

For discussion on 20 March 2009

LegCo Panel on Education

Progress report on implementation of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme

Purpose

Further to the progress report on the implementation of Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) presented to the Education Panel on 14 January 2008 [LC Paper No. CB(2)766/07-08(01)], this paper updates the latest position of the scheme introduced since the 2007/08 school year.

Current status of implementation

Number of Kindergarten (KGs) and students joining PEVS

2. In the 2008/09 school year, some 85% (820 in number) of the KGs have joined PEVS. Among them, 776 are non-profit-making (NPM) KGs¹ and 44 are Private Independent (PI) KGs joining PEVS under the 3-year transitional arrangement which will apply up to the end of the 2009/10 school year. The number of places in the operating classes of KGs joining PEVS and those not joining are estimated to be 163 200 and 25 180 respectively.²

3. As of February 2009, some 116 900 (85%) KG students are benefiting from direct fee subsidy towards their tuition fee, including some 5 000 receiving fee assistance under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme and the Child Care Centre Fee Assistance Scheme. This represents a significant increase in the number of children benefiting from financial support when compared with the former Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Subsidy Scheme (KCSS) covering only some 69 700 students in the 2006/07 school year prior to the introduction of PEVS.

Professional Upgrading

4. As of September 2008, over 80% of KG teachers have either completed the Certificate in Early Childhood Education (C(ECE)) or equivalent qualifications or enrolled in the C(ECE) courses. We anticipate that the rest of the teachers will apply

¹ Among the 776 NPM KGs, 117 were former PI KGs.

² These are preliminary figures. The actual number of places in the KGs concerned in this school year will only be available at a later stage.

for admission to the in-service C(ECE) programmes³ in the coming school year for completion before the end of the 2011/12 school year.

5. Around 494 or 61% KG principals are either holding or pursuing the Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education (BEd(ECE)) qualification. The certification programme⁴ for principals and aspiring principals has been offered since January 2008. As of today, around 300 serving principals/aspiring principals have either completed or are taking the certification course. Individual KGs have also been making use of the Teacher Development Subsidy (TDS) to run school-based training programmes for teachers' continuous professional development.

Quality Review (QR)

6. Up to end February 2009, the Education Bureau (EDB) has already conducted a total of 295 QR visits and another 95 QR visits have been planned for the remaining of the 2008/09 school year. About 240 QR reports have been uploaded to the EDB website to provide additional information to facilitate parents' choice of KG for their children. Results of the post-QR questionnaire survey indicate that about 90% of the respondents⁵ agreed that QR helped their formulation of school development plan for continuous development. While about 12% expressed that QR has created additional pressure, 80% were satisfied with the results of QR, and 90% agreed that the process of QR was open and transparent. We shall continue to adopt an improvement-oriented approach to QR and communicate to KGs to avoid their over-preparation for self-evaluation and QR.

Information for parents

7. The Profile of Kindergartens and Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres is published yearly to provide information to facilitate parents to make informed choice of KG. KGs are required to disclose information on application of funds to various expenditure areas, in addition to other essential operational and curriculum details. Information on "Good Practices" and summary reports on "Quality Assurance Inspection" conducted in the past five years and the QR reports of KGs are also provided in the e-version of the Profile for parents' reference. The July 2008 version of the Profile has been uploaded to the website of EDB in early September 2008 and printed copies are available for parents' reference.

³ The Hong Kong Institute of Education, the Hong Kong Baptist University, the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (Lee Wai Lee), the University of Hong Kong and the Open University of Hong Kong are providing in-service C(ECE) programmes or equivalent in the 2008/09 school year.

⁴ The programme comprises not less than 90 contact hours spreading over 6 to 9 months and includes an approximately 30-hour post-course assignment.

⁵ Altogether 1 751 pre-primary personnel from 154 KGs responded to the post-QR survey in the 2007/08 school year.

Support for KGs

8. Support services have continually been provided to KGs under different auspices of EDB. School-based support services are being rendered in the areas of language, cognitive, socio-emotional, physical and aesthetic development with a choice of focus in child-centred activities, creative learning environment, children's learning portfolio or curriculum planning and organisation. EDB has commissioned a professional principalship training course for KG principals. The course comprises an offshore programme and a provision of on-spot consultative visit to the participating KG principals in Hong Kong. So far, some 130 principals have joined the programme with positive feedback, including the 30 principals who have just joined in March 2009. In support for the implementation of the revised Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum, EDB has been organising Professional Development Programmes since 2007 on curriculum leadership and management, school-based curriculum planning and pedagogical knowledge in various learning areas for KG principals and teachers for capacity building.

KGs' Tuition Fee

9. The average percentage of fee increase for the 2007/08 school year and for the 2008/09 school year is 6.19%⁶ and 4.3% respectively. In determining their tuition fee level, KGs have taken into account a host of factors including fee income, operational expenses, and projected enrolment. However, PEVS has not been followed by a period for re-structuring of the KG sector which will in turn lead to higher fill up rate in KGs and lower operational cost as originally envisaged. The percentage of half day KGs and whole day KGs charging tuition fee at or below the fixed fee remission ceilings have dropped to 38.6% (half day) and 18% (whole day) in the 2008/09 school year. We shall monitor the application for fee increase by KGs and explore ameliorative measures, in our review on the implementation of PEVS, for children who may need additional support.

Alignment with Other Subsidy Schemes

10. From the 2009/10 school year onwards, all parents on the CSSA Scheme with children at the age appropriate for pre-primary education, like other parents with pre-primary children, will apply for the voucher from EDB. If financial assistance on top of the subsidy from the voucher is required, they would approach the Social Welfare Department for additional assistance under the CSSA Scheme.

⁶ A major factor that accounts for the fee increase is the need for KGs under the former KCSS in the 2006/07 school year to reflect wholly or partly the corresponding portion of expenditure in the approved school fee in the 2007/08 school year when the KCSS was replaced by PEVS. Discounting the KCSS element, the increase is around 1.59%.

Application for PEVS for 2009/10

11. The application for PEVS for the 2009/10 school year has commenced. Starting from 19 January 2009, parents of eligible children who will attend KG classes in the 2009/10 school year may apply for the Certificate of Eligibility under PEVS. Students who have already been issued with the Certificate need not reapply.

Background

12. The PEVS introduced with effect from the 2007/08 school year provides direct fee subsidy to parents to meet towards KG fees of their eligible children, and in parallel provides financial support for the professional development of serving KG principals and teachers. It operates on the basis of the following principles –

- (i) only children attending local NPM KGs or relevant classes in local NPM kindergarten-cum-child care centres are eligible to join PEVS⁷;
- (ii) the voucher should only be redeemed by KGs charging a school fee not exceeding \$24,000 per student per annum (pspa) for a half-day place or not exceeding \$48,000 pspa for a whole-day place;
- (iii) the KGs should at the same time meet all stipulated disclosure and transparency requirements;
- (iv) all KGs are subject to a quality assurance mechanism so that starting from the 2012/13 school year only KGs meeting the prescribed standards may redeem the voucher; and
- (v) all KGs should enjoy full discretion in determining teacher salaries, subject to market forces.

13. The amount of fee subsidy of each voucher started at \$10,000 pspa in the 2007/08 school year, increased to \$11,000 pspa in 2008/09 and progressively to \$16,000 pspa in 2011/12. The TDS is also embedded in each voucher to support teachers' professional development. It amounts to a total of \$10,000 per voucher over four years (i.e. \$3,000 each in 2007/08 and 2008/09 and \$2,000 each in 2009/10 and 2010/11). KGs should

⁷ A transitional period of three years until the end of the 2009/10 school year is provided for private independent (PI) KGs satisfying all prescribed requirements of eligible NPM KGs save for the NPM status to redeem vouchers from parents whose children are enrolled in the nursery classes or above in these PI KGs as of the 2007/08 school year and throughout these children's education in the same PI KGs.

spend the TDS up to the end of the 2011/12 school year, in the priority of course fee reimbursement for their principals and teachers attending an approved degree or diploma course in early childhood education, employing supply teachers to relieve the workload of teachers on training course and school-based training programmes. Principals and teachers of PI and non-PEVS NPM KGs may claim reimbursement from EDB for up to 50% of the fees for an approved course in early childhood education, capped at \$60,000.

14. All serving KG teachers will be expected to obtain the C(ECE) within five years by the end of the 2011/12 school year. New KG principals appointed from the 2009/10 school year onwards will be required to possess a BEd(ECE), plus one year post-qualification experience and completion of the certification course for principals.

15. Members are requested to note the progress of the implementation of PEVS.

Education Bureau

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