

Ombudsman invites public views on Education Bureau's mechanism for approving applications for school fee revision

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

The Ombudsman, Ms Connie Lau, today (June 26) invited members of the public to provide information and/or views on the mechanism of the Education Bureau (EDB) for approving applications for school fee revision.

According to information published by the EDB in September 2017, a total of 147 Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS)/private/international schools had been granted approval by the EDB to increase their school fees for the 2017/18 school year. Some schools charge an annual school fee of over \$200,000. The EDB says that it has established procedures for approving applications for school fee revision submitted by DSS/private/international schools. Nevertheless, there are concerns in the community that the bureau's approval mechanism is lax and lacks transparency, such that those schools can often easily obtain approval to raise their school fees, thereby placing a heavy financial burden on parents.

Ms Lau said, "Parents have been relying on the EDB to scrutinise the schools' budgets and their justifications for fee increase. The bureau should ensure that the levels of fee increase are reasonable and protect the interests of students and their parents. If schools are at liberty to unreasonably hike their school fees year after year, that would bring about a heavy financial burden for parents to bear. We are, therefore, very concerned about whether the EDB has in place a sufficiently strict mechanism and proper procedures for approving applications for school fee revision."

The Office of The Ombudsman has initiated a direct investigation into the EDB's criteria and procedures for approving applications for school fee revision, and the bureau's regulatory system for school fees collected by schools. The Office will also examine whether there are inadequacies in the EDB's current approval mechanism and administrative procedures, with a view to making recommendations to the bureau for improvement.

To make the investigation more comprehensive, The Ombudsman now invites members of the public, particularly parents, parents' associations, the education sector and sponsoring bodies, to send information and/or views in writing to the Office of The Ombudsman by July 26, 2018:

Address: 30/F, China Merchants Tower, Shun Tak Centre, 168-200 Connaught Road Central, Hong Kong
Fax: 2882 8149

Email: complaints@ombudsman.hk