



## **OMEP – Hong Kong’s Comments on the Report of the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education**

### **(1) Establishing a clear timetable for upgrading the professional qualification of teachers to degree level and strengthening teachers’ professional development**

- The Committee agrees that upgrading kindergarten teachers to degree and trained level could help enhance the quality of kindergarten education in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, concrete arrangements and schedule cannot be found in the report. We understand that there needs to be resources available in order to support the professional development of teachers, including degree training places and corresponding salaries. It would be of no avail to act with undue haste. Therefore, we recommend the Education Bureau (EDB) to establish a clear timetable in 5 to 10 years to specify how to gradually upgrade the professional qualifications of teachers, including requiring all newly appointed teachers to have obtained a bachelor’s degree, providing a study allowance to encourage continuous professional development of serving teachers, reviewing the quota for and quality of teacher training, optimising the establishment of teaching and non-teaching staff and developing a pay structure for holders of certificates and bachelor’s degrees. In this way, kindergartens would be able to determine how to allocate their manpower and resources in order to maintain a high quality of education while their teachers undergo training. Those who wish to join the profession may also start getting prepared early. Eventually, at least 50% of the teachers in each kindergarten shall obtain a bachelor’s degree.
- The Committee recommends a soft target of around 150 hours of continuous professional development (CPD) for every three years for kindergarten teachers and principals. In fact, 50 hours a year is quite a heavy study load for many kindergarten teachers and principals. Also, the definitions of the “soft target” and the modes of study are rather vague. We want to point out that there needs to be appropriate resources in order to support the staffing needs of kindergartens and alleviate the stress of teachers and principals. The EDB must consult and discuss with the sector in regard to the arrangements of manpower, training hours and other support, and work together to develop a CPD policy with appropriate targets.

### **(2) Examining the staffing needs of kindergartens and setting up a basic staff structure**

- The Committee mentions “large kindergartens” and “small kindergartens” a few times in the report and advices on staffing and salary arrangements accordingly. However, it does not clearly define what “large” and “small” mean. We suggest the Government to pay more attention to the voices of the “small kindergartens” and the problems they are facing, and ensure they have adequate resources and manpower to provide quality education. We recommend the Government to establish a basic staff structure, of which the requirements could be enhanced or lessened in proportion to the actual size of the kindergarten. Each kindergarten should at least have a principal, vice principals/senior teachers and teachers to ensure quality management.

**(3) Taking care of the different needs of children and their families and strengthening support both in and out of kindergarten**

- We are delighted to know that the Committee recommends the Government to provide additional subsidies and support for students from needy families and non-Chinese speaking students. We, besides, would also like to suggest that social work services in kindergartens should be encouraged and enhanced in order to meet the social, emotional, and child-caring needs of children and their families.
- The Committee recommends that the Government should set up a cross-Bureau/Department platform (including the EDB, Social Welfare Department, Department of Health, etc.) to give advice on the development of initiatives to cater for kindergarten children with special needs. In addition to shortening the waiting time for assessment, we believe it is equally important to ensure children with special educational needs (SEN) “hidden” in kindergartens receive appropriate support as early as possible. Hence, we recommend that there should be at least one SEN teacher in every kindergarten, at the same time, the EDB should establish a supportive team of professionals (including educational psychologists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, teachers with special education qualifications) to visit kindergartens regularly to offer early identification, assessment and counselling services, as well as create individual development profiles for children with SEN. In addition, the team will organise educational seminars and provide parents and teachers with support.
- The EDB should also increase the quota of integrated programme in kindergarten-cum-child care centres and extend the programme to kindergartens to alleviate the shortage of services for children with SEN. The programme will cater for young children with mild disabilities. Each participating kindergarten-cum-child care centres or kindergarten will have teachers trained in special education and environment and facilities for individual counselling. Medical professionals will also visit the school regularly to provide support. Moreover, the EDB should also assist kindergartens in transferring young children with moderately and severely disabilities to suitable places (e.g., early education and training centres, integrated programme in kindergarten-cum-child care centres or special child care centres) as soon as possible to allow timely treatment and rehabilitation.
- Training courses in special education should be increased as soon as possible. Universities/ training institutes should be encouraged to provide 2 to 3 courses in special education a year. In the long run, all early childhood teachers should receive appropriate training in special education.

**(4) Appointing the Steering Committee as soon as possible**

- The Government should appoint the Steering Committee as recommended by the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education as soon as possible. The Steering Committee should consist of different stakeholders of early childhood education and professionals of various disciplines in order to effectively supervise, assess and review and advise on the implementation of policy.