

## LCQ4: Online teaching and learning

Following is a question by the Hon Elizabeth Quat and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (May 13):

Question:

In view of the severity of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic, the Education Bureau has earlier deferred for several times the resumption of classes at schools and recommended that schools should provide students with learning materials through school websites, e-learning platforms, etc. during the period of class suspension, so that students can continue their studies at home, thereby achieving the objective of "suspending classes without suspending learning". In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that the Government launched in the last school year an assistance programme known as "Provision of Subsidy to Needy Primary and Secondary Students for Purchasing Mobile Computer Devices to Facilitate the Practice of e-Learning" under the Community Care Fund to subsidise students to purchase mobile computer devices, whether the Government will consider extending the assistance programme's scope of subsidy to cover the costs for Internet access and acquisition of ancillary equipment as well as raising the subsidy rate, so as to assist grass-roots families in meeting the relevant expenses; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as quite a number of parents of grass-roots families have relayed that they lack the knowledge and skills to guide their children on computer operation and online learning, of the measures put in place by the Government to assist such parents, and whether it will organise related seminars or workshops;

(3) on making pre-recorded teaching videos for students to watch on their own and conducting real-time online teaching, whether the Government has studied the differences between these two approaches in terms of effectiveness in teaching and learning; whether it has examined the situation and effect of the use of video conferencing software by schools in teaching; and

(4) whether it has reviewed the mode, operation and effectiveness of online teaching implemented by schools throughout Hong Kong during the period of class suspension; whether it will draw up guidelines on the teaching requirements and modes for online teaching for schools to follow; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

During the period of class suspension, the Education Bureau (EDB) has recommended that schools should continue to support students in their home

learning through suitable modes of learning and teaching according to their own circumstances and the needs of students at different key stages. Teaching and learning modes are diversified. Both online and offline learning should focus on encouraging students' self-directed learning at home and cater for students' needs and the school context. E-learning is only a form of learning. Apart from real-time online teaching, teachers may provide students with learning materials, after-school exercises and texts for extra-curricular reading, collect assignments and offer feedback by using the learning management systems that they are familiar with, as well as emails and the school website. Schools may also encourage students to read extensively, carry out thematic explorations, etc. so as to enhance their ability to engage in self-directed learning and hence achieve the goal of continuous learning at home.

All along, the EDB has been, through professional development programmes and on-site support services, deepening teachers' e-learning capabilities and their competence in using e-learning tools and resources. During the period of class suspension, the EDB has created a dedicated webpage to share the skills of using e-learning platforms, the flipped classroom approach and real-time online teaching, etc. In addition, we also offer advice and support to teachers in need continuously through hotline services, mobile communication applications, webinars and online self-learning courses, etc. The Hong Kong Education City has also launched a dedicated webpage to consolidate some learning and teaching resources for the use of schools, teachers, students and parents.

Our reply to the Hon Elizabeth Quat's question is as follows:

(1) Through the Community Care Fund, the EDB has been implementing a three-year assistance programme, providing a subsidy to needy primary and secondary students from public schools adopting the "Bring Your Own Device" (BYOD) policy to purchase mobile computer devices since the 2018/19 school year. In view of the fact that many schools have attempted to continue teaching via electronic platforms amid the COVID-19 outbreak, the EDB has exercised flexibility in handling the applications submitted by all schools implementing e-learning during the period of class suspension for their needy students, irrespective of whether they have implemented BYOD or not. Apart from purchasing mobile computer devices, the subsidy can also be used to cover the cost of some basic accessories, such as screen shield, protective cover, detachable keyboard, stylus pen and mouse. Schools may also use the subsidy to purchase other necessary accessories for their students depending on their learning needs. For students receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance or full grant under the School Textbook Assistance Scheme (STAS), a subsidy is provided to cover the full cost of the device and items mentioned above. For students receiving half grant under the STAS, the subsidy provided is half of the actual cost of the items. The maximum level of subsidy received by each benefited student will be adjusted annually according to the movement of the Composite Consumer Price Index. The maximum amount of full subsidy in the 2018/19 school year is \$4,500. According to the reports submitted by participating schools, the actual amount of subsidy required by each student receiving full subsidy is on average \$3,984.

In addition, the Government has been disbursing a subsidy for Internet access charges to eligible families through the Student Finance Office of the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency and the Social Welfare Department, providing support for students from grass-roots families to subscribe to basic Internet plans provided by operators of fixed or mobile telecommunications services. The rate of the subsidy is adjusted regularly with reference to prevailing market fees of Internet access services.

(2), (3) and (4) As mentioned in the preamble, there are diversified modes that support students' home learning. Considering that students' needs vary with key stages and schools have different circumstances, the EDB has not prescribed a single mode for all schools across the board. Instead, schools may select from a variety of teaching strategies the suitable modes for their students, including e-learning, to support students' home learning. Teachers should exercise professional judgement to adopt teaching strategies, learning and teaching resources, as well as learning activities appropriate to the needs of their students in order to cater for learner diversity. In addition, e-learning should focus on the flexible use of various electronic media (including digital resources and communication tools) to enhance the effectiveness of learning and teaching as well as the qualities of students (such as self-directed learning abilities) in accordance with teaching goals and the needs of students. The making of teaching videos or conducting of real-time online teaching is only one of the many e-learning strategies, each of which has its own purposes and characteristics. For instance, teachers can produce video clips and students can complete the online exercises after viewing the clips of their own accord. Teachers can then track students' learning progress through the relevant records and provide them with learning support accordingly. Teachers who deliver real-time online lessons can have instant interaction with student groups and provide them with instant guidance and feedback. To enhance the effectiveness of learning and teaching, it is imperative that teachers should master the advantages of different electronic media and integrate them in learning and teaching as appropriate.

The actual implementation of the relevant strategies has to be well-planned with thorough consideration of and full co-ordination on issues such as the learning needs of students at different ages and with special needs, students' power of concentration, impact on eye health caused by prolonged use of electronic screens, students' socio-economic backgrounds, hardware and Internet connection speed at home, and the necessary training for teachers. Schools should also provide technical support to students and parents and answer their enquiries. In formulating study plans, schools should adopt modes of learning which teachers and students have confidence in and are easy to master; and premise on the principle of not exerting undue pressure on students and parents. Schools should also maintain close communication with parents and assess from time to time whether their school-based plans are being taken forward as expected and make necessary modification or adjustment. Hence, they must carefully assess whether those online learning modes, which teachers, students and parents are unfamiliar with, could suit their circumstances and achieve learning effectiveness. During the class suspension period, schools still keep their premises open and have staff on duty to support students who have to return to schools because of individual

needs and answer parents' enquiries. Students and parents with doubts or difficulties may take the initiative to seek appropriate assistance from the schools.

On the other hand, close communication between schools and parents is needed to address issues such as the impact of full implementation of e-learning inside and outside classroom on students' health and parents' awareness of the pros and cons involved including the possibility of Internet addiction. Therefore, the EDB has been providing teachers with professional development programmes and information kits on e-learning and e-safety, so as to assist schools in undertaking relevant parent education. Besides providing seminars for parents, a telephone hotline has been set up to provide individual support for parents, teachers and students in need. Links to the resources on e-safety produced by other government departments and non-governmental organisations are also available on our website ([www.edb.gov.hk/il/eng](http://www.edb.gov.hk/il/eng)) for access by parents and students.

During the period of class suspension, the EDB has set up a dedicated webpage with dozens of videos uploaded, elucidating the skills of using e-learning platforms, flipped classroom approach and real-time online teaching for teacher's reference to better equip them with the relevant teaching strategies. In addition, we have been organising webinars on different topics every week since late January 2020 to share updated information and experience on implementing online teaching. As at April 2020, dozens of webinars have been organised. In addition to explaining the principles of adopting e-learning to support students' home learning in letters and through "Insider's Perspective" and "Clear the Air" articles, we have also uploaded the relevant information to the EDB's website for schools' reference.

The EDB has maintained communication with schools through various channels to better understand the situation and the problems encountered by schools in the implementation of "suspending classes without suspending learning" during the period of class suspension, so as to provide appropriate support according to their needs. As far as we know, during the period of class suspension, schools generally undertake e-learning by different means, which include producing teaching videos, conducting real-time online teaching, using e-learning platforms/learning management systems to arrange teaching activities, as well as distributing learning and teaching materials to students via emails/intranets. Furthermore, in view of the situation of some students (including those lacking computer access or encountering technical difficulties in online learning), schools have also assisted them in keeping up their learning progress by other effective means (such as sending the learning and teaching materials to students by post). Teachers also make phone calls to students from time to time to understand their learning progress and provide them with necessary support. We also note that schools, building on their past experience, are further promoting diversified learning modes (including e-learning) to support students in their home learning. These experience can serve as reference for future development. In anticipation of future needs, the EDB will review the class suspension arrangements made in response to the recent epidemic and identify areas for

improvement. Moreover, schools are encouraged to make good use of various assessment materials to track the learning progress of students during the period of class suspension, so that proper follow-up can be taken upon class resumption.