

立法會
Legislative Council

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by the Administration)

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Panel on Education

Minutes of special meeting
held on Thursday, 25 February 2021, from 3:00 pm to 4:30 pm
in Conference Room 1 of the Legislative Council Complex

- Members present** : Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG Mei-fun, SBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon Alice MAK Mei-kuen, BBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, GBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, GBS, JP
Hon Starry LEE Wai-king, SBS, JP
Hon MA Fung-kwok, GBS, JP
Hon KWOK Wai-keung, JP
Hon Elizabeth QUAT, BBS, JP
Dr Hon CHIANG Lai-wan, SBS, JP
Ir Dr Hon LO Wai-kwok, SBS, MH, JP
Dr Hon Junius HO Kwan-yiu, JP
Hon Holden CHOW Ho-ding
Hon YUNG Hoi-yan, JP
Hon LAU Kwok-fan, MH
Dr Hon CHENG Chung-tai
Hon Vincent CHENG Wing-shun, MH, JP
- Member attending** : Hon SHIU Ka-fai, JP
- Members absent** : Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon Michael TIEN Puk-sun, BBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Che-cheung, SBS, MH, JP
Hon Jimmy NG Wing-ka, BBS, JP
Hon CHEUNG Kwok-kwan, JP

Public Officers attending : Agenda item I

Dr CHOI Yuk-lin, JP
Under Secretary for Education

Ms LAU Yuk-lin
Principal Education Officer (School Administration)
Education Bureau

Clerk in attendance : Ms Angel WONG
Chief Council Secretary (4)4

Staff in attendance : Miss Wincy LO
Senior Council Secretary (4)4

Ms Rachel WONG
Council Secretary (4)4

Ms Sandy HAU
Legislative Assistant (4)4

Action

I. Policy and support strategies on preventing and handling school bullying

(LC Paper No. CB(4)537/20-21(01) -- Paper provided by the Administration)

Briefing by the Administration

The Under Secretary for Education ("US(Ed)") briefed members on the policy and support strategies on helping schools prevent and handle school bullying, including the relevant basic principles and methods, support measures and professional development for teachers. Details of the briefing were set out in the Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(4)537/20-21(01)].

Discussion

Recent incidents of school bullying

2. Mr LAU Kwok-fan, Ms YUNG Hoi-yan, Ms Elizabeth QUAT, the Deputy Chairman, Mr KWOK Wai-keung, Mr SHIU Ka-fai and Mr Holden CHOW expressed concern about the increasing number of political bullying cases in schools since the social incidents in 2019. They said that numerous complaints

Action

had been received from affected students in primary and secondary schools and tertiary institutions. Some students and even teachers had initiated bullying upon other students who held different political views, students whose parents were police officers or members of pro-establishment parties, and students from the Mainland. Those affected students had been doxxed, disturbed on their way to and from school, disregarded during group discussions, etc. It was necessary for the Education Bureau ("EDB") to tackle the problem seriously and take a firm stance against such kind of school bullying. Mr LAU, Ms YUNG and Ms QUAT enquired whether and how EDB would intervene in bullying cases to protect those students, and whether training would be provided to enhance teachers' capability of handling school bullying and help teachers uphold positive values and attitudes.

3. US(Ed) responded that EDB adopted a multi-pronged approach to implement the policy of prevention and handling of school bullying through promotion of values education, strengthening of teacher training, establishment of a caring school culture, and allocation of additional resources. To enable students to understand the basic responsibility of citizens for the benefit of the community, EDB had been actively promoting values education and had added "law-abidingness" and "empathy" to the existing seven priority values and attitudes. Diversified student guidance programmes/activities were organized to promote the spirit of caring, respect and self-discipline. The long-term objective of EDB in minimizing school bullying was to nurture in students the spirit of mutual respect, caring and other core values from an early age. As for teachers, they were role models for students and should never perform any acts of bullying to students. To enhance teachers' capability in guidance and discipline work, including preventing and handling bullying in schools, EDB would continue to organize the 102 hours of certificate courses for primary and secondary teachers. Besides, EDB would regularly conduct relevant seminars, sharing sessions and workshops for teachers and provided schools with diversified learning and teaching resources and relevant information to enhance teachers' understanding of school bullying.

4. Ms YUNG Hoi-yan, Ms Elizabeth QUAT, the Deputy Chairman and Mr SHIU Ka-fai pointed out that it was difficult for the students being bullied to lodge a complaint. As a result, some of these students had applied for changing schools. Ms YUNG enquired about the number of students who had applied for changing schools in 2019 and 2020 because of school bullying, number of successful cases and measures taken by EDB to assist students who failed to get a new school place. Ms QUAT considered it necessary for EDB to provide the total number of applications for changing to new schools and explain how EDB would support the students affected.

5. US(Ed) advised that since June 2019, EDB had received six applications for changing schools due to bullying in connection with the social incidents.

Action

Among them, two students had successfully transferred to other schools and four chose to remain in their original schools after mediation services. In fact, changing to new schools was not the best solution for stopping the bullying as students had to make adaptation to new environments.

6. Mr KWOK Wai-keung enquired about the number of bullying cases involving children of police officers, number of bullying cases successfully handled by EDB, actions taken by EDB to follow up with the cases and the investigation outcome. He also pointed out that recently, the Police had followed up with some serious bullying incidents in schools which had been uploaded on the internet. He questioned why the schools concerned were not even aware of the bullying.

(Post-meeting note: The Administration's response was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)1012/20-21(01) on 20 May 2021.)

7. US(Ed) stressed that EDB/schools had taken immediate action to stop bullying incidents prudently and seriously for the well-being of students. As at 15 January 2021, a total of 25 cases of bullying of police officers' children were received. Three had been substantiated after investigations. Regarding the bullying cases reported by the media, EDB had followed up on 13 cases since the 2018-2019 school year. Most of the cases were discovered to be "false alarm" after investigations. For instance, some cases happened a few years ago and some took place outside Hong Kong. For substantiated cases, the schools concerned had taken disciplinary actions against the teachers/students involved.

Prevention and handling of school bullying

8. The Deputy Chairman opined that the existing school-based mechanism in handling school bullying incidents was not effective. Most affected students and their parents had great hesitation to make complaints because the Regional Education Offices required them to make signed complaints and the complaints would be referred to the schools concerned for follow-up. For those who were willing to lodge a complaint, most cases were not substantiated because the school management had a strong political stance. She urged EDB to set up a dedicated hotline for reporting school bullying cases and designate a team to follow-up with the cases directly.

9. The Chairman, Ms Elizabeth QUAT, Mr KWOK Wai-keung and Mr SHIU Ka-fai said that some schools tended to downplay the seriousness of the bullying incidents to minimize the adverse implications on school reputation. As a result, many cases were not reported to EDB. Besides, students affected felt that they were being victimized after lodging complaints. These members shared similar view that the existing school-based mechanism was not effective in handling the recent bullying cases in schools. EDB should proactively handle

Action

school bullying, review the existing mechanism and explore new effective measures to prevent and handle school bullying incidents.

10. US(Ed) responded that contacting the schools concerned or the Regional Education Offices was the most direct way to report school bullying cases. In 2019, EDB had explored the feasibility of setting up a hotline for reporting bullying cases. It was considered that a dedicated hotline was not the most effective way for speeding up the handling process as school involvement was still required in the investigation. Also, the hotline might be prone to abuse. Having considered that the society was gradually back to normal upon the implementation of the National Security Law, EDB would explore enhanced support measures to handle school bullying incidents.

11. Notwithstanding US(Ed)'s explanation, the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman and Ms Elizabeth QUAT urged EDB to explore new anti-bullying measures to better tackle the recent school bullying incidents, including the feasibility of setting up a dedicated hotline to facilitate the victims in seeking assistance from EDB directly, arranging dedicated officers to follow up every case, etc., and to provide a written response after the meeting.

(Post-meeting note: The Administration's response was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)1012/20-21(01) on 20 May 2021.)

12. Dr Junius HO was of the view that the current policy and support strategies on helping schools prevent and handle school bullying had only achieved little success. He strongly urged EDB to require schools to install closed-circuit television systems ("CCTV") in classrooms, corridors and campus area for the purposes of preventing and handling school bullying. In addition, EDB should strengthen school inspections and set up a task force dedicated to handle school bullying incidents and formulate anti-bullying measures. The task force should involve representatives from EDB, the Police, Home Affairs Department and school sponsoring body, school discipline masters and social workers.

13. US(Ed) advised that in general, installation of CCTV in schools was mainly for crime prevention. Schools must ensure compliance with the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Cap. 486), as well as the "Guidance on CCTV Surveillance and Use of Drones" issued by the Office of Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data. Should schools wish to install CCTV surveillance system on the school campus, they were required to take into account the necessity, reasonableness and openness of the installation, and reach a consensus with the relevant stakeholders, including staff members and parents. As for the suggested task force, US(Ed) explained that as set out in the relevant guidelines on preventing bullying, schools would form a working group or guidance/discipline team to develop preventive measures and strategies on handling bullying and

Action

oversee the implementation process. The working group or guidance/discipline team generally comprised guidance/discipline personnel, school social workers and school-based educational psychologists.

14. Ms Elizabeth QUAT concurred with Dr Junius HO that CCTV could help curb school bullying and pointed out that the use of CCTV was lawful so long as the people affected were explicitly informed that they were under CCTV surveillance. Ms QUAT and Dr HO requested EDB to advise its stance on the installation of CCTV at schools and whether there would be an implementation plan.

(Post-meeting note: The Administration's response was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)1012/20-21(01) on 20 May 2021.)

15. Mr Holden CHOW enquired about the follow-up actions taken by EDB/schools against teachers and students who bullied others and whether penalty would be imposed on them. In his view, EDB should proactively deal with school bullying cases relating to the social incidents in 2019 and impose appropriate penalty on misconducted teachers.

16. US(Ed) advised that schools, as employers, should monitor the performance of their teachers and took the initiative to follow-up on teachers' misconduct cases in accordance with the Employment Ordinance, Codes of Aid, and the terms and conditions stated in employment contracts. These follow-up actions, for example, can include suspension of duties/termination of employment and withholding salary increment. EDB would issue advisory, warning or reprimand letter taking into consideration the gravity of each substantiated case, and consider cancelling the registration of the teacher concerned. For students who bullied others, they would be punished according to school rules and for serious cases, they might be liable to criminal charges. Other than that, counselling service was also arranged to help students understand the mistakes they had committed and the moral values involved.

17. Mr Holden CHOW sought detailed information on the investigation of cases, including the investigation procedures, the problems identified and the follow-up actions taken.

(Post-meeting note: The Administration's response was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)1012/20-21(01) on 20 May 2021.)

18. The Chairman suggested that EDB should continue to follow-up with the schools concerned after the bullying incidents had been handled to prevent the recurrence of similar cases. Moreover, EDB should attach importance to moral and ethical education, and encourage schools to allocate lesson time or make use of school assemblies to strengthen moral and civic education with a view to

Action

cultivating positive values and attitudes in students.

19. US(Ed) advised that schools would arrange guidance personnel to offer assistance to the bullied or further enlist the help of professionals, such as social workers and psychologists, to provide support and mediation services, or refer the students to other professional services if necessary.

20. Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok enquired about the implementation details, key performance indicators and effectiveness of the support measures/programmes/activities organized by EDB to help schools prevent and handle school bullying. He further reminded EDB not to overlook the bullying problem because many parents had arranged their children to leave Hong Kong owing to the hostile learning environment in schools.

21. US(Ed) advised that feedback would be collected from teachers who had completed the professional development programmes, and schools were required to submit Key Performance Measures data which helped schools review the effectiveness of their work, including support for student development. She undertook to provide further details requested by Ir Dr LO after the meeting.

(Post-meeting note: The Administration's response was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)1012/20-21(01) on 20 May 2021.)

22. The Chairman concluded that there was grave concern among members about the effectiveness of the current school-based mechanism in handling school bullying cases. EDB should further enhance the support strategies and introduce new measures to prevent and handle school bullying.

II. Any other business

23. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 4:31 pm.

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
28 September 2021