

LCQ22: Teachers' understanding of national affairs and upholding of Basic Law

Following is a question by the Hon Tony Tse and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (September 1):

Question:

Some members of the community have pointed out that as some teachers have a weak sense of national identity, and they do not understand much about and hold prejudices against national affairs, they fail to assist students in developing a sense of belonging to the country, an affection for the Chinese people and a sense of national identity. Regarding teachers' understanding of national affairs and upholding of the Basic Law, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that starting from the last school year, the Education Bureau (EDB) has set forth specific requirements for training of newly-joined teachers, serving teachers and teachers aspiring for promotion, and the contents of the core training for them cover the Constitution, the Basic Law and national security education, whether the EDB has evaluated the effectiveness of such training and studied which aspects of the training contents need to be enhanced;

(2) given that starting from the last school year, the core training for newly-joined teachers and teachers aspiring for promotion includes study tours of about four days' duration to the Mainland, of the details of the itineraries (including the education units to be visited);

(3) of the plans in place to enhance kindergarten teachers' understanding of national affairs; and

(4) as the Government indicated in November last year that it was conducting a study on whether the arrangement for taking an oath or making a declaration to uphold the Basic Law and bear allegiance to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region was applicable to teachers in aided schools, of the progress of the study and the implementation timetable (if applicable)?

Reply:

President,

The Education Bureau (EDB) has all along adopted diversified modes including talks and mainland study tours to enrich teachers' knowledge of the national development and education policies in the Mainland. For example, the Professional Study Tours for Teachers and the Shenzhen-Hong Kong Principals'

Forum are held annually. Starting from the 2020/21 school year, the EDB provides newly-joined teachers and all serving teachers with more systematic training programmes, and enhances the training requirements for promotion. To deepen principals' and teachers' understanding of "one country, two systems", the legal system in Hong Kong and national security, and to strengthen their grasp of the national development, the core training includes contents about the Constitution, the Basic Law and national security education. Experienced legal experts and academics are invited as speakers at these training programmes.

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Tony Tse is as follows:

(1) Starting from the 2020/21 school year, under the framework of continuing professional development of teachers, the EDB organises training programmes on the Constitution, the Basic Law and national security education for newly-joined teachers, serving teachers and teachers aspiring for promotion. Apart from that, we have collaborated with expert organisations to organise more in-depth thematic programmes. For example, in this school year, we organised two rounds of 3-day training programme of "Respecting the Law, Reinforcing the Rule of Law". The programme enabled teachers to learn more about the constitutional status of Hong Kong and the rule of law systemically. Experienced legal experts were also invited as speakers at the thematic talks on the rule of law and the National Security Law. We have also organised a series of talks on the 100th anniversary of founding of the Communist Party of China in collaboration with an expert organisation. Experts and academics analysed and lectured on the historical background of the founding of New China from different perspectives to enhance teachers' understanding of our national history. All the above-mentioned training programmes were delivered in face-to-face mode with group discussion arranged in some sessions so that participants could interact with the speakers in person. Under the COVID-19 epidemic, in order to keep sufficient social distancing at the training programmes, the training quota is subject to limitations. These programmes were welcome by teachers and the enrolment was very encouraging. There were 24 sessions organised in the school year attended by about 4 700 teachers, principals and school managers.

In tandem, the EDB organises professional development activities (such as seminars, workshops, online self-learning programmes and experience sharing sessions) for teachers of different subjects, covering areas such as Chinese history, Chinese culture and national development. as necessary under the relevant curricula. Experts and academics are invited to speak on related topics to enhance subject teachers' knowledge of the Constitution and the Basic Law education, national security education, national development and Mainland-Hong Kong relations.

The EDB adopts a diversified approach in the evaluation of the training programmes. For instance, the EDB staff will sit in the programmes to assess the suitability of training content and observe participants' immediate feedback; all participants will be invited to fill out questionnaires to provide feedback; and meetings are held with the service providers to review the content of the programmes and share participants' feedback for evaluation

of the training. Since the commencement of the training programmes in November 2020, enthusiastic response and positive comments on the programmes from the school sector were received. They commented that the programmes helped deepen their understanding of the Constitution, the Basic Law, "one country, two systems" and the national development and clarify some misunderstanding. Also, the programmes could help empower them to serve as role models for students, to guide and enlighten students to respect and obey the law in lessons and daily life, and reinforce the rule of law.

The EDB will continue to enhance the content and delivery mode of the training programmes with a view to comprehensively and appropriately catering the needs of teachers and principals, and will for instance, include more elements of experience sharing in respect of the development of national security education in schools.

(2) Starting from the 2020/21 school year, we have included mainland study tours, generally with a stay for about four days, as part of the core training for newly-joined teachers and teachers aspiring for promotion. We have already liaised with relevant Mainland authorities in planning the programmes for these tours in the 2020/21 school year, such as school visits, thematic seminars as well as visits to enterprises and cultural facilities. Through these activities, we hope to enhance teachers' understanding of the latest national development and widen their horizons through direct personal observations and experiences about 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. Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, however, the mainland study tours have been postponed to the 2021/22 school year.

(3) For kindergartens, the EDB invites serving kindergarten principals and teachers every year to participate in professional study tours to the Mainland cities like Wuhan, Nanjing and Beijing. The aim is to enhance their professional knowledge, broaden their horizons and enable them to better understand the latest developments in the Mainland through direct personal observations and experiences.

In addition, the EDB arranges professional development programmes for kindergarten teachers on an ongoing manner to support them in helping children develop an initial understanding of our country and Chinese culture in their early childhood, and nurture their sense of national identity. In July this year, a book on the Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region was distributed to all kindergartens offering local curriculum to help teachers correctly understand and implement national security education. In the 2021/22 school year, the EDB will strengthen kindergarten teachers' understanding of national symbols, including the national flag and the national anthem, by providing relevant training for teachers on the points to note, procedures and etiquette for attending the national flag raising ceremony and when playing and singing the national anthem.

(4) The Government is now looking into matters relating to the arrangement

for oath-taking and the details will be announced in due course.