

LCQ17: Staff of a law firm before it was intervened

Following is a question by the Hon Luk Chung-hung and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (March 24):

Question:

Earlier on, the Council of the Law Society of Hong Kong (the Council) intervened in the operation of a law firm (the firm) because the Council suspected after investigation that a former employee of the firm had dishonestly misappropriated the money of the clients of the firm, and was satisfied that the firm had committed serious breaches of the Solicitors' Accounts Rules (Cap. 159F). The firm's practice forthwith ceased, and all the money of the firm has been held by the Council on trust. The Council has appointed another law firm as the Intervention Agent (Agent) to handle the follow-up work. It is learnt that dozens of staff who worked in the firm prior to cessation of its practice were employed by an independent company. As the company's money deposited with the firm has been held by the Council, it is unable to pay such staff wages totalling over \$4 million (which include salaries, pay for untaken annual leave and statutory holidays, wages in lieu of notice and severance payments). On the other hand, some of such staff have assisted the Agent, upon its request, in handling the follow-up work, but have not been paid any wages. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether the Labour Department (LD) has received requests for assistance from the aforesaid staff; if so, how the LD assists them in recovering the wage defaults, including whether it has assisted them in taking legal actions and applying for legal aid;
- (2) whether the LD will discuss with the Council and the Agent the payment of salaries to the aforesaid staff for the period during which they assisted in handling the follow-up work; and
- (3) whether it will amend the Legal Practitioners Ordinance (Cap. 159) to stipulate that when similar cases occur in future, the Agent appointed by the Council to handle the follow-up work of a law firm which has been intervened should (i) handle the severance matters for all staff who worked in that law firm (irrespective of whether they were directly employed by the law firm concerned) (including verifying the amounts of wage defaults, so as to help the staff concerned expeditiously recover such wage defaults), and (ii) pay salaries to the staff who assist the Agent in handling the follow-up work?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the relevant government department, my consolidated reply to the member's question is as follows:

Upon receipt of the request for assistance from the staff concerned in January 2021, the Labour Department (LD) promptly rendered appropriate assistance to the employees, including providing conciliation service, and assisting them to lodge claims at the Labour Tribunal (LT) for their wages in arrears and termination payments. As the employer failed to pay the sums awarded by the LT, the LD assisted them in no time to apply for ex gratia payment from the Protection of Wages on Insolvency Fund, and for legal aid from the Legal Aid Department as necessary.

If there exists an employment relationship between an employee and the Law Society of Hong Kong (Law Society) or its appointed law firm as the intervention agent, and the employee suspects that his/her employment rights and benefits under the Employment Ordinance (Cap. 57) has been infringed, he/she may approach the LD direct. The LD shall render appropriate assistance.

A self regulatory regime has all along been implemented for Hong Kong's legal profession in order to ensure the professionalism and independence of our legal practitioners. The Legal Practitioners Ordinance (Cap. 159) (the Ordinance) is to make amended provisions for the admission and registration of legal practitioners and their employees, the appointment and registration of notaries public, and for purposes connected therewith. The Ordinance and its subsidiary legislation lay down the statutory powers, functions and duties of the Law Society as the regulator of the solicitors' branch, including section 26A of the Ordinance specifying the circumstances under which the Council of the Law Society may pass a resolution to exercise its statutory power to intervene into a law firm's practice and exercise the powers set out in Schedule 2 to the Ordinance, and appoint an intervention agent to assist in the intervention, for the protection of the interests of the clients of that firm and the public.

In respect of the case referred to in the question, we note that in the Law Society's submission to the Legislative Council Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services dated January 25, 2021, the Law Society stated that it had already set up a working party to review the intervention process. In relation to views on further protection to the parties affected by the intervention of a law firm, the Department of Justice is ready to maintain communication with the Law Society.

US Dollar Liquidity Facility tender

result

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

US Dollar Liquidity Facility tender result:

Tender date	: March 24, 2021 (Wednesday)
Settlement date	: March 25, 2021 (Thursday)
Repayment date	: April 1, 2021 (Thursday)
Tenor	: Seven Days
Amount applied	: Nil
Amount allotted	: Nil
Lowest interest rate accepted	: Nil
Highest interest rate accepted	: Nil

LCQ4: Ordering teachers alleged to have breached law to be suspended from duties

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (March 24):

Question:

During the disturbances arising from the opposition to the proposed legislative amendments, quite a number of teachers were arrested for suspected participation in unlawful activities. The Education Bureau (EDB) has written to schools requiring them to order an immediate suspension from duties of those teachers who were arrested for involvement in cases of serious offences, so as to protect students' safety and safeguard schools' operation. It is learnt that some schools have decided that such teachers are to be suspended from duties only upon conviction by the Court. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that as the conviction threshold for criminal offences is rather high, the acts, committed by those teachers who were prosecuted for taking part in a riot or an unlawful assembly but have been acquitted in a criminal trial, may still constitute professional misconduct, whether the EDB will issue further guidelines to schools in the territory, stipulating that

schools must enforce the arrangements for suspension from duties more stringently, so as to avoid students from being led astray by such teachers; and

(2) given that those teachers who were suspended from duties but have subsequently been acquitted by the Court may claim compensation from the schools for the losses they incurred by being suspended from duties, whether the Government will, on behalf of the schools, bear the liabilities for compensation so as to allay the concerns of the schools; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Schools should be places for students to concentrate on learning without disturbances. As students' role models, professional teachers are obliged to teach them, offer them guidance and emotional support, and in particular cultivate their virtues and positive values, so that they can grow up healthily and contribute to the society in the future. The Education Bureau (EDB) has been striving ahead with schools, providing them with timely guidance, and assisting schools in adopting appropriate measures to create a safe, stable and peaceful environment for students to learn happily. In fact, the majority of teachers uphold professionalism and are dedicated to nurturing their students. The misconduct of a few black sheep, though only a minority, has undermined the reputation of the teaching profession, while some of them are even involved in serious illegal acts. Such acts bring shame on members of the education profession, seriously affect the professional image of teachers, and undermine the society's confidence in teachers. The EDB is the authority for formulation, implementation and monitoring of education policies as well as the authority for registration of teachers. We take a very serious and prudent approach in handling cases of suspected professional misconduct of teachers to maintain the confidence of parents and society in our education services.

From mid-June 2019 to late December 2020, the EDB received a total of 269 complaints about suspected professional misconduct of teachers in relation to the social turmoil. We have largely completed the investigation of 244 cases, of which 95 are unsubstantiated. Among the remaining cases, we have cancelled two teachers' registration and issued reprimand and warning letters to 28 and 24 teachers respectively, reminding them to uphold professional ethics and that recidivism will definitely be met with severe punishments, including the possibility of cancelling the teacher's registration. We have also issued written advice to 27 teachers and verbal reminders to another 28 teachers, reminding them to refrain from activities that are detrimental to the image of the teaching profession, and to show respect to the behavioural norms acceptable to society. For the remaining cases that are likely to be substantiated in our initial view, we are currently handling them in accordance with the established procedures, with a view to determining the appropriate follow-up actions.

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Holden Chow is as follows:

(1) The Codes of Aid stipulate that subject to the Employment Ordinance and other relevant provisions, a school may suspend a teacher from his/her normal duties if he/she has been involved or is likely to be involved in criminal proceedings of a serious nature or in serious misconduct.

In order to assist schools in coping with the challenges posed by social turmoil in 2019, the EDB has issued letters or guidelines to schools for a number of times. In the letter we issued to schools in late December 2019, we explained our expectations of teachers and the code of conduct for them. We also clarified to schools the basic principles for handling teaching staff who have been arrested, pointing out that when considering whether teachers should be suspended from duties, schools should take into account students' well-being, including the impact on their personal safety, moral development and quality of learning, as a primary consideration. If a teacher is suspected of having committed a serious crime, the school should also assess the risk involved should the teacher continue to contact with the students, even if the case or the incident is not yet concluded.

Specifically, if a teacher is involved in a serious offence related to personal safety, such as arson, serious wounding, riot, possession of dangerous goods or prohibited weapons, etc., or an offence generally considered by the public to be seriously violating moral standards, such as a sexual offence, trafficking or possession of drugs, possession of child pornography, etc., taking into account students' personal safety and well-being, schools should handle the case prudently, and suspend the duties of the teacher concerned to prevent him/her from continuing to take up teaching duties or to have contact with students. As for teachers under arrest but not charged with any offences, schools should examine carefully the nature and seriousness of the cases involved and consider whether it is appropriate to allow them to continue to take up their teaching or other duties in schools.

In fact, schools, as employers, are responsible for the management of a professional team of teaching staff in school, including handling the appointment, promotion, termination, dismissal and any other staffing matters. If we learn that there are suspected cases of unlawful acts committed by teachers, we will closely liaise with the schools concerned and provide support in relation to various matters. If it is noted that the schools have deviated from the EDB's instructions in the process, we will offer advice to the schools and require them to re-consider the cases.

Regardless of whether an arrested teacher is convicted or not, the EDB will, upon completion of all the legal proceedings (including the appeal proceedings), review the registration status of the teacher concerned based on the information available. If the EDB considers that the teacher is no longer a fit and proper person to be a teacher, we will cancel the teacher's registration pursuant to the Education Ordinance. If the case does not warrant the cancellation of registration, the EDB will take follow-up actions of different levels having regard to the nature and severity of the case. These include issuing a reprimand, warning letter or advisory letter, etc. to remind the teacher concerned that he/she should uphold professional ethics and recidivism will definitely be met with severe punishments, including the possibility of cancelling the teacher's registration.

(2) Generally speaking, if a teacher is arrested for being suspected of having committed a crime and is charged later, schools will, taking into account the aforesaid factors and the nature of the crime, suspend the teacher from his/her normal duties before the completion of legal proceedings and a judgement is delivered on the case by the Court. Some cases will take a longer time to conclude if appeal procedures are involved. To ensure students can continue with their studies without being affected by the teacher's absence from duties, a school may make use of the resources provided by the Government to hire a supply teacher to temporarily take up the duties of the teacher being suspended from duties. In making the arrangements for the teachers being suspended from duties and their salary payment, schools should observe the requirements under the Codes of Aid, Employment Ordinance, employment contract, schools' own policies and the actual situation. In general, in case the teachers concerned have not performed any duties, they will not receive salary payment. Regarding the arrangements for suspending teachers from their duties, should there be any enquiries or difficulties encountered by individual schools, the EDB will provide appropriate advice and support, with a view to assisting them in making the proper arrangements and ensuring that students' learning will not be affected.

Thank you, President.

LCQ5: COVID-19 Vaccination Programme

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Cheng Chung-tai and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (March 24):

Question:

The Government authorised the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccines "Comirnaty" and "CoronaVac" on January 25 and February 18 this year respectively for emergency use in Hong Kong. It has been reported that since the commencement of the Vaccination Programme on February 26, a number of members of the public have felt unwell after receiving vaccination, and there have been several incidents in which members of the public died within a short period of time after vaccination. As a result, the daily number of people receiving vaccination has shown a downward trend. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will urge the company which researched and developed CoronaVac to expeditiously publish the third phase clinical research data of the vaccine in medical journals, or make public the relevant data by other means; and

(2) whether the Expert Committee on Clinical Events Assessment Following

COVID-19 Immunisation has studied the circumstances under which the Vaccination Programme needs to be suspended pending re-assessment of the pros and cons of receiving vaccination?

Reply:

President,

Since the launch of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme on February 26, more than 400 000 citizens have received the first dose of the vaccine. The goal of our vaccination programme is very clear, which is to implement the vaccination programme in a progressive and orderly manner and expand the priority groups to provide vaccine protection to all people in Hong Kong, having regard to the proposed framework on priority of vaccination by the Joint Scientific Committees under the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health (DH). With regards to Dr Hon Cheng Chung-tai's point that some citizens felt unwell or passed away within a short period of time after receiving the vaccine, I wish to provide a simple response. According to the assessment of relevant experts, so far no death case has been proven to have causal relationship with the administration of COVID-19 vaccines. From the medical professional and science perspectives, so far there is no evidence pointing to the need for us to cast doubt on the safety of the two COVID-19 vaccines (i.e. Sinovac and BioNTech/Fosun vaccine) now made available to members of the public. The relevant vaccines are effective and of good quality.

My consolidated reply to the other parts of the question is as follows:

In accordance with the Prevention and Control of Disease (Use of Vaccines) Regulation (Cap. 599K) (the Regulation), as the Secretary for Food and Health, after making reference to the advice of the Advisory Panel on COVID-19 Vaccines (Advisory Panel) and having considered the threat to public health posed by COVID-19, I considered that the authorisation of the Sinovac vaccine is necessary and in the public interest. I have authorised the emergency use of the relevant vaccine in Hong Kong according to the Regulation on February 28.

As part of the application of the relevant vaccine for emergency use in Hong Kong in accordance with the Regulation, Sinovac has provided to the Advisory Panel the Phase 1 and 2 clinical data that it had submitted to the World Health Organization (WHO) and National Medical Products Administration, the Phase 3 clinical information of trials conducted in Brazil, as well as the Phase 3 clinical information of trials conducted in Turkey and Indonesia. The information and data of the clinical trials submitted by Sinovac have been examined and assessed in a thorough, objective and holistic manner by the 12 experts of the Advisory Panel with reference to the relevant requirements of WHO guidelines. These experts have all participated in peer reviews in their respective academic fields. Their assessment conducted for the Sinovac vaccine is on par with the peer reviews normally conducted for academic journals, and the assessment procedures for the relevant information are not different despite the information has not yet been published in

medical journals. With a view to strengthening the transparency of information regarding vaccines, the expert advice on the Sinovac vaccine given by the Advisory Panel has been uploaded to the website of the Food and Health Bureau. To ensure that the Sinovac vaccine continues to fulfil the criteria of safety, efficacy and quality, I have attached conditions to the relevant vaccine authorisation, including requiring the drug manufacturer to execute a relevant risk management programme, and continue to provide the latest clinical data and laboratory analysis certificates for each batch of vaccines, as well as timely updates of quality reports.

Ensuring that the COVID-19 vaccines meet the requirement of safety, efficacy and quality is the primary consideration of the Government when implementing the vaccination programme. Since the launch of the vaccination programme, DH has put in place a pharmacovigilance system for adverse events associated with COVID-19 vaccines in accordance with WHO guidelines. It has continued to receive reports of Adverse Events Following Immunisations (AEFIs) related to the COVID-19 vaccines used in Hong Kong from healthcare professionals and pharmaceutical industries. Furthermore, the Government has established the Expert Committee on Clinical Events Assessment Following COVID-19 Immunisation (Expert Committee) for continuous monitoring of AEFIs associated with COVID-19 vaccinations and provide expert opinion and advice on the safety monitoring of authorised vaccines. Regarding the serious adverse events following COVID-19 vaccination in Hong Kong, the Expert Committee would review the cases having regard to the available information, including the medical conditions and history of the patient as well as relevant clinical data, available information related to the vaccine and preliminary autopsy findings (if applicable), and conduct causality assessment based on the algorithm of the WHO. So far, the assessment results of the Expert Committee have not indicated any causal relationship between death cases and the administration of vaccines. Put in simple terms, from the medical professional and science perspectives, so far there is no evidence pointing to the need for us to cast doubt on the safety of the two COVID-19 vaccines now made available to citizens. The relevant vaccines are effective and of good quality.

Based on science and following the principles of openness and transparency, DH published on March 12 the regular summary report on AEFIs associated with COVID-19 vaccinations. The results of the report showed that the vaccination situation was in line with expectations and was similar to the experience of other places. There is no particular significant factor that raise concerns on unexpected AEFIs due to COVID-19 vaccination. In view of this, we believe that there is no basis for the suspension of the vaccination programme. We will also regularly update and publish the relevant report. If citizens have any questions about their physical condition or whether they are fit for COVID-19 vaccination, they should first consult their family doctor or attending doctor before getting the vaccine.

I would like to stress that vaccination is an important public health measure to control COVID-19 effectively. The Government has all along been implementing the vaccination programme based on scientific evidence and in adherence to the principles of openness and transparency, providing members

of the public with the choice of vaccines from different technology platforms. Faced with the raging epidemic, the community should work together to fight the virus. We encourage citizens to actively get vaccinated so as to protect themselves, their families, the healthcare system, and even the whole population, so that Hong Kong can successfully overcome the epidemic as soon as possible.

Thank you, President.

LCQ18: Mental health of students

Following is a question by the Hon Kwok Wai-keung and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (March 24):

Question:

The findings of a number of surveys conducted last year have shown that the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic has resulted in the aggravation of the emotional stress and mental health problems of secondary and primary students. The prolonged suspension of face-to-face classes and changes in the mode of learning have exerted certain pressure on students and affected their emotional and psychological health. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number of students who committed suicide and died in each of the past five school years, broken down by age;
- (2) whether it knows the respective numbers of students in each of the past five years who (i) received treatments by the psychiatric services of public and private hospitals/clinics, and (ii) waited for such treatments and their average waiting time, together with a breakdown by age and type of mental illness;
- (3) whether it knows the number of requests for assistance received, since the outbreak of the epidemic, by schools relating to students suffering from emotional disturbance and mental stress, with a breakdown by type of issues pertaining to the requests for assistance; and
- (4) of the work currently undertaken by the Education Bureau on education about students' control of emotions; the new measures in place to (i) strengthen the resilience of students, and (ii) help schools, teachers and parents deal with students' emotional problems more effectively and identify at an early stage students suffering from emotional disturbance, as well as enhance their knowledge of and skills in coping with the relevant situations?

Reply:

President,

Owing to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic, schools have suspended face-to-face classes from time to time since February 2020 to protect the health of students. Nevertheless, the Education Bureau (EDB) and schools are very concerned about students' support needs in learning and emotion. With respect to learning, we help students learn at home through diversified measures, with an aim to achieving "suspending classes without suspending learning". Regarding emotional support, we also help schools provide timely and appropriate emotional support to students through various means, including talks and workshops. All along, we have been working together with schools to enhance students' development amidst the threat of the epidemic. Saddened by all student suicide cases and noting that complicated issues are often involved, the EDB has been supporting students with mental health needs (including those with suicidal risk) through diversified means.

Having consulted the Food and Health Bureau, we have prepared the following consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Kwok Wai-keung:

(1) The EDB has all along been maintaining close contact with schools and providing support as needed. When a suspected fatal suicide case of student arises, the school will immediately inform the EDB and activate the Crisis Management Team to decide on the follow-up actions according to the situation and formulate the contingency plan, so as to minimise the possible negative impact of the incident on students and the school (e.g. emotions of students and teachers, and school operation). The educational psychologists, school social workers and teachers will provide emotional support and follow-up services to students in need. Whether a case is suicide or not will only be confirmed after the legal proceedings of the Coroner's Court (Court) have completed. As the EDB has not captured relevant information from the Court, officially verified figures on students' fatal suicide cases are not available. The numbers of suspected fatal suicide cases of students as reported by primary and secondary schools to the EDB in the past five school years are tabulated as follows:

School year	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
No. of cases	19	19	16	20	23

(2) Table 1 below sets out the number of psychiatric patients aged below 18 who were treated in the Hospital Authority (HA) and diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, behavioural and emotional disorders, schizophrenic spectrum disorder or depression/depressive disorders by age group from 2015-16 to 2019-20. The HA does not maintain information on the number of students receiving psychiatric services from private hospitals/clinics.

Table 1

		Number of psychiatric patients aged below 18 (Note 1, 2 and 3)	Number of patients aged below 18 diagnosed with the following disorders (Note 5)				
			Autism spectrum disorder	Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder	Behavioural and emotional disorders	Schizophrenic spectrum disorder	Depression/ Depressive disorders
2015-16	Aged below 6 (Note 2)	2 870	1 720	200	50	0	0
	Aged from 6 to 11 (Note 2)	15 170	4 870	6 670	680	10	20
	Aged from 12 to 17 (Note 2)	10 780	2 660	4 260	900	350	430
	Total (Note 4)	28 810	9 260	11 140	1 620	360	450
2016-17	Aged below 6 (Note 2)	3 450	1 810	240	30	0	0
	Aged from 6 to 11 (Note 2)	16 680	5 520	7 540	740	10	20
	Aged from 12 to 17 (Note 2)	12 170	3 050	4 940	920	360	590
	Total (Note 4)	32 310	10 380	12 720	1 700	370	610
2017-18	Aged below 6 (Note 2)	3 450	2 060	240	40	0	0
	Aged from 6 to 11 (Note 2)	17 660	6 170	8 100	720	10	20
	Aged from 12 to 17 (Note 2)	13 830	3 540	5 690	950	370	740
	Total (Note 4)	34 940	11 780	14 020	1 700	380	760
2018-19	Aged below 6 (Note 2)	3 510	2 140	260	50	0	0
	Aged from 6 to 11 (Note 2)	18 980	7 070	8 970	1 010	10	20
	Aged from 12 to 17 (Note 2)	15 420	4 200	6 890	1 160	350	980
	Total (Note 4)	37 910	13 410	16 120	2 210	360	1 000
2019-20	Aged below 6 (Note 2)	3 410	1 940	290	70	0	0
	Aged from 6 to 11 (Note 2)	20 280	7 610	9 510	1 410	<5	20
	Aged from 12 to 17 (Note 2)	16 660	4 660	7 610	1 290	300	1 050
	Total (Note 4)	40 350	14 210	17 420	2 760	310	1 070

Note:

1. Including inpatients, patients at specialist outpatient clinics and day hospitals.
2. Age of the patients as at June 30 of the respective year.
3. Figures are rounded to the nearest ten.
4. Individual figures may not add up to total due to rounding.
5. The figures may not be comparable to those released in the past due to expansion in data scope since 2018-19.

Table 2 below sets out the number of child and adolescent psychiatric

specialist outpatient new cases of HA triaged as Priority 1 (urgent), Priority 2 (semi-urgent) and Routine (stable) cases and their respective median waiting time from 2015-16 to 2019-20.

Table 2

Year	Priority 1		Priority 2	
	Number of new cases	Median waiting time (week(s))	Number of new cases	Median
2015-16	202	1	915	4
2016-17	267	1	875	4
2017-18	239	1	907	5
2018-19	282	1	930	4
2019-20	355	1	912	3

Note: In view of the emergence of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic in Hong Kong since early 2020, the HA has adjusted its services in response to the epidemic along with tightening up infection control measures. Hence, the service throughput across a wide range of services provided by the HA might have been reduced when compared with that of previous years.

(3) and (4) The EDB attaches great importance to the emotional education for students. In respect of school curriculum, the current curriculum framework of moral and civic education has listed "adapt to new learning environments with an optimistic and positive attitude" (lower primary level), "handle pressure rationally, and face failure bravely" (upper primary level), "appreciate your strengths and accept your weaknesses" (junior secondary level), and "be proactive and assertive, have a positive self-image" (senior secondary level) as the focuses for nurturing students in schools. The EDB has also adopted "be grateful and treasure what we have, stay positive and optimistic" as the theme for the promotion of values education in schools, provided relevant learning resources, and organised student activities and teacher professional development programmes to support schools in cultivating students' positive thinking and resilience.

The EDB has been encouraging schools to adopt the Whole School Approach directed at three levels, namely "Universal", "Selective" and "Indicated", to promote mental health among students and enhance support for students with mental health needs (including those with suicidal risk).

At the Universal level, the EDB has been actively promoting diversified student development programmes, such as the "Understanding Adolescent Project" for primary schools, "Enhanced Smart Teen Project" for secondary schools, and "Pupil Ambassador Scheme on Positive living" to enhance students' resilience, self-respect, self-discipline, sense of responsibility and courage to embrace changes in facing challenges through adventure-based, team-building and problem-solving training.

At the Selective level, starting from the 2007/08 school year, the EDB has been providing serving teachers with structured training courses on supporting students with special educational needs pitched at basic, advanced

and thematic levels. Some modules of the courses cover mental illness. From the 2017/18 school year onwards, the EDB has also provided teachers of primary and secondary schools with the "Professional Development Programme for Mental Health", including 3-day elementary training for teachers at large and 5-day in-depth training for designated teachers with a view to raising their awareness of mental health and enhancing their professional knowledge and skills to identify and support students with mental health needs.

At the Indicated level, starting from the 2017/18 school year, the Learning Support Grant has covered students with mental illness so that schools can have additional resources to strengthen their support for these students' learning, social, emotional and behavioural needs. Moreover, the Food and Health Bureau, in collaboration with the EDB, HA and Social Welfare Department, has launched the "Student Mental Health Support Scheme" since the 2016/17 school year to provide appropriate support services for students with mental health needs through a school-based platform.

During the suspension of face-to-face classes, the EDB has encouraged schools to keep in contact with, and express concern to, students through telephone or electronic communication. Schools should also strengthen communication with parents and jointly observe and pay attention to the behaviours of students. If students are noticed to suffer from persistent or severe emotional distress, teachers should promptly refer them to the guidance personnel, school social workers, school-based educational psychologists or other professionals for appropriate support.

To help teachers and parents understand methods to deal with students' negative emotions arising from the epidemic and assist them to maintain mental well-being, the EDB produced a series of short psychoeducational videos, namely "Suspending Classes without Suspending Love in the Epidemic" in April and May 2020. The videos have been uploaded to the EDB's YouTube Channel and "Smart Parent Net" website. Besides, the EDB organised 20 sessions of workshops from September to November 2020 and invited psychiatrists to share with school personnel the skills of early identification of students with emotional difficulties and approaches to counselling and therapeutic intervention, and to discuss case studies with a view to enhancing the capabilities of teachers and other school personnel in supporting students to release their negative emotions and stress. Meanwhile, we have also issued guidelines and information on mental health, including the guidelines on "Providing Emotional Support to Students amid the Epidemic", the article on "Learning the Lesson of 'Happiness'" and the e-poster on "Preparing for the Examination Positively during the Epidemic" for reference of teachers and parents.

In summary, schools can take care of students' emotional and mental health amid the epidemic through the above-mentioned measures provided by the EDB and school-based support strategies. If schools find that students have emotional disturbance and mental health difficulties, they should seek assistance from relevant professionals or organisations. The EDB has not collected information on the number of requests for assistance.