

LCQ7: Implementing sex education

Following is a question by the Hon Judy Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (March 27):

It is learnt that instead of teaching sex education as an independent subject, the Government has all along integrated the various related topics into relevant subjects, and allowed secondary and primary schools to devise school-based curricula on their own and decide on their principles and teaching modes in respect of implementing sex education. Nevertheless, a survey has found that a very large proportion of secondary schools do not have time for teaching sex education because the curriculum schedule is too tight, and the level of sex knowledge among young people in Hong Kong has been persistently unsatisfactory over the years. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the learning and teaching resources produced by the Education Bureau over the past three years in support of the implementation of sex education in schools;

(2) whether it has plans to review the current situation of the implementation of sex education and specify the lesson time for sex education, with a view to enhancing the level of sex knowledge among young people; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether it has plans to update the Guidelines on Sex Education in Schools compiled in 1997 and adopt the Guidelines afresh; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) as there are views that information related to sex education available online varies, and that secondary and primary students have difficulty in differentiating the authenticity of such information, whether the Government will consider stepping up promotional efforts on sex education outside schools, so as to provide them with bona fide information; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Sex education is an important component of values education in primary and secondary schools. Considering that sex education is interrelated with rather than separated from other cross-curricular domains in values education (such as moral education, life education, law-abiding education, and media and information literacy education), and covers personal, family, social communication, community, national and global aspects of life, it should not be delivered as an independent subject. Instead, it should be implemented as a cross-curricular initiative with values education being the main axle

connecting different subjects, and life-wide learning activities, etc. The Education Bureau (EDB) has been supporting schools by continuously updating curriculum guides, developing learning and teaching resources, and providing training for teachers to strengthen students' understanding of knowledge related to sex education from an early age while developing their critical thinking skills and nurturing their interpersonal skills through different subjects, cross-curricular values education and life-wide learning activities, etc. The objectives are to help students develop proper values and positive attitudes towards life, and practice appropriate behaviour while building healthy interpersonal relationships.

In consultation with the Health Bureau, our consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Judy Chan is as follows:

(1) to (3) Learning elements related to sex education, including personal growth, hygiene, puberty, making friends, dating, marriage, respect for others, cherishing and protecting oneself, gender equality and gender relationship, sexual harassment and refusal to others' offenses, concern the physiological, psychological and social aspects of sex. These learning elements are all covered in the primary and secondary school curricula (such as General Studies/Primary Humanities and Primary Science; Science, and Life and Society/Citizenship, Economics and Society at the junior secondary level; and Ethics and Religious Studies, and Health Management and Social Care at the senior secondary level). Schools implement sex education through relevant Key Learning Areas and subjects as well as weekly assemblies, class teacher periods or guidance periods, etc, thereby fostering students' all-round development, equipping them with relevant knowledge on sex education and proper values and attitudes.

In recent years, the EDB has pointed out clearly on a number of occasions (Note 1) that it has been advocating since the implementation of curriculum reform in 2001 a comprehensive and integrative approach to promoting values education that includes sex education in order to provide students with holistic and authentic learning experiences. The EDB has also repeatedly emphasised that the related guidelines issued before 2001, including the Guidelines on Sex Education in Schools (1997), are no longer instructional documents for schools. Furthermore, reports were made to the Legislative Council (LegCo) in 2018 (Note 2) and 2022 (Note 3) respectively to inform the LegCo and the general public that various domains of values education would be promoted with an integrative and all-encompassing approach.

Having conducted a holistic curriculum review, the Task Force on Review of School Curriculum agreed with the EDB's holistic and integrative cross-curricular approach to promoting the different domains of values education (including sex education) in its Final Report issued in 2020 (Note 4). In the Values Education Curriculum Framework (Pilot Version) promulgated by the EDB in 2021, a further step was taken to list sex education as one of the major enhancement items. Expected learning outcomes were set for students at different key stages for schools to plan curriculum and pedagogy accordingly. By following the latest curriculum guides and documents issued by the EDB,

schools will professionally formulate an appropriate sex education curriculum, taking into account their respective school mission and context as well as students' growth characteristics and needs. Schools have generally accepted, agreed with and adopted the integrative cross-curricular approach in implementing sex education. In view of this, it is appropriate to allow schools flexibility in arranging lesson time, combining relevant learning activities within and beyond the classroom, as well as creating a positive learning atmosphere for implementing values education (including sex education).

To support schools in fostering students' proper values and attitudes, the EDB continuously updates and develops relevant learning and teaching resources on different topics of sex education based on students' daily life and developmental needs. Such resources include animation resources, "Life Event" Exemplars and a dedicated resource website on Self Protection, covering themes such as gender equality, prevention of sexual abuse, sexual harassment among peers and internet romance/naked chat. The relevant learning and teaching resources have been uploaded onto the EDB website for teachers' reference and use within and beyond the classroom. The learning and teaching resources produced by the EDB in the past three years are set out at the Annex. The EDB has also assisted the Hong Kong Police Force in publishing the "Youth Crime Prevention Booklet" series over the past two years, providing information on content such as the risks of social networking on the Internet, sex-related crime such as naked chat blackmail, ways to prevent crime and support services so as to enhance students' law-abiding awareness, critical thinking skills and self-protection ability.

The EDB has been monitoring and reviewing the implementation of sex education in schools through channels such as inspection, school visits and routine communication with schools so that professional advice and support can be provided to facilitate schools' self-improvement and sustainable development. Schools have generally accepted, agreed with and adopted an integrative, cross-curricular approach to implementing values education (including sex education) with a view to providing students with holistic learning experiences. The EDB will continue to provide professional support and work with relevant government departments and organisations/bodies to help schools implement sex education.

(4) In view of the rapid advancement of information technology, the EDB steps up its efforts to integrate sex education with the learning elements of media and information literacy education for incorporation into the primary and secondary curricula at different key stages, and strives to nurture students' information literacy so as to develop them into effective and ethical users of information and communication technology, enabling them to distinguish the authenticity of information and equipping them with the relevant knowledge, abilities, proper values and attitudes, thereby protecting themselves both in the real world and on the Internet, and refusing inappropriate and unreasonable behaviour on social media.

As for the publicity efforts on promoting sex education outside schools, the Student Health Service (SHS) of the Department of Health has been

implementing the Adolescent Health Programme to promote and improve the physical, mental and psychosocial health of adolescents through school-based health promotion services in secondary schools in the form of outreach programmes. The programme covers a wide range of topics, including the Sex Education series which are delivered by means of talks, group discussions on different scenarios, role playing, games, etc, to explore various themes including changes during puberty, skills in getting along with the opposite gender, differences between friendship and romantic love, handling of a relationship (e.g. dating, break-up of a relationship), etc. The programme also covers the relationship between sex and love as well as the consequences of casual sex to guide students to understand the importance of safe sex. In addition, the principles and methods of contraception, knowledge on sexual harassment and how to handle them, as well as the impacts of pornographic culture on adolescents would be discussed to cultivate in students a correct attitude towards sex. In 2022/23 school year, the Adolescent Health Programme conducted nearly 200 talks on sex education to 190 Secondary Schools with nearly 20 000 students attended.

In addition, the SHS of the Department of Health regularly conducts health talks on sex education at the Student Health Service Centres (SHSC), and through individual health counselling, to enable students and parents to understand the changes during puberty, and provides information on sex education online, including the publicity on importance of sex education at home. In 2022/23 school year, the SHSC provided information about puberty to more than 74 000 primary school students during individual health counselling. The SHS will continue to promote sex education and regularly review and update the contents and methods used to meet the needs of the adolescents.

Apart from school education, the influences of family education, social atmosphere and cyber culture on young people are also factors of the effective implementation of values education (including sex education) that should not be neglected. It certainly requires the concerted efforts among parents, government departments, non-governmental organisations, media, and all sectors of society to bring positive messages across.

Note 1: [LC Paper No. CB\(4\)535/17-18\(02\)](#) of the LegCo Panel on Education dated February 2, 2018, a written reply to the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) dated February 12, 2019, and the meeting with the EOC on October 12, 2022.

Note 2: [LC Paper No. CB\(4\)535/17-18\(02\)](#) of the LegCo Panel on Education dated February 2, 2018, and [LC Paper No. CB\(2\)768/17-18\(01\)](#) of the LegCo Panel on Health Services dated February 5, 2018.

Note 3: [LC Paper No. CB\(4\)41/2022\(01\)](#) of the LegCo Panel on Education dated February 8, 2022.

Note 4: Page 17 of the ["Task Force on Review of School Curriculum Final Report"](#) (2020).