

## LCQ2: Developing Hong Kong into international education hub

Following is a question by the Hon Chu Kwok-keung and a reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (June 11):

Question:

The Government is now establishing the "Study in Hong Kong" brand to develop Hong Kong into an international hub for education. There are views pointing out that with the robust development of local basic education and the extensive recognition of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination qualification, primary and secondary schools are well-positioned to admit non-local students amid the continuing decline in the number of students. At present, however, entry for non-local students to study in Hong Kong's public or aided primary and secondary schools (other than English Schools Foundation (ESF) schools and Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools) is not permitted. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of minor students coming to Hong Kong on student visas to study in private primary and secondary schools, ESF schools, and DSS primary and secondary schools over the past three school years, as well as the distribution of their years of study;

(2) whether it will consider drawing on the practices of other countries to relax the eligibility criteria for student visas, so as to allow non-local minor students entry into Hong Kong to study in public or aided primary and secondary schools, as well as introducing student guardian visas for their parents to stay in Hong Kong and engage in time-limited employment; and

(3) whether it will consider encouraging private enterprises or educational institutions to establish additional student hostels or overseas students' apartments to provide accommodation and ancillary services suitable for students of different ages, as well as establishing corresponding licensing and registration regimes?

Reply:

President,

The Chief Executive announced in the 2024 Policy Address that the Government would promote the development of an international hub for post-secondary education by establishing the "Study in Hong Kong" brand as well as pooling together and nurturing excellent global talents. The policy is built on the foundation that Hong Kong's universities enjoy an international reputation. Among our eight public universities, five are ranked among the world's top 100 and six within Asia's top 50, and four are among the top ten

on the list of the most international universities in the world. The internationalisation and diversity of our post-secondary education attract outstanding talents from all over the world to Hong Kong for further studies and research. Meanwhile, the National 14th Five-Year Plan supports Hong Kong as a development centre in eight key areas ("eight centres"), the Education Bureau (EDB) has been proactively encouraging post-secondary education institutions to develop more related applied degree programmes to complement with the talent backing for the "eight centres". At the same time, we are also committed to promoting the "Study in Hong Kong" brand, developing Hong Kong into an international education hub, attracting outstanding talent from all over the world in all aspects to enrich the local talent pool.

Regarding our basic education, under the "one country, two systems", Hong Kong has the distinctive advantages of enjoying strong support of the motherland and being closely connected to the world. We have been providing 12-year free and quality primary and secondary education to all local children through public sector schools, and parents of local children are offered with diversified choices. Meanwhile, non-local children can study in non-public sector schools, including international schools, private schools and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools, on a self-financing basis. These arrangements aim to ensure a reasonable balance between the supply and demand of school places in basic education in the relevant arrangements, while achieving prudent use of public funds. In fact, Hong Kong's diversified and quality school education system has long been ranked among the top in international education comparative studies.

Having consulted the Security Bureau and the Immigration Department (ImmD), our reply to the question raised by the Hon Chu Kwok-keung is as follows:

(1) In the past three years (2022 to 2024), a total of 1 686 applications for student visa/entry permit were approved by the ImmD for non-local children aged 17 or below coming to Hong Kong for education (see Annex). The ImmD and the EDB do not keep statistics on the types of schools admitting these students.

(2) The Government is committed to developing a vibrant international school sector to meet the demand for education from non-local families living in Hong Kong as well as children of families coming to Hong Kong for work or investment. International schools operate on a self-financing and market-driven basis and belong to the private school sector. They have been enjoying the flexibility, including the medium of instruction, curriculum arrangements, public examinations, etc, and they are not subsidised by public funds for daily operation, providing diversified choices for local parents, while offering school places to non-local children who pay school fees at their own expense under the "user pays" principle. As seen from the figures provided by the ImmD over the past three years, there have been hundreds non-local children aged from five years eight months to 17 years being approved with study visa/entry permit to come to Hong Kong for education annually. We will closely keep in view the demand for school places from non-local children, conduct dynamic assessments of the demand and supply of school

places, create conditions in a timely manner, and launch policy measures to adjust the supply of school places including supporting the development of non-profit-making private schools offering non-local curriculum through the school allocation exercise. Meanwhile, we will proactively explore the feasibility of facilitating non-local students to come to Hong Kong to study in non-public sector schools on a self-financing basis.

As the goal of public sector schools is to provide 12-year quality and free primary and secondary education to eligible children to meet the educational needs of local children, we adopt mother-tongue teaching. The medium of instruction, curriculum arrangements, public examination (i.e. Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination), etc in public sector schools are based on the learning needs of local children.

Therefore, for public sector schools, the Government has always been devoting substantial resources to public sector schools in providing quality education to students over the years, meeting the different learning needs of students in an all-round way, including catering for the learning diversity for students with special educational needs and non-Chinese speaking students with the provision of additional learning support and complementary measures. Public sector schools are publicly funded at full costs, offer local curriculum and serve local children. It ensures the prudent use of public funds and fair allocation of educational resources, and benefit local children.

At present, the parallel development of the public sector schools and non-public sector schools not only caters for the learning needs of the children of different stakeholders, but also achieves the purpose of prudent use of public funds and an appropriate allocation of resources. Therefore, the policy meets Hong Kong's actual circumstances.

(3) In general, the boarding services provided by different types of schools are mainly aimed at enriching local students' learning experiences, and cater for the residential needs of a small number of non-local students. At present, there are a total of 16 publicly-funded and private ordinary primary and secondary schools across the territory, which provide boarding services offering about 3 500 boarding places altogether. If individual schools have needs, and the premises and space allow, they can submit applications to the EDB to provide boarding facilities on a self-financing basis. We will consider the applications based on the actual needs. The facilities and management of boarding schools should comply with the relevant stipulations such as the Education Regulations (Cap. 279A). The accommodation arrangements outside schools should also comply with all relevant laws and requirements. The EDB will closely monitor the residential needs of non-local students, including the boarding facilities provided by different types of schools, and maintain communication with the education sector and relevant government departments to review the related arrangements in a timely manner.

President, education is the key to a hundred-year plan. While being open to different views, the EDB will carefully consider each and every policy initiative to maintain the strengths of Hong Kong education, orderly promote

the development of an international hub for post-secondary education, and strengthen the high quality development of education in Hong Kong.

Thank you, President.