

For information on
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Panel on Education

Subcommittee to Study the Implementation of Free Kindergarten Education

Support for Non-Chinese Speaking Students and Students with Special Needs in Kindergartens

Purpose

This paper sets out the present situation and the initial views of the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education (the Committee) relating to the support for non-Chinese speaking (NCS) children¹ and children with special needs studying in kindergartens (KGs).

Support for non-Chinese speaking children in KGs

Present Situation

2. The Education Bureau (EDB) is committed to encouraging and supporting NCS students' integration into the community, including facilitating their early adaptation to the local education system and mastery of the Chinese language. NCS parents are encouraged to send their children to KGs offering local curriculum for their early exposure to an immersed Chinese environment. In KGs offering local curriculum, the curriculum design is underpinned by an integrated approach whereby KGs should create a language-rich environment in which children, including NCS children, can develop their language abilities through try-outs, exploration and interaction. The teaching contents and pace would be adapted according to children's different abilities and needs. According to our observation, individual KGs provide support for NCS students through various measures, e.g. effective use of group learning time to promote close peer interaction among NCS students and local

¹ For the planning of education support measures, children whose spoken language at home is not Chinese are broadly categorized as NCS children.

students, telling stories with the support of picture cues and dramatized actions, emphasizing the linguistic features of Chinese language, etc.

3. With the implementation of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS), eligible NCS students, like the other local students, receive non-means-tested voucher subsidy to receive KG education. Those from families with financial needs may also apply for fee remission under the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme (KCFRS). In the 2014/15 school year, about 7 000 NCS students are studying in local KGs, of whom about 5 000 (over 70%) are in PEVS KGs.

4. As advised by the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) and with funding from the Language Fund, district-based programmes for NCS children aged 3 to 9 have been organized in collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in districts with a greater concentration of NCS students. The programmes aim to motivate NCS students to learn the Chinese language through fun activities such as games, creative art, etc, so as to complement the effort of KGs. Besides, the Quality Education Fund (QEF) finances projects for the promotion of quality school education in Hong Kong and supports worthwhile non-profit-making initiatives within the ambit of school education. Currently, KGs can apply for QEF projects under the priority themes of “Promoting Whole Child Development in KG Education”, “Catering for Learners’ Diversity” and “Support for Students with Diverse Needs” to address the NCS students’ needs on physical, cognitive, personal, intellectual, social and aesthetic aspects; and to create a caring and inclusive environment or strategy conducive to quality education to cater for learners’ diversity.

5. On teacher empowerment, the existing recognized KG teacher training programmes on early children education² offers a core domain of catering for children with diverse needs. Teachers are equipped with the basic knowledge and skills to cater for learner diversity, including the needs of NCS students. Teachers’ capability of addressing the learning needs of NCS students is also enhanced through professional development

2 The programmes are Certificate Course in Early Childhood Education, Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education and Postgraduate Diploma in Early Childhood Education.

programmes organized by EDB. In the 2014/15 school year, 11 seminars/workshops on catering for young children's diverse learning needs, including NCS students' learning needs, have been organized for KG principals and teachers.

6. In order to help parents of different ethnic groups understand the education services available and how to support their children, EDB has produced various information materials in different ethnic languages, including an information package on school education in Hong Kong, important education policies and related education services for NCS parents, a booklet on *Helping Your Children of Kindergarten Age*, leaflets on PEVS and admission arrangements to KG as well as KCFRS. These information materials are distributed through schools, District Offices of Home Affairs Department, Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs), regional education offices (REO), etc. To help parents make an informed choice of KG for their children, EDB also issues the Profile of Kindergartens and Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres (KG Profile) annually with essential information about individual KGs, including their approved school fees, number of teaching staff and their qualifications, teacher-pupil ratio, the curriculum, quality review results and reports, if any, school facilities, and any additional charges for school items. The KG Profile in bilingual form can be accessed on the EDB website.

7. In addition to EDB's support, different government departments also provide services for ethnic minorities (EMs) under their respective policies and purview. For example, the Home Affairs Department has commissioned NGOs to run six support service centres for EMs and two sub-centres³ to provide various tailor-made learning classes, counseling and referral services, integration programmes and interpretation services for EMs to facilitate their integration into the community.

Deliberations and Views of the Committee

8. The Committee recognizes that KGs need to create a context-apt learning environment and provide students with authentic, meaningful and developmentally appropriate learning experiences. In this connection, the

³ The six support service centres for EMs are located in Wan Chai, Yau Tsim Mong, Kwun Tong, Kwai Tsing, Yuen Long and Tuen Mun, and the two sub-centres in Sham Shui Po and Tung Chung.

Committee is of the view that teachers' professional knowledge and pedagogical skills on catering for the learning differences of NCS students should be further enhanced. The Committee opines that the school-based support services could be strengthened to help KGs build up the expertise on facilitating NCS students' learning of the Chinese language for a smooth transition to primary schools. The experience gained should be shared with other KGs through various professional development activities. Effective learning and teaching strategies as well as resources could also be developed for dissemination to all KGs.

9. The Committee notes that EDB has been providing professional support for KGs to help them cater for the learning needs of their NCS students such as the University-School Support Programme project on the theme of learning and teaching of Chinese for NCS children, and on-going intensive onsite support services provided by EDB. The Committee opines that these support services should continue and be enhanced.

10. The Committee also notes that with the injection of \$5 billion into Language Fund, SCOLAR will further deliberate on initiatives for enhancing the Chinese language learning support for NCS students. The Committee recommends that the district-based programmes subvented by the Language Fund should continue capitalizing on the previous experiences.

11. There are views that KGs need more financial support to enhance their capacity in catering for the diverse needs of NCS students and to strengthen the communication with NCS parents. In this regard, the Committee is of the initial view that a grant may be provided for KGs, with clear objectives set out while allowing flexibility for KGs in utilizing the grant to cater for the diverse needs of NCS students.

12. With regard to admission to KG, it is basically a school-based matter whereby KGs may admit students at their own discretion. The Committee opines that there should be extra efforts to remind KGs to inform parents in advance of the details of their school-based admission mechanism, which should include the number of places available, admission procedure and criteria, etc. through effective channels such as

guidance notes in application forms, admission guidelines / leaflets, school website. The Committee recommends that continuous reminders should be given to KGs about the need of providing equal opportunity to all children regardless of their ethnicity, gender, ability, etc.

13. Also, the Committee recommends that EDB should continue to organize briefing sessions or seminars about KG education for parents such as fee remission scheme, admission arrangements, quality KG education and transition from KG to primary school, etc. The Committee opines that the practice of providing interpretation service for NCS parents in some of these sessions should continue. Should parents need help in school placement or other education service, they may approach EDB for information and advice.

Support for KG students with special needs

Present Situation

14. The Government has all along been providing various services for children with developmental problems through the collaborative efforts of various government departments, including the 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 and helps their families meet their special needs. EDB provides training for KG teachers to enhance their capacity in catering for student diversity. DH, HA, SWD and EDB jointly launched the Comprehensive Child Development Service in phases since 2005, which enables KG teachers to make referral of pre-school children with parental consent directly to DH's MCHCs for initial assessment.

15. A teacher resource kit⁴ has been developed by DH in collaboration with EDB and SWD for distribution to all pre-primary institutions to help them identify children with special needs for due

4 The Pre-primary Children Development and Behaviour Management – Teacher Resource Kit

referral to MCHCs for initial assessment. Training for KG teachers in this regard has also been organized on a regular basis jointly by EDB and DH. To further strengthen teachers' capacity in formulating appropriate teaching strategies to meet the developmental needs of children and to handle their individual differences, EDB has been providing professional development programmes for teachers and school-based support services for KGs.

16. MCHCs of DH conduct health and developmental surveillance in partnership with parents to facilitate early detection of developmental problems. Children with suspected developmental concerns identified at MCHCs are referred to the Child Assessment Service under DH or HA for follow-up and assessment. Upon completion of assessment, children's assessment summaries will be provided to parents, and diagnosed cases will be referred to appropriate training and special needs support services for their follow up.

17. Pre-school children (aged 0 to 6) assessed to have special needs are provided with rehabilitation services by SWD with a view to enhancing their physical, psychological and social developments, thereby improving their opportunities for participating in ordinary schools and daily life activities and helping their families meet their special needs.

18. The above-mentioned government departments also provide parents with parenting programmes, talks, workshops and booklets to enhance their awareness and understanding of child development. Where necessary, counselling and training are provided to empower them in helping their children overcome difficulties.

Deliberations and Views of the Committee

19. The Committee notes that, as announced in the 2015 Policy Address, DH will strengthen the manpower of the multi-disciplinary healthcare teams of the Child Assessment Centres to provide early assessment and professional diagnosis. There are views that the waiting time for assessment should be further shortened.

20. With regard to rehabilitation service, the Committee notes that

improvement measures have been introduced to increase the provision, and that support measures have been introduced by SWD. The Committee is of the view that apart from increasing the rehabilitation service to meet demand, there is a need to enhance the service mode to provide better support for the students with special needs, their parents/carers as well as the KG where they are studying. The Committee notes that, as announced in 2015 Policy Address, SWD will conduct a pilot scheme through the Lotteries Fund to develop and try out new service modes to provide on-site rehabilitation services to children with special needs who are studying in KGs or KG-cum-child care centres. To ensure better coordination and collaboration of the parties concerned, it is suggested that relevant departments, NGOs and KGs should be involved in developing the pilot scheme. On 29 April 2015, Labour and Welfare Bureau and SWD invited relevant stakeholders to attend a discussion session for exchange of views on the design of the pilot scheme before SWD formally invite proposals later in the year.

21. To better equip KG teachers to identify children with special needs and cater for students' diverse needs, there are views that specific training programmes should be organized under a teacher professional development framework to be introduced for the KG sector. That notwithstanding, there are views that the support of various specialists is essential to help KGs cater for their students with special needs. The Committee is of the view that specialist support for KGs should be enhanced.

22. On the suggestion of providing additional funding for KGs to procure support services for their students with special needs, the Committee has reservation on KGs' expertise to procure suitable service for the students, not to mention monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of the procured services. The availability of sufficient quality service providers in the market is also doubtful. The Committee is of the view that KGs' teacher-to-pupil ratio should be improved so that KG teachers will have more capacity for professional development and catering for learner diversity. Also, with a clear teaching staff structure, the coordination and planning relating to the support for students' diverse learning need would be strengthened. To further enhance teachers' capacity in this regard, the Committee recommends that a more structured

in-service training programme be offered for KG teachers.

23. With regard to support for parents, who play a key role in catering for children's special needs, the Committee is of the view that the current support services for parents offered by different government departments should continue, and more publicity should be arranged to optimize the utilization.

24. The Committee also considers that a platform could be set up to further facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration among the respective bureaux and stakeholders in catering for KG children with special needs. That platform would not only facilitate on-going enhancement to the support services in the long run, but also facilitate the deliberation on short and medium-term improvement measures and issues, such as the parameters of the pilot scheme and enhancement on the transfer of information of students with special needs.

Views Sought

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

Education Bureau
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