

LCQ8: Manpower arrangements for primary schools with a smaller number of classes

Following is a question by the Hon Chu Kwok-keung and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (October 18):

Question:

It is learnt that currently, primary schools operating 11 or fewer classes do not have a deputy head rank, and the Education Bureau (EDB) has pitched the rank of heads of such primary schools at the rank of Senior Primary School Master/Mistress, which is equivalent to the deputy head rank in primary schools operating 12 or more classes. As the EDB's requirements for and assessment of schools will not be relaxed even they are operating a smaller number of classes, schools with a smaller number of classes are under manpower constraints, with their average workload being heavier than schools operating a larger number of classes. As a result, quite a number of problems have emerged, including frequent staff turnover, prolonged instability of the management, difficulty for schools to sustain their development, hindrance to the professional development of teachers, and serious impact on the learning of students. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it has plans to create the post of deputy head for primary schools operating 11 or fewer classes to share the work of the head; if so, of the implementation timetable;
- (2) whether it has plans to upgrade the rank of heads of primary schools operating 11 or fewer classes to the Headmaster/Headmistress II rank; if so, of the implementation timetable; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (3) of the measures in place to support primary schools operating 11 or fewer classes so that they can sustain their development?

Reply:

President,

Generally speaking, the staffing and resources required of a school depend on the number of classes it operates. Under the existing mechanism, the Education Bureau (EDB) will, based on the Codes of Aid and the principles set out in the relevant circulars, provide schools with regular teaching posts on the approved establishment according to the number of approved classes. 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. As such, the teaching staff establishment is comprised of three levels, including basic rank teachers,

senior teachers and school head at the corresponding ranks of Assistant Primary School Master/Mistress (APSM), Primary School Master/Mistress (PSM) and Senior Primary School Master/Mistress (SPSM) respectively. My consolidated reply in response to the questions raised by the Hon Chu Kwok-keung is as follows:

To enhance the quality of education, the Government has been allocating substantial resources in recent years to improve the manpower arrangement of schools and enhance teaching and learning. The Government set up the Task Force on Professional Development of Teachers (the Task Force) in November 2017 to review on issues relating to promoting professional development of teachers. After extensive consultation, in-depth studies and deliberation, the Task Force submitted a report in March 2019, putting forward a total of 18 recommendations related to establishing a professional ladder for teachers, implementing the all-graduate teaching force policy, enhancing the ranking arrangement of school management, etc. The Government has accepted all the recommendations of the Task Force and relevant measures have been implemented, which include improving manpower at the middle management level and rationalising salaries for school heads in public sector primary schools, so as to improve the school management standard, strengthen professional capacity and support for the holistic development of schools and enhance the quality of education.

In recent years, the EDB has implemented various initiatives to increase manpower, maintain the stability of the teaching force and enhance teachers' professional roles, benefiting primary schools of different scales, including those operating 11 or fewer classes. With effect from the 2017/18 school year, the EDB has increased the teacher-to-class ratio for public sector primary and secondary schools across the board and provided public sector schools with around 2 200 additional regular teaching posts. The EDB also fully implemented the all-graduate teaching force policy in the 2019/20 school year with a view to facilitating teachers' professional development, as well as enhancing their professional roles and functions. The "one executive officer for each school" policy was implemented in the same year to strengthen school administrative support and at the same time reduce the administrative work of teachers and school heads, thereby creating room for them to focus more on education tasks. In addition, the EDB has also provided additional regular teaching posts for schools under various initiatives, together with cash grants featured by their deployment flexibility so that schools can, according to school-based circumstances, employ additional teaching and non-teaching staff and/or hire services to support school development and meet students' needs.

Regarding school management, the EDB has been enhancing the ranking arrangement for the management of primary schools. For instance, starting from the 2020/21 school year, the Primary School Curriculum Leader post in public sector primary schools operating 11 or fewer classes has been upgraded from the provision of an APSM post or Curriculum Leadership Grant to a PSM post in order to strengthen the support for smaller schools in curriculum leadership. With the implementation of the measures to improve the manpower at the middle management level in primary schools starting from the 2022/23

school year, all primary schools (including those operating 11 or fewer classes) have been provided with more senior teachers to take up school management duties with a view to improving the school management standard, strengthening professional capacity and enhancing the quality of education. Besides, the EDB has implemented the measure to rationalise the salaries for school heads and deputy heads in public sector primary schools since the 2022/23 school year, thereby benefiting the school heads in small-scale schools.

With the implementation of the above enhancement measures, the manpower at the management level and principals' remuneration in primary schools of different scales have been reasonably improved. At present, the schools have been actively utilising the new resources, properly deploying their staff, enhancing the teaching and learning as well as promoting the schools' development. Various enhancement measures are yielding results progressively. As regards Member's concerns about the manpower and management issues encountered by individual schools, this Bureau considers appropriate solutions should be sought by focusing on the crux of the issues, instead of simply relying on improving the manpower or principals' remuneration to address the issues. Schools should properly utilise public funds, leverage their professionalism and ensure the provision of quality education. Therefore, the EDB does not agree to address the issues by adjusting the manpower arrangement or upgrading the rank of school head in primary schools operating 11 or fewer classes. We reiterate that, with the decline in school-age population, there may be changes in the scales for certain schools. The EDB will work along with different stakeholders, with the interests and well-being of students as its prime consideration and through multipronged measures, such as to encourage school sponsoring bodies to plan ahead and explore possibilities to consolidate and integrate school resources, to stabilise the learning and teaching environment and ensure the quality of education.