

**立法會**  
**Legislative Council**

LC Paper No. CB(2)2338/01-02  
(These minutes have been seen  
by the Administration)

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**LegCo Panel on Education**

**Minutes of special meeting  
held on Friday, 26 April 2002 at 10:45 am  
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

**Members Present** : Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung, BBS (Chairman)  
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan  
Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP  
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong  
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung  
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, JP  
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP  
Hon SZETO Wah  
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP  
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP  
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok  
Hon MA Fung-kwok

**Members Absent** : Dr Hon YEUNG Sum (Deputy Chairman)  
Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP  
Hon LAU Kong-wah  
Hon WONG Sing-chi  
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung  
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP

**Public Officers Attending** : Mrs Fanny LAW, JP  
Secretary for Education and Manpower  
  
Mr CHENG Yan-chee  
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (3)

Mr John LEUNG  
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower (9)

Miss Diane WONG  
Principal Assistant Secretary for Health and Welfare  
(Welfare)2

Mr LEE Hing-fai, JP  
Deputy Director of Education

Mr Andrew C S POON  
Assistant Director of Education (Chief Inspector of Schools)

Mrs Eliza LEUNG  
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Services)

Mr FUNG Pak-yan  
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Family and Child  
Welfare)

**Clerk in Attendance** : Miss Flora TAI  
Chief Assistant Secretary (2)2

**Staff in Attendance** : Miss Lolita SHEK  
Senior Assistant Secretary (2)7

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**I. Harmonisation of kindergartens and child care centres**  
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1727/01-02(01)]

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM) highlighted the recommendations of the Working Party on Harmonisation of Pre-primary Services (Working Party) on the harmonisation of kindergartens (KGs) and child care centres (CCCs) as laid down in the information paper. These recommendations covered the areas of admission age, monitoring authority, fees, subsidies, fee assistance, staffing standards, operational requirements, qualification of KG teachers and child care workers (CCWs), quality assurance and implementation.

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Assistance to parents

2. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong noted that under the current Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme (KGFRS), both half-day and full-day pupils were eligible for financial assistance at rates appropriate to half-day and full-day sessions, and their parents were not required to prove their social needs. The social need test was only required under the Child Care Centre Fee Assistance Scheme (CCCFAS) for children attending day crèches (DCs) and day nurseries (DNs). However, in the enhanced KGFRS recommended by the Working Party, assistance to parents would be calculated on the basis of the school fee for half-day KGs only and families would need to pass the social need test in order to receive full-day rates of fee remission. He criticised this as a regressive measure, saying that the social need test for CCC children who were fewer in number should not apply to KG pupils who outnumbered the former.

3. In response, SEM clarified that from an education point of view, a half-day KG programme would suffice for children aged 3 to 6. The assistance for these children should therefore be calculated on the basis of the school fee for half-day KGs. The purpose of a full-day programme was to add care elements in response to social needs or parental choice. The full-day rates of fee remission for KG pupils should only be payable when the families had also passed the social need test. She added that at present, out of the 156 000 KG pupils in Hong Kong, only about 7 500 or more attended full-day programme whereas 27 000 out of the 35 000 children in DCs attended full-day sessions. She pointed out that as illustrated by the above statistics, the number of children attending full-day KGs and hence affected by the proposed new KGFRS would be very small. Many of them could in any case satisfy the social need criteria. SEM assured members that when the new scheme was implemented in 2003, the “no worse-off” principle would apply to beneficiaries under the existing KGFRS and CCCFAS to ensure that they would not receive less assistance under the revised scheme until the children concerned left the KGs/CCCs. The proposed new KGFRS would apply to new applicants after the implementation of the harmonisation proposal in 2003.

4. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong, however, considered that in unifying the existing assistance schemes, the Government should offer a new scheme in which all parents concerned, both existing and new beneficiaries, should become better-off irrespective of the number of parents affected. He pointed out that parents might decide that full-day programme was more suitable for their children out of educational consideration. They should be allowed the freedom to choose the type of KGs for their children and receive the assistance if they were in need. He therefore urged the Administration to revise KGFRS to provide full-day fee remission for families, without requiring them to prove their social need. Sharing similar concern on the impact of the new KGFRS on the parents concerned, Mr SZETO Wah also requested the Administration to further revise the scheme so as

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to ensure that the subsidies to both existing beneficiaries and future applicants would not be reduced irrespective of the number of families affected.

5. In response to the request from Mr Jasper TSANG for statistics on the impact of the proposed new KGFRS on parents, SEM advised that the impact on the new applicant families was not yet known since their background information was not available. However, she assured members that the existing beneficiaries would not be affected. She further informed members that approval had been sought to enhance KGFRS from the 2002/03 school year under which three levels of assistance (100%, 75% and 50% remission) would be offered to parents. Accordingly, the level of fee remission granted would be 100% for four-person families or three-person single-parent families with a household income up to \$8,500, 75% for those with an income between \$8,501 and \$12,356, and 50% for those between \$12,357 and \$22,700. SEM added that the purpose for harmonising the two existing assistance schemes was not to achieve savings but to rationalise the provision of assistance to families. The three levels of assistance were considered reasonable and should apply to both KG and CCC children.

6. The Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Services) (DD of SW(S)) supplemented that administration of financial assistance would be simplified. Though it was difficult to predict the exact impact on the new applicant families without knowing their background information, based on some assumptions, DD of SW(S) roughly estimated that for children of 0 to 2 years old in DCs, the level of fee remission for 5% of the existing beneficiaries would remain the same. The level would be increased for 4% and reduced for 91% of the families concerned. For children of 2 to 6 years old in DNs, the level of fee remission would remain the same for 12% of the existing beneficiaries. The level would be increased for 11% and reduced for 77% of the families concerned. DD of SW(S) assured members that the "no worse-off" principle would ensure that existing beneficiaries (including those admitted in 2002/03 school year) would not be affected until they left CCCs.

7. Noting that a small percentage of children in Hong Kong did not attend CCCs or KGs, Ms Cyd HO pointed out that most of these children might be non-Cantonese speaking Southeast Asians who came from low income families. These mothers were often non-working housewives who stayed at home to take care of their children. As a result, they might not be able to pass the social need test even if they were included in KGFRS. Ms HO therefore requested that KGFRS should be extended to cover these cases if it had not been done so, and that the need for the ethnic minorities to integrate into the main-stream education system and hence society be regarded as a kind of social need so that assistance would be provided to these families. She also suggested that the Administration should step up publicity in the languages of the ethnic minorities on the channels through which their children could be admitted into the mainstream education system.

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8. SEM said that she was not sure whether the children not attending CCCs/KGs were all ethnic minorities. She, however, pointed out that some of the Chinese children were sent back to live with their families in the Mainland by their parents before they reached the age for primary school. On the pre-primary services for the ethnic minorities, the Deputy Director of Education (DD of E) informed members that different services were available to them in Hong Kong and that the Government did offer them assistance to bring their children into the main stream education system in an early stage. Publicity leaflets in different languages such as Hindi, Bengali and Nepali were produced and distributed to them. The Administration had also liaised closely with these families through social workers and their own communities. DD of SW(S) supplemented that discretion would also be exercised by the Social Welfare Department to recommend fee assistance for families with genuine social need. Ms HO, however, remained of the view that the need of the ethnic minorities to integrate into the mainstream education system should clearly be specified as a kind of social need and the families concerned should be granted full fee remission. The Chairman requested the Administration to consider the request.

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Assistance to service providers

9. Both Ms Emily LAU and Mr SZETO Wah opined that pre-primary services should be regarded as part of free basic education provided by the Government. They were both disappointed that the Government had not provided full subsidies to parents and service providers. SEM responded that the Government would ensure that no children would be deprived of pre-primary services due to a lack of means by providing assistance to the parents in need. It also considered that the quality of education and benefits to the children were of utmost importance in pre-primary services. Considering that full subsidies did not necessarily assure the quality of services provided, the Government would allocate limited resources to areas such as staff training that could assure and raise the quality of pre-primary services.

10. Ms Emily LAU expressed concern that the resources put in pre-primary services by the Government would be reduced after the harmonisation of KGs and CCCs. Mr SZETO Wah also questioned whether full subsidies could be provided for the service providers gradually. In response, SEM explained that the subsidies to service providers would be increased according to the percentage of Qualified Kindergarten Teachers (QKTs) they employed under the new harmonised scheme to encourage further education and improvement in the qualification of KG teachers and CCWs. The Administration aimed at raising their entry requirements. To illustrate how service providers would benefit from the proposed scheme, DD of SW(S) advised that the subsidy for a DN with 100 places which achieved full student enrolment and employed 100% QKTs would be increased by 61% from \$135,840 to \$219,100. Similarly, the subsidy for a DC with 40 places which

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satisfied the same enrolment and staffing requirements would be increased by 50% from \$104,888 to \$156,500.

11. Mr SZETO Wah suggested that appropriate measures should be introduced to encourage continuing education of staff in KGs and CCCs to ensure further improvement in their qualifications. Ms Emily LAU said that during a recent Panel's visit to kindergartens, members observed that a non-profit-making (NPM) KG not under the kindergarten subsidy scheme had been operating very successfully. She therefore considered that even if the Government had provided full subsidies to NPM service providers, there would still be room for private independent KGs and CCCs to operate, hence ensuring reasonable competition to assure the quality of the services provided. Ms LAU remained of the view that full subsidies should be provided for NPM KGs and CCCs.

Qualification of KG teachers and CCWs

12. Considering pre-primary education a very important part in the continuum of education, Ms Emily LAU opined that basic qualification for KG teachers and CCWs should be university degree in order to improve the quality of the services provided. SEM explained that considerations such as the availability of sufficient suitable university graduates, the suitability of graduates from existing university programmes to become KG teachers, and the impact on serving staff had been taken into account in the manpower planning for the profession. The Government was of the view that the qualification of KG teachers and CCWs should be raised gradually. In this connection, the pre-primary staff had demonstrated their eagerness in raising their qualifications. The Government had been encouraging tertiary institutions to provide more certificate and associate degree courses for them. Sufficient training places would be available for all unqualified pre-primary staff to receive the necessary in-service training to become qualified by September 2004. The Administration was therefore confident that the target of a fully trained pre-primary workforce would be attained by the 2004-05 school year. By then, steps might be taken to further raise the staff entry requirements.

13. SEM added that with the anticipated drop in the number of pre-primary pupils, the pressure on the demand for resources for pre-primary education would be slightly relieved. More resources could then be channeled towards staff training. She considered that meanwhile, it would not be realistic to set a target date for raising the qualification requirements to the university level which might also create unnecessary pressure among serving staff. Ms LAU remained of the view that a target date should at least be set so that efforts and resources could be directed towards it.

14. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that he supported the decision of the Government to raise the qualification of pre-primary staff gradually. With only 70% of KG teachers possessing a QKT or higher qualification at present, he

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pointed out that it would be more appropriate and practical to encourage improvement in their qualification through the provision of subsidies to their employers so that 100% QKT could be achieved gradually. He suggested that consideration might be given to raising the qualification requirements of KG principals and CCC supervisors to university degree first. To further raise staff qualification and improve the quality of pre-primary services, Mr CHEUNG proposed that the Government should encourage service providers to employ more senior QKTs by providing more subsidies to them. The Administration noted his suggestions. In reply to the question from Mr SZETO Wah, SEM said that the turn-over rate of pre-primary staff had dropped recently.

## Governance arrangements

15. Mr Jasper TSANG noted that after the harmonisation was in place, pre-primary services would still be governed by two ordinances and two monitoring authorities. The joint office to be set up to monitor the co-located education and care services would still be staffed by officers from both the Education Department and SWD. He considered that for continuity purposes, pre-primary education should best be governed by one ordinance and monitored by one authority only. SEM explained that having regard to the developmental needs of children, the Working Party recommended that the minimum age for pre-primary education should remain at 3. Moreover, a clear distinction should be made between child care and education by maintaining two ordinances and two Government departments to oversee their operation. This was to send a clear signal to parents that pre-primary education did not start until the age of 3.

16. Mr TSANG, however, considered that with suitable curriculum design and teaching methods, it might not be undesirable for children to receive their pre-primary education at 2. He asked if the Government did not encourage service providers to admit children at 2. SEM clarified that it was for the service operators to consider the type of services to be provided having regard to demand. She added that the desirability of having one single ordinance and monitoring authority in the long term had to be further considered in the context of the interface of the early developmental programmes for infants and young children and their care needs arising from social factors. This might be further reviewed after the establishment of the joint office.

## Consultation

17. In response to a question from Ms Emily LAU on the views collected from professionals and stakeholders of pre-primary services, SEM assured members that the views collected from various channels had been carefully considered and many concerns addressed in the proposed harmonisation of KGs and CCCs. DD of E advised that nine focus group meetings had been held to solicit views from representatives of training institutes, operators, frontline workers and parents

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based on which the proposals in the consultation paper were drafted. DD of SW(S) supplemented that while the CCC operators consulted considered that different programmes should be provided to cater for the different needs of children from 2 to 6 years old, they generally agreed that the minimum age for pre-primary education should be at 3. They also welcomed the establishment of a joint office to monitor the co-located education and care services. Moreover, they had requested for additional subsidies for service providers and some of them considered that assistance to pre-primary education service recipients should be non-means-tested. DD of SW(S) pointed out that all these views had been accepted by the Administration except that on the means test. She, however, stressed that under the enhanced KGFRS, appropriate assistance would be provided for the low income families to ensure that their children would not be deprived of KG education due to a lack of means.

Way forward

18. As regards the Chairman's query on the implementation schedule of the harmonisation plan, SEM advised that public consultation would end on 30 June 2002 after which the proposals would be finalised based on the views collected. The Administration had recommended the setting up of a Steering Group to steer and a Special Team to administer the implementation details. Subject to the Government's endorsement of the Working Party's recommendations, the harmonisation measures would be implemented by phases starting from 2003. She pointed out that one of the major tasks was to amend the Child Care Services Ordinance/Regulations and the Education Ordinance/Regulations and to prepare new codes of practices. Stakeholders would be consulted whenever necessary. It was expected that the process would be completed by the end of 2004.

**II. Any other business**

19. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 11:45 am.

Council Business Division 2  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
24 June 2002