

LCQ20: Student guidance personnel

Following is a question by the Hon Mrs Regina Ip and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (July 15):

Question:

Some student guidance personnel have relayed that while they join hands with school-based social workers and Student Guidance Teachers (SGTs) to provide Comprehensive Student Guidance Service, their posts are not on the approved establishment of teaching staff members of their schools. As a result, their salaries are on the low side with a lack of promotion prospect. On the other hand, the Education Bureau (EDB) wrote to a relevant organisation on June 28 last year, indicating that the EDB was collecting data and views by way of questionnaire survey and school visits, etc. in order to review the implementation of the relevant policies, including the mode of cooperation among student guidance personnel/school-based social workers and SGTs. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the details of the aforesaid review exercise, (e.g. the content of the questionnaire and the names of the schools visited), the work schedule and the latest progress; whether the EDB will submit the review results to the Panel on Education of this Council;

(2) whether it will consider creating permanent posts of student guidance personnel in primary and secondary schools; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will formulate professional development strategies for student guidance personnel, e.g. providing them with in-service education subsidies and progression pathways; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Education Bureau (EDB) has all along been encouraging schools to adopt a whole school approach for guidance and discipline in supporting and catering for students in need. Guidance work is no longer only the responsibility of social workers or guidance personnel. Teachers will work in collaboration with guidance personnel, social workers or other professionals (e.g. school-based educational psychologists) to provide students with comprehensive and extensive guidance service. In recent years, additional resources have been allocated to schools, including the implementation of the policy of "one school social worker for each school" in public sector primary schools and enhanced school-based educational psychology service in primary

and secondary schools, and professional training and support have been provided to teachers on an on-going basis to promote the healthy development of students. Currently, every school has already set up a guidance team, which comprises several teachers led by a senior teacher, responsible for co-ordinating the guidance work of the whole school. The school social worker and student guidance personnel (SGP) also serve as ex-officio members of the team. This multi-disciplinary whole school approach facilitates the establishment of a robust student guidance system for the provision of sustainable services and minimises the impact arising from the turnover of individual personnel.

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Mrs Regina Ip is as follows:

(1) Since the implementation of the policy of "one school social worker for each school" in primary schools in the 2018/19 school year, the EDB has been continuously reviewing its implementation through different methods, including questionnaire surveys and school visits. In the 2019/20 school year, a questionnaire survey for public sector primary schools was conducted to gather information concerning school social workers and SGP employed by public sector primary schools as well as how the policy of "one school social worker for each school" was implemented. Visits to some 30 schools were made to further understand the implementation of the Comprehensive Student Guidance Service and their views on the policy of "one school social worker for each school". Information shows that over 80% of public sector primary schools have employed at least one school-based registered graduate social worker. The new funding mode is in general well received by schools. Moreover, schools are found to be capable of effectively using the supervision and professional support provided by relevant organisations, which is considered helpful in enhancing the quality of student guidance service. In the 2020/21 school year, we plan to continue to collect such relevant information, including utilisation of guidance resources in schools, collaboration between school social workers/student guidance teachers/SGP and teachers, as well as the professional support on the overall school guidance service by social work supervisors, through school visits and questionnaire surveys. We will continue to communicate with the school sector to gauge its views and suggestions, so as to review and strengthen school social work and guidance services.

(2) SGP posts are not provided in the present approved staff establishment of schools. However, schools may exercise discretion in deploying the relevant grants provided by the EDB and consider whether to engage SGP and the number of such professionals to be engaged having regard to their school-based needs for the provision or strengthening of school-based guidance service. There is no uniform requirement for SGP engaged by schools and they may include registered teachers with qualifications and experience in guidance, registered social workers or professionals in guidance with degrees and relevant experience in psychology and counselling. SGP are normally employed by schools on contract terms or engaged through hiring service by service providers. With the implementation of the policy of "one school social worker for each school" in primary schools, the resources allocated to schools under the new funding mode have been increased. After employing one school-based

registered graduate social worker, most of the schools still have sufficient resources to hire other SGP. As the actual circumstances and needs of schools vary, the EDB considers it necessary to allow flexibility for schools to deploy resources to provide various kinds of enhanced support to students according to their needs. Therefore, it is not advisable to change the existing mechanism.

(3) Every year, the EDB organises professional development programmes on various topics, including mental health, prevention of child abuse, anti-school bullying and supporting students on their relationship problems, etc., for related staff members of schools with a view to enhancing their counselling competencies in early identification and intervention for cases in need. Besides, to support school operation and development, we have all along been providing schools with recurrent grants for their flexible deployment in supporting staff members (including SGP) to participate in professional development programmes according to their school-based needs. In addition, we encourage SGP who do not possess the required qualification for being appointed to the post of Primary School Assistant Social Work Officer to consider pursuing in-service training as necessary, so that they can obtain the qualification of registered graduate social workers and continue to provide social work/guidance service in schools.