

For information on
10 February 2015

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Subcommittee to Study the Implementation of Free Kindergarten Education

Support for Different Modes of Kindergarten Services

Purpose

This paper provides the present situation and the initial views of the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education (the Committee) relating to the support for different modes of kindergarten (KG) services.

Present Situation

2. At present, KGs offer diversified services, with some classes operating on a half day (HD) basis (around 3 to 3.5 hours per day) and some on a whole day (WD) basis (around 7 to 7.5 hours per day, including time for lunch and afternoon nap). A considerable number of KGs are operating both HD and WD classes in the same premises. In the 2013/14 school year, out of 759 local non-profit-making (NPM) KGs, 139 KGs (18%) and 233 KGs (31%) are operating solely HD and WD classes respectively while the remaining 387 KGs (51%) operating both HD and WD classes. 95 587 students attended HD classes whereas 44 121 students attended WD classes (including 21 451 students in long whole day (LWD) KGs) in local NPM KGs. Of those KGs with WD classes, 246 are LWD KGs which are former aided child care centres (FACs) under the Social Welfare Department operating longer service hours (around 10 hours per day and five and a half days per week), some of which also offer ancillary services¹.

¹ The ancillary services include (i) extended hours service (EHS); (ii) occasional child care service (OCCS) and (iii) integrated programme (IP). EHS is provided for children aged below 6 to meet the social needs of families and working parents. OCCS is provided on a full-day, half-day or two-hour sessional basis for children aged below 6 whose parents or carers have sudden engagements or various commitments. IP provides training and care for mildly disabled children aged 2 to 6 with a view to facilitating their future integration into the mainstream education system and the society. Currently, there are 97, 204 and 208 LWD KGs providing EHS, OCCS and IP respectively.

3. The Government has introduced the Pre-primary Voucher Scheme (PEVS) since 2007, under which non-means-tested subsidy is provided for all eligible children in KGs joining the PEVS to help parents defray expenditure on KG education for their children. In addition, means-tested fee remission is available for children from needy families. These aim to ensure that no children will be deprived of the opportunity to receive KG education due to lack of means. Among those students attending WD classes, 50% of those in LWD KGs received fee remission, while 55% of those in non-LWD KGs received fee remission.

4. The weighted average school fees (WAF) for WD and HD classes charged by LWD KGs as compared to those in other local NPM KGs in the 2013/14 school year are tabulated below:

	WAF charged by LWD KGs	WAF charged by other local NPM KGs
HD classes	\$20,776	\$22,430
WD classes	\$34,863	\$35,598

5. In the 2014/15 school year, the voucher subsidy has been raised to \$20,010 per student per annum (pspa), whereas the fee remission ceilings for HD and WD classes have been increased to \$26,500 and \$40,500 pspa respectively. All the LWD KGs (or FACs) are under PEVS. It is noteworthy that on top of the resources under the PEVS, LWD KGs have also been receiving other funding from the Government, including reimbursement of rent, rates and Government rent, as well as reimbursement of management fee and air-conditioning charges for individual LWD KGs. LWD KGs can also apply for funds under the Lotteries Fund via SWD to meet non-recurrent expenditure such as renovation and purchase of furniture and equipment.

6. In the 2014-15 financial year, the estimated Government expenditure on the PEVS and other recurrent expenditures on KG education is estimated at around \$3,500 million, with breakdown as follows:

	(\$ million) (Estimate)
PEVS	2,604.3
Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme (KCFRS)	591.5
Refund of rent, rates and government rent*	237.2
Principal and teacher training	9.2

* In the 2013/14 school year, 394 out of 759 local NPM KGs are provided with rental reimbursement.

7. Apart from resources, EDB has also been providing professional support for KGs with a view to enhancing the quality of KG education. For instance, EDB has been offering on a regular basis a variety of training programmes to help KGs deliver the curriculum effectively for the development and learning of children. School-based support services are also provided for KGs to enhance teachers' capacities in curriculum development and implementation to cater for children's learning needs. Furthermore, expertise from the tertiary sector has been solicited through the "University-School Support Programmes" to provide intensive on-site support for KGs.

8. As parents play an important role in the healthy development of children at young age, EDB has been organizing seminars for parents with children of KG age every year with a view to helping parents understand the developmental needs of their children. The themes of parent seminars in the past three years include "Winning at the Starting Point?" that helps parents understand the developmental needs of children to avoid imposing improper pressure on them; and "Transition to Primary" that helps parents support their children to facilitate their smooth transition to Primary One. The EDB also publishes and distributes booklets to all KG parents to introduce ways to provide children with a pleasurable and diversified life experience that meets their developmental needs. Furthermore, the EDB provides resources for KGs to organize home-school co-operation activities to promote parent participation in school activities and to support their children in learning.

The Committee's Initial Views

9. The Committee fully recognizes the contributions of HD, WD and LWD KGs in providing education and care services for KG students.

While the Committee has an emerging consensus that free KG education should cover HD services as basic provision for all eligible children having regard to the development needs of the children as well as overseas practices, it acknowledges that some families may need WD or LWD services. It is important to distinguish between availability of services (provision of school places) and subsidy (use of taxpayers' money).

10. In terms of provision of WD/LWD places, the Committee will study ways to encourage KGs to provide more WD or LWD services so as to support working parents. In this connection, it is noted that some deputations commented in the meeting on 17 January 2015 that the enrolment rate of children in WD/LWD KGs in Hong Kong is lower than some other European countries. We wish to point out that the social context and actual circumstances of different countries vary, and comparing the percentages of children receiving WD/LWD KG services across countries might not be meaningful.

11. With regard to the provision of additional funding support to facilitate parents to receive WD/LWD service, the Committee is aware that HD, WD and LWD KGs have different operational needs due to their different operating hours, services provided and manpower requirements. The Committee will further deliberate on the issue, taking into consideration the present situation as well as the recommendations of the consultant on the manpower requirements in KGs and their remuneration, details of which will be available later this year.

12. To facilitate needy families to receive WD/LWD services, the Committee is of the view that the existing fee remission scheme should continue. That notwithstanding, it is worth noting from the statistics as quoted in paragraphs 3 and 4 above that there is at present no evidence to show that children attending LWD KGs are more in need of financial support as compared to other WD KGs.

Views Sought

13. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Education Bureau
February 2015