

LCQ21: Facilitating students' understanding of the Motherland

Following is a question by Professor the Hon Lau Chi-pang and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (February 16):

Question:

It is learnt that various sectors of society generally consider that Hong Kong lacks comprehensive national education, resulting in students' weak affection for the country and their difficulties in building up a sense of national identity, which is not conducive to the stable development of Hong Kong society. In addition, it is unacceptable that most senior secondary (SS) students do not have the opportunity to take the subject of Chinese History and quite a number of them do not even know where their native places are. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Government will require kindergartens, primary schools and secondary schools to include a column of "native place" on the Student Information Form of their students, so as to help students acquire an understanding of their homeland from an early age, thereby cultivating in them a caring attitude towards the country; if so, of the implementation date; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as the optimising measures of the four SS core subjects have been implemented in this school year, whether the Government will take advantage of the opportunity afforded by the adjustment of the lesson time of the SS core subjects to make Chinese History a compulsory SS subject, so as to provide all SS students with a further opportunity to learn Chinese history; and

(3) whether the Government will consider providing, in the form of continuing professional development activities, refresher courses on Chinese history and culture for all kindergarten, primary and secondary school teachers, so as to improve their level of competence in telling China's stories in class?

Reply:

President,

The Education Bureau (EDB) has been strengthening its support to schools on all fronts to help students learn about the Chinese culture and history, the developments of our country, national security, the Constitution and the Basic Law, as well as cultivate in them a sense of cultural and national identity.

Our reply to Professor the Hon Lau Chi-pang's questions is as follows:

(1) It is an important goal of primary and secondary school education in Hong Kong and the responsibility of schools to cultivate in students a sense of nationhood and national identity. Cultivating in students a sense of national identity takes more than learning national history in schools or focusing on whether the concept of native places should be promoted to encourage the tracing of roots and ancestors. The key emphasis of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR)'s work on education should be on enabling students to have a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the constitutional order of the HKSAR as well as the historical and cultural connection between Hong Kong and the nation, and of the fact that people of both places are of the same lineage sharing the same root and mind, so as to help strengthen citizens' national awareness and sense of belonging to and patriotic feelings for the nation.

At present, the curricula of all stages at the kindergarten, primary and secondary levels have already covered key learning elements such as national history, Chinese culture and national identity. The EDB has been adopting a "multi-pronged and co-ordinated" approach to cultivate affection for our nation through ongoing renewal of curriculum guides, organising diversified student activities, providing training courses for teachers, as well as developing learning and teaching resources to enable teachers and students to have a holistic understanding of the history of our country, national conditions and Chinese culture, with a view to cultivating their affection for our nation.

The EDB requires schools to help students develop a correct understanding of Chinese history and appreciate Chinese culture and traditional values, including filial piety and clansmanship, from an early age through learning both inside and outside the classroom. First-hand experience and observation can directly help cultivate students' affection and care for our country and their native places. The EDB also organises Mainland exchange programmes for students or subsidises those organised by schools with diversified themes to dovetail with the latest developments of the school curriculum and the country. At present, these programmes cover 22 provinces, four autonomous regions and four municipalities in the Mainland. Many of the destinations are students' native places, and this can help them learn about their native places, experience the local cultures and customs, and see for themselves the developments in different provinces and municipalities. The EDB also provides funding at the same time to encourage local schools to form sister schools with their counterparts in the Mainland with a view to further promoting exchange and understanding between teachers and students of the two places. Schools operated by sponsoring bodies of different backgrounds, including those with clansman background, have also organised tours for students to trace their roots to help students learn about the cultural connection and the changes in their clans and native places over the years, and enable teachers and students of both places to build friendship. In addition, the EDB continues to provide schools with a wider variety of learning and teaching resources, such as online games and audio picture books, and the newly established web-based resource platform National Education One-stop Portal, which covers topics such as Chinese

history and culture and museum learning.

Regarding the suggestion of adding the item on "native place" back to student information records, parents and stakeholders hold different views and no consensus has been reached. At present, some schools have already made such school-based arrangement. While schools and stakeholders generally agree with the "multi-pronged and co-ordinated" approach currently adopted in the promotion of national education, the Government will continue to keep in view the suggestions from various sectors of society for necessary follow-up action.

Capitalising on the present foundation, the EDB will continue to explore ways to further strengthen the patriotic feeling of students and help young people treasure their historical legacy and not to forget their roots. This is a common aspiration of the whole society but the work involved is not limited to school education. It also requires the consensus of all sectors, the creation of a conducive atmosphere and the concerted minds and efforts of different stakeholders. In fact, parents and elders in the families can talk more about the history and developments of their native places with their children and the younger generations, and take them to their native places to visit their clansmen or for sight-seeing during holidays. This can help young people understand that Hong Kong is an inseparable part of our country and there is an indivisible and interactive relationship between us since the ancient times, and that we have an affective connection because of our same lineage, root and mind. All these will help the younger generations develop an affection for their native places and cultivate in them a sense of identity towards the country and the Chinese race.

(2) Since the 2018/19 school year, the EDB has made Chinese History an independent compulsory subject at the junior secondary level and has revised the curriculum content to place equal emphasis on ancient and contemporary periods, so as to help students learn Chinese history in a holistic and systematic manner, cultivate correct historical perspectives among the new generations, facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the history of our country and nurture in them a sense of national identity. At the senior secondary level, Chinese History has always been an elective subject in the senior secondary curriculum, and all students can choose the subject according to their interests and abilities to advance their learning in Chinese history. Besides taking Chinese History, senior secondary students can also learn about the history, culture and the overall development of our country as well as its close relationship with Hong Kong through the senior secondary compulsory subjects such as Chinese Language and Citizenship and Social Development/Liberal Studies. Regarding the optimisation of the four senior secondary core subjects, the spirit of the optimising measures is to release lesson time, reduce examination pressure and enhance the flexibility of the senior secondary curriculum. Schools can, with due regard to their contexts and student needs, use the time released flexibly to provide more diversified learning experiences to cater for students' different interests, abilities and aspirations, and nurture their whole-person development and diverse talents. Without consolidating a comprehensive picture of the implementation of the optimising measures, adding another compulsory subject

will not only affect the overall structure of the senior secondary curriculum, but also limit the choice of subjects (e.g. technology-related subjects) for students, impose more restrictions on subject selection or even increase the burden on students. Students and parents may not find it acceptable. Therefore, the suggestion of making Chinese History a compulsory subject at the senior secondary level will not be considered at the moment. The EDB will review the curriculum structure from time to time, maintain communication with the school sector, and provide more opportunities for senior secondary students to learn about the history and culture of the nation further as far as practicable.

(3) The EDB has strengthened the professional training of teachers. Starting from the 2020/21 school year, contents concerning the Constitution, the Basic Law and national security education as well as a four-day Mainland study tour have been included in the core training for newly joined teachers and teachers aspiring for promotion. The school visits, thematic seminars and visits to enterprises and cultural sites arranged in the Mainland study tours will provide first-hand experience for teachers to increase their understanding of our country's history, culture and latest developments, widen their horizons and enable them to reflect on the relations between Hong Kong and the Mainland, its relation to the world, as well as the opportunities brought to Hong Kong by the development of our country and how Hong Kong can make contribution. The programmes were launched in November 2020. As at January 2022, 22 training programmes on the Constitution, the Basic Law and national security education were held and over 5 500 teachers attended. As for the Mainland tours, they have to be postponed due to the COVID-19 epidemic.

Besides, from July to August 2021, we organised four talks of different themes for the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China in collaboration with an expert organisation. During these talks, experts and academics analysed the historical background and development of the founding of the People's Republic of China from multiple perspectives to help deepen participating teachers' understanding of the Chinese history. Further, to enhance teachers' understanding of the Chinese civilisation and the developments and achievements of our country, the EDB organised two visits to the Chinese People's Liberation Army Hong Kong Garrison Exhibition Centre in December 2021. A total of about 200 school heads and deputy heads of primary and secondary schools joined the activities. These visits facilitated the planning for the implementation of national education in schools more effectively, enabled students to have a correct understanding of our country, and strengthened their sense of national identity.

In addition, the EDB has provided continuous professional training for in-service teachers of kindergartens, teachers of General Studies at the primary level and Chinese History at the secondary level to enhance their historical and cultural literacies and professional capacity. At present, the EDB engages experts and academics from post-secondary institutions and different academic institutions to organise a wide range of teacher professional development programmes, such as the lecture series entitled "Commenting on the Past and Present: New Perspectives on Chinese Historical

Figures" (æ^æ-!â0xä»Ši¼šä,âæ<æ·â0²äººç%œ-ºè|-èš') and "General Studies: Chinese History and Culture" (â,è~çš'i¼šä,âæ<æ·â0²è^†ä,è0-æ-†â(-), for teachers of relevant subjects to enrich their understanding of Chinese history and culture. Frontline teachers are also invited to share their strategies and good practices in learning and teaching by using cultural relics, stories of historical figures and play learning to enhance the teaching of Chinese history and culture in class. In kindergartens, the EDB will enhance teachers' skills in designing integrated learning activities and storytelling so that they can incorporate learning elements of Chinese history and culture into the integrated learning activities and raise students' interest in learning Chinese history and culture. The EDB will also develop diversified learning and teaching resources, such as e-learning resources for primary and secondary schools, exemplars of learning and teaching, and activities designed for subject-related field trips, to assist teachers in adopting diversified modes of teaching to facilitate students' learning of Chinese history and culture, develop their affection for our country and cultivate in them a sense of national identity.