

SED on early commencement of school summer holiday

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, at a media session at the Central Government Offices today (July 10):

Reporter: We have seen a surge in local coronavirus cases since Monday and some schools also reported cases in the meantime. So why did it take you a few days to come with this decision to suspend classes? And secondly, why did you decide to give some leeway to schools to decide whether they should continue with their examinations next week instead of asking them to suspend their classes mandatorily? Are you worried that there may still be a risk of transmission during these examinations? And how do you make sure that students will be able to take these examinations in a very safe manner?

Secretary for Education: We have been monitoring the situation on a daily basis. Of course we know that there has been a surge in confirmed local cases in the past few days. According to what we gathered and what measures the schools have been implementing for the safety and hygiene of the students, I think the measures are basically very effective, and so far there have not been any confirmed cases of infection in schools. So in the past few days, we think that our guidelines, our current system could cope with the occasional happening of confirmed cases. As we all know, the COVID will likely be with us for a period of time. We have to balance between the normal daily life against the spreading of the COVID. The same principle applies to education. We have to balance the safety of the students as well as the educational needs of the students. Every day we have to judge whether we need to take any extra measures for the safety of the students. In the past two days we did observe that there is another surge of confirmed local cases. And also it is now very close to the planned summer vacation anyway – we are talking about seven to 10 days. So we think that for the general good of the community as well as the health of the students, we think that we can advance the commencement of the summer vacation to next Monday. At the same time, we allow some flexibility for some important examinations to take place at the schools at the same time, such as the Primary Five Examination, the results of which will be used for the Secondary One selection process, the SSPA (Secondary School Places Allocation) exercise; and also (for) the Secondary Three and Secondary Five students, for various reasons – for preparation for the DSE (Diploma of Secondary Education) Examination and also for the selection of subjects in the coming years – the examinations seem more important. So we allow the flexibility for schools. If they have already scheduled some examinations in the coming week, we allow them to go ahead. But at the same time, we ask them to take necessary precautionary measures. The experience we gathered from holding the DSE Examination is that with sufficient precautionary measures, including wearing masks, washing hands and keeping a good distance between students, the examinations could be held safely. So we are still confident that the schools will be able to handle

these examinations safely.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)