

LCQ19: Primary One places allocation system

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Han-pan and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (June 2):

Question:

Under the existing Primary One Admission System (POA System), Primary One (P1) places are allocated in two stages. At the "Discretionary Places Admission" (DP) stage, parents may apply to one government or aided primary school for the admission of their children to P1, and then the schools will allocate their places in accordance with the criteria set by the Education Bureau (EDB). Those parents whose applications are unsuccessful and those who have not submitted any application may, at the "Central Allocation" (CA) stage, complete a Choice of Schools Form (Form) and return it to the EDB, and then the EDB will allocate P1 places based on school nets, parents' choices and random numbers. Those parents who do not want their children to attend the schools allocated to them at the CA stage may "door-knock" their preferred schools. It is learnt that quite a number of the more popular schools have set a "1-1-1" screening condition for door-knocking applications, giving priority consideration to those applicants who have applied for admission to those schools at the DP stage and have entered those schools as their first choices in both Parts A and B of the Form (to be proved by the parents' submission to such schools a Parent's copy of the Form (Parent's copy) which has been stamped). Some parents have relayed that in January this year, the CA Centres in certain districts (e.g. Sham Shui Po) made special arrangements in the light of the severe epidemic situation, under which they only placed drop boxes for collecting the Forms, and did not stamp the Parent's copies as they did before. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as some parents are worried that when they door-knock their preferred schools, the schools will not accept the Parent's copies without a stamp, whether the EDB will, before announcing the places allocation results of the CA stage in June this year, (i) issue a circular memorandum to the schools covered by the POA System, requiring such schools to accept the Parent's copies without a stamp in considering P1 door-knocking applications, or (ii) arrange for the Parent's copies without a stamp to be stamped retrospectively; if so, of the details and the timetable; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as some parents have relayed that, due to the epidemic, the EDB issued new Forms by mail to parents who had made mistakes when completing the Forms but did not get back the old Forms, and they are worried that some parents may use two Forms to increase their chance of success in door-knocking, of the measures the EDB has put in place, on the premise of not increasing school administrative work, to ensure that all parents will be given a fair

chance when they door-knock; and

(3) as quite a number of parents have criticised that the existing P1 places allocation system is unfair, and door-knocking preferred schools has exhausted quite a number of parents and students, whether the EDB will review and improve the existing P1 places allocation system; if so, of the details and the timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Primary One Admission (POA) System is divided into two stages, namely, the Discretionary Places Admission (DP) stage and the Central Allocation (CA) stage. This allocation mechanism, which is based primarily on parental choices of schools as well as the demand and supply of school places, centrally manages matters relating to admission to Primary One in all government and aided primary schools in Hong Kong under the principles of openness and fairness. The entire procedure is effective, transparent and orderly. After the release of POA allocation results in early June every year, some parents, due to various reasons such as moving to a new home or seeking admission to a preferred school for their children, may approach other schools directly to apply for admission for their children (a phenomenon commonly known as "door-knocking"). The schools will decide whether to admit these students in light of their school-based circumstances (such as the availability of vacant school places).

Our reply to the Hon Chan Han-pan's question is as follows:

(1) and (2) Parents whose children have joined the POA System but have not secured a place at the DP stage have to complete the Choice of Schools Form (the Form) in order to join the CA. Normally, parents who apply for CA for their children are required to make their choice of schools at a designated CA Centre on the submission dates of the Form at the CA stage. After confirming that the Form is duly completed, staff of the CA Centre will keep the Education Bureau's (EDB) copy of the Form and give the stamped parent's copy to the parents for retention.

In light of the development of the COVID-19 epidemic situation, some CA Centres have been arranged to use drop boxes for collecting the Forms this year for compliance with epidemic control and social distancing measures. Under this special arrangement, parents only needed to put the EDB's copy of the Form and the Letter of Authorisation – Making School Choices (if applicable) into the drop box at the CA centre and keep the parent's copy in order to complete the procedure. In this regard, we have put up notices at the related CA Centres to clearly inform parents of the special arrangement.

The Form is a document used by the EDB during the CA stage and once the CA is completed, the Form will not have any other uses. This is not a document specified by the EDB that parents have to bring along for "door-knocking". In fact, it is entirely an arrangement made by individual schools on their own whereby parents, when applying directly to their preferred

school for admission, are required to meet certain requirements in relation to their choices of school in the POA System i.e. entering the concerned school as their first choices in the DP as well as both Part A and Part B of the Form for the CA, and that parents are required to present the Form during the application. Owing to the epidemic situation, special arrangement has been made for the submission of the Form this year, leading to the situation that some of the parent's copies may not have been stamped. In view of this, we have reminded the school sector not to request parents to provide the stamped parent's copies for reference during "door-knocking". For parents who have difficulties in the related matters, they may contact the School Places Allocation Section of the EDB (Tel no.: 2832 7700) for assistance.

(3) The current POA mechanism, which was introduced according to the recommendation of the Education Commission after extensive public consultation, has been in place for Primary One admission since the 2002/03 school year. On the whole, the current mechanism has strived to strike a right balance between the expectations of various stakeholders and is generally accepted by the public. For the time being, the EDB has no plan to conduct a comprehensive review on the POA mechanism. We will continue to closely monitor the implementation of the POA System and welcome any feasible and specific recommendations to improve the operation arrangement as needed.