

LCQ14: Improving roads and traffic in Yuen Long District

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (January 26):

Question:

Some residents of the Yuen Long District have relayed that the traffic congestion problem is serious on Fung Cheung Road which serves as the main road for local residents to travel to Tung Yick Market and commute between the Yuen Long town centre and other districts, as well as on the adjoining roads such as Kin Lok Street and Fung Yau Street North. In addition, there are also problems with the design of the road junctions concerned, resulting in traffic accidents occurring from time to time. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) regarding the removal of the planters in front of the Transport Plaza on Kin Lok Street for carrying out the widening works at the road junction turning from Kin Lok Street into Fung Cheung Road, of the timetable and progress of the works;

(2) given that at present, vehicles travelling to Kin Lok Street can only make a left turn into Fung Cheung Road which will easily cause traffic chaos, whether the Government will consider changing Fung Yau Street North and Fung Kam Street from the current two-lane traffic to single-lane traffic, so as to make the driving routes clearer, thereby minimizing traffic accidents; and

(3) whether, apart from the aforesaid works and proposed measures, the Government has other proposals for ameliorating the traffic congestion and chaos at the aforesaid roads?

Reply:

President,

The Transport Department (TD) has all along been committed to improving the traffic conditions of Fung Cheung district in Yuen Long. Fung Cheung district, including Fung Cheung Road and its adjacent areas (e.g. Fung Kam Street and Fung Yau Street North), is located at the Yuen Long town centre. Fung Cheung Road is a north-south district distributor connecting Yuen Long South, Yuen Long town centre, Castle Peak Road and Pok Oi Interchange. The existing junctions along Fung Cheung Road are mainly priority junctions without the provision of traffic signals. Due to busy traffic at Fung Cheung Road together with its priority for traffic at the junctions, traffic along Fung Yau Street North westbound, for instance, often finds it difficult to make a right turn to Fung Cheung Road northbound, which causes traffic tailback.

Having consulted the TD, our reply to the various parts of the Hon Holden Chow's question is as follows:

In end 2019, the TD commissioned a consultancy study which covered identification of traffic improvement measures for junctions of Fung Cheung Road, Fung Yau Street North and Kin Lok Street, as well as their adjacent areas. In March 2021, the TD introduced the improvement measures at the meeting of the Traffic and Transport Committee of Yuen Long District Council, and conducted local consultation in Q3 2021 via Yuen Long District Office. The local community in general supported the improvement measures, the details of which are as follows:

(i) Installation of traffic signals at the junctions of Fung Cheung Road, Fung Yau Street North and Kin Lok Street

The TD will install traffic signals at the junctions of Fung Cheung Road, Fung Yau Street North and Kin Lok Street to regulate traffic and to enhance road safety. Regarding the original planned planter trimming works beside Transport Plaza at Kin Lok Street, the TD will further trim the size of the planters on top of the original scheme so as to release more space for road widening.

(ii) Enhancement of traffic conditions of the roads nearby through improving traffic arrangement

The TD will convert the following roads from two-way roads into one-way roads: Fung Kwan Street, Fung Kam Street (section between Fung Kwan Street and Fung Yau Street North), Fung Yau Street North (section between Fung Kam Street and Fung Yau Street East), Fung Yau Street East and Fung Yau Street South. This arrangement can, on one hand, avoid traffic congestion arising from concurrent passing of heavy vehicles on both bounds due to inadequate space, and on the other hand, it can cater more effectively kerbside loading and unloading activities through one-way traffic. The TD has examined the feasibility of re-routing the sections of Fung Yau Street North and Fung Kam Street connecting to Fung Cheung Road as one way eastbound and one way westbound respectively in the study. However, this arrangement will increase the traffic load of Fung Kam Street, and will also divert the original traffic along Fung Kam Street northbound (those heading to the junctions of Fung Cheung Road, Fung Yau Street North and Kin Lok Street) to the already very busy Fung Cheung Road. Therefore, the proposed conversion to one-way traffic does not cover the sections of Fung Yau Street North and Fung Kam Street connecting to Fung Cheung Road. Nevertheless, the TD will install appropriate traffic signs and road markings to make the driving routes at Fung Yau Street North and Fung Kam Street clearer so as to enhance road safety.

Regarding the implementation arrangement, the TD is reviewing the details with the Highways Department (HyD). As the works will be implemented at busy road sections and will involve installation of traffic signals as well as turning existing footpath and planter into carriageway, it is necessary to divert a number of underground utilities and implement multi-stage temporary traffic arrangements. The construction works are relatively

complicated. According to the current assessment, the HyD will carry out ground investigation in Q4 2022 to facilitate diversion of underground utilities, which will in turn prepare for the commencement of the relevant works. The TD will continue to maintain close liaison with the HyD so as to complete the improvement works as soon as possible.

LCQ12: Shortage of parking spaces

Following is a question by the Hon Tang Ka-piu and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (January 26):

Question:

The problem of shortage of parking spaces in Hong Kong has been plaguing the transport sector. As at the end of May 2021, the number of parking spaces available for use by commercial vehicles (CVs) was only around 45 300, while the number of CVs stood at around 71 000. The ratio between the two numbers was only about 0.64. Besides, some members of the sector are dissatisfied that the Government has adjusted the latest operating time of most parking meters from the original 8pm to 12 midnight in recent years, thus increasing their financial burden and affecting their rest time. Regarding the shortage of parking spaces, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will consider reverting the latest operating time of parking meters from 12 midnight to 8pm;

(2) given that parking spaces in some government buildings are currently opened up for public use during non-office hours, whether the Government will consider opening up car parks in other government facilities for parking by CVs during night time, or expediting the provision of additional on-street night-time parking spaces for CVs on road sections with less traffic, so as to address the problem of shortage of parking spaces as soon as possible;

(3) of the total number of additional parking spaces that can be provided upon the Government's implementation of the Automated Parking System (APS) in the following projects: (i) a short-term tenancy (STT) car park at the junction of Hoi Shing Road and Hoi Kok Street in Tsuen Wan, (ii) an STT car park at Pak Shek Kok in Tai Po, (iii) the Joint-user Complex at Chung Kong Road in Sheung Wan, (iv) the District Open Space, Sports Centre cum Public Vehicle Park project at Sze Mei Street, (v) the Joint-user Government Office Building in Area 67 in Tseung Kwan O, and (vi) the project at the junction of Yen Chow Street and Tung Chau Street in Sham Shui Po; and

(4) whether it has plans to expeditiously develop APSs in collaboration with private developers, so as to promote the popularisation of APSs in Hong Kong?

Reply:

President,

The Government's current policy in the provision of parking spaces is to accord priority to considering and meeting the parking demand of commercial vehicles (CVs), and to provide an appropriate number of private car (PC) parking spaces if the overall development permits, but at the same time not to encourage frequent users of public transport to opt for PCs in lieu of public transport, so as to avoid aggravating the burden on road traffic.

In recent years, the Government has formulated and has been actively pursuing a host of short-term and medium- to long-term measures to increase parking spaces for CVs, including the provision of CV parking spaces in suitable "Government, Institution or Community" facilities and public open space projects in line with the principle of "single site, multiple uses", designating suitable on-street locations as night-time CV parking spaces, stipulating the provision of a minimum number of parking spaces for CVs in the tenancy agreement of suitable short-term tenancy (STT) car parks, etc. Last year, the Transport Department (TD) completed the review of the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines (HKPSG) regarding the standards for the provision of ancillary parking spaces for CVs and PCs, and increased the type and number of parking spaces for CVs in subsidised housing developments. In consultation with the TD, our reply to various parts of Hon Tang Ka-piu's question is as follows:

(1) Currently, most of the on-street metered parking spaces for CVs operate from 8am to 8pm while some may operate from 10am to 10pm on Sundays and public holidays. The longest parking period for each transaction is set at 30 minutes, one hour or two hours. To allow a higher vehicle turnover of the metered parking spaces, the TD has taken into account various factors such as the traffic condition, parking demand and vehicle turnover rates at individual locations when setting the operating periods and longest parking periods of on-street metered parking spaces. Every year, the TD will conduct a survey to review the utilisation of the on-street metered parking spaces and will timely adjust the longest parking periods and operating periods where necessary after taking into account the considerations mentioned above.

In January this year, the TD completed replacing about 9 800 existing roadside parking meters in the whole territory by the new generation parking meters. The TD will continue to identify suitable new locations to install new parking meters by batches. The new parking meters support remote payment through the "HKeMeter" mobile application, so drivers do not need to pay at the parking meters in person.

(2) As at December 2021, the Government Property Agency (GPA) has opened up about 1 220 PC parking spaces in 13 joint-user government buildings under its management for public use during non-office hours. In general, subject to the situation of individual car parks, PC parking spaces can be used by PCs, taxis as well as van-type light goods vehicles with such sizes that can be accommodated within PC parking spaces. As regards CV parking spaces, they cannot be open for public use as they primarily serve the vehicles of

relevant government departments. In the "Government, Institution or Community" facilities and public open space projects in the pipeline, we will include CV parking spaces in public vehicle parks in suitable projects following the principle of "Single Site, Multiple Uses".

As at December 2021, around 1 730 on-street night-time parking spaces for CVs have been provided by the Government for use by goods vehicles, coaches and other non-franchised buses. The TD will continue to identify suitable on-street locations for designation as night-time parking spaces for goods vehicles and coaches. In addition, the Government has specified in the tenancy agreement of suitable STT car parks a minimum provision of parking spaces for CVs, in which about 2 000 parking spaces have been provided so far.

Furthermore, noting that a considerable number of CV drivers live in subsidised housing, the revision of the HKPSG in August 2021 has, in addition to increasing the type (Note) and number of parking spaces for CVs provided in subsidised housing projects, raised the number of loading/unloading bays ancillary to subsidised housing, which will be opened up for overnight parking of large-size CVs (i.e. coaches and medium/heavy goods vehicles) where feasible so as to increase the provision of CV parking spaces.

Since February 2021, the Government has requested to include in the leases condition of suitable new government sale sites the requirements for owners to open up certain portion of the ancillary parking spaces and loading/unloading bays for night-time public parking of CVs. This measure applies to government sale sites zoned for "Commercial", "Industrial", "Other Specified Uses (Business)" and "Other Specified Uses (Mixed Use)".

(3) The Government is actively taking forward automated parking systems (APS) projects in STT car parks and public works projects. The total number of the parking spaces provided (including conventional and APS parking spaces) by the concerned STT car parks raised in the Question and other relevant information are set out as follows:

(i) the APS project at the STT site on Hoi Shing Road in Tsuen Wan was commissioned in November 2021, providing a total of 245 parking spaces; and

(ii) for the STT site at Pak Shek Kok in Tai Po, the tenancy was awarded in December 2021 with the APS expected to be commissioned in Q4 2022. The STT car park will provide about 240 parking spaces.

As regards the concerned public works projects involving APS, save for (iii) the Joint-user Complex at Chung Kong Road in Sheung Wan, of which the total number of parking spaces is to be confirmed, the respective works progress and numbers of parking spaces are as follows:

(iv) the District Open Space, Sports Centre cum Public Vehicle Park project at Sze Mei Street will be submitted to the Legislative Council for funding approval this year. The project is expected to be completed in 2026, providing a total of about 300 parking spaces;

(v) the Joint-user Government Office Building in Area 67 in Tseung Kwan O, construction works of which have commenced and are expected to be completed in 2025, will provide a total of about 300 parking spaces; and

(vi) as regards the project at the junction of Yen Chow Street and Tung Chau Street in Sham Shui Po, we plan to seek funding approval from the Legislative Council within the next legislative year. It is expected to be completed in 2026, providing a total of about 200 parking spaces.

The Government will examine the feasibility of adopting APS when inviting tenders for new STT car parks or carrying out re-tendering for the existing STT car parks. Meanwhile, we will actively consider promoting the use of APS in more public works projects.

(4) While considering the adoption of APS, private developers have to ensure the compliance of systems with legal requirements, land leases, etc. Earlier on, the TD gathered valuable feedback on how to facilitate the adoption of APS in private car parks from consulting various stakeholders, including the Real Estate Developers Association of Hong Kong, professional bodies, the Hong Kong Automobile Association, car park operators and APS suppliers. Currently, through taking forward different types of APS projects, the Government is accumulating experiences in building, operating and managing the systems and the application of regulations and administrative guidelines to facilitate the development of APS. The TD will timely share with stakeholders the experience in the implementation of the APS projects and collaborate with relevant departments to look into and review the relevant practice notes, so as to streamline the application procedures for the adoption of APS in privately-owned car parks.

Note: In order to make optimal use of spaces and to improve utilisation rates, the revised standards introduce two types of "shared-use" parking spaces with reference to the similar vehicle dimensions of CVs, one of which to be shared by light goods vehicles and light buses and another shared by medium/heavy goods vehicles and coaches. The "shared-use" parking spaces offer flexibility to the supply of parking spaces by allowing CVs of similar dimensions to share parking spaces when needed.

LCQ8: Measures to prevent child abuse

Following is a question by the Hon Yang Wing-kit and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (January 26):

Question:

It has been reported that the Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children (HKSPC), despite suspecting on the 17th of last month that a number

of child abuse incidents had occurred in its Children's Residential Home, had not reported the incidents to the Social Welfare Department and the Police until the 21st of last month. The HKSPC subsequently set up an Independent Review Committee early this month to conduct a thorough review on the incidents as well as the management and operation of the organisation concerned. Regarding measures to prevent child abuse, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will establish a mechanism that when investigation is conducted on organisations providing child care services suspected of mismanagement, it will make arrangements for other organisations or persons to temporarily take over the services provided by them, and impose punishments (e.g. revocation of licences) on those organisations the mismanagement of which are found substantiated; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it knows if the groups or organisations currently providing child care services have put in place (i) a code of conduct for their employees, volunteers and carers, (ii) a mechanism for handling complaints, and (iii) a system for handling suspected child abuse incidents; if they have, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether it will draw up a blacklist of child care workers and prohibit those child care workers with abuse records from working in the relevant industries; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) whether it will (i) expeditiously introduce legislation on the mechanism for mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect cases, and (ii) take on board the Law Reform Commission's recommendation on introducing an offence of "failure to protect", so as to protect children from abuse; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Immediately after the suspected child abuse incident occurred in the Children's Residential Home (CRH) under the Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children (HKSPC), the Government has taken a series of follow-up actions. Given that investigation of the incident is still underway by the law enforcement and regulatory agencies with the possibility of taking further actions, and that some cases have commenced the judicial proceedings, the Government is not in a position to disclose information on the specific incident in detail.

My reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) and (3) The CRH under the HKSPC is a residential child care centre (RCCC) registered under the Child Care Services Ordinance (Cap. 243) which must be operated in accordance with the relevant statutory requirements and the regulations stipulated by the Operation Manual for Pre-primary Institutions. To monitor and ensure RCCCs' compliance with the relevant statutory

requirements on an ongoing basis, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) conducts surprise inspections during daytime and night-time at every RCCC from time to time, and at a higher frequency depending on individual RCCC's condition.

In December 2021, staff of the CRH were suspected to have abused the children at the service unit. The Police promptly commenced investigation, arrested the staff involved and initiated prosecution against them. The SWD also took a series of immediate follow-up actions to ensure that the operation of the CRH is in compliance with the need to protect children and upholding of service standards. Upon the HKSPC's report on December 21, 2021, the SWD immediately asked the HKSPC to report to the Police and assisted the HKSPC to admit the children involved to hospitals for checking. The SWD also sent a multi-disciplinary professional team, comprising clinical psychologists, nurses, social workers, etc, to investigate and inspect the CRH's operation, check the relevant work records, and observe the behavioural, health and emotional conditions of the 70 children at the CRH one by one, so as to ascertain that their conditions were stable. Subsequently, the SWD met with the Executive Committee and management of the HKSPC to express grave concern about the incident, listened to the HKSPC's report on the incident and follow-up actions, and asked the HKSPC to take corresponding enhancement measures in the supervision and monitoring of frontline staff to ensure children at the CRH are well taken care of.

In tandem, case social workers will continue to assess the family situation, risk factors and needs of the children to formulate suitable welfare plans for them. Social workers will also visit the children regularly and maintain a close liaison with their family members and staff of the CRH to understand their situation and the views of their parents, in order to ensure that the children are provided with proper care. The SWD conducted daily surprise inspections at the CRH in different intervals to continuously evaluate whether the CRH fulfils the relevant statutory requirements and service quality standards. The SWD also urged the HKSPC to implement appropriate measures immediately to ensure that the operation of the CRH meets the relevant requirements.

Starting from January 17, 2022, the SWD has deployed a designated team, comprising social workers, nurses and personnel with experience in supervising child care centres, to station at the CRH every day and closely monitor its daily operation on the ground, in order to ensure that its operation satisfies the required service standards and that effective improvement measures have been put in place to safeguard the proper care of children. The designated team will operate until the CRH's improvement measures and operation situation satisfy the SWD's requirements.

The SWD had issued warning letters and written notice to the HKSPC for improvement plans regarding the incident and asked the HKSPC to submit a review report to the SWD on or before January 25, 2022, including a review of its internal management mechanism and continuous supervision of the conduct of the staff members, so as to avoid similar incidents from recurring in the future. The SWD has just received the report on January 25, and would examine it in detail before devising further actions. Depending on the content of the

report and the outcome of the investigation, the SWD may take statutory regulatory actions where necessary. Besides, if the Director of Social Welfare considers that a child care worker is no longer suitable to take up child care work, he may remove the name of the person concerned from the register.

(2) To fulfil the relevant requirement of the Funding and Service Agreement, all subvented welfare service units shall submit reports regularly according to the Service Performance Monitoring System, including the requirements of basic service, service quality standards and service volume/service effectiveness standards, formulating effective complaint handling mechanism, and taking all reasonable steps to ensure that service users are free from abuse. Furthermore, the SWD, together with relevant bureaux and departments, non-government organisations and relevant professionals, have jointly drawn up the Protecting Children from Maltreatment – Procedural Guide for Multi-disciplinary Co-operation for different professionals' reference in taking necessary actions for suspected child maltreatment cases. The SWD is conducting a comprehensive review on the monitoring mechanism of the CRH and follow up multiple actions, including strengthening continuous staff training, stepping up inspections, improving guidelines, enhancing staff's knowledge and sensitivity in handling suspected child maltreatment cases, and inviting independent individuals to visit service units.

(4) The Chief Executive announced in her 2021 Policy Address that the Government would take forward the legislative work on a mandatory reporting mechanism for child abuse cases. Practitioners in the professions subject to mandatory reporting obligations would receive appropriate training to enhance their capacity for early identification and handling of child abuse cases. The Government's target is to introduce the bill into the Legislative Council in the first half of 2023. The Government is also considering how to take forward recommendations in the Law Reform Commission's report on causing or allowing the death or serious harm of a child or vulnerable adult published in September 2021.

LCQ19: Measures to cope with the decline in student population

Following is a question by the Hon Tang Fei and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (January 26):

Question:

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic has persisted for more than two years and normal traveller clearance between the Mainland and Hong Kong has

not yet been resumed, seriously affecting cross-boundary students on the Mainland coming to Hong Kong for school. Quite a number of local schools have relayed that due to the dropping out of some cross-boundary students affected by the epidemic, a decrease in the number of students applying for admission to local schools, the persistently low local fertility rate, as well as the ageing population and an insufficient number of school-age children in individual districts, many primary and secondary schools have been facing the crisis of "class reduction and school closure" in recent years. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the measures the Education Bureau (EDB) has put in place to assist the education sector in confronting the crisis of a new round of class reduction and school closure, so as to stabilise the education ecology in Hong Kong and resolve the urgent issues faced by the education sector;

(2) of the learning support currently provided by the EDB for Mainland students who are unable to come to Hong Kong for school; the EDB's plans to arrange as soon as possible for such students to come to Hong Kong for school and resume normal school life; and

(3) whether the EDB will consider opening up the school places of local non-public sector primary and secondary schools to applicants from the Mainland and other countries, so as to ease the problem of the declining number of local school-age primary and secondary students?

Reply:

President,

According to the projections of the Education Bureau (EDB), it is anticipated that the gradual decrease in future school-age population will be structural rather than transient. It remains uncertain whether and when the birth rate in Hong Kong will rebound. The well-being of students has always been the prime consideration of the EDB. We will make long-term planning for the future in light of the latest development, and maintain communication with the local school sector to prepare ahead for the necessary follow-up arrangements.

Our reply to the three parts of the question is as follows:

(1) When formulating future plans, our policy objective will certainly be based on the interests of students, considering how to optimise resources for continuous improvement of the quality of teaching and learning. Schools are established to nurture the whole person development of students. It is essential for schools to maintain an optimal size of student population for creating a conducive teaching and learning environment and providing opportunities for learning in groups, so as to meet the different learning and development needs of students while ensuring the quality of education. Taking secondary schools as an example, a small total number of students will limit the choices of senior secondary elective subjects that can be offered in a school. This goes against the principle of the New Senior Secondary

academic structure, that is, to provide students with a broad and balanced curriculum and that they can select different elective subjects in different combinations to meet their different learning needs and interests. The number of students in a school has an effect on how students can learn to socialise in a community, get along with other people and develop their values of mutual respect. On the other hand, the EDB has to make good use of the limited public resources to ensure that education expenditure is used effectively in a targeted manner to provide quality education for students. We believe that, as the future school-age population will continue to drop, it is unavoidable to adjust the overall number of primary and secondary classes correspondingly.

The EDB will adopt multi-pronged measures to address the challenges arising from the structural changes in student population in the long term so as to stabilise the learning environment and maintain the quality of teaching and learning. The measures include:

(a) the EDB, being the school sponsoring body of Government schools, will lead by example and formulate long-term development plans for individual Government schools, taking into account various factors including Government policies, demographic changes, demand and supply of school places, overall development needs of Government schools and utilisation of Government resources. For example, with a view to reducing the long-term surplus of school places in certain districts, the EDB may cease the operation of schools with persistent under-enrolment, merge Government schools as necessary or relocate schools in districts with a relatively sizeable surplus of school places to districts with excessive demand for school places or New Development Areas which are expected to have a greater demand for school places in the future. In this connection, the EDB has already made arrangements to cease the operation of the Island Road Government Primary School in an orderly and gradual manner from the 2021/22 school year, merge the Lung Cheung Government Secondary School with the Kowloon Technical School starting from the 2022/23 school year, and relocate the Canton Road Government Primary School and Shau Kei Wan East Government Secondary School to the new school premises at the Anderson Road Quarry site in Sai Kung District in the 2025/26 and 2026/27 school years respectively with a view to minimising the impact of declining demand for school places in related school nets on schools in the area. We hope that such endeavours could become examples for other school sponsoring bodies' reference;

(b) the four time-limited primary schools operated to cope with the transient increase in Primary One student population in the past will cease operation gradually as originally planned;

(c) our school premises allocation exercises in the future will accord priority to reprovisioning of schools or expansion of school premises, especially those schools which are far below the prevalent building standards, so as to improve the quality of school premises;

(d) at present, small class teaching (SCT) has been implemented in about 80 per cent of public sector primary schools in Hong Kong. Arrangements have

been made by the EDB for 11 schools to start implementing SCT in the 2022/23 school year. We will continue to review the demand and supply of school places in individual school nets, whether there are sufficient vacant classrooms in the school nets for operating additional classes to facilitate full implementation of SCT within the nets, and the additional resources involved. We will also continue to maintain liaison with the public sector primary schools which have yet to implement SCT and their respective school sponsoring bodies, and encourage them to get prepared for early implementation of SCT in public sector primary schools where the conditions permit; and

(e) as for secondary schools, we will timely review the number of students allocated to each Secondary One (S1) class in 2025 and subsequent school years, the criteria for approving classes and other related arrangements to address the structural situation of a long-term persistent decrease in demand for S1 places while ensuring the quality of education and the appropriate use of resources.

The EDB has been meeting with individual school sponsoring bodies to urge them to explore ways to consolidate their resources in an orderly manner. We will keep close communication with the sector and encourage them to plan ahead to cope with the impact of declining student population.

(2) Owing to the restrictions on cross-boundary travel at boundary control points, cross-boundary students (CBS) are at present not able to travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland every day as usual to attend face-to-face classes. Some CBS have decided to reside in Hong Kong temporarily for schooling, but some of them are still staying in the Mainland. The EDB has all along been concerned over the learning situation of CBS amid the epidemic and been providing them with appropriate support as necessary. Schools have flexibly adopted diversified learning and teaching strategies, including establishing e-learning platforms and conducting real-time online lessons, to support students' continuous learning at home, having regard to schools' own contexts and students' needs at different learning stages. Furthermore, under the agreements reached between individual schools and publishers, schools are authorised to upload relevant chapters of e-textbooks to e-learning platforms according to teaching and learning progress for use by those CBS who have been unable to come to Hong Kong to attend face-to-face classes. If necessary, schools may also procure textbook delivery services to assist parents of CBS in delivering textbooks to their residences in the Mainland. On assessment of learning, the EDB has assisted schools in coping with the changes flexibly so that they can arrange examinations and assessments for CBS as far as practicable. The EDB has been encouraging schools to maintain contact with CBS and their parents through different means, and reminding parents to observe and pay attention to the emotion and behaviour of students.

To cater for the learning needs as well as physical and mental development needs of CBS amid the epidemic, the EDB commissioned a service provider to offer two programmes, namely "Learning Support" and "Psychosocial Support", in Luohu, Futian and Nanshan districts in Shenzhen from May to July

2021 for primary and secondary CBS residing in Shenzhen. Other than these, service providers were commissioned to set up general service points in Luohu, Futian and Nanshan districts in Shenzhen from June to August 2021 to provide CBS and their parents with various kinds of information and services such as lending of learning resources and recreational facilities. Networking activities and sharing sessions have also been organised to facilitate their communication with one another. In view of students' positive response towards the two programmes on "Learning Support" and "Psychosocial Support", the EDB organised the two programmes again from October 2021 to January 2022 with more places.

The EDB will continue to closely monitor the development of the epidemic situation and ascertain the needs of CBS and readiness of schools, so as to work out various feasible options on the appropriate learning arrangements for CBS, taking into account the views of stakeholders. We will also maintain liaison and communication with all parties, and hope that that orderly arrangement can be made for CBS to attend classes in Hong Kong as soon as possible when cross-boundary travel is resumed.

(3) Under the prevailing policy of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), the HKSAR may favourably consider the application for a visa/entry permit from students of appropriate age from certain regions/countries, if these non-local persons of appropriate age who intend to study in primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong are admitted to a private school or Direct Subsidy Scheme school registered under the Education Ordinance (Cap. 279) and are able to meet the fees for the course, the living expenses for his/her maintenance and accommodation. Detailed arrangements are available at www.immd.gov.hk/eng/services/visas/study.html.

However, there are a number of practical issues that need to be tackled when underage non-local students come to Hong Kong for education. If one or both of their parents come along to take up residence in Hong Kong, he/she/they can live with the students concerned to provide the necessary care and support. If these students come to Hong Kong for schooling on their own, then we have to consider how to take care of them and ensure that apart from learning, sufficient support, care and supervision are provided for their living and growth. This will involve supporting measures in various aspects, such as the need to identify suitable non-kinship families who can act as their guardians to provide supervision, or the need for the schools concerned to offer boarding places to provide accommodation and meals for the students, etc. As these underage students have to live apart from their parents in another place, parents will also need to carefully consider various factors, including the children's adaptability and psychological well-being as well as their family's financial situations, etc. The arrangements of school choices for non-local students and the impact of the same on school choices for local students are also considerations. Currently, it appears that schools and families in Hong Kong may not have the necessary conditions and readiness to receive a large number of underage students to come to Hong Kong for schooling.

LCQ20: Sick leave and compensation related to work injuries

Following is a question by the Hon Kwok Wai-keung and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (January 26):

Question:

Regarding the sick leave and compensation related to injuries caused to employees by accidents arising out of and in the course of employment (work injuries), will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of employees who were incapacitated by work injuries for a period of (i) three to seven days, (ii) eight to 14 days, (iii) 15 to 30 days, (iv) 31 days to three months, (v) more than three months to six months, (vi) more than six months to one year, (vii) more than one year to two years, and (viii) more than two years, in each year since 2019;

(2) of the respective numbers of employees injured at work who were assessed, by the Employees' Compensation Assessment Boards in each year since 2019, to have suffered from the following percentages of permanent loss of earning capacity: (i) five per cent or below, (ii) six per cent to 10 per cent, (iii) 11 per cent to 20 per cent, (iv) 21 per cent to 30 per cent, (v) 31 per cent to 50 per cent, (vi) 51 per cent to 70 per cent, and (vii) 71 per cent or above;

(3) given that employers and employees may, in respect of work injury cases which entail a period of sick leave exceeding seven days, agree on applying to the Labour Department (LD) for making settlement by "Paper Medical Clearance", of the number of work injury cases which were settled in this way in each year since 2019; and

(4) whether the LD has, since 2019, enhanced the follow-up procedures for work injury sick leave, so as to further facilitate employers and employees to settle their claims in the aforesaid manner, thereby speeding up the processing of the relevant cases; if the LD has, of the details; if not, whether the LD will enhance the relevant procedures?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) From 2019 to 2021, the yearly figures of settled compensation claims

involving incapacitation of employees for more than three days as a result of work injuries (including compensation claims reported to the Labour Department (LD) under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance (ECO) in or before the respective settlement year) with a breakdown by the number of working days lost are provided below:

Number of working days lost (Note)	Number of settled compensation claims		
	2019	2020	2021
Below eight days	11 037	8 848	9 977
Eight to below 15 days	5 534	4 039	4 765
15 to below 30 days	3 907	2 700	3 439
30 to below 90 days	4 267	2 957	4 100
90 to below 180 days	2 710	1 731	2 555
180 to below 360 days	2 585	1 767	2 471
360 to below 720 days	2 083	1 726	2 617
720 days or above	4	1	12
Total	32 127	23 769	29 936

Note: The number of working days lost includes both the number of sick leave days granted and taken and the period of absence from duty certified to be necessary by the Employees' Compensation Assessment Board under the ECO.

If the work injury sick leave of an employee does not exceed three days and no permanent incapacity is involved, the employer should make direct payment of compensation to the employee in accordance with the ECO. The LD does not keep statistics on the number of working days lost for this type of cases.

(2) From 2019 to 2021, the yearly figures of settled compensation claims involving incapacitation of employees for more than three days as a result of work injuries (including compensation claims reported to the LD under the ECO in or before the respective settlement year) with a breakdown by the percentage of permanent loss of earning capacity of employees are provided below:

Percentage of permanent loss of earning capacity	Number of settled compensation claims		
	2019	2020	2021
Assessment not required	17 903	14 277	16 417
Zero per cent to five per cent	13 254	8 800	12 689

Above five per cent to 10 per cent	696	474	552
Above 10 per cent to 20 per cent	164	136	162
Above 20 per cent to 30 per cent	53	34	44
Above 30 per cent to 50 per cent	43	28	33
Above 50 per cent to 70 per cent	6	6	12
Above 70 per cent	8	14	27
Total	32 127	23 769	29 936

(3) and (4) In work injury cases where the period of sick leave of the injured employee concerned exceeds seven days and the injury does not lead to any permanent loss of earning capacity, employers and employees may request the LD to complete the follow-up procedure for work injury sick leave by "Paper Medical Clearance" (PMC) when the sick leave has already ended. For cases adopting the aforesaid handling approach, the LD will issue the "Certificate of Compensation Assessment" direct for settling the claims in accordance with the ECO.

Since December 2019, the LD has implemented a pilot scheme on enhancing the follow-up procedure for sick leave relating to work injury and invited seven establishments mainly from the catering and aviation industries to join the scheme. Under the pilot scheme, the LD scrutinised suitable cases and proactively invited relevant employers and employees to complete the follow-up procedure for work injury sick leave by PMC. While the injured employees joining the pilot scheme were not required to attend the medical clearance in person, the LD would issue the "Certificate of Compensation Assessment" direct under the ECO so as to speed up the settlement of the cases. After reviewing the pilot scheme, the LD will further promote PMC in 2022 by proactively inviting employers and employees of all suitable cases to complete the follow-up procedure for work injury sick leave by PMC with a view to expediting the processing of work injury cases through simplified procedures.

The LD has been keeping statistics on the number of compensation claims settled by PMC since 2020, with the yearly figures shown below:

Year	Number of compensation claims settled by PMC
2020	2 752
2021	2 622