

LCQ13: New measure to support students with special educational needs

Following is a question by the Hon Ip Kin-yuen and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (June 26):

Question:

Starting from the next school year, the Education Bureau (EDB) will implement a new enhancement measure for the Learning Support Grant (LSG) (the new measure) in public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools to support students with various types of special educational needs (SEN) and academic low achievers. The new measure will replace the Intensive Remedial Teaching Programme (IRTP) and Integrated Education (IE) Programme, which have been implemented for many years. Some members of the education sector have relayed that as all classes and regular teaching posts under IRTP will be cancelled in September this year, quite a number of schools need to reduce their staffing establishment and, as a result, the contracts of some existing contract teachers may not be renewed, dealing a severe blow to the morale and stability of the teaching force and running counter to the Government's undertaking made in the 2018 Policy Address that "under the enhanced measure, schools will have a more stable teaching force and additional resources for flexible deployment". In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of (i) the number of classes, (ii) the rate of the class grant, (iii) the number of additional regular teaching posts and (iv) the total recurrent expenditure, under IRTP for the current school year;

(2) of the number of schools in which the number of approved classes will be reduced due to the cancellation of IRTP and/or a decline in the intake of Primary One students, with a breakdown by reason for reduction in classes and by number of classes in schools, i.e.:

(i) those in which the number of classes will drop from 24 or more to 23 or less, and

(ii) those in which the number of classes will drop from 12 or more to 11 or less;

(3) among the schools mentioned in (2), of the respective numbers of schools in which the following personnel arrangements will have to be made in the next school year:

(i) lowering the rank of the principal; the total expenditure on the remuneration and benefits involved in the arrangement, calculated on the basis of the median salary of the post,

(ii) reducing the number of vice principals; the total expenditure on the remuneration and benefits involved in the arrangement, calculated on the basis of the median salary of the post,

(iii) reducing the number of senior teachers; the total expenditure on the remuneration and benefits involved in the arrangement, calculated on the basis of the median salary of the post,

(iv) reducing the number of assistant clerical officers; the total expenditure on the remuneration and benefits involved in the arrangement, calculated on the basis of the median salary of the post,

(v) reducing the number of clerical assistants; the total expenditure on the remuneration and benefits involved in the arrangement, calculated on the basis of the median salary of the post, and

(vi) reducing the number of Workmen II; the total expenditure on the remuneration and benefits involved in the arrangement, calculated on the basis of the median salary of the post;

(4) given that grant thresholds of \$600,000, \$1.6 million and \$2.2 million have been prescribed for the new LSG, of the criteria based on which the EDB set such thresholds;

(5) of the number of schools in which the number of teaching posts converted/provided under the new measure will not be able to absorb all redundant/surplus teachers arising from the cancellation of IRTP and/or the IE Programme, with a breakdown by number of redundant/surplus teachers (i.e., one such teacher, two and three such teachers);

(6) as the Government has indicated that all IRTP teachers can be retained in the staffing establishment of schools and there will be no redundant teachers, of the methods by which schools can retain IRTP teachers, and set out by method the number and names of the schools involved, the number of teaching posts retained, and the total expenditure on the remuneration and benefits involved, calculated on the basis of the median salaries of the posts concerned;

(7) whether it has assessed if the new measure will result in the contracts of the existing contract teaching staff not being renewed; if it has assessed and the outcome is in the affirmative, of the number of the schools and the number of the contract teaching staff involved, and the measures in place to assist them; if the assessment outcome is in the negative, the reasons for that;

(8) given that a school may contravene the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 487) if it caps the number of students with SEN to be admitted, of the EDB's justifications for capping LSG under the new measure; the criteria based on which the EDB set the calculation ceiling and cash grant ceiling at the levels of \$2.2 million and \$1.24 million;

(9) whether it has estimated the number of schools for which the grant calculated under the new measure exceeds the ceiling of \$2.2 million; if so, of the details, and the measures in place to assist those schools not provided with the amount of grant exceeding the said ceiling in catering for learner diversity among students;

(10) of the to-date number of complaints or requests for assistance received by the EDB from schools about the impact of the new measure on them and the contents of such complaints or requests, as well as the assistance offered by the EDB to those schools; and

(11) whether it will implement transitional arrangements for enabling a "soft landing" of the new measure, and ensure that the current staffing establishment and the rank of the principals of the schools concerned will not be affected by the new measure; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Integrated Education (IE) Programme was implemented in 1997. The targets are students with hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical disability, intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorders. The Intensive Remedial Teaching Programme (IRTP) (Note 1) was implemented in 2000 and the targets are academic low achievers, students with specific learning difficulties and students with intellectual disability. The targets of these two programmes are limited. The provision under these two programmes, viz. additional teacher(s), is not designed to cater for the needs of students with different special educational needs (SEN) across the spectrum, such as attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, speech and language impairment and mental illness. In the 2003/04 school year, the Education Bureau (EDB) introduced the Learning Support Grant (LSG) to cover students with all types of SEN. LSG is provided to schools according to the number of students with SEN and academic low achievers (applicable to primary schools) enrolled in the school and the tier of support the students require. Schools may deploy the grant flexibly to provide various kinds of support services for students. We have been encouraging schools to switch to LSG to support students with SEN. We launched the Migration Mode (Note 2) in the 2009/10 school year to facilitate schools' full adoption of LSG. Despite so, in the 2018/19 school year, there are still 239 aided primary schools that have not changed to adopt or fully adopt LSG and another eight aided secondary schools are also yet to adopt LSG.

The EDB conducted a series of consultations with stakeholders before formulating the enhancement measures to be implemented in the 2019/20 school year. In the 2017/18 school year, we consulted school sponsoring bodies, school councils, school head associations, the Task Force on Integrated Education in Mainstream Schools, parent groups, public sector primary and secondary schools as well as Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCO),

etc. On March 2, 2018, we briefed the Panel on Education of the Legislative Council of the review and directions of enhancement with regard to IE. Basically, mainstream views concurred that our enhancement measures should aim at providing schools with a stable teaching force and flexibility in deployment of additional resources. A series of IE enhancement measures were drawn up by the EDB after taking into account the mainstream views of stakeholders, as well as making reference to the recommendations of the Report No 70 of the Director of Audit that the EDB should take measures to speed up schools' switching from IRTP to LSG and suggestion of the Report No 70 of the Public Accounts Committee that the EDB should consider introducing a new scheme merging the merits of both LSG and IRTP.

From the 2019/20 school year, the EDB will consolidate various subvented programmes for IE. LSG will replace IRTP and IE Programme, and be extended to all public sector ordinary schools. Under the enhanced LSG, about 1 000 additional regular teaching posts will be created in public sector schools, 306 of which are for retaining teachers of IRTP/IE Programme while the rest are newly created posts. The restructuring of various subvented programmes for IE and enhancement of LSG involve an additional expenditure of about \$300 million. Other IE enhancement measures include upgrading most SENCO posts to promotion rank, extending the Enhanced School-based Educational Psychology Service (SBEPS), implementing the Enhanced School-based Speech Therapy Service and providing additional resources to public sector ordinary schools that admit non-Chinese speaking students with SEN. These enhancement measures involve an additional expenditure of about \$800 million. The total expenditure on IE in the 2019/20 school year is estimated to be about \$3 billion. This shows that the Government is committed to supporting schools to implement IE.

To let schools understand the implementation arrangement of the enhancement measures to be introduced in the 2019/20 school year, briefing sessions were held for public sector ordinary schools from late October to early November 2018 to explain the details. Among them, we specially explained the special arrangements for schools implementing IRTP/and IE Programme to transit to adopt enhanced LSG. In addition, views from schools were gauged for fine-tuning the implementation details. We also sent a letter to public sector ordinary schools on December 10, 2018 to explain the preparation work to be made for the 2019/20 school year, with briefing materials attached, for them to make early preparation. Our inspectors have, during their school visits, further explained to schools the LSG arrangements in the coming school year according to individual schools' situation and answered enquiries from schools. On March 29, 2019, we formally issued a circular setting out the details of the enhanced LSG. In the light of the above, the enhancement measures were formulated after extensive consultations and schools were informed of the relevant arrangements through various means in the process.

Regarding the Hon Ip Kin-yuen's question, our reply is as follows:

(1), (2) and (3) In the 2018/19 school year, there are 239 aided primary schools operating 380 IRTPs. A class grant of \$9,077 and a Certificated

Master/Mistress post in the teaching staff establishment are provided per IRTP, involving an expenditure of about \$200 million.

The number of Primary One classes to be operated by aided primary schools in the 2019/20 school year will be confirmed after the student headcount in mid-September 2019. Hence, the combined impact of the enhanced LSG and reduction in Primary One classes on the number of approved classes, approved teaching and non-teaching staff establishment is not available at the moment.

Counting only the situation caused by the transition to new measure, 236 of the aided primary schools operating IRTP in the 2018/19 school year will not have the situation mentioned in part (2) of the question. Of the remaining primary schools, one will not reach the threshold of 24 classes and two will not reach the threshold of 12 classes in the 2019/20 school year. We have met with and explained to the schools concerned how their cases can be handled. On the rank of school heads, the above three schools have a situation in which the substantive rank of heads are higher than that in the approved establishment. This could be suitably handled by school sponsoring bodies in accordance with the established practice, viz. through internal redeployment as far as possible. If internal redeployment cannot be arranged, schools can apply to the EDB for retaining the pay points of the school heads concerned, and should make rectification of the situation at an opportune time in due course. On deputy heads, the deputy head posts of two of the schools will be re-ranked as senior teacher. The schools could handle this in accordance with school-based procedures, viz. applying for retaining the pay points of the deputy heads concerned, and rectify the situation at an opportune time in due course. On senior teachers, since all the schools concerned will be entitled to upgrade the SENCO post to promotion rank, the number of senior teachers at substantive rank will not be higher than the number of the approved entitlement due to the closure of IRTP. Regarding the reduction of clerical staff and Workman II (Note 3) posts, two schools will have one Assistant Clerical Officer post reduced; one school will have one Clerical Assistant post reduced; and eight schools will have one Workman II post reduced. Although the number of clerical staff or Workman II posts in the non-teaching staff establishment of individual schools will be reduced owing to the closure of IRTP, the Government will provide support through other measures to enable schools to cope with the situation. For example, the "One Executive Officer for Each School" policy to be implemented in public sector schools starting from the 2019/20 school year will provide schools with additional resources for strengthening school administrative support. If necessary, schools may retain the existing clerical staff by applying for suspension of the Administration Grant for Additional Clerical Assistant. Schools may also, under the principle of flexible deployment of the Operating Expenses Block Grant (OEBG)/Expanded Operating Expenses Block Grant (EOEBG), use resources flexibly to hire additional clerical staff or janitors in the light of their specific circumstances.

(5) and (6) Under the enhanced LSG, all public sector ordinary schools are provided with the corresponding LSG and additional teaching posts in the establishment according to the number of students with SEN and the tier of

support the students require. The EDB has put in place a special arrangement for retaining IRTP and IE Programme teachers in the establishment so that they are not affected. Specifically, in the 2019/20 school year, if the additional teaching post(s) to be created through conversion or provision under LSG is/are insufficient to retain all the IRTP or IE Programme teachers, schools with teaching post vacancies in the establishment, including frozen teaching post vacancies in the approved establishment or vacancies arising from wastage (such as retirement, resignation of serving teachers) or increase in the number of classes, should make rectification as soon as possible. This is a long-established practice. If schools do not have any teaching post vacancies, part of the LSG can be converted into additional regular teaching post(s) for retaining these teachers in the establishment.

In the 2018/19 school year, there are 239 aided primary schools operating IRTPs, 25 of which are running IE Programme in parallel, involving about 400 teaching posts. Under the new measure, all the teachers concerned can remain in the school's establishment should schools adopt the above arrangement. In other words, no teachers will be rendered redundant. Among these primary schools, 143 have retained all the IRTP/IE Programme teachers with the additional teaching posts provided under the enhanced LSG. The remaining 95 primary schools (additionally, one school will be closed in the 2019/20 school year) have fully retained such IRTP/IE Programme teachers through the following means. Two primary schools each have made use of one new teaching post vacancy in the establishment arising from the increase in the number of classes for retaining purpose. 55 primary schools have made use of frozen teaching post vacancies for retaining purpose, out of which 48 used one such frozen vacancy while seven, which have three to five such frozen teaching post vacancies (some being senior teacher vacancies), used two. Besides, should there be teaching posts vacated by departing teachers in these 55 primary schools later, the vacancies will be used in place of frozen teaching posts for retaining purpose. Regarding the 38 schools without any teaching post vacancies, they are allowed to convert part of LSG into an additional regular teaching post for retaining IRTP/IE Programme teachers.

As for the seven schools that have to make use of two frozen teaching post vacancies, the amount of LSG receivable, after deducting the sum for conversion, in the 2019/20 school year for supporting students with SEN is estimated to be around \$0.8 million to \$1.1 million. A SENCO post at promotion rank will also be provided to each of these schools in the 2019/20 school year to support IE. Also, these schools will be given additional resources for hiring additional executive officer under the "One Executive Officer for Each School" policy. Overall speaking, despite having to use two frozen teaching post vacancies, these schools still have substantial additional resources for creating room for school heads and teachers to address the learning, emotional, behavioural and developmental needs of their students.

To avoid individual schools from being labelled and mistaken in regard of their admission of and support for students with SEN on the basis of the number of teaching posts in the establishment and the amount of expenditure involved, we will not disclose the situation of individual schools one by one

according to the school's arrangement for retaining the teachers concerned.

(4), (8) and (9) The enhanced LSG will be implemented from the 2019/20 school year with the unit grant rate for tier-2 support increased to \$15,000 where that for tier-3 support increased multifold to \$60,000. Apart from having LSG, schools will have additional regular teaching post(s) through conversion/provision when LSG reaching the threshold(s).

We have consulted and analysed the current situation of the use of LSG in schools and found that most schools hire contract teachers or teaching assistants with LSG. We understand that teachers in the establishment can better maintain the stability of the teaching force. Therefore, when considering the setting of the threshold of LSG, we decided to provide schools with a relatively large number of students with SEN with more stable additional teaching posts. Should LSG reach Threshold 1 (i.e. \$600,000), schools can convert part of the LSG (i.e. equivalent to the annual salary at starting point of a basic rank graduate teacher (about \$360,000)) into a graduate teaching post in the establishment. Schools will still have a certain amount of LSG for flexible deployment, such as appointing additional teaching assistant(s) or hiring professional services for supporting students with SEN after conversion. This is a reasonable arrangement from the perspective of public resource management and school operation. We have made reference to the LSG ceiling of 2018/19 school year (i.e. \$1,652,434) to set Threshold 2 as \$1,600,000. Should LSG reach Threshold 2, apart from using part of LSG to convert a graduate teaching post in the establishment, schools are provided with an additional regular graduate teaching post in the establishment, i.e. a total of two additional regular graduate teaching posts. Should LSG reach Threshold 3 (which is set as \$2,200,000 for the 2019/20 school year with reference to the calculation of Thresholds 1 and 2), apart from using part of LSG to convert a graduate teaching post in the establishment, schools are provided with two additional regular graduate teaching posts in the establishment, i.e. a total of three additional regular graduate teaching posts.

In the current school year, only 51 primary schools (around 11 per cent) and 58 secondary schools (around 15 per cent) are disbursed with the maximum amount of LSG, which is about \$1.6 million, but no additional graduate teaching post in the establishment is provided. Under the new measure, schools admitting a relatively large number of students with SEN will be provided with LSG together with one to three additional graduate teaching post(s) for strengthening support to students with SEN. In the 2019/20 school year, among the 456 ordinary primary schools and 389 ordinary secondary schools in the public sector:

- a. about 64 per cent of primary schools and about 42 per cent of secondary schools will have less than \$1.24 million of LSG and one additional graduate teaching post in the establishment (the annual mid-point salary of Assistant Primary School Master/Mistress posts is around \$530,000 while that of Graduate Master/Mistress posts in secondary schools is around \$610,000);
- b. about 21 per cent of primary schools and about 15 per cent of secondary

schools will have about \$1.24 million of LSG and two additional graduate teaching posts in the establishment; and

c. about 9 per cent of primary schools and about 6 per cent of secondary schools will have about \$1.24 million of LSG and three additional graduate teaching posts in the establishment.

The above schools constitutes about 94 per cent of the primary schools and 63 per cent of the secondary schools.

It is noteworthy that the EDB provides schools with professional support, including assessment and consultation services from educational psychologists, speech therapists and audiologists on an ongoing basis. We also introduce to schools teaching strategies for supporting students with SEN and develop teaching resources for use by teachers from time to time. The SBEPS has been extended to cover all public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools since the 2016/17 school year. Moreover, schools are also provided with other related resources to support students with SEN based on their situations, such as the top-up fund for procurement of special furniture and equipment, as well as intensive support grant for hardcore cases of students with SEN.

(7) Upon implementation of the enhanced LSG in the 2019/20 school year, about 80 per cent of public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools will be provided with additional graduate teaching post(s) in the establishment, amounting to a total of about 1 000 additional regular teaching posts. Among these teaching posts, about 70 per cent are provided through conversion with part of LSG (equivalent to the annual salary at starting point of a basic rank graduate teacher) while about 30 per cent are the one to two additional graduate teaching posts in the establishment provided for schools with LSG reaching Threshold 2 or Threshold 3. Apart from using some of the additional teaching posts (306 teaching posts) to retain teachers of IRTP and IE Programme, schools could fill the new posts in the establishment with serving contract teachers with a view to building a stable teaching force. Moreover, schools can continue to use LSG to renew the contracts of serving contract teachers to provide appropriate support services for students with SEN. The position of contract teachers is not available. Yet, it is expected that additional regular teaching posts in the establishment will increase substantially under the new measure and quite a number of serving contract teachers will be appointed as regular teachers.

(10) and (11) We have received enquiries about the enhanced LSG from individual schools, including four letters from primary schools (one from a district school head association) expressing their views on the special arrangements of retaining IRTP teachers under the enhanced IE measures, as well as letters from two primary schools and an association of secondary schools stating their views about the usage of LSG. To allay their concerns, we have further explained such arrangements to schools through tele-conversation, schools visits, etc. Afterwards, these schools have a better grasp of the relevant arrangements and will take follow-up action in accordance with our explanations.

As mentioned above, most public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools can benefit from the enhanced LSG, including provision of additional regular teaching posts (about 1 000 in total). IRTP and IE Programme teachers can be fully retained in the establishment and they can continue to assist schools in supporting students with SEN with their knowledge and experience. The EDB will review the school implementation of various enhanced measures on an ongoing basis. We believe that the effectiveness of schools' practice of IE will be further enhanced when the various measures are fully implemented and smoothly operated.

Note 1: Since 1983, the former Education Department provided students of low academic achievement with a range of intensive remedial services, including resource classes operated in public sector ordinary primary schools. From September 2000, resource class was renamed as IRTP under which schools are encouraged to abolish the concept of "a separate class" and provide enhanced support services through the Whole School Approach.

Note 2: Migrating from the Mixed Mode to full adoption of LSG during a grace period of six school years with the LSG ceiling capped at \$600,000.

Note 3: The number of clerical staff and Workman II posts in the non-teaching staff establishment of aided primary schools is basically used for calculating the disburseable amount of Administration Grant/Revised Administration Grant, which have been subsumed under the OEGB/EOEBG. Under the principle of flexible deployment of the block grant, schools may use their resources more flexibly, having regard to their school-based circumstances, to employ administrative/clerical staff and janitors or hire outside services to meet their specific needs.