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Education Bureau
Government Secretariat, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

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22 February 2019

Panel on Education
Legislative Council
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong
(Attn: Ms Angel WONG)

Dear Ms WONG,

Panel on Education
Bullying in Schools

I refer to your letter dated 31 January 2019. The detailed information we provide in response to the concerns of Hon CHIANG Lai-wan, Hon QUAT Elizabeth and Hon CHEUNG Kwok-kwan on the handling and prevention of bullying in schools is set out in the Annex.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'So Yuen-yi'.

(Ms SO Yuen-yi)
for Secretary for Education

Encl.

Handling and Prevention of Bullying in Schools

Policy

Acts of bullying generally refer to any malicious and repetitive acts harmful to others and inflicted in a state of imbalance of power. The Education Bureau (EDB) adopts a zero tolerance policy on school bullying where any bullying act, no matter in whatever forms (including verbal, physical and cyber-bullying) or on whatever grounds (including poverty, race, special educational needs and sexual orientation), is unacceptable.

2. The EDB will not tolerate any act of bullying in schools. All along, we have been maintaining close contact with schools through circulars, guidelines and training, requiring all of them to take the matter seriously and implement proactive measures to ensure the safety of students at school and strive to create a harmonious school environment which is conducive to students' learning by raising the awareness of anti-bullying among students and staff and handling bullying incidents in schools in an appropriate manner.

Handling of bullying incidents in schools

3. As set out in the guidelines on handling of bullying cases in the School Administration Guide, schools are advised to adopt a Whole School Approach in formulating and implementing anti-bullying strategies, including a clear stance on zero tolerance, reporting mechanism and handling procedures, highly transparent monitoring and handling each school bullying incident proactively and seriously.

4. If there are bullying incidents, schools should intervene and take follow-up action as soon as possible, taking education, guidance and protection of their students as their prime concern. Such actions include stopping the act of bullying immediately upon receipt of such a report; assessing whether the student(s) concerned is/are injured or emotionally unstable and arranging for first aid/treatment as appropriate if there is any physical injury; thereafter intervening and conducting an initial mediation; and arranging for intensive counselling by counsellors or relevant professional service from outside as appropriate. Schools are equipped with professionals, including guidance personnel, school social workers and school-based educational psychologists, etc., who provide necessary support and mediation to students in need. In the process of handling these cases, schools have to work together with parents to help students

involved rectify their behavioral problems and better protect the students being bullied to restore a harmonious school environment.

5. To support schools in tackling the problem of school bullying, the EDB has also put in place a mechanism to deal with special cases. If suspected abuse is involved, schools may consult the Family and Child Protective Services Unit of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) in their respective district so that case consultation, referral, counselling and group work services, etc. can be provided. If students are suspected to have been involved in illegal behaviour, schools should proactively approach the respective Police School Liaison Officer. For serious cases, schools should report them to the Police immediately to seek assistance. The EDB will liaise with schools, the SWD and the Police for appropriate handling measures.

Prevention of bullying in schools

6. Regarding the prevention of school bullying, the EDB has all along attached great importance to nurturing positive sense of values and attitudes of students for their whole-person development. On curriculum arrangements, learning topics like personal growth, interpersonal relationships and protecting oneself are covered in the Key Learning Areas, subjects and the curricula of moral and civic education of primary and secondary schools. Moreover, the EDB has provided diversified and practical learning and teaching resources for schools. Relevant professional development programmes for teachers are also offered. These include making arrangements for schools to share their own approaches and strategies adopted in implementing values education. Such initiatives help support schools in developing students' empathy and respect for others, and enable students to learn how to handle conflicts and build harmonious interpersonal relationships.

7. To tie in with the curriculum, the EDB has organised diversified guidance and discipline programmes for schools, such as the "Understanding Adolescent Project (Primary)" (UAP), "Pupil Ambassador Scheme on Positive Living" and "Enhanced Smart Teen Project" (ESTP) to promote the spirit of caring, respect and self-discipline. To increase their effectiveness, we have allocated additional resources to enhance these programmes. For example, starting from the 2016/17 school year, the "UAP Guides" Award Scheme has been introduced under the UAP to promote service and experiential learning. Besides, the numbers of students required for operating two Intensive Programmes have been reduced since the 2018/19 school year. Furthermore, the service quota of the ESTP will be increased by phases.

8. Schools are encouraged to establish a caring school culture. Starting from the

2006/07 school year, the Caring School Award Scheme has introduced a range of grand awards for promoting related themes such as care, respect and equality, so as to give public recognition to schools that are actively dedicated to implementing caring school measures. To better facilitate the integration of students who are in greater need of counselling support (including students in poverty, those with special educational needs and non-Chinese-speaking students) into school life, the EDB encourages schools to adopt a Whole School Approach to integrated education. Through strategically organised peer support programmes, circles of friends, learning groups and collaborative teaching, etc., students can get to know and accept each other, and all teachers and students will respect individual differences and jointly cultivate an inclusive school culture.

9. Starting from the 2011/12 school year, the EDB has launched the Harmonious School – Anti-bullying Campaign. Teaching resources, an anti-bullying charter and promotional materials are provided to schools for organising their own Anti-bullying Day/Week, with the aim of guiding students to an empathetic understanding of the impact of bullying on others and its possible consequences, thus raising their anti-bullying awareness; and training Student Peace Ambassadors to get familiar with peer mediation skills, so that they can assist in resolving campus conflicts. The EDB has also launched the Harmonious School Net and the Wise NET School Recognition Scheme for inter-school sharing of information and successful experience, with a view to minimising the occurrence of incidents involving discrimination, bullying and violence.

10. The EDB values the importance of nurturing students' information literacy. The framework on "Information Literacy for Hong Kong Students" was updated in 2016 to enable schools to incorporate information literacy into their curriculum. Students are expected to use information and communication technology effectively and ethically in their study and daily life, and refuse to engage in any improper acts like cyber-bullying. Besides, we have provided relevant professional development programmes for teachers and information kits on e-learning for schools in undertaking parent education in this regard. Moreover, we have organised seminars for parents to help them develop proper attitudes of their children in using information technology in daily life and study, in order to avoid access to undesirable information. A telephone hotline has also been set up to provide individual support for parents, teachers and students in need. To further support teachers in developing students' information literacy and proper attitude in using information technology, the EDB produced the "Smart e-Master" Information Kit on e-Learning in 2018, covering topics like how to handle cyber-bullying.

11. Home-school co-operation is very important. Schools are encouraged to promote parent education, through which parents are urged to listen patiently to the problems encountered by their children (including the problem of bullying). They should support their children to face difficulties with a caring attitude, nurture their children with positive values and ways to get along with others to prevent them from becoming bullies. Parents should also maintain communication with schools and seek help from teachers, guidance personnel and social workers whenever necessary.

Teacher Training and Support

12. To equip teachers for handling school bullying, the EDB commissions tertiary institutions to organise certificate courses on student guidance and discipline for teachers of primary and secondary schools with “school bullying” as a compulsory component. In addition, the EDB regularly conducts relevant seminars/sharing sessions on topics such as handling students’ emotional and behavioural problems, conflict resolution and mediation skills, nurturing a positive school climate and effective communication with parents for teachers, guidance personnel and school social workers, so as to enhance their capability of preventing and handling bullying acts in schools. In the 2018/19 school year, the EDB has organised a total of 14 relevant seminars/workshops for about 1 000 participants up to present.

13. To support schools in implementing the anti-bullying measures, the EDB has produced three resource packages on the prevention of school bullying, namely “Co-creating a Harmonious School”, “Co-creating a Harmonious School - Stop Bullying”, and “Co-creating a Harmonious School - Anti-bullying Day/Week”. These resource packages, which have been uploaded to the EDB website, provide schools with ways, teaching materials and demonstrations of activities on how to establish an anti-bullying policy and the strategies in implementing relevant activities through a Whole School Approach, with a view to further enhancing the anti-bullying work in schools. The EDB website also provides a Peace Ambassador Training Manual, Self-control and Handling Conflict Teaching Materials, a leaflet on “Help Your Child Develop a Harmonious Peer Relationship in School” for parents and various relevant resources on other issues such as Internet safety for access and use by schools, parents and the public.

14. The EDB has launched the project on Supporting Primary School Teachers in Building Harmonious Schools in the 2018/19 school year, with a view to strengthening its support for individual schools in enhancing teachers’ strategies of promoting a harmonious school culture. Learning circles are also organised to assist teachers in creating a harmonious in-class atmosphere and positive class spirit through games.

Recent situation

15. According to the survey data, the overall number of primary and secondary students involving in school bullying cases over the past five years is on a downward trend, declining from about 250 students in the 2013/14 school year to about 200 students in the 2017/18 school year. This shows that our work in preventing school bullying is producing results. As for individual schools, the EDB will continue to provide support for them on a need basis for enhancing their staff's capability of preventing and handling bullying acts in schools.

Education Bureau

February 2019