

EDB clarification on Summer Reading Programme – Gift Book Pilot Scheme

In response to a Legislative Council member's allegations made yesterday (June 19) against the Summer Reading Programme – Gift Book Pilot Scheme launched by the Education Bureau (EDB), a spokesman for the EDB issued the following clarification:

The EDB has all along been recommending books based on professional considerations of the quality of the books and whether the books are suitable for students at different key stages of primary and secondary schools, and not making recommendation based on the publishers of the books. Therefore, there is no question of giving preferential treatment to a particular bookstore or books from a certain publisher.

In fact, the EDB has long been providing recommended book lists to schools with a view to promoting reading. The well established practice of recommending quality books to the school sector by EDB's professional staff is effective. Since the 2018/19 school year, to align with the disbursement of the Promotion of Reading Grant to all public sector schools, the EDB has been providing schools with recommended book lists on four themes, namely Chinese History and Culture, Healthy Living, Moral Education, and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Education. For details, please refer to

www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/4-key-tasks/reading-to-learn/contribution-of-book-titles/index.html.

The Gift Book Pilot Scheme aims to offer free printed books to about 600,000 primary and secondary students before the summer vacation through schools' procurement initiatives. In this connection, it is of prime importance to ensure that the supply of books to schools could be secured within a short period of time. The EDB understands that the book procurement procedures take time, and the reprinting of books and the relevant logistics are difficult to be arranged. To enable students to receive printed books before the summer vacation and enjoy leisure reading during the holiday, a pragmatic approach is adopted to include only local Chinese books in the Pilot Scheme.

Based on the aforementioned recommended book lists on the four themes, professional staff of the EDB have consolidated within a very short period of time the book lists of a certain amount of quality books from different publishers to provide schools with sufficient choices. Schools can exercise discretion on book selection according to their own contexts and operational needs. Schools can select appropriate books from the designated book lists with reference to students' abilities and interests. They can also repeatedly select certain books to tie in with their work in promoting reading, such as class-based/level-based book exchange activities, so as to help students develop a sense of gratitude and learn to cherish the things they have, thereby nurturing students' positive values. Since printed book publishers

have different market share and the themes of their publications vary, it is not difficult to understand that their proportions of books on the designated book lists are different.

It is with good intention that the EDB initiated the Summer Reading Programme – Gift Book Pilot Scheme to provide students with a gift before the summer vacation to enhance their interest in reading. The EDB announced the pilot scheme to primary and secondary schools in mid-June so as to allow schools to aptly undertake the book procurement procedures after class resumption. To ensure that students can receive their books before the summer holiday, the EDB has allowed schools to shorten the period for written quotations from two or three weeks to one week to meet the operational needs of schools and the pilot scheme so that schools can complete their book procurement procedures as early as possible. If schools' administrative procedures are not compatible due to time constraints, they can proceed with procurement in accordance with their established procedures. However, the delivery of books to schools before the end of the school term in end July for students' reading during the summer holiday cannot be guaranteed.

The acceptance of gift cannot be forced. As EDB explained to the representatives of School Councils, schools can choose not to join the pilot scheme. They may only join the free use of Hong Kong Education City's eRead Scheme, which comprises both Chinese and English books.

The EDB has to point out clearly that apart from the summer pilot reading scheme, schools can use the recurrent Promotion of Reading Grant (about \$20,000 – \$40,000 and \$50,000 – \$70,000 per year for primary and secondary schools respectively), according to their school-based needs, to procure different kinds of books including Chinese and English printed books and e-books which are not included in the designated book lists to enrich the collection of their school libraries.

Regarding the attempt of politician to politicise and demonise the promotion of reading with a standpoint of "China/Taiwan" and distort the facts to smear the EDB with totally unfounded accusation of transfer of benefits, the EDB expresses utmost regret and condemns the move.