

# LEGISLATION URGED TO DEAL WITH BULLYING

**Think tank believes the introduction of a law can increase awareness and help track cases in schools, which are currently not forced to report them**



The MWYO group was founded by Lau Ming-wai. Photo: K.Y. Cheng

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A think tank founded by the vice-chairman of the city's Youth Development Commission has proposed the implementation of an anti-bullying law to raise awareness of the problem and to better track such cases in schools.

MWYO, an independent group set up by Lau Ming-wai, which focuses on youth issues, called for the government to set up a working group to look into

matters relating to bullying and coordinate data collection, which the city lacked.

In a recently released report, MWYO noted that the lack of specific legislation on bullying or cyberbullying in the city had led to poor awareness and under-reporting in schools.

"The government has provided a lot of guidelines and resource packages for schools on how to handle bullying, but there is no legal obligation or responsibility for schools to set up these programmes and handling proce-

dures due to the school-based management system in Hong Kong," said Fred Ng Cheuk-yin, a senior researcher at MWYO.

Ng was referring to a management framework that had been implemented in local public schools run by operators other than the government since 2005, which allowed greater autonomy and flexibility.

Current guidelines also do not force schools to report cases of bullying.

In the long term, Ng said the city should implement an anti-bullying law, present in many developed countries such as South Korea and Finland, and some US states.

Such a law would include obligations for stakeholders, such as teachers, social workers and parents, to follow up and report cases of bullying, with liability on instances of neglect.

Ng added legislation should also provide for an independent investigation body for victims, bullies, bystanders or even parents to lodge complaints to if they deemed schools were not handling a case well.

In the short term, he urged the government to set up a working group to review the current situation and collate better data.

He said such a group could copy the methods of the US and Norway and gather information through a questionnaire for students on the bullying they had witnessed or experienced, which would offer a different perspective from what schools say.

"Sometimes, society does not understand that the consequences of bullying can be serious," Ng said.

Hong Kong was ranked first among 53 countries and territories in terms of the percentage of children who reported being bullied at least a few times a month in a 2015 study by the Programme for International Student Assessment, a three-yearly test of 15-year-olds worldwide.