

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Kindergarten (KG) education is important in developing the physical, social, emotional and aesthetic aspects of a child as well as his/her language and cognitive skills in early part of life. It lays vital foundation for balanced development and learning in future. As an affluent and advanced city, Hong Kong must ensure that our children can access quality KG education irrespective of the family's financial means. The current Government has set as one of its policy priorities to extend the current 12-year free education to 15 years to cover KG education, and to further improve the quality of KG education in tandem.

2. KGs in Hong Kong have all along been operated by private operators in accordance with rules and regulations set by the Education Bureau (EDB). The sector has been characterized by a high level of flexibility in operation, diversity, vibrancy as well as timely responsiveness to service needs. While there are varied views and expectations on the future policy on KG education, there is a consensus in the KG sector that the formulation of any new policy must not upset the strength and merits of the existing vibrant and diversified system. The Committee on Free Kindergarten Education (the Committee) was set up in April 2013, under which five Sub-committees were formed, to examine various related issues with a view to making proposals on how to implement quality KG education free in a practicable and sustainable manner.

DELIBERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3. The proposals cover the following main aspects –
- (a) Vision, mission and objectives of KG education
 - (b) Scope of free KG education (including the provision of whole-day services)
 - (c) Enhancement to the quality of KG education, in terms of teacher professionalism, staffing, accommodation, governance and quality assurance
 - (d) Developing an attractive career for the teaching profession
 - (e) Funding arrangement
 - (f) Catering for Student Diversity
 - (g) Provision of premises
 - (h) Parents' involvement and education

- (i) Other important factors conducive to quality education
- (j) Implementation

4. Major recommendations are highlighted below.

(a) Vision, mission and objectives of KG education

4.1 Vision: “Children First: Right Start for All”

4.2 Mission: To provide for a **sustainable** policy that respects the **uniqueness** of KG education in Hong Kong as well as the **diverse** needs of children, and to provide for **equitable** access to **quality** holistic KG education that promotes lifelong development of a person.

4.3 Objectives: To lay the foundation of lifelong learning by fostering in children an inquisitive mind, an interest in learning and exploration, a balanced development, a healthy self-concept, the ability and confidence to adapt to the ever-changing world and getting them ready for school.

(b) Scope of Free KG Education

4.4 The Government subsidy should cover half-day (HD) service as the basic provision for all eligible children aged three to six. Additional resource support should be provided for KGs offering whole-day (WD) and long WD (LWD) services.

4.5 On eligibility of KGs to be covered by the future quality KG education policy, the Committee proposes that whilst all KGs are eligible and welcomed to join the policy, such KGs should, among other criteria, be non-profit-making (NPM), offering a local curriculum that conforms with the KG curriculum guidelines published by EDB and having proven track records on providing quality KG education. This is in line with the existing practice and policy of the Government.

4.6 The Government subsidy should fund KG education at a level which enables KGs to provide quality education. The basic provision should cover school fees related to the expenses directly attributable to students’ learning and school operation. Other charges such as expenses arising from rental exceeding government subsidies, if any, and above-standard services should be borne by parents. Needy families may apply for financial assistance.

(c) Enhancement to the Quality of KG Education

Teacher Professionalism

- 4.7 The Committee recommends that the Government should aim at raising the entry qualification requirement of KG teachers to degree level. The Government should also study the issue of setting a graduate teacher ratio for each KG when it reviews the future KG education policy after implementation. Meanwhile, more support should be provided for KG teachers to upgrade their qualification.
- 4.8 A continuous professional development (CPD) policy with appropriate targets could be developed based on a Teacher Competencies Framework (TCF) and a Principal Competencies Framework (PCF). The Certification Course for KG Principals should also be enhanced. Various professional development opportunities should be provided and additional resources should be made available to create capacity for teachers to pursue professional development.

Staffing

- 4.9 The existing threshold teacher-pupil (TP) ratio is 1:15. It is proposed to increase the teaching staff of KGs to bring about an improved TP ratio of no worse than 1:12. It will provide more capacity for teachers for curriculum development and lesson preparation, catering for the diverse needs of the children and professional development. Individual KGs may continue to have the discretion to appoint / deploy sufficient number of teachers to meet their operational needs.
- 4.10 There should be at least one clerk for each KG, and two clerks for the large KGs with more than 300 HD students. As regards janitor staff, the recommended ratio is one janitor staff for about 50-60 HD students. For LWD and WD KGs with a kitchen, a cook will be required, though for KGs of very small size, KGs may consider employing a part-time cook. For other supporting staff such as teaching assistants, the provision of a recurrent grant to KGs would more effectively address the school needs.

Accommodation

- 4.11 As a long-term target, a more spacious environment should be provided in KGs for children's physical activities and learning, and where applicable, it would be desirable for KGs to have some outdoor space.

- 4.12 It is proposed that the Government should initially aim to increase the indoor floor space for each student by about 20%.
- 4.13 As a medium-term measure, the Committee recommends that the Government may explore the feasibility of setting up resource centres for use by KGs to provide a safe education environment and a variety of activity-based learning activities for children.

Governance

- 4.14 KGs should enhance their administration, management and accountability under an effective governance framework with transparency, well-defined roles and responsibilities. In the medium or long-term, each KG should have a management committee with preferably five or more managers comprising representatives from the school management, school sponsoring body, teachers, parents, and independent or professional members in the medium or long-term.
- 4.15 To ensure that KGs have well-established mechanism in handling various administrative matters such as school finance and budgeting, procurement, trading operation, staffing and appointment matters, remuneration package, student admission, use of funds, surplus and reserves, etc., comprehensive administrative guidelines and operation manual under the future KG education policy would need to be drawn up for compliance of eligible KGs.
- 4.16 The existing quality assurance framework should be enhanced, including involving an external independent member in the Quality Review (QR) inspection team as an external observer and updating the Performance Indicators which form the basis for school self-evaluation and external review. The Committee considers it appropriate to continue to make the QR reports available on the websites for public information. KGs should be given opportunity to publicize their response to the QR reports and the follow-up actions taken in those areas requiring improvement.

(d) Developing an Attractive Career for the Teaching Profession

- 4.17 To retain and attract quality teachers and maintain a stable teaching force for providing quality KG education, KGs should offer a career ladder and competitive remuneration for their teachers. In this regard, the Committee recommends that the KG teaching staff structure in general should comprise a principal, a vice-principal (for large scale KGs), senior teachers and class teachers.

- 4.18 Schools should be given discretion to appoint teachers of different ranks commensurate with their scale of operation. As a general guide, KGs with about 600 HD students may have up to five senior teachers while very small scale KGs (say, one teacher for each level) may not have any senior teachers. A vice-principal may be needed for KGs with an enrolment of more than 300 HD students.
- 4.19 While KGs should have the discretion to appoint or promote suitable teachers with either C(ECE) or degree qualifications to the senior teacher post, priority may be given to those who possess degree qualifications. As for vice-principals, they should be degree-holders.

(e) Funding Arrangement

Mode of Funding

- 4.20 The existing mode of funding adopted by aided schools or under the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme is not fully applicable to KGs under the future KG education policy. The Committee recommends that a more flexible funding mode be adopted under the new policy, whereby funding for individual KGs would be provided partly on a per student basis (i.e. unit cost approach) and partly on a school-specific basis to cater for the special circumstances of the KGs or the students.
- 4.21 Funding for teaching staff salary, supporting staff salary and other operating expenses would be provided for KGs in the form of a unit subsidy, i.e. on a per student basis. Additional funding will be provided to cater for the specific needs of individual KGs, including rental subsidy, additional subsidy for major repair, additional resources for WD and LWD KGs, grant for KGs admitting a cluster of non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students (say, eight or more), etc.

Staff Salary

- 4.22 It is necessary to set a salary range for each position for reference of KGs. This would provide useful reference for KGs to set reasonable salary for their staff on the one hand, and allow flexibility for them to appoint suitable staff to meet their specific operational needs on the other.
- 4.23 On the salary ranges for KG staff, having regard to the recommendations of the consultant, the Committee proposes the following reference salary ranges and recommends that a mechanism to enable adjustment of the pay levels should be in place.

Teaching Staff	Proposed Salary Range (2014 price level)
Class Teacher	\$18,000 – \$32,000
Senior Teacher	\$24,000 – \$38,000
Vice Principal <i>(for large scale KGs)</i>	\$30,000 – \$42,000
Principal II	\$34,000 – \$47,000
Principal I	\$40,000 – \$53,000
Supporting Staff	Proposed Salary Range (2014 price level)
Clerk	\$10,000 – \$18,000
Janitor	\$10,000 – \$13,000
Cook	\$12,000 – \$14,000

Note: For very small scale KGs, the rank of Principal will be comparable to Vice Principal.

- 4.24 Control on the use of Government funding by KGs needs to be stepped up to make sure that they utilize their resources properly in teacher remuneration. For example, a certain proportion of the Government funding should be designated for teaching staff salary expenses.
- 4.25 The staff salary-related subsidies might be referenced on the mid-point of the respective salary ranges of the staff. Given the concerns of the sector on the mid-point approach, the Government should consider providing a safety net under which KGs may apply for additional funds on a case-by-case basis to meet expenditure on salaries of long service staff.

Other Operating Expenses

- 4.26 For KGs to meet their other operating expenses, the expenditure items currently accepted for fee revision purposes should generally continue to be accepted for subsidy under the future funding arrangements. Additional items for school development or staff training should also be considered as appropriate. The subsidy for other operating expenses might be determined with reference to past expenditure patterns of KGs.

Premises-related support for KGs

- 4.27 Rental subsidy should be provided in the form of a school-specific grant for all eligible KGs to lessen the KGs' rental-related financial burden. The rental subsidy should be subject to a ceiling and fill-up rate to ensure proper use of public funds. The ceiling may be set with reference to the rentals of comparable KGs operating in premises situated in public housing estates, which are relatively less market-driven. KGs under the future KG education policy which are receiving rental subsidy less than their actual rental payment shall be allowed to charge a fee to be approved by EDB to cover the difference.
- 4.28 The Government should consider providing subsidy for eligible KGs operating in self-owned school premises or premises owned by their school sponsoring bodies (SSBs) with zero/nominal rent to alleviate the financial burdens arising from major repair.

Support for WD and LWD services

- 4.29 With a view to providing more support for working parents to tie in with the population policy which aims to unleash the potential of the local labour force, incentives should be provided to encourage KGs to offer more WD or LWD services.
- 4.30 It is proposed that additional grant be provided for KGs for the provision of WD places, thus enabling those parents in need of such services to have access to them and at a more affordable cost. The amount of grant may be 25% to 30% of the half-day unit subsidy.
- 4.31 For LWD KGs, further additional resources on top of the WD subsidy are also considered necessary to cater for the longer hours and more school days they operate. The amount of grant should enable the KG to employ one to three headcounts, depending on the size of the KG.

(f) Catering for Student Diversity

KG Students from Needy Families

- 4.32 To ensure that no child will be deprived of the access to KG education due to a lack of financial means, fee remission should continue to be provided under the existing Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme.

- 4.33 The Government should provide a grant for supporting needy families to pay for the expenditure incurred from the learning or schooling of the students, such as for purchase of books and school uniforms, etc.

Non-Chinese speaking (NCS) Students in KGs

- 4.34 A grant comparable to the salary of one teacher should be provided for KGs admitting a cluster of NCS students (say, eight or more) to enable them to enhance the support for NCS students. Besides, professional support should be further enhanced.

KG Students with Special Needs

- 4.35 Further enhancement measures should be considered to improve the services for KG children with special needs through the collaborative efforts of various Government departments. The Committee recommends that the Government should set up a cross-Bureau/Department platform with Government representatives and involving various stakeholders to give advice on the development of initiatives to cater for KG children with special needs.
- 4.36 The Committee recommends that the waiting time for assessment should be further shortened. As for rehabilitation services for pre-school children, the Committee proposes that in addition to increasing the number of places, the service mode should be enhanced in order that support could be provided for the students in need, their parents/carers as well as the KGs where they are studying.
- 4.37 The Committee also proposes that with a view to enhancing teachers' capacity to cater for students' diverse learning needs, more structured in-service training programme(s) should be offered for KG teachers.

(g) Provision of Premises

- 4.38 The current planning standards for provision of KG places should be reviewed to increase the provision, particularly WD places. Having regard to the supply and demand of KG places, the Government should consider revising the planning standards progressively to 500 WD and 500 HD places for every 1 000 children aged between three to six.

- 4.39 To ensure a stable supply of quality KG premises, the Government should introduce measures to increase government-owned KG premises in public housing estates and private housing estates in the long run. The feasibility of providing incentives for SSBs and KG operators to acquire their school premises and co-location of KGs and primary schools should also be explored.
- 4.40 In future, SSBs or operators should be allowed to get involved in the design of the KG premises at an early stage if they are allocated new KG premises.

(h) Parents' Involvement and Education

- 4.41 Parents play a very important role in their child's early life and are the children's role model. The Committee considers that parents' involvement in the learning of their children should be promoted. Parent education to help them understand the role of parents and development needs of their children should also be enhanced.

(i) Other Important Factors Conducive to Quality Education

Transition from KG to Primary School

- 4.42 A transition policy should be in place at both KG and primary school levels so as to provide support systematically. Clear but non-prescriptive learning outcomes for KG graduates could be formulated. More elaboration on the issue of transition should also be developed in the revision of the Curriculum Guide to be completed by 2016 as planned.

Strategies for Local Research on KG Education

- 4.43 To keep the sector well-informed of the latest trends in child development and to examine the impact of the new policy on the quality of KG education services, the Committee considers that more researches on these aspects should be encouraged.

KG Admission Arrangements

- 4.44 KG student admission should remain a school-based matter. The K1 admission arrangements in the 2015/16 school year should continue to be adopted for future student admission, and be refined as appropriate in the light of experience gained.

4.45 Regarding the admission of pre-nursery (PN) class students to K1, the Government may further study the issue of requiring KG-cum-CCCs to set aside K1 places required for application from non-PN class students.

(j) Implementation

4.46 Government should consult the relevant stakeholders in the formulation of the future KG education policy. The Committee recommends the appointment by the Government of a Steering Committee consisting of representatives of relevant stakeholders, relevant Government departments as well as professionals in overseeing the implementation of the future KG education policy.

4.47 In the long run, Government may consider setting up an independent commission comprising representatives of the relevant Government departments, stakeholder groups and professionals to co-ordinate services for pre-school children.

5. The Committee wishes that, when the above package of recommendations is implemented, about 60% of students attending local NPM KG would not need to pay school fee.
