

# LC: Speech by CS in presenting Government Minute in response to Report No. 80 of Public Accounts Committee

Following is the speech (translated from Chinese) by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Chan Kwok-ki, in presenting the Government Minute in response to Report No. 80 of the Public Accounts Committee in the Legislative Council today (October 18):

President,

Laid on the table today is the Government Minute (GM) responding to Report No. 80 of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) presented to the Legislative Council on July 12, 2023.

I welcome the Report of the PAC and am grateful for the time and efforts devoted by the Chairman of the PAC, the Hon Shiu Ka-fai, and members of the PAC. The Government accepts the PAC's various recommendations and sets out in detail in the GM the specific responses of the relevant bureaux and departments. The PAC has conducted public hearings on the chapter on "Maintenance and improvement of school premises for aided schools" in the Director of Audit's Report No. 80. I would like to highlight the key measures taken and progress made by the Government and relevant organisations in response to the recommendations.

As noted by the PAC, the Audit Commission examined the works carried out from 2020 to 2022, during which the daily operation of schools, including the maintenance and repair works in school premises, was greatly affected by the epidemic. The related works quality monitoring work was also delayed in certain months. As schools were closed intermittently, government staff and contractors could not enter the school premises to work. In addition, various anti-epidemic measures resulted in serious shortage of works personnel. This notwithstanding, the Education Bureau (EDB) endeavoured to maintain all necessary Emergency Repairs (ER) works and implemented improvement programmes in response to the anti-epidemic needs. Upon the easing of the epidemic, the EDB immediately caught up with the progress and, in some cases, went beyond the target. We are grateful for the recommendations of the Audit Commission and the PAC, which enable the EDB to further improve the mechanism so as to better assist schools in improving the learning and teaching environment.

As regards contract management, the EDB has completed a series of computer system enhancements to carry out the relevant work more effectively, including selection of Works Orders (WOs) for various types of audits, reminding Term Consultants (TCs) to submit replies to audit cases, reminding the TCs to certify completion of the WO, and recording detailed

justifications for approval of repair applications. In addition, the EDB has strengthened existing guidelines or issued new guidance notes to assist the TCs in handling repair applications from schools and improving the quality of various repair reports.

Currently, all schools comply with the requirements of the National Flag and National Emblem Ordinance, as well as the requirements related to the display of the national flag and conduct of national flag raising ceremonies as set out in the EDB circular. The EDB pays great attention to the status of flagpoles on school premises. If a flagpole is so damaged that it cannot operate, the EDB will handle it without delay. The EDB updated the guidelines in May and July 2023, clearly requiring the TCs and schools to handle the repair works of flagpoles that are not in normal operation through the ER. The EDB will continue to examine the technical feasibility for schools that intend to install additional flagpoles and carry out the works for them wherever feasible.

The Government attaches great importance to the fact that there are still asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) in the building components in a small number of school buildings. The EDB launched a time-limited Asbestos Management Plan for School Premises in 2006 to engage professionals to remove the building components containing asbestos for schools in Hong Kong in accordance with the methods approved by the Environmental Protection Department (EPD). Such removal works were completed for more than 570 schools in Hong Kong. However, some schools indicated that as the remaining ACMs were concealed under the floor, the removal works would affect school operation. Professional assessment also confirmed that such ACMs would not pose danger to school users. The schools thus chose to remove the ACMs together with other works items during Major Repairs (MR) works. The EDB liaised closely with these schools and appointed professionals for the schools to closely monitor the building components with the ACMs in accordance with the EPD guidelines. The latest regular inspection completed in February this year confirmed that all building components with the ACMs were in good condition and would not pose safety hazard. With the co-ordination of the EDB, the remaining 11 schools have submitted applications for removing the building components with the ACMs through the 2024-2025 MR or ER mechanism. The EDB will continue to maintain close liaison with these schools to ensure that the required works will be completed in good time.

As for the thresholds for the minimum repair cost for applications by aided schools, the EDB has commenced the review and aims to complete it within the 2023/24 school year.

President, I would like to thank the PAC again for its efforts and suggestions. The bureaux and departments concerned will strictly adhere to their responses and implement the improvement measures set out in the GM.

Thank you, President.