

LCQ1: Training of school principals and teachers

Following is a question by the Hon Tommy Cheung and a reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (June 23):

Question:

It is learnt that the Education Bureau (EDB), after investigating complaints against teachers, found that some teachers had used teaching materials with biased contents to impart twisted concepts to students and arouse students' hostility towards the nation. The EDB has indicated that it will strengthen, in the pre-service and in-service teacher training, the contents on values education, teachers' professional conduct, the Constitution, the Basic Law and national security education. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) given that teachers whose registration has been cancelled for a specified period may make fresh applications for registration upon expiry of that period, whether the EDB will require them to complete the training provided by the EDB on national affairs, the Basic Law and the National Security Law for Hong Kong (including receiving training on national affairs at normal universities on the Mainland) before their applications will be considered;
- (2) whether the EDB has considered arranging in-service teachers and prospective teachers to receive training on national affairs at normal universities on the Mainland, so as to enhance their understanding of the nation's development; and
- (3) what new measures the EDB has put in place to further enhance school principals' and teachers' knowledge in areas such as national affairs, "one country, two systems" and the National Security Law for Hong Kong?

Reply:

President,

The society has very high expectations and requirements on the professional conduct of teachers. The Education Bureau (EDB) has all along seriously handled each case involving the conduct of teachers and, pursuant to the Education Ordinance, considered cancelling the registration of teachers who have seriously misconducted themselves or violated the law. If de-registered teachers submit fresh applications for registration, we will definitely consider their applications prudently. We generally did not approve applications for re-registration in the past to safeguard the well-being of students. Upon consolidating our experience in handling complaint cases over the past year, we have suggested some improvement measures. When cancelling a teacher's registration, we will stipulate that application for

re-registration will not be considered within a specified period (say, three years) to let the society and teachers understand clearly the seriousness of the cases and the protection for students.

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Tommy Cheung is as follows:

(1) Cancellation of teachers' registration may involve a lot of different reasons which are not limited to imparting distorted values or teaching wrong knowledge or concepts. There were six and seven teachers whose registration were cancelled or whose application for teacher registration were refused in 2019 and 2020 respectively. Two of these cases involved the teaching of seriously biased and even wrong contents, while others mainly involved behaviour beyond teacher-student relationship, criminal offences, serious integrity problems, etc.

The EDB makes holistic considerations when deciding whether de-registered teachers can be re-registered. If the registration was cancelled due to serious integrity problems, serious professional misconduct, endangering the safety of students, etc., we (and the community as well) have strong reservation to entrust students to them even if they have attended training. Besides, these persons must bear the consequences for cancellation of their registration due to their personal words, professional conduct, teaching of wrong contents or incompetence. If they wish to make a fresh application for registration, they must take initiative to take appropriate actions (including receiving appropriate training) and provide strong and concrete evidence to prove that they are "fit and proper" and capable to serve as competent teachers. The EDB will prudently consider their applications. On the premise of protecting students' safety and well-being, we will not entrust students to these persons solely because they have received certain training.

I wish to point out that, these persons, whose teacher registration have been cancelled, are no longer teachers. The EDB's teacher training is, in principle, generally provided to serving teachers only. As for training to help teachers reflect on, and rectify, their wrongdoings, it is more applicable to teachers who have been reprimanded, warned or advised by the EDB. Since the background, case details and severity of each case are different, schools as employers should encourage these teachers to attend training as appropriate to help them re-develop positive values, acquire proper knowledge and concepts (including better understanding of Hong Kong and our country), and reflect on the personal conduct required as a role model for students. Schools should also strengthen the supervision of these teachers' performance by conducting class observation, reviewing the teaching materials and reminding them to be mindful of their words and deeds at all times. They are encouraged to enroll for the wide range of training programmes offered by the EDB on different topics (including teachers' professional conduct, the Constitution, the Basic Law, the Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (the National Security Law), etc.).

(2) and (3) Training teachers (including school principals) is a priority task for the EDB. We have been providing training programmes on the Basic Law

for school principals and teachers. Starting from the 2020/21 school year, the EDB has stepped up the relevant work, including strengthening the contents on the Constitution, the Basic Law and the National Security Law in the core training programmes for newly-joined teachers, in-service teachers and teachers aspiring for promotion as well as the training programmes for school principals. Experienced legal experts and academics are invited as speakers. Besides, in the 2020/21 school year, we have organised different programmes in collaboration with some organisations such as working with the Endeavour Education Centre to organise a training programme titled "Respecting the Law, Reinforcing the Rule of Law". Two rounds of training programmes, each lasting for three consecutive days, were held to systematically help teachers understand Hong Kong's constitutional status and rule of law. Such training can help school principals and teachers become the role model for students, enlighten students in lessons and daily life, guide them to respect and obey the law, and eventually to reinforce the rule of law. Enthusiastic response was received from school principals and teachers who gave positive comments on the programmes. They commented that the programmes can help deepen their understanding of the Constitution and the Basic Law while clarifying some misunderstanding. We will organise more of such training programmes in future.

Furthermore, the EDB has all along been working on the organisation of professional study tours to the Mainland for school principals and teachers. This is to help them better understand the latest development of our country through direct personal observations and experiences. They can then reflect on the relationship between Hong Kong and our country, and the relationship between the country and the world, and widen their horizons. We will continue to arrange newly-appointed school principals to participate in professional exchange tours to the Mainland. In tandem, starting from the 2020/21 school year, we have included study tours to the Mainland, generally with a stay for about four days, as part of the core training for newly-joined teachers and teachers aspiring for promotion for enhancing their understanding of the national and educational development. We hope that teachers can inspire their students and help them think about the opportunities brought to Hong Kong by the development of our country, and how Hong Kong can make contribution to it. We have liaised with the relevant Mainland organisations and drawn up initial plans on the study tours that were originally scheduled for the 2020/21 school year. However, these tours have to be postponed to the 2021/22 school year due to the pandemic.

We will continue to review the modes and contents of these programmes on an on-going basis to address the needs of teachers and school principals in a more comprehensive manner.

Thank you, President.