

**Notes of the
Eighth Meeting of the Commission on Children**

Date : 13 November 2020
Time : 3:00 p.m.
Venue : 5/F, West Wing, Central Government Offices

Present

Chairperson

Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung Chief Secretary for Administration (CS)

Vice-chairperson

Dr Law Chi-kwong Secretary for Labour and Welfare (SLW)

Ex-officio Members

Dr Christine Choi Under Secretary for Education (USED)
(for Secretary for Education)

Dr Chui Tak-yi Under Secretary for Food and Health (USFH)
(for Secretary for Food and Health)

Mr Jack Chan Under Secretary for Home Affairs
(for Secretary for Home Affairs)

Ms Judy Chung Principal Assistant Secretary
(Constitutional and Mainland Affairs)⁵
(for Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs)

Mr Gordon Leung Director of Social Welfare

Dr Thomas Chung Consultant Community Medicine
(Family & Student Health)
(ConCM(F&SH))
(for Director of Health)

Mr Howard Yam Assistant Director of Home Affairs (3)
(on behalf of Director of Home Affairs)

Ms Chan Yuen-han Chairperson of Women's Commission

Non-official Members

Mr Peter Au Yeung Wai-hong
Miss Cheng Hui-kiu
Ms Janus Cheng
Ms Kathy Chung Lai-kam
Mr Dennis Ho Chi-kuen
Dr Patrick Ip
Dr Sanly Kam Shau-wan
Mr Edwin Lee
Mrs Priscilla Lui Tsang Sun-kai
Mr Kenny Ng Kwan-lim
Ms Susan So Suk-yin
Ms Michelle Tam Chi-yun
Dr Sandra Tsang Kit-man
Mr Gary Wong Chi-him
Dr Lilian Wong Hiu-lei
Ms Kathy Wong Kin-ho
Dr Wong Kwai-yau

Secretary

Ms Annie Kong

Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour
and Welfare (Commission on Children)

In attendance

Chief Secretary for Administration's Private Office

Miss Carrie Chang

Administrative Assistant to Chief
Secretary for Administration

Mr Alex Chan

Press Secretary to Chief Secretary for
Administration

Ms Kathy Siu

Political Assistant to Chief Secretary for
Administration

Labour and Welfare Bureau

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| Ms Chang King-yiu | Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare |
| Mr David Leung | Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) ¹ |
| Miss Linette Au | Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Commission on Children) |
| Ms Terry Cheung | Chief Executive Officer (Commission on Children) |

Education Bureau (EDB)

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| Mrs Iris Kwong [For item 3 only] | Principal Education Officer (Kindergarten Education) (PEO(KGE)) |
| Ms Edith Tse [For item 3 only] | Principal Education Officer (Curriculum Development) ¹ |
| Ms Annie Leung [For item 3 only] | Chief Curriculum Development Officer (Kindergarten and Primary) |
| Ms Yonny Chan [For item 4 only] | Chief Curriculum Development Officer (Physical Education) (CCDO(PE)) |

Social Welfare Department

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| Ms PANG Kit-ling | Assistant Director (Family & Child Welfare) |
| Miss Chan Lai-chu | Chief Social Work Officer (Rehabilitation & Medical Social Services) ¹ |

Members absent with apologies

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| Prof Daniel Shek Tan-lei | Chairperson of Family Council |
| Miss Bakar Fariha Salma Deiya | |
| Mr Winson Chow Wai-chung | |
| Ms Shalini Mahtani | |
| Dr Halina Poon Suk-han | |

Item 1: Confirmation of the Notes of the Seventh Meeting held on 25 May 2020

The draft notes of the Seventh Meeting were circulated to Members for comment on 24 June 2020. Taking on board a Member's comments, revised notes with amendments made to paragraphs 5(d) and 7 were circulated to Members on 16 July 2020. The revised draft notes were confirmed without further amendment.

Item 2: Matters arising

2. In regard to paragraphs 11 and 12(d) of the notes of the Seventh Meeting held on 25 May 2020 concerning hospital visiting arrangement and school guidelines for COVID-19 respectively, USFH provided the following information -

- (a) Noting the importance of visiting arrangement for both children in-patients and their carers, compassionate visiting arrangements had been made by hospitals as far as practicable subject to the situations of individual cases and the needs of the children.
- (b) The Centre for Health Protection had drawn up the "Health Advice to Schools for the Prevention of COVID-19" and provided guidelines to schools on actions to be taken if there were confirmed COVID-19 cases in schools.

3. Regarding a Member's concern on the actions taken by government bureaux/ departments (B/Ds) to follow up on the deliberations of the Commission meetings and the progress achieved, SLW said that some suggestions and views required cross-departmental collaboration. The Secretariat would coordinate with relevant B/Ds to keep track of their follow-up progress. As to her views on the child fatality review mechanism, SLW asked the Secretariat to pass them to the Working Group (WG) on Children Protection for reference.

Item 3: Education Development & Academic Pressures in Hong Kong [Paper No. 04/2020]

4. Ms Susan So declared interest as her organisation (Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children) had been running kindergarten-cum-child care centres.

5. On CS's invitation, PEO(KGE) briefed Members on the latest education development and measures taken to alleviate academic pressure of students and to promote playtime for children as well as joyful learning.

[CS left the meeting at 3:45 p.m. and SLW took over to chair the meeting at this juncture.]

6. Members' views and suggestions were summarised as follows –

(a) Education development

- (i) On the new kindergarten (KG) education policy (viz. kindergarten education scheme), it was suggested that the Government should enhance the participation rate of KGs in the Scheme and explore the feasibility of free KG education in Hong Kong. To meet the needs of some low-income families, subsidy could be given to support children for attending KGs offering whole-day programmes.
- (ii) Noting the different understanding on the concepts of learning through play and free exploration, EDB should provide the assessment indicators to facilitate the implementation. Training should also be provided to strengthen teachers' understanding of the pedagogy for planning the learning activities.
- (iii) With regard to school-based homework policy, a set of objective criteria should be provided for schools' reference to ensure that the amount of homework set by schools would be maintained at a reasonable and appropriate level.
- (iv) The Government should explore the feasibility of relocating schools from sub-standard premises, relaxing the use of public open space (such as those of the public estates) for schools, and identifying outdoor areas easily accessible with ecological values so that children could have sufficient place to play and explore.
- (v) To better prepare for the global trend of e-learning in education, EDB should enhance support for students from low-income families who lacked sufficient online learning equipment. Schools should be provided with guidelines for supporting the

needs of these students flexibly. An assessment and monitoring mechanism on e-learning should also be set up. It was also necessary to provide training for teachers to learn the electronic tools and master the skills of online teaching.

- (vi) As for life-wide learning, EDB should give adequate guidelines to teachers, parents and students to support its effective implementation.
- (vii) A Member raised the need of enhancing children's understanding of their rights as stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child at an early age. It was proposed to incorporate the basic principles of children's rights into the education curriculum with a review mechanism in place to help cultivate a rights respecting atmosphere in schools.
- (viii) A review should be conducted on the Understanding Adolescent Project (Primary) (成長的天空計劃(小學)) which has been launched since the 2004/05 school year with encouraging results in enhancing primary students' resilience, to facilitate its sustainable development and implementation.

(b) Academic pressures on parents and children

- (i) Academic pressure was considered a significant source of stress not only in primary and secondary schools students, but also in parents. Some research findings reflected that the number of child abuse cases relating to primary school students tended to increase during examination seasons. With reference to overseas experience, the Government should explore the feasibility of scrapping examinations at certain school levels on a gradual basis if possible.
- (ii) It was important to view from the children's perspectives to fully understand the sources of stress. The Committee on Home-School Co-operation should step up efforts in educating parents the importance of listening to children's voices to better understand their needs.
- (iii) While advocating the policy of diversified education and whole-person development, students' achievements in the core subjects were still heavily emphasised. It was suggested to provide multiple pathways to meet the needs and aspirations of

school leavers and to increase the number of publicly-funded degree places to reduce the stress of both parents and students.

- (iv) EDB should strengthen promotion of the Happy Kids Charter to arouse parents' awareness of the importance of fostering children's healthy and happy development, as well as avoiding excessive competition. Practical tips on free play should also be provided to parents to offer guidance on how they could play with their children under the time and space constraints.
- (c) Support for non-Chinese speaking (NCS) and children with special educational needs (SEN)
 - (i) In addition to the five-year C-for-Chinese@JC project funded by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust for enhancement of the language competency of NCS KG students, the Government should roll out more sustainable measures to support the long-term development and growth of NCS children.
 - (ii) EDB should also look into the academic pressure on children with SEN, as well as the stress associated with adaptability, peer relationship and deterioration of academic performance under the pandemic. In respect of the latter, it was observed that children with SEN encountered difficulties in learning effectively through online platforms. EDB should consider providing alternative arrangements on assessment of the studies and examination requirements to cater for the needs of these children. To better understand the feelings and needs of children with SEN, the Commission would conduct thematic engagement sessions for these children and their parents/carers.

7. In response to Members' views, USEd made the following responses –

- (a) Stress in children was caused by various factors and varied from person to person. The issue should not be over-simplified. EDB would continue to foster students' positive values and attitudes, in particular on enhancing their resilience, by strengthening school-based professional support and organising professional training to principals and teachers to implement values education. It would also strengthen parent education, home-school cooperation and partnership with non-government organisations to bring about

synergy in enhancing the effectiveness of values education.

- (b) Given the diverse learning needs and abilities of students, it would not be practical to quantify the amount of homework and the number of hours spent daily on homework by students with indicators/guidelines. EDB had all along emphasised that it was the quality rather than quantity of homework that mattered. The schools were encouraged to design interesting and meaningful homework that stimulated students' thinking and enabled them to consolidate and apply what they had learnt. Schools/teachers were allowed the flexibility to formulate the appropriate school-based homework policy with due regard to their school contexts and the learning needs of their students.
 - (c) EDB had put in substantial amount of resources to support NCS children and children with SEN. It was encouraging to note that more local schools had admitted NCS students. EDB would continue to allocate resources to support NCS children to facilitate their effective learning of the Chinese language and consequently their integration into the community.
 - (d) With the distinctive rise of e-learning amid the pandemic, EDB had been implementing an assistance programme through the Community Care Fund to subsidise needy primary and secondary students studying in public sector schools to purchase mobile computer devices under the "Bring Your Own Device" policy. In addition, EDB would disburse a one-off top-up grant to subsidise schools for the additional expenses incurred in purchasing portable Wi-Fi routers (Wi-Fi eggs) and/or mobile data cards for needy primary and secondary students to facilitate e-learning at home. EDB would, having regard to resources available, continue to provide support to the underprivileged students for their learning needs.
8. USEd also responded to Members' enquiries as follows –
- (a) On the Education Commission Reports, the Education Commission would, as and when necessary, advise the Secretary for Education on the overall education objectives and policies, and the priorities for implementation of its recommendations. Various Task Forces had been set up to carry out in-depth reviews on eight key areas of school education as the direction in education development.

- (b) Regarding the Quality Education Fund (QEF), the QEF Steering Committee had allocated \$3 billion for the setting up of the Dedicated Funding Programme for Publicly-funded Schools, through simplified procedures, for schools to launch school-based curriculum development and support measures for students, as well as relevant school campus improvement works and procurement of supplies. Priority themes would be renewed to meet the needs of school education.
 - (c) On the interface between KG and primary education owing to the prolonged class suspension amid the pandemic, EDB would continue to provide necessary support measures for schools, including the provision of guidelines, to facilitate the smooth transition of KG students to primary school.
9. USEd further informed Members that, owing to the outbreak of upper respiratory tract infection, all KGs and kindergarten-cum-child care centres would suspend face-to-face classes and schools activities for two weeks starting from 14 November 2020, with the health of children being the prime concern. EDB would continue to keep in close contact with the Department of Health (DH) to monitor the development of the situation.

Item 4: Children's Physical Health
[Paper No. 05/2020]

10. On SLW's invitation, USFH, ConCM(F&SH) of DH and CCDO(PE) of EDB briefed Members on the public health approach and the major health services provided by DH to safeguard and promote the physical health of children, as well as the measures taken by EDB on students' health promotion.
11. Members' views and suggestions were summarised as follows –
- (a) Health services
 - (i) Despite the provision of school outreaching vaccination service, some parents opted out of the seasonal influenza vaccination for their children in light of recent reports of deaths in South Korea following flu vaccination. DH should follow up on the situation and enhance parent education on vaccination.

- (ii) There was insufficient support for breastfeeding mothers, in particular the insufficient supply of lactation consultants.
 - (iii) A wide range of health services were provided to young children aged 0 - 18 months (through the Maternal and Child Health Centres) and to children studying in primary and secondary schools (through the Student Health Service). The Government should provide similar services for children aged in between, in particular for children from underprivileged families, to bridge the service gap. An example of service delivery was by outreaching to KGs.
 - (iv) Members welcomed the new Special Oral Care Service provided to pre-school children with intellectual disabilities at the Hong Kong Children's Hospital (HKCH) through on-site dental examination at Special Child Care Centres. A Member suggested to streamline the referral mechanism of HKCH for children with dental treatment needs. On the other hand, the Government should consider providing oral health services for all pre-school children.
 - (v) In view of the long waiting time for child assessment service, a Member suggested that the Government should enhance collaboration between the public and private sectors in increasing assessment places. Besides, consideration might be given to provide training subsidy to children identified with developmental problems for them to seek treatment as early as possible in the private market.
- (b) Physical health issues regarding COVID-19 pandemic
- (i) Noting that the vaccination uptake rate for children had dropped during the pandemic, a Member raised her concern on the risk of outbreak of vaccine preventable diseases.
 - (ii) With the social distancing measures in place, the physical education (PE) lessons and co-curricular activities in schools had to be adjusted. Schools were encouraged to arrange other suitable activities for students to maintain adequate physical activities under the pandemic.
 - (iii) The Government should tackle the problem of children's "covibesity" (increasing obesity under COVID-19 pandemic)

which was more severe among children from low-income families as they tended to have less space for physical exercises at home. On the other hand, there was a concern that children from low-income families would be more prone to malnutrition.

- (iv) There were also concerns on the impact of prolonged use of digital devices for e-learning on eyesight. Along with the implementation of half-day classes during the pandemic, Members were concerned about students' eating habit as healthy lunch meals were no longer supplied at schools. They suggested that the Government should promote the message of healthy eating and healthy screen time. Educational materials such as health tips cards could be produced for dissemination of the information to children and parents.

(c) Physical education in schools

- (i) To achieve the target of a 10% reduction in the prevalence of insufficient physical activity among adolescents stated in the "Towards 2025: Strategy and Action Plan to Prevent and Control Non-communicable Diseases in Hong Kong", a Member supported EDB's proposal to include the recommendation of the World Health Organization that children and youth should accumulate 60 minutes of physical activities daily as a direction for the development of the PE curriculum and would like to know how it would be taken forward.
- (ii) Regarding the Survey Study on Students' Physical Fitness, a Member asked about the scope of the study and whether the findings were accessible by the public.
- (iii) While 130 schools had joined the PE teachers' professional network, EDB was suggested to continue to expand the network as appropriate, by recruiting more schools and considering engaging non-governmental organisations, with a view to further promoting physical activities to students.
- (iv) Schools should encourage parents' participation in physical activities with their children, as it would be easier for children to develop the habit of doing exercise with the support and participation of their parents.

- (v) Members emphasised the importance of adequate space and suitable school environment in promoting physical activities for students, and shared their concerns on the space constraints of some schools with small premises, as well as the time constraints when schools only resumed half-day sessions under the pandemic situation.
 - (d) There was a need to increase public awareness of the health hazards and impacts to students associated with the use of electronic cigarettes.
 - (e) A Member suggested that the Government should address children's health issues in a holistic approach, as many contributing factors were interrelated, such as issues of mental health, maltreatment and negligence, right to survival, accidents and emergency. It was also suggested that the Government should review the Comprehensive Child Development Service for enhancing the services to promote physical health of children.
12. USFH made the following responses –
- (a) Hong Kong did not import the batch of flu vaccines used in South Korea which caused adverse effects in some people receiving the flu shots. DH would rigorously monitor the development and ensure the safe implementation of the vaccination programme.
 - (b) Members' views and suggestions regarding the support to breastfeeding mothers would be conveyed to the Committee on Promotion of Breastfeeding.
 - (c) FHB had taken a number of initiatives to promote healthy eating, for example, the introduction of "EatSmart@restaurant.hk" Campaign and "Salt / Sugar" Label Scheme for pre-packaged food products, in addition to the school-based healthy eating policies.
 - (d) On the use of electronic cigarettes, the Government attached great importance to the issue and planned to submit a bill to the Legislative Council on the proposed ban on electronic cigarettes, heated tobacco products, and other smoking products in Hong Kong.

13. ConCM(F&SH) supplemented with the following responses –

- (a) In addition to the School Dental Care Service provided for primary school students, DH had been working closely with KGs and nurseries in conducting an oral health promotion programme named “Brighter Smiles for the New Generation” for pre-school children with the aim to promote the establishment of good oral health care habits to these children.
- (b) The Government was aware of the adverse impacts of COVID-19 on children’s physical health. In this regard, DH had collaborated with EDB in developing health education resources and tips to children and parents covering topics such as physical activity and healthy screen time. These resources could be accessed on DH’s and EDB’s websites.

14. CCDO(PE) provided the following information in response to Members’ comments –

- (a) To achieve the target of 60 minutes of cumulative physical activities daily by students and help them develop the habit of doing exercise, schools had been encouraged to design diversified physical activities with fun elements for enhancing students’ interests in engaging physical activities.
- (b) On the view that a holistic approach should be adopted in promoting students’ physical health, EDB had been promoting the whole school approach to help students develop an active and healthy lifestyle. Support measures such as organising trainings on effective learning and teaching strategies and sharing of good practices through the PE teachers’ professional network (the network) were provided to more than 130 networking schools. By supporting schools in formulating the policy of “Developing an Active and Healthy Schools Campus”, sporting culture for increasing students’ motivation to participate in physical activities could be developed in schools.
- (c) EDB acknowledged the difficulties of schools with limited space and facilities in promoting physical activities. Schools were advised to make reference to the good practices shared in the network, such as how to arrange suitable activities for students with limited space and arrange extended learning for students to exercise after school.

Item 5: Progress Reports of the Working Groups
[Paper No. 06 – 09/2020]

15. The Convenors / Vice-Convenor presented the deliberation and conclusion of the WG on Children Protection [Paper No. 06/2020], WG on Research and Public Engagement [Paper No. 08/2020] and WG on Children with Specific Needs [Paper No. 09/2020]. The Secretary reported the deliberation and conclusion of the WG on Promotion of Children's Rights and Development, Education and Publicity [Paper No. 07/2020] on behalf of the Convenor.

16. With regard to the deliberation of the WG on Children Protection on the review mechanism of child fatality in Hong Kong, a Member suggested that consideration should be given to expanding the scope of work of the Child Fatality Review Panel (the Review Panel) to cover all child death cases and serious injury cases of children, in addition to those reportable to the Coroners. Another Member asked whether the Review Panel should be conferred with statutory powers. In response, SLW said that it would take a very long lead time to set up a statutory Review Panel as necessitated by the legislative process and hence Members might wish to take a pragmatic approach to consider both the short- and medium-term measures to enhance the existing child fatality review system. Members noted that these views had already been raised and fully deliberated at the WG meeting on 10 September 2020.

17. In view of the postponement of the face-to-face thematic engagement session for children with specific needs owing to COVID-19 pandemic, a Member suggested that the Secretariat should explore alternative arrangement to conduct the engagement session, such as via online platform.

[Post-meeting note: The Secretariat has scheduled an online engagement session with stakeholders for children with specific needs and their parents in January 2021.]

18. Having noted the above comments, the meeting endorsed the progress reports of the four WGs.

Item 6: Any Other Business (AOB)

19. The meeting noted that Members had proposed to discuss three items under AOB. In light of the house rule that there should not be more than two substantive items and one information item for each CoC meeting to allow thorough and in-depth discussion of each item and owing to time constraint,

SLW said that the Secretariat would arrange for these items to be considered at the relevant WGs or other suitable forums.

20. A Member suggested to redefine the work of certain WGs so as to achieve better synergy between public engagement and public education work on the one hand, and on-going consultancy studies and research on children-related policy issues on the other. SLW said that the Secretariat would facilitate exchange of views among convenors of the WGs concerned and channel the consensus reached back to CoC for consideration.

21. Noting that the date of next meeting was tentatively scheduled on 5 March 2021, a Member suggested advancing the meeting to an earlier date in view of the CoC's pressing work commitments on various fronts. SLW advised that he would reflect the Member's view to the Chairperson, although it would also depend on the prevailing pandemic situation.

[Post-meeting note: The next meeting has been tentatively advanced to 28 January 2021, subject to the pandemic development.]

22. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:10 p.m.

**Commission on Children Secretariat
December 2020**