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Government of the HKSAR
Education Bureau

11 June 2015

EDUCATION BUREAU CIRCULAR NO. 9/2015

Handling Emergency Situations in Schools

[Note: This circular should be read by -

- (a) Supervisors and heads of all schools - for action
- (b) Heads of all sections - for information]

SUMMARY

The purpose of this circular is to inform schools of the arrangements under emergency situations.

BACKGROUND

2. From time-to-time, schools may need to take action in response to different emergency situations, which include among others, outbreak of communicable diseases, natural disasters and sudden suspension of transport services, etc¹. While schools should have already drawn up school-based contingency plans in handling some common emergency situations, the following serves as advice for schools to facilitate their updating of contingency plans to cater for complicated or unprecedented emergency situations, in particular when suspension of classes is required.

¹ For arrangements under inclement weather conditions, schools should refer to EDB Circular No. 6/2015 and 7/2015.

DETAILS

School-based special arrangements under emergency

Principles to be observed

3. When faced with emergency situations, individual schools may exercise discretion in making special arrangements in the light of the situation prevailing at the time, and/or having considered the advice of the relevant government departments. Examples include taking precautionary preventive measures (such as suspending classes) as proposed by the Centre for Health Protection in mitigating spread of communicable diseases in the school, closing the school if there is sign of landslip danger² and suspension of classes due to flooding in the northern New Territories.

4. In making school-based special arrangements under emergency, schools should observe the following principles:

- (a) Safety of students should be the prime consideration;
- (b) While students' learning interest should be the top priority, schools should ensure students can learn in a safe, disruption-free and orderly environment;
- (c) There would be adequate support to take care of students in need in the event that school operation/activities are suspended/cancelled; and
- (d) Disturbance to student learning should be kept to the minimum.

Action to be taken

5. School principals are advised to consult and seek endorsement from their incorporated management committees (IMC)/school management committees (SMC) on the contingency plans, which should include the mechanism in activating special arrangements such as suspension of classes. In exercising their discretion to suspend classes, schools should work in accordance with the schools' contingency plans endorsed by IMC/SMC, and in the light of the situation prevailing at the time. Respective Regional Education Offices (REO)/Joint Office for Kindergartens and Child Care Centres (JOKC) and/or relevant government departments should also be informed of the decision and special arrangements.

² Schools in the vicinity of slopes should refer to paragraph 10 of EDB Circular No. 25/1998 and take necessary action.

6. To ensure all stakeholders understand the emergency arrangements, schools should keep school staff, parents, students and others involved (e.g. school bus or lunch box service providers) properly informed of the schools' contingency plans. Contact points should be made available for responding to enquiries under emergency situations.

Advice on class suspension announced by the Education Bureau

7. Under exceptional circumstances which may affect normal school operation territory- or district-wide (e.g. spread of communicable diseases, severe flooding in individual districts, serious traffic obstruction, etc.) and in consideration of the safety of students, the Education Bureau (EDB) may advise schools to suspend classes. Schools are advised to pay attention to the public announcements made by EDB from time to time. A sample of the announcement to be issued by EDB is at [Appendix 1](#).

8. Schools are strongly advised to suspend classes in accordance with EDB's advice. It would be under very special and exceptional circumstances justified by the schools that they decide to operate classes as usual in spite of EDB's advice.

Contingency plan

9. To prepare for possible emergency situations, schools may refer to the points to note at [Appendix 2](#) and review and update their contingency plans. In this connection, schools may also adapt the template letter at [Appendix 3](#) to inform parents of the arrangements under various emergency situations.

Enquiries

10. For enquiries, please contact your respective School Development Officers or Services Officers.

Ms S W WONG
for Permanent Secretary for Education

**Sample announcement on advice on class suspension
to be issued by EDB under emergency situation**

“Here is an Education Bureau special announcement about schools:

[As the traffic is seriously disturbed...], taking students’ safety as the top consideration, the Education Bureau advises classes of all kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools and special schools in the xxx districts to be suspended today (date). Schools should remain open and arrange staff to look after students who might arrive. School lists by district are available at the EDB website (<http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/student-parents/sch-info/sch-search/schlist-by-district/index.html>).

For students studying in other districts but being unable to go to schools due to traffic *[or other]* problems *[related to emergency situation]*, schools should exercise flexibility when handling students’ lateness or absence.”

Formulation of contingency plans

To prepare for possible class suspension under emergency situations, school heads are requested to ensure and take forward the following:

- (a) Schools are required to draw up a contingency plan to deal with special arrangements including suspension of classes due to emergency situations and seek proper endorsement from their IMC/SMC in advance. The contingency plan should be sufficiently comprehensive to cover all likely situations pertaining to the school in emergency situations, as well as the communication mechanism among all parties concerned. The courses of action to be taken as set out in the contingency plan should be practical and understood by all parties concerned.
- (b) The contingency plan should be worked out in consultation with teachers, parents, school bus operators, lunch box suppliers and others involved so that they will cooperate fully to avoid any misunderstanding or dispute. Moreover, schools must take account of the safety of all parties concerned in drawing up the contingency plans.
- (c) If there is a possibility that school events might be postponed or cancelled under emergency situations, schools should communicate the contingency arrangements to all relevant parties in advance.
- (d) If EDB advises the suspension of classes before the school session begins, schools should activate the contingency plans. As part of the plan, schools should ensure that the school premises will be open and appropriately staffed so that students who might arrive are properly looked after, and safe and proper arrangements are made for these students to return home at an appropriate time.
- (e) If schools are in session when EDB advises the immediate suspension of classes, schools should also activate the contingency plans to ensure that their students are kept in schools until safe and proper arrangements have been made for them to return home at an appropriate time. An advice on suspension of classes does not mean sending all students home immediately.
- (f) Parents should be advised that they should exercise their discretion under individual circumstances in deciding whether or not to send their children to school in emergency situations. They should keep their children at home if they consider that road,

slope, traffic, transport conditions or other emergency situations at that time have yet to resume normal.

- (g) Alternative arrangements should be made regarding school tests or examinations for students who cannot return to school or arrive late because of emergency situations. Schools should also re-assure parents that their children will not be penalised under such exceptional circumstances.
- (h) School staff, students, parents and those involved should be fully informed of the above arrangements and the contingency plan by circular letters.
- (i) Drivers and escorts of school buses and school private light buses should be provided with contact telephone numbers for communication in emergency situations.

2. The following items should be included in the contingency plan:

- (a) Communication mechanism;
- (b) Duty roster of school staff in emergency situations;
- (c) Arrangements of the school in emergency situations, including examinations, tests, internal and external activities, lunch, school bus, etc.;
- (d) Student guidance in/after emergency situations;
- (e) Support for students' learning in emergency situations;
- (f) Arrangements for parents who are unable to look after their children during the class suspension period, where applicable, e.g. whether parents are required to escort their children to and from school, lunch arrangements, whether students are required to wear uniform, etc.;
- (g) Holiday re-arrangement and supplementary lessons in case of resumption of classes after class suspension, where applicable; and
- (h) Arrangements for resumption of classes and the first day of school after class suspension, where applicable.

3. Schools may refer to the following for further information:

- Crisis management for schools:
http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/sch-admin/regulations/sc-h-admin-guide/SAG_E.pdf#page=8; and
<http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/student-parents/crisis-management/about-crisis-management/crisise.pdf>

- Information of the various preventive measures against communicable diseases:
<http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/sch-admin/admin/about-sch/diseases-prevention/index.html>
- Information on traffic condition:
<http://www.td.gov.hk> (Transport Department website)
- School safety and insurance:
<http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/sch-admin/admin/about-sch/sch-safety/index.html>
- Circulars for reference:

Administrative procedures for safety of schools in the vicinity of slopes

<http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/sch-admin/admin/about-sch/sch-safety/AD98025E.pdf>

Tropical cyclones, heavy persistent rain, and thunderstorms

<http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/sch-admin/admin/about-sch/sch-safety/EDBC15006E.pdf>

<http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/sch-admin/admin/about-sch/sch-safety/EDBC15007E.pdf>

Sample letter to parents

(Schools should revise/adapt the content according to their specific situation)

<Date>

Dear Parents,

The Education Bureau (EDB) issued Circular No. 9/2015 on 11 June 2015 to advise schools on arrangements under emergency situations. As mentioned in the circular, in case of emergency situations other than inclement weather conditions (the aforesaid situations), EDB may advise kindergartens, secondary, primary and special schools in the whole territory or individual districts to suspend classes with students' safety as the top consideration.

1. After comprehensive assessment and thorough deliberation by the school IMC/SMC, we will suspend classes in accordance with EDB's advice on class suspension in case of the aforesaid situations. In other words, parents should not send their children to schools when EDB's advice on class suspension is announced.
2. Parents should pay attention to the announcements made by our school on the school website [*or other means of communication as appropriate*] about the arrangements relating to the class suspension.
3. To meet practical needs during the period of class suspension, we will arrange for an appropriate number of staff to be on duty to handle school affairs and answer parents' enquiries. If parents are unable to arrange their relatives or friends to take care of your children, please contact our teacher Mr/ Ms XXX (Tel: XXXX XXXX) for further arrangement.
4. School bus service and lunch provision will be suspended during the period of class suspension. Parents will therefore have to escort your children to and from school and make lunch arrangements for them in the event that, due to special circumstances surrounding your children, your children need to return to school during class suspension. Should this be the case, your children should return to school in school uniform and during normal school time.
- 5a. All examinations/tests/extra-curricular activities will be postponed/cancelled during the period of class suspension. *In addition, parents should be assured that we will re-arrange for the date(s) of submission of P5 second-term/ P6 first/ second-term examination results to EDB in accordance with EDB's relevant announcements (Delete if not applicable.)* (Only applicable to primary schools).

- 5b. All examinations/tests/extra-curricular activities will be postponed/cancelled during the period of class suspension. Unless otherwise announced, the public examinations held by Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) will take place as scheduled. Students should attend the examinations punctually. Please pay attention to the relevant announcements by HKEAA (only applicable to secondary schools).
6. To minimize the disturbance caused to students' learning, we have prepared learning materials and readers for students which will also be uploaded to the school website during the class suspension period. Parents are requested to pay attention to the learning situation of your children.
7. To safeguard the safety of your children, parents are advised to keep your children home during class suspension.
8. We enclose herewith the telephone list of our school and relevant organisations for your reference. If you have any enquiries, please feel free to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

<Signature>

School Principal/ Supervisor,

<Name of School>