

LCQ3: Study tour activities to the Mainland

Following is a question by the Hon Yiu Si-wing and a reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (January 27):

Question:

The Chief Executive pointed out in the 2020 Policy Address that enhancing students' understanding of the history of the nation, Chinese culture and national developments, as well as deepening education on the nation's Constitution and the Basic Law, are the basic work for fostering students' sense of the nation and awareness of national security. Quite a number of schools have organised study tour activities to the Mainland with the goals of deepening students' understanding of the nation and strengthening their sense of national identity. However, there are views that the itineraries concerned often merely involve gaining a shallow understanding from a fleeting glance, and may not necessarily meet the goals of organising study tour activities. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Education Bureau (EDB) has formulated guidelines, for study tour activities to the Mainland, setting out the learning themes about the history, culture and developments of the nation that should be included in the study tour activities, as well as the mechanism for evaluating the effectiveness of the activities;

(2) given that quite a number of schools have requested travel agents to submit suggested itineraries, but the relevant suggestions may not necessarily meet the goal of organising study tour activities, whether the EDB will formulate guidelines and a scoring mechanism to assist schools in discussing itineraries with travel agents and selecting suitable travel agents; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) in order to achieve the aforesaid education objective mentioned in the Policy Address, whether the Government will allocate additional resources to schools, so that they can organise more study tour activities to the Mainland; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Education Bureau (EDB) attaches importance to the promotion of national education. Schools are facilitated to adopt a "multi-pronged and co-ordinated" approach to deepen students' understanding of our country's developments in various aspects, strengthen education on the Constitution, the Basic Law and national security, as well as enhance students' sense of

national identity through learning within and beyond the classroom, including curricula of various subjects and life-wide learning activities (including Mainland exchange activities and formation of sister schools with Mainland schools). Unlike the general escorted tours, Mainland exchange activities are not intended for travelling and sightseeing. Instead, they are one type of life-wide learning activities, the content of which should dovetail with school curriculum and the latest developments of our country so that students can learn outside the classroom and deepen what they have learnt in the classroom. These activities could cover areas such as culture, history, economy, geography, physical education, music, art and education. Furthermore, in light of the development strategies of our country (such as the Belt and Road Initiative and development in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area) and the ongoing renewal of school curriculum, including education on the Constitution, the Basic Law and national security, these exchange activities should offer opportunities for students to gain first-hand experience of the developments of our country in various aspects, enable them to have a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between our country and Hong Kong and foster their sense of national identity.

All along, schools have been using different ways to arrange students to join Mainland exchange activities according to their school-based needs. These include using relevant subsidies to organise Mainland exchange activities or participating in the exchange activities commissioned by the EDB, such as the Mainland Exchange Programme for Junior Secondary and Upper Primary Students and the Mainland Exchange Programme for Secondary School Students, on a voluntary basis. In addition, through exchanges with sister schools, schools can enable teachers and students to have a better understanding of the education in the Mainland, facilitate cultural exchange and broaden student' horizons.

The reply to the question raised by the Hon Yiu Si-wing is as follows:

(1) and (2) Mainland exchange activities organised by secondary and primary schools are one kind of study tours outside Hong Kong. The main purpose of the EDB in including the "Guidelines on Study Tours Outside Hong Kong" (Guidelines) as an appendix to the "Guidelines on Outdoor Activities" is to remind schools to ensure the safety of participants joining the study tours. The Guidelines cover points to note such as manpower arrangement, appointment of escorts, scheduling of activities and safety matters for schools' reference in organising such activities. It is also clearly stated that if agents are commissioned to arrange the itineraries, the agents concerned must be licensed ones and the accompanying staff must be holders of a valid Tour Escort Pass issued by the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong. The Guidelines also remind schools to make reference to the curriculum guides on various Key Learning Areas (KLAs) and design suitable study tour programmes, including learning objectives and relevant activities, according to their school-based curriculum and the needs of their students.

The EDB attaches great importance to the quality of Mainland exchange activities for students. In this regard, the EDB has developed the "Points to Note for Schools in Planning Mainland Activities for Their Students". When planning and organising Mainland exchange activities, schools are required to

make reference to relevant curriculum guides on KLAs and their students' needs to set clear learning targets and objectives, as well as provide appropriate learning materials and learning experiences to enable students to apply different learning strategies and understand our country from different perspectives. The EDB also recommends that accompanying teachers of the schools (including the principals) should serve as learning facilitators to help students construct knowledge and enhance learning effectiveness. Before the study tour, teachers should give guidance to students on designing the content for project learning or other learning activities, collecting information and formulating learning objectives. During the study tour, they should guide students to explore and understand the learning objectives, facilitate them to reflect, explore and discuss from multiple perspectives, and nurture their collaboration skills, communication skills and study skills, etc. After the study tour, extended learning activities should be arranged for sharing students' learning experiences and reviewing the effectiveness of student learning. Usually, schools would also collect the opinions of the participating students and/or parents to evaluate the effectiveness.

There are different modes for schools to organise study tours outside Hong Kong, such as commissioning travel agents to do the job, collaborating with other organisations or arranging the tours by the schools themselves. If agents are commissioned to organise study tours, the schools concerned should follow related tendering and procurement procedures in the appointment of agents and conform to the related administrative and financial requirements. For example, for schools with Incorporated Management Committee (IMC), they should obtain prior approval from their IMC when engaging in commercial activities and follow the procurement procedures applied to aided schools. Generally speaking, schools should determine the learning objectives of the exchanges, learning themes and itinerary requirements (such as spots to be visited and learning activities) first before proceeding with the quotation or tendering procedures in choosing the appropriate travel agents to organise study tours that suit the learning objectives.

(3) The Government currently deploys considerable resources to support various Mainland exchange activities. Since the 2017/18 school year, over 100 000 quotas have been provided annually through the Mainland exchange programmes commissioned by the EDB, such as the Mainland Exchange Programme for Junior Secondary and Upper Primary Students and the Mainland Exchange Programme for Secondary School Students, which are sufficient for students to join at least one Mainland exchange activity each in the primary and secondary stages. Students participating in these programmes will receive a subsidy amounting to 70 per cent of the tour fee. For every 10 students nominated for the programmes, schools can apply for full subsidy for one student so that students with financial needs will be subsidised. If schools need to apply for full subsidy for more students, they should give brief explanation in the application forms and the EDB will follow up according to the merits of individual cases.

Besides, the Government also provides sufficient resources for schools to organise Mainland exchange activities on their own. For example, since the

2019/20 school year, the Government has allocated about \$0.9 billion annually to provide public sector schools and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools with a recurrent Life-wide Learning Grant (in the 2020/21 school year, for schools operating 24 classes as an example, the amount for each primary school and secondary school is approximately \$760,000 and \$1,170,000 respectively). Further examples include the recurrent grant for sister schools in Hong Kong (in the 2020/21 school year, the amount for each school is approximately \$156,000), the Junior Secondary and Upper Primary School Students Exchange Programme Subsidy Scheme: "Understanding Our Motherland", as well as the Senior Secondary School Students Exchange Programme Subvention Scheme for organising diversified Mainland exchange activities. In addition, schools can make use of the Expanded Operating Expenses Block Grant to subsidise students to participate in exchange learning activities. The Quality Education Fund (QEF) has also included "Life-wide Learning" as one of the priority themes. Schools may apply for additional resources under the QEF to arrange diversified learning activities, including cross-boundary learning activities and exchange activities, to complement various curriculum areas, which will enrich students' learning experiences, broaden their horizons and enhance their interest and motivation in learning, thereby facilitating their whole-person development. As schools have already obtained sufficient resources, there is no need to allocate more resources at this stage.

Thank you, President.