

For information on
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Panel on Education

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

**Quality Assurance Framework, Regulation and Longer-term
Development of the Kindergarten Sector**

Purpose

This paper sets out the present situation and the initial views of the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education (the Committee) relating to the Quality Assurance (QA) Framework, regulation and longer-term development of the kindergarten (KG) sector.

Quality Assurance Framework

2. The QA Framework for KGs was introduced in 2000. It was built upon two interactive and transparent mechanisms, namely school self-evaluation (SSE) and an external review. With the roll-out of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) in 2007, the external review was then formalized as Quality Review (QR). All KGs under PEVS are required to conduct ongoing SSE and undergo QR for sustainable school development and accountability purposes.

School Self-evaluation

3. SSE is a process of collective reflection that provides insights into the current circumstances of schools, so that school staff can review the strengths and weaknesses of their schools. With reference to the findings, they can then identify areas requiring improvement for the sustainable development of the school. Specifically, KGs should conduct a holistic review on their current state of performance with

reference to the performance indicators (PIs)¹ developed by the Education Bureau (EDB). Schools should then analyze their SSE findings to strategically devise a development plan for the next school year. They should record the findings and the development plan in the School Report². KGs are strongly encouraged to upload their School Reports onto their school website and make the document available to their major stakeholders.

Quality Review

4. During QR, the review team from EDB will, using the KG's areas of concern as the starting point, make professional judgment on the school performance with reference to the PIs. During the on-site QR visit, the review team will conduct lesson observations, read children's work, interview the principal, teaching staff, parents and children, and review school documents. The review team will give oral feedback to the principals and teachers of the KGs at the end of the on-site visit. The QR report of KGs under PEVS will be uploaded onto the EDB website and linked to the Profile of Kindergartens and Kindergarten-cum-child Care Centres (KG Profile) to facilitate parents in making informed choices of KG for their children.

5. From the 2007/08 to 2011/12 school years, all the 703 KGs under PEVS have undergone the first phase of QR. The second phase of QR started in the 2012/13 school year.

Latest development

6. Two reviews have been conducted during the first 5-year cycle of PEVS with a view to evaluating the effectiveness of PEVS and QR, namely *Review of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme*³ and the *Impact Study on the Effectiveness of Quality Review in Pre-primary Education in Hong Kong*⁴ (Impact Study). Both reviews concluded that the QA Framework as a whole was effective in promoting the sustainable

1 The "Performance Indicators (Pre-primary institutions)" (PIs) were published between 2001 and 2003. They cover four major domains of school work – Management and Organisation, Learning and Teaching, Support to Children and School Culture, and Children's Development. There are a total of 16 areas and some associated evidences of performance under the four domains.

2 A school report template is available on the EDB website for schools' reference.

3 The review was commissioned by the Education Commission and was completed in 2010.

4 The study was commissioned by EDB to East China Normal University and was completed in 2013.

development of KGs and enhancing the quality of KG education in Hong Kong. The QA Framework has also gained wide support from the KG sector.

7. EDB fine-tuned the QA Framework⁵ on the basis of the recommendations of the two reviews as well as the feedback from KGs, with a view to enhancing the effectiveness of SSE and QR. The enhancement was implemented in the 2012/13 school year to tie in with the second phase of QR. Also, as recommended by the study team of the Impact Study, EDB is conducting a review on the PIs with a view to responding to the development in the KG sector in the past decade and keeping pace with the latest development of SSE and QR. In this connection, an Advisory Group on the Review of PIs was set up in July 2014 to review the PIs and make recommendations. The Impact Study also recommended that experts in the field of KG education can be invited to serve as external observers during QR. This is to enhance the transparency of the QR mechanism and professionalism of the teaching force in the KG sector.

Deliberation and Views of the Committee

8. In the course of deliberation on this subject, there are views that although KGs appreciate the importance of the QR mechanism, they find it very stressful to have their QR reports uploaded on the website as it would have impact on the admission of students. Some also consider that the QR report may not reflect the latest KG developments. However, others hold the view that releasing the QR reports of individual KGs will facilitate school development and the report would also provide parents with more information on the operation of the KGs. The practice of uploading should therefore continue. They are also of the view that with a likely substantial increase in Government funding under the future policy and should the Committee's recommendations be accepted by the Government, the governance and transparency of KGs would need to be strengthened.

9. With regard to the QR review team, there are views that the inclusion of an external observer would facilitate the professional

⁵ For example, the School Report template was modified for better guiding KGs to devise a development plan; each QR visit will last from 2.5 to 3.5 days depending on the school size.

development and exchange among the principals and teachers in the KG sector. There are views that EDB should ensure that the external observers understand the QR mechanism and have good experience in early childhood education. Some however are concerned about the possible conflict of interest between the external observer and the KGs.

10. The Committee considers that it would be more appropriate to continue making the QR reports available on the website for public information. Noting KGs' concerns that the QR reports may not be able to reflect their latest development, the Committee considers that KGs should be encouraged to publicize their feedbacks to the QR report and the follow-up actions taken in those areas requiring improvements.

11. With regard to the inclusion of an external observer in the review team, the Committee generally agrees that an external independent member may facilitate professional development in the KG sector. To address some stakeholders' concern about possible conflict of interests between the external observer and the KG concerned in the QR process, the Committee opines that EDB can consider inviting ex-KG personnel who has rich experience in KG education to serve as external observer. Also, to ensure that QR would be conducted in an effective and fair manner, the external observers should have thorough understanding of QR and their role in the process.

Regulation of School Operation

12. All KGs are registered under the Education Ordinance and are required to comply with the related regulations such as requirements on staff, school premises, health and safety, etc. In addition, the Operation Manual for Pre-primary Institutions specifies requirements for operators on areas covering premises design, furniture and equipment, safety measures, health, sanitation, nutrition and diet, curriculum and activities, staffing, etc. to ensure quality service delivery. In terms of curriculum, KGs should develop their school-based curriculum with reference to the recommendations set out in the *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum (2006)* (the Guide).

13. KGs under PEVS are required to fulfill a set of criteria and

requirements, including having acquired a non-profit-making status, offering a full local curriculum in accordance with the Guide, charging a tuition fee not exceeding the specified fee thresholds, employing sufficient number of teachers possessing the Certificate in Early Childhood Education qualifications based on the teacher to pupil ratio of 1:15, etc. They are also required to observe various financial and administrative requirements as well as instructions issued by EDB from time to time.

14. As provided in the Education Regulations, KGs must obtain the written approval of the Permanent Secretary for Education before collections of or adjustments to any fees. For collection of school fees, KGs are requested to submit application to EDB should they want to make any changes in the number of instalments or the amount of school fees. EDB would issue circular memorandum setting out the procedures and required information or documents to be submitted by KGs for school fees revision annually. In processing the applications, the income and expenditure situation of the KGs, and whether the expenditure items are reasonable and allowable, will be assessed vigorously. For collection of application fee and registration fee, EDB has set fee ceilings and given blanket approval for KGs to collect these fees below the ceilings⁶. Prior approval has to be obtained from EDB if KGs wish to charge a higher fee.

15. KGs may conduct trading operations at school for the sale of school items such as textbooks and exercise books, school uniforms, etc. and provision of paid services like school bus services. The purchase or acceptance of these items and services by parents must be on a voluntary basis. While approval from EDB for conducting trading operations for the sale of school items and provision of paid services at KGs is not required, KGs should observe the rules and guidelines to ensure that trading operations are properly conducted. Among others, no profit should be generated from the sale of textbooks, whereas profit from the sale of school items and provision of paid services should not exceed the profit limit of 15% of the cost price at which they are purchased from the suppliers.

⁶ At present, the approved ceiling for application fee is \$40. For registration fee, the approved ceiling is \$970 for HD session and \$1,570 for WD session, or half of the monthly school fee, whichever is lower.

16. To enhance the transparency of the operation of KGs to facilitate public scrutiny, all KGs under PEVS are required to disclose to the public their key operational details (including but not limited to staff information, school facilities, the curriculum and school finance information and any additional charges for optional activities and items) and consent to the publishing of such information in the KG Profile issued by EDB annually.

17. EDB has also instituted a system of regulatory measures on the financial management of PEVS KGs, including annual review of audited accounts, conduct on-site inspections and surprise headcount inspections.

Deliberation and Views of the Committee

18. Members take note of the various measures already in place to monitor the operation of PEVS KGs, particularly in matters relating to the use of public funds and collection of fees from parents. There are views that under the future KG education policy, the Government should consider further strengthening the requirements and guidelines on collection of fees or miscellaneous charges. Some opine that to further increase the transparency of KG operations, EDB may prescribe a list of key fee-charging items, and require all KGs to provide the information on their school website. There are views that EDB should step up monitoring to ensure that the profit from the sale of school items and paid services would be applied for educational purposes that would directly benefit the students but not be transferred to the school sponsoring body or other parties.

19. There are views that KGs should not be allowed to collect tuition fees for offering above-standard services such as employing more teachers for teaching in smaller groups. On the other hand, some are of a different view that it would be desirable to allow KGs to provide a variety of services, which some parents welcome, having regard to the students' needs, in order to maintain the diversity of the KG sector. In any case, the general view is that EDB should exercise more stringent control on the collection of tuition fees by KGs.

20. With the likely substantial increase in Government funding under the future KG education policy and should the Committee's

recommendations be accepted by the Government, there are views that each KG should be required to set up an effective governance framework. Specifically, each KG should set up a management committee with well-defined roles and responsibilities to oversee its management and operation. In the mid or long term, the management committee should comprise different stakeholders of the KGs, including the principal, representatives of the school sponsoring body, parents and teachers, and independent member(s). Some opine that the inclusion of independent member(s) in the management committee may be considered at a later stage.

21. The Committee considers it necessary to enhance the support to KGs in relation to the setting up of management committee and administration of KGs. For instance, more training for KG staff should be provided to help them better understand the rules and regulations.

Longer-term Development of the KG Sector

22. The Committee is well aware that the KG sector has a long history of development with their unique modes of operation, and the formulation of any new policy must not lose sight of or upset the strength and merits of the existing system. Hence, in formulating its recommendations, the Committee has analyzed comprehensively the information and data regarding existing operation of KGs.

23. The new KG education policy will be an additional commitment of the Government towards KG education on top of the existing PEVS which already provides parents with heavy financial assistance in the form of voucher. The Committee is of the view that under the new KG education policy, there must be significant enhancement to the quality of the existing KG education as provided under PEVS, or else it would not be too meaningful for the Government to inject more funding into KG education without corresponding improvement to quality. In all circumstances, the policy must be practicable and sustainable, and the uniqueness and diversity of KG education must be respected.

24. The Committee anticipates that should the recommendations of the Committee be accepted by the Government and are implemented, the

quality of KG education will be significantly enhanced. The recommendations will cover various aspects of KG education, including teacher professionalism, manpower and remuneration, premises and accommodation, support for full-day KG services, catering for student diversity, governance and accountability as well as parent education.

25. Upon receiving the report from the Committee, the Government will study the recommendations, formulate the policy and specific measures as well as estimate the resources and arrangements required for the implementation of the new KG education policy in practicable and sustainable ways, taking into consideration various factors such as the financial implications, parents' choice and financial burden, as well as the sustainable and quality development of the KG sector marked by flexibility and diversity.

Views Sought

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

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