

LCQ5: Problem of bullying in schools

Following is a question by the Hon Kwok Wai-keung and a reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (October 21):

Question:

It has been reported that since the eruption in June last year of the disturbances arising from the opposition to the proposed legislative amendments, quite a number of children of police officers have been bullied by their classmates or teachers in schools. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the numbers of requests for assistance, complaints and reports received by the Police and the Education Bureau (EDB) respectively since June last year in respect of police officers' children being bullied in schools;
- (2) of the measures currently in place to curb the acts of bullying in schools (including teachers bullying students) and ensure that the bullied students are provided appropriate support and counselling services; and
- (3) whether it has plans to make new regulations or set up new mechanisms to combat acts of bullying in schools, e.g. requiring schools to (i) notify, within a specified timeframe, the EDB of all the reports received, (ii) set up a dedicated telephone hotline for parents and students to report bullying cases, and (iii) formulate school-based anti-bullying policies (stipulating the discipline and guidance arrangements for the persons concerned, the measures for preventing bullying in schools, the procedure and timeframe for investigating bullying cases, etc.); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

A school is a place where care, concern, mutual support and mutual respect are practised. All along, the Education Bureau (EDB) has been adopting a zero tolerance policy on any act of discrimination, bullying and violence in schools. Any bullying act, irrespective of the form or for whatever reasons, is totally unacceptable. The EDB regularly reminds schools to pay attention to the performance and behavior of their students. No one should treat others with hostility, bullying or violence because of differences in stance, political view, or occupation and background of their family members. Schools also have the responsibility to take proactive measures to ensure students' physical and psychological safety in schools and to prevent bullying. These measures include explaining in detail their school-based anti-bullying policies and measures to their teaching staff and students, and ensuring their effective implementation by the teaching staff.

We have also reminded schools to pay special attention to the emotion of students who are more likely to encounter bullying in different periods, including the children of police officers during the occurrence of social incidents, and their interaction with schoolmates. Schools are also reminded to carefully protect the personal data of students and their family members and not to disclose the family background of any students to the public.

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Kwok Wai-keung is as follows:

(1) Regarding the suspected cases of bullying of police officers' children in connection with the social incidents, the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) and the EDB have established a reporting mechanism under which the HKPF, upon receipt of such bullying incidents, will refer the cases to the EDB for follow-up. Besides, there are some cases directly received by the EDB. From June last year to early October this year, a total of 25 cases, which include complaints and cases which expressed discontent, were received. The schools have handled the cases in accordance with the guidelines issued by the EDB and provided emotional support and counselling to the students affected, as well as explained the incidents to the parents concerned. For complaints that have been substantiated after investigations, the schools have taken disciplinary action against the teachers/students involved. Besides, the EDB has conducted follow-up investigations into the cases involving teachers and taken appropriate actions.

(2) and (3) Regarding the second and third parts of the question, the EDB adopts a multi-pronged approach to implement the policy of prevention and handling of school bullying through different aspects, and requires schools to adopt a "whole school approach" in formulating and implementing anti-bullying strategies, which should include a clear stance on zero tolerance, reporting mechanism and handling procedures, highly transparent monitoring and an attitude to handle each school bullying incident proactively and seriously.

Prevention of school bullying

We adopt the principle of "prevention is better than cure" in dealing with school bullying, and have advised schools to nurture in students the spirit of mutual respect and caring from an early age. To prevent school bullying, the EDB has actively promoted values education through school curriculum, learning and teaching resources and various student guidance programmes/activities, with a view to nurturing students' positive values and attitudes such as law-abiding awareness, mutual respect, and the sense of inclusion and friendship.

On curriculum arrangements, learning contents such as personal growth, interpersonal relationships and protecting oneself are covered in relevant Key Learning Areas, subjects and the curricula of moral and civic education of primary and secondary schools. The aims are to prevent school bullying and violence by nurturing the positive sense of values and attitudes of students, such as empathy and respect for others, and to equip students with the positive attitudes and courage to face bullying and deal with the situation

in an appropriate manner.

The EDB continues to organise diversified student guidance programmes for schools, such as the "Understanding Adolescent Project" in primary schools and the "Enhanced Smart Teen Project" for secondary school students, to promote the spirit of caring, respect and self-discipline.

To support and equip schools in handling school bullying, the EDB continuously organises professional development programmes for teachers to enhance their capability of preventing and handling bullying and improper behaviours in schools. Moreover, the EDB has provided schools with diversified learning and teaching resources and relevant information to enhance teachers' understanding of the problem of school bullying and help schools formulate strategies on prevention, handling and follow-up on school bullying.

Parents play a vital role in their children's development and learning. The EDB encourages and promotes home-school co-operation and communication and organises various parent education activities so as to enable parents to understand their children's needs during their personal growth.

Handling school bullying incidents in a timely manner

If unfortunately there are school bullying incidents, schools should take immediate action to stop the bullying according to the guidelines issued by the EDB, taking education, guidance and protection of their students as the prime concern, and then assess the condition of the students concerned (including whether he or she is injured or emotionally unstable) so as to provide appropriate assistance. According to the prevailing guidelines, after the emergent incident is under control, the details of the incident are ascertained and the initial intervention and mediation are completed, schools should contact the parents as soon as possible to explain the situation. For serious cases, the EDB should be notified. Parents may also request the school management and the guidance and discipline personnel to approach the Regional Education Offices of the EDB for further assistance on respective bullying incidents. The EDB will seriously follow up on every school bullying case.

In handling bullying incidents, schools should guide their students to have self-reflection and work on ways to solve the problem, with the aim of preventing the recurrence of such incidents. Schools will, if necessary, arrange guidance personnel to offer assistance to the bullied or further enlist the help of professionals, such as social workers and psychologists, to provide support and mediation services, or even refer the students to the necessary professional service (e.g. support for those who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder), so as to safeguard their psychological health while ensuring that they will not be hurt again.

When dealing with the students who bullied others, schools should help them understand the mistake they have committed and the moral values involved in accordance with the guidelines on disciplinary procedures and school

rules. Schools should also work with parents to help the students involved rectify their misbehavior. If necessary, arrangements should be made for guidance personnel to take up the cases for thorough follow-up by providing individual/group counselling or referring the students to relevant professional service outside school.

Teachers should never perform any acts of bullying to students. Schools should monitor their teachers and take the initiative to follow up on cases of misconduct involving their teaching staff. The EDB will seriously follow up, and issue an advisory, warning or reprimand letter taking into consideration the gravity of each substantiated case, and will even consider cancelling the registration of the teacher concerned in accordance with the Education Ordinance.

To conclude, the existing policy and mechanism prevent and handle school bullying incidents from various angles. The EDB will continue to monitor the situation of the schools and provide necessary support so as to prevent bullying in schools for the well-being of students.

Thank you, President.