

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(4)471/14-15
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB4/PS/1/13

Panel on Education

**Subcommittee to Study the Implementation of
Free Kindergarten Education**

**Minutes of the second meeting
held on Tuesday, 16 December 2014, at 2:30 pm
in Conference Room 3 of the Legislative Council Complex**

Members present : Hon Starry LEE Wai-king, JP (Chairman)
Hon IP Kin-yuen (Deputy Chairman)
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, GBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, BBS, MH
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan, JP
Hon IP Kwok-him, GBS, JP
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon Steven HO Chun-yin
Hon MA Fung-kwok, SBS, JP
Hon Charles Peter MOK, JP
Hon CHAN Chi-chuen
Dr Hon Kenneth CHAN Ka-lok
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Dr Hon Helena WONG Pik-wan
Dr Hon CHIANG Lai-wan, JP

Members absent : Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che
Hon Christopher CHUNG Shu-kun, BBS, MH, JP

Member attending : Hon TANG Ka-piu, JP

Public Officers attending : Item II

Education Bureau

Mr Eddie NG, SBS, JP
Secretary for Education

Mrs Michelle WONG
Deputy Secretary for Education (3)

Ms Hera CHUM
Principal Assistant Secretary
(Special Education & Kindergarten Education)

Committee on Free Kindergarten Education

Mrs Betty IP
Vice-Chairman

Clerk in attendance : Miss Polly YEUNG
Chief Council Secretary (4) 4

Staff in attendance : Mr Ian CHOW
Council Secretary (4) 4

Ms Sandy HAU
Legislative Assistant (4) 3

Action

I. Confirmation of minutes

(LC Paper No. CB(4)151/14-15 -- Minutes of meeting on
27 October 2014)

The minutes of the meetings held on 27 October 2014 were confirmed.

II. Meeting with the Administration and the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education

- (LC Paper No. CB(4)225/14-15(01) -- Paper provided by the Administration
- LC Paper No. CB(4)225/14-15(02) -- Background brief prepared by the LegCo Secretariat)

Meeting with the Administration and the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education for agenda item II

2. The Subcommittee deliberated (index of proceedings attached at **Annex**).

EDB 3. The Education Bureau ("EDB") was requested to provide the following –

- (a) relevant information on long whole-day ("LWD") kindergartens ("KGs"), including the number of children attending such KGs, the proportion of them who were in receipt of fee remission, as well as the levels of school fees charged by LWD KGs and how they compared to those charged by whole-day and half-day KGs;
- (b) the consultancy briefs of the three consultancy studies as mentioned in the Administration's paper, and to advise the Subcommittee of the time when the reports of such consultancy studies would be issued;
- (c) in the context of the implementation of free KG education, information on the support provided to non-Chinese speaking students and students with special educational needs; and
- (d) information on how and the direction in which the various stipulated requirements on premises in the Operation Manual for Pre-primary Institutions would be reviewed and revised.

III. Any other business

4. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 4:30 pm.

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
6 February 2015

**Proceedings of the meeting of the
Subcommittee to Study the Implementation of
Free Kindergarten Education
on Tuesday, 16 December 2014, at 2:30 pm
in Conference Room 3 of the Legislative Council Complex**

Time marker	Speaker(s)	Subject(s)	Action required
<i>Agenda Item I - Confirmation of minutes</i>			
000308 - 000347	Chairman	Confirmation of minutes	
<i>Agenda Item II- Meeting with the Administration and the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education</i>			
000348 - 001010	Chairman Education Bureau ("EDB")	Opening remarks EDB briefed members on the overview of subjects to be studied and progress of related work of the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education ("the Committee") as set out in LC Paper No. CB(4)225/14-15(01).	
001011 - 001533	Chairman Mr WONG Kwok-hing EDB Vice-Chairman of the Committee ("VC of the Committee")	Mr WONG noted the Committee's consensus that free KG education should cover half-day ("HD") service as the basic provision for eligible children. He said that in consideration of the valuable services provided by long whole-day ("LWD") kindergartens ("KGs") to working parents, Members of the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions would urge the Administration to render appropriate support to LWD KGs upon implementation of free KG education. EDB was fully aware of the demand for the services provided by whole-day ("WD") and LWD KGs. It was envisaged that the three consultancy studies commissioned to examine the human resources requirements and remuneration, accommodation and rental issues would shed light on practicable ways to support WD and LWD KGs. VC of the Committee said that it was the broad consensus of the Committee that additional subsidies should be provided to those students from needy families attending the WD and LWD KGs.	
001534 - 002009	Chairman Mr TANG Ka-piu EDB VC of the Committee	Mr TANG expressed concern that under the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme, children of a four-member family with a monthly income of less than \$14,000 would be eligible for full remission. Mr TANG opined that EDB should not adopt such a low threshold in determining whether a family was in need of assistance. It was also necessary for the Administration and the Committee to ensure that	

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		<p>parents in need of WD/LWD KG services would not be deterred from sending their children to WD/LWD KGs due to the lack of means. On this basis, Mr TANG suggested that the Administration should conduct a survey to gauge the demand for HD, WD and LWD KG places.</p> <p>EDB advised that currently, financial assistance would be made available for children from needy families to defray expenses related to KG education. With respect to the demand for KG places (including HD, WD and LWD), the Administration would take into consideration the population projections and would consider ways to address the demand.</p> <p>VC of the Committee said that the Committee shared the view that additional subsidies should be provided for children on a need basis for receiving WD or LWD services, and the eligibility criteria were still subject to deliberation. The Committee would be prepared to consider views and suggestions from Members and the public.</p>	
002010 - 002436	Chairman Mr Tommy CHEUNG	<p>Mr CHEUNG stated the following views –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) he did not subscribe to the reasons given by the Administration/the Committee that private independent ("PI") KGs should be excluded from the coverage of free KG education; (b) he would only support the provision of free KG education for all eligible children attending HD KGs, as WD/LWD KGs involved the provision of child care services, which should be distinguished from the provision of education services; (c) the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme ("PEVS") should be enhanced to cover all types of KGs; (d) he did not support the provision of rental subsidies to KGs as the historical reasons for this form of support no longer existed; and (e) he did not support the setting up of a mandatory teacher salary scale for KG teachers.. 	

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002437 - 002852	Chairman Mrs Regina IP EDB VC of the Committee	<p>Having regard to the difficulties encountered by some parents in securing a KG place for their children in their resident or neighbouring districts, Mrs IP stressed the need for proper planning of the provision of KG places and improvement in the quality of KG education, instead of the mere provision of financial subsidy to parents.</p> <p>EDB advised that whilst the provision of free KG education was generally supported by parents, it was necessary to delineate its scope. The Committee's initial view was that the Government's subsidy under free KG education should cover the school fees that related to the expenses directly attributable to students' learning and school operation, while other charges collected by KGs for various school items as well as the expenses arising from paid or above-standard services should be borne by parents.</p> <p>On Mrs IP's concern about the appointment of Mrs Betty IP, who had recently retired from her senior government post, as VC of the Committee, EDB said that Mrs Betty IP had been appointed on account of her rich experience and expertise in kindergarten education. Mrs Betty IP was rendering her service to the Committee on a non-remunerated basis. VC of the Committee added that she mainly assisted the Chairman of the Committee in coordinating the work of the Committee and its five subcommittees, and was not involved in the work of EDB.</p>	
002853 - 003305	Chairman Deputy Chairman EDB	<p>The Deputy Chairman sought explanation on how the Administration would propose to support WD and LWD KGs in the context of the implementation of free KG education.</p> <p>EDB advised that –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) an emerging consensus of the Committee was that free KG education should cover HD service as basic provision for all eligible children, taking into consideration the development needs of children aged 3 to 6 as well as overseas practices; (b) it was recognized that HD, WD and LWD KGs played important roles in providing services to cater for the needs of different families; and (c) owing to the different operational needs of HD, WD and LWD KGs, the Committee would further deliberate on how to support these 	

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		different types of services.	
003306 - 003953	Chairman Dr Kenneth CHAN EDB	<p>Dr CHAN sought explanation on the policy on free KG education, the timetable and resources earmarked for implementation of free KG education, as well as the need or otherwise for the introduction of legislation.</p> <p>EDB advised that –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) the Committee would submit a report to EDB in mid-2015 with recommendations on how to practicably implement free KG education; (b) EDB would examine the recommendations and consult the community on the proposed way forward; and (c) after finalizing the way forward, the Administration would earmark the necessary resources and take appropriate steps for implementing free KG education. <p>Dr CHAN urged EDB to actively perform its steering role and take forward the implementation of KG education expeditiously.</p>	
003954 - 004631	Chairman Dr CHIANG Lai-wan EDB	<p>Dr CHIANG enquired about the ultimate goal of free KG education and whether the Government would run any publicly-funded KGs.</p> <p>EDB advised that the objective of free KG education was to deliver quality KG education, while maintaining the flexibility and diversity of the KG sector to cater for the choice and needs of parents. It was expected that suitable measures would also be implemented to support non-Chinese speaking ("NCS") children and children with special educational needs ("SEN").</p> <p>In response to Dr CHIANG's concern whether local PI KGs would be covered under the free KG education policy, EDB said that the issue would be subject to further deliberation by the Committee.</p>	
004632 - 005120	Chairman Dr Helena WONG EDB	Dr WONG said that Members of the Democratic Party supported the implementation of free KG education, and expressed concerns over the following issues –	

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		<p>(a) to enable children to attend KGs in the vicinity of their residence, the Administration should examine the feasibility of co-location of KGs and primary schools. EDB should explore in conjunction with the Housing Authority the availability of KG premises in public housing estates;</p> <p>(b) KG teachers should be remunerated according to a reasonable salary scale. Many KG teachers opposed the disbursement of a lump sum grant ("LSG"), similar to the arrangement for the welfare sector, for the implementation of free KG education;</p> <p>(c) EDB should discuss with the Labour and Welfare Bureau on how to collaborate in the provision of education and child care services and to share the allocation of resources accordingly; and</p> <p>(d) whether all KG students, irrespective of the type of KGs attended by them, could be included under PEVS.</p>	
005121 - 005901	<p>Chairman Dr Fernando CHEUNG EDB VC of the Committee</p>	<p>Dr CHEUNG referred to a recent survey conducted by the Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children and the Hong Kong Institute of Education, which estimated that about 15% of pre-primary children had SEN. However, only about half of these children (between 12 000 to 13 000) had been assessed by relevant government departments/agencies. Noting that the responsibilities for early identification and assessment of pre-primary children with SEN were shared among EDB, the Department of Health, Hospital Authority and Social Welfare Department, Dr CHEUNG was concerned about the excessively long waiting time for assessment and rehabilitation services, and asked how the Administration would manage and allocate appropriate resources for supporting pre-primary children with SEN.</p> <p>EDB and VC of the Committee advised that the Subcommittee on Catering for Student Diversity under the Committee would study issues related to the provision of support for specific groups of KG students, including children with special needs. It was important to provide teachers, parents and KGs with appropriate training on how to support children with special needs.</p>	

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005902 - 010705	Chairman Mr MA Fung-kwok EDB	<p>Noting that the Committee would submit its report to the Administration by mid-2015, Mr MA asked whether further public consultation would be conducted on the subject. He highlighted the need to determine the core or basic services which should be covered by free KG education, and to prioritize resources accordingly.</p> <p>EDB reiterated the initial view of the Committee that government subsidy under free KG education should cover the school fees related to the basic expenses directly attributable to students' learning and school operation. Other charges collected by KGs for various school items as well as the expenses arising from paid or above-standard services should be borne by parents. The above view had taken into a balanced account of factors such as the implications on public resources, parents' choice and financial burden, sustainability and diversity of the KG sector.</p> <p>On whether the funding mode for aided primary and secondary schools could be applied to the KG sector, EDB pointed out that there were noteworthy concerns such as the need to maintain diversity and flexibility in the operation of KGs. If the subvention mode of aided schools was adopted, it might be necessary to set a standardized threshold for an operating class, which might result in packing of classes in the event of under-enrolment. This would create pressure for closure of some very small KGs and a knock-on effect on the stability of the KG teaching force in times of student population drop. There might also be a need to centralize the allocation of KG places to ensure fairness through the creation of KG school nets. This would in turn affect the sector's overall operating flexibility to cope with changes in the number of students in different districts.</p>	
010706 - 011051	Chairman Mr TAM Yiu-chung EDB	<p>Mr TAM said that as reflected by some KG principals and teachers, there was a general consensus on the establishment of a salary scale and qualification framework for KG teachers and principals. Noting that the monthly salaries of teachers working on a WD basis in KGs under PEVS could range from about \$8,300 to over \$71,000, Mr TAM enquired about their average monthly salaries.</p> <p>EDB advised that while there were views in support of a mandatory teacher salary scale for compliance by all KGs, there were also views that the Government should only provide salary ranges for reference of KGs. To facilitate consideration by the Committee, a consultancy study had been commissioned to</p>	

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		examine the human resources requirements of KGs and their remuneration.	
011052 - 011901	Chairman EDB	<p>The Chairman considered that the implementation of free KG education should also result in an overall improvement in the quality of KG education. Hence, there was a need to align the standards and services of all KGs, irrespective of whether they operated on a HD or WD basis.</p> <p>Whilst noting the Committee's view that free KG education should cover HD service as the basic provision for all eligible children, the Chairman was concerned whether free or subsidized WD and LWD KG places would also be provided in the longer-run, given that for historical reasons, WD and LWD KGs had been an integral part of the KG sector providing valuable services for working parents.</p> <p>EDB re-affirmed the services rendered by WD and LWD KGs. The Administration would explore appropriate ways to render support to them. For members' reference, EDB provided the following information on LWD KGs –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) about half of the students attending LWD KGs were in receipt of fee remission; (b) the school fees charged by LWD KGs was generally lower than the weighted average school fees charged by other KGs; and (c) the highest level of school fees charged by LWD KGs was about \$46,000 per student per annum in the 2013-2014 school year. <p>The Chairman requested the Administration to confirm the above information in writing.</p>	EDB was requested to provide the information as stated in paragraph 3(a) of the minutes.
011902 - 012647	Chairman Ms Cyd HO EDB	Ms HO highlighted the tight timeframe within which the Subcommittee had to complete its work. She also queried that in its paper, the Administration had only provided certain information on four of the main subjects being studied by the Subcommittee [LC Paper No. CB(4)87/14-15(01)]. Ms HO considered that members of the Committee and its Subcommittees should also attend future meetings of the Subcommittee, and that the Administration should	

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		<p>address key issues such as premises-related issues more thoroughly in its paper.</p> <p>The Chairman recapitulated that at the last meeting held on 27 October 2014, it was agreed that in the coming few months, the Subcommittee would first focus on the first four subjects on its list of major subjects to be studied. She confirmed that the Subcommittee would study each of the listed subjects in due course.</p>	
012648 - 013158	Chairman Mrs Regina IP EDB VC of the Committee	<p>Mrs IP was doubtful whether the five principles of uniqueness, equity, quality, diversity and sustainability could be achieved under the implementation of free KG education if the Administration merely sought to provide parents with a one-off payment. For the balanced and whole-person development of children, provision of free KG education should not be confined to HD services as currently contemplated by the Committee.</p> <p>VC of the Committee said that –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) the objectives of free KG education would be studied by one of the Sub-committees of the Committee; (b) with reference to the development needs of children as well as local and overseas practices, there was no evidence indicating any significant difference between HD KGs and WD or LWD KGs in fulfilling the objectives of KG education; and (c) to balance the need for services and the prudent use of public funds, consideration could be given to providing free or subsidized WD and LWD KG places on a need basis for children who could meet certain prescribed criteria. <p>EDB said that the funding mode for KGs was subject to further deliberation by the Committee. The provision of free KG education was not merely the provision of enhanced subsidies to parents.</p>	
013159 - 013617	Chairman Dr Kenneth CHAN EDB	Dr CHAN considered that the Administration had not adequately explained how it would propose to take forward free KG education, and appeared to be relying heavily on the work of the Committee.	

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		<p>EDB stressed that the Administration was committed to taking forward the implementation of free KG education. Pending completion of the Committee's study, the Administration had accepted short-term support measures proposed by the Committee. For instance, in the 2013-2014 school year, each KG under PEVS was given a One-off Grant in an amount ranging from \$150,000 to \$250,000 to improve school premises, facilities and learning resources. The voucher subsidy under PEVS would be increased by \$2,500 per year in the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years.</p>	
<p>013618 - 013922</p>	<p>Chairman Deputy Chairman EDB</p>	<p>The Deputy Chairman requested the Administration to provide the consultancy briefs of the three consultancy studies as mentioned in the Administration's paper, and to advise the Subcommittee of the time when the reports of such consultancy studies would be issued.</p> <p>The Deputy Chairman sought clarification on whether the Administration was exploring the feasibility of providing LSG to KGs, and drew the Administration's attention to the drawbacks of this funding mode as manifested in the welfare sector.</p> <p>EDB clarified that the Administration was not aware of any discussion or suggestion of the Committee regarding LSG as a funding mode for free KG education.</p>	<p>EDB was requested to provide the information as stated in paragraph 3(b) of the minutes.</p>
<p>013923 - 014429</p>	<p>Chairman Dr Fernando CHEUNG EDB VC of the Committee</p>	<p>Dr CHEUNG was concerned about the support for NCS children and children with SEN, notably the long waiting time for assessment and receipt of support services.</p> <p>VC of the Committee said that the Committee was aware of the importance of early identification and assessment of children with special needs. It also attached great importance to strengthening teacher training in supporting children with special needs.</p> <p>EDB referred to the Council meeting of 10 December 2014 at which the Secretary for Education and the Secretary for Labour and Welfare had responded to concerns about early assessment and early intervention for children with special needs. They had indicated that where practicable, consideration would be given to strengthening resources in this regard. Both Secretaries also stressed the importance of providing appropriate training to teachers so as to enhance their professional knowledge in identifying</p>	

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		<p>children with special needs.</p> <p>The Chairman reminded members that the issues raised by Dr CHEUNG had been included on the list of subjects to be studied by the Subcommittee. The Chairman requested the Administration to provide, in due course, a detailed paper on the provision of support to NCS students and students with SEN.</p>	<p>EDB was requested to provide the information as stated in paragraph 3(c) of the minutes.</p>
<p>014430 - 014938</p>	<p>Chairman Mr WONG Kwok-hing EDB</p>	<p>Noting that currently, about one-third of serving KG teachers were degree holders, Mr WONG asked whether the Administration would consider gradually raising the entry qualification of KG teachers to degree level in order to enhance the professional capacity of KG teachers.</p> <p>EDB advised that one of the key concerns of the Committee on Professional Development of Teachers and Principals was to enhance KG teachers' professionalism. The entry qualification and professional development pathways of KG teachers would be further examined.</p> <p>In response to Mr WONG's enquiry on the timetable for enhancing KG teachers' professionalism, EDB advised that the Committee would explore the short-, medium-, and long-term development of KG teachers' professionalism.</p>	
<p>014939 - 015158</p>	<p>Chairman EDB</p>	<p>The Chairman sought the Administration's confirmation that it had not precluded the provision of free or subsidized WD and LWD KG places. EDB advised that the Committee would look into practicable ways of supporting the operation of WD and LWD KGs.</p> <p>In response to the Chairman's enquiry on the applicability of the funding mode for aided primary and secondary schools to the KG sector, EDB reiterated its earlier explanation that various requirements might need to be imposed on the KG sector, which might in turn undermine the flexibility and diversity of the sector in providing services to cater for the diverse needs of children.</p> <p>Given the grave concerns about LSG, the Chairman considered that the Administration should not resort to this funding mode to implement free KG education.</p>	

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015159 - 015326	Chairman Mr TAM Yiu-chung EDB	Mr TAM enquired about the course of action after the Administration had received the report from the Committee in mid-2015. EDB advised that it would examine the feasibility of all the recommendations, and conduct further public consultation on the proposed way forward.	
015327 - 015429	Chairman Ms Cyd HO EDB	Ms HO requested the Administration to provide information on how and the direction in which the various stipulated requirements on premises in the Operation Manual for Pre-primary Institutions would be reviewed and revised.	EDB was requested to provide the information as stated in paragraph 3(d) of the minutes.
015430 - 015605	Chairman Deputy Chairman EDB	The Deputy Chairman sought confirmation on the stance of EDB and the Committee on LSG as a funding option, and whether assistance would be provided to WD and LWD KGs in the context of free KG education. EDB reiterated that – (a) it was not aware of any discussion by the Committee on LSG as a funding mode; and (b) WD and LWD KGs played a useful role in meeting certain social needs. After collecting information on their operation, the Committee would consider practicable ways to provide support to them in the delivery of quality KG education.	
015606 - 015943	Chairman EDB Ms Cyd HO Clerk Mr TAM Yiu-chung	The Chairman reminded members that the next meeting of the Subcommittee would be held on 17 January 2015 to receive deputations' views on various issues related to the implementation of free KG education. In reply to Ms HO, the Clerk confirmed that the list of major subjects to be studied by the Subcommittee had been hyperlinked to the Subcommittee's notice on the Internet inviting submissions. Mr TAM said that pending receipt of the Committee's report, the Administration might not be in a position to provide a firm answer to members' queries on key issues such as the provision of financial assistance to WD/LWD KGs. To make the discussion with the Administration more cost-effective, he suggested that	

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		<p>the Subcommittee might wish to re-consider whether it was necessary to hold meetings at very frequent intervals prior to the Committee's publication of its report.</p> <p>Ms HO considered that to facilitate further deliberation, the Subcommittee might wish to seek information from the Administration, such as the different types of KG premises and the distribution of KG student population in different districts.</p>	

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