

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

Date : 4 December 2023
Time : 3:30 p.m.
Venue : Conference Hall, West Wing,
Central Government Offices, Tamar

Present

Chairperson

Mr KK Chan Chief Secretary for Administration (CS)

Vice-chairperson

Mr Chris Sun Secretary for Labour and Welfare (SLW)

Ex-officio Members

Dr Christine Choi Secretary for Education
Mr Raistlin Lau Acting Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism
Dr Libby Lee Under Secretary for Health
(for Secretary for Health)
Mr Clarence Leung Under Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs
(for Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs)
Miss Charmaine Lee Director of Social Welfare (DSW)
Dr Thomas Chung Consultant Community Medicine
(Family and Student Health) (ConCM(FSH))
(for Director of Health)
Mr Kelvin Kong Acting Chief Superintendent of Police
(Crime Support)(Crime Wing) (Ag. CSP(CS)(CW))
(for Commissioner of Police)
Ms Rebecca Chan Chief Executive Officer (3)
(for Director of Home Affairs)
Ms Melissa Kaye Pang Chairperson of Family Council
Ms Chan Yuen-han Chairperson of Women's Commission

Non-official Members

Ms Karin Ann
Mr Peter Au Yeung Wai-hong
Mr Chan Kin-ping
Miss Anna May Chan Mei-lan
Miss Kelly Cheng Hui-kiu

Ms Kathy Chung Lai-kam
Prof Patrick Ip
Dr Sanly Kam Shau-wan
Ms Joyce Lee Yuen-sum
Ms Shalini Mahtani
Mr Kenny Ng Kwan-lim
Ms Cindy Pun Siu-fung
Dr Tang Chun-pan
Dr Sandra Tsang Kit-man
Dr Rizwan Ullah
Mr Gary Wong Chi-him
Ms Donna Wong Chui-ling
Dr Lilian Wong Hiu-lei
Miss Koby Wong Lok-yin
Ms May Wong May-kwan

Secretary

Ms Jeanne Cheng Principal Assistant Secretary for
Labour and Welfare (Children)

In attendance

Chief Secretary for Administration's Private Office

Mr Sammy Leung Administrative Assistant to
Chief Secretary for Administration
Mr Nicky Ng Press Secretary to Chief Secretary for Administration
Ms Joyce Li Political Assistant to Chief Secretary for Administration

Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB)

Ms Alice Lau Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare
Mr David Leung Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare)1
Ms Terry Cheung Chief Executive Officer (Children)

Education Bureau (EDB)

Mr Jeff Sze Under Secretary for Education (US(Ed))
Ms Candy Chan Principal Education Officer(Special Education)2
[For item 3 only] (PEO(SE)2)
Ms Jennifer Young Principal Inspector (Guidance & Discipline)
[For item 3 only]
Mr Yan Po-wa Chief Curriculum Development Officer
[For item 3 only] (Information Technology in Education) (CCDO(ITE))

highlights of both events were played at the meeting. CS expressed appreciation and encouragement to Members for their enthusiastic participation and support as well as the bureaux/departments (B/Ds), including HKPF, SWD and EDB, for their concerted efforts in jointly organising the two events. In response, Members thanked the support of CS and the efforts made by the Secretariat in staging the two events, which had received positive feedback from the participants and attracted extensive media coverage.

**Item 3: Child Protection in the Digital Environment
[Paper No. 18/2023]**

3. On CS' invitation, PEO(SE)2 and CCDO(ITE) of EDB, SSP(TCCI)(CSTCB) of HKPF, ConCM(F&SH) of DH and AD(YC) of SWD briefed Members on the various measures taken by the Government to keep children safe from online threats in the digital environment.

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

(a) On school-related measures

- (i) EDB should evaluate the effectiveness of different support measures provided to students involved in cyber bullying and promote a positive help-seeking attitude in schools. Parents, teachers and social workers were encouraged to build trust with students.
- (ii) Noting that the General Studies (GE) for primary schools would undergo reform, EDB should explore the feasibility of including digital competence in the revised framework of GE curriculum so as to strengthen students' resilience against online threats, and their literacy and ethics for an optimum use of artificial intelligence technology. Students should also be alerted to the importance of protecting their digital footprint and data privacy.
- (iii) In view of the increasing prevalence of online sex abuse cases involving children as victims, the teaching mode and lesson time of sex education in school should be reviewed.

- (b) On health-related measures
 - (i) A Member observed that the frequent use of digital devices would adversely affect children's fine motor skills. When assigning online homework to students, schools should also take into account the estimated time required for students to spend on digital devices.
 - (ii) More comprehensive data on children's behavioural pattern in using digital devices should be collected to identify severe addiction cases and provide the children and their families in need with health intervention and community support.
- (c) On parent education
 - (i) Positive parenting programmes should cover the negative impacts of parent overusing digital devices on children's development and parent-child relationship.
 - (ii) Noting that parents commonly used digital devices to appease their agitated children, parents should be alerted to the potential mental health risks in overuse, and be provided with tools for filtering accessible online information for age-appropriate digital content. Where necessary, the Government should provide more legal protection to children in the use of internet.
- (d) Others
 - (i) Members appreciated the efforts made by B/Ds in protecting children in the digital world. They hoped that the Government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and business sectors could collaborate in providing a safe online environment for children. Internet service providers should be reminded of their social responsibilities particularly in child protection.
 - (ii) Children from lower income families and living in congested homes tended to have longer screen time. The Government should conduct relevant research and provide

appropriate support to these families.

5. In response, US(Ed) said that EDB had been launching the Positive Parent Campaign, which offered diversified programmes and activities to foster parents' positive thinking and promote proper ways and attitudes of nurturing children, and hence help reducing children's reliance on digital devices. Experts were invited to provide advice and information on parenting and ways to manage the internet usage by children. In view of the harmful impacts which might bring to young children due to early access to digital devices, EDB had also issued guidelines on the usage of e-learning for kindergarten children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

6. Ag. CSP(CS)(CW) said that HKPF had launched promotional and educational initiatives on child protection in collaboration with different B/Ds. HKPF would maintain collaboration with the Interpol and other overseas law enforcement agencies in combating online child abuse cases.

7. ConCM(FSH) noted Members' concern about the harmful impacts to children caused by prolonged screen time and video gaming. DH would keep in view the latest information released by the World Health Organization on gaming disorder, in particular, the development of relevant assessment tools and treatment.

8. AD(YC) said that the Cyber Youth Support Teams of SWD had been working in collaboration with different B/Ds, schools and community stakeholders in supporting youths and their families in using internet safely. Other youth service units such as integrated children and youth services centres also organised preventive and educational programmes on an ongoing basis to enhance children's digital literacy.

9. CS thanked members for their views and assured them that the Government would suitably take into account their suggestions and follow up as appropriate.

Item 4: Follow-up on Recommendations of Review on Residential Child Care and Related Services [Paper No. 19/2023]

10. On CS' invitation, DSW and AD(FCW) briefed members on the follow-up on the recommendations of Review on Residential Child Care and Related Services (the Review).

11. Members appreciated the Government's commitment and quick response in following up on the recommendations of the Review, as reflected in the rich package of initiatives announced in The Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address. Their suggestions and views were summarised as follows –

(a) Service provision and service quality

- (i) The manpower support of residential child care services (RCCS), especially those covered in the Second Phase Review, should be enhanced to address the growing number of service users diagnosed with special learning or care needs. To attract new blood and to retain experienced staff, a Member suggested that more training and support should be provided to RCCS staff and the pay scale of staff working in RCCS settings should also be reviewed regularly.
- (ii) Members suggested increasing the service places of Small Group Home for Mildly Mentally Handicapped Children due to its strong demand.
- (iii) Members were pleased to note that additional RCCS places would be provided to prepare for the expected surge of needs for RCCS arising from the implementation of the mandatory reporting regime of child abuse. A Member reminded the Government to take into account the needs of ethnic minority (EM) children.
- (iv) A Member was pleased to note that CoC had served as an effective platform to garner views and suggestions regarding RCCS through stakeholder engagement, and that the Government had taken such views into consideration in formulating the recommendations of the Review.

(b) Foster care and adoption services

- (i) Considering that some birth parents rarely visited their children receiving RCCS nor showed any intention for family reunion, Members advised the Government to arrange foster care or adoption for the children concerned so

that they could grow up in a family setting.

(ii) Members suggested strengthening the support measures for foster parents, such as training on fostering children with special needs and provision of community-based rehabilitation services.

(c) Child protection

(i) Operators of RCCS and foster parents should be provided with training on child protection, including protection in the digital environment, with support from the Government.

12. DSW thanked Members' views and suggestions and made the following responses –

(a) SWD would take into consideration Members' concern on the service needs of EM children, including exerting greater efforts in motivating families from different ethnic groups to join the foster care service, and endeavouring to match EM children with families with similar backgrounds.

(b) SWD noted a rather significant increase in the number of enquiries on foster care service upon the announcement of the substantial increase in incentive payment for foster parents. In conjunction with the foster care agencies, SWD would scrutinise each application carefully, and provide foster parents with the necessary training, as well as outreaching service from professionals for foster children in need.

(c) Information on service supply and demand, as well as the waiting times were available in the Report of the First Phase Review of RCCS. SWD would continue to identify suitable premises for setting up new Residential Child Care Centres and Small Group Homes. To shorten the service waiting time, SWD would strive to improve the efficiency of case management for children receiving RCCS to facilitate their early family reunion, thus expediting the turnover of service places of RCCS.

**Item 5: Progress Reports of the Working Groups
[Paper No. 20-22/2023]**

13. The progress reports of the Working Group (WG) on Children Protection and WG on Promotion of Children's Rights and Development, Public Education and Engagement, WG on Research and Development, as well as WG on Children with Specific Needs were circulated to members for information prior to the meeting. The Secretariat had not received any view on the reports from members.

Item 6: Any Other Business

14. In response to a Member's concern on the rising number of student suicide cases, CS said that the Government attached great importance to the issue and, on the directive of the Chief Executive, had strengthened the collaboration among different B/Ds to address the situation. He then invited representatives of EDB, HHB and SWD to brief Members on the relevant support and preventive measures taken by the Government.

15. US(Ed) said that EDB had examined and kept track of each student suicide case. It had issued a circular memorandum to all schools advising them to prioritise students' well-being and mental health, as well as to review the schools' homework and assessment policies to avoid overstressing students. EDB had also launched the territory-wide Positive Parent Campaign and organised "Gatekeeper Training" workshops for parents. Additional resources would be provided for schools and their Parent-Teacher Associations to conduct related activities or procure services or materials for supporting students' mental health. EDB would continue to provide holistic support to students from different perspectives.

16. USH said that the Government had implemented the Three-Tier School-based Emergency Mechanism (the Mechanism) through cross-departmental collaboration of HHB, EDB and SWD in all secondary schools in Hong Kong, providing various supports ranging from assisting schools to identify students in need to offering off-campus support, as well as referral of students with severe mental health needs to the psychiatric specialist services of the Hospital Authority (HA). In addition, the HA had set up a telephone consultation hotline specifically for school principals to provide them with professional advice. The Government would constantly review the Mechanism to ensure its effectiveness.

17. DSW supplemented that under the Mechanism, SWD had commissioned five NGOs specialising in services for youth-at-risk to form an off-campus support network to proactively approach at-risk students for timely intervention. These NGOs would also refer cases to other service units for further follow-up as appropriate.

18. CS thanked Members for their views and suggestions. He said that the Government was deeply concerned about student suicide cases, and would closely monitor the situation while rolling out preventive and support measures.

19. A Member suggested to arrange screening of local films, such as “Zero to Hero (媽媽的神奇小子)” to students and parents at schools to promote positive thinking and resilience in adversity. CS took note of the suggestion and asked the CoC Secretariat to follow up the initiative with EDB, together with relevant B/Ds including the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau.

20. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 5:55 p.m.

**Commission on Children Secretariat
January 2024**