

LCQ13: School-based Educational Psychology Service

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 (January 10):

Question:

It is learnt that the School-based Educational Psychology Service (SBEPS), implemented by the Education Bureau (EDB), is a comprehensive and integrated educational psychology service which provides support to public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools, including the provision of case follow-up and intervention services as well as support for schools in promoting preventive and developmental work. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of educational psychologists (EPs) employed by the Government to provide SBEPS to primary and secondary schools in each of the past five years as well as the respective ratios of such EPs to schools and to students;

(2) of the average number of days of visits to each school by the EPs mentioned in (1) in each of the past five years, as well as whether they increased the number of visits and provided intensive support to schools in need; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) of the average time taken by the EPs mentioned in (1) between receipt of referrals and completion of the assessment reports prepared for students with special educational needs in each of the past five years;

(4) whether it will take measures to improve the waiting time for SBEPS as well as the problem of excessively long time taken for the relevant assessment; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(5) of the respective numbers of primary and secondary schools currently provided with the Enhanced SBEPS by the EDB;

(6) whether it knows the number of places of educational psychology programmes available at local universities as well as the number of graduates from such programmes in each of the past five years; and

(7) whether it will consider engaging more EPs from overseas; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The School-based Educational Psychology Service (SBEPS) is a comprehensive and integrated educational psychology service that aims at enhancing schools' capacity to cater for students' diverse educational needs. Starting from the 2016/17 school year, the SBEPS has covered all public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools. The Education Bureau (EDB) has also progressively provided the Enhanced SBEPS to public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools admitting a greater number of students with special educational needs (SEN) by enhancing the educational psychologists (EPs) to schools ratio to 1:4, in order to provide more comprehensive and regular case follow-up and intervention service for schools and students, as well as to strengthen the preventive and development work of schools. The EPs would collaborate with teachers, social workers, etc, to jointly cater for students' diverse educational needs according to the principle of Whole School Approach, and enhance the effectiveness of the support rendered by schools to students through strengthening the school support system and teachers' knowledge and skills in catering for students' diverse needs.

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

(1) and (2) SBEPS in public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools is provided by EPs of the EDB and school sponsoring bodies. In the past five years (from the 2018/19 to 2022/23 school years), the respective EP establishment for SBEPS is 151, 156, 161, 181 and 186 posts. Each EP serves about four to eight schools including those receiving the Enhanced SBEPS. The average number of visit days paid by school-based EPs to each school is around 20 to 30 days per school year. To cater for schools' needs, school-based EPs may increase the number of school visits as necessary, such as supporting schools in managing crises or providing immediate support to urgent cases.

(3) and (4) In the past five years (from the 2018/19 to 2022/23 school years), about 80 per cent and 10 per cent of the cases referred to school-based EPs were assessed within two months and within two to three months respectively. Some cases involved a longer waiting time for assessment because of their special circumstances (e.g. parents' request for deferral of assessment, or assessment being held up due to students' need for medical treatment). In fact, the EDB has all along encouraged schools to adopt the "intervention before assessment" principle to provide appropriate support for students displaying learning or emotional and behavioural difficulties first without having to wait for the EPs to complete the assessment or issue the assessment report. Upon completion of the assessment, the EPs will meet with the parents and school personnel concerned to explain the assessment results and discuss the support measures.

(5) In the 2023/24 school year, 244 primary schools and 204 secondary schools have been provided with the Enhanced SBEPS.

(6) The student intake and the number of graduates of the University Grants Committee-funded master programmes in educational psychology for the past five years (from the 2018/19 to 2022/23 academic years) are tabulated as

follows:

Academic year	Student intake (Note 1)	Number of graduates (Note 2)
2018/19	25	16
2019/20	50	19
2020/21	30	40
2021/22	30	30
2022/23	30	25

Note 1: The above programmes include the Master of Arts Degree Programme in Professional Educational Psychology offered by the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Master of Educational and Child Psychology Programme offered by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and the Master of Social Sciences (Educational Psychology) Programme offered by the University of Hong Kong. All of them are two-year full-time programmes.

Note 2: Since the programmes last for two years, the students admitted in an academic year would graduate in the next academic year. Thus, there is no direct relationship between the student intake and number of graduates in the same academic year.

(7) As school-based EPs are required to provide assessment service and carry out intervention work for students as well as communicate with the students' parents, they must be fluent in the local language and familiar with the local education system and social culture. Non-local trained EPs may apply for the post of EP if they meet the above requirements and other employment requirements.

In addition, the EDB has been closely monitoring the demand and supply of EPs as well as maintaining close liaison with local universities to discuss the feasibility of increasing the training places for EPs.