

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1582/08-09
(The minutes have been seen by
the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Friday, 20 March 2009, at 3:30 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan (Chairman)
Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG Mei-fun (Deputy Chairman)
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, SBS, JP
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
Prof Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
Hon Starry LEE Wai-king
Hon Tanya CHAN
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon WONG Yuk-man
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-yee, GBS, JP
Dr Hon Samson TAM Wai-ho, JP
- Member attending** : Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che
- Member absent** : Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Mr Michael SUEN Ming-yeung, GBS, JP
Secretary for Education

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Mr Raymond WONG, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education

Dr Catherine CHAN Ka-ki
Deputy Secretary for Education (5)

Mr Jeremy YOUNG
Political Assistant to Secretary for Education

Ms Priscilla TO
Administrative Assistant to Secretary for Education

Mr Tony TANG
Principal Assistant Secretary (Quality Assurance)

Attendance by invitation : Hong Kong Kindergarten Association

Ms Mary TONG
Chairlady

Ms Wisa LIU
Vice-Chairlady

The Non-Profit-Making Kindergarten Council of Hong Kong

Ms CHENG Sau-yan
Chairman

Ms Harlanna YEUNG Chui-chun
Vice-Chairman

Lutheran Church - Hong Kong Synod

Ms Mary CHIU
Education Coordinator

Ms SO Yuk-har
Principal, Chan Mung Yan Lutheran Kindergarten

Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children

Ms Susan SO
Director

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Hong Kong Baptist Kindergarten Education Convention

Mr CHAN Mei-tak
President

Ms CHAN Tsui-yuk
Principal

The Salvation Army

Ms NG Yin-kam
Coordinator for Pre-School Education

Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union

Ms YUNG Hau-heung
Spokesperson on Early Childhood Education

Ms CHEONG Un-i
Spokesperson on Early Childhood Education

Civic Party

Ms Annie KI
Chairman, Hong Kong Island Branch

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

Mrs TAM Siu-hing
Chairperson

Mr CHANG Hoi-ping
President

Hong Kong Christian Service Early Childhood
Education Service

Mrs CHAN KONG Siu-wai
Principal Coordinator

Mrs LEUNG LEUNG Lai-fun
Coordinator

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

Mrs TSANG KAM Shau-wan
Chairman

Mrs LO CHU Yin-kwan
Consultant

Hong Kong Teachers' Association

Ms LAU Seung-man
Chairperson of Kindergarten Section

Ms CHOW Yun-ling
Secretary of Kindergarten Section

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Mr CHAN Kam-ming
Chief Officer of Children & Youth Service

Ms YIP Choi-ha
Officer of Children & Youth Service

Hong Kong Early Childhood Educators Association

Ms CHOW Wai-chun
Chairman

Ms LEUNG Pik-lin
Vice-Chairman

S.K.H. Kindergarten and Nursery Council

Ms LEUNG Yuk-sum
Chairperson

Ms WONG Tung-tai
Vice-Chairperson

Tai Po Early Childhood Education Principal Association

Ms KWOK Chor-kiu
Chairman

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Miss YIP Fung-kwuan
Secretary

關注學券制幼兒家長聯盟

Mr YIP Chi-yuen
Chairman

Ms LO Yuk-wa
Member

Five Districts Business Welfare Association Cheung
Chuk Shan Nursery Cheung Chuk Shan Kindergarten
Parents-Teacher Association

Mr JONG Tak-hing
Member

Mr YUEN Kai-hung
Member

Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers

Mr WU Siu-wai
Vice Chairman

Mr FOONG Nim-yee
Deputy Secretary

Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Welfare Council

Ms TSE Yuk-fung
Principal

Ms LAU Yau-lin
Service Supervisor (Child Care Service)

St. James' Settlement

Mr KWOK Wai-sang
Senior Manager

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The Hong Kong Institute of Education

Dr LEUNG Cheung-shing
Head of Department of Early Childhood Education

Dr YUEN Wai-kwan
Assistant Professor, Department of Early Childhood
Education

Caritas Pre-school Education and Child Care Service

Ms Gloria LEUNG Chi-kin
Service Head, Pre-school Education and Child Care
Service

Hong Kong Early Childhood Education Professional
Administrative Association

Ms CHAN Shun-lai
Chairlady

Ms LEUNG Lai-ching
Vice-Chairlady

World Organization for Early Childhood Education –
Hong Kong

Dr Hazel LAM
Exco Member

ELCHK, Social Service Head Office

Ms LAU Yin-king
Service Coordinator

Hong Kong Parents Association Ltd

Mrs May CHAN Siu-wan
Vice-Chairman

New Forum

Mr HSU Hoi-shan
Hon Secretary

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Education Convergence

Mr LAU Kam-man
Publication Secretary

Kwai Chung & Tsing Yi District Kindergarten Heads
Association

Ms Nancy LAM Chui-ling
Chairwoman

Ms AU Lai-sin
Vice-Chairwoman

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

Mrs MAK TSE How-ling
Chairman

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

**Staff in
attendance** : Mr Stanley MA
Senior Council Secretary (2)8

Ms Judy TING
Council Secretary (2)3

Miss Jenny LEE
Legislative Assistant (2)6 (Acting)

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I. Review of Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme
[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1077/08-09(01) - (02) and CB(2)1111/08-09(01)]

At the invitation of the Chairman, Secretary for Education (SED) said that the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (the Scheme) was introduced since the 2007-2008 school year and the Administration had undertaken to review the Scheme in the 2011-2012 school year. The main purpose of the Administration attending the meeting was to listen to the views of the deputations.

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Oral presentations by deputations

Hong Kong Kindergarten Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1077/08-09(03)]

2. Ms Wisa LIU presented the views of Hong Kong Kindergarten Association as detailed in its submission. She said that the Scheme had helped alleviate the financial burden of many parents since its implementation in the 2007-2008 school year. She also welcomed the one-off school development grant offered in the 2006-2007 school year. However, Ms LIU pointed out the shortcomings of the Scheme which included limited choice of schools for parents as only non-profit making (NPM) kindergartens (KGs) were eligible for joining the Scheme; whole-day KGs not receiving as many subsidies as half-day KGs; serving teachers under stress to obtain the Certificate in Early Childhood Education (C(ECE) qualification by 2011-2012, recruitment competition for pre-primary teachers and requirement for adopting the local curriculum. She suggested that the Administration should conduct a comprehensive review on the Scheme as soon as possible; formulate a blueprint for post-2012 development; and relax the ceilings on school fee.

The Non-Profit-Making Kindergarten Council of Hong Kong
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1077/08-09(04)]

3. Ms CHENG Sau-yan presented the views of the Non-Profit-Making Kindergarten Council of Hong Kong as detailed in its submission. She emphasised that the Council had all along objected to not including pre-primary education as a part of free formal education. As regards the Scheme, Ms CHENG suggested that the Administration should uphold the equity principle by including private independent kindergartens (PI KGs) in the Scheme; adjust the ceilings on school fee of KGs eligible for the Scheme since most KGs had increased school fees in the past two years; pay to KGs direct the school fees of students under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme (CSSA) in order to avoid late payment by parents; process the applications of these students for the Scheme to avoid the need for advance payment of school fee; extend the five-year period for KG teachers to obtain the C(ECE) qualification; extend the four-year period for the provision of teacher development subsidy (TDS); formulate a comprehensive remuneration structure for KG teachers commensurate with their qualifications; and remove the requirement for uploading the results of quality review (QR) onto the website of Education Bureau (EDB) to reduce stress on KGs.

Lutheran Church – Hong Kong Synod
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1149/08-09(01)]

4. Ms Mary CHIU presented the views of Lutheran Church – Hong Kong Synod as detailed in its submission. She highlighted its suggestions for

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improving the Scheme in three aspects. First, in terms of KG teachers' remuneration, Ms CHIU suggested that the Administration should formulate a remuneration structure commensurate with teachers' qualifications and working experience. She explained that the abolition of the Recommended Normative Salary Scale (RNSS) had resulted in the pre-primary teaching profession not being formally recognised. In the long term, KG teachers' remuneration should be subsidized by public funds. Second, in order to reduce administrative work and stress on KG teachers for attaining the professional qualification, Ms CHIU suggested standardizing the QR mechanisms for KGs and nursery centres, removing the requirement for uploading QR results onto the EDB website, providing for credit transfer for professional development programmes offered by different institutions and increasing the establishment of KG teaching assistants. Lastly, Ms CHIU considered it important to adjust the ceiling on fee remission of \$25,400 for whole-day classes under the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme (KCFRS), and extend the Scheme to cover children aged between two and three.

Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1124/08-09(01)]

5. Ms Susan SO presented the views of Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children as detailed in its submission. She highlighted the inequity to kindergarten-cum-child care centres under the Scheme. She explained that these centres had all along provided long hour, up to 12.5 hours, child care services to double-income families as well as families with children of special educational needs. However, under the Scheme, the value of the voucher, TDS, school development grant were all calculated on the basis of half-day operation with the result that whole-day KGs received substantially fewer TDS than half-day KGs. Ms SO pointed out that the ceilings on school fee were set at \$24,000 for half-day KGs and \$48,000 for whole-day KGs (at the ratio of 1:2). However, the value of the voucher was \$16,000 for half-day KGs and fee remission for whole-day KGs under KCFRS was \$25,400 (at the ratio of 1:1.6). To rectify the disparity, Ms SO suggested that the Administration should immediately set up a committee with the participation of KG representatives to review the Scheme and raise the fee remission for attending whole-day KGs to no less than \$32,000.

Hong Kong Baptist Kindergarten Education Convention
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1218/08-09(1)]

6. Ms CHAN Tsui-yuk presented the views of Hong Kong Baptist Kindergarten Education Convention as detailed in its submission. The Convention put forward four suggestions for improving the Scheme. First, the five-year timeframe for KG teachers to obtain the C(ECE) qualification should be extended to reduce the stress of KG teachers. Second, KG teachers' remuneration should be subsidized by public funds. Third, school fees for CSSA

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recipients should be paid directly to KGs in order to avoid late payment or non-payment by parents. Lastly, KGs should be given greater autonomy in using the surplus accumulated over the years.

The Salvation Army

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1111/08-09(02)]

7. Ms NG Yin-kam presented the views of the Salvation Army as detailed in its submission. She highlighted the problems in connection with the Scheme including fixing the ceiling on fee remission for five years, depriving the choice of low-income parents for KGs and increasing the administrative and paper work of KGs. She made several suggestions to improve the Scheme, including simplifying the application procedure; relaxing the ceiling on fee remission; excluding the value of voucher in calculating fee remission; providing resources for appointing additional administrative staff; increasing flexibility of using TDS to cover overseas academic exchange activities; continuing the provision of TDS after 2012; reviewing the Scheme and formulating a development plan for pre-primary education after 2011-2012. In the view of the Salvation Army, pre-primary education should be free in the long run.

Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1124/08-09(02)]

8. Ms YUNG Hau-heung presented the views of Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union as detailed in its submission. The Union held the view that the Scheme had failed to fulfil its goals of alleviating the financial burden of parents and improving the teaching quality of KGs. Ms YUNG highlighted that the Union had launched a signature campaign in October 2008, supported by more than 6 000 KG principals and teachers, to urge the Administration to immediately review the Scheme. After the implementation of the Scheme, low-income families paid more for the school fee; pressure on KG teachers had increased as they had to cope with the requirements of the Scheme; and job security had decreased making it difficult to attract and retain talents in the profession. The Union called on the Administration to review the pre-primary education policy, formulate a remuneration structure commensurate with qualifications, reduce the need for school-based curriculum training to mitigate stress on KG teachers, reduce the work for QR, increase resources for undertaking non-teaching work and review comprehensively the various schemes for pre-primary education including increasing subsidy for whole-day KGs and child care centres.

Civic Party

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1182/08-09(01)]

9. Ms Annie KI presented the views of Civic Party as detailed in its submission. In the view of Civic Party, the major problems of the Scheme

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included inequitable allocation of TDS to KGs and child care centres which was based on student enrolment, increase of stress on KG teachers because of the need to cope with QR and to attain professional qualification, and increase of financial burden on low-income families because the voucher value had to be deducted from the fee remission. The Civic Party called on the Administration to conduct a comprehensive review on the Scheme, rectify the inequitable allocation of resources to whole-day KGs and child care centres, extend the Scheme to cover students aged between two and three, and provide free pre-primary education.

Hong Kong Kowloon and N.T. Kindergarten Education Advancement Association Ltd
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1133/08-09(01)]

10. Mrs TAM Siu-hing presented the views of Hong Kong Kowloon and N.T. Kindergarten Education Advancement Association Ltd as detailed in its submission. The Association put forward a number of suggestions for improving the Scheme. These included extending the Scheme to cover PI KGs so as to give the choice for KGs to parents; raise the ceilings on fee remission under KCFRS to mitigate the financial hardship of needy families; provide a mechanism for adjusting the ceilings; directly subsidise KG teachers' remuneration or provide a remuneration subsidy commensurate with years of service of KG teachers; review the abolition of providing a subsidy of \$2,000 per student per annum previously under the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Subsidy Scheme (KCSS); and provide a social worker for each KG/child care centre to assist children with special educational needs.

Hong Kong Christian Service Early Childhood Education Service
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1091/08-09(01)]

11. Mrs CHAN KONG Siu-wai presented the views of Hong Kong Christian Service Early Childhood Education Service as detailed in its submission. The Service welcomed the Scheme to ease the financial burden of parents and enhance the quality of pre-primary education. However, she pointed out that contrary to its objective, the financial burden of low-income families had increased after its implementation. This was because the ceilings on fee remission under KCFRS had been capped at \$16,000 for half-day KGs and \$25,400 for whole-day KGs, and these ceilings would remain unchanged until the 2011-2012 school year. Full grant beneficiaries who attended KGs with school fee exceeding these ceilings would have to top up the difference. Mrs CHAN called on the Administration to adjust the ceilings with reference to the weighted average fee, calculate fee remission after discounting the voucher value, set up a working group to review the Scheme comprehensively and map out the way forward for pre-primary education after 2011-2012.

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*Council of Non-profit Making Organizations for Pre-primary Education
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1091/08-09(02)]*

12. Mrs TSANG KAM Shau-wan said that the Council of Non-profit Making Organizations for Pre-primary Education requested the immediate rectification of the wrong method for calculating fee remission. The ceiling on fee remission for attending half-day classes was \$16,000. However, the ceiling on fee remission for whole-day classes was only \$25,400. The school fee of more than 97% of whole-day KGs exceeded that level with the result that needy parents who were fully reimbursed in 2007 had to pay around 10% of the KG fees in the current year. This would be increased to 18% in the 2011-2012 school year. The Council considered that the ceiling on fee remission for whole-day classes should double that for half-day classes, i.e. \$32,000. The Council also considered the current subvention system unfair to teachers, parents and their children attending whole-day KGs, resulting in serious wastage of whole-day KG teachers. The multi-educational functions of whole-day pre-primary education had not been taken into account in designing the provision of subsidy for parents, teachers and KGs. The Council suggested the adoption of a mixed mode of subvention for pre-primary education having regard to the needs of parents, children, KGs and teachers. The Council called on the Administration to set up immediately a committee including representatives from the pre-primary education sector to comprehensively and continuously review the Scheme and formulate policies and direction for the development of quality pre-primary education in the long term.

*Hong Kong Teachers' Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1149/08-09(02)]*

13. Ms LAU Seung-man said that the Hong Kong Teachers' Association welcomed the Scheme which had demonstrated the Government's commitment to subsidize and improve the quality of pre-primary education. However, the Scheme was implemented hastily without extensive consultation, and many problems were unveiled in the course of implementation. The Association called on the Administration to formulate a remuneration structure for pre-primary teachers commensurate with their qualifications and experience; relax the ceiling on fee remission for whole-day KGs; review the impact of the Scheme on KG operation such as the demand and supply of qualified teachers; extend the deadline for teachers attaining professional upgrading; streamline the application procedures for the Scheme; and review the QR process to reduce stress on teachers.

*The Hong Kong Council of Social Service
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1111/08-09(03)]*

14. Mr CHAN Kam-ming said that as the ceiling on fee remission for whole-day KGs was fixed at \$25,400, some 9 000 families or 40% of poor

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families had to top up an average KG fee of \$2,845 per annum. The Administration had overlooked the functions of whole-day KGs to provide both education and care services for children including children with special educational needs. He stressed that teachers in whole-day KGs had to work for extended hours. Without conducting a family impact assessment and in the absence of an educare policy in formulating the Scheme, the Administration had not provided needy families and whole-day KGs with fair and reasonable financial support. The turnover rate of whole-day KG teachers was high. The Council considered that the Administration should review and adjust the ceilings on fee remission and voucher value for attending half-day and whole-day KGs in the light of changing circumstances and parents' affordability. The Administration should also conduct immediately a comprehensive review of the Scheme with participation from the pre-primary education sector.

Hong Kong Early Childhood Educators Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1111/08-09(04)]

15. Ms CHOW Wai-chun said that all parents with children attending whole-day KGs agreed that teachers and principals of whole-day KGs were working exceedingly hard under extreme pressure. However, the level of TDS for whole-day KGs and their teachers under the Scheme was not commensurate with their work and efforts. As the amount of TDS was calculated on the basis of children enrolled in KGs, a KG with morning and afternoon classes and a whole-day KG each with 100 pupils were provided with TDS of \$2 million and \$860,000 respectively. She highlighted the heavy workload of principals in whole-day KGs, the high turnover rate of teachers, the need to deal with various departments including EDB, the Social Welfare Department, the Student Financial Assistance Agency, etc, and the tremendous administrative and paper work. She urged the Administration to review the Scheme having regard to the needs of working parents and the workload of teachers and principals in whole-day KGs.

S.K.H. Kindergarten and Nursery Council
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1149/08-09(03)]

16. Ms LEUNG Yuk-sum said that the Scheme had generated tremendous stress on KG principals and teachers. The S.K.H. Kindergarten and Nursery Council suggested that the Administration should extend the deadline for obtaining the C(ECE) qualification; remove the requirement for uploading QR reports onto the Internet; provide resources for KGs to appoint an additional clerical staff to take up the administrative and paper work arising from the implementation of the Scheme; provide direct subsidy to pre-primary teachers' remuneration; and adjust the ceilings on fee remission for attending half-day and whole-day classes in line with living cost.

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Tai Po Early Childhood Education Principal Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1091/08-09(03)]

17. Ms KWOK Chor-kiu said that Tai Po Early Childhood Education Principal Association requested the Administration to take immediate measures to resolve the problems arising from the implementation of the Scheme. These included formulating a remuneration structure for pre-primary teachers; allowing KGs to use the subsidy under the Scheme to employ clerical staff to take up the additional administrative work; adjusting the ceilings on fee remission for half-day and whole-day classes in line with inflation and the increase in operational costs including teachers' salaries; removing the requirement for uploading QR reports onto the Internet; and advancing the schedule for reviewing the Scheme.

關注學券制幼兒家長聯盟
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1111/08-09(05)]

18. Mr YIP Chi-yuen welcomed the allocation of \$2 billion for the implementation of the Scheme, but regretted that low income families had to top up on average of \$2,845 per year for KG school fee after its implementation because of the policy to fix the ceiling on fee remission for whole-day classes at \$25,400. He urged the Administration to immediately adjust the ceilings on fee remission to relieve the financial burden of needy families and review the Scheme on the way forward. He also suggested that the Administration should provide three-year free whole-day pre-primary education. Ms LO Yuk-wah then shared her experience as a mother of two children to illustrate how the operation of the Scheme had adversely affected low income families. As the ceiling on fee remission for whole-day classes was fixed at \$25,400, she could not afford to top up the school fee and had to send one of her children to attend a half-day class under the care of her mother in Tin Shui Wai.

Five Districts Business Welfare Association Cheung Chuk Shan Nursery Cheung Chuk Shan Kindergarten Parents-Teacher Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1111/08-09(06)]

19. Mr JONG Tak-hing said that the Administration should immediately review the Scheme to formulate a long-term policy on pre-primary education and provide free pre-primary education. Being a father with two children attending KGs, he could not understand why he needed to pay more for the school fee after the implementation of the Scheme. He urged the Administration to double the ceiling on fee remission for whole-day KG classes to that of half-day classes, i.e., from \$25,400 to \$32,000.

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Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1133/08-09(02)]

20. Mr WU Siu-wai said that the Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers had conducted three surveys in May, October and November 2008 to collect the views of pre-primary teachers on the impacts of the Scheme. According to the findings of the surveys, 80% of the respondents were concerned about the increased administrative work; 75% expressed difficulty in recruiting KG teachers; 80% requested an increase in the value of the voucher; over 70% requested an extension of the five-year period for obtaining the C(ECE) qualification; about 20.5% and 35.8% respectively considered the work stress great and too great; and 95% requested an immediate review of the Scheme. Based on these findings, the Federation requested the Administration to extend the deadline for obtaining the C(ECE) qualification, increase resources to KGs to reduce the administrative work, and set up a committee to review the Scheme at an early opportunity.

Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Welfare Council
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1091/08-09(04)]

21. Ms TSE Yuk-fung said that she had worked as a whole-day KG principal for 20 years. She cited her experience to illustrate the great demand of not only low income but also middle class families for whole-day pre-primary institutions. She elaborated that she worked in a KG in Tin Shui Wai which had over 80 waitlisted applicants. Only 10% of the parents attending the KG applied for fee remission, and 90% were working parents. She urged the Administration to set up a committee to review the Scheme expeditiously and rectify the inequitable provision of subsidy for whole-day KGs and their staff.

St. James' Settlement
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1077/08-09(05)]

22. Mr KWOK Wai-sang said that the Scheme had benefited the majority of parents and their children attending half-day KGs, but not those who needed to apply for fee remission under the KCFRS. He referred to the experience of Ms LO Yuk-wah to illustrate the predicament faced by needy families due to the fixation of the ceiling on fee remission at \$25,400 without an adjustment mechanism. He was concerned that some needy families could not afford to top up the difference of KG school fees exceeding the remissions, putting their children at a disadvantageous starting point in education. This would widen wealth disparity and perpetuate inter-generation poverty. He shared the concern of other deputations about the inequitable provision of subsidy to whole-day KGs. He called on the Administration to provide a mechanism to adjust the ceilings on fee remission for needy families, review the Scheme as soon as possible and adopt a mixed mode of subsidy which should comprise a school-based subsidy and a student-based subsidy.

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The Hong Kong Institute of Education
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1124/08-09(03)]

23. Dr LEUNG Cheung-shing said that the Hong Kong Institute of Education was concerned about the need to increase KG fees to improve quality which might be beyond the means of parents. According to the studies conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the provision of direct subsidy to pre-primary operation was more effective than to parents. The Institute was also concerned about the inequitable distribution of pre-primary resources. It was found that the implementation of the Scheme had not reduced the financial burden of all eligible families and broadened their choice for KGs. Furthermore, whether the professionalism of pre-primary teachers could be enhanced would depend on the working environment of KGs. The Institute suggested that the Administration should comprehensively review the Scheme immediately and on a regular basis thereafter; conduct a study on the impact of the Scheme on the quality of KG education and the stakeholders; create a favourable working environment and formulate a competitive remuneration package to retain a quality workforce; formulate a schedule for the provision of free pre-primary education; and draw up the role and functions of pre-primary education for future development.

Caritas Pre-school Education and Child Care Service
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1111/08-09(07)]

24. Ms Gloria LEUNG Chi-kin said that the Scheme had marked the beginning of a new era in the Government's commitment to upgrade the quality of pre-primary education. However, the implementation of the Scheme had generated certain problems. She pointed out that before its implementation, the maximum fee remissions for half-day and whole-day classes were adjusted on a yearly basis. After its implementation, the ceilings were fixed for five years. Caritas shared the view of many deputations that the Administration should adjust the ceilings on fee remission in line with the increase in KG fees to relieve the financial burden of the needy families. The amount of fee remission to eligible applicants should be calculated after deducting the voucher value. To reduce the turnover rate of pre-primary teachers in whole-day KGs and their administrative work, the Administration should formulate policies to ensure equitable distribution of pre-primary resources having regard to the need for diversity in pre-primary education. To enhance the quality of pre-primary education which was essential for the development of Hong Kong into a regional education hub, the Administration should immediately set up a committee to review the Scheme with the interests of teachers, parents and children as the basis.

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Hong Kong Early Childhood Education Professional Administrative Association

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1149/08-09(04)]

25. Ms CHAN Shun-lai said that the Hong Kong Early Childhood Education Professional Administrative Association welcomed the Scheme as it marked the beginning of a new era in the provision of pre-primary education. However, it was concerned about the problems generated. The removal of the RNSS for pre-primary teachers had taken away salary protection. As pre-primary teachers had to attain professional upgrading within five years, more experienced teachers would be replaced by junior ones which would dampen morale. As the Scheme did not cover PI KGs, their survival was at stake because of low student enrolment. The requirement to attain professional upgrading within five years, coupled with QR, had created excessive stress on KG teachers.

World Organization for Early Childhood Education - Hong Kong

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1111/08-09(08)]

26. Dr Hazel LAM said that the World Organization for Early Childhood Education - Hong Kong welcomed the Scheme. Nevertheless, the Organization considered that there was room for improvement. The Organization suggested that the Administration should remove the requirement of uploading QR reports onto the Internet to mitigate stress on KG teachers; continue to provide TDS beyond 2011-2012 to facilitate further professional upgrading to degree level; conduct regular review on the Scheme; set up a steering committee to oversee the implementation of the Scheme; and formulate a salary structure for pre-primary teachers. The Administration should provide free pre-primary education in the long term.

Social Service Head Office of ELCHK

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1091/08-09(05)]

27. Ms LAU Yin-king said that Social Service Head Office of ELCHK considered it necessary for the Administration to clarify whether the Scheme aimed to benefit low income families and whether whole-day childhood education was valuable. She elaborated that the Scheme had not benefited low income families as the voucher value had been deducted in calculating fee remission for needy families and the ceilings on fee remission would remain unchanged. The Scheme was unfair to some 300 whole-day KGs which constituted about 30% of the total number of pre-primary institutions as the voucher value, TDS, school development grant and fee remission were all calculated on the basis of half-day operation. The Head Office called on the Administration to remove the offsetting of the voucher value in calculating fee remission, adjust the ceilings on fee remission to a reasonable level, include pre-primary education in the provision of basic education and formulate long-term policies for the development of half-day and whole-day KGs.

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Hong Kong Parents Association Ltd and New Forum
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1171/08-09(01)]

28. Mrs May CHAN Siu-wan said that the Association and the New Forum acknowledged the benefits of the Scheme in reducing the financial burden on parents and enhancing the quality of pre-primary education as about 80% of pre-primary teachers had completed or were pursuing a course in C(ECE). To further improve the Scheme, the Administration should provide tax deduction for parents who were not benefited from the Scheme; extend the deadline for obtaining the C(ECE) qualification in five years to seven to eight years; adjust the ceiling on fee remission for whole-day classes as less than 7% of whole-day KGs were charging below \$25,400 per student per annum (pspa); and incorporate pre-primary education in the provision of free basic education.

Education Convergence
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1149/08-09(05)]

29. Mr LAU Kam-man said that the Education Convergence queried whether adequate consultation had been conducted before the implementation of the Scheme and whom had been consulted. Without adequate consultation, many problems arose after its implementation, and the parties concerned had to spend a lot of time and efforts resolving them. The Education Convergence suggested that the Administration should include pre-primary education in the provision of formal education; explain the arrangements for dealing with in-service KG teachers who had not attained the C(ECE) qualification in 2012; and ensure the supply of C(ECE) places after 2012. The Education Convergence was concerned that the Scheme had polarized KGs into those charging high and low school fees. As a result, KGs charging school fee at a middle level would face under-enrolment gradually and might close down in future, affecting the diversity of pre-primary education in the long term.

Kwai Chung & Tsing Yi District Kindergarten Heads Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1124/08-09(04)]

30. Ms Nancy LAM Chui-ling said that the Scheme demonstrated the commitment of the Administration to subsidize parents and enhance the quality of pre-primary education. However, the Administration had not taken into account the needs of KG operators and pre-primary teachers. She pointed out that as the salaries of KG teachers were determined by the market and the increasing demand for KG teachers, KGs receiving lesser subsidies encountered difficulties in recruiting and retaining their teachers. The Association called on the Administration to formulate a salary scale for pre-primary teachers commensurate with their years of experience and qualifications. She also pointed out that as TDS was calculated on the basis of student enrolment, KGs with a small enrolment did not have sufficient funds to support their teachers to

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pursue C(ECE) studies at the same time. As a result, many teachers in small KGs sought employment with larger KGs in order that they could receive TDS to complete a C(CEC) course in time. To help small KGs to retain their teachers, TDS should be teacher-based and not KG-based. Lastly, she hoped that the Panel would continue to follow up on the subject.

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

31. Mrs MAK TSE How-ling said that Hong Kong Institute of Education Past Student's Association of Early Childhood Teacher Education Ltd had expressed reservations about the Scheme in 2006 before its implementation as the experience of a voucher system in the United States and Taiwan had been found unsatisfactory. The Association had also expressed grave concern about the need for serving teachers to obtain the C(ECE) qualification within five years as the specified period was too short. She elaborated the heavy workload and stress of serving pre-primary teachers to cope with work in daytime and studies in the evening and of principals in carrying out the heavy administrative and assessment work.

The Administration's response

32. In response to the views and concerns of the deputations, SED said that the Scheme was approved by the Finance Committee in December 2006 with a commitment of up to \$2 billion to alleviate the financial burden on parents and provide them with more choices for KGs. The Scheme was not intended to provide full subsidy to pre-primary education. At the present stage, the Administration had no intention of providing free pre-primary education. The Administration had undertaken to review the Scheme in 2012 with reference to its policy objectives. The Administration noted the support from the majority of the deputations for the Scheme and the problems experienced by some KGs in the course of implementation. These included the keen demand for supply teachers to provide support for KG teachers attending professional upgrading courses and the stress faced by pre-primary teachers in obtaining the C(ECE) qualification within the five-year transitional period. SED further said that as over 80% of serving teachers had completed or enrolled in the C(ECE) courses, the Administration believed that the transitional problems would be resolved gradually within the next few years with some 20% yet to attain the required qualification. The Administration hoped that the pre-primary workforce could endeavour to go through the transitional period to achieve the professional upgrading.

33. SED further said that the quality assurance framework was an integral part of the Scheme for KG to be accountable for effective utilization of public resources and the quality of pre-primary education. The QR conducted by EDB and the annual school plan and report prepared by KGs were essential for

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upgrading the quality of pre-primary education. As regards salaries for pre-primary teachers, the Administration was of the view that some of the problems expressed were also transient because of the supply and demand for KGs teachers during the period for attaining professional upgrading. The Administration believed that after all serving KG teachers had obtained the C(ECE) qualification, the market forces would determine the reasonable remuneration for KG teachers.

34. As regards the impact of the Scheme on whole-day KGs and low income families, SED said that the problems were partial and not structural. While the Administration considered it sufficient and appropriate for young children to attend half-day KGs, he acknowledged the practical need of some families for whole-day KGs. The Administration also took note that some low income families had been paying more for KG school fees after the implementation of the Scheme. The Administration would see what could be done to address the difficulties faced by whole-day KGs and low income families.

Members' concerns

35. Dr Priscilla LEUNG shared her experience in deciding to send her son to a local KG instead of an international KG, and her son's complaint of losing a creative key after attending the local KG. She pointed out that substantial resources were allocated to pre-primary education in overseas places which was considered very important and had attracted creative talents to join the profession. She expressed reservations about the adoption of a voucher system for pre-primary education. She requested the Administration to review the Scheme and provide information on the estimated cost for the provision of free pre-primary education.

36. Ms Audrey EU said that she was resented by SED's response that the problems arising from the implementation of the Scheme were transitional and partial, ignoring the needs of some 300 whole-day KGs and the needy parents. She expressed dissatisfaction about SED having left the meeting after making his response. She stressed that the pre-primary education sector had pointed out the problems before the implementation of the Scheme but these problems had remained unresolved. The working time of whole-day KG teachers was more than double that of their half-day counterparts but they received less TDS. She considered it unreasonable to fix the ceiling on fee remission for whole-day KGs at only \$25,400, with the result that low income families eligible for full fee remission before the implementation of the Scheme had to pay 10 % or even more of KG fees after its implementation. Ms EU requested the Administration to provide a timetable for completing a review of the Scheme to address the concerns of the pre-primary workforce and the needy parents.

37. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong shared the view of a deputation that SED was at too high a position to be aware of the adverse impact of the fixed fee remission

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ceiling of \$25,400 on needy parents and the prescribed fee ceiling of \$24,000 pspa for half-day KGs on pre-primary teachers. With these ceilings, KGs were not operated in a free market as they could not increase tuition fees beyond these ceilings to increase salaries for retaining or recruiting KG teachers even though they had attained professional upgrading. The Scheme had increased tremendously the workload of and stress on pre-primary teachers as a result of the additional administrative work and the need for higher qualifications, QR and self-evaluation, but without a reasonable increase in salaries. The Scheme was unfair to PI KGs and whole-day KGs. He considered SED's response unacceptable by saying that the difficulties encountered by teachers and whole-day KGs were transitional and partial. He urged the Administration to review the Scheme immediately and propose remedial measures as soon as practicable to address the problems identified, failing which he would organize a protest of the pre-primary education sector against the Government on 1 July 2009.

38. Ms Starry LEE said that as a parent with a daughter who had attended both whole-day and half-day KG before, she considered the operation of whole-day KGs essential to cater for the need of working families and provide them with choices. She expressed sympathy for the predicament faced by the parent who had to send their children to a half-day KG far away from home because of the ceiling on fee remission. She considered the present Scheme unfair to whole-day KGs. Given that many KGs had genuine need to increase school fees, she urged the Administration to immediately adjust the ceilings on fee remission to address the needs of low income families and review the Scheme with a view to ensuring the continuous operation of whole-day KGs.

39. Miss Tanya CHAN considered the oral presentation of Ms CHOW Wai-chun touching but the response of SED infuriating as he insisted that the problems experienced by the pre-primary workforce and needy parents were transitional and partial that would be resolved in 2012. She shared the concerns raised by the deputations about the heavy workload of KG teachers and principals, the unreasonable remuneration for KG teachers and inadequacy of fee remissions. She echoed the views expressed by Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong in his recent article in newspaper on teachers' anxieties and grievances. She was concerned that unless the Scheme was reviewed expeditiously, whole-day KGs could not survive. She urged the Administration to provide a timetable for reviewing the Scheme.

40. Permanent Secretary for Education (PSED) responded that the Administration was aware that owing to an increase in KG fees in the past two years, the choice for KGs had been reduced for certain needy families. The Administration noted the views expressed. He undertook to follow up the matter and report to the Panel in due course.

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41. Mr TAM Yiu-chung said that the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB) had conducted a survey on the impact of the Scheme on pre-primary teachers. The survey covered some 800 pre-primary teachers, and the views collected were similar to those of the deputations. He further said that DAB strongly requested the Administration to review the Scheme and the KCFRS expeditiously; adjust the ceiling on fee remission for attending whole-day KGs to relieve the financial burden of low income families; rationalize the administration of the Scheme including the QR framework; formulate a remuneration framework commensurate with qualifications for pre-primary teachers; and provide free pre-primary education.

42. PSED responded that the Scheme aimed to reduce the financial burden of the needy parents, and the Administration had no intention of providing free pre-primary education at the present stage. He pointed out that before the implementation of the Scheme, the RNSS only applied to KGs under the former KCSS and did not apply to all KGs in the pre-primary sector. The Administration remained of the view that salaries for the pre-primary workforce should be determined by the market.

43. Professor Patrick LAU noted that \$2 billion had been committed for the full implementation of the Scheme. He asked whether the Administration could make use of the remaining balance to improve financial support for pre-primary teachers, whole-day KGs and low income parents. He considered that the Administration should work out the costs required for the necessary improvements to the Scheme to resolve the problems raised by the deputations.

44. In response, PSED pointed out that the \$2 billion was the total commitment upon the full implementation of the Scheme. As the fee subsidy through the voucher would be increased gradually and had yet reached its maximum value, the expenditure incurred so far represented the existing level of requirements of the Scheme. PSED said that apart from financial consideration, the Administration would have to examine the operational arrangements and policy objectives should any changes be proposed to the Scheme.

45. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that he had expressed objection to the Scheme and had suggested that the Administration should provide free pre-primary education when the Scheme was first discussed in 2006. He considered it unreasonable to remove the RNSS for pre-primary teachers which had resulted in a high turnover of the pre-primary teachers. In his view, the Scheme was discriminatory against low income families, double-income families and whole-day KGs. He urged the Administration to review the Scheme and rectify the discrimination policy expeditiously.

46. The Chairman asked when the Administration would review the Scheme to rectify the situation for low income families to pay more after the implementation of the Scheme, and the inequitable provision of resources to

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whole-day KGs vis-à-vis half-day KGs.

47. PSED replied that the Administration would examine immediately how these concerns could be addressed. He explained that even before the implementation of the Scheme, parents were required to top up the difference should the annual KG fees exceed the approved fee remission under KCFRS. The Administration was aware that as a result of KG fee increases in the past two years, the percentage of half-day KGs and whole-day KGs charging tuition fee at or below the fixed fee remission ceilings had dropped to 38.6% (half day) and 18% (whole day) in the 2008-2009 school year, which had in turn limited the choices for KGs for certain families.

48. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that the Administration should at least remove the fixed fee remission ceilings and half-day KG school fee ceiling immediately to enable the operation of a free market for the pre-primary education sector. In his view, the Administration should undertake to conduct an interim review immediately.

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49. The Chairman requested the Administration to consider the views of members and the deputations and come up with the ameliorative measures to improve the Scheme in end of June or early July 2009. PSED reiterated that the Administration had already undertaken to examine immediately the concerns about fixed fee remission ceilings and the impact of the Scheme on whole-day KGs.

Motion

50. Miss Tanya CHAN moved the following motion -

(Translation)

"That this Panel urges the Government to establish instantly a committee which includes representatives of the pre-primary education sector to review the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme immediately."

51. Dr Priscilla LEUNG considered it more comprehensive and effective to include representatives from the education sector, parents, the Government and Legislative Council (LegCo) Members in the committee to review the Scheme. She moved an amendment to the motion as follows -

(Translation)

"That this Panel urges the Government to establish instantly a committee which includes representatives of the education sector, pre-primary education sector, parents, the Government and Legislative Council Members to review the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme

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immediately."

52. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan moved another amendment to the motion as follows -

(Translation)

"That this Panel urges the Government to establish instantly a committee which includes representatives of the pre-primary education sector and parents to immediately review the kindergarten fee subvention system, as well as to establish a remuneration system that is linked to teachers' training and qualifications."

53. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan explained that he considered it necessary to enlarge the scope of the review to include the kindergarten fee subvention system. He considered it superfluous to specify the inclusion of representatives from the education sector and the Government in the motion as the Government would decide on the composition of the committee which would invariably include its representatives. As regards LegCo Members, Mr LEE said that the wording of his amendment had not ruled out the possibility of LegCo Members being appointed to the review committee.

54. Ms Audrey EU considered the amendment proposed by Mr LEE Cheuk-yan fine, and shared his views that it was not necessary to state expressly the inclusion of representatives of LegCo Members in the review committee. She said that the Administration could appoint LegCo Members to sit on the review committee should it be considered necessary.

55. Dr Priscilla LEUNG said that based on her experience, the proposals put forth by the review committee would be more convincing should its composition be broad enough to include all the relevant sectors. She therefore considered it necessary to state in the motion the inclusion of representatives from the education sector, the Government and LegCo Members in the review committee.

56. Mrs Regina IP shared the views of Mr LEE Cheuk-yan. She considered the wording of Dr Priscilla LEUNG's amendment too complicated.

57. The Chairman put to vote the amendment to the motion moved by Dr Priscilla LEUNG. Two members voted for the amendment, and five members voted against it. The Chairman declared that the amendment was not carried.

58. The Chairman then put to vote the amendment moved by Mr LEE Cheuk-yan. Six members voted for the amendment, and one member abstained. The Chairman declared that the motion as amended by Mr LEE Cheuk-yan was carried.

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II. Any other business

59. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:05 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
19 May 2009