

**Progress Report on the Motion on
“Striving for 15-year Free Education”
Moved by Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong at the
Legislative Council Sitting on 16 February 2011**

The motion, as moved by Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong and amended by Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, Hon Starry LEE Wai-king and Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG Mei-fun, was carried at the Legislative Council (LegCo) sitting on 16 February 2011. This note reports on the follow up taken by the Administration since then.

Being private sector led, the kindergarten (KG) sector exhibits great diversity in operation, such as hardware provisions, levels of fee charged, service hours and remuneration of principals and teachers. The sector as a whole has always been very responsive and successful in meeting the different needs of different parents. Any attempts towards quality improvements should not prejudice diversity and choice. Experience suggests that the Pre-primary Education Voucher System (PEVS) currently combines well market forces and policy-driven calibration to enhance choice and improve access to KG services by the needy.

Not only has the PEVS induced a significant professional enhancement in the KG sector, it has also made KG education more affordable. By providing direct fee subsidy to parents, the PEVS helps enhance parental choice especially by needy families. Since the introduction of the PEVS, an average of some 85% KG children have benefited from the voucher subsidy annually, compared to some 50% KG children benefiting from the financial assistance under the former Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Subsidy Scheme.

While we share Members' concern about the quality and accessibility of KG education, we deem it more pragmatic and prudent to build on what the PEVS has achieved. Hence, we have proposed to take forward Education Commission's recommendations in its Report on Review of the PEVS as follows-

- (a) the existing PEVS as a mechanism for providing direct fee subsidy for parents to pay for KG education should be enhanced, with the following modifications to be introduced with effect from the 2012/13 school year (sy) -
 - (i) the value of the voucher for parents to defray the tuition fee of KG education for their children should be adjusted annually with reference to the Composite Consumer Price Index (CCPI);
 - (ii) the existing eligibility criteria for admission of KGs to the PEVS should continue but the fee thresholds should be CCPI-adjusted annually but frozen in situation of deflation; and
 - (iii) the voucher subsidy to the PEVS KGs should be disbursed according to their tuition fee payment schedules; and
- (b) fee remission for half-day and whole-day KG education under the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme (KCFRS) should continue to operate in parallel with the PEVS, with assistance to KG children of needy families enhanced from the 2011/12 sy as follows -
 - (i) the calculation of fee remission under the KCFRS should be revised;
 - (ii) the social needs assessment for eligibility for whole-day rate of fee remission should be removed; and
 - (iii) the meal allowance ceiling for needy KG children attending whole-day PEVS KGs should be adjusted annually with reference to the Consumer Price Index (A).

We note Members' call for instituting a salary scale for KG teachers and share Members' view that the professionalism of the teaching force is crucial to the quality of KG education. With a view to inducing professional enhancement, the Administration has, since the 2007/08 sy, implemented the PEVS. The PEVS provides financial support for the professional development of teachers, thus helping to

induce a progressive rise in their professional attainment. In fact, the percentage of KG teachers holding or pursuing Certificate in Early Childhood Education qualification has increased from 56% in the 2006/07 sy (before the introduction of PEVS) to some 90% as of the 2009/10 sy.

We wish to reassure Members that the Administration shares Members' concern about the quality, choice, affordability and professionalism of KG education and would, in this connection, keep the PEVS policy under review and strive for continuous improvements.

Education Bureau
June 2011