

Ombudsman examines Education Bureau's monitoring of boarding sections of schools for children with intellectual disabilities

The following is issued on behalf of the Office of The Ombudsman:

The Ombudsman, Ms Winnie Chiu, today (April 7) announced the launch of a direct investigation to examine the monitoring of boarding sections of schools for children with intellectual disabilities by the Education Bureau (EDB).

There have been media reports about suspected maltreatment of students, causing injuries, by the boarding section of an EDB-aided school for children with intellectual disabilities. Such maltreatment included improper use of restraint or isolation to restrict the limb movements and mobility of the children. The incident has raised public concern over the adequacy of government measures to protect the welfare of children with intellectual disabilities boarding at schools and monitor the quality of service provided by the boarding sections of such schools.

The Office of The Ombudsman has found that, in the academic year 2021/22, there are in total 43 EDB-aided schools for children with intellectual disabilities, 16 of which have boarding sections subvented by the EDB to cater for students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities who need boarding service. Unlike residential care homes for persons with disabilities, the boarding sections of aided schools for children with intellectual disabilities are establishments registered and administered by schools. Under the school-based management policy, these schools are required to manage and monitor the quality and effectiveness of each area of their work including the boarding service while the EDB regulates different aspects of schools and their boarding sections to ensure that school management and operation are in compliance with relevant legislation and the EDB's guidelines including the Practice Guide for Special Schools on Planning and Managing Boarding Service issued in September 2021.

Ms Chiu said, "It is our duty in society to protect and support children with disabilities. Children living in boarding sections of aided schools for children with intellectual disabilities are those with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities. These children lack the ability for self-care, and their physical conditions and medical needs vary. Many of them are being placed at boarding sections of schools because their families could not afford to take care of them. They rely on carers in their daily and medical care. Given their inability to communicate effectively with others, they may not be able to explain their situation and discontent to their parents or others even when encountering problems in boarding sections. The Government

is obliged to ensure that children living in boarding sections of schools for children with intellectual disabilities are receiving proper care and attention so as to safeguard their welfare and provide them with a safe environment that fosters healthy growth of their body and mind. Hence, we have decided to initiate this direct investigation to examine the adequacy and effectiveness of the EDB's monitoring of the boarding sections of schools for children with intellectual disabilities."

The Ombudsman now invites views from members of the public on this topic. Written submissions should reach the Office of The Ombudsman by May 10, 2022:

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