



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部教育局
Education Bureau
Government Secretariat, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

本局檔號 Our Ref.:

電話 Telephone: (852) 2810 2657

來函檔號 Your Ref.:

傳真 Fax Line: (852) 2868 5916

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To: All Primary and Secondary Schools

Dear Principals, Teachers, Parents and Students,

The Christmas holiday is coming. On behalf of the Education Bureau (EDB), I wish to send my heartfelt greetings and best wishes to you all. Before turning a new page of the calendar, let us look back to the past year and draw up our expectations for the new year ahead.

Starting from June, what were protests against a legislative amendment exercise have developed into increasingly radical actions. Although the Government has withdrawn the Bill and committed to conducting a review, violence continues. Many incidents affected schools, harming our students in different ways. Apart from some students with different views being bullied, there are also teachers involved in making hate messages or imparting biased concepts to students. There were even teachers and students arrested for participating in unlawful activities. These events inevitably lead the general public to lose confidence in our education. Recently, explosive materials were found in a secondary school campus, and another case involved school staff suspected of testing remote-controlled bombs on the hillside. As the Secretary for Education, I am saddened by and worried about these developments.

The core values of rationality, peace and the rule of law are the key to the success of Hong Kong. Any so-called “reasons” that condone, approve of or advocate violence and unlawful behaviour are merely excuses to cover up unruly actions, misguide people’s thoughts and even attract them to break the law. Only through rational communication and progressive means to resolve the problems could we find the way out for Hong Kong. In the past few months, the EDB has continuously appealed to schools in the hope of preventing problems before they grow. However, our schools are now still on the brink of danger. We must join hands and take decisive action, with no tolerance of any improper behavior, to protect our immature students from the influence of distorted views.

I always fully trust our professional teachers, who teach students, offer them guidance and emotional support, and serve as their role models. Teachers are of utmost importance in students’ character building and personal development. My trust has been unswerving. We must not slack off and must work together on the different fronts of moral integrity and conduct, learning and teaching materials and daily teaching to safeguard the professional quality of education and professional image of teachers. The EDB is seriously following up every case involving teachers’ professional conduct in accordance with the Education Ordinance. For cases of serious nature, the EDB will consider cancellation of the registration of the teachers concerned, regardless of whether it is professional misconduct or a breach of the law that is involved in the cases. At the same time, for unlawful behaviour, the teachers concerned have to bear the legal responsibility.

I believe everyone agrees that schools are places for students to concentrate on learning without disturbances. Therefore, based on their school mission and school-based policy, schools have their own rules and regulations and disciplinary and counselling mechanisms to encourage students to be self-discipline and to be responsible for their own behaviours. This is part of the natural process of learning to behave properly and to act sensibly. It should not be regarded as so-called “suppression of freedom”. In fact, true freedom is not completely without

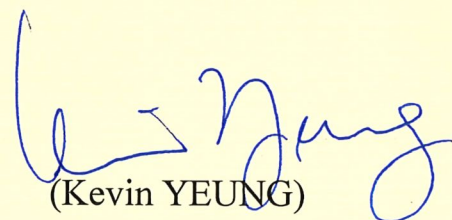
restraints. We have to respect others and exercise our rights in reasonable and lawful ways, otherwise it is an abuse of freedom. Besides, schools are places for students to learn. They should not be used as venues for different political stances to vie for influence. Students should not organise or participate in activities that aim at expressing political stance (including class boycott, singing, chanting slogans, forming human chains and other related activities) or distribute political propaganda items in schools. While still at the stage of learning in schools, students need the guidance of their principals and teachers and should comply with school rules and regulations, and all activities held in schools should have prior approval of the school management. School uniforms represent the school as well as all of its teachers and students. Misbehaving in school uniform would tarnish the reputation of one's school. It is inappropriate for students to be in school uniform when they participate in political activities outside school as by so doing, they would give others the mistaken impression that the stance advocated by these activities is shared by other teachers and fellow students of the school. Schools will continue to seriously handle matters relating to breach of school rules and regulations according to the prevailing school-based guidance and disciplinary mechanism.

What saddens us most is students being hurt, arrested or prosecuted in violence incidents. The offences involved include rioting, unlawful assembly, criminal damage and possession of offensive weapons, etc. Some students need to be remanded in custody immediately hence separated from parents and classmates. If convicted, they may even receive sentences of imprisonment and have a criminal record. I wish to remind all students again to think twice before you act. Do not be misled by seemingly noble ideas. You should distinguish the right from wrong and appreciate the love and care of your parents. Listen to your principals and teachers and meanwhile, pay attention to the safety of yourself as well as others. Never participate in any violence and unlawful activities which may put your future at risk.

I also appeal to all parents and schools to bring the spirit of home-school cooperation to full play, listen to the views of students, understand their thoughts or confusions, and help them manage their emotions. If there are any signs of unruly behaviours, they must be given clear advice and guidance, so that they could handle problems in a calm and rational manner, and should be given to understand that they have to be responsible for their behaviours. Parents and schools should help them distinguish right from wrong, and earnestly support them to grow in the right track. I deeply believe that criticising without listening, or indulgence without control could neither help alter children's extreme views nor establish good family relationships. I sincerely hope that while we care and love our children, we are also guiding them to comply with rules and laws.

We are about to celebrate a festival that is filled with gratitude and hope. Let us cherish and care for one another. Let us wipe out violence through love and good sense, and let us prepare for the new year hand in hand, jointly finding a way out for Hong Kong and building a better future together.

Yours sincerely,



(Kevin YEUNG)
Secretary for Education