

23 February 2018

Education Bureau Circular No. 4 /2018
Reporting Mechanism for Absentees in Kindergartens

[Note : This circular should be read by -

- (a) Supervisors and Heads of Kindergartens, Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres and Schools with Kindergarten Classes - for action; and
- (b) Heads of Sections - for information.]

Summary

This circular informs all kindergartens, kindergarten-cum-child care centres and schools with kindergarten classes (collectively referred to as “KGs” hereafter) of the new arrangements for reporting to the Education Bureau (EDB) on KG students’ absence without reasons or under doubtful circumstances. Schools are requested to bring the content of this circular to the attention of all school personnel.

Details

Purpose

2. The Government attaches great importance to the well-being of children and firmly believes that every child should be protected against harm and abuse. Should a KG suspects any child abuse case, it should immediately seek assistance from the Social Welfare Department (SWD), EDB or other relevant departments. To raise the alertness of school personnel and support KGs in early identification of students in need of support or suspected child abuse cases so that early intervention and appropriate support and services can be timely provided, this circular delineates the new arrangements for KGs to report students’ absence without reasons or under doubtful circumstances.

3. The new arrangements will be implemented with effect from 15 March 2018 under which KGs must report to EDB on students’ absence for seven consecutive school days without reasons or under doubtful circumstances. Details are set out in paragraphs 4 to 10 below. KGs are suggested to make due preparation (for example, explaining the related arrangements to the teaching and non-teaching staff etc.) for the reporting mechanism as

described in the ensuing paragraphs during the approximately two weeks' time from the issue of this circular.

Principles

4. The mechanism for reporting absentees in KGs is premised on caring about the safety and health of young children. If there are any suspected child abuse cases (for details, please refer to Chapter 2 of the SWD's "Procedural Guide for Handling Child Abuse Cases" (referred to as the "Guide" hereafter), in particular the parts on "Indicators of Possible Child Abuse", "Checklist for Identifying Possible Child Abuse", "Guide to Risk Assessment", etc.), schools should report immediately to EDB, SWD and/or other relevant departments for assistance, which should not be limited by the number of days of absence under the reporting mechanism. On the other hand, as KG students are young, parents apply for leave for their children more often due to various considerations. If the situation is not doubtful, the school may handle in accordance with their prevailing school-based arrangements. Only if the students are absent without reason or under doubtful circumstances, KGs should report to EDB. Besides, KGs should put in place effective mechanism, procedures and contingency plans in advance for handling crisis, so that the mechanism could be activated immediately to facilitate professional judgment and decision, in seeking support as appropriate.

5. Early identification and intervention can effectively prevent problems from deteriorating. Should there be students and/or their parents in need of support (such as inadequate care and improper parenting), even if it is not a case of suspected child abuse, subject to parents' consent to receive social services, schools may refer the children and their families to the Integrated Family Services Centre (IFSC) or Integrated Services Centre (ISC)¹ for assistance and support as appropriate (e.g. training on parenting skills).

Procedures

6. If any KG student is absent (regardless of the days of absence) without any form of notification from parents/guardians (collectively referred to as "parents")², the school should take initiative to contact the parents on the same day to express concern about the students, understand the reasons of absence, and handle according to EDB circulars/guidelines and SWD's Guide, including first considering whether the family is in need of services from IFSC/ISC, and if necessary, introduce the services to parents and make referral.

¹ The addresses and contact phone numbers of IFSC /ISC are available on SWD website : http://www.swd.gov.hk/en/index/site_pubsvc/page_family/sub_listofserv/id_ifs/

² KGs should confirm with parents on the recognised parent/guardian in applying leave for students.

7. Even if a student is absent for less than seven school days, or even attending school as usual, or absent intermittently, should the school personnel notice any wounds or any signs of child abuse, it should immediately refer to the SWD's Guide and, complete the "Report Form of Student Absentee in Kindergarten" (Appendix 1) (hereafter "Report Form") as appropriate for reporting to the respective School Development Section / Joint Office for KGs and Child Care Centres (Joint Office), and in parallel report to SWD and/or the Hong Kong Police (the Police) for assistance. In this connection, KGs are requested to note the following:

- (a) If the student and/or the family is receiving case services from SWD or service unit of a non-governmental organisation (NGO), the KG should report the case immediately to the responsible social worker for follow-up. In case of doubt or failing to reach the social worker, the KG may contact Supervisor of the service unit or the Family and Child Protective Services Unit (FCPSU) of SWD.
- (b) If the student and/or the family is not receiving case services from SWD or service unit of NGO, the KG should report the case immediately to FCPSU of SWD.

8. If a student is absent for seven consecutive school days without reason or under doubtful circumstances, the school should complete the Report Form on the 7th day of the student's absence, and send it to the respective School Development Section /Joint Office for reporting.

9. When completing the Report Form, schools should make reference to the student's daily behaviour and performance, as well as the situation of teachers' daily contact with the parents. Upon receiving the Report Form, the respective School Development Section/Joint Office will contact the school for details and, taking into account the situation of individual student and family, remind the school to handle the case according to the EDB circular (or guidelines) and SWD's Guide, and discuss with the school how to handle the case, including approaching FCPSU for professional advice or support.

10. KGs should continue to liaise with relevant departments after submitting the Report Form, and follow up on the latest development. The school is required to report the progress of follow-up by completing Appendix 2 in seven working days after submission of the Report Form.

Training

11. The key to early identification and early intervention of child abuse cases is to

enhance the awareness of the school personnel in identifying child abuse, their ability in crisis assessment, and multi-disciplinary collaboration. In this connection, EDB will continue to collaborate with SWD and the Police in organising talks and seminars to support school personnel in early identification, intervention and support students suspected to be suffering from child abuse. In late January and early February this year, EDB jointly organised four seminars with SWD and the Police, introducing how to identify and make referrals for suspected child abuse cases, strengthening teachers' ability and sensitivity in identifying the symptoms of child abuse, and enhancing their understanding of the procedures in handling child abuse cases. In March and April this year, EDB will continue to jointly organise seminars with SWD and the Police to introduce early identification, mechanism for reporting absentees in KGs, and support provided by relevant departments. Schedules of the seminar sessions are at [Appendix 3](#). Please visit EDB's Training Calendar System for course details and enrolment (Course code: KGE020180051).

12. As regards the mechanism of reporting students' absence for an entire month by KGs joining the new kindergarten education scheme and staying in the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme during the transitional period, its function is different from the above-mentioned mechanism for reporting KG students' absence without reasons or under doubtful circumstances. The former serves to confirm whether subsidy for the students concerned should be released for that month, while the latter serves to help KGs identify students in need of support or suspected cases of child abuse. Therefore, after the implementation of the above-mentioned reporting mechanism, KGs should continue with the prevailing practice of reporting students' absence for an entire month.

Enquiries

13. For enquiries, please contact the respective Senior School Development Officers/Senior Services Officers.

Mrs CHAN SIU Suk-fan
for Permanent Secretary for Education

To: Education Bureau (EDB) (Fax no. : _____)
 [Attn : Joint Office for Kindergartens and Child Care Centres (Joint Office) /
 _____ District School Development Section]

[Note: As this document contains personal data, please contact the respective School Development Section/ Joint Office by telephone before sending the document to the responsible officer by fax.]

Report Form of Student Absentee in Kindergarten

School Name: _____

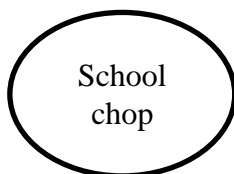
| | | | |
|---|---|---------|------------|
| Name of student: | _____ | Class: | _____ |
| Date of birth: | ____/____/____ (dd/mm/yyyy) | Gender: | (boy/girl) |
| Period of absence: | from ____/____/____ to ____/____/____ (day/month/year) (a total of ____ school days) | | |
| Any siblings attending the same school (or same organisation if known): | (please specify if yes) | | |
| Reasons for absence given by parents/guardians | _____ | | |

As far as the school understands, the student and/or the family is currently not receiving case service from Social Welfare Department (SWD) or service unit of non-governmental-organisation (NGO) (see Note 1)

| | |
|---|---|
| Areas in doubt or areas of concern (Note 2): (please put a ✓ in the appropriate box(es), and/or specify) | Action taken by school: (please put a ✓ in the appropriate box(es), and/or specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> parent has NOT notified the school about the student's leave Concern about: <input type="checkbox"/> student's body <input type="checkbox"/> student's behaviour <input type="checkbox"/> student's emotion <input type="checkbox"/> parent's behaviour <input type="checkbox"/> parent's attitude/emotion <input type="checkbox"/> student's interaction with parent <input type="checkbox"/> home environment (please specify the observations) _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> unable to reach the parent/ contact person(s) assigned by the parent <input type="checkbox"/> has reached the parent /contact person(s), but their responses are unusual (Please specify: _____) <input type="checkbox"/> has sent the student for medical examination /treatment <input type="checkbox"/> has consulted SWD/NGO (Service unit & contact point: _____) for professional support <input type="checkbox"/> has reported to the Police <input type="checkbox"/> Others : _____ |

Note 1: If the student is a known case currently handled by Family and Child Protective Services Unit of Social Welfare Department (SWD) or Integrated Family Services Centre / Integrated Services Centre under SWD or NGO (e.g. bearing a case number under SWD/NGO and is followed up by designated professionals), it is not necessary to report the absence to EDB.

Note 2: please refer to Chapter 2 of the SWD's "Procedural Guide for Handling Child Abuse Cases", in particular parts on "Indicators of Possible Child Abuse", "Checklist for Identifying Possible Child Abuse", "Guide to Risk Assessment", etc.



Signature of Principal : _____

Name of Principal : _____

Telephone Number : _____

Date : _____

To: Education Bureau (Fax no. : _____)

[Attn : Joint Office for Kindergartens and Child Care Centres (Joint Office) /
_____ District School Development Section]

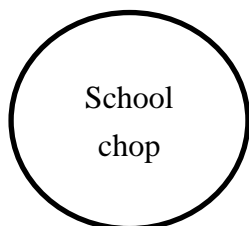
Follow-up to
the Reported Case of Student Absentee in Kindergarten

Subsequent to our reporting of the absence of _____ (name of student)
of _____ (class) of _____ (name of school) without reason or
under doubtful circumstances to the Education Bureau on (Date) _____:

I would like to report our school's follow-up to the absentee case as follows:

- The case has been followed up by Integrated Family Services Centre / Integrated Services Centre / Family and Child Protective Services Unit* of the Social Welfare Department/(for non-government-organisation, please provide the name: _____)
- The Social Welfare Department has given advice, and our school will continue to follow up.
- The student has already resumed schooling, nothing unusual is found.
- Others (please specify)

(*Please delete as appropriate)



Signature of Principal :

Name of Principal :

Phone Number :

Date :

Seminars on Prevention of Child Abuse

1. To enhance the alertness of kindergarten principals and teachers continuously in handling suspected cases of child abuse, Education Bureau (EDB), Social Welfare Department (SWD) and the Hong Kong Police (the Police) will jointly organise 5 seminars as tabulated below. For details, please visit EDB's Training Calendar System (Course Code: KGE020180051).

| <u>Session</u> | <u>Region</u> | <u>Date</u> | <u>Date</u> | <u>Date</u> |
|----------------|-----------------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| AA | Kowloon East | 20 March 2018 | (Tuesday) | P.M. |
| AB* | Hong Kong Island | 22 March 2018 | (Thursday) | P.M. |
| AC* | Kowloon West | 11 April 2018 | (Wednesday) | P.M. |
| AD | New Territories North | 13 April 2018 | (Friday) | P.M. |
| AE | New Territories South | 21 April 2018 | (Saturday) | P.M. |

* With English interpretation

2. The contents of the seminars include the introduction of the new arrangements of the reporting mechanism for absentees in kindergartens by EDB, the procedures of handling child abuse cases by the Police; early identification of and handling suspected child abuse cases by SWD; and sharing on the signs of child abuse and sharing on follow-up to the trauma by pediatricians and educational psychologists etc.. There will be Q&A session for each seminar.
3. As the regional Police School Liaison Officers will be present in the seminar, your school is strongly advised to take part in the seminar to be held in the respective region of your school. Please submit the online enrolment through EDB's Training Calendar System starting from March 2018 (Course Code: KGE020180051).
4. In case of Black Rainstorm Warning Signal or Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No.8 (Signals) on the event date, the seminar will be cancelled. It will only resume as scheduled when the Signal(s) is cancelled two hours prior to the start of the seminar.
5. For enquiries, please contact Kindergarten Administration 2 Section at 2892 6424.