

LCQ12: Education on the Constitution and national security

Following is a question by the Hon Cheung Kwok-kwan and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (November 11):

Question:

The Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (NSL) and the National Anthem Ordinance have come into effect on June 30 and 12 this year respectively. The Secretary for Education has indicated that, the Education Bureau (EDB) will carry out national security education and step up education on the country's Constitution and the Basic Law (BL), with a view to enhancing the students' awareness of national security and abiding by law. To this end, the EDB will strengthen its support for schools, including adopting a wide array of measures in aspects such as the curriculums, teaching resources and professional training of teachers. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the details of and timetable for the work to carry out national security education and step up education on the Constitution and BL for students of various grades in primary schools as well as in junior and senior secondary levels;
- (2) whether the EDB will stipulate in the Secondary Education Curriculum Guide the number of hours for learning the Constitution and NSL at junior secondary level;
- (3) given that civil servants joining the Government on or after July 1 this year are required to take an oath or make a declaration that they will uphold BL, whether the EDB will extend such requirement to the teachers in aided schools;
- (4) whether the EDB will enrich the contents about the Constitution, BL and national security of the pre-service and in-service training courses for teachers, and set the passage of the relevant examinations as one of the conditions for teacher registration; and
- (5) as it has been reported that a school sponsoring body has issued letters to the management staff of its schools to remind them to guard against the campuses being politicised, and another school has implemented in the new school year school rules which have been revised to prohibit students from bringing unapproved newspapers to the campus and participating in unlawful assemblies, whether the EDB will encourage other school sponsoring bodies and schools to take such actions?

Reply:

President,

Safeguarding national security is the constitutional responsibility of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). It is also the common obligation of all Hong Kong residents. The National Anthem Ordinance and the NSL were gazetted for promulgation and took effect in June this year. Since then, in addition to promoting the Constitution and BL education at the school level, the EDB has been actively planning and implementing various support measures to not only help students gain a correct understanding of the legislative background, message, importance and significance of the NSL, but also enable them to learn and respect the national anthem and to understand the importance of national security and abiding by the law. In doing so, students will develop into good nationals who have a sense of national identity, respect the rule of law and abide by the law, hence safeguarding national security.

Our reply to the questions raised by Hon Cheung Kwok-kwan is as follows:

(1) and (2) The HKSAR shall, in accordance with the NSL, implement national security education in schools to enhance students' sense of national security and law-abidingness. National security education is part of, and inseparable from, national education. The fundamentals of national security education are to develop in students a sense of belonging to the country, an affection for the Chinese people, a sense of national identity, as well as an awareness of and a sense of responsibility for safeguarding national security. In tandem with the implementation of the NSL, the EDB issued a circular to all schools in Hong Kong on July 3 this year, detailing the main contents and requirements of the related legislation as well as outlining the direction for curriculum resource development and support measures to enable schools to lay the groundwork for implementing national security education. The EDB will continue to adopt a "multi-pronged and co-ordinated" approach and support schools in promoting national education and national security education within and beyond the school curriculum through updating the curriculum, developing learning and teaching resources, providing training for teachers, as well as organising student activities and exchange programmes.

Curriculum Renewal

Fostering students' sense of national identity has long been a key learning goal of primary and secondary education. The Secondary Education Curriculum Guide (2017) clearly states that strengthening values education, which includes moral and civic education and BL education, is a major renewed emphasis of the school curriculum. It also provides schools with guidelines on teaching the learning elements relevant to the Constitution and BL in different subjects (including Chinese History) as well as in moral and civic education lessons. In view that the NSL has been added to Annex 3 to the BL, schools should integrate national security education into the existing framework for implementing the Constitution and BL education.

The EDB will provide curriculum documents/guidelines within this school year to enable schools to build on their implementation of the Constitution and BL education to promote national security education holistically through various subjects and learning activities within and beyond lessons at the primary and secondary levels according to students' cognitive abilities. For instance, students at the primary level are guided to develop a sense of belonging to the country and national security. At the junior secondary level, students grasp the relationship between individuals and the country as well as develop an enhanced awareness of national security, while at the senior secondary level, emphasis is placed on the relationship between people's well-being and the country, hence a better understanding of the different aspects of national security.

National security education is not confined to learning the provisions of the NSL. It should cover the important rationale behind national security. In fact, national security is not confined to wars, conflicts and struggle over sovereignty and territory but encompasses a wide range of areas such as ecological security, financial security, technology security and information security, all of which are integral to the national security framework. The EDB is currently examining and considering how the different facets of national security can be naturally integrated with the curriculum contents of various subjects. In addition, the EDB will incorporate the learning contents about national security into the existing standalone module on "Constitution and the Basic Law". While schools can choose to teach it separately, it is the holistic implementation rather than the number of lesson hours that matters.

Learning and Teaching Resources

We are continually updating/enriching the learning and teaching resources. In mid-June this year, we provided all schools in Hong Kong with new learning and teaching resources on the Constitution and the BL, as well as three sets of wall-charts and resource packages on the themes of "Event Book on Hong Kong's Return to China", "Human Rights and the Rule of Law" and "The Constitution and the Basic Law" respectively to enable teachers to explain the related basic concepts to students. We have also produced an audio picture book titled "Our National Flag, National Anthem and Regional Flag" (for primary schools) (www.hkedcity.net/etv/resource/7160023208). We will provide students with more diversified learning resources (including online self-learning courses and online games) within this school year to promote national security education and national education and to strengthen students' sense of law-abidingness. Further details are available at www.edb.gov.hk/tc/Basiclaw (Chinese version only).

Teachers' Training

The EDB will continue to organise training programmes, workshops, seminars, online self-learning courses and experience-sharing sessions to enable teachers and school leaders to better understand how to promote the Constitution, BL and national security education through various subjects, learning activities and the adoption of learning and teaching resources, as

well as diversified and effective teaching strategies. From the third quarter of this year, the EDB has introduced the advanced version of the Constitution and the Basic Law Knowledge Enrichment Online Course for Secondary School Teachers, and will launch the Knowledge Enrichment Online Course for Primary School Teachers. Besides, a series of seminars aimed at enriching knowledge about national security will be organised for primary and secondary teachers by the EDB from November onwards, and schools' response is overwhelming.

Students' Activities

The EDB will continue to organise more diversified life-wide learning activities, including the Territory-wide Inter-school Basic Law Competition, talks by experts, and visits to the barracks. This year, we will organise an array of activities for the National Constitution Day (December 4) to enhance students' understanding of the Constitution. The EDB has all along been organising different types of exchange activities to the Mainland (amounting to about 100 000 exchange places every year) or providing schools with subsidies to organise these activities so that students can experience the country's development in various aspects first-hand and have a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the country and Hong Kong, thereby developing a sense of national identity.

The EDB will continue to actively seek the views of relevant bureaux and experts in various fields and to engage in discussion with the education sector so as to provide schools with appropriate and more diversified support in areas such as the school curriculum and learning and teaching.

(3) The Civil Service Bureau issued a circular to all departments in October this year, requiring all civil servants (including civil servants of the education grades) joining the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China (HKSAR Government) on or after July 1 this year to take an oath or make a declaration that they will uphold the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, bear allegiance to the HKSAR and be responsible to the HKSAR Government. The Government is now looking into matters relating to whether the arrangement for oath-taking applies to teachers in subsidised schools.

(4) On teacher training, the EDB has set out new training requirements for teachers starting from this school year (i.e. 2020/21), under which newly-joined teachers are required to complete 30 hours of core training within the first three years of service, whilst teachers aspiring for promotion are required to complete 30 hours of core training within five years prior to the date of substantive promotion. The core training will include contents on the Constitution, the Basic Law and national security. Furthermore, other relevant professional development programmes are also provided for all teachers as elective training. In this regard, the first three-day relevant course rolled out in mid-November has received overwhelming support from the school sector. On the other hand, the EDB will strengthen its liaison with teacher education universities, with a view to enhancing the contents on the Constitution, the BL and the NSL in the pre-service teacher training

programmes. As for teacher registration, applications are handled according to the provisions of the Education Ordinance. All applicants must comply with relevant requirements.

(5) Schools are places for students to learn. No one should use schools as venues for expressing political demands. In view of the politicisation of some school campuses caused by the social incidents last year, the EDB issued letters and guidelines to schools in response to the development of the events from time to time last school year, clearly stating that students should not participate in any suspected unlawful acts and activities. We also appealed to schools to handle students' misbehavior based on the established guidance and discipline policies, and through appropriate guidance and discipline measures to bring students back to the right track. In addition, as the school sponsoring body of government schools, the EDB issued a letter in early July 2020 to all government schools, elucidating our requirements for government schools in school management and teaching of students. Besides, considering the importance of parents' co-operation in the process of teaching students, we requested government schools to issue a letter to parents and explain it to them. We subsequently issued letters to the school sponsoring bodies. In addition to enclosing the letter sent by the EDB to government schools, we also recommended the school sponsoring bodies to adopt the approach of the EDB to elucidate school's stance and requirements to parents in order to strengthen home-school co-operation. We welcome the fact that some school sponsoring bodies reacted positively by issuing guidelines to their schools for school stakeholders to follow. We will provide advice to schools through various means, including school visits and daily contacts, so that we could work together to provide a safe and peaceful environment for students to learn and grow healthily.