

LCQ15: Impacts of social incidents on teachers, students and parents

Following is a question by the Hon Elizabeth Quat and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (June 17):

Question:

Since the occurrence of social incidents in June last year, quite a number of teachers and students have been arrested for alleged participation in unlawful activities. As at the 15th of last month, some 8 000 persons were arrested, and students accounted for 40 per cent of them. There are views that the aforesaid situation shows that it is imperative to enhance law-abiding awareness among teachers and students as well as strengthen moral education in schools. Regarding the impacts of social incidents on teachers, students and parents, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of teachers of tertiary institutions, secondary schools and primary schools who were arrested in social incidents, and the respective numbers of secondary school and primary school teachers whose teacher registration was cancelled, from June last year to May this year;

(2) given that among the 192 complaints received by the Education Bureau (EDB) from June last year to March this year about professional misconduct of teachers in social incidents, 51 were found unsubstantiated, whether EDB has issued guidelines to the teachers concerned to remind them to be cautious with their words and deeds, so as to avoid giving people the impression of being unprofessional again;

(3) of the respective numbers of students of tertiary institutions, secondary schools and primary schools who were arrested in social incidents from June last year to May this year;

(4) as EDB indicated that it would provide various remedial, preventive and developmental counselling programmes for students who were arrested or prosecuted for participating in social incidents, of the details of such programmes;

(5) as EDB has issued, to all schools in Hong Kong, guidelines stating the basic principles on helping students manage their emotions, and provided teachers and school professionals with information on mental health and professional support services, of the details of such guidelines and information;

(6) of EDB's specific measures to (i) deepen the understanding of the country's Constitution and the Basic Law among teachers and students, (ii) enhance law-abiding awareness among teachers and students, (iii) enhance

teachers' professional capability for implementing positive values education in schools, and (iv) strengthen moral education in schools; and

(7) as the number of requests for assistance from parents relating to social incidents received last year by some social welfare organisations saw a year-on-year increase of 30 per cent, and some social workers have pointed out that social incidents have heightened the divide and tensions between the two generations, causing family members to suffer from psychological and emotional problems one after another, of the Government's specific measures to help the assistance seekers patch up family relationships?

Reply:

President,

Students are the future pillars of society. We are pleased to see students care about society, but we never want them to participate in unlawful activities for any reason. Some people and groups with ulterior motives deliberately mislead students into participating in political activities using radical means, attempting to achieve their political objectives at the expense of students' interests and prospects. The Education Bureau (EDB) strongly condemns the acts of these people who have been misleading and causing harm to our students. We have also repeatedly appealed to schools and parents that they should work together to safeguard our students, show concerns about their situation both inside and outside schools as well as teach them to think rationally and distinguish right from wrong. Students should always put their own safety and prospects as the top priority and must not participate in dangerous or suspected unlawful activities. We have also clearly stated that we will ferret out the small population of individual teachers in the teaching profession who have broken the law, breached the rules and violated the moral standards, and that we will not tolerate the black sheep who jeopardise the well-being of students and undermine public confidence in Hong Kong's education.

The social incidents have posed unprecedented impact on and challenges to the education sector. As a place for nurturing students and developing their moral values, schools should assist students to rectify their misdemeanour when they have deviant behaviour or even questionable values, regardless of the reasons behind them. They should also work with parents to help students reflect on the impact of their behaviour on themselves and others, so that students can re-establish positive values and grow healthily. The EDB will also maintain close contact with schools to understand their overall situation and needs as well as provide appropriate guidance and support with a view to collaborating with schools and different sectors of society to nurture students into committed, visionary, law-abiding and responsible citizens in the future.

Our reply to the different parts of the question is as follows:

(1) The EDB attaches great importance to the professional ethics and conduct of teachers. Teachers play a vital role in passing on knowledge and nurturing

students' character and serve as an important role model for students. For teachers who are involved in illegal acts, they have to bear the legal responsibility and the EDB will follow up on the matter seriously in accordance with the Education Ordinance. According to information gathered from various channels, among the people arrested from June 2019 to May 2020 in relation to the social incidents, about 10 of them were staff members of post-secondary institutions and about 100 of them were staff or teachers of primary and secondary schools. Under the established mechanism, if a registered teacher is charged upon arrest, the EDB will review whether a teacher has misconducted himself/herself and his/her teacher registration status by referring to the court documents and other obtainable information, regardless of whether the teacher concerned is convicted or not. If an arrested teacher is not charged but the EDB receives complaints or information about the professional conduct of the teacher concerned, the EDB will also take action according to the established mechanism. We are currently following-up on the concluded case according to the procedures mentioned above. No cancellation of registration of the teachers concerned has been recorded so far.

(2) The EDB attaches great importance to the professional conduct of teachers. In view of the development of the social incidents, the EDB has repeatedly and clearly stated the professional requirements for teachers to schools and teachers in Hong Kong through various channels including issuing guidelines and letters. We have reiterated that teachers are students' significant role models and their every word and deed (both inside and outside school) have a far-reaching impact on students. Therefore, teachers, whether at school or in their private life, are required to uphold the professional conduct of education, show respect for the law and the behavioural norms acceptable to society. They also need to stay cautious with their words and deeds, in order to fulfill the expectation of society on the ethics and professionalism of teachers.

The EDB adopts a prudent approach in handling every complaint involving the professional misconduct of teachers. We will carefully consider and scrutinise the available information and evidence as well as the school's investigation report and representations from the teacher concerned before deciding on whether a complaint is substantiated. In accordance with the Education Ordinance and from the perspective of education professionalism, we will comprehensively consider the facts and circumstances of each case including the background of the case, the incident that led to the complaint, the impact of the incident on the education sector and students as well as precedent cases, in order to determine the action to be taken for each case. Actions to be taken include issuing a reprimand, warning or advisory letter, etc. For serious misconduct cases, the EDB may consider cancelling the registration of the teachers concerned or refusing their registration applications. When issuing a reprimand, warning or advisory letter, we will remind the teachers concerned to refrain from activity that is detrimental to the image of the teaching profession and to abide by the behavioural norms acceptable to society.

(3) According to information gathered from various channels, among those

arrested from June 2019 to May 2020 in relation to the social incidents, about 2 000 of them were students of post-secondary institutions; and about 1 600 of them were aged under 18 (we trust that most of them were secondary students and very few of them were primary students).

(4) The EDB has issued letters to all primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong, clearly stating that students should not participate in any unlawful political acts and activities. Any activities expressing political stance or relating to political propaganda should not be allowed at school. We have also explained the EDB's requirements on schools' handling of students in breach of school regulations, which includes pointing out that offenders have to bear the legal responsibility and that schools should assist students in developing correct values and improving their behaviour based on the prevailing disciplinary and counselling mechanisms.

We shall never give up on students who have violated the law or even students convicted by the court. We should deploy appropriate guidance and discipline measures, and bring them back to the right track. Schools should provide support to students by continuously adopting a whole school approach to guidance and discipline. Schools' professional personnel (including school social workers, guidance and discipline personnel as well as school-based educational psychologists) should collaborate with teachers to provide various remedial, preventive and developmental guidance programmes for students according to their needs so as to help them adapt to the learning environment and reintegrate them into school life. In respect of support to students who have violated the law as well as students convicted by the court, we suggest that schools should develop a long-term personalised counselling programme for each of these students as early as possible, with emphasis on the inculcation of positive values, positive thinking and proper attitude in getting along with others, and maintain close contact with parents to handle students' behavioural and emotional problems. Furthermore, schools are encouraged to make arrangements for students to participate in relevant support programmes, such as the Understanding Adolescent Project and the Enhanced Smart Teen Project launched by the EDB for primary and secondary students respectively, with a view to enhancing their resilience in facing adversity and temptation.

Subsequent to the gradual resumption of classes at school, the EDB has just issued a circular memorandum, calling on schools to enhance the follow-up work and the relevant support at the school level for students who need guidance and discipline support. We also encourage schools to make good use of community resources to help students rectify their deviant behaviour. We will closely monitor the follow-up situation at schools and provide support based on their needs.

(5) As the EDB is concerned that the social incidents may affect the emotions of some students, it issued, to all schools in Hong Kong, guidelines stating the basic principles of helping students manage their emotions in late August 2019 and provided schools with information on mental health and professional support services. The guidelines suggest that teachers should enhance students' sense of belonging and security in schools through diversified

means, teach students ways to ease their emotions, and call on teachers to care about students proactively and observe their situation closely for timely identification of and support for students in need. We also encourage teachers to take good care of themselves and allow themselves room for a break to properly manage their emotions. Besides, information on mental health and professional support services provided by government departments and non-government organisations is attached to the guidelines for schools' reference. In addition, we conducted 34 sessions of related workshops and thematic talks before the start of the 2019/20 school year and in mid-December 2019 to assist schools in mastering the skills to communicate with students, understand and handle mental health crisis, and provide psychological support for students after the occurrence of an emergency incident. We will organise workshops for teachers and guidance personnel again before the start of the next school year, where experts (including psychiatrists) will be invited to share practical skills for supporting students and discuss case studies with participants. From the 2017/18 school year onwards, the EDB has also provided the Professional Development Programme for Mental Health for primary and secondary teachers, which includes three-day elementary training for teachers at large and five-day in-depth training for designated teachers, with a view to raising teachers' awareness of mental health and enhancing their professional knowledge and capability in identifying and supporting students with mental health needs.

(6) The EDB is committed to maintaining a teaching profession of high quality and with professional conduct in Hong Kong. To enable teachers and school leaders to demonstrate the professional roles and conduct expected of them, we have embedded the elements of Professional Standards for Principals and Professional Standards for Teachers of Hong Kong (T-standard+) in teacher training programmes as appropriate, which include training programmes for aspiring principals and newly-appointed principals, as well as serving teachers and newly-joined teachers. To implement the recommendations made by the Task Force on Professional Development of Teachers, starting from September 2020, all newly-joined teachers are required to complete 30 hours of core training and not less than 60 hours of elective training within the first three years of service. For in-service teachers, they are required to spare a minimum of 30 hours, in each three-year cycle, to take part in specified categories of professional development programme/activity, in which at least six hours have to be spent on the category of teachers' professional roles, values and conduct. The EDB will continue to reinforce the identity of education professionals among teachers and school leaders through professional development programmes as appropriate, with a view to further enhancing the professional capability of teachers and promoting their professional growth.

The promotion of the Basic Law is an ongoing task of the EDB and schools. Basic Law education (BLE) elements have long been covered by the school curriculum. BLE is not implemented as an independent subject, but incorporated into the curricula of different subjects. At the primary level, the General Studies Curriculum Guide for Primary Schools (Primary 1 – Primary 6) (2017) provides examples of curriculum planning and learning and teaching for teachers' reference, in order to enable students to understand the origin

of the Basic Law and its constitutional background as well as the relationship between the Basic Law and their daily lives. At the secondary level, the Secondary Education Curriculum Guide (2017) highlights the major renewed emphases of the secondary education curriculum, which include strengthening values education (including moral and civic education and BLE). It also states that BLE has already been incorporated into the curricula of various subjects, including Life and Society, Chinese History, History and Geography, for students to gain a comprehensive understanding of the concept of "one country, two systems" and the origin and implementation of the Basic Law from the perspectives of history, geography, society and culture, economic relations and political structure. In an appendix of the curriculum guide, a planning and self-evaluation tool for BLE is provided as reference, so as to facilitate schools' continuing implementation of BLE in a more structured and holistic manner.

Noting the needs of the school sector, the EDB has all along been including elements related to the Constitution and the Basic Law in the professional training programmes for principals, middle managers and teachers to shed light on the constitutional status of the Basic Law and the concept of "one country, two systems", and share the learning and teaching (L&T) strategies for promoting BLE inside and outside the classroom. In addition, a set of 15-hour L&T resources entitled "Constitution and the Basic Law" has been produced to facilitate teachers in teaching the Basic Law in the context of subjects such as Life and Society, Chinese History, History and Geography or as a standalone module. The EDB has also provided Basic Law online courses for self-directed learning for teachers and students, and enriched respective L&T materials with a video teaching resource package, animation clips and online games. Besides, a variety of student activities have been organised, such as Territory-wide Inter-school Basic Law Competitions and interflow/visit activities to the Mainland held annually. These multi-faceted strategies enable teachers and students to acquire a deeper understanding of the relationship between the Constitution and the Basic Law, the historical background and implementation of the Basic Law, Hong Kong's legal system, and the fact that the Basic Law is the cornerstone of Hong Kong's development and is closely related to our daily lives.

To further strengthen moral education, the EDB has chosen "Expressing gratitude, to cherish, be proactive and optimistic" as the theme for promoting values education in schools for the current and the next two school years, with a view to encouraging all schools in Hong Kong to create a positive education etho. Meanwhile, the EDB will continue to organise the Outstanding Teaching Award for Moral Education which aims at promoting moral education at whole-school level, provide professional development programmes and school leaders' workshops for principals and teachers to enhance their professional capacity for planning a holistic approach to values education, encourage whole-school participation and work in collaboration with non-governmental organisations to co-organise "Moral Education" award schemes for the promotion of values education.

To strengthen education on the rule of law, including understanding of the Constitution and the Basic Law, the EDB would highlight its importance

and to illustrate the learning content to the education sector and the public through strengthening teacher training, enriching L&T resources, broadening the scope of students' activities and enhancing promotion etc. For instance, in mid-June, we will provide the schools with a new set of teaching resources on the Constitution, and three sets of wallchart resources with the themes of "Hong Kong's return to China", "Human Rights and the Rule of Law", and "The Constitution and the Basic Law". These resources will enable teachers to explain accurately the related concepts to students. From the third quarter of this year, the EDB will launch the advanced version of the Basic Law Knowledge Enrichment Online Course for Secondary School Teachers, the Constitution and the Basic Law Knowledge Enrichment Online Course for Primary School Teachers and the Basic Law Online Course for Senior Primary School Students by phases, so as to strengthen students' and teachers' understanding of the Basic Law.

The school is where education takes place. It is the school's responsibility to cultivate good character in students and teach them to be polite and abide by the rules so that they will become responsible citizens of society. We will strengthen education of the Constitution and BLE, including teachers' professional development and curriculum planning, so as to deepen teachers' and students' understanding of our country's Constitution and the Basic Law. Moreover, building on the existing foundation of values education, we would encourage schools to highlight the basic meaning of the rule of law and the importance of abiding by the law, so as to strengthen the law-abiding awareness of teachers and students, and enable students to recognise their national identity, distinguish right from wrong, properly understand and uphold "one country, two systems" in the learning process, and get ready to contribute to society and become the future pillar of our society.

As the National Anthem Ordinance was gazetted on June 12, 2020, the EDB has strengthened relevant curriculum resources and supportive measures. Moreover, to meet the development needs of society, such as the legislation in national security law, the EDB will continue to adopt multi-faceted measures relating to curriculum, teacher training and teaching resources, so as to strengthen the support to schools in promoting the country's Constitution and the Basic Law as well as enhancing positive values education, law-abiding awareness of teachers and students and moral education.

(7) According to the information provided by the Labour and Welfare Bureau, to render support to families in need, the Social Welfare Department provides a series of welfare services for individuals and families suffering from psychological and mental stress, including integrated family service, clinical psychological service, 24-hour emotional support hotlines, outreaching social work service, etc., and arrange for appropriate follow-up services to cater for individual needs. Individuals and families in need may seek assistance directly from the integrated family service centres nearby in their districts.