

## LCQ16: Arrangements for class resumption

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 (May 20):

Question:

In view of the coronavirus disease 2019 epidemic, classes of all schools in Hong Kong have been suspended since the end of January this year. As the epidemic has subsided, the Education Bureau (EDB) has announced that classes of primary and secondary schools will resume in three phases starting from May 27. Regarding the arrangements for class resumption, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that while the EDB has stipulated that there should be no less than 190 school days in a school year for primary and secondary schools, classes of various schools have now been suspended for nearly four months, whether the EDB will issue clear guidelines to schools in respect of the number of school days for this school year, if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) given that due to the limited sizes of classrooms, it is generally difficult for schools to space out students' seats at intervals of 1.8 metres to reduce the risk of infection, of the measures put in place by the EDB to help schools resolve this problem, including whether the EDB will suggest schools to implement the arrangement under which students of each of two halves a class taking turn to go to school on alternate days, if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) given that upon class resumption for Primary Four to Primary Six students on June 8, there will be only about one month's time left for various schools to teach their Primary Five students face to face to prepare them for internal school examinations (and schools are required to submit the relevant results to the EDB by the end of July at the latest), and they also have to help their Primary Six students to get ready for the Pre-Secondary One Hong Kong Attainment Test scheduled for July 14, whether the EDB will consider cancelling the Test of this year to alleviate teachers' work pressure; and

(4) whether the EDB will (i) follow the practice of the Macao Government as follows: recommending kindergartens, primary schools and secondary schools to let all their students promote to the next grade upon the end of this school year, and then adjust the teaching schedule and progress in the next year, and (ii) request schools to advance the commencement of the next school year, shorten the school holidays and reduce outside school exchange activities, so as to increase the number of school days, thereby catching up with the teaching progress delayed by the epidemic, if so, of the details, if not, the

reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the Hon Elizabeth Quat's questions is as follows:

(1) and (4) As stipulated in the Education Bureau (EDB) Circular No. 7/2005 "School Holiday List and Student Learning Time", when schools draw up the school calendar, under normal circumstances, the total number of school days for whole-day schools should not be less than 190 school days in accordance with the recommendation of the Curriculum Development Council stated in the Basic Education Curriculum Guide. However, in view of the special circumstances caused by the epidemic, schools can, taking into account their school-based requirements, flexibly adjust their school days in accordance with the learning hours and progress of students before class resumption as well as the supplementary classes arrangement after class resumption (if applicable), in order to cater for the learning needs of students and operational circumstances of schools.

In light of the outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and to safeguard the health of students, all schools have deferred the resumption of classes since the Chinese New Year holidays. Nevertheless, during the class suspension period, schools have been adopting diversified modes of learning in order to achieve "suspending classes without suspending learning". Upon class resumption, schools will suitably adjust their teaching and learning arrangements to assist students in keeping up their learning progress, such as rescheduling school activities as well as arranging supplementary lessons for individual students before summer holiday according to their school-based circumstances and needs of parents and students. Besides, the curriculum guides for all subjects of secondary schools and primary schools are formulated by learning stages across different levels. Thus, schools can review and flexibly adapt their curriculum in accordance with the progress of their own students, for example, arranging part of its curriculum to be taught in the next school year on a need basis to facilitate the transition between different levels or learning stages.

In fact, as stated in the "Guidelines to Schools on Class Resumption" issued by the EDB on May 13, schools can flexibly arrange supplementary lessons in accordance with their school-based circumstances. Schools should act according to the best interest of students with sufficient justifications, consult representatives of teachers and parents, and inform parents of the revised summer holidays schedule and arrangement for supplementary lessons (if applicable) after obtaining approval from the Incorporated Management Committee / School Management Committee. Hence, the EDB will not provide separate guidelines on the number of school days.

According to the School Administration Guide, a student should be promoted to the next level upon the end of each school year. The decision to ask a student to repeat for a particular level should only be made under

special circumstances. Schools, have all along been exercising their professional judgements to decide whether a particular student need to repeat the current level, taking into account the circumstances of individual students and their learning needs. The EDB will provide appropriate support and professional advice to schools whenever necessary.

(2) To ensure students can learn in a healthy and safe environment, schools should put in place various measures, including maintaining appropriate social distances, frequent cleaning and disinfection of school premises, and reminding students to maintain personal hygiene, so as to properly observe health protection in a multi-pronged manner. In terms of maintaining appropriate social distances, students should keep at least one metre apart from one another when they are staying in classrooms as well as queuing up in toilets and at tuck shops. According to the actual circumstances of individual schools, various special lesson arrangements could be adopted, such as arranging students to sit in a single row with a "face-to-back" setting and requiring them to wear masks, arranging teachers to teach students who are facing one direction, and avoiding group discussion activities. Schools can make the best use of space in classrooms and different environments to maximise physical distancing and minimise close contacts among students.

(3) Under the prevailing Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) System, samples of the Pre-Secondary One Hong Kong Attainment Test (Pre-S1 HKAT) results are collected by the EDB biennially and the average of the two most recently sampled results is used as the scaling tool in the SSPA System. All secondary schools offering local curriculum in Hong Kong are required to arrange their S1 entrants to participate in the Pre-S1 HKAT in the sampling year; whereas in the non-sampling year, secondary schools may choose whether to conduct the Test or not. The test results can serve as reference for schools in formulating appropriate learning support plans. The EDB originally plans to implement the relevant sampling arrangements in 2020.

In light of the outbreak of COVID-19, schools have suspended classes for a few months and the upper levels of primary schools will resume classes on June 8. After consultation with the school sector, the EDB has decided to cancel the sampling arrangement for the Pre-S1 HKAT this year with a view to allowing more flexibility for schools to deal with matters relating to class resumption, as well as helping students adapt to class resumption in schools. The EDB will continue to use the average of the sampled results of the Pre-S1 HKATs in 2016 and 2018 as the scaling tool in the SSPA System for the 2021 and 2022 cycles. Since no sampling arrangement will be made this year, secondary schools can choose whether to conduct the Pre-S1 HKAT on July 14 or not according to the established practice.