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Take breaks from computer screen to protect your eyes

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Order what you can eat – don't waste food

Tuesday, September 16, 2008

youngpost

A home for the future

Secondary students join forces to build energy-efficient model houses, writes

Adrian Plani

In the future, according to a winning secondary team of budding engineers, homes will be environmentally friendly and energy self-sufficient.

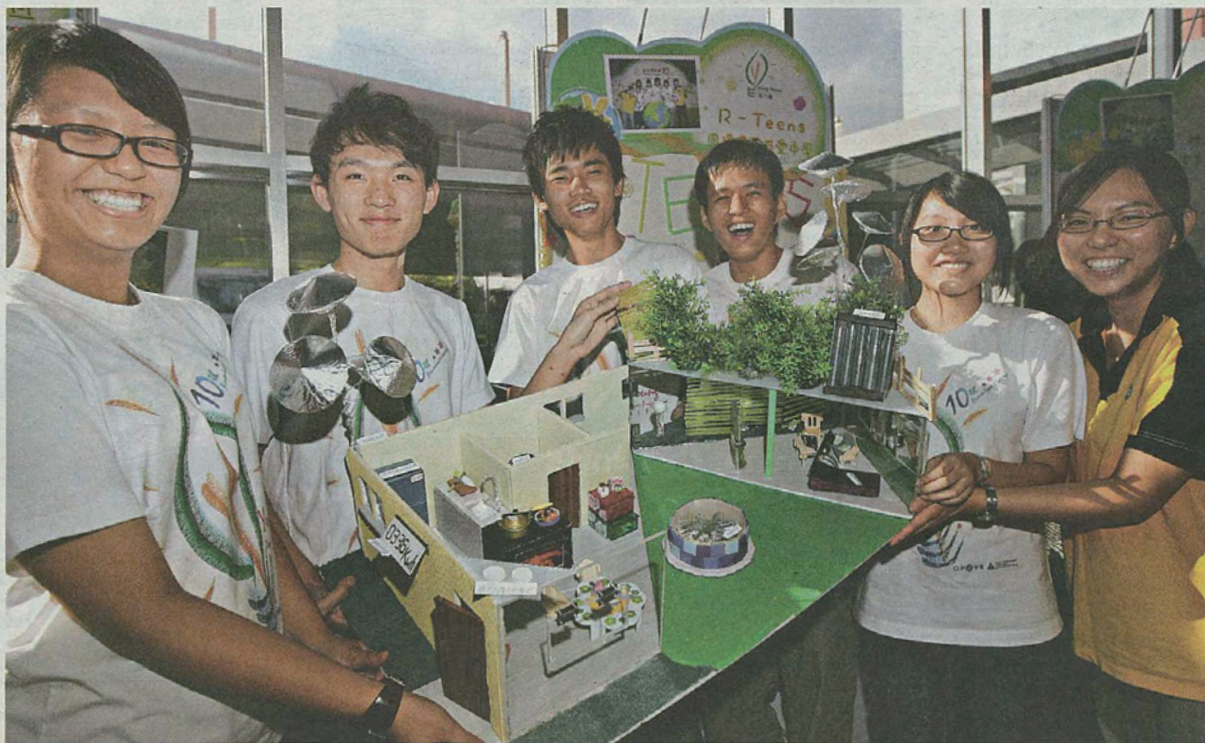
There will be electricity-producing treadmills and oxygen-producing tanks of algae on the roof.

The team of five secondary students from Fung Kai Liu Man Shek Tong Secondary School recently beat nine other secondary school teams with its impressive model of the house of the future.

The 10 teams of 50 young engineers were participants in a five-and-a-half week programme jointly organised by CLP Group and Junior Achievement Hong Kong. It aimed to raise awareness of energy conservation among students.

Held from July 22 to August 28, the programme consisted of a series of visits to CLP's power-generating plants, along with workshops on energy conservation, in which 20 CLP engineers served as mentors for the students.

At the end of the programme, students had to build an energy-saving model and give a presentation on their models.



THE WINNING TEAM FROM FUNG KAI LIU MAN SHEK TONG SECONDARY SCHOOL. FROM LEFT, WINGS CHEUNG WING-SZE, VIMPLUS TSANG YIU-CHUNG, ICEMAN CHONG CHU-MAN, JACK LI NIN-CHUN, KINKI CHEUNG TSZ-KI AND THEIR CLP MENTOR, XENOS HUNG CHUI-SHAN SAY THEIR MODEL IS THEIR VISION OF A HOUSE IN 2050.

The winning team's model was judged best based on its feasibility and originality, and in December the members will be rewarded with a visit to CLP's most recently constructed power station in

Treadmills are installed to transform kinetic energy into electricity to power small household appliances

Guangxi (廣西). They will learn how advanced technology can help Hong Kong's leading power company lower carbon emissions.

Vimplus Tsang Yiu-chung, 17, said his winning team's energy-efficient household was their vision of a modern house in 2050.

"The exterior of the house is made of glass, which allows for maximum use of natural light. Treadmills are installed to transform kinetic energy into electricity to power small household appliances. On the rooftop are tanks of algae,

which absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen, helping to offset the carbon emissions from sources like air conditioners," said the Form Six student.

Lok Sin Tong Yu Kan Hing Secondary School's team of young engineers won the Best Booth in the Eyes of the Audience award.

Lai King-hei, 17, said their brainchild was assembled from different materials, including LED lights, solar panels and acrylic plastic.

"The solar panels on the rooftop are improved through

nanotechnology and can absorb four times more heat than normal panels. With their special ability to absorb infrared rays, the panels work in any kind of weather. They can produce electricity even on cloudy or rainy days," said the Form Six student.

The winning models will be on display at the Hong Kong Science Museum from mid-December to mid-February next year.

Additional reporting by Elaine Yau

Basketball camp benefits Page 12

your say letters

Dreams

Everyone has a dream in their heart,
When we grow up,
We always give up our dreams.
We need to stick to our dreams.
Don't give up
Because our dreams are waiting
for us.

*Yu Kam-Ling, Fung Kai Liu Man
Shek Tong
Secondary School*

What a long night

My confused mind
Framed by the starry night
The crowd outside
Grin with delight
I wonder whether can I
do something I feel like
Despite the gorgeous temptation
outside
My schedule is tight
I wonder when can I
Fly carefree in that fancy sky
Prostrate on piles of exercise books
I worry how can I escape my
stressful life
No time to sigh
Grab each second to fight
Bravely against the dreadful 'night'
The endless night, I entirely realise
Last still my HKCEE arrives

*Linda Cheng, Fung Kai Liu Man
Shek Tong
Secondary School*

Show you care by learning the facts

I am writing in response to the letter
'Reaching out to the HIV positive'
(Young Post, December 12)

December 1 is World Aids Day.
When I was young, I didn't know
there was a day aimed at raising
people's awareness of Aids and
showing concern for those infected.

Many of us are still prejudiced

against HIV-positive people.

And many people would avoid
eating at the same table as them or
shaking hands with them.

But we shouldn't discriminate.
We should educate ourselves, know
what the actual risks are and offer
our support.

World Aids Day is symbolised
by a bright red ribbon. Wearing these
ribbons symbolizes open-mindedness
and acceptance of those unfortunate
enough to live with HIV/Aids.

The more people accept the
realities of the disease and learn
the facts, the sooner the spreading
of the disease will slow down and
all sufferers can be treated with the
respect they deserve.

*May Yuen, Fung Kai Liu Man Shek
Tong Secondary School*

Apology should come from the heart

I am writing in response to Elaine
Tse's letter 'Hardest word to say'
(Young Post, January 19)

She thinks 'sorry' is the hardest
word to say for those who have done
something wrong. These people don't
want to apologise because they are
too proud or are embarrassed.

I agree with her views. But
sometimes this word can be overused,
especially by local officials.

When they commit a blunder,
they simply apologise to the public,
like the head of a medical centre did
recently.

This is all too easy. And it does
not come from the heart. Therefore,
the word has little meaning.

*Lily Chan, Fung Kai Liu Man Shek
Tong Secondary School*

Keep young people out of triads

Hong Kong teenagers face many
problems.

One which is perhaps unique
to this city is the temptation of the

triads.

Triad members always try to
recruit young people. But joining the
organization is a bad idea.

Peer pressure is usually the
reason teenagers join the triads.

If a friend or classmate joins,
they may encourage or even bully
you to join.

It's important to learn to be
strong enough to say no.

Some teenagers join the triads
because they are rebellious.

Joining a gang may seem
appealing because they'll be
surrounded by powerful people who
do things society frowns upon, and
even things that are illegal.

To prevent teenagers joining
such groups, parents need to spend
more time with their children.

By showing an interest in
their lives, and taking the time to
chat, parents can improve their
relationship with children.

Then young people will not
feel they need to turn to strangers for
support.

But most importantly, teenagers
should not give in to peer pressure.

*Harry Wong, Fung Kai Liu Man
Shek Tong Secondary School*

Let's spread the happiness

I think we should share around more
happiness

Too often we worry about the
pressures we have to deal with, and
we keep one another at a distance.

But being alone can easily make
us negative. We need friends.

When we concentrate on
spreading happiness, we feel happier
and so does everyone around us.
When we smile, other people smile.
The result is psychological well-
being for yourself and others.

So, come on, let's spread the
happiness.

*Jojo Wong Ming-fong, Fung Kai
Liu Man Shek Tong Secondary
School*

Perseverance for A-level success

After passing the HKCEE a year ago, my next challenge is approaching fast. The A-level subjects are much tougher than the HKCEE subjects, and there seems to be too much to remember.

Coping with the A-levels is not just about hard work, but also perseverance. It is vital to have the proper attitude when we study. We cannot leave revision until a week before the exam like we did in Form Three.

We have to revise every day or we will accumulate too much work to do at the last minute with exams looming.

Yes, the A-levels are tough, but perseverance will win the day.

Peggy Butt, Fung Kai Liu Man Shek Tong Secondary School

Road safety is top priority

There have been several fatal accidents caused by drink driving over the past few months. It is a tragic waste of life since all of them could have been prevented.

It is a good idea to display car wrecks outside busy tunnels and border crossings. I also agree with a longer licence suspension for first-time offenders. But the maximum penalty for dangerous driving – 10 years in prison – is inadequate. It cannot compensate for the valuable lives that have been lost.

Last but not least, education is vital. With better awareness among drivers, the roads will be safer.

Yvonne Lee, Fung Kai Liu Man Shek Tong Secondary School

Lactose intolerance causes concern

If you feel sick every time after drinking milk, you may be lactose intolerant.

If someone is lactose intolerant, their bodies don't make sufficient amounts of an enzyme to break down sugar found in milk and other dairy products.

Star letter

Don't throw your life away

I am writing in response to the article 'Life on the streets' (Young Post, February 17).

The problem of teenagers spending the night out on the street is getting increasingly serious. To solve it, we should find out why they leave home at night.

Peer pressure is the main reason for this behavior. Friends have the biggest influence on us in our teens. If our friends do not head home at night, we're more likely to join them.

Another reason is poor academic achievements. If teenagers are getting bad results at school, they may feel studying is a waste of time. By hanging out with like-minded youngsters, they feel less insecure.

This leads to the third reason: low self-esteem. For young people who are not very good at school, hanging out at night is a way to escape from reality.

I think the first solution is for parents to spend more time with their children. Schools should also offer more support. But most importantly, teenagers should think carefully about their choices.

Minnie Law, Fung Kai Liu Man Shek Tong Secondary School

From the Editor

Thanks for your letter, Minnie. It would seem the problem of teenagers hanging out at night is a vicious circle. If they are not getting enough sleep, this is sure to affect their academic performance. It is also likely to have a negative effect on their ability to focus and handle relationships with their families. This, in turn, will make it more likely for them to hang out with their friends.

A recent survey has shown that 12.7 per cent of students in Hong Kong get less than 10 hours of sleep a week! Doctors say that this can lead to all sorts of mental problems.

Students should realise that the choices they make now can affect them for the rest of their lives. Not only can this kind of behavior affect their future job prospects, but it can also have a bad effect on their relationships.

Susan, Editor

If lactose cannot be digested, bacteria will remain in the colon. This could lead to severe stomach pain. If you are lactose intolerant, do not eat any food that contains dairy products like milk and cheese.

One of my cousins is lactose intolerant. Every time he drinks milk, he gets stomach pain.

We should be aware of this problem and try to control it.

Nelvin Ng, Fung Kai Liu Man Shek Tong Secondary School

Bringing joy to Sichuan victims

I am writing in response to the article 'Survivors offer hope' (Young Post, May 12). We will never forget the Sichuan earthquake which left more than 80,000 people dead.

A lot of children lost their parents. Other lost their arms or legs. This is a very difficult time for them. But I am very happy they are facing up to the challenges with a positive mind.

One of the young victims said she has become stronger after the tragedy. She said she has learned to face problems calmly. She also encouraged Hongkongers to live happily every day.

She has shown a lot of courage and we can learn from her attitude towards life. When we are facing problems, we should never give up.

The Sichuan victims need a helping hand. I hope we can provide that. I hope they can smile every day, and be happy.

Where there's a will, there's a way.

Lisa Tang

Survivors offer hope in hard times

The earthquake that struck Sichuan on May 12 last year was one of the deadliest natural disasters to hit the mainland. It toppled homes, schools, factories and offices, leaving many people, including students, trapped in the rubble.

A few of the survivors visited Hong Kong last month to mark the first-year anniversary of the earthquake. One of them, Liu Xiaohua, impressed me with her attitude.

She no longer allows herself to cry easily, and has become stronger.

Her positive attitude was a fine example for Hongkongers during the present economic crisis, with people losing jobs and fretting about being able to support their families.

Fish Yau

To all writers,

Hi! This is my first time to write a letter to ES Junior. I want to tell you that the newspaper is good and I like it very much! I love it! Thank you for bringing us a great newspaper!

I like the newspaper because I can learn many things in this English newspaper. I can read more news about HK, China and other cities.

I like the first page of the newspaper. It is colourful and beautiful! I like the drawings and the pictures too.

I like drawing and watching TV. I love cartoons very much. I like to read comics like ESJ comic and the Old Master Q comic. I sometimes read English comics! My favourite comic is Old Master Q!

Finally, I want to thank all the writers again. I like this newspaper very much!

How many writers does ESJ have? I want to know!

*With love,
Au Yeung Yuen Yee*

Dear Yuen Yee,

Thank you for your letter! I am happy to know that you like ES Junior so much!

We like writing for our readers. We hope that you can improve your English and have fun by reading ES Junior. Therefore, every week we spend much time brainstorming what to write and how. After hearing from you, I think our efforts pay off.

I agree with you that graphics and designs in ES Junior are beautiful. Thanks to our fellow designers for their creativity. They work late every day to produce the newspaper you read. They are very talented and hardworking.

I liked drawing when I was a kid. But later I became busy with school work and exams so I didn't have the time to draw. You should keep this good habit!

On behalf of all the writers, I would like to thank you for your support! Keep reading ES Junior and write to us again! I look forward to your letter.

*Cheers,
Joe*



Write to us at:

Young Post, 4/F, Morning Post Centre,
22 Dai Fat Street, Tai Po Industrial Estate,
Tai Po, New Territories
or e-mail
yp@scmp.com

Star letter

Encourage students to give blood

Schools should encourage students to give blood during their teenage years.

Hong Kong's education system is heavily subsidized by the city's taxpayers, making it possible for everyone to get an education. Giving blood is a way of giving something back to society.

Red Cross allows Hong Kong citizens to donate blood when they turn 16. I think this is a good way to start to take the responsibility as a Hong Kong citizen.

Taking responsibility early in life makes us more confident when we become adults and have to adjust to a working environment.

Your blood will save somebody's life. Donating blood is slightly painful, but definitely worthwhile.

Eric Wong

From the Editor

Thanks for your letter, Eric. Giving blood is such a small sacrifice to make to save someone's life. It is a shame that you always see people rushing to give blood in times of disaster, but they forget the blood bank needs a steady supply all the time. If your blood type is rare, it is more important for you to be a donor.

Human blood is used to save people who have been in accidents, need surgery or are suffering from cancer. It can also be used for research purposes. There is no danger in giving blood. The blood collectors use sterile needles and your body makes up the blood lost over the next few weeks.

It certainly is a good idea for schools to become involved in blood drives as this allows students the opportunity to give something to society. It also instils in students the habit of donating blood that hopefully will carry over into their adults lives.

Susan, Editor

Valentine's Day Karaoke



Cosplay



Trick or treat



Sports Day



The Pied Piper



Fish Yau: During the Chinese New Year holidays, I joined a workshop about a play called Pygmalion. Interestingly, we learned some dialogue in Cockney English. We also played a role in order to further experience it. Not only could I learn new vocabulary, but also how to improve my pronunciation properly.

Through participating in this workshop, I could practise my speaking skills when I read the dialogue. Apart from that, it definitely gave me a precious chance to boost my confidence when I acted on stage. So it was really rewarding to take part in it.



Wilson Fung: Have you ever watched any musicals? In January, I joined an English workshop which featured a famous musical - My Fair Lady, based on the play Pygmalion. The story is about a Cockney flower seller Eliza Dolittle, who is changed into an upper class lady within 180 days by Professor Henry Higgins. I think it is a great story. Plays and musicals are a useful medium for us to learn English easily and have fun.



Mrs Libby Wong & Fish Yau



Strike a chord with you?



So good so fun



F.1 Girls Choral Speaking



Mrs Libby Wong and participants



The cast of Beauty is a Beast

Talkback The E-mail Forum

Should all restaurants switch to reusable chopsticks?

Disposable chopsticks are part of Japanese culture, therefore, most Japanese restaurants provide them for their customers. Although we should respect cultural beliefs, we must also consider the environmental problems associated with these chopsticks.

A survey has shown that most customers would not mind being given reusable chopsticks ('Safety warning over disposable chopsticks', September 1), and I would also be happy to use them.

Reusable chopsticks can benefit our environment by reducing the amount of rubbish we produce. This is important as there is little space left in Hong Kong's landfills.

Disposable chopsticks are cheaper than reusable ones, but in the long term, restaurants that make the switch will save money.

All restaurants should opt for reusable chopsticks. However, staff must ensure that the chopsticks are washed properly. As a restaurant customer, clean cutlery is a top priority.

Staff at takeaway outlets should ask their customers whether they really need disposable chopsticks, because if they are taking their meal home, they could use their own cutlery. Our priority should be protection of the environment.

May Yuen, Sheung Shui

We must consider the environmental problems associated with these disposable chopsticks

May Yuen, Sheung Shui

Should more be done to help Tin Shui Wai residents?

As a Tin Shui Wai resident, I strongly agree that more should be done to help this area.

The core problem is lack of jobs. A number of residents cannot get work, because wages are low and there are few vacancies. As a result, many have to go to nearby districts or to urban areas to find work.

Many people here are recently arrived migrants. They are not so well equipped for the working environment in Hong Kong and so it is difficult for them to find work. Even when they get a job, if it is outside Tin Shui Wai, they have high travelling expenses, and that can make it more difficult to make ends meet.

Though the government has held some jobs exhibitions in Tin Shui Wai, this has not solved the problems.

Residents face other problems. Facilities cannot meet demand as the area is densely populated. This is a remote part of Hong Kong and we need a hospital, so that people no longer have to travel to Tuen Mun or Yuen Long to see a doctor. We also need a larger swimming pool and library.

Another problem is that things in Tin Shui Wai are more expensive than in other areas because of a lack of competition.

The government should act promptly to deal with these problems. This area needs more investment and greater competition.

Lily Chan, Tin Shui Wai

Does Hong Kong have a good work-life balance?

A survey has found that the average working week in Hong Kong is 55 hours and 80 per cent of people regularly work unpaid overtime.

Clearly employees here work

very long hours. This adversely affects the work-life balance.

It is very rare for an employer to encourage members of staff to take time off work so they can exercise, or to bring their children or other family members to work.

In fact, most employers don't even recognize the benefits of having a good work-life balance. Having that balance can improve the productivity of employees, and this can enhance a company's reputation.

Take teachers as an example. They are under a lot of pressure and have a large workload and they have to adapt to changes in the education system.

They often have to bring students' work home to mark. They must find it difficult to get the right work-life balance.

I think many professionals in Hong Kong are in a similar situation.

I am quite concerned about working practices in the city.

Paco Chan, Sheung Shui

Does Hong Kong have a good work-life balance?

I do not think Hong Kong has a good work-life balance.

It is a fast-paced city and many people in the workplace face keen competition.

Because of that, employees work long hours and have heavy workloads.

A Community Business Day was held last week to raise awareness of corporate social responsibility in the city. Achieving a good work-life balance can lead to higher productivity, higher morale and less absenteeism.

However, a lot of companies did not take part in the work-life balance day and for many employers, the priority is to boost profits.

Things could get more difficult with the economic recession.

Cherry Wong Ching-ha, Sheung Shui

What do you think of the proposed food safety recall law?

The food scares we have experienced have been very inconvenient for shoppers. We have become increasingly wary of buying food, especially items that have come from the mainland.

It has left consumers concerned because we do not know what food is tainted and what food is safe to eat.

This means that people have sometimes unwittingly bought products that could be harmful to their health. The fact is that some food suppliers have acted irresponsibly.

Although they knew that the food could make people sick, they still supplied it to stores just so they could make more money.

I think the situation will improve if the government brings in a food-recall law.

Terence Chung, Sheung Shui

Education can enrich children's knowledge about the concept of indecent materials

Terence Chung, Sheung Shui

How can children be protected from obscene material online?

It is a pity if obscene materials taint children's minds. However, how can we protect them from obscene material, since they have the right to read magazines and surf the internet?

Some may say the law can help.

I wonder whether it is useful, since ISPs have provided filtering services for years.

Children can be protected from obscene items through education. Adults may feel embarrassed to talk to them about what would be considered obscene. Children are curious, so they find the information they want on the internet.

If we instil the correct and positive attitudes in them, and teach them how to distinguish good from harmful materials, the situation can be improved.

We should not be conservative and use our power to force them to stay away from indecent information. We should be open-minded and educate them on what is obscene and teach them how to protect themselves when surfing the internet.

We are not God, we cannot always monitor our children. But education can enrich children's knowledge about the concept of indecent materials.

Terence Chung, Sheung Shui

We should see how having hawkers can be good for the tourist industry and also provide jobs

May Yuen, Sheung Shui

Should ice-cream hawkers' licences be renewed?

The issue of hawkers' licences has been in the spotlight over the past few months. The debate centre around ice-cream, cigarette and dai pai doing hawkers.

I think the government has just focused on the economic aspects, but has not listened to the views of residents. Although some hawkers can be annoying when they are selling on the streets, they are

undoubtedly a part of Hong Kong.

Officials talk about the need to keep our streets clean, but we should see how having hawkers can be good for the tourist industry and also provide jobs.

As Cheung Chee-hung, chairman of the Dairy Products Beverage and Food Industries Employees Union, has pointed out ('Support for ice-cream licences', November 6), most hawkers make about HK\$ 6000 per month and 'more when business is good'.

Though people who work as hawkers cannot make a fortune, at least they can make ends meet, and it means that Hong Kong can keep a cultural asset. The government should renew ice-cream hawkers' licences without delay.

Hawking is not only a part of Hong Kong's culture, but also offers opportunities for unskilled workers. If they can remain financially independent, this will reduce the government's welfare-payment burden, which is important during this financial turmoil.

I do not know why our administration is being so hesitant.

May Yuen, Sheung Shui



Tomorrow's
Talkback questions

What do you think of the
drug-abuse proposal?

What changes do you want to
see at ATV?

Send your e-mails to
talkback@scmp.com
Please include your full name,
address and telephone number,
not necessarily for publication.

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What can be done to prevent domestic tragedies?

This is a question a number of people have been asking because of a number of incidents in Hong Kong.

The reasons behind domestic violence cases can be complicated. They can start with a simple argument and then escalate.

I think neighbours can play an important role, by showing their concern for these people and trying to help.

Victims of domestic violence are often reluctant to confide in a social worker. But they might be willing to talk to the neighbour if the neighbour makes it clear they are willing to listen. The neighbour can try to encourage them to seek professional help from a social worker.

Yuko Ng, Tin Shui Wai

What do you think of the Discovery Bay ferry plan?

Discovery Bay Transportation Services wants to increase ferry fares.

I think this would be an absolute nightmare for commuters, especially for low-income families. Not all commuters will be able to pay the percentage increase. Many people have lost huge amount on the stock market. Hongkongers face financial difficulties.

The fare rise is like trying to get blood from a stone. Citizens have to deal with rising food prices caused by high inflation. Now those living in Discovery Bay will have to deal with high transport costs. I am concerned that some people in Hong Kong who are under financial pressure and feeling vulnerable will consider suicide.

I think cutting services after midnight is an acceptable measure. Although it is a bit inconvenient, a night bus service will be provided.

Terence Chung, Sheung Shui

How can children be protected from obscene material online?

I am writing in response to the article "proposal to censor internet over pornography may be dropped" (November 11)

Recalling the incident of Edison Chen Koon-hei's indecent photos being circulated among internet users, I think there is an urgent need to discuss the safe use of the internet.

It is a great idea to prevent children coming in contact with online obscene material.

However, the freedom of the press might be affected if filtering software is made compulsory.

On the other hand, an earlier report said that internet service providers have been providing filtering software for 10 years but the rate of use remains low.

This shows that people have poor recognition of this tool.

Therefore, the more effective method is to promote the use of filtering software to citizens and, especially, parents but not making it compulsory.

Besides, the filtering software is not 100 per cent effective, like any other software.

In my opinion, the more suitable approach would be education.

The education of children about the proper attitude for them to adopt when they encounter such situations should be encouraged instead.

Wong Pui-ling, Fanling

What do you think of the drug-abuse proposals?

In recent years, the drug problem in Hong Kong, especially among teenagers, has worsened.

We keep reading news reports about young drug users.

As a consequence it has been proposed that there should be compulsory tests in schools of pupils suspected of taking illicit drugs.

I would not support such as measure.

The test would not catch students who take drugs but do so outside school.

Also, it is easy now to cross the border to the mainland.

It is easy for teenagers to go to the mainland to take drugs.

It only takes a few minutes to get to Lok Man Chau (border checkpoint) from Sheung Shui.

Also it would be very costly in terms of time and money, to have these tests and it might interfere with students' studies.

Also, what criteria would the school authorities draw up while deciding which students to test? Different teachers might set different criteria, which is unfair to students.

When it comes to curbing drug use among young people, education is crucial.

Teenagers always want to rebel. We need to take a gentler approach when dealing with them.

Wing Tam, Fanling



What changes do you want to see at ATV?

I would like to see ATV screening more of the latest soap operas from countries such as Japan, the United States and Korea.

Their shows often have good storylines and strong casts and are very popular in Hong Kong.

I also would like to see more Hong Kong artists being invited to perform. So often I see performers on ATV shows and I do not know who they are, so I switch channels.

ATV should show concerts featuring local singers or recently released films at the weekend, when families watch television together.

The concerts and movies ATV screens tend to be a bit old.

Only a few viewers will be interested in these films.

When it comes to Hong Kong

singers, I would suggest the likes of Eason Chan Yick-shun and Joey Yung Cho-yee could be shown by ATV.

The channel could also consider having reality shows.

It could have competitions involving citizens.

If I saw people on a reality show I knew, I would find it compelling and would have to keep watching. Just look at how successful reality shows have been in the US. They are very popular in Hong Kong.

When people start discussing a show, it is proof that it has succeeded.

Terence Chung, Sheung Shui



What do you think of the drug-abuse proposals?

There has been much discussion about drug abuse in Hong Kong.

Some people argue that compulsory drug tests should be carried out in schools, but I do not support this proposal.

Drug taking is on the increase among young people.

Compulsory tests of students suspected of taking illicit drugs may reduce the use and sale of drugs in schools, but it is a temporary solution. We have to tackle the root of the problem.

Mandatory tests can identify users, but they are an invasion of students' privacy and may not even be effective. There is always a danger under such a scheme that some police officers and teachers might overstep the mark.

I have doubts about how effective it would be. It is easy for young people to get drugs outside of school hours.

Compulsory testing might damage the relationship between

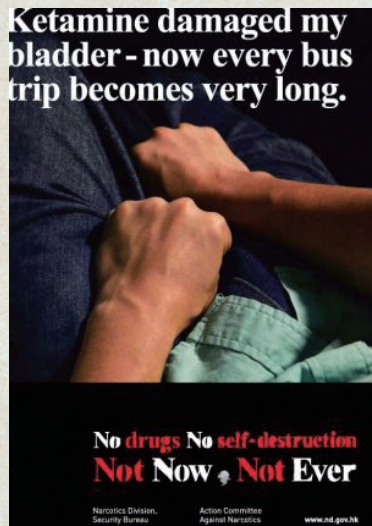
teachers and students, and even between parents and children.

Performance could suffer as a consequence.

It would be best for the government to devote more resources to educating students about the harmful effects of drugs.

It should also co-operate with the mainland authorities to curb drug use by Hong Kong students on the mainland.

Annabelle Chau, Tin Shui Wai



<http://www.nd.gov.hk/en/druginfo.htm>

What do think of the drug-abuse proposals?

The problem of drug abuse is getting worse. We are also seeing that drug abusers are getting younger and I am concerned that this could adversely affect a young person's development as he or she could become addicted.

In looking at proposals to have compulsory tests in schools of students who are suspected of illicit drug use, we have to ask if such a programme would be effective. If compulsory tests are introduced, then drug users and their suppliers will just find clever ways to make the tests show negative results, making them useless.

There is also the issue of respecting the rights of the individual. Students will probably resent the implementation of these tests. I think what is important is for parents, teachers and police officers to monitor the situation.

Lisa Tang, Sheung Shui

What do you think of the drug-abuse proposals?

I refer to the letter by Wing Tam (Talkback, December 17).

She mentioned that students are taking drug outside school.

Some even cross the border to the mainland to get their drugs.

However, I think she misunderstands the aims of the proposed compulsory drug tests in schools, which are meant to find young drug users.

If these tests do identify at least some pupils who are taking illegal drugs, then they will have proved to be effective.

These young people can then get guidance and we can work to wean them off drugs. A school is a place for learning. However, it should also be a place where a troubled teenager can be helped to switch from drugs to a healthy lifestyle.

I am aware of the problem. I live in Sheung Shui and I see how easy it is for young people to cross the border.

I am concerned about young people who take these substances and about drug trafficking which I think could become a serious problem. Therefore, I support the testing proposal.

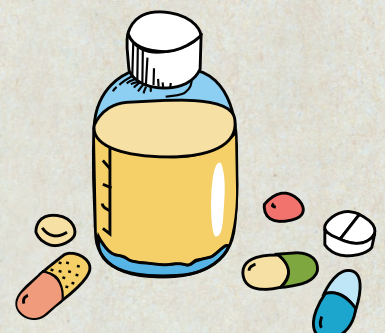
Ms Tam criticized the possible role of teachers in such a scheme.

I accept that teachers are not trained to pinpoint drug users.

However, we should trust their judgment and accept that they are there to help students.

Of course, I accept that the police have an important role in reducing the number of young drug users.

May Yuen, Sheung Shui



What do you think of the drug-abuse proposals?

I can understand why people support the proposal to have compulsory drug tests in schools.

For many years I have lived in the northern New Territories and there have been a number of drug-related incidents.

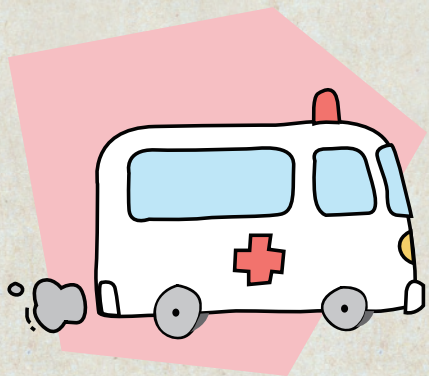
Of course, in this part of Hong Kong we are close to the mainland. It is very easy for teenagers to cross the border and get hold of drugs.

It is argued that these tests can alert people to those students who have a drug problem and it could lead to a decrease in the rate of drug use.

However, we have to recognise that the operating cost for such a test programme would be very high and it is not foolproof.

Critics say that sometimes the drug tests give an incorrect result. Therefore, I do not think this is the right way to spend taxpayers' money.

Wilson Fung, Sheung Shui



Parents should not feel that when it comes to drugs and teenagers, schools are solely responsible

Wong Pui-ling, Fanling

What do you think of the drug-abuse proposals?

I refer to the letter by May Yuen (Talkback, December 30) and I agree with her on the matter of compulsory drug testing in schools.

I think this proposed measure, if implemented, could help schools, parents and the police identify potential drug abusers.

Students who tested positive for illicit drugs could then be helped with follow-up action in an effort to get them to kick the habit.

However, teachers need to be given the necessary training before the test programme is brought into force in schools.

Pupils need to be able to know they can trust their teachers.

However, parents should not feel that when it comes to drugs and teenagers, schools are solely responsible.

They also have a responsibility to look after their children and care for their welfare.

I appreciate the drug test programme may be expensive to implement. However, given that it concerns protecting our young people, I think it is money well spent.

Wong Pui-ling, Fanling

What do you think of the drug-abuse proposals?

I am not convinced that compulsory drug tests in schools will solve the problem of drug abuse among teenagers.

I do not even think they would work.

If students test positive in a school then that school may be labelled and acquire a bad reputation. This might adversely affect it.

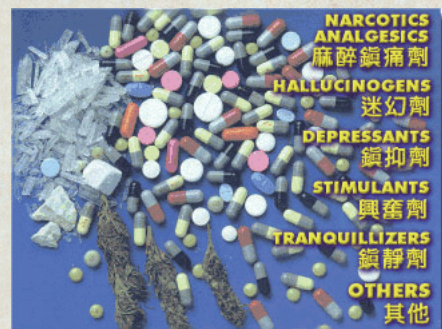
It could also damage students' relationships with their peers or teachers. That might make them hate the thought of going to school and their academic studies could suffer accordingly.

As I understand it, there are also problems associated with the test itself, I am not sure that it is foolproof. And who is to decide who will have to take the test? Would it be up to the teacher to make that choice?

Finally, I think a compulsory test programme will be too expensive to implement.

I think there are too many problems associated with this proposal.

Effy Luk, Fanling



<http://www.nd.gov.hk/en/druginfo.htm>

How can parents get on better with teenagers?

I agree with Wong Wing-ching (Talkback, January 15) that communication is the key to improving the relationship between parents and children.

When they spend more time communicating, they will have a better understanding about themselves and there will be fewer misunderstandings and arguments.

Many teenagers think that their parents do not understand them because of the generation gap. But in most cases parents only want what is best for their children. They want young people to appreciate the importance of doing their best in exams, but some teenagers think hanging out with their friends is more important than passing tests, and this can lead to conflicts with parents.

They can have a better understanding of each other through communication.

Parents need to encourage and support their children.

Terence Chung, Sheung Shui



Should alcohol be banned for everyone intending to drive?

Many people have expressed concern about the drink-driving problem, following a tragic accident last month.

Our government has already tried to advise drivers not to drink through television adverts and posters.

I strongly support a ban.

All drivers have to take responsibility for their actions.

They cannot put other people at risk.

Drink-driving is a problem with private and commercial drivers. Therefore, the ban should apply to all drivers, with particular attention to those who have just got their licence.

Given that large vehicles can cause greater damage, those drivers who are found guilty should face stiffer penalties.

However, before making changes to the law, there should be some further discussion.

Drink-driving is not the only problem.

As Ringo Lee Yiu-pui of the Institute of the Motor Industry of Hong Kong pointed out, there is a need to tighten law enforcement to

deter bad habits ('Drivers' unions warn of bias in drink-drive law', February 7). I totally agree.

Some people need to drive through the night to make a delivery.

This increases the risk of accidents, especially at the border.

I hope the government can come up with a workable law so we can see a reduction in these accidents.

May Yuen, Sheung Shui

Should the penalty for drink-driving be increased?

I agree with those who argue that the existing punishment for those convicted of drink-driving should be increased to raise public awareness. Some people have suggested that convicted drink-drivers should be banned from driving for at least one year for even a first offence.

However, I have doubts about that argument. Some drivers may depend on their vehicles to earn a living.

I think the best solution is public education. Apart from, for example, putting warnings on beer bottles and the approach to tunnels, I think the government should also step up its publicity campaign against drink-driving.

For example, police officers could be sent to schools to give talks about drink-driving, and there could be more government adverts. This could be similar to the campaign warning of the dangers of taking drugs.

Wong Pui-ling, Fanling

What do you think of restaurant food portions?

Restaurant portions vary in different establishments.

Some restaurants offer too much rice and some do not serve enough. And I have eaten at some restaurant chains and thought the serving was just right.

However, I agree with the campaign launched by Greener Action ('Green campaign to persuade city diners that less is more', February 4)

People can get a 'HK\$1 rebate if they ask for less rice with a meal at more than 160 restaurants citywide'.

Therefore, customers can get some money back and at the same time we may see reduction food waste in Hong Kong.

We should support a campaign that is trying to make people more friendly to the environment.

Mandy Man Sze-ting, Sheung Shui



What do you think of restaurant food portions?

I think the campaign launched by Greeners Action is very good for Hong Kong ('Green campaign to persuade city diners that less is more', February 4).

Whenever I go to a restaurant I see a lot of people who do not eat all the rice on their plates, especially children.

I think the HK\$1 rebate (for people who accept smaller portions) will be an incentive for a lot of people.

Suki Lui, Fanling

What do you think of the winning bidders in the revitalisation scheme?

I appreciate the government's revitalisation scheme and am satisfied with the results of the first stage.

Although not all of the historic buildings that have been chosen will get a new lease of life, the initiative shows that Hongkongers are determined to conserve their heritage.

I am glad that one of winning bidders is an organisation from the west – the Savannah College of Art and Design (which bid for the former North Kowloon Magistracy building). Hopefully it can lead the way in showing how to regenerate an old building. Unlike China, many countries with old buildings have found a way to strike a balance between economic advancement and cultural conservation.

The Savannah College has experience in renovating historic buildings, so it can take the lead in the city's first revitalization scheme.

Although it can get help from overseas organisations, the government must also oversee all the projects and ensure that the revitalisation schemes are undertaken properly.

I am sure taxpayers will be happy to see their money being put to good use, that is, the preservation of our rare and precious cultural heritage.

Kinki Cheung Tse-ki, Sheung Shui

What do you think of restaurant food portions?

I refer to the report 'Green campaign to persuade city diners that less is more' (February 4).

Some women and girls often find the portions they are served in restaurants are too big, or they intentionally do not eat everything on the plate because they want to stay slim. Inevitably, therefore, there will be leftovers.

Some teenage boys may think the portions are too small, because they tend to have big appetites.

However, I find the portions I get are just the right size and I never leave any rice.

I support this campaign because it reduces municipal solid waste, and this is good for the environment.

Also, offering a HK\$1 rebate will attract more customers, which is good for restaurants during the financial tsunami.

However, I do think there is room for improvement.

The group behind the campaign, Greeners Action, could try to get more sponsors for the scheme. However, overall, I think it is a good campaign and will help people save money during this difficult economic period.

Tony Chan, Sheung Shui

Computers have become an integral part

Computers have become an integral part of our lives. You can find them in schools, libraries and even in MTR stations.

If students use computers wisely, they can be a useful tool for study.

For example, you can get an enormous amount of information from the online encyclopedia Wikipedia, no matter what subject you are studying.

This is useful for pupils if they cannot understand something they have read in a textbook. It is worth

going online before trying to get an explanation from your teacher.

However, too often young people use their computers for recreation. I think they have to learn to use their time wisely when online, to get the maximum benefits.

David Chan, Sheung Shui

Blood donation

People can donate blood to the Hong Kong Red cross once they reach the age of 16.

I think teenagers should be encouraged to donate blood. This is the best way for them to realise that they must start to take on responsibilities as citizens of Hong Kong and to appreciate that their blood can help save people's lives.

Taking on such social responsibilities can also help young people to become more self-confident and that can help them as adults when they join the workforce.

C.Wong, Sheung Shui



Is Hong Kong lagging behind in sexual equality?

I am writing to express my concern about sexual inequality in Hong Kong.

I do not think that Hong Kong is lagging behind with regard to sexual equality, it is just that it is developing slowly in Hong Kong.

Laws are already in place to prevent women from being discriminated against in different sections of society, such as education

and the workplace. Employers cannot ignore a job application because of the applicant's gender.

A number of companies in Hong Kong have women in senior positions on their management teams. Therefore, I do not think it is fair to say that Hong Kong is lagging behind in sexual equality.

As I said, developments in terms of sexual equality are slow, because of gender stereotyping that affects the attitude of some people.

Because of Chinese traditions, many Hong Kong people still believe that women should put their family before their careers. They think that the man's duty is to take care of the family.

If we want to see a faster pace of development regarding sexual equality in Hong Kong, then the government must do more in the realm of education.

Tango Tang, Sheung Shui

Is Hong Kong lagging behind in sexual equality?

I refer to the report ('Half believe women should put family before careers, poll finds', March 6).

I do not think Hong Kong is lagging behind when it comes to sexual equality.

In Hong Kong most people agree that men and women should share the responsibilities that go with parenting and doing housework in a family.

For example, I know of one family where the husband does the housework and the wife goes out to work.

Of course some people see things in terms of stereotypes, for example, a doctor should be male and a nurse female. However, this is not what happens in real life. You see more women police officers and workers on construction sites.

A number of women also play a prominent role in public. Take, for example, the case of Anson Chan

Fang On-sang, who is a former chief secretary and legislative councillor.

These examples show that in Hong Kong there is sexual equality between males and females. Therefore, I do not think Hong Kong is lagging behind in sexual equality.

The government should try to get the message across that men and women are equal in our society.

Wilson Fung, Sheung Shui

Is Hong Kong lagging behind in sexual equality?

I am writing with reference to the article 'Half believe women should put family before careers, poll finds' (March 6). Hong Kong does not lag behind in sexual equality. Nowadays, Hong Kong is an equal society.

If you have ability, you will have an opportunity to get a job. For example, if a woman is strong, she can be a police officer; if a man works carefully, he can be a nurse. Many people think women can't take up some 'male occupations' such as firefighting, but according to a Fire Services Department spokesman, it wants to employ women. However, not many can pass the rigorous tests. It is believed that if you have talent, your employer will appreciate you.

And Hong Kong people have a high level of education. We are now very open-minded, so gender stereotyping is not as prevalent.

Besides, the Equal Opportunities Commission can help protect people from discrimination on the basis of gender, so I am not worried.

Austin Wong, Sheung Shui

Is Hong Kong lagging behind in sexual equality?

I don't think Hong Kong is lagging behind. Men and women enjoy equality, and women's status in Hong Kong is quite high compared with other cities.

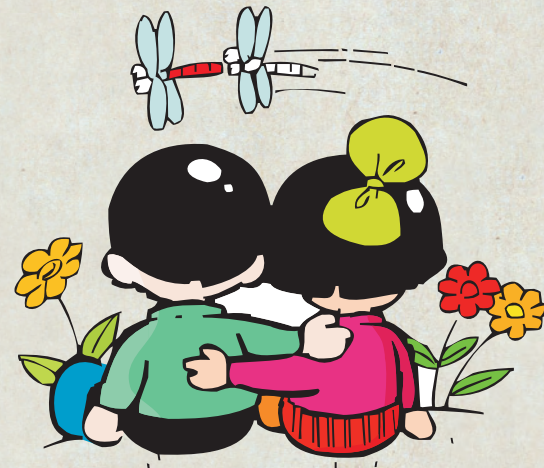
Gender equality has been

progressing in recent years, as men in Hong Kong respect women in many areas, such as work.

Some women's associations fight for sexual equality and help improve the status of women in Hong Kong. Even so, some sexual inequality still persists in traditional values, whereby a woman is expected to put more emphasis on family than men.

This is a deeply rooted concept that is difficult to change and should not be considered discrimination.

Theresa Wan, Fanling



Is Hong Kong lagging behind in sexual equality?

There has been much controversy over the issue of sexual equality. Despite Hong Kong's status as a modern city, there is unequal treatment of women, such as lower pay and poorer conditions.

So, I think Hong Kong is lagging behind in gender equality.

Chinese culture emphasizes that a woman's duty is to take care of the family, while a man's duty is to work. This is a deeply ingrained facet of our society.

Although more people accept that women can work, they are also expected to look after the children and do housework. Therefore, women in Hong Kong face great pressure, especially those from low-income families, as they not only need to take care of the family but also need to earn a living.

Domestic violence is also caused

by sexual inequality. When women cannot cope with the stress, a family tragedy can happen, as it did in Tin Shui Wai.

The mother left a suicide note saying that she was unhappy and under immense pressure.

Then she threw her two children, aged nine and 12, from their 24th-floor flat before leaping to her death in October 2007.

Some men believe that because men have a higher status than women they can beat their wives or partners. This is sexual inequality.

Many people think women should not take some jobs such as in the construction sector.

Some employers will not hire women since their physical appearance seems not as strong as men.

In short, gender stereotyping affects the status of women in Hong Kong society. Women still face unequal treatment although there are laws to protect them from discrimination.

Annabelle Chau, Tin Shui Wai

Should there be more facilities for cyclists?

I love cycling in spare time. However, I recognise that in Hong Kong there are insufficient facilities for cyclists. There are not enough venues for BMX, road and mountain biking.

This makes it difficult for Hong Kong people competing in these sports to practice and this may mean that they are never able to fulfil their potential.

Also there is no network of linked paths. You can ride between Sha Tin and Tai Po, but if you want to go from Sheung Shui to Tai Po or Yuen Long, you have to use the road, which is dangerous for cyclists. The government should be encouraging cycling by building more paths. It is environmentally friendly as it does not need any fuel and so there are no greenhouse gas emissions. It is also

economical as cyclists do not have to pay fares. I have a friend who does not know how to ride a bicycle, so there must be more facilities where people can get cycling lessons. If the government does decide to expand facilities for cyclists, it must think carefully about how to do so.

Austin Wong, Sheung Shui

Should the monorail be extended beyond Kai Tak?

I support the suggestion to extend this project ('Plan for Kai Tak monorail may be extended into east Kowloon', March 25), as building the monorail will help to reduce traffic problems in Tai Tak.

Given that the government plans to build a cruise terminal at Kai Tak, there will be a lot of tourists.

Kai Tak covers a fairly extensive area, therefore, it would be difficult for visitors to get around on foot and they will need some form of transport. If they all take taxis there will be traffic jams, which will be time-consuming for the visitors and for residents.

Another advantage is that the monorail will be environmentally friendly.

Such transport systems do not emit any greenhouse gases, so it will not contribute to air pollution and help the government achieve the aims set out in its Action Blue Sky Campaign.

I do hope that if the project does go ahead, it will be extended.

Austin Wong, Sheung Shui

Should the smoking ban be delayed?

The extension of the smoking ban to entertainment venues including mahjong parlours and karaoke bars is a controversial issue.

Smokers and the owners of these

entertainment venues are obviously against the ban.

They argue that the ban will be bad for business when it comes into force in July.

As a non-smoker I am in favour of the ban. It means there is less likelihood of us being exposed to second-hand smoke, which is bad for our health. I think people will actually enjoy themselves more at entertainment venues that have become smoke-free.

The owners of these bars may be surprised to find that more non-smokers are encouraged to come, and the increase in revenue may offset the losses incurred by smokers who stay away.

I do think the government should stick to its July schedule.

Wing Tam, Fanling

Should developers be forced to be greener?

Developers should be forced to be greener, because pollution of the whole world is hurting the health of people every day. I think the Urban Renewal Authority must take action.

Green measures are to be adopted on buildings in the future, including low-emittance glass to reflect sunlight, solar hot-water systems and low-power light-emitting diode fixtures. They can save energy and reduce carbon emissions.

Although science and technology can help people mitigate pollution, these systems aren't a foundation of environmental protection. I suggest education is the main way to ensure it. If we can teach all people about the pollution problems of the world, this will lead them to understand how to solve them. Then everyone will help save the world. But I don't feel the Hong Kong government has done much in this direction. I hope the government can put more emphasis on education about environmental protection.

Tango Tang, Sheung Shui

A14 Leaders & Letters

Chopstick move sets the tone

I am glad to know that 140 Japanese restaurants in Hong Kong will switch to reusable chopsticks within a year ('Restaurants open door to reusable chopsticks' October 13).

I have been aware that this was a problem and welcomed Friends of the Earth's 'No more disposable chopsticks' campaign.

After I learned that the Japanese restaurant chains were taking this action, it made me realise that ensuring environmental protection, sometimes involves sacrifices.

Although using waribashi (throwaway chopsticks) is a decades-old practice in Japan, Japanese restaurants have decided that environmental concerns must come first.

It may lead to some extra costs, if they need more staff to wash the chopsticks or have to buy an electric dishwasher. But they recognise that protecting the environment is a priority.

This 'anti-waribashi movement' is a small step for environmental protection, but it is a good start and I hope these restaurants will go further.

However, other areas of environmental protection leave much room for improvement in Hong Kong.

I am particularly concerned about the lack of recycling bins ('Recycling efforts hindered by lack of bins', October 13).

We need to see more of these bins in public places such as shopping malls and cinemas. People are throwing away rubbish in ordinary bins, because they cannot find a nearby recycling bin. I too have been in that situation.

Providing more bins is not that costly, when you considered that it can slow down the rate at which our

landfills are filling up.

May Yuen, Sheung Shui

Recycling is not the answer

I refer to the letter by Kathleen Ng ('Helping paper recyclers is a good social and environmental policy', November 14).

I agree that paper recycling is a good way to protect our environment and increase job opportunities for low-income families. However, the fact that some recycling firms (are struggling), suggests that it is not the most effective form of environmental protection. People often do not recycle paper because they are lazy.

Also there are not enough recycling bins in public areas of Hong Kong.

Recycling paper seems to be an environmentally-friendly process.

However, recycled paper is more expensive than other paper and so it is not popular with students.

I think what we should be doing is trying to reduce the amount of paper we use rather than recycling it.

I do not think the government should be giving large subsidies to waste recyclers.

If we reduce paper consumption there will be no need to have a recycling industry.

Low-income families which depend on waste collection could be helped by the government to find more suitable kinds of work.

May Yuen, Sheung Shui



Recycling firms need assistance

I refer to the letter by May Yuen ('Recycling is not the answer', November 18).

The government wants to promote environmental protection and, therefore, I think it must subsidise and thereby strengthen the recycling industry. Some recycling firms in Hong Kong are struggling to survive because of high rents and operating costs during the financial crisis.

If the government really wants people to become more aware of the importance of recycling, we must have a well-developed recycling industry in Hong Kong.

I agree with Ms Yuen that reducing the use of paper is good for the environment, but daily use of paper, for example newspapers and magazines, is unavoidable. Therefore, it is important to promote recycling.

It is better to recycle waste than to dump it in landfills.

They will soon be full and we can relieve the pressure on them through recycling.

Ms Yuen should be aware that there are people in Hong Kong who are willing to support the industry.

We should take our old newspapers and other waste paper to recycling collection points.

I think the government has to come up with initiatives to help the industry get over this difficult period.

Also, the administration must keep working at raising the awareness of Hong Kong people about the importance of recycling.

Lily Chan, Tin Shui Wai

Not the place

Calls for schools to carry out compulsory tests on suspected illicit drug users are misguided.

I appreciate that teachers want to help students who they think may have a drug problem, but this is not the way to do it.

What schools should be doing is trying to prevent young people taking drugs in the first place.

Education is the best way of preventing drug use. It is important that pupils are taught about the dangers of illicit drugs.

When it comes to illegal drug use it is up to the police, not schools, to catch offenders.

Lilian Chan, Tin Shui Wai

Drug test idea has downside

It has been proposed that suspected illicit drug users could be given compulsory tests.

Supporters of such a scheme argue that it would help target drug users, especially in schools.

We cannot ignore this problem among young people and it is worth discussing.

One advantage to having these tests is that it may scare some students who are considering drug use and deter them, because they know they can be taken out of the class and tested. This is relevant given that drug use has increased among young people.

However, there are disadvantages, such as the argument that compulsory testing infringes people's rights.

Schools may also be concerned that if a number of students test positive, it will harm the image of the school.

Also, young people who take drugs may only do so at weekends, so if they were tested during the week the result would be negative.

Ultimately the best way to curb drug use among young people is through education and the school

and parents both have a role to play in this regard.

Parents have to get the message across to their children about the side effects of taking drugs.

Bonnie Ng, Tin Shui Wai

Deterrent effect worth noting

I support calls for compulsory tests in schools of suspected illegal drug users.

First it will act as a deterrent and so lead to a decrease in drug use. Also, if a student tests positive, then the school and family members can focus on them and help them deal with their problem.

Police are having to undertake too many checks of young people in public places to see if they have drugs. Early detection in schools will reduce the number of these searches and police can be deployed to more important tasks.

S.Kwok, Sheung Shui

Schools should back drug tests

There has been some discussion about a proposal for schools to introduce compulsory drug testing for students suspected of taking illicit drugs.

I recall an incident where a student was selling drugs to his classmates at a government-funded secondary school.

When this happens it means that the school is no longer offering a peaceful environment where students can go to learn. Therefore, I totally approve of drug testing of students at school if it allows young people a safe environment.

I do not support the argument that such a test infringes upon a student's right. The fact is that drug-taking puts our social fabric at risk.

Also, I think there is a problem in present-day Hong Kong. With many

families, both parents go out to work and they may not be able to spend as much time with their children as they would like. They cannot always check what their children do when they are at school and so these tests will help detect young people who have a problem. The parents can be alerted to the fact that the child has a problem. I do not think we should see cost as being an issue. Teenagers are our future and if students are taking drugs they need our help.

T.Tang, Sheung Shui

Drug tests can target problem students

There is clearly a drug problem among some Hong Kong youngsters and a trend is developing whereby teenagers go to the mainland to take drugs.

Because of this, there have been calls for mandatory drug tests in schools. I think this is a good way to tackle the problem.

Testing enables police to find out which students are on illegal drugs and then they can get help. Opponents say it is a waste of resources. But, the future stability of this city depends on our younger generation.

Victor Yung, Sheung Shui

Drug tests not the solution

Some people have argued that compulsory tests should be introduced in schools for students suspected of taking illicit drugs. It is felt this is one way to curb the drug-taking culture among teenagers.

I have doubts about whether or not this policy would be effective. Those who support testing say it can act as a deterrent for students tempted to take drugs.

However, we have to consider the rights of students and the argument that such a test is an invasion of your privacy.

I think it would be better for schools to collaborate with non-governmental organizations to launch educational campaigns. We can make students aware of the dangers of taking drugs and help drug abusers with their problems and encourage them to adopt a more positive approach towards their lives.

Adam Liu, Fanling

Drug test is not the answer

There have been calls for compulsory drug tests in schools, but I do not think that will solve the problem of youth drug abuse.

Students who know that they might fail the test if they have taken drugs can stay at home.

Also the scheme would be unfair to students who do not take drugs, as they might also be forced to take a test.

I do not believe this is an effective way to prevent teenagers from taking drugs.

The money that would need to be spent to launch such a scheme could be put to better use, through education and targeting the people who are selling drugs.

We also have to consider the issue of human rights and question whether you can actually force someone to take the test. There is a legal question here which we have to consider.

Koey Chan, Sheung Shui

For their good

In the debate about proposed compulsory drug tests for students, critics have talked about an invasion of privacy, saying such tests could strain relations between teachers and pupils.

I support such tests if they can foster a drug-free environment in schools. Students are our future and we should be trying to help them

develop the correct attitude towards life.

If the tests can identify drug users, then they can get the help they so obviously need.

I hope students will realise that the tests are for their own good and that their teachers are not discriminating against them.

Ken Tsang, Sheung Shui

Test assurance

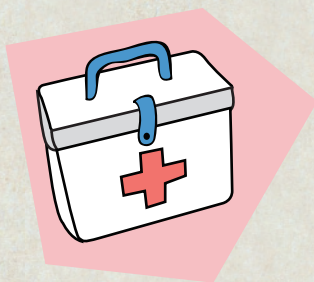
Illegal drug use has increased in Hong Kong, particularly in the 13 to 18 age group.

For this reason I think it is important to have compulsory drug testing in schools.

We need to ensure that schools enjoy a drug-free environment. If schools do not implement this policy, the problem will only get worse.

It is important that parents should know their children are attending drug-free schools.

Chan Lai-man, Fanling



New proposals have downside

I refer to Leborn Tsui's letter ('New measures good for Hong Kong', January 13), referring to the latest changes in education policy ('Schools using Chinese set to be given chance to teach in English', January 9). I am also a Form Seven student and, except for Chinese Language and Culture, I study all my subjects in English.

However, I do not feel that I have gained a lot of advantages by

learning these subjects in English. Some of my classmates have been taught in English for years and yet they still do not have a good command of the language.

I think it depends on the students themselves.

If students are compelled to speak English in biology lessons, they may be reluctant to do this and so feel less motivated. I don't think students can improve their English during the core-subject lessons where they are being taught key words rather than grammar.

Although many parents and teachers have welcomed the new education policy, I can see the downside, in particular, the labelling problem.

I think the Education Bureau is only going to make this problem worse.

May Yuen, Shueng Shui

Policy change a mixed blessing

Secretary for Education Michael Suen Ming-yeung has announced proposals which would allow secondary schools to choose their own medium of instruction, depending on the proficiency of their students.

I think it can enable some students to raise their standard of English.

However, I am concerned that the less-able students might lose confidence if they are taught in English, and get bad results.

I think improving students' English standards is a long-term task. We should try and get students interested from an early age, but we should not overdo it.

I study at a Chinese-medium school and do not feel I am at a disadvantage. I see learning English as lifelong process, and how you progress depends on individual students.

Wong Pui-ling, Fanling

Teens can learn from failure

When students commit suicide, it is sometimes because they are unable to cope with the academic pressure they face.

Often parents have unrealistic expectations of their capabilities. I wish young people could appreciate that life is precious. Today's younger generation in Hong Kong lacks fortitude. Teens seem unable to cope with the difficulties of life and want to escape from them.

They must learn to be persistent, face up to their problems and learn from their mistakes. Failure is the mother of success.

Chris Chan, Sheung Shui

Finance chief's budget a good start for people who need it most

Financial Secretary John Tsang Chun-wah's budget plan has been the most discussed topic in Hong Kong.

Many people have criticized his job-creation scheme, part of which is a university graduate internship programme. (The scheme aims to offer 4000 internship opportunities this year, with a monthly subsidy of HK\$2000 to Hong Kong employers for every intern they hire. Those working on the mainland will get HK\$3000.)

Some people say the subsidy is too low and will not help university graduates that much. However, I support this plan very much.

Firstly, these graduates can gain valuable experience. Because of the scheme, they will have the chance to work as interns in big companies and they can get real work experience.

As a result, they can learn not only from books but also from the real world. And these experiences can really increase their competitiveness so they will be able to find better jobs when the economy improves.

Secondly, even though HK\$4000

is not a lot of money in terms of wages, graduates should still appreciate it. During a financial crisis, it is really hard to find a job and graduates may find themselves unemployed for a long time.

A salary of HK\$4000 surely cannot provide these students with a luxurious lifestyle, but it is better than nothing as it can at least help pay for some basic living expenses.

Moreover, some people also criticize the job generation plan as not focusing on the middle classes but mainly the grass-roots level.

It may sound a little unfair, but it is not the wrong move. Middle-class workers must have some savings to support themselves even if they lose their jobs.

However, the poor may not have any savings at all and they would 'stop eating when stop working'. So I think the government is just trying to help the needy.

To conclude, I think people should support the budget more and try to work it out with the government, so we can all survive the financial crisis.

Tsang Yiu-chung, Tin Shui Wai

Triad menace

Triad gangs have long been a problem in our society. The number of youngsters joining triads has increased.

Often young people from problem families are attracted. Some teenagers leave home after having arguments with their parents. They may join a triad gang as an act of rebellion against their parents. It is difficult to stop youngsters joining these gangs, but there are things we can do. Parents have to maintain the lines of communication with their children so that conflict and misunderstandings can be avoided.

Students also have to take responsibility for their own actions and spurn approaches from triad members.

Cheung Wing-sze, Fanling

Earthquake lessons learned

I refer to the editorial 'Sichuan victims still deserve an inquiry' (May 12). We can see that China has improved its handling of natural disasters. In 1976, there was a massive earthquake in Tangshan (唐山), but the government responded by closing the area off and restricting media access, preventing news and images of the earthquake from getting out. That meant international organizations could not offer aid and help rescue the victims. Many victims did not receive the aid and treatment they needed. In the end, about 250,000 people died.

The Sichuan (四川) earthquake also killed many people and destroyed lots of buildings, but the government tried to respond in a better way, and asked the international community to help with the rescue of victims. Beijing did not suppress the bad news or prevent survivors from speaking to the media. The news broadcasts touched hearts across the nation, and people across China donated generously to support the Sichuan residents.

However, even after investigations, no one has been held responsible. There should be further investigations. The victims deserve it.

Austin Wong, Sheung Shui



We welcome all letters

E-mail letters@scmp.com

Fax 22503242

Post 22 Dai Fat Street, Tai Po Industrial Estate, Tai Po, Hong Kong

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We must count our blessings

I am writing in regard to the first anniversary of the Sichuan earthquake.

The survivors have suffered pain and nightmares. Two brave youngsters – Liu Xiaohua and Lin Hao – came to Hong Kong. They wanted to give a message of encouragement to Hong Kong people.

The financial crisis has depressed lots of Hong Kong people, but, compared to those survivors in Sichuan, they are lucky. Survivors have lost their homes and loved ones.

In Hong Kong, citizens just lose their money and they get the support of family members and friends. They should not just focus on the loss, they should treasure what they have now.

I agree with Xiaohua. She said that ‘nothing is worse than losing your life, so Hong Kong people should not think too much about gains and losses and should try to live happily every day.’

So I hope Hongkongers can always look on the bright side of life.

Money is just one part of our lives.

Chan Tsz-ying, Sheung Shui

Quake victims want the truth

I refer to the editorial (‘Sichuan victims still deserve an inquiry’, May 12). One year on, many people are still struggling to recover from the trauma of the Sichuan earthquake.

Although people helped the victims rebuild their homes, questions remain unanswered about the shoddy construction work that caused buildings to collapse during the quake.

People want to find out the truth, but the government in Beijing will not allow investigations to take place. People should be allowed

to look into the shortcomings of construction projects.

Ally Chan, Fanling

Plea for full disclosure

The Sichuan earthquake exposed allegations of dishonesty. The government does not appear to want people to look into these claims and address them.

Concerns were also expressed about the actual final death toll not being revealed. Also, there are fears that not all the material and money donated actually reached those needing help.

The government should be responsive to people expressing concern over these problems.

It should not ignore them or the problems that exist in Sichuan will just get worse. Officials must be completely honest with the public.

Bonnie Ng Sui-ki, Tin Shui Wai

Quake probe can save lives

I refer to the editorial (‘Sichuan victims still deserve an inquiry’ May 12)

The government has reimposed some reporting restrictions a year after the earthquake. It does not want to see any portrayal of negative images of the country. Despite this view on the part of Beijing, I think a proper inquiry is needed to look at the contributing factors that led to so many deaths.

Many parents in Sichuan lost their children because schools collapsed during the earthquake. There must be a probe into shoddy construction work and to determine who is responsible.

Surely it is important for mainland officials to look into this issue and find out if corners were cut. It would prove how much the central government cares about its people.

Officials could learn from this disaster and try to ensure that new buildings going up would pose fewer

risks in the event of future quakes.

If an inquiry does take place the government must allow full disclosure of its findings.

If this is done then lives can be saved in future.

Wing Tam, Fanling

Quake’s lessons

On the first anniversary of the Sichuan earthquake, some of the survivors visited Hong Kong.

I was impressed by the brave way in which they have coped with adversity, such as the loss of family members and the destruction of their homes.

There was one little girl who displayed so much strength and has faced her problems calmly.

We can learn from their examples. Many of us have lost our jobs in the economic crisis and even our savings. But we must try to remain optimistic.

The disaster has taught me that money and property are not the most important things in our lives. Like the survivors of the earthquake, we must learn to never give up.

Effy Luk, Fanling

**Fung Kai Liu Man Shek Tong
Secondary School**

**6 Fung Nam Road, Sheung
Shui, N.T.**

Tel: 26736106

Fax: 26736810

<http://www.fklmstss.edu.hk>

Editorial Board:

Editors: Ms Alison Farr &

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