

LCQ10: Arrangements for students of subsidised schools ceasing operation

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Tik Chi-yuen and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (February 28):

Question:

It has been reported that following the announcement made by the school sponsoring body (SSB) of Rosaryhill Secondary School in September last year that the school would cease operation after two school years, the SSB announced in December last year that the school would cease operation earlier in the coming school year, with its students transferring to Yu Chun Keung Memorial College No. 2. Regarding the arrangements for students of subsidised schools ceasing operation, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of SSBs of subsidised schools giving up their school operating rights of their own accord, other than those with under-enrolment, in the past five years;

(2) as it is learnt that most subsidised schools will make proper arrangements for students to graduate smoothly from their original schools before ceasing operation, but the SSB of Rosaryhill Secondary School, which is a subsidised school, has reportedly planned to give up its school operating right starting from the coming school year, making it impossible for students of the school to graduate from their original school, how the Government ensures that SSBs of subsidised schools will make every effort to enable a smooth transition for the relevant students to continue their studies in another school after their schools cease operation;

(3) as it has been reported that Rosaryhill Secondary School had conducted two parents' opinion surveys on the transitional arrangements for students, and some parents pointed out that as the school conducted a second survey with revised options and selection criteria when the outcome of the first survey fell short of expectation, they considered that the relevant surveys were "fake consultations", whether the Government knows the relevant details; whether it has monitored the conduct of parents' opinion surveys by the school and other subsidised schools, and how it ensures the integrity of their practices; and

(4) as it has been reported that the SSB of Rosaryhill Secondary School has decided to adopt a vote by simple majority instead of a vote by the number of parents at least half the total number of the relevant students for a given proposal in requesting that all students be transferred to Yu Chun Keung Memorial College No. 2 in the coming school year, whether the Government has reviewed if subsidised schools have such a power, and how it safeguards the interests of the affected students and parents?

Reply:

President,

Our reply to the question raised by Dr the Hon Tik Chi-yuen is as follows:

(1) In the past five school years, three school sponsoring bodies (SSBs) decided and announced to cease operation of an aided school each under their sponsorship. In addition, there is another SSB which decided to hand over four aided schools under its sponsorship to another SSB for continued operation.

(2), (3) and (4) For any SSB wishing to cease operation of its sponsored school, it should submit a detailed proposal to the Education Bureau (EDB) setting out clearly the timeline, operation mode during the transitional period and other relevant details. The EDB will urge SSBs to accord top priority to the interests of students and ensure the impact of the school's cessation arrangements on students is minimal. During the process of cessation, the EDB will closely monitor the situation and maintain communication with the SSBs and schools, so that timely assistance can be offered if the schools encounter difficulties in making related arrangements.

SSBs may make different cessation arrangements according to schools' circumstances. Generally speaking, schools will first stop admitting Secondary One (S1) or Primary One students, and arrange for current students at upper secondary or upper primary levels to study in their original school until graduation. Some SSBs will also take into consideration the situation where the overall number of students is too small and there is a wastage of school staff in one or two years prior to the cessation. Since the corresponding adjustment of resources will make it difficult to provide a broad and balanced learning environment and is not conducive to the social development of students, the SSBs will try their best to arrange for their students to transfer to other schools as soon as possible. For example, some primary schools will arrange for their students to transfer to other schools to continue their studies at upper primary levels, and some secondary schools will arrange for their students to participate in the Central Placement upon their completion of Secondary Three and proceed to Secondary Four in other public sector schools.

As regards the case of Rosaryhill Secondary School (RSS), in September 2023, its SSB informed the EDB and relevant stakeholders of its decision to cease operation of three schools (namely RSS, Rosaryhill School and Rosaryhill Kindergarten) under its sponsorship due to various factors such as the structural decline in the student population in Hong Kong and the financial situation of the SSB. Noting the decision of the SSB, the EDB has been repeatedly reminding the SSB and the related schools to maintain close liaison and good communication with the stakeholders (including parents, alumni and school staff), consider feasible options to support students and school staff in a pragmatic manner, as well as pay attention to the emotions

of students so that appropriate counselling and support can be provided as necessary.

We understand that the SSB has established a Transition Committee (the Committee) to deliberate on appropriate support to the students and school staff of the RSS and explore different feasible plans. Members of the Committee include the SSB's representatives, the principal, and teacher, parent and alumni representatives of the school. In the course of deliberation, the SSB and school have approached another SSB, conducted briefing sessions and opinion surveys for parents, and maintained communication with school staff, students and parents.

We note that after considering relevant factors (including the survey results), the Committee has endorsed the option of supporting all S1 to Secondary Five students to transfer to another secondary school in the 2024/25 school year. The SSB and school met with teachers and parents separately in late January this year to introduce the transitional arrangements.

The EDB has all along been monitoring the development of the incident while maintaining communication with the SSB and schools. We have liaised and met with the stakeholders for many times, which include discussing the transitional arrangements with representatives of RSS, the other secondary school and their SSBs, as well as making co-ordination for students, school staff and parents to work out plans for appropriate assistance and support. We note that the two schools are actively deepening and progressively implementing the relevant arrangements to effect a smooth transition for teachers and students with a view to helping them familiarise with and adapt to the new environment. The EDB will continue to render support on the transitional arrangements. We will also provide advice and assistance to parents and students in need. If necessary, they may approach Regional Education Offices of the EDB for enquiries on vacant school places in the district.