



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部教育局

Education Bureau

Government Secretariat, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

The People's Republic of China

香港灣仔皇后大道東 213 號胡忠大廈 14 樓 1405 室特殊教育及幼稚園教育分部

Special Education and Kindergarten Education Division, Room 1405, 14/F, Wu Chung House, 213 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai, Hong Kong

本局檔號 Our Ref: EDB(KGSD)/16-1/4  
來函檔號 Your Ref:

電話 Telephone: 3540 7430  
傳真 Fax Line: 3106 0055

16 February 2015

Miss Polly YEUNG  
Clerk to Panel  
Legislative Council Panel on Education  
Legislative Council Complex  
1 Legislative Council Road  
Central  
Hong Kong

Dear Miss Yeung,

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

**Response to deputations' views and concerns on  
issues related to the implementation of  
free kindergarten education at meeting on 17 January 2015**

I refer to your letter dated 29 January 2015 requesting the Administration to provide a written response to the views and concerns raised by deputations. Our response is at the **Annex** for Members' reference.

Yours sincerely,

(Y W Kwong)  
for Secretary for Education

**Response to  
deputations' views and concerns on issues related to the  
implementation of free kindergarten education at  
meeting on 17 January 2015**

Since its formation in April 2013, the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education (the Committee) has been studying, among others, the various issues that are covered in the deputations. Set out below are the current situation as well as the initial views of the Committee regarding these issues.

Policy / proposed scope of free kindergarten (KG) education and the funding mode

2. The considerations and initial views of the Committee are provided in LC Paper No. CB(4)473/14-15(01) for discussion in the Subcommittee's meeting on 10 February 2015. There were very in-depth discussion of issues relating to the scope of free KG education at the said meeting.

Financial assistance for needy families

3. The Government's student finance policy is to ensure that no student would be denied access to education due to lack of means. Currently, non-means tested fee subsidy is provided under the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS)<sup>1</sup> while KG students from needy families who require financial assistance on top of the voucher subsidy can apply for fee remission under the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme (KCFRS).

4. In the 2011/12 school year, the Government introduced a series of enhancement measures to the KCFRS, which include revising the formula for the calculation of fee remission, removing the social needs

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<sup>1</sup> The voucher subsidy under the PEVS for the 2014/15 school year and 2015/16 school year per student per annum is \$20,010 and \$22,510 respectively.

assessment for eligibility for whole-day (WD) rate of fee remission for KG children, and adjusting annually the meal allowance ceiling for KG children with reference to the Consumer Price Index (A). The Committee noted that a review on the means test mechanism of the Student Financial Assistance Agency had been conducted in 2011 and the recommendation of the review was that the income ceiling for full level of assistance should be relaxed so that more eligible applicants could receive full assistance. With this relaxation, families with monthly household income at around 50% of the monthly median household income would become eligible for full assistance and those with monthly household income at around the monthly median household income would become eligible for financial assistance. The recommendation was approved by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council in May 2011 and the implementation was launched in the 2011/12 school year. The relaxed mechanism is applicable to nine financial assistance schemes for students from KG up to post-secondary levels. In the 2013/14 school year, 36 699 KG students benefitted from the KCFRS, representing some 28% of the 131 700 students under PEVS.

5. With a view to providing further assistance to needy families and broadening their choice in respect of KG education, approval was given by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council in February 2014 for the fee remission ceilings under the KCFRS to be lifted from the weighted average to the 75th percentile of the school fees of KGs under the PEVS. This was one of the short-term support measures recommended by the Committee. The fee remission ceilings for half-day (HD) and WD places are \$26,500 and \$40,500 respectively in the 2014/15 school year, representing an increase of about 24% and 17% as compared to \$21,300 and \$34,500 in the 2013/14 school year. In the 2014-15 financial year, the estimated Government expenditure on the KCFRS is \$591.5 million.

6. As set out in LC Paper No. CB(4)473/14-15(01), under the future policy on free KG education, while resources would be given to KGs to provide quality education without the need to charge tuition fees in general, some KGs may charge extra tuition fees for extra rental expenses on top of the rental subsidy, if any, or provision of above-standard services which some parents welcome. To ensure that no children would be deprived of the opportunity to receive quality KG education, the Committee is of the view that the existing KCFRS should

be maintained to provide financial assistance for children from needy families.

7. Moreover, the Committee considers that additional financial support may be necessary for KG students from needy families to defray expenses related to KG education, such as textbooks and other school items. The Committee is of the view that if this is pursued, reference might be made to relevant existing schemes such as KCFRS for setting the eligibility criteria and level of assistance. In this connection, the Committee agrees that monitoring of the fees charged by KGs should be stepped up by measures such as enhancing the transparency of KG operation and reviewing the respective guidelines and regulations for compliance by KGs.

#### Salary and qualifications framework for teachers

8. As set out in LC Paper No. CB(4)473/14-15(01), some members of the Committee are in favor of adopting the salary policy applicable to the aided schools as such is believed to, among others, provide stability to the teaching force. Notwithstanding that, members are given to understand that the salary-related practices cannot be applied to KGs in isolation. Specifically, the salary-related practices are part and parcel of the standardized funding mode for aided schools. The said funding mode contains several inter-connected components such as approval of operating classes and teacher entitlement, and is subject to a basket of control measures under the Government's prudent and balanced planning of school places operated through centralized school place allocation systems. For instance, the approval of class structure by EDB will require setting of class threshold, and would result in class packing and teacher redundancy. There might be 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.

9. That notwithstanding, the Committee recognizes that KGs should offer competitive remuneration and a career ladder so as to retain/attract quality teachers and maintain a stable teaching force for providing quality KG education. While some members favor setting mandatory salary scales for teachers and principals for compliance by all KGs, there are alternative views that salary ranges should be provided for

KGs' reference only. Some members are of the view that KGs should have the discretion to determine the remuneration of their teaching staff in accordance with their school-based mechanism, which should be open, transparent and with checks and balances. They consider that respecting KGs' discretion in teachers and principals' remuneration is in line with the principle of maintaining the flexibility and diversity of the KG sector. As regards the rank structure of KG teachers, some members of the Committee are of the view that senior teacher posts should be established, and for KGs of a larger scale, there should also be vice-principal posts to assist the principals in overseeing the operation of the KGs.

10. The Committee is fully aware of the sector's concern about adopting the lump-sum grant mode for KG education, in particular the worry that KGs might not have sufficient funding to meet expenses on staff salaries and be reluctant to employ experienced teachers, which will have negative impact on the quality of education. The Committee would further deliberate on these issues taking into consideration the recommendations of the consultant on human resources requirements and salary structure.

#### Professional development and upgrading

11. The Committee shares the view that to further enhance the professionalism of KG educators and keep them abreast of the latest trends in KG education, a continuous professional development (CPD) policy should be developed for the sector. Similar to the existing CPD policy for the primary and secondary school personnel, the CPD policy for the KG teachers and principals should be formulated on the basis of a teacher competencies framework (TCF) and a principal competencies framework (PCF) to be developed. Moreover, the Committee is of the view that the Certification Course for KG principals should be revised with changes in course requirement, admission criteria and validity period, etc. to further promote the effectiveness of school leadership in the sector.

12. In the 2013/14 school year, about 30% of the teachers (including principals) in local KGs hold Bachelor Degree in Early Childhood Education (BEd(ECE)). The Committee generally agrees that in the long run, the Government should consider raising the entry qualification of

KG teachers to degree level. As to whether a percentage of degree holders in each KG should be set, the Committee will need to further deliberate taking into consideration the recommendations of the consultant on human resources requirements and salary structure.

### Manpower planning

13. At present, KGs under the PEVS are required to employ sufficient teachers with the Certificate in Early Childhood Education (C(ECE)) qualification based on the teacher-to-student ratio of 1:15. The Committee has discussed and agreed that the teacher-to-student ratio should be improved to enhance quality of KG education. The consultant on human resources requirements and remuneration will study the manpower needs of KGs, including both teaching and non-teaching staff. The Committee would further deliberate on this issue taking into consideration the recommendations of the consultant.

### Support for students with special educational needs ("SEN") and non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students

14. The Committee notes that the Government has been providing various services for children with developmental disorders through the collaborative efforts of various departments, including Department of Health (DH), Hospital Authority (HA), Social Welfare Department (SWD) and EDB. Specifically, DH and HA arrange assessment, treatment and referral of rehabilitation services for children with developmental disorders. SWD provides pre-school rehabilitation services for children with disabilities, from birth to the age of 6 years, and helps their families meet their special needs. EDB provides training for KG teachers and school-based support services for KGs to enhance their capacity in catering for the students' diverse learning needs.

15. The Committee fully appreciates that timely assistance should be provided for students diagnosed to have special needs and holds the view that the Government should consider short, medium and long term measures to enhance the support for the KG students with special needs, their parents and the KGs they are attending. It is worth noting that pre-school children progress rapidly in their early years and their pace of

development may vary. It is natural that some children may excel in certain areas but have deficiencies in other areas. Therefore in most cases, it may not be advisable to label a young child with some delay in development as having special needs. It is important to enhance KG teachers' understanding of the children's development needs and to empower them to cater for learner diversity. To achieve this, the Committee agrees that a teacher professional development framework should be introduced for KG teachers.

16. With regard to the support for NCS children, the Committee recognises the importance of an integrated, naturalistic and holistic approach whereby KGs need to create a context-appropriate learning environment and provide students with authentic, meaningful and developmentally appropriate learning experiences. Moreover, the communication with the parents of NCS students and home-school cooperation should be enhanced so as to facilitate the learning of the students. There are views that the Government should consider providing additional resources for KGs so as to provide extra support for the students and their parents. If this is accepted by the government, reference might be made to the number of NCS students admitted by the KG and other relevant staffing-related considerations in determining the eligibility and amount of the grant.

#### Premises-related issues

17. The Committee is of the view that the physical accommodation and facilities of KGs should be enhanced in order to provide a more conducive environment for children's learning and development. In this regard, the Committee notes the need to review the Operation Manual for Pre-primary Institutions to suit contemporary needs. Also, for the sustainable development of KG education, the Committee is of the view that the Government should consider possible measures to ensure a stable supply of quality KG premises in the long run. Some members have suggested that the Government should explore increasing government-owned KG premises in public housing estates, study the feasibility of similar arrangements in private housing estates as well as the possibility of co-location of KGs and primary schools as long-term measures. In the meantime, the Committee considers that rental subsidy may be provided for KGs to help them meet rental expenses. To ensure proper use of

public funds and to forestall the unintended effect of driving up the rental levels of KG premises, there are views that KGs should be required to meet certain criteria in order to be eligible for the subsidy and there should be a ceiling on the amount of subsidy for each eligible KG. The issues of KG premises and rentals will be further deliberated taking into consideration the recommendations of the respective consultants.

### Supply of and demand for KG places

18. At present, should there be any new public housing estates or large scale residential development projects, the Planning Department (PlanD) will reserve sites for educational services upon the advice of the Education Bureau (EDB), taking into account the requirement stipulated in the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines<sup>2</sup>. The PlanD will then follow up with the Housing Department (HD) or the private developer of including the required educational services in the proposed development. For available KG premises in public housing estates, the EDB will act on request of HD and conduct school allocation exercise (SAE) if the demand and supply of KG places in the locality of the KG premises warrants setting up a new KG. The SAE, if conducted, is opened to all KG operators including existing and new one for establishment of new KG or reprovisioning of KGs either in dilapidated condition or in area with diminishing population and demand for KG places. As for private development, the developer will rent the KG premises to operators on its own.

19. The Committee shares the view that the existing planning standards for WD KG places should be reviewed for establishing KGs in housing estates and large-scale private development projects to increase the provision of such places to meet the increasing demand.

### Local research on early childhood education and transition from KG to primary education

20. The Committee acknowledges that more local research studies about KG education should be conducted to keep the sector abreast of the

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<sup>2</sup> According to the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines, the standard for nursery classes and kindergartens should be 730 half-day and 250 full-day places for every 1 000 children in the age group of 3 to under 6.



latest trends in child development, children's learning needs and KG education development all over the world. The Committee has deliberated on possible research topics and suggested topics such as transition to primary education, longitudinal studies on children's learning, etc.

21. The Committee acknowledges that the interface between KG and primary education has room for enhancement. To help children adapt to the changes that they will face in entering primary schools, the Committee has discussed in detail various strategies regarding transition from KG to primary school. Specifically, the Committee is of the view that a transition policy should be put in place at both KG and primary school levels so as to systematically support children in their transition to primary one. Tertiary institutions might consider reviewing their pre-service teacher training programmes in order to better prepare prospective KG and primary school teachers for handling the issue at both levels. To help primary schools better understand the abilities of the children they admit, some learning outcomes, emphasizing the personal qualities of children (e.g. self-care skills, social skills, etc.) could be set for KG graduates. The Committee also considers that parent education is important to help parents develop realistic and positive expectation of children as they transit to primary one.

Education Bureau  
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