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Fax and Mail

4 April 2005

Ms Flora TAI,
Legislative Secretariat,
Legislative Council Building,
8 Jackson Road,
Central,
Hong Kong.

Dear Madam,

Harmonization of Pre-primary Services

I refer to Members' request at the meeting of LegCo Panel on Education on 14 April 2005 to provide supplementary information on the number of parents who might be affected by the Administration's plan to replace the Fee Assistance Scheme for Child Care Centres (CCCFAS) by the Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme (KGFRS). The Administration's reply is set out below.

As mentioned at the Panel meeting, the number of affected parents would depend on the number of children at the appropriate age for pre-primary service in the year and the financial position of the family as well as the choice of pre-primary services by the parents. As such, are unable to provide the figures as requested.

Members proposed at the meeting that the Administration might take the number of children attending child care centres before harmonization of pre-primary services and the number of parents receiving subsidy as reference for such assessment. We consider that

such an approach is not appropriate as figures so derived may be erroneous and will mislead the public. Therefore, we have not adopted the proposal.

However, before we propose to implement the harmonization of pre-primary services, the Administration has fully considered the impact of the harmonization plan on parents and the burden on needy families requiring pre-primary services. In fact, the KGFRS has been improved to provide three levels of assistance with 100%, 75% or 50% fee assistance since 2002-03. We have also proposed to extend the coverage of KGFRS to include-

- (i) children aged between three to six attending half-day child care centres who are currently not eligible for fee assistance under CCCFAS; and
- (ii) both air-conditioning and meal charges in the monthly fee and subject to subsidy under the KGFRS.

At present, about 80% school children attend kindergartens and they will benefit from the enhanced KGFRS. It is therefore not appropriate to maintain CCCFAS. For parents receiving assistance under CCFAS before the harmonization, they may opt for either of the schemes which offers a higher rate of subsidy after the harmonization until their children attend Primary one. This arrangement ensures that existing parents would not suffer any loss after the harmonization.

In sum, the improvements mentioned above would benefit parents who are eligible for the fee assistance scheme.

Thank you for Members' concern on the harmonization of pre-primary services. If Members have further enquiry, they may liaise with Mr. KWAI Sze-kit at 2973 8126.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Linda LAI
for Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food

c.c. Secretary for Education and Manpower (Mr. POON Chung-shing)(Fax: 2868 5916)