

SED on class resumption and Liberal Studies “textbooks”

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, at a media session at the Central Government Offices today (August 31):

Reporter: A few English questions. First, what would be the arrangement if students, teachers or even other staff on the campus got infected after campuses are reopened? We understand that senior secondary school kids probably have the ability to take care of themselves. They have good hygiene and it is safe for them go back to school. But is it really safe for some of the kindergarten kids or lower primary kids to go back so soon to school? Second question, around 20 school campuses will be used for the community testing scheme, so what will be the cleaning arrangements for those campuses so they will be safe for reopening and for students to return? Third question, some critics have called the change of content in some Liberal Studies textbooks after a review a political screening, essentially. What is your response to that? Does the Government now consider some protests or political events like June 4 to be something that should not be taught in Liberal Studies classes and something that does not fit the purpose of the curriculum?

Secretary for Education: For the 20-odd campuses that we are now using as testing centres, of course during the course of the testing there will be regular cleansing every day, at least twice every day. As soon as the whole test has been completed, we will carry out very thorough cleansing for the 20-odd government schools. That is being arranged, so that there should not be any concern about the hygiene condition of these schools even after the testing. By the way, the testing itself is pretty safe, so there should not be any particular concern actually. But to make sure that our students and teachers feel comfortable, we decided to do another thorough cleansing upon the completion of the test.

You are right that in terms of self-discipline and self-management, senior secondary students are of course better than junior students or kindergarten students. We always have to balance between the health of the students and the education needs of the students. After the class resumption in May and June this year, we are confident that schools are able to carry on teaching and learning at schools safely. So this time we decided to allow the face-to-face lessons covering the whole spectrum of students, from kindergarten to senior secondary. That of course would require co-operation between the schools, the parents and the students. And under such a large-scale epidemic, I think even our kindergarten students have to learn how to protect themselves against the virus. So I think, back to the schools, I think the kindergartens will also help them develop their ability to look after themselves in terms of, for example, some basic measures such as wearing masks, how to properly wear a mask, washing hands and even drinking

water. All these can be taught at the kindergartens to help them develop very good habits of maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

We are discussing with the CHP (Centre for Health Protection) on whether we could develop more guidelines for schools to follow. Based on the experience back in May, June and July, there are actually quite a number of scenarios, including teachers or students being confirmed cases or close contacts or their families being close contacts. These are the different scenarios that we are trying to sort out with the CHP and provide clearer guidelines for the schools to follow. But on individual confirmed cases, usually the CHP would need to do an assessment, including what is the scope of contact the student or teacher has encountered, I think, in the past few days. So there needs to be some assessment on a case-by-case basis anyway.

And finally, on the Liberal Studies "textbooks", I would not say it is a political screening. What we do is professionally we look at the "textbooks" already in the market and provide some professional advice to the publishers. And you can see that the publishers adjust the "textbooks" by themselves – some of them maintain some content while others have deleted that. But I think the best way is not to compare the previous one, which the EDB has not made any comments on before, with the present one. I suggest the community look at the current ones and assess whether these "textbooks" are fair, (whether) the information inside is comprehensive, and (whether they) present the actual facts in society. I think these are the key elements that we have to consider – whether they actually facilitate the students' learning. These are all more important than whether one particular incident is included in the "textbook" or not, because in Liberal Studies teachers could have a wide range of topics that they could cover; it is meaningless just to focus on one particular topic, on whether it is included or not. As a matter of fact, I think some of the concepts that are now included in the "textbooks" are much more accurate than before, which is something we are happy to see.

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