

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.

Asia premiere of "Passengers" by The 7 Fingers from Canada to be staged in Hong Kong in December (with photos)

Renowned Canadian contemporary physical theatre troupe, The 7 Fingers, will come to Hong Kong to present the Asia premiere of "Passengers" in early December. The troupe tells the captivating stories of encounters, reunions and goodbyes of strangers in transit through the form of acrobatics, theatre, music and dance performance. The three dazzling performances will also open the Leisure and Cultural Services Department's "Cheers!" Series this year.

The production takes train travel as the story background. Passengers on

this train express their dreams through the exuberance of their bodies. The astounding skills like the silks, flying trapeze, tightrope walking, juggling and hula hoops demonstrate the physical artistry and beauty of the performers. Combining choreography, multimedia effects, music and bits of monologue, the production perfectly captures the essence of human connection and emotions that guarantee an unforgettable theatrical experience for audiences of all ages.

The 7 Fingers was founded in 2002 and strives to redefine the circus by stripping down the spectacle to its thrilling essence. The seven founders set out to tell stories with death-defying acrobatics and life-affirming theatricality. The troupe has produced its own signature touring shows and created diverse theatrical experiences.

"Cheers!" Series: "Passengers" by The 7 Fingers will be held at 8pm on December 1 and 2 (Friday and Saturday), and at 3pm on December 3 (Sunday) at the Auditorium of Sha Tin Town Hall. Tickets priced at \$180, \$260, \$320 and \$380 are now available at URBTIX (www.urbtix.hk). For telephone bookings, please call 3166 1288. Package discounts will be available for ticket purchases with "Cheers!" Series programmes to be held between December 2023 and February 2024. For programme enquiries and concessionary schemes, please call 2268 7323 or visit www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/Programme/en/multi_arts/programs_1633.html.

Moreover, two workshops (conducted in English with Cantonese interpretation) will be organised. The first workshop will be held at 8pm on November 30 (Thursday) at the Music Studio of Sha Tin Town Hall. It is suitable for those with a dance or gymnastics background, wishing to deepen their knowledge and technical skills in the acrobatic discipline. The second workshop will be held at 2pm on December 2 (Saturday) at the Dance Studio of Sha Tin Town Hall. Members of the troupe will guide participants through the foundations of different acrobatic disciplines in an interactive approach. Tickets priced at \$150 per workshop are now available at URBTIX. For details, please refer to the above-mentioned website.



Revised Control List under Import and Export (Strategic Commodities) Regulations to take effect on November 1

The Import and Export (Strategic Commodities) Regulations (Amendment of Schedules 1 and 2) Order 2023 (Order) will come into effect on November 1. The Order updates the control list of strategic commodities set out in the Import and Export (Strategic Commodities) Regulations (Cap. 60, sub. leg. G) (Regulations) to reflect the changes adopted by leading international non-proliferation regimes with respect to the technologies and items under control as well as the control thresholds. At the same time, the Order extends the import, export, transshipment and transit control stipulated in the Regulations to articles regulated under the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).

The control list of strategic commodities in Hong Kong mirrors the control lists adopted by the Wassenaar Arrangement on Export Controls for Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods and Technologies, the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the Missile Technology Control Regime, the Australia Group, and the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction.

Also, with the accession of the country to the ATT as a State Party, the Central People's Government has extended the application of the ATT to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region under Article 153 of the Basic Law. After the Order comes into effect, the articles regulated under the ATT can be covered by Hong Kong's control list of strategic commodities.

The Government updates the control list in a timely manner to ensure that Hong Kong's control system is in line with international standards, which is vital to the trade in doing import/export businesses with foreign trading partners and licensing authorities.

The Trade and Industry Department has informed the trade of the amendment details through trade circular and the department's website (www.stc.tid.gov.hk/eindex.html). Enquiries can be made to the Strategic Trade Controls Branch of the department by telephone at 2398 5587 or by email at stc@tid.gov.hk.

Gazettal of Inland Revenue (Amendment) (Disposal Gain by Holder of Qualifying Equity Interests) Bill 2023

The Inland Revenue (Amendment) (Disposal Gain by Holder of Qualifying Equity Interests) Bill 2023 will be gazetted on October 20 and introduced into the Legislative Council on November 1. The Bill seeks to introduce a tax certainty enhancement scheme to provide greater certainty of non-taxation of onshore gains on disposal of equity interests (the gains) that are of capital nature.

The scheme will help enhance the attractiveness of Hong Kong as a premier international investment and business hub, in particular with regard to facilitating business expansion and restructuring as acquisition and disposal of equity interests are common in this process.

To determine the nature of the gains, the Inland Revenue Department (IRD) presently adopts a "badges of trade" approach where considerations are given to the relevant facts and circumstances of the case. The scheme will provide upfront certainty on the non-taxation of the gains which meet certain specified criteria. Specifically, the gains will be treated as capital in nature and not chargeable to profits tax if the investor entity concerned has held certain equity interests in the investee entity throughout the continuous period of 24 months immediately before the date of disposal and those equity interests having been held amount to at least 15 per cent of the total equity interests in the investee entity.

To strike a balance between facilitating businesses and upholding the integrity of the tax system, the scheme excludes certain gains which are not normally considered as capital in nature and those arising in circumstances where the risk of abuse is relatively high.

Where the gains are not eligible for the scheme or taxpayers do not make an election for the scheme, the IRD will continue to use the "badges of trade" approach as it does at present to consider the tax treatment of the gains.

A Government spokesman said, "Hong Kong is renowned for its simple and competitive tax system which does not tax gains on disposal of equity interests of capital nature. The scheme will further increase the competitiveness of our tax regime through greater upfront tax certainty of non-taxation of the gains based on simple and clear rules, faster tax determination and lower compliance cost of businesses."

Going further, as compared to similar schemes in other tax jurisdictions, the scheme will be more competitive in that it has a wider coverage of businesses and equity interests, as well as lower equity holding threshold. It also provides more flexible arrangements such as allowing the

minimum equity holding percentage of 15 per cent to be met on a corporate group basis, and covering disposal of equity interests in tranches subject to certain restrictions. The scheme also does not specify an expiry date.

The scheme will be applicable to the gains where the disposal occurs on or after January 1, 2024, and the gains accrued in the basis period for a year of assessment beginning on or after April 1, 2023.

The full text of the Bill will be available from the Government Gazette website on Friday (October 20).

Special traffic arrangements for race meeting in Happy Valley

Special traffic arrangements will be implemented in Happy Valley today (October 18). The arrangements will come into effect one and a half hours before the start of the first race and will last until the crowds have dispersed after the race meeting.

A. Traffic arrangements before the commencement of the first race

1. Road closure

Southbound Wong Nai Chung Road between Queen's Road East and the up-ramp outside the Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC) will be closed except for vehicles heading for Aberdeen Tunnel.

2. Traffic diversions

- Southbound Wong Nai Chung Road between Village Road and the up-ramp outside HKJC will be re-routed one way northbound;
- Traffic along eastbound Queen's Road East heading for Wan Chai and Happy Valley will be diverted to turn left to Morrison Hill Road;
- Traffic along southbound Morrison Hill Road heading for Happy Valley will be diverted via Sports Road and Wong Nai Chung Road;
- Traffic along Queen's Road East cannot turn right to Wong Nai Chung Road except for vehicles heading for Aberdeen Tunnel;
- Traffic from Cross Harbour Tunnel heading for Queen's Road East will be diverted via the down-ramp leading from southbound Canal Road flyover to Morrison Hill Road to turn right at the junction of Wong Nai Chung Road and Queen's Road East; and
- Traffic from Cross Harbour Tunnel heading for Happy Valley or Racecourse will be diverted via the down-ramp leading from southbound Canal Road flyover to Canal Road East, southbound Morrison Hill Road, Sports Road and Wong Nai Chung Road.

B. Traffic arrangements before the conclusion of race meeting

1. Road closure

The following roads will be closed from about 35 minutes before the start of the last race:

- The up-ramp on Wong Nai Chung Road outside HKJC leading to Aberdeen Tunnel;
- Southbound Wong Nai Chung Road between Queen's Road East and the up-ramp leading to Aberdeen Tunnel;
- Southbound Wong Nai Chung Road between Village Road and the Public Stands of HKJC;
- Westbound Leighton Road between Wong Nai Chung Road and Canal Road East; and
- Southbound Morrison Hill Road between Leighton Road and Queen's Road East.

In addition, southbound Wong Nai Chung Road between the up-ramp leading to Aberdeen Tunnel and the Public Stands of HKJC will be closed from about 10 minutes before the start of the last race.

2. Traffic diversions

The following traffic diversions will be implemented from about 35 minutes before the start of the last race:

- Eastbound Queen's Road East at its junction with Morrison Hill Road will be reduced to one-lane traffic heading for northbound Canal Road flyover;
- Traffic from Cross Harbour Tunnel heading for Wan Chai will be diverted via the down-ramp leading from southbound Canal Road flyover to Canal Road East, U-turn slip road beneath Canal Road flyover, Canal Road West and Hennessy Road;
- Traffic from Cross Harbour Tunnel heading for Happy Valley will be diverted via the down-ramp leading from southbound Canal Road flyover to Canal Road East, eastbound Leighton Road and Wong Nai Chung Road;
- Traffic along southbound Morrison Hill Road will be diverted to turn left to eastbound Leighton Road;
- Traffic along southbound Morrison Hill Road heading for Happy Valley will be diverted via eastbound Leighton Road and Wong Nai Chung Road; and
- Traffic along westbound Leighton Road will be diverted to Wong Nai Chung Road.

C. Learner drivers prohibition

Learner drivers will be prohibited to turn left from Caroline Hill Road to Leighton Road between one and a half hours before the start of the first race and one hour after the last race. In addition, learner drivers will be prohibited from accessing the following roads within the above period of time:

- Shan Kwong Road between Yik Yam Street and Wong Nai Chung Road;
- Village Road between its upper and lower junctions with Shan Kwong Road;
- Percival Street between Hennessy Road and Leighton Road;
- Canal Road East; and

– The service road leading from Gloucester Road to Canal Road flyover.

D. Suspension of parking spaces

Parking spaces on southbound Wong Nai Chung Road between Sports Road and Blue Pool Road will be suspended from 11am to 7pm during day racing, from 4.30pm to 11.59pm during evening racing, and from 5pm to 11.59pm during night racing.

Any vehicles found illegally parked within the precincts of the above affected areas will be towed away without prior notice.

Actual implementation of road closure and traffic diversion will be made by the Police at the time depending on traffic conditions in the areas. Motorists should exercise tolerance and patience, and follow the instructions of Police on site.