

LCQ12: Sister school scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Lillian Kwok and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (June 26):

Question:

Under the Sister School Scheme (the Scheme), many schools in Hong Kong have formed sister school pairs (SSPs) with schools in Mainland cities. Through exchanges and co-operation, SSPs have deepened students' understanding of Mainland and Hong Kong cultures, and promoted advancement in the quality of education. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the current number of SSPs formed between Hong Kong and Mainland schools, together with a tabulated breakdown by type of schools (i.e. secondary, primary and special schools) and finance type (i.e. public, Direct Subsidy Scheme and private);

(2) of the number of schools which successfully applied for the grant under the Scheme in each of the past 10 years, as well as the number and types of activities organised by the schools with the approved grant; and

(3) whether it will consider extending the scope of the grant under the Scheme to include international schools; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Education Bureau (EDB) has launched the Sister School Scheme (the Scheme) since 2004 to encourage Hong Kong schools to form sister school pairs with their Mainland counterparts, with a view to broadening students' horizons and enhancing their sense of national identity. The Scheme has served as a platform for professional interflows, through which schools in both places can conduct rich and multi-faceted exchanges at school management, teacher and student levels etc, to enhance mutual understanding and achieve mutual advancement in quality of education. The EDB has been actively promoting the Scheme and providing local publicly-funded schools with additional resources and professional support.

Our reply to the questions raised by Hon Lillian Kwok is as follows:

(1) To expand the network of sister schools, the Chief Executive announced in his Policy Address delivered in 2022 that the EDB would, on the basis of having about 780 publicly-funded schools in Hong Kong that had already formed over 2 100 sister school pairs with their Mainland counterparts at the very

time, increase the number of Hong Kong schools which would be participating in the Scheme by 10 per cent to around 860 by the end of 2023. The above target had been achieved. According to the information submitted by schools, as of May 2024, a total of 935 afore-mentioned local schools had formed 2 933 sister school pairs with their Mainland counterparts. Relevant breakdowns are set out in the table below:

School type	No. of local schools that have formed sister school pairs (Note 1)			No. of sister school pairs
	Public sector schools (Note 2)	Direct Subsidy Scheme schools	Total	
Secondary	366	57	423	1 406
Primary	434	20	454	1 411
Special	58	Not applicable	58	116

Note 1: As the Grant for the Sister School Scheme does not cover local private schools, the relevant figures are not available.

Note 2: Public sector schools comprise government, aided and caput schools.

(2) To support local schools on planning and conducting exchange activities with their sister schools in the Mainland, since the 2018/19 school year, the EDB has been providing a recurrent grant and professional support to local public sector schools and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools (including special schools) that have formed sister schools with their Mainland counterparts. The grant is set at about \$163,000 per school for the 2023/24 school year. The total numbers of schools provided with the grant from the EDB and the expenditures involved in the previous school years, broken down by school year, are set out in the table below:

School year	Total no. of schools applied for and provided with the grant (Note 3)	Expenditure of the grant (\$ million)
2018/19	634	93.25
2019/20	662	102.42
2020/21	665	103.72
2021/22	727	112.83
2022/23	830	129.31

Note 3: Only the number of schools that applied for the grant is shown. Some schools have formed sister school pairs with their Mainland counterparts but did not apply for the grant.

The EDB renders assistance for local schools to establish sister schools with their Mainland counterparts, as well as providing them with professional support. For example, the EDB co-ordinates pairing-up arrangements, organises exchange activities, conducts school visits, holds sharing sessions regularly to disseminate good practices of exchanges among sister schools, and commissions service contractor(s) to provide schools with advice and support in relation to the arrangements on exchange activities. These efforts seek to promote more in-depth and multi-angle professional exchanges and multi-faceted collaboration, with a view to enhancing the quality and quantity of sister school exchanges, and hence facilitating cultural exchange and increasing teachers and students' knowledge and understanding of the Mainland.

All along, schools arrange exchange activities (such as school visits, student activities, seminars, teaching demonstrations, lesson evaluation, video conferencing and experience sharing) with their sister schools at student, teacher and school management levels based on their school-based development needs. Schools may publish information of their sister schools and exchange activities on their websites or through other channels. As schools are not required to provide us with details of all their exchange activities, the relevant information on the number and types of exchange activities is not available.

The modes of sister school exchange activities are multi-faceted. Apart from visits to sister schools in the Mainland, online exchanges can be organised for schools to learn from each other and share their experiences and insights at school management, teacher and student levels. Sister schools are encouraged to draw on good practices and develop online exchanges as an ongoing effort, so as to facilitate real-time interaction and sharing among students and teachers, while actively arranging on-site exchange activities for the same to gain first-hand exposure to local culture and an understanding of our motherland.

(3) At present, the Grant for the Sister School Scheme (the Grant) does not cover private schools (including international schools). Private schools are self-financing, market-driven and autonomous in their operation. They have to bear all operating expenses and the Government does not provide them with any recurrent subsidy. Therefore, it is not suitable to extend the Grant to private schools. The EDB will continue to encourage private schools (including international schools) to promote students' understanding of Chinese history and culture to broaden their horizons having regard to school-based circumstances and needs.

Looking ahead, the EDB will continue to encourage local schools to participate in the Scheme, including providing schools with professional support through diversified modes as well as collection and dissemination of good practices, so as to encourage more exchanges between local schools and their Mainland counterparts under the Scheme.