

Notes of the Twenty-fifth Meeting of the Children's Rights Forum

Date : 4 December 2015 (Friday)

Time : 5:15 pm

Venue : Training cum Lecture Room, 5/F, West Wing,
Central Government Offices, 2 Tim Mei Avenue,
Tamar, Hong Kong

Attendance:

Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau

- 1) Mr Gordon LEUNG, JP (Chairman) Deputy Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs
- 2) Mr D C CHEUNG Principal Assistant Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs
- 3) Mr Michael YAU Assistant Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs
- 4) Ms Connie LAU Assistant Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs

Non-government Organisations Representatives

- 1) The Centre for Governance and Citizenship, The Hong Kong Institute of Education Ms Gail YUEN
- 2) Harmony House Ms Judith NG
- 3) Kids' Dream Mr Lawrence TUNG
Mr Kelvin CHEUNG
Miss Christine CHUNG
Miss Angel WONG
Mr Kevin CHEUNG
Mr Jason LAU
- 4) Hong Kong Committee for United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Mr John KU
Ms Heidi TAM
UNICEF Youth Envoys Club and Voices of Youth
Miss Abby LEUNG
Mr WANG Yilin

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5) | Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor | Mr CHONG Yiu-kwong |
| 6) | Hong Kong Unison | Ms Mandy CHEUK
Miss Ali Awan Simrah |
| 7) | Mother's Choice | Ms Monique YEUNG
Ms Winnie CHOY |
| 8) | Society for Community Organization | Miss SZE Lai-shan

<u>Children's Rights Association</u>
Miss LO Yuet-shan
Miss Cherry LEE |
| 9) | The Boy's & Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong | Ms Ada FUNG
Mr WONG Chun-in

<u>Junior CEs</u>
Miss LAU Ying-ting |

Discussion Item

- | | | |
|----|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1) | Ms Eunice CHAN | Assistant Secretary (Assessment & Support), Education Bureau |
| 2) | Ms Lavonne WEI | Senior Curriculum Officer (Assessment & Support/Mathematics), Education Bureau |
| 3) | Mr LAI Tak-wai | Project Officer I (Assessment & Support/Chinese Language) ² , Education Bureau |

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Chairman welcomed representatives of non-government organisations and children representatives to the meeting.
- 1.2 In the light of Forum members' suggestions, the following changes were introduced to this meeting:
 - (i) instead of arranging two items for discussion as in previous meetings, this meeting would focus on the discussion of the Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA) to allow attendees to have sufficient time for discussion;
 - (ii) as proposed by children representatives, discussion would be conducted in a group setting on a trial basis. Following the briefing given by the

representative of the Education Bureau (EDB), attendees would be divided into two groups for group discussion. Under this arrangement, the attendees would have more opportunities to express their views.

2. Discussion Item

Territory-wide System Assessment (Paper No. CRF 6/2015)

2.1 2.1.1 The Chairman invited the representative of EDB to give an account of the TSA.

2.1.2 EDB's representative, Ms Eunice CHAN, briefed the attendees on the background of the TSA. The TSA was a basic competency assessment in Chinese Language, English Language and Mathematics proposed by the Education Commission. It was first introduced to Primary Three (P3) in 2004, then extended to Primary Six (P6) in 2005 and Secondary Three (S3) in 2006. Since 2006, all students at P3, P6 and S3 took part in the TSA annually (except P6 TSA which was suspended in 2012 and 2014). P6 TSA had been held in odd years since the implementation of 2014 enhancement measures.

2.1.3 Ms CHAN explained that the TSA served the following functions:

- (i) at school level, it helped schools understand students' performance against basic competencies and identify areas for improvement for provision of timely support, which would enable enhancement of learning and teaching strategies, and improvement on students' learning effectiveness;
- (ii) at government level, it facilitated the formulation of related policies and measures, such as developing appropriate learning and teaching resources to cater for learner diversity, promoting "Reading to Learn" so as to enhance reading culture in schools, etc; and
- (iii) in the long run, it enhanced the schools' ability to use data from assessment and promoted the culture of assessment for learning in schools.

Ms CHAN also advised that assessment of similar nature was also conducted in advanced countries including the USA, Britain and Australia.

2.1.4 Enhancement measures for the TSA implemented since 2014 included:

- (i) not disclosing their students' basic competency attainment rates to individual primary schools;
- (ii) removing the TSA from the Key Performance Measures for primary schools;

- (iii) continuing to administer P6 TSA in alternate years, i.e. the P6 TSA would be conducted in odd years, and the arrangement for administering P3 and S3 TSA would remain unchanged; and
- (iv) enhancing the reporting functions of the TSA by phases by providing a more interactive reporting platform.

2.1.5 Ms CHAN's response to the public's doubts on the TSA were as follows:

Doubt One: Had the assessment questions gone beyond the requirements of basic competencies?

Ms CHAN pointed out that basic competency was the minimally acceptable level of knowledge and skill which students should attain at the end of a learning stage in order to progress effectively to the next learning stage without extra support. She then cited examples for illustration.

Doubt Two: Would the results of the TSA affect students' advancement? Were the TSA results related to the allocation of secondary school places?

Ms CHAN pointed out that the TSA was only designed to improve learning and teaching. The TSA results would absolutely not affect the advancement of students and were not related to Secondary School Place Allocation. The results were not for ranking schools, nor were they used as an indicator for which bands of students of individual schools belonged to. She reiterated that the TSA served to facilitate the Government to understand student's overall performance in attaining basic competencies, and providing reliable data for schools to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of their students to provide feedback to learning and teaching, enhancing learning effectiveness.

Doubt Three: Was drilling culture attributed to the TSA?

Ms CHAN pointed out that the TSA was designed to gauge students' attainment of basic competencies. These basic competencies were included in the curriculum, students should have attained them through general teaching and no drilling was required. The TSA was a low-stake assessment: at the individual level, it did not reveal the academic performance of individual students; at school level, the attainment rates were not disclosed to individual primary schools and the TSA was removed from the Key Performance Measures for primary schools. Besides, the EDB issued circulars on policy of homework as well as selection of quality textbooks and curriculum resources for use in schools at the end of October 2015.

Ms CHAN welcomed comments and questions on the TSA from attendees and children representatives

2.1.6 The Chairman thanked the representative of EDB for the briefing, and invited attendees to divide into two groups for group discussion.

2.2 Comments and questions on the TSA put forward by attendees and children representatives, as well as responses from the representative of EDB were as follows (Group One):

2.2.1 A children representative enquired in case where the assessment results showed that most students had failed to give correct responses to certain assessment questions, did it mean that those questions were too difficult or the requirements of basic competencies set by the EDB had gone beyond the competencies of ordinary students. On supporting learning and teaching materials, a children representative pointed out that the Bureau's online materials could only be accessed through Internet Explorer but not other platforms, and improvement was needed. EDB's representative Ms Lavonne WEI thanked the children representatives for their question and suggestion. As far as the question design was concerned, Ms WEI advised that the EDB would review the assessment questions; if the rate of correct response for certain question was too low, it might be attributed to the undesirable design of the item or to students' failure to master basic competencies. In the former case, similar types of questions should be avoided in future; in the latter case, the EDB and schools should provide assistance and support to students to help them attain the competencies. As for the technical problem relating to the online support service, the EDB would conduct a review and consider enhancing the platform.

2.2.2 An attendee who had not taken part in the TSA pointed out that despite his lack of personal experience, he learnt from the media that the TSA had exerted pressure on students while parents complained that the TSA had resulted in excessive drilling. He hoped that the EDB would consider adjusting the TSA to relieve the pressure on students. Ms WEI thanked the attendee for his comments. She concurred that there was a need to seriously review the TSA and tackle the culture of drilling. New members had been introduced to the Coordinating Committee on Basic Competency Assessment and Assessment Literacy to facilitate the EDB to take account of views from different sectors.

2.2.3 Some children representatives pointed out that not every school drilled students for the TSA, the schools they attended had not drilled students for the assessment. They considered that the TSA should not be abolished. The children representatives pointed out that school examinations also exerted pressure on students but should not be abolished on that ground.

2.2.4 An attendee pointed out that the TSA had not rendered much help to non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students, and since school-based assessment was already in place, why was there a need to implement the TSA. In response, Ms WEI advised that the TSA could provide reliable data to help schools understand the competencies of their students and other students in the territory for comparison of their performance, so that appropriate teaching adjustments could be made. As for NCS students, their academic performance might have failed to catch up with the standard of Hong Kong due to differences in background and culture. Analysis on the TSA results

of NCS students had been conducted to review the support measures for these students.

- 2.2.5 Some attendees and children representatives agreed that the TSA could collect data on students' basic competencies and considered that how the data was used and how the data could be used to help students with weaker performance were of paramount importance. An attendee enquired that apart from data on students' competencies in Chinese Language, English Language and Mathematics, whether the EDB would develop a comprehensive database to collect data on all-round education, including data for the early childhood stage, as stress in learning in higher grades would have impact on early childhood education. Some attendees and children representatives also pointed out that supplementary exercise questions available in the market were difficult and enquired about the role of the EDB in this regard. Ms WEI thanked the attendees and children representatives for their comments, in particular the suggestion of taking early childhood education into account. Regarding the collection of data on students' competencies in areas other than the three major subjects, Ms WEI advised that consideration should be given to whether this would result in drilling in more subjects. As for the question of supplementary exercises, Ms WEI advised that publishers were currently required to submit textbooks to the EDB for review, but this requirement did not apply to supplementary exercises.
- 2.2.6 A children representative considered the assessment questions of TSA to be very simple and easy, and some students would muddle through the assessment test so that the results could not reflect the basic competencies of students and the assessment could not serve its functions. Given that the assessment questions were simple and easy, the children representative commented that there was no need for the schools to ask their students to do mock papers to prepare for the assessment. She also asked whether the EDB had explained to the schools that the TSA was a low-stake assessment. Ms WEI thanked the children representative for his/her comments and question. She advised that the EDB had ceased to release students' basic competency attainment rates to schools since 2014 and had repeatedly reminded the schools that the TSA was a low-stake assessment.
- 2.2.7 A children representative expressed that it was only after the briefing given by the EDB's representative that he understood the operation and purposes of the TSA and agreed that the original intentions for implementing the TSA were good. However, the message he got from school was the school administration would seek to obtain the TSA results of individual students from the EDB and the scores would have impact on the performance of individual students as well as the school. Ms WEI thanked the children representative for his comment and clarified that the EDB would definitely not release the results of individual students to schools, not even requests from schools were received.

- 2.2.8 An attendee and a children representative expressed that excessive drilling would defeat the purpose of reflecting the students' basic competencies, and the drilling culture was originated from Hong Kong's competitive atmosphere, placing pressure on students, parents and teachers. The attendee and children representative considered that for students, pursuing all-round development, including cultivating positive attitude towards learning and developing emotional intelligence, was more important than scoring a few more points in examinations. Ms WEI thanked the attendee and children representative for their comments and pointed out that the loudest outcry on the TSA was caused by drilling, the EDB would definitely look squarely at the problem in the review.
- 2.2.9 The representative of EDB thanked the attendees and children representatives for their questions and suggestions.
- 2.3 Comments and questions on the TSA put forward by attendees and children representatives, as well as responses from the representative of EDB were as follows (Group Two):
- 2.3.1 An attendee enquired if it was true that Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools and private schools did not need to participate in the TSA while government and subsidised schools were required to take part in the assessment. In response, EDB's representative Ms Eunice CHAN advised that government and aided (including subsidised and DSS) schools were required to take part while private schools could opt to take the assessment.
- 2.3.2 Some attendees and children representatives pointed out that students' basic competency attainment rates had placed pressure on schools and teachers, resulting in a culture of drilling which placed great importance on techniques of answering questions. As a direct consequence of such culture, students were deprived of the time to take part in extra-curricular activities and play, jeopardising their overall development and defeating the purposes of improving learning effectiveness and encouraging learning initiative of students. A children representative also expressed the wish that the EDB would consider setting a limit on the amount of time for doing homework to cater for the students' need for all-round development. In response, Ms CHAN advised that the TSA was one of the assessment tools which aimed at providing feedback to learning and teaching, enabling schools to make appropriate adjustments to teaching mode. Parents might express their views on the TSA and amount of homework to the school administration through different means (such as Parent-Teacher Associations), and schools should not drill their students for the TSA.
- 2.3.3 An attendee pointed out that the TSA had not provided support for low-income families and had failed to cater for learner diversity and children's need. Ms CHAN advised that under the current arrangement of the TSA, the performance of students with special educational needs and NCS students were not included in the overall assessment report.

- 2.3.4 Some attendees and children representatives expressed doubt on the effectiveness of the TSA and raised the point that if students muddled through the assessment, the TSA would have failed to serve its functions. A children representative commented that given the current implementation of the TSA was far from satisfactory, replacement measures such as suspending the TSA, administering the assessment in alternate years, adopting a sampling approach, improving the mode of reporting (for example sending reports to schools directly instead of providing facilities of items) could be considered. Ms CHAN thanked them for their comments which would be relayed to the Coordinating Committee for consideration.
- 2.3.5 Some attendees and children representatives appreciated that the TSA was originally intended to improve students' learning effectiveness, which was not bad. However, as the TSA had deviated from its original purpose in the course of implementation or due to misconceptions, some schools and parents had placed too much emphasis on assessment and thus leading to pressure. Some children representatives also commented that the assessment questions were difficult. In response, Ms CHAN advised that the questions in the exercise books available in the market might be more difficult than the actual TSA questions given that the publishers had their own considerations. Ms CHAN stressed that information on the assessment and past TSA questions had been uploaded to EDB's webpage, and the Bureau would consider stepping up publicity efforts to increase the understanding of the TSA among parents and schools. The attendees and children representatives agreed that publicity efforts should be stepped up.
- 2.3.6 The representative of EDB thanked the attendees and children representatives for their questions and suggestions.

[Post-meeting note: The Coordinating Committee on Basic Competency Assessment and Assessment Literacy had completed the review on the TSA and submitted the preliminary recommendations to the EDB on 4 February 2016. The document was available at <http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/tsa/report.pdf>.]