

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)544/06-07
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 13 November 2006, at 4:30 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP (Chairman)
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum (Deputy Chairman)
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Prof Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
- Members absent** : Hon SIN Chung-kai, JP
Hon MA Lik, GBS, JP
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Item IV

Mr Raymond WONG
Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower

Mr Chris WARDLAW
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (5)

Ms Vivian LAU
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (6)

Mr Tony TANG
Principal Assistant Secretary (Quality Assurance)

Mr LI Wing
Controller, Student Financial Assistance Agency

**Attendance by
invitation** : Item IV

Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union

Ms YUNG Hau-heung
Spokesperson on Early Childhood Education

Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers

Mr WU Siu-wai
Vice-Chairman

Ms SZTO Yuk-lin
Vice-Chairman, Committee of Early Childhood Education

Hong Kong Institute of Education Past Student's
Association of Early Childhood Teacher Education Ltd

Mrs MAK TSE How-ling
Chairman

Mrs MAK LEUNG Shuk-won
Vice-Chairman

Hong Kong Baptist Kindergarten Education Convention Ltd

Mr CHAN Mei-tak
President

Ms CHAN Tsui-yuk
Principal

Hong Kong Early Childhood Educators Association

Ms CHOW Wai-chun
Chairman

Ms LEUNG Pik-lin
Vice-Chairman

Tai Po Early Childhood Education Principal Association

Ms KWOK Chor-kiu
Chairman

Ms CHAN Wai-ling
Vice-Chairman

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Ms Klare CHAN
Officer

Hong Kong Kowloon and N.T. Kindergarten Education
Advancement Association

Ms CHAU Choi-ngo
Chairman

Ms TAM Siu-hing
Chairman

Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of
Hong Kong

Mr Horace CHEUNG
Education Policy Deputy Spokesperson

The Non-Profit-Making Kindergarten Council of Hong Kong

Ms Harlanna YEUNG
Chairperson

Ms YEUNG Suk-ha
Hon Secretary

Hong Kong Baptist University Early Childhood
Education Society

Miss CHAN Hang
Chairman

Miss SIU Lin-ying
Vice-Chairman

Hong Kong Institute of Education

Ms Lily CHAN
Acting Department Head, Department of Early
Childhood Education

Ms Margaret WONG
Director of Programmes (Early Childhood and Special
Education)

Society for Community Organization Children's Rights
Association

Miss SZE Lai-shan
Community Organizer

Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children

Ms Susan SO
Director

The Salvation Army

Ms CHAN Po-kuen
Coordinator for Pre-School Education

Ms NG Yin-kam
Assistant Coordinator for Pre-School Education

Civic Party

Ms Annie KI
District Developer of Hong Kong Island Branch

Mr David LEUNG

Hong Kong Teachers' Association

Ms LAU Seung-man
Chairman of Kindergarten Section

Council of Non-Profit Making Organizations for
Pre-Primary Education

Mrs Sanly TSANG
Chairman

Ms LAU Yin-king
Secretary

Private Independent Early Education Association

Mr Thomas HO
Convenor

Ms WAT King-yee
Secretary

Catiline Anglo-Chinese Kindergarten

Mr WUN Kam-hoi
Director

Ms SIU Heung-hing
Supervisor

World Organization for Early Childhood Education -
Hong Kong

Dr Hazel LAM
President

Ms Gloria LEUNG
Executive Committee Member

Education Convergence

Mr CHOI Kwok-kwong
Chairman

培幼教育事業協會

Ms MAN Kam-wah
Principal

Ms LO Hin-li
Principal

S.K.H. Kindergarten and Nursery Council

Ms LUI Shuk-har
Chairman

Ms LEUNG Yuk-sum
Honorable Advisor

Alumni Association of Pre-school Education
Administration and Management course SPACE –
University of Hong Kong

Ms CHAN Shun-lai
Chairperson

Ms LO Oi-lan
Vice-chairperson

Hong Kong Kindergarten Association

Ms Mary TONG
Chairperson

Ms Wisa LIU
Vice-chairperson

Luk Chiu Kwan Hung's Child Development Research Centre

Dr Angela LUK
Chairperson

Hong Kong Parents Association Ltd

Ms May CHAN
Secretary

New Forum

Mr HSU Hoi-shan
Board Member

Committee on Home School Co-operation

Mr Chris YU
Vice-Chairperson

The Hong Kong Council of Early Childhood Education
and Services

Mr LAU Ming-ki
Vice-Chairman

Ms HO Shuk-ha
Representative

Clerk in attendance : Miss Odelia LEUNG
Chief Council Secretary (2)6

Staff in attendance : Mr Stanley MA
Senior Council Secretary (2)6

Ms Katherine YEUNG
Legislative Assistant (2)6

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I. Confirmation of minutes

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)228/06-07 and CB(2)280/06-07]

The minutes of the meetings held on 12 and 19 October 2006 were confirmed.

II. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting

2. Members noted the following papers issued since the last meeting -

- (a) information paper provided by the Administration on three school projects [LC Paper No. CB(2)60/06-07(01)];
- (b) letter from Hong Kong Christian Service dated 9 October 2006 concerning designated schools for non-Chinese speaking students [LC Paper No. CB(2)77/06-07(01)];
- (c) submission from the Hong Kong School Clerks and Janitors General Union concerning salary adjustments for clerks and janitors in schools [LC Paper No. CB(2)195/06-07(01)];

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- (d) submission from 396 parents of pupils in a private independent kindergarten concerning subsidisation of early childhood education [LC Paper No. CB(2)206/06-07(01)];
- (e) referral from Duty Roster Members of the submission from the Society of Community Organization concerning the provision of 15-year free basic education [LC Paper No. CB(2)247/06-07];
- (f) the Administration's response to the letter from Hong Kong Christian Service [LC Paper No. CB(2)260/06-07(01)]; and
- (g) information paper provided by the Administration concerning a proposal to construct an 18-classroom primary school at Tai Pak Tin Street, Kwai Chung [LC Paper No. CB(2)329/06-07(01)].

III. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[Appendices I and II to LC Paper No. CB(2)277/06-07]

3. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next regular meeting scheduled for 11 December 2006 -

- (a) Articulation and employment opportunities for sub-degree holders; and
- (b) Provision of hostels for non-local students.

4. Members also agreed to discuss "An alternative Chinese Language curriculum for non-Chinese speaking students" at the regular meeting in January 2007.

IV. Subsidising early childhood education

[LC Paper No. CB(2)277/06-07(01) - (02) and CB(2)369/06-07(01)]

5. Members noted the background brief entitled "Financial assistance for pre-primary service providers and parents of children receiving pre-primary services" prepared by the Legislative Council (LegCo) Secretariat.

Oral presentation by deputations

Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union
[LC Paper No. CB(2)316/06-07(01)]

6. Ms YUNG Hau-heung presented the views of the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that

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the Union welcomed the provision of \$2 billion to subsidise early childhood education. The Union suggested that in recognition of the dedication and commitment of the pre-primary workforce to enhancing the quality of early childhood education, the Administration should formulate a comprehensive remuneration structure for pre-primary principals and teachers commensurate with their qualifications. The Union also considered that like non-profit-making (NPM) kindergartens, private independent (PI) kindergartens satisfying the prescribed requirements should be eligible for the subsidy under the proposed voucher scheme (the Scheme).

Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers
[LC Paper No. CB(2)389/06-07(01)]

7. Mr WU Siu-wai presented the views of the Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers as detailed in its submission. He highlighted that the Federation supported the policy initiative to subsidise early childhood education and requested the Administration to consult the pre-primary sector on the implementation of the Scheme. Specifically, the Federation suggested that the Administration should assist PI kindergartens to change their mode of operation to NPM; formulate a remuneration structure for pre-primary teachers; include children aged two to three in the Scheme; provide the same level of subsidy to teachers in child care centres taking care of these children; provide eligible kindergartens and kindergarten-cum-child care centres (referred to collectively as kindergartens) operating on a whole-day basis with more subsidies; and provide sufficient subsidised places in diploma/degree programmes on early childhood education for serving pre-primary teachers to enhance their qualification.

Hong Kong Institute of Education Past Student's Association of Early Childhood Teacher Education
[LC Paper No. CB(2)389/06-07(02)]

8. Mrs MAK TSE How-ling presented the views of the Hong Kong Institute of Education Past Student's Association of Early Childhood Teacher Education as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Association appreciated the provision of \$2 billion to subsidise early childhood education, but was disappointed that early childhood education had yet to be included in the wholly-subsidised basic education. The Association requested the Administration to formulate new salary scales for pre-primary principals and teachers in the light of the higher qualification requirements; monitor the use of the \$3,000 subsidy for professional development of pre-primary teachers; relax the criteria on family income under the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme (KCFRS); and provide appropriate support for PI kindergartens intending to switch to operate on a NPM basis..

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*Hong Kong Baptist Kindergarten Education Convention
[LC Paper No. CB(2)331/06-07(01)]*

9. Mr CHAN Mei-tak presented the views of the Hong Kong Baptist Kindergarten Education Convention as detailed in its submission. He highlighted that the Administration should make use of the \$2 billion to upgrade the quality of pre-primary teachers and pre-primary education. The Convention opposed deregulation of salaries for pre-primary teachers, and urged the Administration to formulate a remuneration system commensurate with the higher qualification requirements of pre-primary teachers and principals. In the long term, the Government should provide free pre-primary education for all children.

*Hong Kong Early Childhood Educators Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)341/06-07(01)] (revised)*

10. Ms CHOW Wai-chun presented the views of the Hong Kong Early Childhood Educators Association as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Association considered that whole-day kindergartens should be provided with more subsidies to meet the operating expenses and the professional development needs of their teachers. The Administration should extend the Scheme to cover children aged two to three; provide sufficient financial assistance to needy families; and formulate a remuneration system for pre-primary teachers. In addition, the Administration should collaborate with the stakeholders in the pre-primary sector to plan and monitor the implementation of the Scheme from the 2007-2008 school year onwards.

*Tai Po Early Childhood Education Principal Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)277/06-07(03)]*

11. Ms KWOK Chor-kiu presented the views of the Tai Po Early Childhood Education Principal Association as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Association appreciated the Administration's commitment to enhance the quality of pre-primary education. The Association suggested that the Administration should devise salary scales for pre-primary principals and teachers and arrange school-based support for their professional development; allow the use of the \$3,000 dedicated for teacher development for adjusting the salaries for serving teachers; explain the design and operation of the Scheme to parents in detail; and promote parent education to facilitate the implementation of the Scheme.

*The Hong Kong Council of Social Service
[LC Paper No. CB(2)389/06-07(03)]*

12. Ms Klare CHAN presented the views of the Hong Kong Council of Social Services as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Council

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appreciated that the Government had decided to allocate additional resources to support parents and teachers in pre-primary education. The Council requested the Administration to extend the Scheme to include children aged two to three; provide equal professional development opportunities for teachers in whole-day or half-day kindergartens; provide a social worker in each kindergarten; and continue to consult the pre-primary sector on the implementation of the Scheme.

*Hong Kong Kowloon and N.T. Kindergarten Education Advancement Association
[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)301/06-07(01) - (02) and CB(2)389/06-07(04)]*

13. Ms TAM Siu-hing presented the views of the Hong Kong Kowloon and N.T. Kindergarten Education Advancement Association as detailed in its submissions. She highlighted that parents should be given the discretion to choose kindergartens for their children, and the Scheme should cover PI and NPM kindergartens alike. The Association considered that the Administration should continue to monitor the development of pre-primary education and provide appropriate support for teachers' professional development and parent education. She added that the Administration should not stigmatised profit-making PI kindergartens.

*Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong
[LC Paper No. CB(2)389/06-07(05)]*

14. Mr Horace CHEUNG presented the views of the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong. He highlighted that the Alliance considered that the Government should provide the subsidy to all parents with children attending pre-primary education. The Alliance requested the Administration to provide a three-year transition period for PI kindergartens to change their mode of operation to NPM. During the transition period, PI kindergartens which complied with the prescribed requirements should also be eligible for redemption of the vouchers under the Scheme. To facilitate the long-term development of pre-primary education, the Administration should allocate additional resources for teachers' professional development, and formulate a salary and grading structure for pre-primary teachers to pursue long-term career development.

*The Non-Profit-Making Kindergarten Council of Hong Kong
[LC Paper No. CB(2)389/06-07(06)]*

15. Ms Harlanna YEUNG presented the views of the Non-Profit-Making Kindergarten Council of Hong Kong as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Government had the obligation to provide quality pre-primary education to all children. To fulfil the obligation, the Administration should maintain a stable and quality pre-primary workforce in kindergartens; provide the subsidy to parents with children attending PI or NPM kindergartens meeting the prescribed requirements; and formulate plans for

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pre-primary teachers to attend a diploma programme in early childhood education. The Association considered that pre-primary teachers should be remunerated at reasonable levels to reflect their efforts and professionalism in early childhood education. In addition, the Administration should devise regulatory measures to facilitate cost-effective use of public resources.

Hong Kong Baptist University Early Childhood Education Society
[LC Paper No. CB(2)389/06-07(07)]

16. Miss CHAN Hang presented the views of the Hong Kong Baptist University Early Childhood Education Society as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Society welcomed the new initiative on subsidising early childhood education, and requested the Administration to elaborate on the details of the Scheme as soon as practicable. The Society suggested that the Administration should extend the Scheme to cover children aged two to three; formulate salary scales for pre-primary teachers; relax the criteria for reimbursement of rent to kindergartens; maintain a list of the recognised programmes for professional development; and retain the KCFRS to assist needy families.

Hong Kong Institute of Education
[LC Paper No. CB(2)277/06-07(04)]

17. Ms Margaret WONG presented the views of the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIED) as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that HKIED had traditionally been a major provider in early childhood teacher education in Hong Kong and had contributed to the development of pre-service and in-service pre-primary teachers. HKIED requested the Administration to examine the effective modes of subsidising training providers; provide reasonable salaries to attract and retain qualified pre-primary teachers; and provide sufficient diploma/degree programme places in early childhood education. She added that in line with its role and mission in higher education, HKIED would continue to provide quality pre-service and in-service programmes to support the implementation of the new policy initiative on subsidising early childhood education.

Society for Community Organization Children's Rights Association

18. Miss SZE Lai-shan said that the Society for Community Organisation Children's Rights Association considered that children should enjoy the right to free and quality early childhood education. The Administration should provide free and compulsory early childhood education and improve the modes of providing subsidies for low income families. She cited the findings of the research report on education voucher system prepared by the LegCo Secretariat to illustrate the unsuccessful experiences in overseas places. The Society called on the Administration to make effective use of the \$2 billion provision to improve the quality of pre-primary education.

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Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children
[LC Paper No. CB(2)316/06-07(02)]

19. Ms Susan SO presented the views of the Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Society welcomed the new initiative on subsidising early childhood education, but considered that the new initiative should apply to families with children aged two to three attending whole-day nurseries as well. The Society requested the Administration to extend the Scheme to cover children aged two to three; review the KCFRS with a view to helping needy families to send their children to whole-day kindergartens; and provide a social worker in each kindergarten.

The Salvation Army
[LC Paper No. CB(2)301/06-07(03)]

20. Ms NG Yin-kam presented the views of the Salvation Army as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Salvation Army appreciated the Administration's new measures to enhance the quality of early childhood education, but considered the proposed voucher system inadequate in subsidising pre-primary education. The Salvation Army considered that the removal of the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Subsidy Scheme (KCSS) would lead to increases in tuition fees and reduction in salaries for pre-primary teachers. The Administration was urged to provide additional resources for whole-day kindergartens to cover the higher operating costs and equal professional development opportunities for their teachers. The Administration was also requested to include children aged two to three in the Scheme and consult the pre-primary sector on the operational details of the Scheme.

Civic Party
[LC Paper No. CB(2)389/06-07(08)]

21. Ms Annie KI presented the views of the Civic Party as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Civic Party welcomed the new initiative on subsidising early childhood education, but considered that the Scheme should benefit all parents and include both PI and NPM kindergartens provided that they complied with the quality assurance requirements. The Civic Party suggested that the Administration should promote diversity in early childhood education to suit the different needs of parents and children. The Civic Party called on the Administration to thoroughly consult the parents and the education sector before the implementation of any new policies in education.

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Mr David LEUNG

[LC Paper No. CB(2)389/06-07(09)]

22. Mr David LEUNG said that parents were concerned about the provision of quality early childhood education for their children, instead of whether the kindergartens of their choices were PI or NPM. He highlighted that the Scheme should benefit all parents, and should apply to both PI and NPM kindergartens provided that they complied with the requirements under the quality assurance mechanism. He supported the requirements that kindergartens eligible for redeeming the vouchers should improve transparency to facilitate parental choice and enhance accountability in the use of public funds.

Hong Kong Teachers' Association

[LC Paper No. CB(2)389/06-07(10)]

23. Ms LAU Seung-man presented the views of the Hong Kong Teachers' Association as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Association welcomed the new initiative on subsidising early childhood education. The Association requested that a three-year transition period should be provided for PI kindergartens which complied with the quality assurance requirements to redeem the vouchers and switch to NPM. The Association called on the Administration to formulate new salary scales for pre-primary teachers; provide regular development grants for kindergartens; and consult the pre-primary sector on the implementation of the Scheme. The Association also considered it inappropriate to strengthen regulation of kindergartens as this would affect the development of diversity in the sector.

Council of Non-Profit Making Organizations for Pre-Primary Education

[LC Paper No. CB(2)331/06-07(02)]

24. Mrs Sanly TSANG and Ms LAU Yin-king presented the views of the Council of Non-Profit Making Organizations for Pre-Primary Education as detailed in its submission. They highlighted the difference in average fee subsidy for each pupil and professional development subsidy for each teacher between half-day and whole-day kindergartens. The Council suggested that the Administration should provide the same level of subsidy for professional development of teachers in half-day and whole-day kindergartens; formulate reasonable salary scales for teachers with diploma/degree in early childhood education; extend the Scheme to cover children aged two to three; set a minimum development grant of \$50,000 for kindergartens; and review the criteria under KCFRS with a view to reducing the financial burden of needy families.

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*Private Independent Early Education Association
[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)301/06-07(01) - (02)]*

25. Mr Thomas HO said that the community generally considered that the Government should subsidise early childhood education and the voucher should be provided to all parents. He highlighted that PI kindergartens were willing to comply with the requirements under the quality assurance mechanism and should be eligible for redemption of the vouchers under the Scheme. He pointed out that PI kindergartens had their visions, missions and histories in the provision of early childhood education. They would switch to NPM as and when their respective sponsors considered it appropriate to do so. Any attempt to force them to change to NPM by administrative measures would be inappropriate.

Catiline Anglo-Chinese Kindergarten

26. Ms SIU Heung-hing said that except the 10% profit margin, PI kindergartens were subject to the same rules and regulations as NPM kindergartens set by the Education and Manpower Bureau. She stressed that parents would strive to select the kindergarten most suitable for their children. Since the objective of the Scheme was to provide direct subsidy to parents, there was no reason to restrict parental choice to NPM kindergartens. She urged the Administration to extend the Scheme to include all PI kindergartens.

*World Organization for Early Childhood Education - Hong Kong
[LC Paper No. CB(2)389/06-07(11)]*

27. Dr Hazel LAM presented the views of the World Organization for Early Childhood Education - Hong Kong as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Organization in principle welcomed the initiative to subsidise early childhood education. The Organization considered that the Administration should provide the school development grant on the basis of enrolment; allow the use of the professional development subsidy to support teaching and continue to provide such subsidy at \$1,000 per voucher after the transition years; review the salary framework for pre-primary teachers in the light of the new requirements; establish a steering committee to monitor the implementation of the Scheme; and formulate long-term policies and strategies to enhance the quality of early childhood education, including the establishment of funds to support parent and community education .

*Education Convergence
[LC Paper No. CB(2)389/06-07(12)]*

28. Mr CHOI Kwok-kwong presented the views of the Education Convergence as detailed in its submission. He highlighted that the Convergence welcomed the policy initiative to subsidise early childhood education, but considered it more appropriate to provide direct subsidy to kindergartens. The

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Convergence suggested that the Administration should formulate a competitive salary scale for pre-primary teachers to reflect their professionalism; and move towards the provision of free pre-primary education in the future. The Convergence also considered that the Administration should not make use of the Scheme to tighten regulation of kindergartens.

培幼教育事業協會

29. Ms MAN Kam-wah said that the "培幼教育事業協會" welcomed the policy initiative to subsidise parents in pursuit of quality early childhood education for their children. The Association considered that as the policy intent was to support families, the Scheme should benefit both the middle-class and low-income families and cover children aged two to three. The Administration should review the income criteria for reimbursement of fees under the KCFRS during the transition years and the salary structure for pre-primary teachers in the light of the new requirements. The Administration should also ensure that all pre-primary teachers would enjoy equal opportunities in professional development.

S.K.H. Kindergarten and Nursery Council
[LC Paper No. CB(2)389/06-07(13)]

30. Ms LEUNG Yuk-sum presented the views of the S.K.H. Kindergarten and Nursery Council as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Council welcomed the policy initiative to subsidise early childhood education, and looked forward to the provision of free pre-primary education in the future. The Council suggested that the Administration should formulate a remuneration framework for pre-primary teachers; reinforce parent education to enhance their choice of kindergartens for their children; assist kindergartens in developing school-based training programmes for teachers; and ensure that all pre-primary teachers would receive the same level of subsidy in professional development.

Alumni Association of Pre-school Education Administration and Management course SPACE - University of Hong Kong
[LC Paper No. CB(2)389/06-07(14)]

31. Ms CHAN Shun-lai presented the views of the Alumni Association of Pre-school Education Administration and Management course SPACE - University of Hong Kong as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Association supported the policy initiative to subsidise early childhood education. The Association suggested that the Administration should explain to parents the possibility of kindergartens under the KCSS increasing tuition fees after the implementation of the Scheme; formulate a comprehensive remuneration system for pre-primary principals and teachers commensurate with their qualifications; and include PI kindergartens which complied with the quality assurance requirements in the Scheme.

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Hong Kong Kindergarten Association

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)277/06-07(05) and CB(2)301/06-07(01) - (02)]

32. Ms Wisa LIU presented the views of the Hong Kong Kindergarten Association as detailed in its submissions. She highlighted that the Association supported the provision of \$2 billion to subsidise early childhood education and a development grant to enhance the teaching and learning environment in kindergartens. The Association suggested that the voucher of \$13,000 should be used to subsidise tuition fees for NPM kindergartens, and the KCFRS should continue until 2011 when a review was conducted. The Administration should provide subsidies for pre-primary teachers to pursue professional development on the basis of individual needs and review the salary scales for pre-primary teachers commensurate with their qualifications. The Association also suggested that for PI kindergartens which complied with the quality assurance requirements, the Administration should provide a transition period of five years to enable them to redeem the vouchers and switch to NPM.

Luk Chiu Kwan Hung's Child Development Research Centre

[LC Paper No. CB(2)341/06-07(02)]

33. Dr Angela LUK said that the new policy initiative to subsidise early childhood education would facilitate student learning, alleviate parents' financial burden and enhance teachers' professional development. She requested the Administration to provide pre-primary teachers with continuing education opportunities and training on teaching pedagogies; reinforce parent education to enhance their choice of schools for their children; and collaborate with the pre-primary sector to ensure the provision of fair and reasonable salaries for teachers.

Hong Kong Parents Association

[LC Paper No. CB(2)331/06-07(03)]

34. Ms May CHAN presented the views of the Hong Kong Parents Association as detailed in its submission. She highlighted that the Association supported the policy initiative to subsidise early childhood education. The Association suggested that the Administration should extend the Scheme to cover both PI and NPM kindergartens so that all parents would be provided with subsidy; and formulate a road map for the provision of free early childhood education in the future.

New Forum

[LC Paper No. CB(2)341/06-07(03)]

35. Mr HSU Hoi-shan said that the New Forum supported the policy initiative to subsidise early childhood education, but considered that the Scheme

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should cover both PI and NPM kindergartens. The New Forum suggested that the Administration should adopt relief measures to assist parents who were not eligible for the Scheme; establish a mechanism to monitor increase of tuition and other fees in kindergartens; promote home-school collaboration; and enhance transparency of kindergartens. In the long term, the Government should review and formulate plans for the provision of free early childhood education for all children.

Committee on Home School Co-operation
[LC Paper No. CB(2)389/06-07(15)]

36. Mr Chris YU said that the Committee on Home School Co-operation supported the policy initiative to subsidise early childhood education. He highlighted that the Administration should continue to subsidise professional development of pre-primary teachers and principals after the transition years; reinforce parent education to promote home-kindergarten collaboration; devise a competitive salary structure to attract and retain pre-primary teachers with high calibre; preserve the autonomy and diversity in the pre-primary sector; collaborate with tertiary institutions in the design of kindergarten curriculum; and formulate long-term policies and strategies to enhance the quality of pre-primary education.

The Hong Kong Council of Early Childhood Education and Services

37. Mr LAU Ming-ki said that the Hong Kong Council of Early Childhood Education and Services hoped that the policy initiative to subsidise early childhood education was the first step towards the provision of free early childhood education in the long term. The Council suggested that the Administration should provide the subsidy to all parents by including PI kindergartens and children aged two to three in the Scheme; and formulate a competitive salary package for pre-primary principals and teachers to facilitate the long-term development of early childhood education.

Other submissions received
[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)277/06-07(06) - (07), CB(2)341/06/07(04) - (08) and CB(2)389/06-07(16) - (62)]

38. Members noted the written submissions from other organisations and individuals who had not attended the meeting.

The Administration's response

39. Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower (PSEM) said that the Administration would carefully consider the views and suggestions of the deputations expressed at the meeting. He explained that the Scheme was formulated after a series of consultations with the stakeholders in the

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pre-primary sector since 2005. The main objectives of the Scheme were to provide direct subsidy to parents on tuition fees of their children attending kindergartens and subsidy to kindergarten teachers for professional upgrading; and enhance the quality of pre-primary education. He stressed that it had been the Government policy to subsidise NPM providers in the pre-primary sector.

40. PSEM further said that at present only those NPM kindergartens joining the KCSS were subject to the recommended normative salary scale for kindergarten teachers. The remainder of the kindergartens not joining the scheme, including both NPM and PI kindergartens, were not subject to the recommended normative salary scale. The Administration believed that kindergartens in receipt of the subsidy through the voucher scheme would provide reasonable and competitive salaries in order to attract and retain their staff. Kindergartens would also be required to maintain and update their information profiles to facilitate parental choice. On provision of fee remission to parents, the Administration would ensure that no pupils would be worse off after the introduction of the voucher scheme.

41. PSEM added that the Administration planned to submit the financial proposal to the Finance Committee for approval in early December 2006. The Administration would continue to consult the stakeholders on the details for implementation starting from the 2007-2008 school year.

Discussion

Eligibility criteria and parental choice

42. Dr YEUNG Sum said that the prescribed criteria that only NPM kindergartens charging tuition fees not exceeding \$24,000 per student per year were eligible for redeeming the vouchers had created confusion and controversies in the community. Given the eligibility criteria, he did not consider that PI and NPM kindergartens were competing in a free market in respect of student enrolment and recruitment of teachers. Dr YEUNG also considered that the middle class was jeopardised as they were the least benefited under the Scheme.

43. Dr YEUNG Sum further said that the Democratic Party considered that the Scheme should be implemented as a transitional measure in preparation for the provision of free early childhood education in the long term. Free pre-primary education could be implemented in the form of providing recurrent funding for kindergartens calculated with reference to an acceptable unit cost. Before the implementation of free early childhood education, the Administration should maintain the existing practice of providing reference salary scales for pre-primary principals and teachers; maintain the KCFRS without the requirement of the social needs test; and extend the Scheme to cover PI and NPM kindergartens alike. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan also urged the Administration to review the need and timing for providing free pre-primary education.

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44. Mr TAM Yiu-chung said that in view of the controversies over the Scheme in the community, the Administration should consider giving the subsidy to all parents, or providing a three-year transition period for PI kindergartens to redeem the vouchers under the Scheme and switch to NPM. In addition, the Administration should ensure fair provision of subsidy to half-day and full-day kindergartens. The Administration should also collaborate with kindergartens to ensure that parents in receipt of comprehensive social security assistance were included in the Scheme.

45. Ms Emily LAU shared the view that the Administration should extend the Scheme to cover PI kindergartens as well so that all parents could enjoy the benefit. She agreed with the objective of the Scheme to upgrade the quality of the pre-primary workforce and that the Administration should provide free early childhood education after the transition years. She pointed out that the Scheme had created confusion among parents in the selection of kindergartens, and many parents would arrange a transfer of kindergartens for their children in order to redeem the vouchers. This would affect the job security of teachers in PI kindergartens. She urged the Administration to work out measures to resolve the problem.

46. PSEM responded that the Administration was aware of the potential issues that needed to be tackled for effective implementation of the Scheme. The Administration would continue to consult the stakeholders on the operational details and refine the Scheme, where needed, within the policy parameters.

47. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong opined that the entitlement of parents to the subsidy under the Scheme should not be deprived because of their choice of PI kindergartens for their children. He asked whether the Administration would consider extending the Scheme to cover children aged two to three, and increase the subsidy for children attending whole-day kindergartens.

48. Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (5) (DS(EM)5) responded that there was no educational basis for children below the age of three to receive formal education which underpinned the pre-primary years. The Administration considered the provision of half-day quality pre-primary education sufficient and appropriate for children aged three to six who should have more time to interact with their parents and families in home environments. From that perspective, the Government policy had all along been to subsidise children at the age of three to six attending pre-primary education on a half-day basis. The Administration recognised the need of some parents to send their children aged two to three to attend child care centres, and children aged three to six to attend whole-day kindergartens. These parents were subsidised by other financial assistance schemes such as the KCFRS, if they met the means test. The Administration had no plan to include children aged two to three in the Scheme in the next five years.

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49. Dr Fernando CHEUNG and Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that the Administration had not thoroughly considered, before the introduction of the Scheme, the issues involved and the implications of the prescribed criteria for redeeming the vouchers. Dr CHEUNG pointed out that there were genuine social needs for many families such as single parent families to send their children at the age of two to three to attend whole-day child care centres. He considered it inconsiderate to ignore the need of these families in the provision of subsidy to early childhood education.

50. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung sought clarification on whether the sole policy consideration in excluding PI kindergartens from the Scheme was that PI kindergartens were allowed a 10% profit margin. He pointed out that the Administration did purchase places from private elderly homes at present and PI schools in the past. In other words, profit-making welfare and educational institutions had been and were being subsidised by the Government.

51. PSEM explained that the practice of purchasing places from PI secondary schools was necessary for a limited time when public sector school places were insufficient to meet the demand for compulsory education. This should not be taken as an established policy to subsidise private profit-making schools.

52. Mr Tommy CHEUNG considered it unnecessary to set a maximum fee at \$24,000 and \$48,000 for half-day and whole-day kindergartens respectively for eligibility for redeeming the vouchers under the Scheme. He asked whether and how the Administration had assessed the standards and quality of PI and NPM kindergartens in the delivery of early childhood education. He also asked how many sub-standard PI and NPM kindergartens had improved to the required standards.

53. Principal Assistant Secretary (Quality Assurance) responded that EMB conducted quality assurance inspections of more than 600 PI and NPM kindergartens since 2000. Around 20% of PI kindergartens and 60% to 70% of NPM kindergartens reached the standards measured in accordance with the performance indicators for the pre-primary sector. EMB would follow up with individual kindergartens on their areas of improvement.

Monitoring and consultation

54. Dr Fernando CHEUNG considered that the Administration should establish a steering committee comprising representatives of the key stakeholders to examine the most effective ways to utilise the \$2 billion provision and monitor the implementation of the Scheme in the transition years.

55. Referring to the concerns of the deputations expressed at the meeting, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan expressed doubt about the effectiveness of the consultation

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done by the Administration in designing the Scheme. He considered that the Scheme did not meet the expectations of parents and kindergarten operators, and should be replaced by the provision of a direct subsidy for kindergartens.

Salaries and professional development for pre-primary teachers

56. Dr YEUNG Sum said that given the prescribed criteria for redeeming the vouchers under the Scheme, the Democratic Party considered it imperative that a salary framework for pre-primary principals and teachers should be formulated. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong and Mr LEE Cheuk-yan considered that retaining the salary scales was essential for protecting the basic interests of pre-primary teachers. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that the operation of kindergartens had become increasingly difficult in the light of a declining pupil population. Without a salary scale, salaries for pre-primary teachers would very likely be adjusted downwards, and the quality of pre-primary education would be compromised.

57. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong asked whether and how the Administration would monitor the provision of subsidy to pre-primary teachers for professional development in half-day and full-day kindergartens.

58. DS(EM)5 responded that the Administration would ensure all serving teachers would have the same incentive and opportunity to meet the enhanced qualifications by the end of the 2011-2012 school year. Referring members to paragraph 15 of the Administration's paper, he explained that all serving pre-primary teachers in PI or NPM kindergartens would be eligible for claiming reimbursement for up to 50% of the fees for an approved diploma or degree programme in early childhood education within the transition years, capped at \$60,000.

59. Referring to paragraph 11 of the Administration's paper, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong noted with concern the employment prospect of a few hundred students who were attending the approved programmes for pre-primary teachers in Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (IVE) and HKIEd. He asked whether these students would be qualified for teaching in kindergartens in the 2007-2008 school year when the entry qualification for new pre-primary teachers would be raised to a certificate in early childhood education.

60. DS(EM)5 responded that the Administration would collaborate with the pre-primary sector to work out transitional arrangements for current students attending approved programmes on early childhood education in IVE and HKIEd. He assured members that the Administration was committed to ensuring that these students would not be disadvantaged in any way.

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Social workers for kindergartens

61. Dr Fernando CEHNG expressed support for the suggestion of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service to provide a social worker in each kindergarten.

Follow-up

62. Ms Audrey EU pointed out that all deputations shared the view that the Scheme should cover PI kindergartens. She suggested that the Panel should follow up on the Administration's final proposal before its submission to the Finance Committee. Ms Emily LAU and Mr Tommy CHEUNG considered that the Panel should hold a special meeting to discuss the Administration's responses to the views and suggestions of members and the deputations expressed at the meeting. Responding to the Chairman, PSEM said that if the Scheme was to put into operation in the 2007-2008 school year, it would be necessary to submit the proposal to the Finance Committee for consideration in early December 2006.

63. Summing up, the Chairman said that as members and the deputations had expressed various concerns about the Scheme, the Panel would not make a decision on the Administration's paper at the meeting. The Panel would consider the need for a special meeting to further discuss the matter if necessary.

[*Post-meeting note*: the Panel held a special meeting on 21 November 2006 to discuss the Administration's proposed modifications to the Scheme.]

V. Any other business

64. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 7:16 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
8 December 2006