

For information on  
16 March 2015

## **Panel on Education**

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

#### **Issues related to manpower requirements, salary and teacher professionalism**

#### **Purpose**

This paper provides the present situation and the initial views of the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education (the Committee) on the issues related to manpower requirements, salary and teacher professionalism.

#### **Present Situation**

##### *Manpower Requirements*

2. At present, the standard teacher-to-student ratio in kindergartens (KGs) is 1:15<sup>1</sup> (including the principal). In actual circumstances, KGs may employ additional teaching staff to arrange different learning activities and for some, the enrolment is far below the classroom capacity particularly in the afternoon session. Hence, the actual teacher-to-student ratios of KGs vary. KGs may also employ teaching assistants to provide support in administrative work and class activities.

3. As for non-teaching staff, there are currently no specific manpower requirements or guidelines. Typically, the non-teaching staff in KGs includes clerks for handling school administrative work and janitor staff for cleaning and other general duties. For whole-day (WD)/ long whole-day (LWD) KGs with a kitchen, KGs will also employ cook(s) to prepare meal for the students.

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<sup>1</sup> This teacher-to-student ratio is the prevailing standard and was first set out in Education Bureau Circular No. 26/2003 on “Improved Teacher to Pupil Ratio in Kindergarten”.

## *Staff Salary*

4. Under the former Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Subsidy Scheme, KGs were required to pay teachers according to the Recommended Normative Salary Scale (RNSS). Upon the introduction of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS), the RNSS was abolished so as to allow all KGs to have full discretion in determining the salaries for teachers and awarding increments to them in consideration of their experience and performance, etc. It is observed that KGs have different school-based arrangements for determining their teachers' salaries. Some KGs follow basically RNSS; some offer remuneration and salary adjustments based on school-based criteria such as performance and qualifications, etc. According to the annual teacher survey conducted in September 2014, the monthly salaries of teachers working full-time<sup>2</sup> in KGs under PEVS ranged from about \$8,900 to over \$70,500. The average salary of teachers was about \$18,800.

## *Teacher Professionalism*

5. Before the implementation of PEVS, all pre-primary principals were required to possess a Certificate in Early Childhood Education (C(ECE)) qualification, and teachers a Qualified Kindergarten Teacher status. To upgrade the professionalism of pre-primary education practitioners, the Education Bureau (EDB) announced new policy targets upon the introduction of PEVS. In gist, newly-appointed KG principals must have a degree in early childhood education (BEd(ECE)) or equivalent, with at least one-year relevant post-qualification experience. Also, KGs are required to employ sufficient number of teachers possessing the C(ECE) qualifications based on the ratio of 1:15.

6. In the 2013/14 school year, the number of teachers holding or pursuing C(ECE) in local KGs account for about 97% of all serving KG teachers. Principals and teachers with BEd(ECE) qualification account for 30% of the teaching force.

7. Apart from the above-mentioned enhanced qualification requirements, EDB has been providing in-service professional

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<sup>2</sup> Full-time teachers refer to those working (including teaching, lesson preparation and administrative duties) in the kindergarten for 6 hours or above on every normal school day.

development programmes for serving KG principals and teachers with a view to equipping/ updating them with skills and knowledge in curriculum planning, school administration and management, child development, effective teaching and learning, catering for learner diversity and school self-evaluation, etc. Non-local training programmes are also organized for KG principals and teachers to provide opportunity to widen their exposure through visits and professional sharing with KG professionals of the mainland and other countries.

8. Moreover, school-based support services are provided for KGs to enhance teachers' capacities in curriculum development and implementation to cater for children's learning needs. Expertise from the tertiary sector has also been solicited through the "University-School Support Programmes" to provide intensive on-site support for KGs.

### **The Committee's Deliberation and Views**

9. The Committee has critically examined various issues relating to KGs' manpower requirements, remuneration and professional development of KG teachers. A consultancy has been commissioned to study and make recommendations to the Committee by end March 2015 on the requirements for teaching and non-teaching staff in KGs and their remuneration. To be more specific, the recommendations of the consultant will cover typical KG hierarchy with core job duties and requirements, proposed career path for teaching positions, staffing ratios of both teaching and non-teaching positions, as well as options on the funding arrangements. The initial views of the Committee based on the relevant information available so far are set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

#### *Manpower Requirements and Career Path*

10. The Committee is of the view that to support the delivery of high quality KG education, the teacher-to-student ratio should be improved to create more capacity for teachers, and a career ladder should be in place to attract talents and maintain a stable teaching force. There is an emerging consensus that the principal should be excluded from the 1:15 ratio as KG principals should devote their time fully to the administration and management as well as day-to-day operation of the KG. There are also views that funds should be available for KGs to employ more

teachers on top of the 1:15 ratio for enhancing the curriculum, better supporting the diverse needs of the students, undertaking professional development, etc.

11. As for the staff structure, there are views that a typical KG should be staffed with a principal, senior teachers, class teachers, clerical staff and janitor. There are also views that large scale KGs should have a vice-principal to assist the principal in overseeing the management matters. As for senior teachers, they should take up, apart from teaching duties, responsibilities such as curriculum development, serving as mentor for class teachers and coordinating the support for students with diverse learning and development needs. For WD/LWD KGs with a kitchen, a cook should also be available, though very small scale KGs may not need a full-time cook.

12. The Committee appreciates that the manpower requirements of half-day, WD and LWD KGs are different. It will make reference to the consultant's recommendations and propose how additional support could be provided for WD and LWD KGs so as to encourage them to offer more full-day services to cater for the needs of working parents.

#### *Qualification, Salary Framework and Teacher Professionalism*

13. There has been detailed discussion on the qualification requirements for KG teachers, senior teachers, vice-principals (if any) and principals. There are views that C(ECE) should continue to be the minimum requirement for class teachers, while some are of the view that all new KG teachers should be degree-holders. Those holding the former view consider that graduates from C(ECE) programmes have proved to be competent in delivering quality services, and making it mandatory for upgrading serving teachers to degree level will create undue pressure on the serving teachers. Those in favor of setting the degree requirement opine that it will ensure professionalism among teachers and attract high quality incumbents to the KG profession. Nevertheless, members appreciate that various teacher education institutions (TEIs) are currently offering C(ECE) programmes on a yearly basis with hundreds of graduates, who are highly regarded by KGs, entering the profession. KGs treasure the new blood in the sector. Any change of the existing policy should not jeopardize the career

prospect of C(ECE) prospective graduates who are receiving training at the TEIs. Though there is no consensus on requiring all KG teachers or senior teachers to be degree-holders or whether a percentage of degree holders for each KG should be set, members agree that it is of paramount importance that all teachers should seek to keep themselves abreast of latest KG education developments through their continuous professional development. The Committee holds the initial view that in the long run, the Government should consider the possibility of raising the entry qualification of KG teachers to degree level. There is also an emerging view that for appointment/ promotion to senior teachers, priority might be given to degree holders. As for vice-principals, they should be degree holders as they are generally considered the successor of the principal who must possess a degree.

14. As for the salary framework for KG teachers, the Committee agrees in principle that competitive remuneration should be offered to attract and retain talents. As set out in the LC Paper No. CB(4)538/14-15(01), some members favor setting mandatory salary scales for teachers and principals for compliance by all KGs, while there are other views that salary ranges should be provided for KGs' reference only. Some members consider 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 balance. 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. The consultant will make recommendations on the salary structure for KGs, taking into consideration factors such as the job duties and accountability of different positions in KGs, pay benchmarking against the general market (i.e. to compare the relative job requirements of those core KG teaching and non-teaching positions against comparable levels of positions in the general market) and key design principles for salary structure as appropriate.

15. Some members of the Committee are in favor of KGs adopting the salary-related policy and practices applicable to aided schools as such is believed to, among others, provide stability to the teaching force. Notwithstanding this, members are given to understand that such salary-related policy and 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 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. Also, the standardized funding mode is premised on a system to centralize the allocation of places to ensure fairness through the creation of school nets. If such is adopted in the KG sector, this will inevitably affect the sector's overall operating flexibility to cope with the rise and fall of students in different districts. Besides, unlike the aided schools that are operated mainly in government-owned or rental-free private lands, the operation of KG in commercial premises will render the planning of school places in a holistic manner like aided schools not applicable.

16. The Committee appreciates the benefits of setting a pay range for each position in a KG. Doing so will provide reference for reasonable salary for KG staff, while at the same time allow flexibility for the KG management to decide on their staff remuneration, taking into account staff performance, job duties, qualification, training and special skills, and relevant working experience, etc. This will be conducive to maintaining the diversity and vibrancy of the KG sector. This notwithstanding, the Committee is fully aware that the concern of KG teachers about their qualifications and experience not being recognized by KGs in determining their remuneration should be properly addressed. In this regard, the Committee is of the view that specific implementation guidelines and clear rules should be set to ensure appropriate use of government fund for KG staff salary. The issue is subject to further deliberation, taking into consideration the consultant's recommendations.

17. For continuous professional development, the Committee is of the initial view that the Government can formulate a continuous professional development (CPD) policy for the sector in order to enhance the professional capacity of KG principals and teachers. The CPD

policy for KG teachers and principals can be formulated on the basis of a teacher competencies framework and a principal competencies framework to be developed.

18. Moreover, the Committee is of the preliminary view that the Certification Course for KG principals can be revised with changes in course requirement, admission criteria and validity period, etc. to further promote the effectiveness of school leadership in the sector.

### **Views Sought**

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

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