

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)758/06-07
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Tuesday, 21 November 2006, at 10:45 am
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 SIN Chung-kai, JP
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 Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
- Members absent** : Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Hon MA Lik, GBS, JP
Prof Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Prof Arthur LI Kwok-cheung, GBS, JP
Secretary for Education and Manpower
- Mr Raymond H C WONG
Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower
- Ms Vivian LAU
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (6)

Mr Tony TANG
Principal Assistant Secretary (Quality Assurance),
Education and Manpower Bureau

**Attendance by
invitation**

: Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union

Ms YUNG Hau-heung
Spokesperson on Early Childhood Education

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

Mrs MAK TSE How-ling
Chairman

Mrs MAK LEUNG Shuk-won
Vice-Chairman

The Non-Profit-Making Kindergarten Council of Hong
Kong

Ms Harlanna YEUNG
Chairman

Ms CHENG Sau-yan
Vice-chairman

Hong Kong Baptist University Early Childhood
Education Society

Miss CHAN Hang
Chairman

Miss SIU Lin-ying
Vice-Chairman

The Salvation Army

Ms CHAN Po-kuen
Coordinator for Pre-School Education

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

Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children

Ms Susan SO
Director

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

Ms TAM Siu-hing
Chairman

Ms CHAU Chui-ngo
Chairman

Hong Kong Kindergarten Association

Ms Mary TONG
Chairlady

Ms Wisa LIU
Vice-chairlady

Private Independent Early Education Association

Mr WUN Kam-hoi
Convenor

Ms WAT King-yee
Secretary

Catiline Anglo-Chinese Kindergarten

Ms SIU Heung-hing
Supervisor

Ms CHEUNG Kwan-fung
Principal

Hong Kong Baptist Kindergarten Education Convention

Ms CHAN Tsui-yuk
Principal

New Forum

Mr HSU Hoi-shan
Board Member

Tai Po Early Childhood Education Principal Association

Ms KWOK Chor-kiu
Chairman

Ms CHUNG Kam-ling
Secretary

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

Mrs Sanly TSANG
Chairman

Ms CHAN LAU Yin-king
Secretary

Hong Kong Teachers' Association

Ms LAU Seung-man
Chairman of Kindergarten Section

Hong Kong Early Childhood Educators Association

Ms CHOW Wai-chun
Chairman

Ms LAM To-foon
Secretary

Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers

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

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

Ms LO Oi-lan
Vice-chairperson

S.K.H. Kindergarten and Nursery Council

Ms LUI Shuk-har
Chairman

Ms LEUNG Yuk-sum
Honorable Advisor

Hong Kong Parents Association

Ms May CHAN
Secretary

Mr LEUNG Man
Executive Committee Member

Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of
Hong Kong

Mr Horace CHEUNG
Education Policy Deputy Spokesperson

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Mr Ken CHAN
Chief Officer

Ms Klare CHAN
Officer

Civic Party

Ms Annie KI
District Developer of Hong Kong Island Branch

World Organization for Early Childhood Education -
Hong Kong

Dr Hazel LAM
President

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. Subsidising early childhood education
[LC Paper No. CB(2)369/06-07(01)]

The Chairman drew members' attention to the proposed modifications to the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (the Scheme) as detailed in the information paper entitled "New Initiatives in Pre-primary Education" provided by the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) on 14 November 2006. He highlighted the provision of a transition period of three years until the end of the 2009-2010 school year for private independent (PI) kindergartens satisfying all prescribed requirements of eligible non-profit-making (NPM) kindergartens save for the NPM status (the eligible PI kindergartens) to redeem the vouchers of parents whose children were enrolled at various study levels in such PI kindergartens as of the 2007-2008 school year throughout these children's education in the same PI kindergartens.

Oral presentation by deputations

Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union

2. Ms YUNG Hau-heung said that the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union had presented its views on the policy initiative to subsidise early childhood education at the meeting on 13 November 2006, which were detailed in its submission [LC Paper No. CB(2)316/06-07(01)], and the Union's views remained unchanged.

Hong Kong Institute of Education Past Student's Association of Early Childhood Teacher Education
[LC Paper No. CB(2)419/06-07(01)]

3. Mrs MAK TSE How-ling said that Hong Kong Institute of Education Past Student's Association of Early Childhood Teacher Education supported the policy initiative to subsidise early childhood education. She pointed out that replacing the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Subsidy Scheme (KCSS) with the Scheme would lead to substantial increase of tuition fees in kindergartens and kindergarten-cum-child care centres (referred to collectively as kindergartens) currently in receipt of subsidy under the KCSS. The Association suggested that the Administration should retain the KCSS and the recommended normative salary scale for teachers in kindergartens under the KCSS; explain the

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provision of subsidy to whole-day kindergartens; and consult the pre-primary sector on the details for implementing the Scheme.

*The Non-Profit-Making Kindergarten Council of Hong Kong
[LC Paper No. CB(2)419/06-07(02)]*

4. Ms Harlanna YEUNG said that the Non-Profit-Making Kindergarten Council of Hong Kong supported the policy initiative to subsidise early childhood education. The Council requested the Administration to work out a timetable for serving pre-primary teachers and principals to upgrade their qualification in early childhood education; collaborate with the pre-primary education sector to formulate new salary scales for principals and teachers in the light of the higher qualification requirements; and work out appropriate measures to monitor the use of the professional development subsidy by kindergartens.

Hong Kong Baptist University Early Childhood Education Society

5. Miss CHAN Hang said that Hong Kong Baptist University Early Childhood Education Society suggested that the Administration should allow a transition period of five years for students currently attending an approved programme for qualified kindergarten teachers to complete a certificate programme on early childhood education, and continue to provide the subsidy under the Scheme to PI kindergartens meeting the requirements under the quality assurance mechanism after the 2012-2013 school year.

*The Salvation Army
[LC Paper No. CB(2)405/06-07(01)]*

6. Ms NG Yin-kam said that the Salvation Army considered it necessary to include children aged two to three in the Scheme and ensure fair provision of subsidies to half-day and whole-day kindergartens; otherwise, teachers in whole-day kindergartens would seek to work in half-day kindergartens in order to be entitled to a greater amount of subsidies. This would affect the continued operation of whole-day kindergartens.

*Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children
[LC Paper No. CB(2)419/06-07(03)]*

7. Ms Susan SO said that the Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children requested the Administration to include children aged two to three in the Scheme, and ensure fair provision of subsidies and school development grants to half-day and whole-day kindergartens. In particular, the Administration should provide the same level of subsidies to pre-primary teachers working in half-day kindergartens, whole-day kindergarten or child care centres in pursuit of professional upgrading.

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Hong Kong Kowloon and N.T. Kindergarten Education Advancement Association Ltd
[LC Paper No. CB(2)405/06-07(02)]

8. Ms CHAU Choi-ngo said that the Hong Kong Kowloon and N.T. Kindergarten Education Advancement Association did not accept the provision of only a three-year transition period for eligible PI kindergartens to redeem the vouchers of parents whose children were enrolled in such kindergartens as of the 2007-2008 school year. The Association considered that the transitional arrangements would still limit parental choice and create unfair competition among PI and NPM kindergartens. The Association was of the view that the Scheme should include all PI kindergartens so that parents could select any kindergartens meeting the quality assurance requirements.

Hong Kong Kindergarten Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)419/06-07(04)]

9. Ms Wisa LIU said that Hong Kong Kindergarten Association was concerned that the Scheme might lead to increase in kindergarten fees and closure of PI kindergartens. The Association considered that the Scheme should cover all PI and NPM kindergartens so that they would compete on a level playing field. The Administration should allow flexibility in the use of the professional development subsidy for teachers and encourage kindergartens to formulate staff remuneration system with reference to the normative salary scale under the KCSS. In addition, the Administration should consult the pre-primary education sector to facilitate smooth implementation of the Scheme.

Private Independent Early Education Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)405/06-07(03) and (04)]

10. Mr WUN Kam-hoi said that the Private Independent Early Education Association considered it inappropriate to exclude PI kindergartens from the Scheme and encourage them to switch to NPM. The Association considered that the policy to subsidise only NPM kindergartens was a form of Government intervention on the operation of PI kindergartens, and would create unfair competition among PI and NPM kindergartens. This would jeopardise the reputation of Hong Kong as an international city. Given the keen competition for pupil enrolment in the pre-primary sector, the Scheme would adversely affect the continued operation of PI kindergartens as well as the job security of principals and teachers of PI kindergartens.

Catiline Anglo-Chinese Kindergarten
[LC Paper No. CB(2)405/06-07(05)]

11. Ms SIU Heung-hing cited examples to illustrate the use of public funds to subsidise private enterprises and individuals in the past. The Catiline

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Anglo-Chinese Kindergarten requested the Administration to provide five-year transition period to PI kindergartens to redeem the vouchers; review the Scheme after the transition period with a view to providing 12-year free basic education including the three-year pre-primary education in the long run; and continue the operation of the KCSS.

Hong Kong Baptist Kindergarten Education Convention

12. Ms CHAN Tsui-yu said that the Hong Kong Baptist Kindergarten Education Convention maintained the views as detailed in its submission for the meeting on 13 November 2006 [LC Paper No. CB(2)331/06-07(01)].

New Forum

[LC Paper No. CB(2)466/06-07(01)]

13. Mr HSU Hoi-shan said that the New Forum considered that the provision of three-year transition period for eligible PI kindergartens to redeem the vouchers under the Scheme was only a short-term measure to resolve the prevailing controversy about the differentiation of NPM and PI kindergartens. The Forum suggested that the Administration should establish a committee comprising educators and members of the community to explore the feasibility of including pre-primary education in the provision of free basic education for all children after the three-year transition period.

Tai Po Early Childhood Education Principal Association

14. Ms KWOK Chor-kiu said that Tai Po Early Childhood Education Principal Association welcomed the provision of a three-year transition period for eligible PI kindergartens to redeem the vouchers under the Scheme. The Association called on the Administration to formulate a normative salary scale for pre-primary teachers; provide all pre-primary teachers with the same level of professional development subsidy; establish an advisory and consultative mechanism to explain the details of the Scheme to stakeholders; and oversee the implementation of the Scheme.

Council of Non-profit Making Organisations for Pre-primary Education

[LC Paper No. CB(2)419/06-07(05)]

15. Ms CHAN LAU Yin-king said that the Council of Non-profit Making Organisations for Pre-primary Education welcomed the policy initiative to subsidise early childhood education. The Council suggested that the Administration should conduct an interim review and establish a steering committee to advise on the implementation of the Scheme; include children aged two to three in the Scheme; provide the professional subsidy to all pre-primary teachers and support to kindergartens to relieve their teachers to attend approved certificate/diploma programmes on early childhood education; and review the

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provision of financial assistance to needy families under the Kindergarten and Child-Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme (KCFRS). The Council considered that the Administration should provide free pre-primary education in the long term.

Hong Kong Teachers' Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)419/06-07(06)]

16. Ms LAU Seung-man said that Hong Kong Teachers' Association welcomed the policy initiative to subsidise early childhood education. The Association requested the Administration to assist PI kindergartens to switch to NPM during the three-year transition period; monitor the provision of reasonable salaries to pre-primary teachers; provide regular development/facilitation grants to NPM and PI kindergartens; promote diversity in the development of pre-primary education; and establish a steering committee to oversee the implementation of the Scheme. The Association hoped that the Administration would formulate a timetable for provision of free pre-primary education in the future.

Hong Kong Early Childhood Educators Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)419/06-07(07)]

17. Ms CHOW Wai-chun said that Hong Kong Early Childhood Educators Association considered that the Administration should include children aged two to three in the Scheme; provide all pre-primary teachers with the same level of professional development subsidy; and preserve and review the normative salary scales for pre-primary teachers in the light of the higher qualification requirements. In particular, the Association hoped that the Administration would appreciate the efforts and commitment of pre-primary teachers in whole-day child care centres in the delivery of pre-primary services.

Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers
[LC Paper No. CB(2)419/06-07(08)]

18. Ms SZTO Yuk-lin said that the Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers supported the provision of a three-year transition period for eligible PI kindergartens to redeem the vouchers under the Scheme. The Federation suggested that the Administration should formulate a salary framework for pre-primary principals and teachers; include children aged two to three in the Scheme; provide more resources for whole-day kindergartens calculated on a weight-average basis; and brief the key stakeholders on the detailed operation of the Scheme as soon as practicable.

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

19. Ms LO Oi-lan said that the Alumni Association of Pre-school Education Administration and Management course SPACE - University of Hong Kong welcomed the provision of a three-year transition period for eligible PI kindergartens to redeem the vouchers under the Scheme and to switch to NPM. The Association requested the Administration to formulate salary scales to reflect the professionalism of pre-primary principals and teachers. Before that, the Administration should encourage kindergartens under the KCSS to follow the existing salary scales.

S.K.H. Kindergarten and Nursery Council

20. Ms LEUNG Yuk-sum said that the S.K.H. Kindergarten and Nursery Council on the Scheme maintained its views as detailed in its submission for the meeting on 13 November 2006 [LC Paper No. CB(2)389/06-07(13)].

Hong Kong Parents Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)405/06-07(06)]

21. Ms May CHAN said that the Hong Kong Parents Association supported the policy initiative to subsidise early childhood education. The Association suggested that the Administration should make reference to overseas experience and incorporate early childhood education in the provision of free basic education; reinforce parent education on early childhood education; and enhance professional development of pre-primary teachers to enhance the quality of pre-primary education.

Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong

22. Mr Horace CHEUNG said that the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB) all along supported the provision of free pre-primary education for all children. DAB considered it appropriate to provide a three-year transition period for eligible PI kindergartens to redeem the vouchers under the Scheme and switch to NPM so that more parents would be benefited. DAB requested the Administration to formulate salary scales for pre-primary teachers and looked forward to the implementation of the Scheme from the 2007-2008 school year onwards.

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service
[LC Paper No. CB(2)419/06-07(09)]

23. Ms Clare CHAN said that the Hong Kong Council of Social Service supported the policy initiative to subsidise early childhood education. The Council requested the Administration to include children aged two to three in the

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Scheme; provide more resources to whole-day kindergartens; provide equal professional development opportunities and subsidies to pre-primary teachers working in whole-day or half-day kindergartens; review the KCFRS to support needy families; conduct an interim review; and consult the pre-primary sector on the implementation of the Scheme.

The Civic Party

[LC Paper No. CB(2)451/06-07(01)]

24. Ms Annie KI said that the Civic Party considered that all kindergartens meeting the requirements under the quality assurance mechanism should be eligible for redeeming the vouchers under the Scheme. The Administration should review the Scheme in the 2011-2012 school year with a view to providing free pre-primary education. She pointed out that the provision of a three-year transition period for eligible PI kindergartens to redeem the vouchers and switch to NPM would exclude pupils enrolled in eligible PI schools after September 2007 from the Scheme. This would restrict parental choice to NPM kindergartens only and affect the development of diversity in pre-primary education as well as the quality of pre-primary education.

World Organization for Early Childhood Education - Hong Kong

25. Dr Hazel LAM said that the World Organization for Early Childhood Education - Hong Kong in principle welcomed the Scheme and the proposed modifications to the Scheme to benefit more parents. The Organisation considered that the Administration should collaborate with the pre-primary sector to formulate salary scales for pre-primary principals and teachers and monitor the implementation of such scales by kindergartens after the Scheme had come into effect.

Other submissions received

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)405/06-07(07) and CB(2)419/06-07(10)]

26. Members noted the submissions from Luk Chiu Kwan Hung's Child Development research Centre and the Education Convergence.

The Administration's response

27. Secretary for Education and Manpower (SEM) said that PI kindergartens in the territory varied considerably in size, some operating on a profit-making basis and some on a NPM basis. They employed teachers with different levels of qualification and length of teaching experience, and charged different levels of tuition fees ranging from a few hundred to more than \$10,000 per student per month. The Administration considered it necessary to set criteria for the Scheme to ensure that public funds were used in a cost-effective manner to subsidise parents and enhance the quality of pre-primary education. With these objectives,

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the Administration proposed to introduce the Scheme with effect from the 2007-2008 school year on the basis of the following five principles -

- (a) only children attending local NPM kindergartens were eligible to join the Scheme but a transitional period of three years would be provided for eligible PI kindergartens to redeem the vouchers from parents whose children were enrolled at various study levels in such PI kindergartens in the 2007-2008 school year throughout their children's education in the same PI kindergartens;
- (b) the voucher should only be redeemed by kindergartens charging a school fee not exceeding \$24,000 per student per annum for a half-day place or not exceeding \$48,000 per student per annum for a whole-day place;
- (c) the kindergartens should, at the same time, meet all stipulated disclosure and transparency requirements;
- (d) all kindergartens were subject to a quality assurance mechanism so that starting from the 2012-2013 school year only kindergartens meeting the prescribed standards might redeem the voucher; and
- (e) all kindergartens should enjoy full discretion in determining teacher salaries, subject to market forces.

28. SEM added that EMB had explained the above five principles to the pre-primary education associations at a briefing session on 18 November 2006. At the briefing session, all attending representatives agreed to the five principles for implementing the Scheme. Nevertheless, the Administration was willing to continue discussion with the pre-primary sector should they consider it necessary.

Parental choice and eligibility criteria

29. Dr YEUNG Sum said that the eligibility criteria under the Scheme would restrict parental choice to NPM kindergartens charging up to \$24,000 per student per year. He pointed out that the middle class were dissatisfied with the criteria and urged the Administration to remove the criteria to enable parents to have free choices.

30. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that the Liberal Party supported the provision of subvention to kindergartens in the form of vouchers under the Scheme. However, the Liberal Party remained of the view that money should follow parents and the Scheme should apply to all PI and NPM kindergartens regardless of their levels of tuition fees. The Liberal Party also considered that the Administration should extend the transition period to five years otherwise parents would not be able to change kindergartens for their children for various

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reasons such as removal of home.

31. SEM responded that the Administration considered it reasonable and necessary to provide a transition period for parents to use the vouchers for their children enrolled in an eligible PI kindergarten as of the 2007-2008 school year. The Administration also considered it appropriate to prescribe the tuition fee limit for eligibility for the Scheme to ensure cost-effective use of public funds to enhance the quality of pre-primary education.

32. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung expressed dissatisfaction that the Administration had insisted on its policy to provide subsidy to NPM kindergartens only and had not listened to the views of members and the deputations. He pointed out that by providing a three-year transition period for eligible PI kindergartens, the Administration would in practice provide subsidies to profit-making kindergartens. This was not in accord with the principle held by the Administration that public funds should not be used to subsidise profit-making institutions. In addition, the Administration had purchased places from PI schools in the past and provided subsidies to private elderly homes at present. As such, Mr LEUNG did not see the justifications for limiting the Scheme to NPM kindergartens only.

33. SEM explained that a three-year transition period for eligible PI kindergartens was provided to address the concern that parents had already selected kindergartens for their children for the current school year and the coming school year. He added that the purchase of places from PI secondary schools was necessary as the supply of publicly-funded places was insufficient to meet the need of the eligible users.

34. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the pre-primary sector and parents supported the provision of \$2 billion to subsidise pre-primary education. Notwithstanding their concern about the eligibility criteria of the Scheme, he considered it inappropriate to withdraw the proposal. He suggested that the Administration should allow a transition period of five years for eligible PI kindergartens to redeem the vouchers, and review the Scheme in 2012 when only accredited kindergartens were eligible for redeeming the vouchers.

35. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that it was inappropriate to compel PI kindergartens to switch to NPM through the Scheme and unacceptable to threaten to withdraw the Scheme should the pre-primary sector not agree with the principles laid down by the Administration. He stressed that the Administration should give parents a free choice on selection of kindergartens for their children, and the market would adjust the supply and demand of places in different types of kindergartens. The Administration should fully subsidise kindergartens which complied with the relevant rules and regulations, and the decision should rest with the parents to send their children to which types of kindergartens.

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36. Ms Emily LAU said that the Administration should review the need to provide free pre-primary education in the 2011-2012 school year. She pointed out that the prescribed criteria for redeeming the vouchers under the Scheme would limit the choice of parents to send their children to NPM kindergartens only. This would affect serving pre-primary teachers in PI kindergartens/child care centres as well as whole-day NPM kindergartens/child care centres who might try to seek employment in NPM kindergartens, leading to an exodus of pre-primary teachers from non-eligible to eligible kindergartens. The quality of pre-primary education would be jeopardised eventually.

37. SEM clarified that he had not indicated intention to withdraw the proposal on the Scheme, or force the stakeholders to accept the proposal. He believed that if the pre-primary sector accepted the five principles in respect of the Scheme, there should not be a major problem about the stability of the pre-primary workforce.

38. Ms Emily LAU remarked that the Administration should continue to consult the pre-primary sector on the eligibility criteria for the Scheme, and set out its responses to the views of members and the deputations when it submitted its proposal to the Finance Committee (FC) for consideration.

39. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that the Scheme should not exclude child care centres as harmonisation of pre-primary services had been put into place in 2005. He pointed out that children enrolled in Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres at the age of two attended pre-primary classes as children aged three and above. It would be very unreasonable to exclude these children from the Scheme.

40. SEM explained that it had been the Government policy to provide financial assistance to needy families with children aged three to six for pre-primary education on the basis of half-day classes. In the view of the Administration, children below the age of three should best be taken care of by their parents at home. Moreover, there was no educational basis supporting the provision of school education to children below the age of three. The Administration recognised the social need of some parents to send their children aged two to three to attend whole-day child care centres, and provided financial assistance to these needy families by way of the KCFRS.

41. Mr TAM Yiu-chung said that DAB supported the provision of additional resources to subsidise early childhood education and the provision of a three-year transition period for eligible PI kindergartens to redeem the vouchers. He added that the Scheme was introduced without thorough consultation with the pre-primary sector, hence causing controversies in the community.

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42. Ms Susan SO said that child care centres in Hong Kong operated for about half a century to provide both education and care services for children aged two to six whose parents worked full-time. The operation of these centres would be seriously affected if children aged two to three were excluded from the Scheme. Ms Klare CHAN called on the Administration to include children aged two to three in the Scheme as the policy was to subsidise early childhood education.

Remuneration and professional development of pre-primary teachers

43. Dr YEUNG Sum said that it was contradictory that the Administration on the one hand intervened the operation of a free market by setting eligibility criteria for the Scheme but left it to the market to determine the salaries for pre-primary teachers on the other. He called on the Administration to collaborate with the pre-primary sector to formulate salary scales to provide career development paths for and reflect the professionalism of pre-primary teachers.

44. Dr YEUNG Sum also said that the Scheme should include children aged two to three and teachers should be given the same level of professional development subsidy irrespective of whether they worked in whole-day kindergartens or child care centres and whether they taught children aged below or above three.

45. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that formulating salary scales for pre-primary teachers would encourage them to pursue professional developments. He urged the pre-primary education sector to work out reasonable and competitive salary scales for pre-primary principals and teachers. He considered that the Administration should at least demonstrate a supportive attitude and provide support to kindergartens for the adoption of these salary scales.

46. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that the continued operation of a salary scale for pre-primary teachers was essential for maintaining a stable and quality pre-primary workforce as well as enhancing the quality of pre-primary education in the long term. In his view, deregulating the salaries for pre-primary teachers went against the policy to upgrade the quality of pre-primary workforce and pre-primary education.

47. Mr TAM Yiu-chung said that pre-primary teachers and principals in general were worried about the possible adverse effects on the long term development of pre-primary education if the salaries for pre-primary teachers were deregulated. He opined that the issue should be further examined and the Administration should be more proactive in this respect.

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48. Mrs MAK TSE Hau-ling and Ms Harianna YEUNG called on the Administration to set normative salary scales for pre-primary principals and teachers in the light of the higher qualification requirements. Ms MAK said that the salary scales set by the primary education sector themselves would not have the same effect as the normative salary scale set by the Administration. Ms YEUNG said that EMB had the professional expertise and relevant data to formulate fair and competitive salary scales for pre-primary principals and teachers. The NPM Kindergarten Council of Hong Kong was willing to collaborate with Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong and other pre-primary institutions to work out the salary scales for discussion with EMB. Ms Susan SO said that the continued operation of normative salary scales set by EMB was essential for maintaining reasonable and competitive salaries for the pre-primary workforce. Ms Klare CHAN called on the Administration to provide teachers in whole-day kindergartens with the same level of professional development subsidy as their counterparts in half-day kindergartens.

49. SEM responded that kindergartens should enjoy full discretion in determining salaries for teachers and principals. The Administration welcomed the pre-primary sector to formulate salary scales for their teachers and principals but would not interfere in this regard.

Interim review

50. Dr YEUNG Sum suggested that the Administration should establish a steering committee to oversee the conduct of an interim review on the implementation of the Scheme and report the findings to the Panel in due course.

Submission of the proposal to the Finance Committee

51. Dr YEUNG Sum said that the Democratic Party supported the submission of the financial proposal on the Scheme to FC for consideration on 1 December 2006 although it had reservations about the prescribed criteria under the Scheme.

52. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that the Civic Party was not entirely satisfied with the Scheme and considered that early childhood education should be fully subsidised.

53. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan supported the submission of the proposal to FC on 1 December 2006 but reiterated his major concerns about the Scheme.

54. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union supported the submission of the proposal to FC but maintained its views concerning salaries for pre-primary teachers and subsidy for children aged two to three.

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55. Ms Emily LAU raised no objection to the submission of the proposal to FC and said that the Administration should continue discussion with the pre-primary sector to address their concerns.

56. Mr Abraham SHEK, Mr TAM Yiu-chung and Mr LEUNG Kwan-yuen indicated that the Alliance, the DAB and the Liberal Party respectively supported the submission of the financial proposal on the Scheme in its present form to FC on 1 December 2006.

57. SEM said that in view of the concerns raised, the Administration would need to further consult the pre-primary sector on the criteria and arrangements for implementation of the Scheme on the basis of the five principles. Subject to acceptance of the five principles by the pre-primary education sector, the Administration would submit the proposal to FC for approval of funds.

58. Concluding the discussion, the Chairman said that the Panel supported the submission of the proposal on the Scheme to FC for consideration on 1 December 2006. The decision would rest with the Administration and three options were possible. The Administration might submit the proposal in its present form to the FC on 1 December 2006; revise the proposal after further discussion with the stakeholders and submit it to the FC on 1 December 2006; or defer submission of the proposal to the FC pending further discussion with the stakeholders.

II. Any other business

59. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:51 pm.