

Save the Children Hong Kong

Recommendation on the 2026–27 Policy Address

1. Position of Save the Children Hong Kong

1.1 Child Protection in All Dimensions

Save the Children Hong Kong believes that every child has the right to grow up in a safe, healthy, and supportive environment, free from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Comprehensive child protection must encompass physical health, mental well-being, and online safety. Legislative reforms represent merely the starting point; all sectors of society—including families, schools, child-serving organisations, the public, and digital platforms—share a collective responsibility to ensure a safe environment for every child.

1.2 Child Safeguarding (CSG)

We believe that “Child Safeguarding” (CSG) is an essential organisational foundation for preventing harm and protecting children. All organisations in contact with children and youth—whether social welfare and educational institutions, national sports associations, community groups, or commercial organisations—have a duty to establish Child Safeguarding Policies, provide regular staff training, and implement transparent, child-friendly reporting mechanisms. Only by embedding a culture of Child Safeguarding into organisational governance and daily operations can we prevent harm to children and youth at its source.

1.3 Child Mental Health

Mental health remains an integral component of child protection. Children and youth face multifaceted pressures from family, academics, peer relationships, digital environments, and societal expectations. Their emotional distress and hidden emotional harm are often difficult to detect, yet can exert profound, long-term impacts on their physical and mental well-being. We observe that current support mechanisms lean heavily toward post-crisis intervention and are predominantly adult- and expert-led. They fail to adequately address youth’s actual help-seeking behaviours—specifically their tendency to confide in peers and avoid adults—leaving high-risk students without timely assistance. We strongly advocate shifting the defence line upstream from “crisis intervention” to “prevention-oriented” strategies, establishing an accessible, non-stigmatising, and child-participatory support system tailored to the needs of children and youth.

1.4 Towards a Prevention-Based Child Protection System

The implementation of the *Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Ordinance* marks a significant milestone in Hong Kong's child protection framework. However, child protection must not stop at case identification and reporting; it must progress toward proactive prevention and early intervention. Beyond strengthening identification and reporting mechanisms, the Government must enhance family support, promote positive parenting, integrate Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) into the mainstream curriculum, and foster cross-sector collaboration to comprehensively safeguard the safety and well-being of children and youth.

2. Core Policy Recommendations

2.1 Strengthening the Implementation of the *Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Ordinance* and Planning for Future Expansion

In recent years, while public awareness of child protection in Hong Kong has increased, the issue of child abuse remains a serious concern. According to the latest official statistics from the Social Welfare Department, 1,354 newly registered child protection cases were recorded in 2025, representing a cumulative increase of 44% compared to 940 cases in 2020. Among child protection cases, physical abuse and sexual abuse are generally easier to identify, whereas psychological abuse continues to be significantly underestimated. Our 2026 child-led research "*Hearing Children*" highlighted that hidden emotional harm within households is difficult to detect yet inflicts deep, lasting impacts on children's well-being and development.

The *Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Ordinance* came into full effect on 20 January 2026, covering 25 categories of specified professionals across the social welfare, education, and healthcare sectors. Latest government data indicates that as of end-June 2026 (approximately five months post-implementation), a total of 176 reports involving 188 children were received. Crucially, no widespread over-reporting or false reporting was observed, indicating initial success in government publicity, training, and support efforts. Among the 188 children involved, sexual abuse accounted for the highest number of cases (83), followed by physical harm/abuse (64) and neglect (32). However, psychological harm/abuse accounted for a mere 7 cases, a proportion markedly lower than other categories. This data reinforces our concern that hidden psychological harm remains difficult for frontline personnel to detect due to ambiguous definitions, posing operational challenges for professionals.

- **2.1.1 Enhancing Training on Identifying Psychological and Emotional Abuse and Expanding the List of Specified Professionals**

We recommend that the Government introduce specialised training focused on identifying psychological harm and abuse for the 25 categories of specified professionals, incorporating established real-life case studies to build their sensitivity and confidence. Furthermore, the

Government should explore gradually expanding the mandatory reporting obligation to other personnel working closely with children and youth (such as sports coaches, art instructors, and private tutors), thereby expanding the list of specified professionals.

- **2.1.2 Establishing a “Central Databank on Children”**

In the long term, the Government should expedite the establishment of a centralised “Central Databank on Children”. By integrating cross-sectoral data across healthcare, education, and social welfare, and leveraging big data analytics—with dedicated inclusion of data on ethnic minority children, children with mental health needs, and children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)—the Government can identify high-risk cases early and enable timely intervention.

- **2.1.3 Establishing Statutory Status for the “Commission on Children”**

We call upon the Government to grant statutory status to the “Commission on Children” and establish a standing post of “Commissioner for Children” to oversee policy consistency and further coordinate inter-departmental collaboration.

2.2 Addressing Mental Health, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), and Family Support

According to the Department of Health's *Annual Health Report of the Student Health Service*, during the 2024/25 academic year, 6,848 students (1.6%) reported having planned to commit suicide, and nearly 3,000 students (0.7%) reported having attempted suicide, highlighting an alarming risk of youth suicide across society. Our latest research “*Hearing Children*” reveals that when experiencing emotional distress, youths are reluctant to seek help from adults (including teachers, school social workers, and parents), preferring instead to confide in peers. This pattern creates a significant mismatch with existing adult- and expert-led support frameworks, such as the “Three-Tier Emergency Mechanism” for student mental health, underscoring the urgent need for peer-support-based preventive initiatives.

- **2.2.1 Addressing Gaps in the “Three-Tier Emergency Mechanism” through Peer Support**

We recommend that the Government support and scale evidence-based peer support programmes on campuses, such as the “I Support My Friends”, which is a Youth Psychological First Aid Peer Support Programme co-developed by Save the Children and the World Health Organisation (WHO). This initiative equips students with age-appropriate Psychological First Aid (PFA) skills to recognise distress signals and offer empathetic listening, acting as a bridge to encourage and assist high-risk peers in seeking professional support before crises escalate. We also recommend implementing peer support initiatives alongside staff training to strengthen school-based support systems, referral mechanisms, and a whole-school help-seeking culture, ensuring vulnerable students are identified and assisted at the earliest stage.

- **2.2.2 Institutionalising and Practising Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) on Campus**

The Education Bureau (EDB) should systematically incorporate Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) into the mainstream curriculum framework. Drawing from the empirical success of our “Integrating Social and Emotional Learning into Schools” (ISEL) programme (see the [link](#) for more details), a preventive and structured SEL curriculum can enhance students' emotional development and resilience. At the same time, the Government should optimise the “School-based After-School Care Service Scheme” by transforming it into a key venue for SEL practice. By replacing purely academic and homework-focused routines with sports, play, and arts activities, the programme can deliver a stable, safe emotional safety net for grassroots children.

- **2.2.3 Lowering the Age Threshold for Mental Health Services at District Health Centres (DHCs)**

At the community level, we recommend lowering the age threshold for mental health services at District Health Centres (DHCs)—for instance, lowering the minimum assessment age to 12—allowing youth to independently access non-stigmatising preliminary support in their local communities, bypassing the stigma often associated with conventional psychiatric services.

- **2.2.4 Positioning “Community Living Rooms” as Buffer Spaces for Grassroots Families**

We urge the Government to position “Community Living Rooms” as buffer spaces for grassroots families. Beyond providing homework support and shared amenities, these spaces should offer parent-child groups and parent peer support groups that deliver positive parenting guidance. Social workers and relevant professionals could be deployed on an outreach basis to connect with parents in natural settings—such as while waiting for children to finish homework or laundry—enabling low-pressure access to positive discipline resources.

2.3 Establishing Child Safeguarding (CSG) Policies

- **2.3.1 Integrating Child Safeguarding into the Sports Coach Training System**

Recent incidents involving alleged abuse and mistreatment of children by sports coaches have raised significant public concern. Historically, coach training was individually managed by National Sports Associations (NSAs), with curricula heavily focused on athletic skills and lacking emphasis on Child Safeguarding. Since April 2026, coach training management has been centralised under the Coaching Department of the Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China (SF&OC). We strongly urge SF&OC to leverage this opportunity to review the coach training framework and systematically embed Child Safeguarding as a mandatory core module for all levels of coaching certification and registration. The module should cover codes of conduct, identification of child abuse risks, prevention of inappropriate physical contact, and reporting protocols, thereby establishing a strong safeguarding culture across the sports sector.

- **2.3.2 Embedding Child Safeguarding Mechanisms into Corporate Mentorship and Volunteer Schemes**

As corporations actively advance Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) initiatives, many engage in mentorship and volunteer schemes, including government-led programmes such as the “Strive and Rise Programme” and the “Child Development Fund” (CDF). As corporate employees interact closely with children as mentors and volunteers, associated Child Safeguarding risks increase. We urge the Government to require all participating corporate partners and operating organisations to formulate Child Safeguarding Codes and mandate basic CSG training for corporate mentors and volunteers, ensuring children are fully protected during all mentorship and volunteer activities and extending a safeguarding culture across sectors.

- **2.3.3 Promoting Child Safeguarding Policies, Training, and Pre-employment Screening**

In the long term, we recommend establishing a dedicated fund to support all non-governmental organisations providing child and youth services (including non-subsidised NGOs) in formulating and implementing Child Safeguarding Policies. All new hires in child-contact roles should complete mandatory CSG training upon onboarding, supplemented by mandatory annual refresher training for all staff to maintain safeguarding awareness over time. Furthermore, while requiring child-serving organisations to establish CSG policies, the Government should mandate the “Sexual Conviction Record Check” (SCRC) as a compulsory component of recruitment processes across all child-serving entities. On the educational front, we recommend allocating resources to study the feasibility of incorporating systematic Child Safeguarding modules into tertiary degree programmes for future teachers, social workers, and healthcare professionals.

2.4 Strengthening Digital Safety and Enhancing Digital Literacy

- **2.4.1 Fostering Digital Literacy for Children and Families**

While the Education Bureau has integrated digital literacy into primary and secondary curriculum frameworks, the focus remains primarily on IT application, AI literacy, and basic cybersecurity. We recommend broadening the framework to address internet addiction, cyberbullying, online grooming, sexual exploitation, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, data privacy protection, online help-seeking, and responsible AI usage. Furthermore, the Government should expand parent training on AI and emerging technology to empower parents to navigate digital transformations alongside their children.

- **2.4.2 Providing Regular “Digital Management and Application” Training for Child-facing Professionals**

Given the rapid pace of technological advancement, child-facing professionals—including teachers and social workers—urgently require enhanced digital literacy. The Government should establish continuous, practical professional training on digital management and application. Key areas should

include: identifying and addressing emerging AI-driven risks (e.g., deepfakes, AI-generated inappropriate content, and the mental health impacts of AI chatbots); protecting data privacy; and safely and ethically applying digital tools when providing services for children (such as reviewing content accuracy and avoiding algorithmic bias when utilising AI for lesson planning or administration).

- **2.4.3 Enhancing the Responsibility of Online Platforms in Child Safeguarding**

In alignment with ongoing legislative updates regarding cybersecurity and sexual offences, we recommend statutory regulation requiring social media and digital platforms to conduct regular child risk assessments. Platforms should regularly review recommendation algorithms and content distribution mechanisms to minimise children's exposure to harmful content, including cyberbullying, online grooming, and child sexual exploitation.