drilling, Effective Learning”, the EDB reiterated that schools should formulate an appropriate school-based homework policy that caters for the needs of students of varied abilities and levels. For instance, coordinating the efforts of different subject teachers and reviewing the frequency, quantity, type and quality of homework regularly. Teachers should design diversified modes of homework, adjust the content flexibly and utilise homework

data to provide feedback to learning and teaching, so as to promote students' learning interest, self-directed learning and inquisitiveness.

In line with the spirit of school-based management and under the principles of transparency and effective communication, schools and parents should strengthen communication on homework matters. Parents may directly put forward their views and suggestions for improvements in respect of their children's homework matters to schools for refinements of their school-based homework policy. In Chapter 8 "Meaningful Homework" of the Guide, parents' role in respect of homework is also articulated, for example, parents' should have reasonable expectations and demands towards their children and understand more about their children's difficulties and learning needs, so that timely support can be provided. They should also care about their children, as well as appreciating and acknowledging their efforts. When their children encounter difficulties, understanding and encouragement should be offered. Meanwhile, parents should keep in touch with teachers and gain an understanding of their children's learning progress, attitudes, habits, performance, etc. Parents may understand more about their children's strengths and weaknesses through teachers' feedback on homework, and thus help their children seek improvements and unleash their potential further.

Regarding the work to strengthen home-school co-operation and parent education, the EDB has invited the Education Commission to set up a Task Force in late 2017. The main tasks of the Task Force include reviewing the existing approach in promoting parent education and home-school co-operation and, based on the outcome of the review, formulating the direction and strategy for fostering home-school co-operation and promoting parent education so that parents could help their children learn effectively and grow up healthily and happily. This includes, among others, exploring how to avoid excessive competition. Besides, to further enhance parent education, the EDB has launched a parent education website called "Smart Parent Net" in early 2018. The website enables parents with children from kindergarten to primary and secondary school levels to easily access useful information (including articles and video clips) on supporting the physical and mental development of students, and assisting children to learn. It also encourages parents to adopt positive approaches in educating their children, establish a good parent-child relationship and enhance children's resilience, so that children will grow up healthily and happily.

The EDB will continue to promote effective measures in catering for learner diversity among students through various means. For example, reviewing and updating of relevant circulars and curriculum documents in a timely manner, organising professional training programmes for teachers to recapitulate the principles and policies of catering for learner diversity and how to design meaningful homework, recommending schools with good practices, conducting school visits, focus inspections and external school reviews, etc. to gain an understanding of the implementation of schools' homework policies. Feedback will be given to schools on how to further enhance their support in catering for learner diversity. We will also communicate and collaborate with parents and other stakeholders through different channels.

Wording of the Motion

This Panel urges the Government to face up to the problem of homework pressure on primary students and their parents, study the formulation of a more specific and reasonable indicator for homework load in the guidelines issued by the Education Bureau to schools, and ensure that schools will follow the guidelines on rest time in schools.

(Moved by Hon HUI Chi-fung)

Response

The Education Bureau (EDB) has all along emphasised that it is the quality of homework rather than its quantity that matters. The factors behind whether a student would find homework stressful are multifaceted and complicated. As the circumstances of each school and the learning needs and abilities of students differ, professional handling by the school management and teachers is required. It is not desirable to set a maximum amount of homework load or time for each day, weekend or long holiday on an across-the-board basis.

It is emphasised in the EDB Circular No.18/2015 “Guidelines on Homework and Tests in Schools – No Drilling, Effective Learning” that schools should cater for the needs of students with varying abilities and levels and take into account the need of balanced development in students’ learning as well as their physical and mental health. Schools should review the frequency, quantity, type and quality of homework regularly and formulate an appropriate school-based homework policy. For example, there should be coordination among subject teachers in respect of the amount of homework assigned daily, and flexible adjustments to the learning content. Teachers should, as far as possible, allow time during lessons for students to complete part of their homework under guidance, so that students can participate in other beneficial social or extra-curricular activities after school, cultivate interests and have sufficient time for rest and sleep. Teachers may also make good use of tutorial periods/class teacher periods to provide guidance to students who have difficulty in their homework. Under the principles of school-based management, transparency and effective communication, schools and parents should 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 to schools.

The EDB will continue to gain an understanding of schools' implementation of homework policy through different means, such as external school reviews, focus inspections, school visits, daily contacts, etc. We will urge schools to refine their school-based homework policy and timetable as well as to maintain close contact and communication with parents to ensure that students have sufficient time for rest and leisure activities and hence have healthy growth and development.

Wording of the Motion

A spate of unfortunate incidents of students committing suicide due to study pressure has occurred in Hong Kong in recent years. Some parents have also relayed that the homework load of Hong Kong students is too heavy. Every day, students have to devote a lot of time to finish their homework after school. Consequently, they lack a reasonable amount of time to play. Moreover, some students do not even have enough time to rest and sleep.

In this connection, this Panel urges the Government to expeditiously conduct a comprehensive review of the homework load of primary/secondary students under the existing education system of Hong Kong. In parallel, the Government should take the lead to implement in Primary One to Primary Three classes over the territory a voluntary “zero homework” study programme by requesting participating schools to let students finish all their homework during school hours, so as to alleviate the pressure on students as they no longer need to work strenuously at home after school.

(Moved by Hon Wilson OR Chong-shing and seconded by Hon CHEUNG Kwok-kwan)

Response

The Education Bureau (EDB) has all along emphasised that it is the quality rather than the quantity of homework that matters. Students have diversified learning needs and abilities. The factors behind whether a student would find homework stressful are multifaceted and complicated. Homework helps students consolidate their classroom learning and extend learning outside classroom. We trust that principals, curriculum leaders and teachers have worked out an appropriate school-based homework policy based on their professional knowledge, taking into consideration the school context, and the students’ abilities, interests and needs.

It is emphasised in the EDB Circular No.18/2015 “Guidelines on Homework and Tests in Schools – No Drilling, Effective Learning” that schools should cater for the needs of students with varying abilities and levels and take into account the need of balanced development in students’ learning as well as their physical and mental health. Schools should review the frequency, quantity,

type and quality of homework regularly and formulate an appropriate school-based homework policy. For example, there should be coordination among subject teachers in respect of the amount of homework assigned daily, and flexible adjustments to the learning content. Teachers should, as far as possible, allow time during lessons for students to complete part of their homework under guidance, so that students can participate in other beneficial social or extra-curricular activities after school, cultivate interests and have sufficient time for rest and sleep. Teachers may also make good use of tutorial periods/class teacher periods to provide guidance to students who have difficulty in their homework. Under the principles of school-based management, transparency and effective communication, schools and parents should 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 to schools.

The EDB will continue to gain an understanding of schools' implementation of homework policy through different means, such as external school reviews, focus inspections, school visits, daily contacts, etc. We will urge schools to refine their school-based homework policy and timetable as well as to maintain close contact and communication with parents to ensure that students have sufficient time for rest and leisure activities and hence have healthy growth and development. If the condition is found continuously undesirable, the EDB will explore how to help schools to make improvement in terms of the quality and quantity of homework..

Wording of the Motion

This Panel urges the Education Bureau to revise the “homework guidelines” and actively consider:

- (1) setting maximum homework time;
- (2) requiring schools to assign same amount of homework on Fridays and other school days;
- (3) requiring schools to arrange at least one long vacation homework-free so as to allow students to have a “genuine vacation”.

(Moved by Hon SHIU Ka-chun)

Response

Homework is an important component in learning and teaching in schools. Taking different forms outside lesson time, homework enables students to consolidate their learning in class, stimulate their thinking, enhance their understanding of lesson topics and construct 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 in the EDB Circular “Guidelines on Homework and Tests in Schools – No Drilling, Effective Learning” issued in 2015, we further emphasise the whole-person development of students, which encompasses their physical and psychological well-being, and reiterate that schools should attach the greatest importance to fostering students’ balanced development and helping them develop a healthy lifestyle. While nurturing students’ abilities to pursue lifelong learning, schools should refrain from overburdening their students with homework. Students could then have sufficient time for rest, cultivating their interests, participating in various physical and art activities, and developing good relationships with family and peers.

In line with the spirit of school-based management and under the principles of transparency and effective communication, schools and parents should strengthen communication on homework matters to ensure that an appropriate school-based homework policy is formulated and implemented. To further enhance such a policy, parents may directly put forward their views and suggestions for improvements in respect of their children’s homework to schools for refinement of their school-based homework policies. The EDB organises

homework-related professional development programmes for principals, curriculum leaders and teachers every year. These programmes cover topics such as the importance of striking a balance between quality and quantity when assigning homework, and the need for timely reviews and communication with parents on homework arrangements. In addition, the EDB will gain an understanding of the implementation of schools' homework policies through external school reviews, focus inspections, school development visits, curriculum development visits, daily contacts, etc. When necessary, the EDB will offer specific suggestions and professional support to schools to help them improve the effectiveness of students' learning. If complaints about the homework arrangements or excessive drilling practices of individual schools were received from parents, we would take appropriate follow-up actions accordingly.

Students have diverse learning needs and abilities. Whether a student would find homework stressful, there are multifaceted and complicated factors behind. Parents' expectations on the quality and quantity of homework assigned to students studying in the same school may vary as well. If parents have any views on their children's learning in schools, including both the quality and quantity of homework, they should strengthen their communication with the schools. For children with special learning needs, the parents concerned should discuss with the schools about how adjustments could be made for their children's homework. Setting a maximum amount of homework load or time for each day, weekend or long holiday on an across-the-board basis can neither cater for the needs of less able students nor unleash 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.

Nevertheless, the EDB will communicate with major stakeholders about homework matters in a timely manner. For example, before this Chinese New Year holiday, we approached major school sponsoring bodies (SSBs), primary and secondary schools councils, regional school heads associations, etc. and got positive responses about homework arrangements from these parties. They agreed that as far as possible, less homework should be assigned to students during holidays and interesting homework tasks should be given. This is to ensure that students would have more time to spend with their family and friends during the Chinese New Year holiday. We note that the SSBs and some school councils have reached out to their sponsored schools/member school heads (e.g. by issuing circulars/letters, and by holding meetings with school heads) to pass on the above

message in respect of homework arrangements during holidays.

Wording of the Motion

According to an international study covering 46 countries and regions, Hong Kong school children spend the second-longest time on homework. The study also found that students who spend less time doing homework are better readers. In recent years, many students and children have also indicated that their homework burden is excessively heavy and the amount of homework should be limited. This Panel urges the Education Bureau to formulate guidelines to cap the homework load and homework hours of small children and primary students of Hong Kong as well as to actively monitor the implementation of such guidelines, so as to give back to children a healthy environment to grow up.

(Moved by Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung)

Response

Homework is an important component in learning and teaching in schools. Taking different forms outside lesson time, it enables students to consolidate their learning in class, stimulate their thinking, enhance their understanding of lesson topics and construct 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 in the EDB Circular “Guidelines on Homework and Tests in Schools – No Drilling, Effective Learning” issued in 2015, we further emphasise the whole-person development of students which encompasses their physical and psychological well-being, and reiterate that schools should attach the greatest importance to fostering students’ balanced development and helping them develop a healthy lifestyle. While nurturing students’ abilities to pursue lifelong learning, schools should refrain from overburdening their students with homework, so that students could have sufficient time for rest, cultivating their interests, participating in various physical and art activities, and developing good relationships with family and peers.

In line with the spirit of school-based management and under the principles of transparency and effective communication, the Education Bureau (EDB) all along emphasises schools and parents should strengthen communication on homework matters to ensure that an appropriate school-based homework policy is formulated and implemented. To enhance such a policy, parents may directly put forward their views and suggestions for improvements in respect of their

children's homework to schools. The EDB organises various homework-related professional development programmes for principals, curriculum leaders and teachers every year. These programmes cover such topics as the importance of striking a balance between quality and quantity when assigning homework, and the need for timely reviews and communication with parents on homework arrangements. In addition, the EDB has gained an understanding of the implementation of schools' homework policies through external school reviews, focus inspections, school development visits, curriculum development visits, daily contacts, etc. When necessary, the EDB will offer specific suggestions and professional support to schools to help them improve the effectiveness of students' learning. If complaints about the homework arrangements or excessive drilling practices of individual schools were received from parents, we would take appropriate follow-up actions accordingly.

Students have diverse learning needs and abilities. The reasons behind whether a student would find homework stressful are multifaceted and complicated. Parents' expectations on the quality and quantity of homework assigned to students studying in the same school may vary as well. If parents have any views on their children's learning in schools, including both the quality and quantity of homework, they should strengthen their communication with the schools. For children with special learning needs, the parents concerned should discuss with the schools about how adjustments could be made for their children's homework. Setting a maximum amount of homework load or time for each day, weekend or long holiday on an across-the-board basis can neither cater for the needs of less able students nor unleash 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.

- (b) According to paragraph 12 of the Administration’s paper [LC Paper No. CB(4)287/17-18(03)], questionnaire surveys were commissioned by the Education Bureau (“EDB”) in 2015 and 2016. The Administration was requested to provide the questionnaires, detailed findings (including the average time spent daily on homework by primary and secondary students, if any) and analysis of the surveys.

The Education Bureau (EDB) commissioned an independent academic institution (academic institution) to conduct questionnaire surveys on students’ learning attitude and motivation in 2015 and 2016 respectively¹. There are three sets of questionnaires, namely questionnaire for schools, questionnaire for parents and questionnaire for students. Before conducting the questionnaire surveys, the responsible academic institution had to obtain prior consent from schools and parents. All information collected is kept in strict confidence. Copies of the questionnaires for schools, parents and students in 2015 and 2016 are available on the following webpage:

<http://caite.fed.cuhk.edu.hk/projects/wp2016/?p=4733>.

After analysing and collating the information collected from the questionnaire survey, the academic institution provided each participating school with an independent and detailed school information analysis report. These detailed school information analysis reports were issued directly to schools by the academic institution and were not submitted to the EDB.

Meanwhile, the academic institution provided the EDB with an overall data analysis. Among others, the time spent daily on homework and revision by students is covered. The research findings indicate that the time spent daily on homework and revision by Primary 3 students varies 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, the amount of time spent daily on homework and revision by students also varies significantly. This indicates that homework load is not the only, if not major, factor in affecting the time spent by students on

¹ The 2015 questionnaire survey was conducted at the end of a key learning stage (namely Primary 3, Primary 6 and Secondary 3). Since the Primary 6 Territory-wide System Assessment is conducted in alternate years, the 2016 questionnaire survey was conducted only at Primary 3 and Secondary 3 levels.

homework. The factors behind whether a student would feel the pressure from homework are even more complicated.

- (c) The Administration was requested to provide information/studies gathered on homework guidelines, homework load and homework time in Hong Kong and overseas places.

The information gathered by the EDB indicates that in terms of the homework policies/arrangements adopted in quite a number of countries, schools are given professional autonomy to formulate their school-based homework policies based on school context and the needs of students. Among these countries, Finland, Singapore, the United Kingdom (UK), Germany and Australia² have not imposed any across-the-board restrictions on homework load and the time spent on homework, while the UK and Germany governments have not adopted any countrywide policy or guidelines on homework. The UK government, in particular, abolished in 2012 its recommendation on the time to be spent on daily homework and changed to allow schools and teachers to make their professional decisions instead. Certain places of individual countries such as Canada and the United States have drawn up grade-specific homework guidelines to elaborate the purposes and meaning of homework and give recommendations on the time to be spent daily on homework for schools' reference. However, none of the information gathered indicates that regions that have laid down guidelines for schools' reference are monitoring closely the strict compliance of schools.

When updating the “Basic Education Curriculum Guide – To Sustain, Deepen and Focus on Learning to Learn (Primary 1-6)” (2014) and drafting the EDB Circular No.18/2015 “Guidelines on Homework and Tests in Schools – No Drilling, Effective Learning”, the EDB had made reference to different countries/regions, as well as related local and overseas documents and study reports (for details, please visit the following website: <https://cd.edb.gov.hk/becg/english/chapter8.html#reference>).

Views of various stakeholders were also extensively sought through different channels, including focus group meetings, questionnaire survey, etc. so as to compile the guidelines which would cater for the development needs of students, as well as aligning with the direction of curriculum development and the actual situation of Hong Kong.

² While policy formulation is on state-basis in Australia, the great majority of its state governments have not stipulated any recommended time to be spent on daily homework.