

LCQ18: Services provided for persons with intellectual disabilities and their parents

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (November 4):

Question:

It has been reported that earlier on, students with intellectual disabilities (ID) living in the boarding facility of a special school were found to have been abused by staff members of the school. Besides, persons with ID are required to leave their schools and move out of the boarding facilities upon their reaching the age of 21, but it takes decades for them to wait for adult residential services. Such persons have to live at home and be taken care of by their family members during the time they are waiting for the services. In September this year, a tragedy was reported in which a mother who had become mentally and physically exhausted for taking care of her 21-year-old son with ID who had just left school was suspected of having strangled him to death and then attempted to commit suicide. On the services provided for persons with ID and their parents, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number of complaints received by the Education Bureau (EDB) in each of the past five years about students with ID being abused in the boarding facilities of special schools and, among such cases, the number of those found substantiated after investigations and the relevant details;
- (2) of the number of reports received by the EDB in each of the past five years on injuries sustained by students with ID in the boarding facilities of special schools, and the relevant details;
- (3) of the current staffing establishment of the boarding section of a special school;
- (4) whether the EDB will (i) step up its monitoring and inspection of the boarding facilities of special schools, (ii) review the codes on management and care of students issued to special schools, (iii) strengthen the staffing establishment of the boarding sections of special schools, and (iv) provide special school students with regular physical check-ups for early detection of abnormalities (e.g. injuries caused by abuse);
- (5) of the respective current numbers of persons waiting for various types of residential services for persons with ID;
- (6) of the support services put in place by the Government for persons with ID who are waiting for residential services and their parents; whether the

EDB will consider allowing students with ID to continue to stay in schools after reaching the age of 21 until they have been allocated places in hostels for persons with ID; and

(7) whether the EDB and the Social Welfare Department will (i) strengthen the support for parents of persons with ID (e.g. providing training on the relevant caring skills and knowledge), and (ii) take other measures to alleviate the parents' pressure, so as to prevent the occurrence of similar tragedies?

Reply:

President,

The Education Bureau (EDB) has been providing aided special schools with resources and support to facilitate schools to help students develop their potential at the growing stages. For students with needs for boarding service, they would be referred to special schools with a boarding section. Staff of the boarding section mainly provide boarders with personal care service during non-school sessions. In the 2020/21 school year, there are 61 aided special schools in Hong Kong, among which 22 provide boarding service under the EDB's subvention. In general, students of special schools are admitted at the age of 6 and leave school upon completion of Secondary Six. Special schools will devise individualised education programmes for their students and guide them in life planning from the perspective of whole-person development. When students approach the senior secondary stage, schools will discuss with the parents the pathways of their children, and will assist them in applying for appropriate post-school services.

The EDB pays high attention to the recent media reports and their queries about the ways of taking care of students by the boarding section of an individual special school. In this connection, we notice that the school concerned has already issued a statement on its website, which states, among other things, that the school, upon initial understanding, has found that part of the case details given in the media reports did not match with the school's information, and that the school management committee has been currently examining the cases concerned. On the other hand, the EDB is exploring ways to strengthen the mechanism for monitoring the boarding sections of special schools.

Our consolidated reply, prepared in consultation with the relevant bureau and department, to the question of Hon Chan Hak-kan is as follows:

(1) From the 2015/16 to 2019/20 school year, the EDB received three complaint cases related to suspected maltreatment of students with intellectual disabilities (ID) in the boarding sections of special schools, of which two cases were found not substantiated after investigations. In the case that was substantiated, the staff was subsequently charged by the Police with common assault and convicted in court. The staff's contract with the school was terminated.

(2) From the 2015/16 to 2019/20 school years, the EDB received one related

accident reported by school, in which a student with ID showed abnormal signs after being fed by staff of the boarding section of a special school and was taken to hospital for medical treatment.

(3) The EDB has, premised upon the perspective of the education profession and with due consideration of the learning needs of students, provided aided special schools with resources and manpower. The staff establishment of the boarding section is provided in accordance with the stipulations of the "Code of Aid for Special Schools". The number and rank of wardens, assistant wardens, houseparents-in-charge, houseparents, programme workers, registered nurses, as well as auxiliary staff, such as clerical assistants, janitor staff, cooks and watchmen are decided according to the respective capacities of the boarding sections and/or the categories of special schools.

(4) (i) and (ii) To facilitate schools in implementing school-based management smoothly, we have prepared the "School Administration Guide" (the Guide) for aided schools (including special schools) and updated it regularly. There is a chapter in the Guide elaborating on the handling of student matters, including the provision of support services for students with special educational needs, counselling and guidance services, and the handling of suspected child maltreatment cases. The Guide also provides a hyperlink to the guideline on the use of physical restraint or seclusion to handle students with special educational needs having serious emotional and behavioural problems for schools' reference.

Principals of aided special schools are also responsible for monitoring the respective boarding sections, whereas wardens of the boarding sections are registered social workers who are responsible for managing the operation of the boarding sections. Wardens and other staff of the boarding sections deploy their professional knowledge and make reference to the relevant guidelines in managing the boarding sections, in order to provide boarders with proper boarding and personal care services. Under the School Development and Accountability Framework, schools (including special schools) should conduct annual self-evaluation on the effectiveness of their education and support to students (including boarding services, if applicable), to constantly enhance their schools' development.

Moreover, the EDB has been monitoring the quality of school operations, including that of special schools. Through school visits and daily communication with school personnel, the EDB has been offering advice to schools on various aspects, including schools' administration arrangements, daily operation and human resources. Special schools and their boarding sections, same as ordinary public sector schools, shall comply with the rules and regulations under the Education Ordinance, Education Regulations as well as other related ordinances; the relevant Codes of Aid; and instructions as may be issued by the EDB from time to time and the guidelines from their respective school sponsoring bodies. If schools are found not complying with the requirements, the EDB will request the schools to take follow-up actions and make rectifications.

(iii) Since the current-term Government took office, the EDB has implemented various improvement measures for public sector schools, where aided special

schools also benefit in principle. Examples of these measures are the implementation of the all-graduate teaching force policy from the 2019/20 school year; and enhancement of the ranking arrangement of school management of aided schools starting from the 2020/21 school year, which includes improvement in the demarcation arrangements for headship rankings and improvement in the manpower arrangements of vice-principals.

On the other hand, we have increased the provision of specialist staff for special schools. In addition to principal and teaching staff, various specialist staff are provided with reference to the disabilities or learning difficulties of students in different categories of special schools with a view to strengthening the care for the special educational needs of students. The specialist staff include occupational therapists (OT), physiotherapists (PT), speech therapists (ST), occupational therapist assistants (OTA), registered nurses (RN), educational psychologists (EP), school social workers (SSW) and braillists. Besides, we have further enhanced the staff establishment of the boarding sections of the aided special schools starting from the 2020/21 school year, including the upgrading of ranks of warden and assistant warden, increasing the number of assistant wardens and houseparents-in-charge, improving the Saturday and Sunday manning ratios for the boarding sections as well as providing subsidies for schools to hire personal care workers or purchase related services.

(iv) Multi-disciplinary professional teams are established in special schools, comprising teachers, RN, ST, EP, OT, PT and SSW. They work together to foster the physical, cognitive and psychosocial development of students. Depending on their areas of expertise, the professional staff regularly review the performance of students and provide timely intervention to them when they observe discrepancy between the development and expected performance of the students. On the other hand, if the school personnel observe any injury on the body of a student and have reasons to believe that the student has been maltreated, they should immediately report the incident to the Principal for activating the school-based contingency mechanism. According to the EDB circular on "Handling Suspected Cases of Child Maltreatment and Domestic Violence" and with reference to the "Protecting Children from Maltreatment – Procedural Guide for Multi-disciplinary Co-operation (Revised 2020)" issued by the Social Welfare Department (SWD), the case should be handled with immediacy with a view to protecting the student's safety and best interest. Moreover, according to the School Administration Guide, for serious accidents that happened in schools leading to severe bodily injuries to or requiring immediate hospital treatment for students, schools should activate the crisis management mechanism, inform the parents and the respective Regional Education Offices of the EDB of the accidents immediately and submit a written report giving all the details.

(5) Currently, the types of special schools that provide boarding service subvented by the EDB include schools for children with moderate ID (MoID), schools for children with severe ID, schools for children with physical disability, schools for children with visual impairment and schools for children with hearing impairment. The EDB has been closely monitoring the supply and demand of boarding places in special schools and exploring

feasible ways to increase the supply with reference to the actual demand. Currently, the overall supply of boarding places for different types of special schools is sufficient to meet the demand, except for schools for children with MoID. As at September 2020, there are about 100 children with MoID waiting for the boarding service of special schools.

On the other hand, according to the information from the SWD, the number of persons waitlisted for residential care services for persons with intellectual disabilities is set out below.

Service type	Number of persons waitlisted (as at September 30, 2020)
Hostel for moderately mentally handicapped persons	2 533
Hostel for severely mentally handicapped persons	2 457

(6) and (7) Special schools for children with ID offer a 12-year academic structure of education (including six years of primary, three years of junior secondary and three years of senior secondary education) for their students. Students are generally admitted at the age of 6, and graduate from school upon completion of Secondary Six. Starting from the 2010/11 school year, the EDB has implemented the measure on extension of years of study. Schools for children with ID and other types of special schools could exercise school-based professional judgment and arrange for students (including boarders) with such a need to extend their years of study according to the objective criteria jointly set by the EDB and the sector. Therefore, some students with ID will receive education in special schools till the age of 21. In fact, students at this age should proceed from school education to another stage of life. We encourage parents to discuss with schools the pathways of their children as early as possible, and plan for their long-term well-being.

To help the prospective school leavers and their parents, special schools will arrange seminars and invite parents of alumni to share their experience, so as to alleviate parents' pressure and worries. Special schools generally follow up with the school leavers for two years after they have left school and when they are waiting for post-school services to keep track of their adjustment to daily lives. Special schools will refer them to District Support Centres for Persons with Disabilities or Integrated Family Service Centres subvented by the SWD if necessary, where assistance will be provided for the school leavers and families.

The SWD subvents non-governmental organisations for providing day training and community support services, such as centre-based services, home care services and respite services, for persons with disabilities (including persons with ID) and their families/carers. Support services for families/carers of persons with disabilities include care skills training, mutual support and experience sharing activities, educational courses/seminars/workshops, provision of information on community resources and service referral, emotional support and counselling services for

enhancing caring capabilities and lessening stress. The SWD also operates a 24-hour hotline to provide emergency support and assistance for persons with disabilities and their families/carers. Besides, the "Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Low-income Carers of Persons with Disabilities" under the Community Care Fund provides living allowance to carers concerned.