

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

The policy and proposed scope of free kindergarten education

(a) Prevailing practices adopted by different jurisdictions in the provision of kindergarten (KG) services

1. It is generally observed that internationally, the provision for KG (or early childhood education (ECE) in some other jurisdictions) services is becoming a growing priority, and has received increased policy attention. The service providers are multiple, including government, private, community and non-governmental organisations. There are also diverse arrangements in the mode of service such as family day care homes, centre-based programmes and institutional KG education services delivered in half-day (HD) and/or whole-day (WD) modes with some also offering after-school or holiday care. The services may follow school term arrangements or open all year round.

2. In terms of the mode of subsidy, the practices vary across countries. Some may set up public institutions, some provide subsidies to service providers or directly to parents. For needy families, additional assistance may be provided in the form of fee reductions, exemptions, tax relief, allowances or vouchers to reduce or offset the costs.

3. The duration of subsidised ECE services also differs across countries. For example, children over three in England are entitled to 15 hours free ECE services a week for 38 weeks of the year¹. Those in Wales and Northern Ireland are entitled to 12.5 hours free ECE services a week for 38 weeks of the year. Those in Scotland are entitled to around 16 hours of free ECE services a week during the school term. In Finland, the government provides free pre-school classes to all six-year-old children which are conducted in half-day mode for around 4 hours a day. Similarly, in Sweden, the government offers all children at six a place in pre-school classes which comprise a minimum of 525 hours per year free. In Victoria, Australia, 15 hours of subsidised ECE

¹ In England, plans are being drawn to provide a total of 30 hours of free childcare entitlement per week for working parents of three- and four-year-olds from September 2017, with pilots in some areas from September 2016.

services per week is provided for children during the year before compulsory education, usually at the age of four or five. In Korea, children aged three to five, who attend ECE programmes that implement Nuri Curriculum, are entitled to subsidised ECE services for three to five hours per day. In Taiwan, the government provides fixed amount of subsidy for parents to defray school fees, regardless of the duration of the ECE programmes the children attend. Parents need to pay extra if they require longer hours of services.

4. In all, while different jurisdictions have different practices having regard to their specific circumstances, it is not a common practice internationally to provide free WD KG services for all children from three to six years of age.

- (b) Detailed justifications on why HD KG service was considered adequate in meeting the objectives of KG education
- (c) The respective roles and functions performed by HD, WD and long WD (LWD) KGs with a detailed analysis

5. The Curriculum Development Council issued the *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum* (the Guide) in 2006 to provide guidance on all-round development for children in the domains of ethics, intellect, physique, social skills and aesthetics. In the Guide, it stipulates that the design of the curriculum should be child-centred, comprehensive and balanced, and should adopt a play-based strategy. Specifically, play activities should be incorporated into different learning areas through an integrated approach so that children may participate actively in a self-driven and relaxed manner for effective learning. The recommended activities and schedules for HD and WD KGs have also been set out (as attached at the **Appendix**) in the Guide for reference of KGs. Basically, besides afternoon nap time, all teaching and learning components should be essentially covered by both the HD and WD curriculum, though the latter might have more time for extended activities.

6. KGs should provide children with care and appropriate learning opportunities which cater for children's developmental needs and potential, in order to stimulate their interest in learning and foster a balanced development in ethical, intellectual, physical, social and aesthetic aspects. To foster children's whole person development, KGs should develop an integrated school curriculum across the six learning areas, namely Physical Fitness and Health, Language, Early Mathematics, Science and Technology, Self and

Society and Arts, to achieve the above developmental objectives for young children.

7. An effective KG programme must be geared to the development of young children. The National Association for the Education of Young Children calls practitioners for adopting “developmentally appropriate practices” to bring about effective children’s learning. HD KG in this regard is better suited for children aged three to six for their short attention span and declining interest in a single setting. HD KG makes room for more parental involvement in child nurturing, which is proven to be a significant contribution to children’s whole-person development. In the local context, the school inspections conducted by Education Bureau (EDB) found that the majority of KGs, whether in HD or WD mode, could fully utilise their school hours, with reference to the recommendations set out in the Guide, to provide a desirable environment that is conducive to the balanced development of children in various aspects.

8. We believe that an effective school programme delivered in a HD mode according to the needs of children and school context should be adequate to achieve the education objectives as stipulated in the Guide.

9. We may need to note that children’s development exhibits specific patterns and characteristics, and their learning and growth are mainly influenced by family, school and society. Among the three, family is of prime importance in the formation and development of children’s personality, self-image and positive values and attitudes. Attendance in HD KGs allows children to have sufficient time to learn and grow, under the guidance from teachers with rich interaction among peers in a school setting, and at the same time, establish secure attachment with their parents or carers and learn through their life experiences in authentic contexts at home and in the society. Various researches have also shown that education both at home and at school plays a critical role in educating and socialising children. The findings of relevant researches have been quoted in Chapter 2 of the Report of the Committee on Free KG Education.

10. WD KGs operate under the same curriculum goals as HD KGs to lay the foundation for life-long learning and whole person development in children. With longer school hours, in addition to the provision of meal time and afternoon nap, children may have more time for free play and extended activities in KG contexts. However, family time for children’s healthy and

all-round development (including free play at home) will be reduced. As children in HD and WD KGs are provided with the same kinds of educational experiences and care services, the operation of WD KGs is mainly to address the practical needs of some families and working parents or to serve as a choice to some parents with diversified circumstantial considerations and specific needs.

11. Historically, child care centres (CCCs) were set up as a welfare service under the auspice of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) for children from low-income families with social need. These CCCs, comprising day nurseries (DNs) for children aged two to six and day crèches (DCs) for infants and toddlers up to the age of two, provided full-day programmes at all levels from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm, Monday to Friday; 8:00 am to 1:00 pm on Saturday; during school holidays and inclement weather including Typhoon Cyclone Signal No. 3 or Red Rainstorm Warning Signal. However, due to social changes in the community such as an increasing number of working mothers, CCCs are no longer restricted to children from low-income families. In the Education Commission Report (Report) No.2 published in 1986, it was pointed out that the difference in practice between HD and WD KGs lay in the additional care offered by WD programmes, as reflected by their longer operating hours and fewer holidays.² After the harmonisation of pre-primary services with effect from the 2005/06 school year, the aided DN and DN-cum-DCs were also registered as KGs in order to continue to serve children aged three to six, with the service hours remaining unchanged. These former aided DN and DN-cum-DCs under SWD are now commonly known as “LWD” KGs which are under the administration and regulatory control of EDB. These LWD KGs provide KG education as other WD KGs but with longer service hours to meet the different needs of the families.

12. In gist, children in LWD KGs will receive the same kinds of educational experiences and care services as those in WD KGs during school hours and no structured learning and teaching activities will be arranged after normal school hours. LWD KGs serve to cater for the need of parents of different background or specific needs, in particular those having long working hours.

² *Education Commission Report No.2.* (1986). Education Commission, p.40

Recommended Activities and Schedules³

Activities	Appropriate Time Allocation (minutes)	
	Full-day	Half-day
Welcoming / Whole-class Activities (health inspections, conversation and sharing of everyday life experiences)	15-30	15-30
Free Choice Activities (e.g. play involving construction, creation, exploration, manipulation, social interaction and language)	95-145	75-95
Physical Fitness/Music/Arts	60-105	45-60
*Toilet Time	*40-60	*20-30
Meals (tidying up, lunch time, snack time)	60	15-20
**Afternoon Nap / Break	*80-105	-
Tidying-up Activities and Getting Ready to Go Home (conclusion of the day's activities, conservation and nursery rhymes)	20-30	10-15

* This can be adjusted based on the needs of specific children and the toilet facilities in an institution.

** Soft music or story-telling may help children fall asleep. If children cannot fall asleep, or wake up earlier than expected, teachers may arrange “quiet” activities for them instead of forcing them to take a short nap.

³ See the *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum* (2006), p. 49