

SWD's response to media enquiries on suspected child abuse case

In response to media enquiries about a suspected child case, a spokesman for the Social Welfare Department (SWD) gave the following response today (December 28):

The SWD has all along attached great importance to the well-being of children and firmly believes that every child has a right to protection against harm and abuse. The SWD has taken a series of actions in relation to the incident.

The SWD today met with the chairman and some members of the executive committee as well as the management of the organisation that operates the service unit concerned. The department expressed its deep concern about the incident and received a briefing by the organisation on its handling of the incident. The organisation reported that more staff members might have been involved in the child abuse incident and that they have already been suspended from duty. The SWD has requested the organisation to take corresponding measures to enhance the supervision of front-line staff and ensure that the children at the centre are provided with proper care. The organisation is also required to report the follow-up actions taken to the SWD as soon as possible.

At the meeting, the organisation also introduced the immediate measures that they have taken. A taskforce will be established as soon as possible so that thorough investigation can be conducted and a review report with improvement plans, including enhanced risk management, staff supervision and monitoring, will be submitted. The SWD has urged the organisation to fully co-operate with police investigations, submit the review report in a timely manner and implement the necessary improvement measures, including a review of its internal management mechanism and continuous supervision of the conduct of staff members, so as to avoid similar incidents from recurring in the future.

In addition, the SWD yesterday (December 27) sent an inter-disciplinary team, comprising more than 20 clinical psychologists, nurses, social workers, etc, to the child care centre concerned to conduct investigations and inspect the operation of the centre and its work records. The team also conducted observations on each of the 70 children in the centre in regard to their behaviours, health and emotional status. Initial observations suggested that the children were in stable condition. The SWD will continue to closely monitor the situation of the centre to ensure that its operation is in compliance with service standard and the need to protect children. The SWD yesterday also contacted the parents of the children who were on home leave to ensure their children were in good condition.

The SWD has all along conducted surprise inspections at the centre

concerned, including daytime and night-time inspections, to ensure that the centre fulfils the licensing requirements. The SWD has issued warning letters to the operator of the centre and will continue to follow up on the incident to ensure the children at the centre are provided with proper care.

All child care centres must be registered in compliance with the requirements under the Child Care Services Ordinance (Cap 243) and the Child Care Services Regulations (Cap 243A). Under the laws, registered child care staff must be employed in the child care centres. The Director of Social Welfare may remove the name of any person from the register of Child Care Workers if he considers he/she is no longer suitable to take up child care work. Subject to the investigation results on different fronts, the SWD may take actions according to relevant regulations.