

LCQ4: Manpower and remuneration of middle and senior-level staff in primary schools

Following is a question by the Hon Chu Kwok-keung and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (February 16):

Question:

In March 2019, the Task Force on Professional Development of Teachers put forward to the Government 18 recommendations to tie in with the establishment and promotion of a Professional Ladder for Teachers, among which the recommendation on "rationalising the salaries of school heads and deputy heads and improving the manpower at the middle management level in public sector primary schools" (the recommendation) has not yet been implemented. Some primary school teachers have relayed that since the implementation of an all-graduate teaching force, the number of middle-level posts in primary schools has not increased correspondingly, resulting in a shortage of administrative and management staff. Many teachers even need to wear multiple hats, which affects the quality of teaching. On the other hand, the current salary structure for senior and middle ranks in primary schools is unreasonable. For example, (i) the starting pay point for deputy heads of primary schools whose workload is heavy is Master Pay Scale (MPS) Point 34, which is merely above MPS Points 30 to 33 for Primary School Masters/Mistresses; (ii) some of the pay points for Headmasters/Headmistresses I and Headmasters/Headmistresses II (HMIIIs) of primary schools overlap, and the starting pay point for HMIIIs of primary schools is MPS Point 35, which is only at roughly the same level as the starting pay point (i.e. Point 34) for Senior Graduate Masters/Mistresses of secondary schools; and (iii) heads of primary schools operating 11 or fewer classes are merely at the rank of Senior Primary School Master/Mistress. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that since the cancellation of the relevant meeting of the Finance Committee (FC) in the last term of this Council, the Education Bureau (EDB) has not re-submitted to the FC the funding application relating to the recommendation, whether the EDB will submit the relevant funding application to the FC of the current term; and

(2) for primary schools currently operating a relatively small number of classes, whether the EDB will consider upgrading the rank of their heads to HMII, so as to retain talents?

Reply

President,

To enhance the quality of education, the current-term Government has implemented a series of policy measures covering the entire education system in the past four years, allocating over \$13.5 billion recurrent expenditure. Besides, the Government has set up eight task forces to conduct in-depth studies on quality education. Among them, the Task Force on Professional Development of Teachers (the Task Force) submitted a report in March 2019 with recommendations such as establishing a professional ladder for teachers, implementing the all-graduate teaching force policy and enhancing the ranking arrangement of school management. On enhancement measures involving primary schools, we have implemented the all-graduate teaching force policy since the 2019/20 school year, and encouraged schools to enrich the professional responsibilities of graduate teachers so that they are given exposure to more diversified professional duties, and responsibilities to support their professional growth and can take on more proactive roles in their participation in and support for school development. In addition, starting from the 2020/21 school year, primary schools operating 18 or more approved classes may upgrade one Primary School Master/Mistress (PSM) post to the Senior Primary School Master/Mistress (SPSM) to serve as deputy head and share the workload of deputy heads. The professional ladder for teachers has also been established since the 2020/21 school year to provide structured training for newly-joined and in-service teachers, and the training requirements for teachers aspiring for promotion have been enhanced to enhance their professionalism and competencies.

Our reply to Hon Chu Kwok-keung's question is as follows:

(1) The two recommendations on the increase in the manpower at the middle management level and rationalisation of the salaries for school heads and deputy heads in public sector primary schools are put forth by the Task Force after long discussion, taking into account views from different stakeholders and consultation with the sector. The Task Force considered that with the implementation of numerous education initiatives implemented in primary schools in the past years (such as values education, catering for learner diversity, learning support to non-Chinese speaking students, integrated education, whole school approach to guidance), schools need more middle leaders. Besides, the implementation of whole-day primary schooling since 1993, and the implementation of school development and accountability framework since 2003/04 school year have increased both the loading and complexity of the work of school heads and deputy heads. However, the salary of school heads has all along been set based on the arrangements for half-day primary schooling. The Task Force considered the overlapping of the pay scales for Headmaster/Headmistress I (HM I) and Headmaster/Headmistress II (HM II) as well as overlapping salary scales for SPSM and HM II indeed could not adequately reflect the importance and complexity of their responsibilities in the present day circumstances.

In tandem, taking into account the differences between primary and secondary schools in terms of the breadth and depth of the respective curricula, requirements of participation in public examinations, focuses of student development, approaches to counselling in life planning, the Task

Force considered it not appropriate to simply make direct comparison of the salaries of school heads and middle leaders in primary schools and those in secondary schools. Nonetheless, the Task Force acknowledged that the gaps could be narrowed to better attract talents to join the primary sector for its long-term development. If the recommendation is approved, the pay scales of SPSM and HM II will no longer overlap. As for the pay scales for HM I and HM II ranks, having considered a host of factors such as the Government's financial commitment and the impacts of the recommendations on the Civil Service, we are of the view that the pay scales of the two ranks may overlap. The current recommendation has narrowed the overlapping from two increment points to one, which will fairly reflect the differences in the complexity of their work and at the same time minimise the impacts brought by the proposed salary increase.

The EDB consulted the Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service on the recommendations in 2019, and gained the support of the Legislative Council (LegCo) Panel on Education and the Establishment Subcommittee (ESC) consulted on March 29, 2019 and June 11, 2019 respectively. The funding matters relating to the recommendations were originally scheduled for discussion at the meeting of the LegCo Finance Committee (FC) on July 5, 2019, but the meeting was cancelled due to the social turmoil.

With the implementation of the Hong Kong National Security Law, chaos has ended and social order has been restored. The EDB has proposed to the LegCo Panel on Education to discuss the recommendations in March and will submit the recommendations to the ESC as well as the FC for scrutiny as soon as possible. We hope that Members will support the recommendations so that the related recommendations can be implemented soon.

(2) Public sector primary schools operating 11 or fewer classes are smaller in scale. The middle management is taken charge by senior teachers and school operations are led by the school head. The teaching staff establishment is comprised of three levels, including basic rank teachers, senior teachers and school head at the corresponding ranks (in terms of the graduate teacher posts) of Assistant Primary School Master/Mistress (APSM), PSM and SPSM respectively. On manpower provision, we have implemented improvement measures in the past two years. Apart from the full implementation of the all-graduate teaching force policy, the Primary School Curriculum Leader post in public sector primary schools with 11 or fewer classes has been upgraded from the provision of an APSM post or Curriculum Leadership Grant to a PSM post to strengthen the support for smaller schools in curriculum leadership. In addition, if the current recommendation to improve the manpower at the middle management level in schools is approved, all primary schools (including the smaller-scale ones) will have more senior teachers to take up school management duties, while the measure to rationalise the salaries for school heads and deputy heads in public sector primary schools will also benefit the school heads in small-scale schools. Enhancing the ranking of school heads in small-scale schools is currently not considered.

We expect that, with the implementation of the all-graduate teaching

force policy and improvements to the manpower and salary arrangements, schools would make further good use of their human resources to strengthen school leadership, cultivate students' positive values, their sense of national identity and promotion of national security education, and enhancement in teachers' professional development to cater for the social development and needs, thereby enhancing the professional capacity of the whole teaching force and school effectiveness to provide quality education for students.