

LCQ1: Schools applying for all their Primary 3 students to participate in the Primary 3 Territory-wide System Assessment

Following is a question by the Hon Ip Kin-yuen and a reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (January 30):

Question:

Last year, the Education Bureau (EDB) resumed the Primary 3 Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA), which was administered by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA). Approximately 10 per cent of Primary 3 students from each public sector and Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) primary school are sampled to participate in TSA. In addition, schools may on their own apply to the HKEAA for all their Primary 3 students to participate in TSA (full participation in TSA), and may request for their TSA school reports under such circumstances. The Secretary for Education indicated in March last year that the EDB would not ask about the relevant information. It has been reported that in variance with the practice adopted last year, the HKEAA refuses in this year to disclose the number of schools which applied for full participation in TSA. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of schools that applied for full participation in TSA last year and this year to date, and the total number of students involved, together with a breakdown by school type (i.e. aided, DSS, government and private primary schools);

(2) as the Chief Executive (CE) told the media on the 8th of this month that she would "request the various policy bureaux to be more proactive and positive when making arrangements for giving an account of important issues to the media" and that she was "very respectful of the media's function of overseeing the Government for the public", and there are views that the number of schools applying for full participation in TSA provides important reference information for formulating primary schools' curriculum, teaching arrangements and assessment system, whether the CE will require the EDB to gain an understanding from the HKEAA of the reasons for its refusal to disclose the relevant information, so that the EDB can give a full account of the implementation of the policy to the public; and

(3) whether it will require schools to consult all of their teachers and all of the parents of their students before they apply for full participation in TSA, so as to implement the policy objectives of "Led by Professionals" and "Listening to Views Directly" in the field of education, as advocated by the CE?

Reply:

President,

The Coordinating Committee on Basic Competency Assessment and Assessment Literacy (the Committee) conducted over two years since 2015 a review, during which views of stakeholders, such as school sponsoring bodies, school heads, teachers and parents, were collected through various means and channels in full demonstration of the principles of "Led by Professionals" and "Listening to Views Directly". The Committee's report and recommendations included the arrangements for Primary 3 TSA in 2018 and beyond and the related enhancement measures. The Government accepted the recommendations in the report, and started handling Primary 3 TSA separately at the territory-wide and school levels with effect from 2018.

At the territory-wide level, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) samples around 10 per cent of students from each public sector and Direct Subsidy Scheme school for Primary 3 TSA each year. Students' assessment results are only counted as territory-wide data serving as useful information for the Education Bureau (EDB) in fine-tuning education policies and curriculum arrangements.

If schools consider that the school-level reports can help them understand the overall strengths and weaknesses of students as well as formulate targeted measures to facilitate students' learning, the HKEAA can arrange for full participation of their Primary 3 students in TSA. Respective schools will be provided with individual school reports. Since the EDB merely needs territory-wide data and does not see the number of schools arranging for full participation of students in Primary 3 TSA has any relationship with the primary school curriculum, learning and teaching as well as assessment system, the EDB would not request school reports of individual schools from the HKEAA, or enquire about the identities of participating schools.

Primary 3 TSA of 2018 was conducted in May and June last year. The relevant TSA Report was also uploaded to the HKEAA's website in mid-October last year.

Our reply to the Hon Ip Kin-yuen's various questions is as follows:

(1) and (2) As I pointed out earlier, Primary 3 TSA has been conducted on the basis of "no student names, no school names, no collection of reports and selection of participants by sampling" since 2018. As it is a low-stake assessment, the education sector and the public do not have to be over anxious. Schools arranging their Primary 3 students for full participation in Primary 3 TSA approach the HKEAA directly without any involvement of the EDB. Since this is entirely a school-based decision, and the number of participating schools is also not pertinent to the policy objective, the EDB has repeatedly reiterated that it will not enquire about or request school reports of individual schools from the HKEAA, or seek information about the identities of participating schools, and does not hold the information about the number and type of schools opted for full participation of their Primary 3 students in TSA in order to avoid being misconstrued as exerting pressure

on schools. We feel rather helpless about being sometimes alleged of refusing to disclose data that we do not possess and are not pertinent to policy implementation.

In the same vein, the HKEAA is solely adhering to the policy intent of the new arrangements for Primary 3 TSA in taking a prudent approach to handle the information of schools which opted for full participation of their Primary 3 students in TSA. If the number of such schools is disclosed, we cannot rule out that persons holding different views may come up with their own interpretations, thereby exerting undue pressure on schools (irrespective of whether the schools have participated in Primary 3 TSA by sampling or have opted for full participation), as was the case last year in which the government primary schools were accused as "taking the lead" when the majority of government primary schools had been reported for having opted for full participation in Primary 3 TSA.

We understand that the new arrangements for Primary 3 TSA adopted since 2018 are a matter of concern to Members of this Council, parents, the public and the media, and the Government has the responsibility to explain its policies to the public. Therefore, in last year, shortly after accepting the Committee's recommendations set out in the review report on Primary 3 TSA, the EDB arranged a briefing session for the media on the same day, and gave an account on the new arrangements to the Legislative Council as quickly as possible, with a view to enabling the public to apprehend that the sampling requirement for Primary 3 TSA and school-based decisions would be handled separately. This was done purely out of respect for the communication with Members of this Council and the media.

We will continue to strengthen communication with Members of this Council and the media on important matters of concern, strive to explain in detail the related policies and their operation, and make our best efforts to provide the information requested and respond to the questions raised as far as practicable.

(3) At present, under the school-based management principle, the School Management Committees (SMC)/Incorporated Management Committees (IMC) of government or public sector schools have put in place a well-established mechanism to communicate with stakeholders and seek their views on the handling of daily school matters of various scales, as well as riding on the backgrounds and experience of SMC/IMC members in the education sector, to make decisions that are in the best interests of students. Whether individual schools will arrange for all their Primary 3 students to participate in TSA is a school-based decision, and that should be deliberated professionally by SMCs/IMCs in accordance with their well-established decision-making mechanism.

If individual parents or teachers have any concerns, as in other matters under the purview of school-based management, they could approach the school to express their views. We will continue to keep in view the implementation of school-based assessment through various channels, including inspections, school visits and daily contacts with schools, etc.

The arrangements for Primary 3 TSA have been greatly enhanced. While we do not request schools to opt for full participation in Primary 3 TSA, we neither endorse any measures which would negatively label schools opting for full participation in Primary 3 TSA. I appeal to members of the community to refrain from exerting pressure on schools on this matter, but to allow room for schools to make school-based decisions professionally to cater for the learning needs of students.

The EDB will, as always, closely monitor the implementation of Primary 3 TSA, maintain communication with schools and stakeholders at hand, explore further room for continued enhancement, and inform the public of the implementation of our policies in a timely manner.

Thank you, President.