

**For discussion
on 7 February 2025**

**Legislative Council Panel on Education
Upholding Teachers' Professional Conduct**

Purpose

This paper reports on the implementation and the latest progress of the measures taken by the Education Bureau (EDB) to further uphold the professional conduct of teachers.

Background

2. Education is the foundation for building a strong country and rejuvenating the nation. The country has recently issued the 2024-35 master plan on building China into a leading country in education (Master Plan), which clearly sets out the goal of building China into a leading country in education by 2035 in order to support the country's modernisation in all respects. Cultivating a high-quality professional teaching force is one of the key missions. As emphasised by President Xi Jinping, teachers should possess the moral sentiment with "what they say as guides for learners and what they do as examples of the times". They should behave, learn and teach with virtue. As role models for students, teachers' words and deeds, conduct and values have a profound impact on students. The EDB has been attaching great importance to the professional conduct of teachers. Further to providing relevant guidelines, enhancing training and strengthening the cultivation of teachers' morality and ethics so as to build a teaching force with virtues and talents, we have performed our gate-keeping role firmly to prevent improper persons from becoming teachers and uphold the professional conduct of teachers. The ensuing paragraphs elaborate on the latest progress of the EDB's efforts in upholding and enhancing the professional conduct of teachers.

Measures to Uphold Teachers' Professional Conduct

(1) Providing Guidelines for Schools

Formulating the Guidelines on Teachers' Professional Conduct

3. Since the promulgation of the Guidelines on Teachers' Professional Conduct (the Guidelines) at the end of 2022, the EDB has all along been helping the sector understand the objectives of the Guidelines and the eight codes of professional conduct therein through various channels. Schools are required to regularly convey to all teaching staff the schools' expectations regarding their performance through various channels (such as teachers' handbook and staff meetings) and circulate the Guidelines to remind teachers of the importance of upholding professional conduct and the dire consequences of violating professional conduct. Schools should also improve their teachers' appraisal systems with a view to objectively assessing teachers' performance in teaching and professional ethics, thereby maintaining the professional standard and image of the teaching force. The EDB will continue to promote the content of the Guidelines in the sector, facilitate teachers' integration of their pursuit of professionalism and personal virtues for embracing the spirit of cultivating values and nurturing people, and update the Guidelines as necessary in a timely manner to keep abreast of the times.

Issuance of Circular and Letter on Staff Appointment

4. The EDB issued EDB Circular No.14/2023 on "Measures for Strengthening the Protection of Students: Appointment of Teaching and Non-teaching Staff in Schools" in August 2023, and issued a letter in June 2024 to further remind schools on matters relating to the appointment of teaching staff, which include requiring schools to, prior to appointing teachers and upon seeking the consent of the applicants, apply to the EDB for checking information on their registration status; check the certificates of service issued by the applicants' previous employers; and consult their previous employers about their performance, so that they can give informed and due consideration before the appointment. In addition, starting from the 2023/24 school year, schools intending to appoint teachers who have already left the teaching profession for one year or more should require the teachers concerned to declare their criminal conviction records and submit the details to the EDB for verification. Schools should also require prospective teachers to study the Guidelines to make

themselves aware of the expectations of the EDB, schools and the community on teachers' professional conduct.

(2) Enhancing Teacher Training

Pre-service Teacher Training

5. The Master Plan has mentioned taking action to strengthen the teaching force by instilling the spirit of outstanding educators and integrate such spirit in the cultivation and training of teachers. The EDB has actively incorporated elements of teachers' professional conduct in the in-service and pre-service training for teachers and encouraged teachers to actualise and reflect on their professional role. In respect of pre-service training, the EDB collaborated with teacher education universities in 2023 to develop a guiding framework for teacher education programmes, covering elements such as strengthening teachers' professional conduct, understanding education-related laws (including a correct understanding of the Constitution, the Basic Law and the National Security Law) and understanding national affairs. The framework has been gradually implemented by teacher education universities starting from the 2023/24 academic year to better equip pre-service teachers. The EDB will liaise closely with the teacher education universities to follow up on their implementation of the framework.

In-service Teacher Training

6. The EDB has developed a training framework and related requirements for newly-joined teachers, in-service teachers and teachers aspiring for promotion since the 2020/21 school year. At present, the core training for newly-joined teachers and teachers aspiring for promotion includes a workshop on teachers' professional conduct and values provided by the EDB. Apart from elaboration on the professional roles of teachers, the workshop includes case studies to facilitate teachers' understanding of the eight codes set out in the Guidelines and remind them of their responsibilities to uphold professionalism, protect students' well-being and safeguard the education profession. The core training also covers contents on the Constitution, the Basic Law and the National Security Law, which aims at enhancing the spirit of the rule of law among teachers. The

training programmes have been rolled out since November 2020. As at the end of December 2024, the EDB organised 44 workshops on Teachers' Professional Identity for about 6 200 newly-joined teachers and 36 workshops on Professional Conduct and Values for about 8 900 teachers aspiring for promotion.

7. Furthermore, as set out in the Chief Executive's 2022 Policy Address, newly-joined teachers in publicly-funded schools and teachers aspiring for promotion in public sector schools are required to participate in the Mainland study tours. Through the thematic talks on education and visits to schools, teachers will learn about the professional competencies and ethics, as well as the role model of teaching by example of their Mainland counterparts, which will enhance teachers' sense of responsibility and mission in teaching and nurturing students. Starting from the 2023/24 school year, all public sector school teachers substantively promoted to a higher rank are required to complete the Mainland Study Tours for Promoted Teachers organised by the EDB within two years from the date of substantive promotion in order to meet the training requirements for promotion. From April 2023 to December 2024, the EDB organised 47 Mainland study tours of three to four days for newly-joined teachers in the Greater Bay Area (GBA), Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan, Changsha, Hangzhou and Nanjing respectively, with a participation of about 5 750 teachers. From October 2023 to December 2024, the EDB also organised 21 4-day Mainland Study Tours for Promoted Teachers in Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Hangzhou, Guangzhou and Zhuhai respectively, with a participation of about 2 080 teachers.

Developing Training Resources

8. The EDB will continue to promote teachers' self-reflection and self-advancement. To support schools in organising school-based teachers' professional development activities, the EDB launched a training resource kit on "T-standard⁺" in bilingual versions and a training package on Teachers' Professional Values and Conduct for schools in the 2022/23 and 2023/24 school years to strengthen the professional roles, values and conduct of teachers, as well as encourage professional reflection.

9. Besides, we have edited the highlights of the Fifth GBA Forum on Teachers' Professional Ethics into a number of selected short video clips and uploaded them onto the EDB website for teachers' viewing. Schools are also encouraged to use these highlights in their teachers' professional development activities, so as to guide teachers in gaining a profound understanding of the epoch-making significance of outstanding educators' spirit, fulfilling the core mission of cultivating values and nurturing people, enhancing professional competencies and upholding teachers' professional conduct.

(3) Strengthening the Cultivation of Teachers' Morality and Ethics

Promoting Teachers' Morality and Ethics

10. The EDB has been actively collaborating with different Hong Kong and Mainland authorities to promote teachers' morality and ethics, foster a culture of respect for teachers, and widely promote the Guidelines and the spirit of cultivating values and nurturing people as set out in the Guidelines. In this regard, the EDB has been supporting the GBA Forum on Teachers' Professional Ethics since 2023. In the 2024/25 school year, The Ministry of Education's Promotion of Spirit of Outstanding Educators (Hong Kong and Macau) cum the GBA Academic Seminar on Cultivation of Teachers' Morality and Ethics were held from 9 to 10 November 2024 in Macau. The EDB arranged a group of about 70 school principals to participate in the event and some principals were invited to speak at the seminar. Through in-depth discussions with experts and scholars, school principals and teachers from the Mainland, Hong Kong and Macau during the keynote seminars and roundtable forums, the participating principals had shared good stories of schools in Hong Kong in cultivating teachers' morality and ethics. Besides, in this school year, the EDB supported a forum on moral education for school principals organised by the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals and co-organised by the Education University of Hong Kong and East China Normal University, to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China. At the forum, participants shared their work and successful experiences of promoting moral education in schools, enabling schools to guide students to develop positive values and outlook on life, and nurture them to become a new generation with virtues and talents.

Commending Outstanding Teachers

11. The EDB strives to recognise the dedication and contribution of distinguished teachers through commending teachers with outstanding performance, which also set a benchmark and example in the education sector, encourage the cultivation of teachers' morality and ethics as well as tell the good stories of education in Hong Kong. In addition to organising the annual Chief Executive's Award for Teaching Excellence (CEATE) to commend outstanding teachers and sponsoring the annual Teacher Commendation Scheme and Teachers' Day ceremony held by the Committee on Respect Our Teachers Campaign, the EDB has also introduced the "Award for Budding Teachers" and the "Award for Education Innovation" under the CEATE starting from the 2024/25 school year so as to recognise more accomplished teachers who are excelled in different areas. This can help enhance the professional image and social status of teachers, raise the social recognition for the teaching profession and reinforce the culture of respect for teachers.

(4) Firmly Performing the Gate-keeping Role

Imposing Basic Law and National Security Law Test as Entry Requirement for Appointment

12. Starting from the 2023/24 school year, all the newly-appointed teachers (including newly-joined teachers and teachers changing schools) in public sector schools, Direct Subsidy Scheme schools and kindergartens joining the Kindergarten Education Scheme are required to obtain a pass result in the Basic Law and National Security Law Test (BLNST) in order to be considered for appointment. The purpose of this entry requirement is to ensure that teachers will have a correct and basic understanding of the Basic Law and the National Security Law. The EDB conducted a total of 11 rounds of BLNST respectively for degree holders and non-degree holders in the 2022/23 and 2023/24 school years. As at the end of 2024, more than 50 000 (i.e. over 70%) in-service teachers have obtained a pass result in the BLNST, reflecting the importance that teachers attach to the correct understanding of the two important laws, namely the Basic Law and the National Security Law.

Handling Teacher Registration Matters Rigorously

13. The EDB is responsible for teacher registration and gate-keeping the quality of teachers, making sure that all teachers allowed to teach in schools are fit and proper persons. While handling teacher registration applications, we will seriously check the information declared by the teachers and check with the Hong Kong Police Force (the Police) any criminal conviction records against the applicants. If the person concerned was involved in committing an offence, we will decide whether or not to refuse his/her teacher registration application, taking into account the nature and severity of the case. Cases of suspected professional misconduct of teachers will be handled seriously according to the established mechanism and, depending on the nature and severity of the case, reprimand letters, warning letters or advisory letters will be issued to the teachers concerned. For serious cases, the EDB will consider cancelling the teachers' registration pursuant to the Education Ordinance.

14. The EDB has been requiring applicants for teacher registration and serving teachers to declare whether or not they have been previously convicted of criminal offences. To further strengthen our gate-keeping role in relation to teacher registration, starting from the 2021/22 school year, the EDB conducts criminal record check on all registered teachers every three years to prevent unintentional and intentional omissions in reporting by registered teachers with criminal convictions. We had conducted a criminal record check on all registered teachers (about 160 000 teachers) in December 2021 and relevant follow-up actions have been largely completed.

Seriously Punishing the Black Sheep

15. When handling professional misconduct, we firmly adopt “zero tolerance” towards teachers failing to meet the ethical and moral standards expected of them, which is in line with the principle laid down in the Master Plan. The follow-up actions taken by the EDB against teachers' professional misconduct in the past three years (2022 to 2024) are tabulated as follows:

	2022	2023	2024
Cancellation of teacher registration	21	47	71
Reprimand letter	12	13	38
Written warning	43	69	149
Written advice	11	13	21
Verbal reminder / Record for future reference	17	29	25

16. Regarding cases leading to the cancellation of teacher registration in 2024, apart from offences relating to theft, child abuse, deception, etc., there are also cases of serious professional misconduct which mainly included going beyond teacher-student relationships and improper physical contact with students. There was significant increase in the numbers of cases against which the EDB has taken actions in 2023 and 2024, which was mainly due to the revelation of cases arising from the criminal record check on all registered teachers every three years as mentioned above. Though the teachers concerned of a majority of the cases have already left the teaching profession, if the cases involved serious unlawful acts or professional misconduct, we will still follow up seriously to prevent such persons from teaching in schools again in order to safeguard the well-being of students.

17. The EDB has been actively strengthening its gate-keeping role in recently years and, through regular liaison with the Police, has effectively prevented teachers alleged to breach the law from concealing their misconduct. A new round of criminal record check has started in December 2024. If unintentional and intentional omissions in reporting were identified, we would take immediate follow-up action, including requesting the court to provide related documents so as to learn about the details, and handle the cases seriously in accordance with the Education Ordinance.

Way Forward

18. The EDB will continue to strengthen its efforts in training, promotion and gate-keeping, and following the key missions set out in the Master Plan, enhance teacher management, and strengthen the professional quality and competencies of teachers. While requiring teachers to

enhance their professional conduct and competencies, as well as encouraging the cultivation of teachers' morality and ethics in the sector, we would rigorously strengthen our work in relation to teachers' entry into the profession, appointment, and management so as to ensure that all teachers allowed to teach in schools are fit and proper persons. The EDB will continue to handle cases of teachers involving in unlawful acts or professional misconduct in a serious manner, with a view to protecting students' well-being and safeguarding the teaching profession.

Advice Sought

19. Members are invited to note and comment on the contents of this paper.

Education Bureau
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