

LCQ22: Student Guidance Officers in government primary schools

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

Question:

It is learnt that the posts of Student Guidance Officers (SGO) in government primary schools, which belong to a non-graduate grade, are responsible for providing school-based student guidance service. Some SGOs have relayed to me that since the early 1990s, they have been trying to negotiate with the government departments concerned (including the then Education Department and the current Education Bureau (EDB)) over the issue of upgrading the SGO posts to the degree level. However, when the Government announced in 2019 the all-graduate teaching force policy for public sector schools across the territory, it did not upgrade the SGO posts to the degree level at the same time. They have pointed out that the EDB has undertaken to further study the issue of upgrading the SGO posts to the degree level (including permitting the staff affected to take part in the reform exercise) and to create Inspector grade posts to absorb those SGOs who are willing to change posts, but no progress has been heard of so far. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) why the Government did not upgrade the SGO posts to the degree level at the same time in 2019;

(2) of the progress of its work to create Inspector grade posts to absorb those SGOs who are willing to change posts; whether the measure of zero growth in the civil service establishment in this financial year as announced earlier by the Government has affected such work; if so, of the EDB's proposal to resolve the problem; and

(3) whether it will consider making use of the vacancies of graduate teacher posts in government schools to absorb those SGOs who are willing to change posts; if so, of the implementation details and timetable; if not, how the EDB will resolve the problem of different pay for the same work between SGOs and personnel of other guidance grades in schools (such as Student Guidance Teachers)?

Reply:

President,

Student Guidance Officer (SGO) is a non-graduate grade under the establishment of the Education Bureau (EDB). In the 1980s and early 1990s, SGOs offered on-site services to different primary schools for providing individual or group counselling services for students in need. Thereafter,

the Government had continued to enhance the student guidance service and created Student Guidance Teacher (SGT) posts starting from 1992 to provide school-based student guidance service in aided primary schools, with a view to strengthening the preventive guidance work and the participation of all school staff. Since then, the demand of schools for the services provided by SGOs has decreased and the Government has ceased recruiting new SGOs since 2000. Starting from the 2002/03 school year, the Government has further increased the resources for schools to hire SGTs or social work services according to their needs in order to implement the Comprehensive Student Guidance Service. The Government has also, starting from the 2018/19 school year, provided additional resources for public sector primary schools to implement the policy of "one school social worker for each school" according to school-based circumstances. With changes in the relevant policy, the duties and roles of SGOs have been adjusted with time. Currently, their main duties are to provide guidance and discipline services in the form of school-based support, ranging from one to five days per week for dozens of schools in need, and also assist the EDB handle and follow up students' non-attendance cases as well as enforce the Education Ordinance and administrative procedures.

Our reply to the questions raised by the Hon Luk Chung-hung is as follows:

(1) The SGO grade, which is under the EDB's establishment, is not under the staff establishment of any schools. The Chief Executive announced in the 2018 Policy Address that the all-graduate teaching force policy would be implemented in public sector primary and secondary schools in the 2019/20 school year. Schools might, taking into account their school-based circumstances, achieve full implementation by the 2020/21 school year. The arrangements for implementing the all-graduate teaching force policy have been made primarily according to the teacher establishment and operational needs of public sector schools. As SGOs have all along been outside the school establishment and their work arrangement and nature are different from that of SGTs, the SGO grade is therefore not covered by the all-graduate teaching force policy.

(2) and (3) The EDB has all along attached importance to the professional development and career prospects of staff of different grades, expecting them to unleash their potential in different posts and exploring new paths for staff in need. As mentioned above, the Government has ceased recruiting new SGOs since 2000. For years, most of the SGOs have retired, transferred to other grades or left the service. With the encouragement of the EDB, some of the SGOs have successfully transferred to the graduate posts in the EDB. At present, there are less than 40 serving SGOs in the EDB.

Since SGOs do not perform teaching duties in the EDB, it is inappropriate to deploy them to government schools directly for taking up teaching duties. Nevertheless, if there are vacancies in government schools, the EDB will recruit teaching staff to fill the vacancies in accordance with the existing procedures. Serving SGOs may apply for these teaching posts if they are interested and have obtained the relevant qualifications. In addition, recruitment exercises are conducted every year according to the

vacancy situation of various grades (including Inspector) in the EDB. All serving EDB staff, including SGOs, are welcome to apply for these posts. For SGOs who do not meet the entry requirements of the vacant graduate posts, they are encouraged to obtain the relevant qualifications through continuing education. The EDB will continue to communicate with SGO grade members to explain the relevant policies and offer advice according to their needs.