

Children First Right Start for All

**Report of the
Committee on Free Kindergarten Education
May 2015**

Committee on Free Kindergarten Education
免費幼稚園教育委員會

28 May 2015

Mr Eddie NG Hak-kim, SBS, JP
Secretary for Education
The Government of the
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
11/F., East Wing, Central Government Offices
2 Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar, HK

Dear *Secretary,*

We feel privileged to be tasked by you to study and make recommendations on how to practicably implement free kindergarten (KG) education. Since establishment, the Committee on Free KG Education and its five sub-committees have conducted in-depth studies on various related issues. I, on behalf of the Committee, hereby submit the report of our Committee with recommendations for your consideration.

The Committee respects the current diversity in KG education and unanimously comes to a view that preserving the diversity marked by flexibility and responsiveness is vital in assuring and enhancing the quality of KG education. Premised on this, we have put forward in the report recommendations for implementation of the future policy on KG education in a practicable and sustainable manner. We hope that the new policy will bring about significant improvement in KG education.

In closing, we wish to thank various stakeholders of the KG sector who have joined rounds of discussion and consultation sessions and shared with us their valuable views. We also wish to thank the Secretariat of the Committee for their efficient and effective support for our work.

Yours sincerely,



(Dr Moses Cheng)

Chairman

Committee on Free Kindergarten Education

Report of the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education

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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.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

1.1.1 One of the priorities of the current term Government is to extend the present 12 years of free education to 15 years so as to cover kindergarten (KG) education and to further improve the quality of KG education in tandem. It is widely recognised that KG education has profound impact on lifelong learning and development of a person. No one should therefore be deprived of KG education because of lack of family's financial means.

1.1.2 In Hong Kong, nine years' free, compulsory and universal basic education (primary and junior secondary) in public sector schools has been implemented since 1978. Starting from the 2008/09 school year, free education has been extended to 12 years covering senior secondary levels. KG education, which refers to the 3-year KG programme for children aged three to six before primary education, is neither part of the free nor compulsory education. That notwithstanding, the participation rate is over 100%, meaning that virtually all parents enrol their children in KG programme. For the purpose of this report, KGs shall be taken to cover both KGs and Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres (KG-cum-CCCs) except otherwise specified.

1.1.3 In an effort to provide affordable and quality KG education to all eligible children, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (the Government) introduced the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) in the 2007/08 school year. PEVS provides a non-means-tested direct fee subsidy for eligible children attending eligible local non-profit-making (NPM) KGs. The objective of PEVS is to increase the Government's investment in pre-primary education so as to alleviate the financial burden on eligible parents, upgrade the professional qualifications of KG principals and teachers, and improve the quality of KG education.

1.1.4 The Committee on Free KG Education (the Committee) was set up in April 2013 to examine the various related issues and recommend sustainable and practicable proposals on how to extend the free education policy to cover quality KG education. To embrace and study such issues, five Sub-committees were also formed under the Committee as follows:

- (a) Sub-committee on Objectives, Teacher Professionalism and Research
- (b) Sub-committee on Operation and Governance
- (c) Sub-committee on Funding Modes
- (d) Sub-committee on Catering for Student Diversity
- (e) Sub-committee on Communication Strategy

1.2 Composition and Terms of Reference of the Committee on Free KG Education and its Sub-committees

1.2.1 The Committee comprises 21 members including the Chairman, the Vice-chairman, representatives from the KG sector, school sponsoring bodies, teacher education institutions, primary school principals, parents and the Education Commission, as well as members from other professions and representatives from the Education Bureau (EDB). The membership and terms of reference of the Committee are at [Appendix 1](#).

1.2.2 The Sub-committees studied in detail specific areas relating to quality KG education, including the objectives and scope of quality KG education and teacher professionalism, funding modes, the demand for and different needs of whole-day (WD) services, the planning and space allocation of KG, rental subsidy, the supply, qualification and remuneration framework of the teaching profession, teacher-to-pupil ratio, monitoring, governance and quality assurance framework, catering for student diversity, home-school cooperation, and public engagement strategies, etc. The membership and the terms of reference of the five Sub-committees are set out in [Appendix 2](#).

1.3 Guiding Principles Adopted by the Committee

1.3.1 Given the huge diversity among and accommodating the current modus operandi of KGs in Hong Kong, the different views and expectations of stakeholders, as well as the intricacies of the issues involved and the far-reaching implications of the future free KG education policy, the Committee takes a prudent and evidence-based approach in considering how to develop such policy so that the KG

sector's flexibility and diversity of services would be preserved. The Committee has made reference to the following principles to guide its deliberation and formulation of recommendations:

- (i) while KG education should not be compulsory, no child aged between three to six should be deprived of KG education due to the lack of financial means;
- (ii) quality of KG education is the prime concern;
- (iii) the policy must be practicable and sustainable;
- (iv) the uniqueness, vibrancy and diversity of KG education must be respected and the diverse needs of the children should be catered for through different modes of operation; and
- (v) Government funding should be accompanied by good governance on the part of KGs leading to consistent improvement in quality in education.

1.3.2 Apart from reviewing existing policy initiatives on KG education in Hong Kong, the Committee has made reference to overseas experience and practices, and studied if the recommended best practices in KG education internationally could be applicable in the Hong Kong context. For this purpose, overseas visits were made to Korea, Singapore and Melbourne in mid-2013 to explore their latest KG education development. In addition, an international forum was held in late October 2013 to facilitate professional exchange among local and overseas experts and professionals on KG education.

1.3.3 Before submitting its report in 2015 to the Government proposing the long-term policy on KG education, the Committee submitted a progress report to EDB in December 2013 and proposed some short-term support measures in five aspects to address the sector's imminent needs. They included providing additional subsidy for KGs and parents, enhancing the training for KG principals and teachers, improving KG admission arrangements and enhancing parent education. The Government had accepted the short-term measures proposed by the Committee and followed up accordingly. EDB's follow-up action on the short-term measures is summarised at [Appendix 3](#).

1.3.4 Three consultancy studies were commissioned to examine specifically the human resources requirements and remuneration, accommodation and rental issues of KGs with a view to collecting more comprehensive information and making recommendations for consideration of the Committee. The Committee has given due consideration to the findings and proposals from the consultancy studies in formulating the recommendations for the consideration of the Administration.

1.4 Consultation and Public Engagement Activities

1.4.1 The Committee is fully aware of the importance of understanding the need and views of the KG sector, the parents, members of the Legislative Council, political parties and interested organisations as well as the community at large in formulating practicable recommendations for implementation of the future free KG education policy. Hence, apart from involving representatives from different sectors in the establishment of the Committee and Sub-committees, five focus groups were formed with various stakeholders, including school sponsoring bodies, KG principals, KG teachers, parents, and teacher education institutions¹. Each focus group comprised representatives of a good mix of different types of KGs. Two rounds of focus group meetings were conducted between October and December 2013 as well as between September and October 2014 respectively.

¹ The respective focus groups comprised:

- i. School Sponsoring Bodies (SSBs): 15 Members with representatives from SSBs of different scale of operation (defined by the number of KGs operating under the SSB).
- ii. KG Principals: 22 Members with 1-2 principal representatives from KGs of different districts. Different types of KGs, including KGs joining and not joining the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS), non-profit-making (NPM) and private independent (PI) KGs, KGs and Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres (KG-cum-CCCs), were represented. The KGs involved did not overlap with those represented in the teachers and parents focus groups.
- iii. KG Teachers: 22 Members with 1-2 teacher representatives from KGs of different districts. Different types of KGs, including PEVS and non-PEVS KGs, NPM and PI KGs, KGs and KG-cum-CCCs, were represented. The KGs involved did not overlap with those represented in the principals and parents focus groups.
- iv. Parents: 27 Members with 1-2 parent representatives nominated by KGs with parent-teacher associations (PTAs) from each district. Different types of KGs, including PEVS and non-PEVS KGs, NPM and PI KGs, KGs and KG-cum-CCCs, were represented. The KGs involved did not overlap with those represented in the principals and teachers focus groups.
- v. Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs): 12 Members with 2 representatives from each TEI offering teacher training courses on early childhood education.

1.4.2 Also, the Chairman, Vice-chairman of the Committee and the Convenors of the Sub-committees have met with school heads associations in different districts, various political parties, Federations of Parent-Teacher Associations and different concern groups to listen to their views. In the past two years, over 40 meetings have been held with various stakeholders, concern groups and political parties. A list of consultation and public engagement activities conducted by the Committee is at Appendix 4.

1.4.3 A webpage on EDB website has been set up, through which relevant information on the Committee was released to the public from time to time. A designated email account has also been set up for the public to send their views and opinions directly to the Committee via an earmarked email address.

1.4.4 For the purpose of engaging the public, the Committee has issued press releases, conducted media briefing sessions and submitted reports to the Legislative Council from time to time. Moreover, two video clips were produced in August/September 2014 to inform the public on the progress of work of the Committee. Another series of video clips were produced in April 2015 to promote quality KG education. These video clips were released through the various public channels, including bus TV-system, Maternal and Child Health Centres, Student Health Services Centres, Special Assessment Centres and School Dental Clinics under the Department of Health, online advertising platforms, etc. All the press releases, reports and videos are available for public access on the above-mentioned designated webpage on EDB website.

Chapter 2 Overview of Kindergarten Education

2.1 International Perspective

2.1.1 KG education is an important stage which lays the foundation for lifelong learning and whole person development, and serves as the starting point of formal education. In different countries, a variety of terms are also used for describing the services for young children, including Early Childhood Care and Education, Early Childhood Development, and Early Childhood Care and Development. The term of KG Education is used to refer to services provided to children ranging in age from three to six years in Hong Kong, but the term of Early Childhood Education (ECE) is also used interchangeably.

2.1.2 Compelling reasons for investment in the early years of a child's development emanate from three interrelated strands of research. Firstly, studies on early brain development have shown that the brain develops most rapidly in the first years of life, and that it is positively affected by environmental stimulation. Secondly, research has also drawn attention to the better economic returns of government investment in early childhood compared to adulthood. Thirdly, programme evaluation research has also indicated that ECE promotes child development and school readiness all over the world. Hence, governments all over the world have increased investment in ECE, though they may differ in the rationale and the priorities they set for children and families and in the services they provide. Their policy objectives can be driven by educational, economic and social agendas such as establishing ECE as getting the child ready for school education, supporting parents, encouraging women's participation in the labour market, supporting disadvantaged families, etc. In general, all countries are making great efforts in promoting quality ECE and ensuring that it is accessible to all young children.

Accessibility to ECE and Overseas Practices

2.1.3 To ensure that ECE is accessible to all children regardless of their family background and financial status etc., some countries enact legislation to safeguard the rights of children, others offer support for parents and disadvantaged families, while some provide subsidised ECE places for all children whose parents request

them. In terms of subsidised ECE services, the practices vary across countries. Governments may set up public ECE institutions, or provide subsidies to ECE service providers or directly to parents. For needy families, there are often fee reductions, exemptions, tax relief, allowances or vouchers to reduce or offset the costs.

2.1.4 The weekly duration of subsidised ECE services differs across countries. For example, children over three in England are entitled to 15 hours free ECE services a week for 38 weeks of the year. Those in Wales and North Ireland are entitled to 12.5 hours free ECE services a week for 38 weeks of the year. Those in Scotland are entitled to 475 hours free ECE a year, which is normally delivered as a daily two and a half-hour session during the school term. In Finland, the government provides free pre-school classes to all six-year-old children which are conducted in half-day mode for around 4 hours a day. Similarly, in Sweden, the government offers all children at six a place in pre-school classes which comprise a minimum of 525 hours per year free. In Victoria, Australia, 15 hours of subsidised ECE services per week is provided for children during the year before compulsory education, usually at the age of four or five. In Korea, children aged three to five, who attend ECE programmes that implement Nuri Curriculum, are entitled to subsidised ECE services for three to five hours per day. In Taiwan, the government provides fixed amount of subsidy for parents to defray school fees, regardless of the duration of the ECE programmes the children attend. Parents need to pay extra if they require longer hours of services.

2.1.5 It should be noted that even for countries which claim to provide free ECE service, there is a limit to the number of hours a week for such provision. Also, government subsidies seldom cover all ECE expenditure for children aged three to six. Parent contributions are expected. In most European countries, an average of approximately 14.4% of the total ECE expenditure comes from parents², though there are often fee reductions, exemptions, tax relief, allowances or vouchers to reduce or offset the costs for needy families.

² European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014. *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe. 2014 Edition*. Eurydice and Eurostat Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Half-day (HD) or Whole-day (WD) KG Services?

2.1.6 An important factor all governments have to take into account in formulating subsidised ECE policies is the impact of the duration of ECE programmes on the developmental and academic outcomes of children. A number of studies have been carried out in different parts of the world in this respect, yet the findings are not conclusive. The general view is that the quality of the learning programmes (whether on a WD or HD basis) and the teachers are the determining and critical success factors.

2.1.7 Various researches reveal that the potential positive outcomes of WD programmes include enhancing literacy and cognitive outcomes and academic achievement, improving students' social and emotional skills, and allowing a balance between child-initiated and process-oriented activities³. A study reveals that despite the potential positive impacts of WD programmes, they have drawbacks which include unreasonably high expectations towards children, early implementation of primary school curriculum in KG level, fatigue and separation anxiety in children, less time for informal interaction with others in a more relaxed and unstructured setting, decreased parental involvement, etc. Besides, the potential benefits of WD programmes appear to fade over time, and eventually disappear by the end of third grade⁴. It is also worth noting that comparatively, children who attend WD programmes spend relatively little time in a home setting⁵.

2.1.8 Home, specifically parental involvement, has been found to be significant to the child's development. Home provides a rich source of love, intimate interaction and emotional support as the child builds strong bonds and attachments with the parents and other family members. The sense of security and bond thus generated

³ For example, Brownell, M.D., Nickel, N.C., Chateau, D., Martens, P.J., Taylor, C., Crockett, L., Katz, A., Sarkar, J., Burland, E. & C.Y. Gohand the PATHS Equity Team. (2015). Long-term benefits of full-day kindergarten: a longitudinal population-based study, *Early Child Development and Care*, 185:2, 291-316; Cannon, J.S., Jacknowitz, A. & Painter, G. (2006). Is full better than half? Examining the longitudinal effects of full-day kindergarten attendance. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 25(2): 299-321.

⁴ Brownell, M.D., Nickel, N.C., Chateau, D., Martens, P.J., Taylor, C., Crockett, L., Katz, A., Sarkar, J., Burland, E. & C.Y. Gohand the PATHS Equity Team. (2015). Long-term benefits of full-day kindergarten: a longitudinal population-based study, *Early Child Development and Care*, 185:2, 291-316.

⁵ Votruba-Drzal, E., Li-Grining, C.P. & Maldonado-Carreno, C. (2008). A developmental perspective on full-versus part-day kindergarten and children's academic trajectories through fifth grade. *Child Development*, 79(4): 957-978.

is of paramount importance to the psychological growth of children. Family education will also enable children to make connection with what they have learnt at school in the real life setting, and provide a venue for them to apply knowledge outside the school context. Some scholars consider that the roles of parents and family are far more important and influential to children's lives than that of a teacher⁶. As indicated in some longitudinal studies, what parents do with their children (e.g., reading with the child, singing songs and chanting nursery rhymes, painting and drawing, visiting libraries and places, etc.) is crucial, even more important than who they are (e.g., parental occupation, education or income), in eliciting positive effects on their children's development⁷. Compared to WD programmes, HD programmes allow relatively more time for young children to play and interact with their family in a less-structured but more relaxing setting. The benefits home can bring to child development are irreplaceable by a school setting.

2.1.9 While WD programmes do not necessarily benefit young children more than HD programmes do, one of the aforementioned longitudinal studies suggests that it is the quality of the programmes, instead of the ECE hours, that determines whether children can benefit from them. During their study, the researchers identified some effective ECE practices that promote children's developmental outcomes. Children were found to make more progress if the programmes:

- 2.1.9.1 arrange an equal balance of child and adult initiated activities;
- 2.1.9.2 are delivered by teachers who are equipped with knowledge in curriculum and child development;
- 2.1.9.3 engage parents in their children's learning; and
- 2.1.9.4 support children's behaviour management through teachers' reasoning and talk⁸.

⁶ For example, Farquhar, S. (2005). *The Role of Parents and Family in Children's Early Education*. Keynote presentation to the International HIPPIY Symposium, Auckland, 22nd Sept 2005.

⁷ See Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. & Taggart, B. (2004). The effective provision of pre-school education (EPPE) project: findings from pre-school to end of key stage 1. *SureStart*, November 2004 and Melhuish, E. (2010). *Impact of the home learning environment on child cognitive development: secondary analysis of data from Growing up in Scotland*. Scotland: Scottish government.

⁸ Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. & Taggart, B. (2004). The effective provision of pre-school education (EPPE) project: findings from pre-school to end of key stage 1. *SureStart*, November 2004.

2.1.10 As a means to support those children who cannot benefit from quality parental involvement or to unleash labour force, some promote the provision of WD programmes to these children. More details about the practices in Hong Kong are provided in section 7.4 of Chapter 7.

2.1.11 In short, from educational perspective, existing evidence precludes drawing conclusions that WD programmes, compared with HD ones, lead to more positive developmental outcomes in children. Given the non-conclusive research findings in the impact of school hours on child outcomes, some research studies further advise that governments should be cautious about the financial implications of investing in WD programmes and consider carefully whether the benefits really outweigh the costs⁹. They caution that WD programmes are very expensive, especially when implemented on a universal basis.

The Quality of ECE

Teacher Training

2.1.12 Research studies have shown that quality ECE and desirable child outcomes are not possible without quality pedagogies and professional teachers¹⁰. Therefore, teacher professionalism is another key issue of the ECE sector worldwide. Countries nowadays are not only trying to employ enough teachers in the ECE sector, they are also investing more and more in ECE teacher training with a view to raising the quality of the teaching force. Aspiring teachers should be provided with quality pre-service training so as to better prepare them with adequate knowledge and skills. Despite the consensus on the importance of well-trained teachers for quality ECE and children's outcomes, different countries have different requirements on the kind of professional qualifications and duration of training. The qualification requirements vary from post-secondary non-tertiary level to having a specialised 3-year-Bachelor's

⁹ See Brownell, M.D., Nickel, N.C., Chateau, D., Martens, P.J., Taylor, C., Crockett, L., Katz, A., Sarkar, J., Burland, E. & C.Y. Goh and the PATHS Equity Team. (2015). Long-term benefits of full-day kindergarten: a longitudinal population-based study, *Early Child Development and Care*, 185:2, 291-316 and Cannon, J.S., Jacknowitz, A. & Painter, G. (2006). Is full better than half? Examining the longitudinal effects of full-day kindergarten attendance. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 25(2): 299-321.

¹⁰ See *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators*. (2014). OECD Publishing and *Starting Strong III: A Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care*. (2012). OECD Publishing.

degree in education. In Germany and Denmark for example, the minimum entry requirement is set at a post-secondary non-tertiary level, whereas the ECE teachers in Belgium and Finland are required to possess a Bachelor's degree in education¹¹.

2.1.13 In fact, initial teacher training is only the starting point in equipping ECE teachers for the profession. It takes more than teachers' professional qualifications to achieve quality ECE and children's outcomes. It requires on-going professional development opportunities and support to continuously equip teachers for all sorts of challenges that are to come throughout their teaching career. Continuous professional development (CPD) of teachers is considered essential in keeping teachers abreast of the current educational policies, the latest trends of ECE, etc. as doing so helps enhance the quality of ECE services in the long run. To cater for the different ECE systems and working environment of teachers, various forms and structures of professional development programmes (PDPs) are being offered and they vary from place to place. The more common forms and structures are seminars/workshops, onsite mentoring, online training and formal training courses. To encourage teachers to continuously upgrade the skills themselves, various kinds of incentives are often provided and financial support is by far the most common one, followed by advancement to higher qualifications. More than 96% of the OECD countries/regions offer government financial support for KG teachers to enrol themselves in PDPs¹². Many European countries even make CPD a working requirement while some countries also make it a prerequisite for promotion¹³.

Quality Assurance

2.1.14 An effective quality assurance system plays a crucial role in promoting better ECE services and learning outcomes. It is an ongoing evaluation process of school performance for accountability, keeping track of school practices, informing parental choice, etc. Again, no two countries/regions have the same quality assurance system. Amongst the OECD member countries/regions, a mixed use of

¹¹ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014. *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe. 2014 Edition*. Eurydice and Eurostat Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

¹² *Starting Strong III: A Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care*. (2012). OECD Publishing.

¹³ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014. *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe. 2014 Edition*. Eurydice and Eurostat Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

external and internal evaluation is the most commonly adopted mode of assessment. Monitoring methods like rating scales, questionnaires, observation, interview, etc. are often used during the evaluation process. Some countries/regions have the evaluation results published online. For instance, in Singapore, a list of KG that have passed the external evaluation is posted online. In Australia and Shanghai, detailed external evaluation results of schools are also available online for public information.

2.2 The Local Context

(a) Major Milestones in Kindergarten Education

Background

2.2.1 Back in year 2000, the *Learning for Life, Learning through Life – Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong* [Proposals (2000)] has already spelled out explicitly the Government’s determination in promoting quality education, including KG education. In response to an increased focus on knowledge, Proposals (2000) expanded the meaning of education from a narrow focus on academic achievement to a concern about students’ holistic development. It envisioned an education system that allowed all students to have equitable opportunities for personal advancement and social mobility. KG education has been positioned as the foundation of lifelong learning. Its aims were to help children cultivate a positive attitude towards learning and good living habits in an inspiring and enjoyable environment. Since then, much has been done to enhance the quality of KG education in Hong Kong.

2.2.2 In an attempt to eliminate the disparities in the delivery of service and financial assistance to children, and the inconvenience caused to school operators and parents, harmonisation of pre-primary services was implemented in 2005. Before 2005, all KGs in Hong Kong were governed by the then Education Department while child care centres were monitored by the Social Welfare Department (SWD). In 2005, a new section called Joint Office for Pre-primary Services (now known as Joint Office for Kindergartens and Child Care Centres) was set up. It was staffed by both EDB and SWD officers to monitor and support the KG-cum-CCCs. From then on,

all KGs and KG-cum-CCCs in Hong Kong were collectively referred to as KGs.

2.2.3 While harmonisation was introduced with a view to unifying the governance of KG services, the Government has successfully maintained a multifaceted KG sector here. It remains as a vibrant private sector to flexibly cope with parents' diverse demands and the various needs of children. In the 2014/2015 school year, the sector was made up of about 90% local KGs and 10% non-local ones. The KGs offer diversified services, with some classes operating on a HD basis (around 3 to 3.5 hours per day) and some on a WD basis (around 7 to 7.5 hours per day, including time for lunch and afternoon nap). A considerable number of KGs are operating both HD and WD classes in the same premises. Some of these KGs are "long WD" (LWD) KGs, which were former aided child care centres (FACs) under the SWD. They operate longer service hours (around 10 hours per day and five and a half days per week), and may also offer ancillary services including extended hours service, occasional child care service and Integrated Programme. In the 2014/15 school year, out of the 760 local NPM KGs, 381 KGs operate both HD and WD classes (around 50%), followed by 235 KGs operating solely WD classes (31%) and 144 KGs solely for HD classes (19%).

Enhancing Accessibility

2.2.4 The gross enrolment rate for KG education in Hong Kong has been 100% or above for a long time, which is higher than that of many other parts of the world. According to UNESCO (2014), the gross enrolment rate for ECE in 2011 in developed countries was around 85%¹⁴. The Government provides parents with direct fee subsidy, in the forms of vouchers, to ease their financial burden and enhance accessibility of education for young children. The enrolment of over 100% reflects that there is an adequate supply of places in KG education for every child in Hong Kong. Moreover, no child is deprived of access to KG education irrespective of their ability, developmental needs, family background or socio-economic status.

2.2.5 As mentioned previously, all KGs in Hong Kong are privately run. They can be categorised as NPM and private independent (PI) KGs depending on their

¹⁴ UNESCO. (2014). *The 2013/4 Education for All Global Monitoring Report Teaching and Learning: Achieving quality for all*. Paris, France: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

sponsoring organisations which can be either voluntary agencies or private enterprises. In the 2014/15 school year, NPM KGs made up approximately 80% of all KGs; while the rest were PI KGs. The Government has long been financially supporting KG education, with gradual increase in its financial commitment over the years just like the rest of the world. The Government has been providing NPM KGs with rent, rates and government rent reimbursement since 1982. The respective numbers of NPM KGs receiving rent under the Rent Reimbursement Scheme, rates and government rent in the 2014/15 school year were 396, 652 and 308 respectively.

2.2.6 The Government has also played an active role in providing subsidies for parents of children aged three to six to receive KG education on a need basis. Before the harmonisation of pre-primary services, needy families could apply for the Child Care Centre Fee Assistance Scheme (CCCFAS) if their children went to child care centres, or the Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme (KGFRS) if their children went to KGs. Upon harmonisation, the ambit of the KGFRS was expanded to cover all eligible children receiving pre-primary services, including those originally covered by the CCCFAS. The KGFRS was re-named as Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme (KCFRS) from 2005/06. Under KCFRS, low income families could be eligible for 100%, 75% or 50% fee remission. The three levels of assistance and a common means-tested mechanism of the KCFRS could ensure that no child would be deprived of the opportunity to receive KG education due to family financial difficulties.

2.2.7 In 2007, the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) was launched and its objective is to further subsidise all eligible children aged three to six to receive affordable and quality KG education. Under PEVS, a non-means-tested subsidy is provided for parents of all eligible children in KGs joining PEVS to help them defray expenditure on KG education for their children. More details about PEVS are available in Section 2.2(b). In addition, the means-tested KCFRS is still available for children from needy families. Again, this is to ensure that no child will be deprived of the opportunity to receive KG education due to a lack of financial means. As of January 2015, there are a total of 35,632 families enjoying fee remission under KCFRS, on top of PEVS subsidy. The estimated government expenditure on PEVS and KCFRS in the 2014-15 financial year is \$2,564.6 million and \$544.9 million respectively. The overall government expenditure on subsidising KG education has increased from

about \$1,600 million in the 2007-08 financial year to about \$3,400 million in the 2014-15 financial year.

Enhancing Quality

Teacher Training

2.2.8 Recognising that effective leadership and high quality teaching practices are vital to achieving quality KG education, the Government has for many years taken an active role in promoting the professional competence of the teaching force by offering training opportunities and supporting school personnel financially for receiving training.

2.2.9 Prior to the implementation of PEVS, in the light of the global trends and the recommendations of Proposals (2000), the Government has been upgrading the professional standards of KG teachers and principals progressively. In September 2003, all newly appointed KG teachers had to have achieved five passes in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (including both the Chinese and English languages) with a Qualified Kindergarten Teacher (QKT) qualification. The percentage of QKTs employed by a KG increased from 40% in 1997/98 to 100% in 2004/05. Starting from September 2002, all newly appointed KG principals were also required to possess a Certificate in Early Childhood Education [C(ECE)] qualification. All serving KG principals were required to possess the same qualification before the end of 2005/06.

2.2.10 With the implementation of PEVS in 2007/08, the Government provided further financial support and appropriate professional development opportunities to bring the KG teachers and principals to a higher level of professional competency. In the first 5-year phase of PEVS, i.e. the 2007/08 – 2011/12 school years, specific policy targets regarding teacher qualifications requirement were set out for KGs that join the Scheme. By the end of 2011/12, on the basis of the teacher-to-pupil ratio of 1:15, all KG teachers should possess a C(ECE). All newly appointed principals had to possess a Bachelor's degree in early childhood education [BEd(ECE)], one-year post-qualification experience and have had completed the Certification Course for KG

Principals (CKGP) before, or exceptionally within the first year of, their appointment. In the 2014/15 school year, about 98.5% of KG teachers and principals are either holding or pursuing C(ECE) as compared to 56% in the 2006/07. Around 82% of the KG principals were either holding or pursuing BEd(ECE). Between the school years of 2007/08 and 2013/14, a total of 464 principals had completed CKGP. In gist, over the past years, there had been great improvement in the professional knowledge and qualifications of the KG sector.

2.2.11 A Teacher Development Subsidy was embedded in each voucher under PEVS at the amount of \$3,000, \$3,000, \$2,000 and \$2,000 respectively for the 2007/08, 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11 school years. NPM KGs joining PEVS could spend the Teacher Development Subsidy, until end of the 2011/12 school year, on professional upgrading of teachers and principals, in the priority of reimbursement of course fees, appointment of supply teachers to substitute for teachers on training course to relieve their workload, and arrangement of school-based staff development programmes. Teachers serving in private independent and NPM non-PEVS KGs were also entitled to claim up to 50% of the fees for one approved early childhood education diploma or degree course, capped at \$60,000, until end of the 2011/12 school year. After the lapse of the Teacher Development Subsidy at the end of the 2011/12 school year, to further support KG principals and teachers who were expected to complete their professional upgrading by the end of the 2013/14 school year, the Government offered course fee reimbursement for up to 50% of the fees for serving KG principals and teachers under PEVS if they pursued a relevant approved ECE course in the 2012/13 and/or 2013/14 school year(s) and could successfully complete the course before the end of the 2013/14 school year.

2.2.12 On top of qualification upgrading, the Government is also committed to providing professional development opportunities for KG principals and teachers, in line with overseas practices. Both local and non-local PDPs are provided for serving KG principals and teachers. The local PDPs are usually in the form of seminars/workshops, training courses and on-site support. They are mainly provided by EDB and teacher education institutions (TEIs). In 2014, EDB offered around 70 PDPs on topics such as school self-evaluation, learning and teaching, catering for learner diversity, etc. to help KGs deliver the curriculum effectively for the development and learning of children. School-based support services were also

provided for KGs to enhance teachers' capacities in curriculum development and implementation to cater for children's learning needs. Furthermore, expertise from the tertiary sector has been solicited through the "University-School Support Programmes" to provide intensive on-site support for KGs. With regard to non-local PDPs, three training programmes to Seoul, Shanghai and Hangzhou respectively were organised for KG principals and teachers in the 2014/15 school year.

Quality Assurance

2.2.13 To promote quality KG education through continuous school development and enhanced accountability, the Quality Assurance (QA) Framework was introduced to the KG sector in 2000. Similar to the global trend, it is based on a mixed use of internal and external evaluation. The QA Framework encompasses school self-evaluation (SSE) conducted by KGs themselves and external reviews conducted by inspectors of EDB. The external review took the form of Quality Review (QR) with the roll-out of PEVS in 2007. All KGs under PEVS are required to conduct ongoing SSE and undergo QR for sustainable school development and accountability purposes. For KGs to remain eligible for joining PEVS, they also need to be periodically assessed as meeting the prescribed standards at QR by the inspectors of EDB. During the first 5-year phase of PEVS, all KGs under PEVS (a total of 703) have undergone QR. Like Singapore, Australia and Shanghai, China, QR reports are available online for public information.

2.2.14 The QA Framework would not have been effective if EDB and KG sector have not shared a mutual understanding of the assessment criteria and standards. For this purpose, the "Performance Indicators (Pre-primary institutions)" (PInds) were published between 2001 and 2003 which cover four major domains of school work – *Management and Organisation, Learning and Teaching, Support to Children and School Culture, and Children's Development*. To ensure a thorough assessment on school performance, the PInds set forth a total of 16 areas and some associated evidences of performance under the four domains. These PInds serve as a reference for KGs to evaluate their own performance and to formulate development plans to advance towards quality education. They also serve as a basis for EDB inspectors to make professional judgments on the performance of KGs.

2.2.15 During the course of QR, school performance data are regularly collected, compiled and analysed by EDB. The findings are used to inform the planning of professional support provided to KGs. It is through this feedback system that the needs of KGs are effectively catered for, and the continuous development in the sector further enhanced.

2.2.16 In conclusion, just like the rest of the world, the Government has for many years been supporting enhancement of the quality of KG education and striving to enhance the accessibility of children to KG education irrespective of their families' financial means. Various measures have been taken, such as provision of subsidies to parents, enhancing teacher professional competence, and implementation of the QA framework, to achieve the goals. Against this background, and taking into account the fact that KG education in various forms and shapes has already taken root in Hong Kong, the Committee set out to examine the related issues and recommend specific proposals on how to implement quality KG education free in a sustainable and practicable manner.

(b) The Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme

Objective

2.2.17 In the 2006-07 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced a major financial commitment for KG education and introduced PEVS with effect from the 2007/08 school year with a view to preserving the responsiveness of the sector, alleviating the financial burden on parents and enhancing the quality of KG education.

2.2.18 The rationale of PEVS is for all school-age children to receive affordable and quality KG education to be achieved through:

2.2.18.1 Enhancement of parental choice – facilitated by direct fee subsidy in the form of a voucher, coupled with transparency of KG operations;

2.2.18.2 Well-qualified teaching staff – facilitated by financial support for professional upgrading and ongoing professional development; and

2.2.18.3 Accountability – achieved by a quality assurance mechanism that combines self-evaluation with external review.

Implementation

2.2.19 Under PEVS, a non-means-tested direct fee subsidy is provided for parents to defray KG school fees. Children¹⁵ who are aged two years and eight months or above can apply for the Certificate of Eligibility for PEVS. Parents with children holding a valid Certificate of Eligibility and studying in KGs joining PEVS would be eligible for receiving subsidy for paying KG school fees. The amount of fee subsidy under PEVS is \$20,010 per student per annum in 2014/15 school year.

2.2.20 Apart from providing non-means-tested fee subsidy to parents through PEVS, the Government also provides additional fee subsidy under KCFRS for needy families to ensure that children will not be deprived of the opportunity for KG education due to lack of means. Children who are from needy families and studying in KGs joining PEVS may apply for fee remission through KCFRS.

2.2.21 KGs joining PEVS must be NPM, offer a full local curriculum and charge a tuition fee not exceeding the specified fee thresholds¹⁶. Besides, KGs should employ sufficient number of teachers possessing the C(ECE) qualifications for the purposes of meeting the 1:15 C(ECE) teacher-to-pupil ratio (TP) ratio basic requirement.

2.2.22 To assure the quality of education received by the students studying in PEVS KGs, EDB would conduct QR for KGs under PEVS. PEVS KGs are also required to submit SSE report upon EDB's request. Only KGs that are assessed as having met the prescribed standards of QR will remain eligible for PEVS.

2.2.23 Regulatory controls on financial management of PEVS KGs have been instituted to forestall abuse and to ensure that expenditure is incurred to support teaching and learning activities. In this connection, KGs are required to submit to

¹⁵ Children must be Hong Kong residents with right of abode, right to land or valid permission to remain without any condition of stay (other than the limit of stay) in Hong Kong.

¹⁶ In the 2014/15 school year, the fee thresholds for half-day and whole-day classes are \$30,020 and \$60,040 per student per annum respectively.

EDB their audited accounts annually for scrutiny. Among others, PEVS KGs are not allowed to transfer their surplus, in whatever form, including donation, to any of their sponsoring bodies or other organisations. KGs may be excluded from PEVS if they are unable to comply with the regulations set under PEVS. KGs are also required to meet the transparency requirement by disclosing their key operational details and consent to publish such information in the Profile of Kindergartens and Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres issued by EDB to the public as well as comply with all instructions or directives issued by EDB from time to time.

2.2.24 KGs under PEVS in the 2013/14 school year were provided with a One-off School Development Grant (One-off Grant) in the amount ranging from \$150,000 to \$250,000 for enhancing the school environment and facilities. The One-off Grant would help enhance the education quality of the PEVS KGs while at the same time relieve the pressure of KGs from raising school fees.

2.2.25 As mentioned in paragraph 1.3.3 above, the Government has been following up with the short-term measures proposed by the Committee in December 2013 to address the imminent needs of parents and KGs. Among others, the voucher subsidy of PEVS has been/will be increased by \$2,500 per year in the 2014/15 and 2015/16 school years to \$20,010 and \$22,510 per student per annum respectively. The fee remission ceilings under KCFRS has also been lifted from the weighted average fees of KGs joining PEVS to the 75th percentile of the school fees of respective KGs with effect from the 2014/15 school year.

2.2.26 In the 2014/15 school year, around 95% of local NPM KGs are under PEVS and around 80% of the KG students are receiving voucher subsidies.

Chapter 3 Proposed Framework of Kindergarten Education in Hong Kong

3.1 Vision, Mission, Objectives and Principles of KG Education

Current Situation

3.1.1 As mentioned in 2.2.1 above, in 2000, the Education Commission comprehensively reviewed the education system in Hong Kong and formulated a blueprint for the development of education in the 21st century in the light of the latest trends and needs of the society [Proposals (2000)]. It pointed out that it was important to envision future changes in society so as to define the new roles and functions of education. It was this refined education system that could cater for the needs of learners in the new society at the turn of the century:

“To enable every person to attain all-round development in the domains of ethics, intellect, physique, social skills and aesthetics according to his/her own attributes so that he/she is capable of life-long learning, critical and exploratory thinking, innovating and adapting to change; filled with self-confidence and a team spirit; willing to put forward continuing effort for the prosperity, progress, freedom and democracy of their society, and contribute to the future well-being of the nation and the world at large.”¹⁷

3.1.2 The Education Commission has refined the aims of KG education in Proposals (2000). It considered that KG education held the significance as the foundation for life-long learning. Hence, KG education should be able to help children cultivate a positive attitude towards learning and good living habits in an inspiring and enjoyable environment through the provision of all-round and balanced learning experiences according to children’s physical and psychological development needs.

3.1.3 With reference to Proposals (2000), the development of KG education in the past decade, the social context of Hong Kong, and the international KG education

¹⁷ *Learning for Life, Learning through Life – Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong.* (2000). Education Commission, HKSAR, p.30.

systems, the Committee agrees that :

3.1.3.1 In order to lay the foundations for later success in life in terms of education, well-being, social relationship, career, etc., the provision of both “education” and “care” in KG education stage is essential.

3.1.3.2 Every child should have the right to the highest possible standard of education and care services for their betterment.

3.1.3.3 In response to the growing diversity of society, KG education should be able to cater for the diverse needs of children, including their family and cultural background, etc.

3.1.3.4 The goal of pursuing quality KG education could be achieved through a thorough and sustainable plan where financial resources, staffing, teacher professional growth, transition to primary school, parent education, quality assurance mechanism, etc. were well considered.

The Committee’s Recommendations

Vision and Mission

3.1.4 The vision is: *“Children First: Right Start for All”*

3.1.5 The Committee is of the view that KG education, being the very first stage in children’s learning, should provide children with appropriate support so that they may grow and develop healthily and happily. Therefore, the vision of KG education stresses the significance of a right start for nurturing children to become adults who can contribute to the future well-being of the nation and the world at large.

3.1.6 To achieve the vision of KG education, thorough planning and multifaceted collaboration by society as a whole is crucial. The Committee further proposes the mission of KG education which informs the five proposed guiding principles in paragraph 3.1.9.

3.1.7 The mission is: “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.”

Objectives

3.1.8 In preparing our children to meet the future challenges in a globalised and competitive society with diverse values and culture, the Committee proposes that the objectives of KG education should be:

To lay the foundation of lifelong learning by fostering in children:-

- 3.1.8.1 an inquisitive mind;
- 3.1.8.2 an interest in learning and exploration;
- 3.1.8.3 a balanced development;
- 3.1.8.4 a healthy self-concept; and
- 3.1.8.5 the ability and confidence to adapt to the ever-changing world.

Principles

3.1.9 The following five principles, formulated by the Committee, lay a foundation for working out various implementation strategies and measures to attain the above-mentioned objectives.

3.1.9.1 Uniqueness - KG education is a foundation stage of learning and whole person development with unique pedagogical characteristics by using a comprehensive approach which integrates care and education.

- Proposals (2000) positioned KG education as a foundation stage of learning and whole person development. The needs of KG-age children are very different from those of school-age children. The provision of education should cover not only cognitive learning but also socialisation and a range of other non-cognitive aspects.
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child stresses the significance of

a child-centred approach to KG education. It recognises that every child has unique characteristics and learning needs, and thus the curriculum should be able to respond to the child's social, cultural, environmental and economic context¹⁸.

- The Committee is of the view that the uniqueness of KG education should be respected and the sector should uphold the values of child-centred curriculum that integrates the elements of care and education.

3.1.9.2 Equity - All children between the age of three and six should have equitable access to quality KG education.

- “Equity measures” is the most common policy goal of ECE across the OECD countries. It emphasises that ECE system should be “fair and inclusive, acting against child poverty and educational disadvantage”¹⁹. At present, the Government starts providing children with compulsory education when they turn 6 years old. Children can enjoy free primary and secondary education in public-sector schools. Although KG education is not compulsory in Hong Kong, with the implementation of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme in the 2007/08 school year, the non-means-tested subsidy further ensures that KG education is accessible, fair and inclusive for all KG-age children. Needy families can obtain additional assistance under KCFRS to cover the part of the tuition fees which is in excess of the voucher value. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the enrolment rate here is over 100%. When compared with the data collected in different parts of the world, this enrolment rate of Hong Kong is high not only when compared to OECD average (82%), but also to other Asian countries such as Singapore (88%) and Korea (83%). The Committee considers this equitable and universal access

¹⁸ *Education for ALL: The Quality Imperative. Global Monitoring Report 2005.* (2004). Graphoprint: UNESCO, France.

¹⁹ *Starting Strong III: A Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care.* (2012). OECD Publishing, p.45.

to KG education for all children between the age of three to six should be maintained and ensured.

3.1.9.3 Quality - Quality KG education, with professional teachers, sound regulations and appropriate funding mode, should provide for a child-centred curriculum, quality pedagogy and learning opportunities. In turn, it will ensure all-round and balanced development of children. It is also dedicated to developing respectful and engaging relationships between children and others.

- Providing universal access to KG education services without giving due attention to the quality of it does not ensure good individual and social outcomes, or effective use of financial resources. A quality-focused policy goal in KG education provides directions for the government and the community to plan resources strategically with prioritised areas. Hence, the Committee considers quality KG education vital to the well-being and future learning of children.

3.1.9.4 Diversity - Diversity in children's abilities and backgrounds has to be respected and catered for through different modes of operation, forms of support, curriculum design, learning environment, etc. so as to unfold children's full potential.

- As mentioned in Chapter 2, the KG sector in Hong Kong has long existed as a vibrant private sector to flexibly cope with parents' diverse demands and the needs of children. Like the rest of the world, Hong Kong is undergoing unprecedented changes in social, cultural, economic, political and environmental aspects, and thus school curriculum should enable children to face the changes²⁰. Stakeholders also reflected that growing diversity in children's learning needs, family and cultural backgrounds, parent's values, etc. was observed.

²⁰ *Basic Education Curriculum Guide –To Sustain, Deepen and Focus on Learning to Learn (Primary 1 – 6)*. (2014). The Curriculum Development Council.

- The Committee is of the view that KG education should continue to respect learner diversities and help realise every child's full potential. In this connection, the KG sector should remain to be a vibrant private sector that flexibly copes with parents' diverse demands and the various needs of children.

3.1.9.5 Sustainability - A coherent infrastructure to achieve the objectives of KG education has to be sustainable in the long run to maximise the benefits of KG education.

- To achieve the objectives of KG education, the provision of full and consistent support and strategic planning of resource allocation is essential. The Committee is of the view that stable and well-established groundwork can ensure the sustainable development of the KG sector, which in turn facilitates the all-round development of children.

Chapter 4 Teacher Professionalism

4.1 Teacher Qualification and Professional Development

Current Situation

4.1.1 As mentioned in Chapter 2, teachers' professional competence impacts directly on the quality of KG education. With a view to enhancing the effectiveness of KG education, the Government has taken an active role for years in upgrading and promoting the professional capacity of the teaching force by providing subsidised KG teacher training programmes. The minimum entry qualifications for KG teachers and principals in Hong Kong have been rising steadily over the years.

4.1.2 While initial teacher training equips aspiring teachers with the basic knowledge and skills necessary for delivering quality services to children, in-service training can prepare teachers for continuous and systematic improvement in pedagogical practice. Apart from the professional upgrading courses, a variety of ongoing government-funded professional development opportunities are made available to KG teachers and principals. The EDB provides KG personnel with a variety of professional development programmes (PDPs) every year in areas such as learning and teaching, catering for learner diversity, school leadership, etc. School-based support services and "University-School Support Programmes" are also available to provide intensive on-site support for KGs. Non-local PDPs have also been offered by EDB to KG principals and teachers on a regular basis.

The Stakeholders' Views and Committee's Deliberations

4.1.3 The Committee recognises that KG education is a foundation stage of learning and its quality can only be ensured if children receive high-quality instructions delivered by competent teachers.

4.1.4 There have been diverse views on whether all new KG teachers should be required to attain a Bachelor's degree in early childhood education [BEd(ECE)] or equivalent. Those in favour of setting the degree requirement as the entry

qualification of KG teachers felt that it would denote the high quality of KG education. It will also ensure professionalism among teachers and attract high quality individuals to the KG profession. Nevertheless, some considered that the minimum entry requirement for KG teachers should be maintained at the Certificate in Early Childhood Education [C(ECE)] level because teachers with C(ECE) had proved themselves to be proficient teachers over the years with adequate competencies in delivering quality KG education services. It was also noted that various teacher education institutions (TEIs) are currently offering government-subsidised C(ECE) programmes on a yearly basis with around seven hundred graduates who are highly regarded by KGs, entering the profession each year. The actual number of C(ECE) graduates are indeed more than a thousand if the graduates from self-financed C(ECE) programmes are to be included. The new blood is highly treasured in the sector and any change to the existing policy should not jeopardize the career prospect of C(ECE) prospective graduates who are receiving training at the TEIs. The Committee is also mindful that setting the minimum requirement to a degree level is not a universal practice worldwide. Similar to Hong Kong, a number of countries have set the minimum entry requirement at non-degree level. Therefore, a one-size-fits-all approach in setting the degree entry level requirement on all new KG teachers will not be desirable.

4.1.5 There were also views that before the goal of having an all graduate teaching force was to be achieved, a percentage of degree holders should be set in each KG in the interim, with specified timeline for achieving the ultimate target. Those in favour of this are also those who support raising the entry requirement of KG teachers for enhancing professionalism among teachers and attracting high quality individuals to the KG profession. However, other members considered that graduates from C(ECE) programmes have proved themselves to be competent in delivering quality services. Making it mandatory for upgrading serving teachers to degree level would create undue pressure on serving teachers, especially in view of the fact that the majority of them had just finished pursuing C(ECE) between the school years 2007/08 to 2011/12. The pressure on teachers might in turn cause a negative impact on the delivery of quality KG education. The dichotomy of degree and non-degree holders might even affect the morale of the latter. Moreover, the need to recruit a specified percentage of teachers with a degree would pose undue pressure on KGs as well. Other members cautioned that making it mandatory for

professional upgrading involved detailed and careful planning on issues such as the provision of training places for various TEIs, the financial and human resources implications on the Government, etc.

The Committee's Recommendations

4.1.6 The Committee considers that upgrading KG teachers to degree and trained level could help enhance the quality of KG education in Hong Kong. It is of the view that the Government should aim at raising the entry qualification requirement of KG teachers to degree level. Leadership positions in KG including principals and vice-principals should be degree holders. Senior teachers should preferably be degree holders as well. The Committee considers that EDB should study the issue of setting a graduate teacher ratio for each KG in its review after implementation of the future KG education policy. In the interim, EDB should continue to provide opportunity and create capacity for serving teachers to upgrade their qualifications.

4.1.7 The Committee agrees 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 (CPD). The Committee considers that teachers' CPD is equally important. A professional teacher does not only need to have a good initial education, but must also make sure that the effects of initial education are sustainable. CPD can fill in the knowledge and skills that may be lacking or require updating on the part of teachers with reference to the current trends in KG education. The Committee recommends that in general, the existing local and non-local PDPs organised by both EDB and TEIs could be enhanced to further promote the KG teachers' professional competencies in response to the latest development of KG education in Hong Kong and worldwide. Some areas for enhancement could be:

- 4.1.7.1 enhancing teacher training to better prepare KG teachers for supporting children with diverse needs;
- 4.1.7.2 equipping KG teachers with some basic knowledge of lower primary school education, so that they are more capable of getting their children ready for P1; and

4.1.7.3 fine-tuning the induction programmes for newly appointed KG teachers to better equip them with the skills needed for the job.

CPD Policy

4.1.8 In order to upgrade the skills of KG teachers and principals more systematically, the Committee is of the view that a CPD policy with appropriate targets could be developed for the sector. Additional resources should also be made available to create capacity for teachers to pursue professional development. Similar to the existing CPD Policy for the primary and secondary school personnel, the one for the KG teachers and principals could include three aspects:

4.1.8.1 target CPD hours;

4.1.8.2 modes of study; and

4.1.8.3 content structure in form of competencies frameworks.

4.1.9 For the target CDP hours and modes of study, the Committee recommends a soft target of around 150 hours for every three years for KG teachers and principals. KG personnel could upgrade the skills themselves through structured training mode such as seminars and workshops, or other modes such as professional sharing in school.

Teacher Competencies Framework (TCF) and Principal Competencies Framework (PCF)

4.1.10 As an integral part of the CPD policy, a TCF and a PCF should be formulated to set forth the skills and knowledge specifically suggested for KG teachers and principals to ultimately promote the well-being of young children. Teachers and principals could refer to the respective frameworks to strategically plan their own training based on their own professional needs.

(a) TCF

With regard to the TCF, the Committee has studied the existing framework for the primary and secondary sectors and considers it could serve as a reference

for developing the TCF for the KG sector. The KG TCF could include four domains with specific content areas under each domain:

4.1.10.1 Learning and Teaching

- Design of integrated curriculum, e.g. developmentally appropriate practices, play-based learning, etc.
- Pedagogical content knowledge of various learning areas
- Continuous assessment and evaluation

4.1.10.2 Child Development

- Catering for children's diverse needs in school
- Whole person development of children

4.1.10.3 School Development

- School's vision and mission, culture and ethos
- Policies, administration, procedures and practices
- Home-school collaboration
- Responsiveness to societal values and changes

4.1.10.4 Professional Relationships and Services

- Collaborative relationships within the school
- Teachers' professional development
- Involvement in policies related to education
- Education-related community services and voluntary work

(b) PCF

Good leadership in KGs is essential to quality KG education. Unlike teachers who focus mainly on curriculum planning and learning and teaching, principals are faced with a wide range of other issues such as human resources, financial management and connections with outside organisations. Premised on the fact that teacher competencies should be the prerequisites of KG principals, the Committee is of the view that PCF should build upon the TCF. Since KG principals should also be further equipped with specific knowledge that enables them to lead their KG effectively and professionally for its sustainable

development, themes such as innovative thinking, school leadership, legal matters, child protection, communication with other organisations, etc. are considered desirable. Additional domains like “School Leadership” could also be included in the PCF.

4.2 Certification for Kindergarten Principalship

Current Situation

4.2.1 As mentioned earlier, starting from the 2009/10 school year, all new principals are expected to have completed CKGP before, or exceptionally within the first year of, their appointment. It serves to equip KG principals with the basic knowledge and skills in managing a school. To attain Certification for Principalship (CFP) for KG, aspiring/serving KG principals need to successfully complete CKGP. There is no validity period set for the existing KG CFP.

The Committee’s Deliberations and Recommendations

Certification Course for KG Principals (CKGP)

4.2.2 Taking into account the stakeholders and members’ view regarding CKGP, the Committee recommends it to be enhanced in the following areas to further promote the efficacy of school leadership in the sector.

(a) Course Structure

Currently, the major structure of the CKGP comprises the four domains of the PInds, namely, Management and Organisation, Learning and Teaching, Support to Children and School Culture, and Children’s Development. In order to equip KG principals with an emphasis on the knowledge and skills in school management and leadership, the Committee recommends modifying the existing structure with reference to the structure of the Preparation for Principalship Course for the primary and secondary sectors. The structure consists of the following six areas:

- ✧ Strategic Direction and Policy Environment
- ✧ Learning, Teaching and Curriculum
- ✧ Teacher Professional Growth and Development
- ✧ Staff and Resources Management
- ✧ Quality Assurance and Accountability
- ✧ External Communication and Connection to the Outside World

(b) Admission Criteria

At present, aspiring and serving principals with C(ECE) or BEd(ECE), regardless of their teaching experience, can apply for CKGP. The Committee is of the view that candidates with higher professional qualifications and significant teaching experience would benefit more from CKGP. With appropriate training, these candidates would be better prepared to lead a KG and contribute to the delivery of quality KG education. The admission criteria for CKGP could be revised. To be eligible for CKGP, the Committee proposes that both aspiring and serving KG principals must possess or be pursuing a BEd(ECE) or equivalent; and have at least three years of KG teaching experience.

(c) Course Levels

CKGP are currently offered to aspiring/serving principals with various teaching experience and qualifications. Their learning needs and areas of concern might not be the same. In the light of this, the Committee proposes that CKGP should be set at different levels, such as elementary and advanced levels, to suit the different needs of principals.

(d) Modes of Study

Taking into consideration the wide diversity of KGs in Hong Kong in terms of school size, school structure and mode of operation, aspiring/serving principals might have different work schedules or hours. CKGP is currently conducted in a part-time face-to-face mode. The Committee is of the view that flexible modes of study could be offered, such as mixed learning mode, comprising both

on-campus learning and e-learning aid, intensive programmes in the summer holiday, etc.

(e) Quality Assurance

With regard to the quality assurance of CKGP, the Committee is aware that the existing programme content of CKGP complies with EDB's suggested course framework. For accountability and quality assurance purposes, the Committee is of the view that the service providers should establish an internal quality review mechanism. This will ultimately promote effective leadership in KGs.

CFP

(a) Certification Requirements

4.2.3 At present, aspiring primary and secondary principals must satisfy the following criteria in order to attain CFP so as to be eligible for appointment to principalship:

4.2.3.1 Successful completion of the Preparation for Principalship course;

4.2.3.2 Successful completion of the needs analysis; and

4.2.3.3 Fulfilling requirements for the professional development portfolio.

4.2.4 The Committee considers that the needs analysis, which requires aspiring principals to design a personal professional development plan for improving their own leadership ability, gives them a chance to assess their suitability for principalship during the process. As for the professional development portfolio, it provides a way for aspiring principals to present evidence of their continuing development and learning progress, as well as their growing preparedness for principalship. Members of the Committee opines that these two elements of CFP (i.e. needs analysis and professional development portfolio) provide aspiring principals with more opportunities for self-reflection and application of textbook knowledge, which in turn can better prepare them for facing the challenges of leading a school. In the light of these merits, the Committee recommends that these two elements be included in the CFP for the KG sector and aspiring/serving KG principals be required to fulfil the

following in order to attain CFP:

4.2.4.1 Successful completion of CKGP;

4.2.4.2 Successful completion of the needs analysis; and

4.2.4.3 Fulfilling requirements for the professional development portfolio.

(b) Validity Period

4.2.5 The Committee notes that the CFP for the primary and secondary sectors is generally valid for five years. To renew it, aspiring or newly appointed primary and secondary school principals need to submit a new professional development portfolio or school development portfolio respectively, as evidence of their continued suitability. They may also need to retake some of the modules of the Preparation for Principalship course or re-submit a needs analysis. The Committee considers that a validity period should also be set for KG CFP with a view to enhancing the readiness as well as the professional competence of aspiring or newly appointed KG principals.

Chapter 5 Staffing Requirements

5.1 Teaching Staff

Current Situation

5.1.1 At present, KGs offer diversified services, including HD, WD and LWD programmes. While the teaching staff manpower requirements of KGs of different operating modes may be different, all KGs are required to employ sufficient teachers with relevant qualifications calculated on a teacher-to-pupil ratio (TP ratio) of 1:15. For the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) KGs, they should employ sufficient number of teachers with C(ECE) qualification based on the prescribed ratio. The actual TP ratios of KGs vary because some KGs may employ additional teaching staff to provide for different learning activities and for some, the enrolment is far below the classroom capacity particularly in the afternoon session, hence resulting in a better TP ratio.

5.1.2 At present, there is no clear staff structure or career ladder in KGs, though individual KGs may assign teachers with different responsibilities or duties. In general, relatively few KGs have clearly defined senior teacher post.

The Stakeholders' Views and Committee's Deliberations

5.1.3 A consultancy had been commissioned to study the human resources requirements for KGs and make recommendations to the Committee. Specifically, the consultant's recommendations covered typical KG establishment with core job duties and requirements, proposed career ladder for teaching positions as well as staffing ratios of both teaching and non-teaching positions. In this regard, the consultant has examined the current situation of KGs such as their operating scale, staffing ratios as well as job duties and requirements of different positions in KGs. In coming up with the recommendations, the consultant has considered 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.

5.1.4 There were views that KG teachers in general have long working hours and heavy workload, including heavy administrative duties. It was considered that measures should be taken to reduce the teachers' workload. Also, there were concerns about the relatively high turnover in LWD KGs, which many believe was due to their long operating hours and fewer school holidays as compared to other HD and WD KGs. It was suggested that additional manpower support should be provided for these KGs.

5.1.5 With a view to supporting the delivery of high quality KG education, many stakeholders have expressed the need for an improved TP ratio, and better employment conditions as well as more professional development opportunities for teachers. These were considered essential factors for attracting/retaining quality teachers and maintaining stability in the teaching force, which are conducive to enhancing the quality of education. There were opinions that the TP ratio should be improved to provide more capacity for KGs to enhance the curriculum, to better cater for the diverse needs of the students and to create space for teacher professional development, etc. Moreover, there were views that the principal should not be counted in the overall TP ratio as the principal should have sufficient room to oversee the operation of the KGs and handle administrative work. Some have expressed that the TP ratios for different levels (K1, K2 and K3) should be different to cater for the different needs of the students of different age groups, with a better ratio at the K1 level. Specifically, some suggested that the TP ratio should be 1:10 for the age group of two to four years, and 1:12 for the age group of four to six years. Some also had the views that the teacher establishment should make reference to the class-to-teacher ratio, suggesting to set the class-to-teacher ratios for HD, WD and LWD KGs at 1:1.25, 1:1.3 and 1:1.4 respectively. It was also pointed out that for small KGs in particular, the number of teachers is not sufficient for proper division of responsibilities for such tasks as curriculum development, communication with parents and support for ethnic minorities (EMs).

5.1.6 There were views that extra teachers should be available in KGs for various purposes, such as subject-specific teachers to lead the development of school-based curriculum. Additional teachers or teaching assistants would also be required for liaison with parents, particularly for the students with special needs and non-Chinese

speaking (NCS) students²¹. Also, other posts like school-based social workers have also been suggested.

5.1.7 There were strong views that a clear career ladder for KG teachers should be established to retain quality teachers and attract talents to the KG sector. Some were of the view that senior teacher posts should be established to assist in handling curriculum as well as administration and operational matters like student admission, student support and home-school cooperation, etc. Some also suggested that for large scale KGs, there should also be a vice-principal to assist the principal in overseeing the operation and development of the KGs as well as supervising teaching and non-teaching staff. While there were views that the Government should set the ratios of senior teacher and vice-principal posts in KGs, some others considered that the actual number of posts and rank might be decided by KGs according to their operational needs to maintain flexibility and vibrancy of the KG sector.

5.1.8 As discussed in Chapter 4, with regard to the qualification requirements for KG teachers, there were views that the minimum qualification should continue to be C(ECE), while some others considered it necessary to set a certain percentage of graduate teachers for each KG with an implementation timeline. On the qualification requirement for senior teachers, some were of the view that all teachers with certain years of teaching experience should be qualified for promotion to the senior teacher post, while others opined that KGs might be encouraged to appoint or promote degree-holders to the senior position. As to the qualification requirement for vice-principals, the majority view was that being the successor of the principal, they should be required to attain a degree qualification.

The Committee's Recommendations

5.1.9 The Committee has considered carefully various factors, including the current requirements on TP ratio and teacher qualifications, operational needs of KGs to provide for quality education, system stability and professional development needs of teachers, etc. The findings and the proposal on KG staffing requirements

²¹ For the planning of education support measures, students whose spoken language at home is not Chinese are broadly categorised as NCS students.

in the consultancy study have also been taken into account.

TP Ratio

5.1.10 The Committee is of the view that to support the delivery of quality KG education, there is a need for KGs to employ additional teaching staff on top of the existing threshold TP ratio of 1:15 to create more space for teachers to improve the teaching and learning. Moreover, the principal should be excluded from the 1:15 ratio so that KG principals can devote their time fully to the administration and management as well as day-to-day operation of the KG. Taking into account relevant factors such as the workload of the teachers, need to provide more capacity for teachers for curriculum development and lesson preparation, catering for the diverse needs of the children and professional development to enhance the quality of KG education, communication with parents to strengthen home-school cooperation, etc. as well as the practices of other countries²², the Committee recommends that KG be provided with more funding to increase the teacher manpower by about 20% which in effect will bring about an improved TP ratio of no worse than 1:12. To provide greater flexibility for KGs to deploy their manpower resources to meet their operational needs, the Committee considers it not necessary to set a different TP ratio for different levels (K1, K2 and K3).

5.1.11 The Committee also appreciates that the manpower requirements of HD, WD and LWD KGs are different and proposes that additional support should be considered for KGs to offer more full-day services to cater for the needs of working parents. Relevant details are set out in Chapter 7.

Staff Structure

5.1.12 The Committee recognises that KGs should offer a career ladder so as to retain and attract quality teachers and maintain a stable teaching force for providing quality KG education. According to the Consultant, who conducted a thorough assessment of the current core job duties in KGs, the staff structure of a typical KG should consist of different levels depending on its size, including staff at management

²² According to the consultant, overseas references on TP ratio gathered range from 1:11 to 1:20.

level, teaching staff and supporting staff. With reference to this staff structure, the Committee proposes that the KG teaching staff structure in general should comprise a principal, a vice-principal (for large scale KGs), senior teachers and class teachers. The Committee is of the view that a vice-principal may be needed for KGs with an enrolment of more than 300 HD students to assist the principal in overseeing school administration, curriculum development and operation matters.

5.1.13 The Committee notes that KGs having an enrolment ranging from 10 students to about 600 HD students constitute about 98% of all local NPM KGs in Hong Kong. Taking into account the establishment of a typical KG and from the perspective of effective management, the Committee proposes that, 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. The Committee also recommends that to maintain the diversity and flexibility of KGs, individual KGs may continue to have the discretion to appoint / deploy sufficient number of teachers to meet their operational needs.

Core Job Duties and Appointment Requirements

5.1.14 As discussed in Chapter 4, the Committee holds the view that at the present stage, the minimum qualification requirement for KG teachers should continue to be C(ECE). For senior teachers, the Committee considers that 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. The Committee considers that 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 a reference, teachers filling the senior teaching posts are expected to have at least three years of recognised teaching experience. As for vice-principals, given that they would probably be the successor of the principal, the Committee is of the view that they should be degree-holders to facilitate their providing effective support to the Principal. As a reference, vice-principals are expected to have a minimum of five years' recognised teaching experience including two years' educational administration experience. Whereas for principals, they are expected to have a minimum of five years' recognised

teaching experience including four years' educational administration experience.

5.2 Supporting Staff

Current Situation

5.2.1 In addition to the teaching staff, KGs employ supporting staff to assist in different tasks to meet operational needs which may vary due to different operating modes, scales as well as services provided. There are currently no specific manpower requirements or guidelines. Typically, the supporting staff in KGs includes clerks for handling school administrative work, and janitor staff for cleaning and other general duties. For WD or LWD KGs with a kitchen, KGs will also employ cook(s) to prepare meal for the students. Some KGs may also employ teaching assistants to provide support in teaching and learning activities as well as administrative work.

The Stakeholders' Views and Committee's Deliberations

5.2.2 There were views that after the implementation of PEVS, the administrative workload in handling student information and redemption of voucher has become very heavy. To allow KG teachers to have more room to focus on teaching-related duties, some expressed that greater clerical and administrative support should be provided to alleviate teachers' workload in handling administrative work such as assisting in school activities, handling general enquires, procurement and students' record, etc. Supporting staff, such as teaching assistants, would also be needed to assist teachers in lesson preparation, development of teaching materials, etc.

5.2.3 It was pointed out that the types and numbers of supporting staff required would vary with the operational needs of individual KGs. Factors such as the number and age of children, hours of operation, number of meals and the floor area of the KGs would also affect the manpower requirements. Specifically, some suggested that there should be at least one clerk with accounting knowledge for each KG, and more clerks for the large scale KGs. For janitor staff, there were views that more manpower would be required to maintain the hygienic environment for students. Some were also of the view that WD or LWD KGs would require additional

janitor staff due to their different services and operational needs. For LWD and WD KGs with a kitchen, it was considered that a cook should be employed, while some others suggested that an additional cook assistant be required for large KGs.

5.2.4 There were views that in order to cater for the diverse needs of students, including those with special needs, and their parents, KGs would need other supporting staff such as social workers, educational psychologists and speech therapist. It was also suggested that to help teachers deal with increasingly complex problems related to children development and their families, support from a multi-disciplinary team comprising social workers and educational psychologists might be necessary. While some opined that KGs might contract out services such as organising seminars and counselling sessions for parents, others were concerned that there might not be enough specialists in the market.

The Committee's Recommendations

5.2.5 Taking into consideration the stakeholders' and members' views as well as the consultant's findings and proposals, the Committee agrees that adequate supporting staff is essential for maintaining a desirable learning environment for children in KGs. To provide necessary administrative support for smooth operation of KGs, there should be at least one clerk for each KG, and two clerks for KGs with an enrolment of more than 300 HD students. Recognising that the workload of the clerical staff varies with the student enrolment, and that KGs operate in different modes (some operate only HD, others only WD, and many operate both HD and WD classes), the Committee considers it more appropriate for KGs to decide at their own discretion on the number of clerical staff to be appointed. Similarly, KGs would decide on the number of janitor staff to be hired to assist in general domestic duties. The ratio of one janitor staff for about 50-60 HD students is recommended. For LWD and WD KGs with a kitchen that complies with all the government requirements, the Committee considers that a cook will be required for preparing meals for the students, though for KGs of very small size, KGs should consider employing a part-time cook.

5.2.6 The Committee also notes that other supporting staff, such as teaching assistants who may assist in various tasks, are currently employed by some KGs in

different ways, i.e. full-time or part-time or through hire of service. Since different KGs may need different support for different tasks, the Committee considers that the provision of a recurrent grant to KGs based on the school size for this purpose would more effectively address the school needs. KGs may use the grant flexibly for employment of staff, hire of service or other uses as appropriate.

5.2.7 As regards additional specialist staff for supporting students with diverse needs, the issue will be addressed in Chapter 8.

Chapter 6 School Premises and Accommodation

6.1 Existing and Long-term Provision of Kindergarten Premises

Current Situation

6.1.1 Unlike aided primary and secondary schools which all operate on rental-free premises, KGs are located in a variety of premises, such as self-acquired premises, privately leased premises, public housing estates or premises owned by their SSBs.

6.1.2 According to the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines, the current planning standards for KG places are 730 HD and 250 WD places for every 1,000 children in the age group of three to under six. The recommended size of a KG should be a minimum of six classrooms with a total accommodation of 180 pupils per session. Where necessary, KGs with more than six classrooms may be considered with regard to district characteristics and site conditions.

6.1.3 At present, should there be any new public housing estates or large scale residential development projects, the Planning Department will reserve sites for educational services upon the advice of EDB, taking into account the requirement stipulated in the Hong Kong Planning Standard and Guidelines. The Planning Department will then follow up with the Housing Department or the private developer about including the required educational services in the proposed development. For available KG premises in public housing estates, there is an established mechanism for their allocation through a School Allocation Committee set up by EDB. KGs allocated premises through the School Allocation Committee will pay rental costs as stipulated in the tenancy agreement. These KGs will in general pay concessionary rent which is about 50% of the market rent. As for private development, the developer will rent the KG premises to operators on its own. Currently, less than 50% of the KGs operate on premises allocated by the Government.

The Stakeholders' Views and Committee's Deliberations

6.1.4 A consultancy study had been commissioned to study KG premises-related issues, including KG rental issues and long-term solutions of providing more quality KG premises.

6.1.5 There were views that in order to have a stable supply of quality KG premises, KG premises should be either provided by the Government or owned by the KG operators in the long run. To achieve this, the Government should increase the provision of KG premises in public housing estates. Some have also suggested that EDB should explore the feasibility of having government-owned KG premises in private housing estates.

6.1.6 Another suggested measure to increase the provision of KG premises was through co-location of KGs and primary schools. On this suggestion, there were issues to be resolved, such as different facilities requirements for primary schools and KGs, safety issues and legal responsibilities of the operators, particularly if the KG and primary school concerned were operated by different SSBs.

6.1.7 To enable existing KG operators to own their KG premises, there were suggestions that EDB should provide incentives, such as setting up an interest-free (or low interest) loan scheme, for SSBs or operators to purchase their school premises. However, some considered this not practicable as it had very complicated financial and legal implications, in particular for cases where the KG is closed and the premises sold. There were also views that the Government should be very cautious in devising policies which might have impact on the property market. Besides, some expressed concern over subsidizing private KG operators with public money through the loan scheme. In this regard, the Consultant had identified some issues of concern as follows:

- (i) SSBs or KG operators may be exposed to high risks on property investment, as they may not be familiar with the real estate market conditions;
- (ii) Fierce competition for SSBs or KG operators to purchase good quality school premises, which drives up the investment costs;
- (iii) Limited availability of KG school premises for sale, as some private owners

- are not willing to sell their commercial property (e.g. shopping centres);
- (iv) Regulations or arrangements for disposal of property if a KG ceases its operation; and
 - (v) Regulatory or accounting controls on the capital gain or loss given that the KGs are NPM.

6.1.8 While it took time to improve the physical accommodation and facilities of KGs, there were views that the Government should consider some short- or medium-term measures to provide children with a better learning environment, in particular small KGs or those without adequate facilities. In this regard, some, making reference to overseas experience, suggested setting up regional resource centres for providing various activity-based experiences for use by KGs. For example, the regional resource centres could provide facilities for running various learning programmes in areas covering science and exploration, nature, language, health and safety, culture, art and music, etc. The centres could also provide teacher training and parent education programmes or activities to maximise the use.

The Committee's Recommendations

6.1.9 The Committee has taken into consideration the views of various stakeholders and members as well as the findings and proposals of the consultancy studies on KG premises-related issues.

6.1.10 The Committee recognises that a stable supply of quality KG premises is crucial to an increase in the number of KGs that will not have to collect additional fees to defray rental expenses. This could be achieved if KG premises could be provided by the Government or owned by the SSBs/operators in the long run. The Committee is of the view that as a long-term strategy, the Government may explore with the relevant bureaux or departments measures to increase government-owned KG premises in public housing estates, including setting aside adequate sites for KG use in new towns with new demand, and making available KG sites for relocation of existing KGs in aged districts/ areas whose physical accommodation and facilities require substantial improvement. The feasibility of similar arrangements in private housing estates might also be explored. Moreover, the Government might consider whether there is a need to study the feasibility of providing incentives to encourage

SSBs/operators to acquire their own KG premises as a long-term strategy.

6.1.11 The Committee also recommends that the Government may explore the possibility of co-location of KGs and primary schools, either in existing primary school premises or in new schools. The Committee is of the view that this might be a possible option for KGs and primary schools under the same SSB. EDB might also consider revising the design of new primary school premises in the future to make co-location possible as and when necessary.

6.1.12 While it is the long-term target to provide more quality KG premises, some medium-term measures to support KGs in terms of premises facilities should also be considered. The Committee recommends that the Government may explore the feasibility of setting up resource centres, by region if feasible, for use by KGs. Drawing from overseas experience, such centres would be able to provide a safe education environment and a variety of activity-based learning activities for children from KGs in the region. Given the scarcity of land in Hong Kong and the lack of adequate facilities, KGs and their children should benefit from such resource centres.

6.1.13 Given most KGs are operating in public housing estates or on private premises and need to pay rent, the Committee proposes that the Government would consider providing rental subsidy to KGs. Details on the proposal are in Chapter 7.

6.2 Accommodation and Facilities

Current Situation

6.2.1 Disparities in accommodation and facilities are a common feature among KGs in Hong Kong. The number of classrooms in KGs may range from two or three to over 30. For some KGs, there are spacious indoor and outdoor play areas with different kinds of facilities. In contrast, some KGs have only limited space for storage, learning corners or other facilities.

6.2.2 With regard to the premises and facilities of KGs, there are stipulated requirements in the Operation Manual for Pre-primary Institutions (Operation Manual) on the premises design, furniture and equipment, safety measures, health,

sanitation, etc. The Operation Manual, compiled in 2006, is revised on a need basis with reference to changes in legislation, rules and regulations upon advice by the respective departments.

The Stakeholders' Views and Committee's Deliberations

6.2.3 In this connection, a consultancy study had been commissioned to study KG accommodation and facilities as well as the future design of KG premises. With regard to the standard accommodation and facilities of KGs, there were views that the Operation Manual should be reviewed to take into account contemporary needs, including the requirements on space for each student, teacher facilities and student facilities. The major concern on students' facilities was the lack of space and spatial flexibilities for teaching. There was a strong call for a clearer and more systematic re-evaluation on the minimal size of the future classrooms for KGs. Consideration should also be given to raising the standard of indoor play area. In this connection, the accommodation requirements as well as the basic functions and facilities should be carefully re-evaluated and re-considered in tandem with the KG curriculum and teaching philosophy. Specifically, some suggested increasing the indoor area per student by about 25%. Some considered that it would be desirable to have an outdoor play area as well, subject to availability of suitable sites/premises.

6.2.4 Some were of the view that certain special rooms such as Music Room and Art Room should be the core components of KGs for promoting effective learning of young children. Other facilities such as learning corners, library corners, medical room, display area for children's work and larger storage area for various purposes would be required. It was also proposed that for each classroom, there should be a washing basin and storage space. Some suggested that the toilet arrangement should be re-designed, e.g. in a decentralised manner such as pocket toilets between classrooms to facilitate effective use by students, maintain the hygienic environment and avoid queuing up.

6.2.5 On teachers' facilities, some were of the view that there was a need to improve the working environment for teachers. There were suggestions that KGs should have a principal office and a staff room. It was noted in some KGs that teachers had to work in students' classroom with children's furniture which was

undesirable. There was also insufficient space for various activities, such as meetings and administrative work.

6.2.6 To provide a better environment for students as well as saving time for bed-making, some suggested that there should be a nap room in KGs if possible. To ensure children's safety during admission and dismissal time, it would be desirable to have proper pick up area, such as parking facilities and waiting area for parents. There were also calls for improving the environment of KGs in terms of cross ventilation, natural lighting penetration and high ceiling space.

6.2.7 While many of the proposed enhancements to KG accommodation and facilities would be long-term goals, some cautioned that in considering any major changes to the existing requirements or standards of accommodation, EDB should take into account the current situation of KG premises and the implications for them.

6.2.8 Some were concerned about the existing arrangement for allocation of KG premises by the Government. There were views that the premises allocated to KGs through the School Allocation Committee quite often could not meet their operational needs in terms of the design and facilities. For this reason, the SSBs or operators should be invited to state their premises requirements at an early stage so that the design/facilities could better suit their operational needs.

The Committee's Recommendations

6.2.9 The Committee has taken into consideration the views of various stakeholders and members as well as the findings and proposals of the consultancy study on KG accommodation. In general, the Committee considers that the physical accommodation and facilities of KGs should be enhanced in order to provide a more conducive environment for children's learning and development. In this regard, the operational needs of different types of KG (i.e. HD, WD and LWD) should also be considered.

6.2.10 While noting the scarcity of land in Hong Kong, the Committee recommends that as a long-term target, KGs should provide a more spacious environment for children's physical activities and learning. While it would be desirable for KGs to

provide an outdoor play area for the students, the Committee considers it advisable to increase the indoor floor area for each student. In this connection, the Committee proposes that the existing recommended standard of 1.8 sq. metres per student might be reviewed with reference to overseas practices and the specific circumstantial factors like the need for striking a balance between the genuine need for improvement to the premises and the keen competition for scarce land resources in the HK context. As a reference, the Committee proposes that the Government should initially aim to increase the indoor floor space for each student by about 20%.

6.2.11 The Committee also considers that KGs should be situated away from busy areas to minimise the effects of environmental pollution and should ensure that children would gain easy access to the KG premises safely.

6.2.12 It is noted that KGs offer diversified services and operate in different modes, and hence they have varied operational needs. The Committee is of the view that the future design of KG premises should be flexible where feasible, such as the use of sliding doors between classrooms, provision of multi-purpose rooms, allowing flexibility for conversion from HD to WD operation, etc. to meet the operational needs.

6.2.13 Noting that children should be given a more conducive learning environment, the Committee considers it favourable to have some core facilities which are essential to KG operation or student learning in the future design of KGs. In addition to standard size classrooms, adequate space or area should be available for core student learning activities such as music and art activities. For LWD and WD KGs, a kitchen should be available. Where feasible, it would be desirable to have a washing basin and storage space for students' use in each classroom. To provide a better working environment for teachers, it would also be desirable to have a staff room in each typical KG.

6.2.14 For further enhancement, the Committee is of the view that for WD and LWD KGs, accommodation such as a laundry and additional storage area for beds would be desirable. In the long term, the feasibility of re-designing the toilet arrangement might be explored, e.g. in a decentralised manner to facilitate effective use by students and for hygiene purposes.

6.2.15 In the light of the above proposed enhancement measures, the Committee considers that the Government should also review the requirements of KG premises stipulated in Operation Manual to suit contemporary needs, such as space for each student, teacher facilities and student facilities.

6.2.16 To help ensure that new school premises can better meet the operational needs of KGs, the Committee considers that the existing school allocation mechanism should be reviewed. 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.

6.2.17 Apart from the long-term improvement targets, the Committee proposes that in the interim, the Government might also explore means to assist KGs in upgrading the school premises and facilities to provide a more conducive learning environment for students. For example, KGs might consider adding sliding doors where appropriate to enable flexible use of space in KGs. The ventilation and lighting might also be improved by installing windows of proper size. Generally, given the disparities in their space and facilities, individual KGs may have different improvement needs in respect of their accommodation.

Chapter 7 Funding Arrangement

7.1 Scope of Free Kindergarten Education

Current Situation

7.1.1 At present, there is huge diversity across the KG sector. KGs have been enjoying much flexibility which enables them to respond to the needs of parents and children in their daily operation. While KGs in Hong Kong are all privately run, they can be categorised as NPM KGs or private independent (PI) KGs which differ in several aspects. SSBs or operators of NPM KGs are granted tax exemption under the Inland Revenue Ordinance and may budget for a margin (up to 5% of expenditure) in their school fees when seeking approval of fee revision to meet cash flow requirements, provided that the whole margin be re-invested in education. However, PI KGs are profit-making and can reap a profit margin of 10% which can be distributed to shareholders. In the 2014/15 school year, there are 978 KGs and among them, 760 are local NPM KGs enrolling some 144 700 students, and 114 are local PI KGs enrolling some 22 000 students.

Diversity in the KG Sector

7.1.2 The following statistics can help illustrate the diversity:

- (i) The number of students in a KG ranges from 17 to over 1200 for KGs under the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS), and from 5 to over 1400 for local non-PEVS KGs in the 2014/15 school year.
- (ii) In the 2014/15 school year, the annual school fee for PEVS KGs ranges from \$11,800 to \$30,020 for HD session, and from \$19,400 to \$60,040 for WD session. For local non-PEVS KGs, the annual school fee ranges from \$14,100 to \$99,000 for HD session, and from \$23,300 to \$154,100 for WD session.
- (iii) For PEVS KGs, the monthly salary of full-time teachers ranges from \$8,000 to \$70,500 in the 2014/15 school year.
- (iv) While the TP ratio according to EDB's standard is 1:15, KGs usually

flexibly arrange grouping of children according to the needs of different learning activities. For local NPM KGs, in the 2014/15 school year, the average TP ratio of the AM session is around 1:10.0 while the average TP ratio of the PM session is 1:8.4.

- (v) In the 2014/15 school year, more than half of the local NPM KGs (52%) receive rental reimbursement (among which more than 90% operate in public housing estates or government-owned premises), 26% pay nil/nominal rent while the remaining 22% are housed in commercial premises and pay market rent. The market rent paid by KGs varies significantly. For example, in the 2014/15 school year, the amount of rent reimbursed for one of the KGs is \$3,100 per month but the reimbursed rent for another KG in the same district reaches \$150,150 per month. The highest amount of rent reimbursed by a KG is \$350,000 per month.
- (vi) KGs offer diversified services. In 2014/15 school year, out of the 760 local NPM KGs, 381 KGs operate both HD and WD classes (around 50%), followed by 235 KGs operating solely WD classes (31%) and 144 solely for HD classes (19%). Such number varies from year to year mainly depending on the demand for such places.

The Stakeholders' Views and Committee's Deliberations

7.1.3 In the course of the Committee's deliberation, there were different views and expectations on the future free KG education policy. On the provision of KG programmes to children, some opined that HD schooling would suffice at KG level from the educational perspective. There were opposite views that free KG education should cover HD, WD and LWD KGs to cater for the different needs of families. While the operating hours of HD and WD KGs are three hours and six hours respectively (and even more for LWD KGs), it was considered that both WD and LWD KG programmes are not solely for education but also for child care service purposes. Some therefore held the view that HD KG education would be the basic provision for all eligible children aged three to six, and free or subsidised WD or LWD KG places should only be provided on a need basis for children who meet certain prescribed criteria such as family income or both parents are working.

7.1.4 There was in-depth discussion on the level of subsidy under the basic provision of the future free KG education. The majority view was that it should cover the school fees that relate to the expenses directly attributable to students' learning and school operation. While some were of different views, most considered that other charges collected by KGs for various school items as well as the expenses arising from paid or above-standard services should be borne by parents. For students from needy families, it was suggested that additional subsidy might be provided on a need basis for them to meet the other related expenses.

7.1.5 On which types of KGs should be covered by the future free KG education policy, there were views that in line with the existing practice for PEVS, NPM KGs offering local curriculum should be covered. While there was a broad consensus that non-local KGs (i.e. KGs offering non-local curriculum) should be excluded from the new policy, there were diverse views on whether the profit-making local PI KGs should be covered. Some opined that PI KGs should not be covered as this was in line with the existing practice that only NPM KGs would be provided with recurrent government subvention. There were concerns that the use of public funds could not be justified and safeguarded if PI KGs, being allowed to siphon off profit or distribute dividend to shareholders, were to be covered. However, there were opposing views that PI KGs should be covered as all eligible children should be able to benefit from subsidy for free KG education regardless of whether they study in local NPM KGs or local PI KGs. There were also suggestions that under the future free KG education policy, government subsidy could be provided for local NPM KGs directly, whereas for students attending PI KGs, subsidy might be given to parents in the form of a voucher.

7.1.6 Members noted there would be about 760 local NPM KGs and such have provided reasonable choices for parents. Some also suggested that local PI KGs meeting EDB's prescribed criteria (e.g. quality and financial requirements) could be covered by the future free KG education policy as a temporary arrangement, whereby they should be required to change to NPM status after a transitional period.

7.1.7 There were views that apart from local NPM status, other major criteria applying to KGs to be covered by the future free KG education policy might include charging a tuition fee not exceeding the specified fee thresholds, meeting the

minimum 1:15 TP ratio with teachers who possess C(ECE), etc.

The Committee's Recommendations

7.1.8 The Committee is of the view that the objective of the future free KG education policy should be for the Government to provide funding to pay for KG education at a quality level in local NPM KGs so that parents need not pay for such education for their children. The future free 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. 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. As regards the scope of quality KG education to be provided free, as detailed in Chapter 2, a number of research studies have been carried out to investigate the impact of school hours on three- to six-year-old children but existing evidence precludes drawing conclusions that WD programmes are more favourable to young children than HD programmes. The Committee shares the view that it is the quality of the KG programmes, rather than the duration, that determines whether children can benefit from them or not, and HD programmes allow relatively more family time for young children to play and interact with their family in a less-structured but more relaxing setting. The Committee is tasked to define the scope of quality KG education to be provided free. Taking into consideration the development needs of the children as well as overseas practices, the scope of quality KG education that directly impacts upon the learning and development of children can be provided by a HD (about three hours a day) programme. The Committee recommends that all eligible children aged three to six should have access to such programme and the Government should provide for that as the basic provision.

7.1.9 The Committee recognises the much needed services provided by WD and LWD services. The Committee also takes note of the recommendation of the "Population Policy" of releasing more women back to the workforce and the need of extended care services required to support them. The Committee therefore recommends that appropriate and additional resources be provided for KG offering WD or LWD services. That notwithstanding, the Committee considers it important

to distinguish between the availability of services and the subsidy provided. While the former hinges on the supply of school places, the latter is a matter of how taxpayers' money should be deployed. To facilitate a higher provision of WD or LWD services does not necessarily mean that full subsidy should be provided by the Government without considering the actual needs and circumstances of the parents using the services. In fact, some families with dual working parents would welcome the availability of more WD or LWD services no matter the services are fully subsidised by the Government or not. Against this background, the Committee's views and recommendations on how to support WD/LWD KGs and the families in need of such services are set out in paragraph 7.4.

7.1.10 The Committee recognises that KG education is a foundation stage of learning and whole person development of children with unique pedagogical characteristics that integrate care and education. In formulating recommendations on the practicable implementation of free KG education, the Committee's primary concern is to ensure the quality of KG education. The Committee respects the current diversity in KG education, and considers it important to maintain it, since such diversity caters for the different and unique needs of the children and their parents. Preserving the diversity is vital in assuring and enhancing the quality of KG education. With this in mind, and to ensure that the implementation of government assistance for KG education is practicable and sustainable, the Committee considers that it would not be tenable for the Government to subsidise every facet of the current and future free KG education. The Committee regards it important that government subsidy should fund KG education at a level which enables KGs to provide quality education. In this regard, the basic provision should cover school fees related to the expenses directly attributable to students' learning and school operation. Other charges collected by KGs for various school items as well as the expenses arising from above-standard services should be borne by parents. Also, rental charges exceeding government subsidies, if any, have to be borne by parents. Children from needy families may apply for financial assistance and the details are set out in Chapter 8.

7.1.11 The Committee recommends that as a matter of equity, all eligible children aged three to six should have access to quality KG education. On the eligibility of KGs to be covered by the 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 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. The Committee further recommends that for other eligibility criteria, reference might be made to some of those of the existing PEVS such as meeting the requirements in teacher qualifications, quality assurance and transparency in operation.

7.2 Mode of Funding

Current Situation

7.2.1 Since 2007, the Government has been implementing PEVS with an aim to facilitate all eligible children in receiving affordable and quality KG education. All local NPM KGs are eligible for applying to join PEVS. Parents are free to choose eligible KGs, and have to pay for the difference in case the tuition fee exceeds the voucher value. Apart from the PEVS subsidy, eligible NPM KGs may also apply for government subsidies which include reimbursement of rent, rates and government rent. As for former aided centres which are commonly known as LWD KGs and are all under PEVS, they have also been receiving other funding from the Government, including reimbursement of rent, rates and government rent, as well as reimbursement of management fee and air-conditioning charges for individual LWD KGs. LWD KGs can also apply for funds under the Lotteries Fund through SWD to meet non-recurrent expenditure such as renovation and purchase of furniture and equipment.

The Stakeholders' Views and Committee's Deliberations

7.2.2 In the course of the Committee's deliberation, there were different views on the modes of financing for KG education. It was suggested that the Committee should consider whether the Government could continue to adopt the current approach through the use of the voucher system, or change to a different approach by providing funding direct to KG operators. In this regard, some opined that the existing PEVS, with enhancement, could continue to be adopted. On the other hand,

there were strong calls that the Government should fully subsidise KGs by adopting the aided school subvention mode. Others opined that the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) mode, whereby funding was given to schools primarily on a per student basis, might be considered. There were also other suggested funding modes.

7.2.3 In view of the diverse views, the Committee had examined the main features of some existing subvention modes, analysed their pros and cons as well as their applicability to the KG Sector. The major observations and views are summarised below.

PEVS

- (i) It is conceived by many that PEVS would facilitate freedom of choice on the part of parents. PEVS would preserve the market responsiveness of the sector and enhance quality at the same time. Some appealed for enhancing the existing PEVS to provide parents with more subsidy and choices.
- (ii) However, some have expressed reservations over providing direct subsidy to parents as the market force alone might not be sufficient to drive quality in KG education, neither can it address the school-specific needs such as the specific target groups that they serve, or the unique services that they provide. Specifically, enhancement to PEVS voucher subsidy as the funding mode for free KG education is considered incapable of addressing the concerns of WD or LWD KGs, which have all along complained about financial difficulties arising from inadequate subsidies.

Aided school subvention mode

- (iii) The Committee notes that under the aided school subvention mode, there are stringent planning parameters to ensure that sufficient subvented school places are available under compulsory education. Aided schools are financed by the Government according to the Code of Aid, in which rules are also laid down for various issues including the

salary scale of teachers, appointment, promotion and dismissal of staff, admission and dismissal of students, etc. The level of subvention for each school is mainly based on the approved class structure which also determines the staff establishment. To ensure public funds are utilised in a cost-effective manner, there is a class threshold for approving the number of classes to be operated in each school. In other words, when the student enrolment falls short of the threshold, classes will be packed accordingly and shrinkage of the staff establishment will result.

- (iv) Some members were in favor of adopting the salary policy applicable to the aided schools as such it is believed that; among others, should provide stability to the teaching force. Notwithstanding that, the Committee notes that such salary-related practices could not be applied to KGs in isolation. Specifically, the salary-related practices are part and parcel of the standardised funding mode for aided schools.
- (v) The aided school 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, as mentioned in (iii), according to the class approval mechanism, a drop in student enrolment would result in class packing and teacher redundancy. Therefore, rigid adherence to the aided schools' salary policy by KGs will actually hamper the stability of the teaching force. There might even be pressure for closure of some very small KGs in times of student population drop.
- (vi) Also, the aided school funding mode is premised on a centralised school place allocation system to ensure student placement is conducted in a fair and transparent manner through the creation of school nets. If such is adopted in the KG sector, this will inevitably affect the sector's overall operating flexibility in coping with the rise and fall of students in different districts. On the other hand, diversity in the present KG system is cherished by parents as their children have wide choices of different types of KGs not bound by districts. Location-specific feature in the school-net system is therefore considered not suitable in a free

KG education context.

- (vii) Besides, unlike the aided schools that are operated mainly in government-owned or rental-free private lands, the operation of KGs in commercial premises will render the planning of school places in a holistic manner neither practicable nor feasible.

Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS)

- (viii) The Committee notes that the objective of the Government to introduce the DSS was to inject diversity to the education landscape by means of government subsidies and competition among different school sectors so as to provide parents with greater choices. Under the DSS, the funding for each school is primarily based on the average unit cost of an aided school place and the school's actual enrolment. Unlike their aided school counterparts, DSS schools are allowed to charge school fee for providing additional facilities and for implementing measures to enhance the learning environment. Besides, DSS schools are given much greater freedom in areas such as curriculum, staffing, entrance requirements, and other school policies.
- (ix) Some favoured adopting the DSS, which aims at fostering diversity and parental choice in the school sector, as the funding mode for KG education. However, some have expressed concerns over the complete applicability of the DSS mode for future free KG education. Under the DSS, private financing through fees for top-up facilities or provision is regarded as a useful supplement to public financing to cater for individual needs for some schools. However, the purpose of free KG education will be defeated if a lot of KGs will have to charge school fees to supplement their operating costs. Besides, there is no readily available reference rate for deriving the unit cost of a KG place as in the case of DSS which can make reference to the average unit cost of an aided primary/ secondary school place.
- (x) There were views that the major feature of the DSS mode, i.e. the provision of a recurrent government subsidy in a lump sum based on

student enrolment, which can give schools more autonomy and flexibility to deploy available resources so as to make better educational decisions for their schools and students, should be considered when designing the funding mode for free KG education. Nevertheless, should the Government wish to take reference from the DSS mode, it should be mindful to provide sufficient subsidy by way of unit rate and/or other school-specific subvention so that most parents do not need to top up KG school fees.

Lump Sum Grant (LSG)

- (xi) On providing government subsidy by lump sum, the Committee has studied the LSG mode adopted in the welfare sector. Under the LSG funding arrangement, salaries and personal emolument related allowances as well as other charges are provided in a lump sum on an agency basis. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have flexibility in deploying their LSG.
- (xii) The Committee notes that under the LSG mode, the lump-sum grant related to personal emolument is basically determined on the basis of the mid-point salaries of the respective ranks of the staff. In this respect, there were concerns over adopting the LSG mode for KG education.
- (xiii) The Committee is fully aware of the sector's concern about adopting the above-mentioned LSG mode for KG education, in particular the worry that KGs might not have sufficient funding to meet expenses on staff salaries and would be reluctant to employ experienced teachers, which will have negative impact on the quality of education.

The Committee's Recommendations

7.2.4 The Committee recognises that in formulating the funding mode for the future free KG education policy, it is imperative that the diversity, vibrancy and uniqueness of the KG sector should be maintained. In making its recommendations,

the Committee will make reference to the relevant features of the various existing subvention modes as well as the views expressed by the stakeholders.

7.2.5 The Committee has considered whether the future subsidy should be in the form of voucher as is the case for PEVS, or of providing funding for KG operators, or a combination of both. In this regard, while noting that PEVS may facilitate freedom of choice on the part of parents, the Committee is aware that the KG sector has complained that it has resulted in unhealthy competition among KG operators and failed to cater for the needs of KGs of different operation modes.

7.2.6 The Committee has also considered the pros and cons of adopting the standardised subvention mode for aided schools. It is of the view that the stringent control measures of the aided school mode, such as centralised student placement system, approval of class structure and setting of class threshold, may result in packing of classes and redundant teachers in KGs in times of enrolment drop. Also, KGs will become less flexible in operating HD and WD classes to meet the needs of parents. All these would not be conducive to maintaining the diversity, vibrancy and uniqueness of the KG sector. In the light of the above, the Committee considers it not desirable to adopt this funding mode for KGs.

7.2.7 While appreciating that the DSS mode may not be fully applicable to KGs, especially because DSS schools do not have rental issues, in designing the funding mode for KG, the Committee considers that the Government may make reference to some features of the DSS mode such as its unit cost approach, and the provision of different unit costs according to the school's operating history.

7.2.8 As regards the LSG funding approach, the Committee is of the view that if reference is to be made to this mode, the Government should explore ways to address the KG sector's concern over insufficient funding to meet the salary expenses of KGs and consider providing a safety net under which KGs may apply for additional funding on a case-by-case basis.

7.2.9 The Committee is aware of the complexity and diversity in KG operation as manifested in KGs offering HD, WD, LWD services and/or a mix of different types of services. The level of government subsidy for the different modes of KG operation

and services might also be different in future. Based on the above analysis, the Committee recommends a more flexible funding mode be adopted under the new policy, whereby funding for individual KGs will be partly provided 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.

7.2.10 Specifically, 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 NCS students, etc. In this regard, a mechanism should be in place to enable annual adjustment of the unit cost and school-specific grant, and a regular review of the arrangement after the implementation of the new policy. The Committee is of the view that by adopting such a funding mode, the flexibility, vibrancy and uniqueness of the KG sector would be maintained.

7.3 Subsidy for Basic Operational Expenses of KGs

7.3.1 As set out in paragraph 7.1, the Committee proposes that the basic provision of free KG education should cover the school fees that relate to the expenses directly attributable to students' learning and school operation. The level of funding would be linked to the cost of delivery of quality KG education. In determining the subsidies for a KG's basic operational expenses, the Committee has examined the various components of operational expenses which might be grouped under the following categories:

- (a) Staff salary-related and other operating expenses
 - (i) Salary-related expenses, which include salaries of teaching and supporting staff as well as Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF), long service payment, severance payment, etc.
 - (ii) Other operating expenses, which include school general expenses for the operation of KGs (e.g. minor repairs, furniture and equipment), teaching-related expenses (e.g. teaching materials and consumables), and expenses for school and staff development, etc.

(b) Premises-related expenses

- (i) KG premises rentals
- (ii) Major repair

7.3.2 With a view to collecting more comprehensive information and making recommendations for consideration of the Committee, two consultancy studies had been commissioned to examine specifically the human resources requirements and remuneration as well as KG rental issues.

(a) Subsidy for Staff Salary-related and Other Operating Expenses

Current Situation

7.3.3 On staff salary-related issues, the Committee is aware that under the former KG and Child Care Centre Subsidy Scheme, KGs were required to pay teachers according to the Recommended Normative Salary Scale. Upon the introduction of PEVS, the Recommended Normative Salary Scale was abolished so as to allow all KGs to have full discretion in determining salaries for teachers and awarding increments to them in consideration of their experience and performance. Currently KGs have different school-based arrangements for determining their teachers' salaries. Some KGs follow basically the Recommended Normative Salary Scale while some offer remuneration and salary adjustments based on school-based criteria such as performance, qualifications, etc. According to the annual teacher survey conducted in September 2014, the average salary of teachers working full-time²³ in KGs under PEVS was about \$18,800.

7.3.4 KGs adopt different practices in determining remuneration for KG teachers. Some existing practices are as follows-

- (i) Some KGs follow the civil service's Master Pay Scale (MPS), for example, from Point 7 to Point 18 for teachers.

²³ 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.

- (ii) The salary for some HD KG teachers is about two-thirds of that for full-day teachers.
- (iii) Annual salary adjustments would be made in accordance with various school-based criteria such as staff performance, attainment of academic qualifications, years of teaching experience, civil service pay adjustments and Composite Consumer Price Index adjustments, etc.

The Stakeholders' Views and Committee's Deliberations

7.3.5 A consultancy had been commissioned to study KG staff salary and related issues. Specifically, the consultant's recommendations covered the proposed salary structure for KG teaching and supporting staff positions as well as the subvention arrangements.

7.3.6 In the course of the Committee's deliberation, members noted that there were strong calls for a mandatory salary scale to be put in place for compliance of all KGs. Some also considered that teachers' teaching experience should be recognised upon transfer from one KG to another.

7.3.7 There were opposite views that the Government should only provide salary ranges for reference of KGs, so that KGs would determine the remuneration of their teachers in accordance with their school-based mechanism which should be open, transparent and with checks and balances. They considered that respecting KGs' discretion in teachers' and principals' remuneration was in line with the principle of maintaining the flexibility and diversity of the KG sector. Nevertheless, some were concerned that teachers' salaries would be market-driven if flexibility was allowed so a monitoring mechanism would need to be in place to make sure that KGs would follow the pay policy.

7.3.8 Some expressed the views that adopting the salary policy applicable to the aided schools would, among others, provide stability to the teaching force. However, some opined that the salary-related practices might not be applicable to KGs in isolation from the standardised funding mode for aided schools which is subject to the Government's stringent control in, for example, the approval of class structure and the setting of class threshold.

7.3.9 As set out in Chapter 5, it is recommended that a KG should be staffed with a principal, a vice-principal (for large scale KGs), senior teachers and class teachers, while very small scale KGs may not have any senior teachers. It is considered that a salary range should be provided for each position. Similarly, salary ranges would also be proposed for the core supporting staff of a KG, including clerks, janitor staff, and a cook in the case of KGs with a kitchen.

7.3.10 In this regard, the consultant examined the current pay levels of the core teaching and supporting staff positions in KGs, and conducted a thorough analysis and comparison with the pay levels of similar roles/positions in the job market. On salary of KG teaching staff, the consultant considered that basically the proposed salary should be higher than the current pay levels to reflect the upgrading of teacher qualifications since the introduction of PEVS. Apart from this, reference should be made to the pay levels of comparable roles/positions in the job market. In the case of teaching staff, the different positions, namely class teacher, senior teacher, vice-principal and principal would be comparable to entry level professional, professional, supervisor, and management in the market. For supporting staff including clerk, janitor and cook, reference should also be made to similar roles/positions in the job market.

7.3.11 On the funding arrangement for staff salary, the consultant was of the view that the aided school subvention mode, which is standardised and less flexible, might not be fully applicable to KGs. On the other hand, while the provision of funding in the form of a block grant would allow flexibility, clear guidelines should be provided for KGs to ensure the funding for staff salary would be used properly for the designated purposes.

The Committee's Recommendations

(i) Staff Salary-related Expenses

7.3.12 In formulating its recommendations, the Committee has given due consideration to the views expressed by various KG stakeholders as well as the findings and proposals of the consultancy.

7.3.13 The Committee recommends that competitive remuneration should be offered to KG teachers to attract and retain talents. The Government should set a salary range for each of the teaching positions and core supporting staff positions (clerk, janitor and cook) for reference of KGs.

7.3.14 The Committee is of the view that as compared to a mandatory salary scale, in which teacher salary is determined solely in accordance with seniority, a reference salary range, which would ensure competitiveness and at the same time allow flexibility for the KG management to decide on their staff remuneration, taking into account their teaching experience, performance, additional job duties, qualification, and training and special skills, etc. would be more appropriate. That notwithstanding, the Committee is fully aware that the concerns of KG teachers about their qualifications and experience not being recognised by KGs in determining their remuneration, particularly in cases when a teacher transfers from one KG to another, should be properly addressed. In this regard, the Committee proposes that specific implementation guidelines and clear rules and regulations should be set out to ensure that KGs use government funding appropriately for staff salary. For example, a certain proportion of the government funding should be designated for teaching staff salary expenses. Also, KGs should be required to set up a transparent school-based mechanism with checks and balances for determining staff salaries.

7.3.15 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 should be in place to enable adjustment of the pay levels.

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 KG)</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.

7.3.16 As regards the funding arrangements for staff salary expenses, the Committee is aware that the salary-related practices under the funding mode for aided schools cannot be applied to KGs in isolation as explained above. The Committee recommends that government subsidy for staff salaries might be referenced on the mid-point of the respective salary ranges of the staff. The Committee also recommends the Government to consider introducing measures to address the KG sector's concerns that KGs with a large number of long-serving teachers might not be able to meet the high expenditure on staff salaries if the provision is based on the mid-point salary. The Government should consider providing a safety net under which KGs may apply for additional funds on a case-by-case basis.

(ii) Other Operating Expenses

7.3.17 On the provision of subsidy for KGs to meet their other operating expenses, the Committee considers that the expenditure items currently accepted for fee revision purposes should generally continue to be accepted for subsidy under the future funding arrangements, which includes -

- Furniture and equipment
- Teaching aids, learning activities
- Teachers' stationery, paper and other consumables
- Student handbooks, profiles, certificates, identity cards
- Water and electricity charges, telephone line, cleaning fees
- Postage charges, publications, transportation fees
- Insurance premium, first aid and fire safety equipment
- Audit fees, school administration service charges, etc.

The list of acceptable items should be reviewed as and when necessary. For instance, expenditure items for school development or staff training purposes should be considered for inclusion. The subsidy for other operating expenses might be determined with reference to past expenditure patterns of KGs.

(b) Subsidy for Premises-related Expenses

Current Situation

7.3.18 KG premises-related expenses include expenses on rental, government rent and rates, repairs and maintenance, etc. KGs operate in different types of school premises and the rental costs vary considerably. Currently, some KGs operate in government-allocated premises (such as public housing estates) while others are in private premises such as rented premises in commercial buildings, church premises or private sites owned by school sponsors.

7.3.19 Of the 760 local NPM KGs in the 2014/15 school year, about 22% of them are in commercial premises paying market rentals, 26% are charged nominal or nil rental, and about 52% of them (396 KGs) receive rent reimbursement under the Rent Reimbursement Scheme (RRS).

7.3.20 There is great variation in rental expenses among different KGs. The relevant information is set out in paragraph 7.1.

The Stakeholders' Views and Committee's Deliberations

7.3.21 A consultancy had been commissioned to study KG rental and related issues. Specifically, the consultant's proposals covered ways to provide rental subsidy for KGs and how to tackle the rental issue in the long run.

7.3.22 There were views that rental subsidy should be provided to eligible KGs as rentals for school premises constitute one of the KGs' major expenditure items. As long-term measures, the Government should explore measures to ensure a stable supply of KG premises (details of which are set out in Chapter 6).

7.3.23 The Committee opines that the Government should make efforts to lessen the KGs' rental-related financial burden. In this regard, the Committee has reviewed the existing RRS to consider if it would still be applicable in future for providing assistance to KGs under the future free KG education policy. The Committee notes that the existing RRS has the following major features:

- (i) Over 80% of KGs in receipt of rent reimbursement are estate KGs.
- (ii) Eligible KGs have to fulfil a set of eligibility criteria which include being NPM KGs, having satisfied the requirement of proven demand for KG places in the district concerned, and having an average rental below a cut-off rate determined by EDB.
- (iii) The amount of reimbursement is based on assessment by the Rating and Valuation Department (RVD), and determined by the KGs' fill-up rate (total no. of students / total permitted accommodation as stated on the Accommodation Certificate). KGs will receive full reimbursement for a fill-up rate of 50% or above, or receive only 50% reimbursement for a fill-up rate below 50%²⁴.
- (iv) A biennial monitoring mechanism is in place to assess if KGs will continue to be eligible for rent reimbursement.

7.3.24 There were views that under the future free KG education policy, all local NPM KGs should be eligible for rental subsidy, such that their financial viability can be enhanced and all parents will benefit. It would be different from the current situation where only about 50% of NPM KGs are in receipt of rent reimbursement. It was suggested that the eligibility criteria of 'proven demand for KG places in the districts concerned' and 'rental cut-off rate' under RRS might no longer be applicable in future. The Committee considers that a new rental subsidy scheme has to be devised which should be financially sustainable to both the Government and KG operators.

²⁴ New KGs with the school premises allocated by the School Allocation Committee are eligible for full rent reimbursement in the first three-year tenancy agreement regardless of their rental cost and fill-up rate.

7.3.25 There were views that as the rental charges among different KGs vary significantly, there should be a ceiling on the amount of subsidy to be provided for each eligible KG to ensure proper use of public funds. As a result, some KGs which operate in commercial premises may need to pay extra rental expenses on top of the rental subsidy provided by the Government, if any. In this regard, there were concerns that the competitiveness of some KGs in recruiting students might be reduced.

7.3.26 Some raised the concern that KGs in districts of over-provision of KG places would also receive rental subsidy when the 'proven demand for KG places' is no longer an eligibility criterion. It was hence proposed that the actual amount of rental subsidy for a KG should continue to be determined based on the KG's fill-up rate in terms of student enrolment and school capacity. The Committee fully agrees that the Government should exercise control in the provision of rental subsidy, and there should be appropriate mechanism to ensure that free KG education does not lead to subsidising profits of KGs and/or owners of KG premises.

7.3.27 On the ceiling of rental subsidy, one option proposed by the consultant was to use the average unit rental of KGs within a district as the subsidy ceiling for KGs in that particular district. However, this option was considered undesirable as it would be difficult to achieve an optimal grouping of KGs given the great variation in rentals of KG premises. There were also concerns over a potential inflationary effect on KG rentals as some landlords might raise the current rentals to the subsidy ceiling. Another possible option was to make reference to rentals of comparable KG premises in public housing estates. This option was considered more preferable as the rentals of estate KG were relatively less volatile, and it would also be in line with the long-term goal of increasing the provision of government-owned premises in public housing estates. As regards the level of rental subsidy, given that all KGs under the future free KG education policy might be eligible for rental subsidy, the consultant was of the view that for prudent use of public funds, there might be a need to have more tiers of subsidy according to fill-up rates of the KGs.

The Committee's Recommendations

(i) KG Rental

7.3.28 In formulating its recommendations, the Committee has given due consideration to the views expressed by KG stakeholders as well as the findings and proposals of the consultancy. The Committee is of the view that rental subsidy should be provided for eligible KGs as recurrent funding on a per school basis to alleviate KGs' financial burden.

7.3.29 The Committee proposes that the Government should take into account the following in the design of the new rental subsidy scheme:

- (i) The current RRS should be reviewed to enable the amount of rental subsidy for a KG to become contingent upon the KG's fill-up rate. Consideration may be given to introducing more tiers of rental subsidy according to different fill-up rates to guard against using public funds to subsidise over-provision of KG places.
- (ii) There should be a ceiling on the amount of subsidy to be provided for each eligible KG 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. The rentals of estate KGs are relatively less market-driven as compared to the rental of KG premises in commercial premises, which will enable better budgetary control for the Government.
- (iii) KGs under the future free 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.

7.3.30 The Committee also recommends that there should be some transitional arrangements to help KGs under the existing RRS migrate smoothly to the new scheme.

(ii) Major Repair

7.3.31 As for major repair, the Committee is of the view that for leased premises, major repair should be the responsibility of the owner rather than the KG tenant. Hence, the Committee considers it not necessary to provide additional funding for them for the purpose.

7.3.32 As for other eligible KGs operating in self-owned school premises or premises owned by their SSBs with zero/nominal rent, the Committee recommends that the Government should consider providing subsidy to alleviate the financial burdens arising from major repair. EDB would need to work out the details about the eligibility criteria for such subsidy.

Other School-specific Subsidy

7.3.33 For other school-specific subsidies such as additional funding for KGs admitting a cluster of NCS students, the details are set out in Chapter 8.

7.4 Additional Subsidy for Whole-day/ Long Whole-day Kindergartens

Current Situation

7.4.1 As mentioned in paragraph 2.2.3, KGs at present offer diversified services, including operation on HD, WD and LWD basis. Some KGs offer either HD (morning or afternoon sessions) or WD classes while others operate both HD and WD classes in the same premises. Out of the 760 local NPM KGs in the 2014/15 school year, 381 KGs operate both HD and WD classes (around 50%), 235 KGs operating solely WD classes (31%) and 144 solely HD classes (19%). Of those KGs with WD classes, 246 are LWD KGs (formerly known as aided centres under SWD) operating five and a half days per week with longer service hours and some of them also providing ancillary services²⁵.

²⁵ The ancillary services include (i) extended hours service (EHS), (ii) occasional child care service (OCCS) and (iii) Integrated Programme (IP) in KG-cum-CCCs. EHS is provided for children aged below six to meet the

7.4.2 With regard to the current provision and enrolment of WD and LWD KGs, an uneven distribution among different districts is noted. Taking local NPM KGs operating only WD classes as an example, in the 2014/15 school year, the number of such KGs ranges from 3 (offering some 255 places) in Islands district to 26 (offering some 2 412 places) in Kwun Tong. The percentage of enrolment in these WD KGs out of the total number of KG students in the respective districts varied from 6.4% in Islands district to 22.3% in Yau Tsim Mong. Similarly, the number of LWD KGs ranges from 5 in Islands district (offering some 417 places) to 24 (offering some 2 282 places) in Kwun Tong. The percentage of enrolment in these LWD KGs out of the total number of KG students also varied from 6.3% in Kowloon City to 22.3% in Yau Tsim Mong.

7.4.3 As for financial support, the current subsidy of PEVS applies to all eligible KGs, irrespective of whether they are offering HD, WD or LWD programmes. On top of the resources under PEVS, eligible HD, WD and LWD KGs have also been receiving other funding from the Government, including reimbursement of rent, rates and government rent, with individual LWD KGs having reimbursement of management fee and air-conditioning charges. LWD KGs can also apply for funds under the Lotteries Fund through SWD to meet non-recurrent expenditure such as renovation and purchase of furniture and equipment. Currently, all LWD KGs are PEVS KGs. Among those students attending WD classes, 50% of those in LWD KGs received fee remission while 55% of those in non-LWD KGs received fee remission in the 2013/14 school year.

The Stakeholders' Views and Committee's Deliberations

7.4.4 As deliberated in paragraph 7.1.8, the Committee considers that future free KG education should cover HD (3-hour) service as the basic provision. Yet, the Committee is fully aware that WD and LWD KGs have been an integral part of the KG

social needs of families and working parents. OCCS is provided on a full-day, half-day or two-hour sessional basis for children aged below six whose parents or carers have sudden engagements or various commitments. IP provides training and care for mildly disabled children aged two to six with a view to facilitating their future integration into the mainstream education system and the society.

sector providing vital services to many families and working parents. Hence, their roles should be duly recognised.

7.4.5 To tie in with the population policy to release more women back into the local labour force, the Committee considers that additional support, such as in terms of an extra grant, should be in place to encourage KGs to provide more WD or LWD services. This does not mean that all WD or LWD services should be fully subsidised as a basic provision, but the additional support provided to WD and LWD KGs would enable those parents in need of such services to have more access to them and at a more affordable cost. In determining the level of extra grant, the Committee considers that the different operating hours, services provided and manpower requirements of WD and LWD KGs should be taken into consideration.

The Committee's Recommendations

7.4.6 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.

7.4.7 After thorough deliberations, the Committee comes to a view that, from the planning angle, the existing planning standards for provision of KG (i.e. 730 HD and 250 WD places for every 1,000 children in the age group of three to under six) should be reviewed so as to increase the WD provision in housing estates as well as large-scale private development projects. The Committee feels that the planning standards could be revised progressively to 500 HD and 500 WD places for every 1,000 children in the age group of three to six. To cater for the changing needs for WD places, such demand and supply situation should be monitored and reviewed.

7.4.8 As for additional resources, the Committee recommends that the Government should consider providing a grant, which might be on a per capita basis, to eligible KGs offering WD places, to serve as an incentive to KGs for offering more WD places. With the provision of the WD grant, it is envisaged that school fees for WD classes would be lower and more affordable to parents and more KGs might be envisaged to provide WD services to cater for parents' needs. As regards the level of

additional subsidy for WD services, it is proposed to be 25% to 30% of the basic funding for HD services. EDB should devise the details.

7.4.9 For eligible LWD KGs, on top of the WD subsidy, the Committee is of the view that further resources would need to be provided to cater for the longer hours and more school days they operate. The amount of grant might be determined with reference to the manpower incurred for the extra hours of service, which should enable the KG to employ one to three headcounts, depending on the size of the KG. EDB should devise the details.

7.4.10 Apart from proposing KGs which run WD/LWD services to receive additional subsidies to meet their respective operational needs, the Committee also considers it important for families in genuine need to benefit from the subsidies. Hence, albeit that KG student admission is basically a school-based matter, those families in need (e.g. where both parents are at work) should be given priority in admission. Last but not least, to facilitate needy families to receive WD/LWD services, the Committee recommends that the existing Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme should continue.

Chapter 8 Catering for Student Diversity

8.1 Additional Support for Kindergarten Students from Needy Families

Current Situation

8.1.1 The Government's student finance policy is to ensure that no student would be denied access to education due to lack of financial means. Apart from the non-means-tested fee subsidy provided under the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS)²⁶, KG students from needy families can apply for fee remission under the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme (KCFRS)²⁷. Eligible applicants who pass the means test could receive fee remission²⁸ by subsidy level of 100%, 75% or 50%²⁹. The level of subsidy mainly depends on the applicants' gross annual household income and the number of family members. Before the 2011/12 school year, applicants were required to pass the social needs assessment apart from the means test for fee remission for children attending WD classes in PEVS KGs. To enhance the accessibility of families having passed the means test to WD KG education, such assessment has been removed. Besides, meal allowance³⁰ is provided for students studying WD KG class.

8.1.2 For children from families receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA), they can receive grants under CSSA, which cover school fees and meal charges. A flat-rate grant³¹ is also available under CSSA to cover school-related expenses (e.g. books, stationery and school uniforms) for KG students.

²⁶ An account of PEVS is in Chapter 2.2(b).

²⁷ An account of KCFRS is in Chapter 2.2.

²⁸ With a view to providing further assistance to needy families and broadening their choice in respect of KG education, approval was given by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council in February 2014 for the fee remission ceilings under the KCFRS to be lifted from the weighted average to the 75th percentile of the school fees of KGs under PEVS. The fee remission ceilings for HD and WD places are \$26,500 and \$40,500 respectively in the 2014/15 school year, representing an increase of about 24% and 17% as compared to \$21,300 and \$34,500 in the 2013/14 school year.

²⁹ In the 2013/14 school year, 36 699 KG students benefited from KCFRS, with 23 692, 2 715 and 10 292 students receiving fee remission by subsidy level of 100%, 75% and 50% respectively.

³⁰ The maximum meal allowance (WD KG class only) is \$480 per student per month for the 2014/15 school year.

³¹ The amount is \$3,425 and \$3,600 for the 2014/15 school year and 2015/16 school year respectively.

The Stakeholders' Views and Committee's Deliberations

8.1.3 There were views that the thresholds for fee remission should be further relaxed so that more students can benefit from it. In this regard, the Committee understands that all the nine existing means-tested financial assistance schemes for students from pre-primary to post-secondary levels are subject to the same means test mechanism. The Committee also understands that a review on the current means test mechanism has been conducted and the recommendation of relaxation of the threshold for full level of assistance was approved by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council in May 2011. The Committee appreciates that with the relaxation, the number of KG beneficiaries has substantially increased from 25 057 in the 2010/11 school year to 36 699 in the 2013/14 school year, representing an increase of 46%. The percentage of KG students who receive full remission among the total beneficiaries under KCFRS has also significantly increased from 52% in 2010/11 to around 65% in the 2013/14 school year. In the light of the above, the general view was that the existing thresholds should be maintained.

8.1.4 There were views that apart from fee remission under KCFRS, additional financial support should be provided for needy families. In this connection, the Committee understands that apart from school fees, it is a common practice for KGs to charge students for school items (such as textbooks, exercise books, school uniforms, school bags, tea and snacks) and paid services (such as school bus services and interest classes), which parents may choose to purchase on a voluntary basis. The amount of such charges varies among KGs and could range from several hundred to several thousand dollars a year. There was a suggestion that student travel subsidy and school textbook assistance be provided for needy KG students. In this connection, some members were of the view that parents should be encouraged to choose schools in their neighbourhood for their children so as to minimise the travelling time for small kids. As such, providing travel subsidy to KG students might not be appropriate. As for textbook assistance, some members opined that KG education should emphasise children's learning through play, doing and sensory stimulation and should avoid over-reliance on textbooks; a grant specifically provided for textbooks at KG level was therefore not advisable.

The Committee's Recommendations

8.1.5 Upon the introduction of the future KG education policy which shall cover the basic provision for HD KG places and provide additional support for WD and LWD services, most HD KG services will be free while WD or LWD programmes will become more affordable. However, some KGs may still need to charge tuition fees for extra rental expenses on top of the rental subsidy, or to cover the expenses arising from above-standard services. To ensure that no child would be deprived of the opportunity to receive quality KG education due to lack of financial means, the Committee recommends that the existing KCFRS be maintained to provide additional financial assistance for children from needy families.

8.1.6 The Committee also recommends that the Government should provide an additional grant for supporting needy families (i.e. those who can pass the means test) to pay for the expenditure incurred from the learning or schooling of the students such as for purchase of books and school uniforms, etc. As for the grant level, reference may be made to similar grant available under CSSA.

8.2 Additional Support for Non-Chinese Speaking Students in Kindergartens

Current Situation

8.2.1 As it is important to facilitate early integration of NCS children into the local education system and community, parents of NCS children are encouraged to send their children to local KGs for early exposure to the Chinese language in an immersed language environment to facilitate the students' transition to local primary schools. In the 2014/15 school year, there are about 11 900 NCS students studying in some 560 KGs (with around 76% offering the local curriculum, 20% non-local curriculum, and 4% both). Among those students, about 5 000 are attending 380 KGs under PEVS, all of which are offering the local curriculum.

8.2.2 At present, teachers are equipped with the basic knowledge and skills to cater for learner diversity through the recognised KG teacher education/training

programmes³² with a core domain of catering for children with diverse needs. Teachers' capability of addressing the learning needs of NCS students is also enhanced through professional development programmes (PDPs)³³ organised by EDB and school-based support services, including the "University-School Support Programmes" which provides support for KGs in the teaching and learning of Chinese for NCS children³⁴ with expertise solicited from the tertiary sector.

8.2.3 With funding from the Language Fund and as advised by the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research, district-based programmes for NCS children aged three to nine have been organised in collaboration with NGOs in districts with a greater concentration of NCS students with a view to motivating NCS students to learn the Chinese language through fun activities such as games, creative art, etc. These programmes are expected to complement the effort of KGs. With the injection of \$5 billion into Language Fund in the form of seed capital, the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research will further deliberate on initiatives for enhancing the Chinese language learning support for NCS students. 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. KGs can apply for support under the QEF for initiatives which address the NCS students' needs and create a caring and inclusive environment or strategy conducive to quality education to cater for learners' diversity.

8.2.4 With a view to helping parents of different ethnic groups understand the education services available for them, EDB has provided the information package for parents of NCS children, leaflets on PEVS and relevant booklets in different languages for distribution through District Offices, Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs), etc. Parent briefing sessions on KG education and school admission have been organised with interpretation service for parents of NCS children. In addition, different government departments also provide services for ethnic minorities (EMs) according to their respective policies.

³² The programmes are Certificate Course in Early Childhood Education, Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education and Postgraduate Diploma in Early Childhood Education.

³³ For instance, seminars/workshops on catering for young children's diverse learning needs, including NCS students' learning needs, have been organised since the 2013/14 school year.

³⁴ In the 2014/15 school year, 61 KGs are supported under the "University-School Support Programmes", representing about 11% of all KGs with NCS students.

The Stakeholders' Views and Committee's Deliberations

8.2.5 It was generally recognised that KGs need to create a context-appropriate learning environment and provide students with authentic, meaningful and developmentally appropriate learning experiences. Since most KGs have admitted only a small number of NCS students, they could provide an immersed Chinese language environment which facilitates their early integration. However, a small number of PEVS KGs have admitted a relatively large number of NCS students³⁵. This is not desirable from the educational perspective, especially when the learning of Chinese language is at stake.

8.2.6 There were views that KGs need more support to enhance their capacity in catering for the diverse needs of NCS students and to strengthen the communication with parents with NCS children. Some suggested that a grant could be provided to KGs for this purpose. Clear objectives should be formulated while flexibility be allowed for KGs in utilising the grant to cater for the diverse needs of NCS students.

8.2.7 Some stakeholders were of the view that the learning needs of NCS students could be addressed under the general principles of catering for learner diversity. In this regard, teachers should pay attention to students' different abilities and learning needs, and make adjustments in the learning content as well as teaching approaches accordingly. There were views that targeted teacher training programmes could be organised specifically on the learning of the Chinese language among NCS students with a view to better supporting teachers to cater for their needs.

8.2.8 In addition, the Committee appreciates that in the 2014/15 school year, on-site professional support services are provided under the theme "Promoting Early Integration and Adaptation for EM Children in KGs", which aim to enhance teachers' capability in helping the EM children adapt to local KG school life as well as building a foundation for these children to learn the Chinese language. There were views that the intensive mode of school-based support services could help improve teachers' capacity in catering for the individual learning needs of NCS students.

³⁵About 4% of PEVS KGs have admitted NCS students amounting to 50% or above of their total enrolment.

8.2.9 The Committee appreciates that the district-based programmes subvented by the Language Fund as mentioned in paragraph 8.2.3 continue, capitalising upon with previous experience accumulated, and studies are being conducted with a view to understanding more concretely the needs of NCS students in learning the Chinese language. Some suggested that more studies in this regard could be conducted to develop appropriate strategies to support NCS students. There were also views that KGs could support NCS students with the various existing resources (e.g. Language Fund, QEF) .

8.2.10 There were views that active engagement and support of parents with NCS children are crucial to facilitate the learning of NCS students, and parents with NCS children should be well supported by different sectors such as NGOs.

The Committee's Recommendations

8.2.11 The Committee opines that NCS parents should be well supported by different sectors in the community and the Government to facilitate early integration of NCS children into the local education system and the community. In this regard, the Committee appreciates the efforts of different government departments and the various services/support provided to EMs according to their respective policy purviews³⁶. The Committee recommends that additional assistance, in the form of a grant comparable to the salary of a KG teacher, should be provided for KGs admitting a cluster of NCS students (say eight students or more) to enable them to enhance the support for these students. With the additional resources, KGs could provide teachers with professional training and development in the areas of culture, language and diversity, and develop effective strategies to help NCS students learn through the Chinese medium, so as to lay a foundation for their study in primary schools. KGs could also deploy the additional resources to enhance the communication with the parents of NCS students and strengthen home-school cooperation. In view of the relatively small size of KGs, the Committee considers that there may not be a need to increase such additional resources according to the number of NCS students admitted.

³⁶ For example, the Home Affairs Department commissions NGOs to run six support service centres for EMs and two sub-centres to provide support various tailor-made learning classes, counseling and referral services, integration programmes and interpretation services for EMs to facilitate their integration into the community.

The Committee also recommends that the KGs receiving the additional resources may be invited to share experiences with other KGs.

8.2.12 The Committee is of the view that teachers' professional knowledge and pedagogical skills in catering for the learning differences of NCS students should be further enhanced. In this connection, the Committee recommends that the Government consider measures to enhance the provision of quality and targeted teacher training programmes on the learning of the Chinese language among NCS students. Besides, the Committee recommends that school-based professional support service should be strengthened to help KGs build up the expertise in facilitating NCS students' learning of the Chinese language for a smooth transition to primary schools. The experience gained should also be shared with other KGs through various professional development activities for teachers. Moreover, effective learning and teaching strategies as well as resources could be developed, and good practices be compiled for dissemination to all KGs.

8.2.13 The Committee considers that more studies on the needs of NCS students in learning the Chinese language could be conducted to develop appropriate strategies to be deployed to support NCS students. The Committee also recommends that KGs admitting NCS students should be encouraged to make use of existing means and resources (e.g. Language Fund, QEF) to cater for the needs of these students.

8.2.14 The Committee realises that support of different nature for EMs is being provided by different government departments and community sectors and recommends that there should be more publicity of the various support services to reach out to more EMs.

8.3 Additional Support for Kindergarten Students with Special Needs

Current Situation

8.3.1 The Government has all along been providing various services for children with developmental problems through the collaborative efforts of various government departments, including 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 six 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 have jointly launched the Comprehensive Child Development Service (CCDS) 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.

8.3.2 MCHCs of DH conduct health and developmental surveillance in partnership with parents to facilitate early detection of developmental problems. A teacher resource kit³⁷ has been developed by DH in collaboration with EDB and SWD to equip pre-primary teachers, among others, so that they can identify children with developmental problems for due referral for initial assessment at MCHCs. Training for KG teachers in this regard is also organised by EDB in collaboration with DH. Children with suspected developmental concerns identified at MCHCs are referred to the Child Assessment Service (CAS) under DH or HA for follow-up and assessment. In the past three years (2012 – 2014), nearly all new cases were seen within three weeks and assessments for 83% - 90% of newly registered cases were completed within 6 months at the CAS under DH. Upon completion of the 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 long-term follow-up.

8.3.3 Pre-school children (from birth to six) 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. The services are provided mainly through Early Education and Training Centre³⁸ (EETC), Integrated Programme³⁹ at KG-cum-CCCs and Special

³⁷The Pre-primary Children Development and Behaviour Management – Teacher Resource Kit

³⁸EETC provides early education and training programmes for children from birth to six with disabilities or children at risk of becoming disabled, where particular emphasis is placed on the caring and training role to be played by the parent(s)/guardian(s)/family member(s).

³⁹Integrated Programme provides training and care to mildly disabled pre-schoolers aged two to six in ordinary

Child Care Centre⁴⁰ (SCCC). In March 2015, there were a total of 6 626 subvented pre-school rehabilitation places, including 1 775 SCCC, 2 991 EETC and 1 860 IP places, yet there were about 7 000 applications on the waiting list for subvented pre-school rehabilitation services, with about 90% aged two or above and the remaining 10% being under two. The average waiting time for such services ranged from 13 to 19.6 months in 2014-15. To increase the provision, the Government will provide about 1 470 additional pre-school rehabilitation places within its current term. For children with disabilities waiting for subvented rehabilitation services, low-income families may apply for training subsidy to obtain outside services. SWD will also increase the number of social workers in the subvented Parents/Relatives Resource Centres to improve parents' ability to take care of their children with special needs in 2015-16.

8.3.4 KG teachers are equipped with the basic knowledge and skills in identifying children with special needs and catering for individual needs through the existing recognised teacher education/training programmes as mentioned in paragraph 8.2.2. Besides, PDPs are provided by EDB in collaboration with DH to enhance teachers' ability to identify students with developmental problems at an early stage, using the tools and resources developed in the teacher resource kit as mentioned in paragraph 8.3.2, which has been distributed to all pre-primary institutions. PDPs and school-based support services are also provided by EDB to strengthen teachers' capacity in formulating appropriate teaching strategies to meet the developmental needs of children and to handle individual differences.

8.3.5 The government departments concerned 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.

KG-cum-CCCs (which are FACs receiving subsidies from SWD) with a view to facilitating their future integration into the mainstream education as well as the society.

⁴⁰SCCC provides intensive pre-school training for children aged two to six with moderate to severe grade of disability who cannot benefit from IP in KG-cum-CCCs.

The Stakeholders' Views and Committee's Deliberations

8.3.6 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. In the past three years (2012 - 2014), assessments for 83% - 90% of newly registered cases were completed within 6 months. Stakeholders were of the general view that the waiting time for assessment should be shortened.

8.3.7 The Committee notes that some parents have reservation about transferring their children's information to the concerned KG upon professional diagnosis from DH. This might result in a delay in diagnosis and intervention. There were views that the Government should pay attention to the issue in order to ensure timely support for the students with special needs.

8.3.8 Some stakeholders suggested arranging universal screening for all students at KG stage for the purpose of early identification and intervention. However, others had doubts about the effectiveness and the reliability of such screening. They were of the view that as KG children progress rapidly in their early years and their pace of development may vary, it is natural that some children may excel in certain areas but have deficiencies in other areas. In most cases, it may not be advisable to label a young child with some delay in development as having special needs. Instead of conducting universal screening at KG stage, it was generally agreed that it would be more cost-effective to equip parents and KG teachers with the knowledge to monitor the children throughout the course of their development, and to further promote the identification mechanism so that they could seek help when required. In addition to bringing their children to attend the routine developmental surveillance conducted in MCHCs, parents of pre-school children can also approach MCHCs any time if they have concern on their children's development.

8.3.9 Currently, the number of children put on the waiting list for pre-school rehabilitation services after assessment outnumbers the number of rehabilitation places. Notwithstanding that efforts have been made by the Government to provide additional pre-school rehabilitation places, stakeholders were of the general view that there was a need for the provision of more places and to explore other feasible

measures to meet service demand. In this connection, there were suggestions for extending IP to KGs instead of just restricting such programmes to FACs. Besides, there were views that the present service mode should be reviewed and enhanced, with a view to providing better support for the students with special needs, their parents/carers as well as the KGs where they are studying. There were also suggestions to explore enhancing the services of Parents/Relatives Resource Centres to further support disabled children on the waiting list of subvented pre-school rehabilitation services and their parents/carers.

8.3.10 Some stakeholders considered that teachers' capacity in catering for students' special needs should be further enhanced by providing them with specific training programmes. There were views that additional teaching staff could help KGs cater for students with special needs. That notwithstanding, in consideration of the professional capacity of KG teachers, the sector was of the general view that the school-based support of allied health professionals was essential to help KGs play a complementary role of supporting their students with special needs. With regard to the suggestion of providing additional grant for KGs to procure support services for their students with special needs, there was 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 was also in doubt.

8.3.11 Stakeholders generally shared the view that parents, who also play a key role in catering for children's special needs, should be well supported by different sectors in the community.

The Committee's Recommendations

8.3.12 The Committee recognises that the Government has all along been committed to providing early identification and early support for children with special needs through the collaborative efforts of various government departments. In view of the importance of early assessment, the Committee recommends that the waiting time for assessment should be further shortened. That notwithstanding, it understands the constraints in increasing the number of specialists to make a significant improvement in the short and medium term.

8.3.13 The Committee considers that support for KG students with special needs should be enhanced through further increasing the number of places for rehabilitation services. In this regard, the Committee is aware that the Government is pro-actively seeking suitable sites for providing rehabilitation services. In addition, the Labour and Welfare Bureau, in cooperation with the NGOs, is in the process of implementing a Special Scheme on Privately Owned Sites for Welfare Uses whereby NGOs will redevelop the sites under their ownership to provide more welfare services including, among others, EETC and SCCC places. The Committee recommends that in the short and medium term, due resources should also be allocated to Parents/Relatives Resource Centres to further support those disabled children on the waiting list of subvented pre-school rehabilitation services and their parents/carers. To facilitate easy accessibility to the services of Parents/Relatives Resource Centres, the establishment of these centres in each district could be explored. The Committee opines that in the long run, the service mode should be enhanced with a view to rendering holistic support for KG students with special needs, their parents/carers and the KGs they are attending. The Committee also considers that the support of a multidisciplinary team (comprising allied health professionals) for KGs is essential to cater for the students in need of additional support. In this connection, the Committee is pleased to see that the Government will try out a new service mode of rehabilitation services whereby operators of subvented pre-school rehabilitation services will provide on-site rehabilitation services to children studying in KGs or KG-cum-CCCs under a scheme supported by the Lotteries Fund. The Committee notes that the Government has sought views from relevant stakeholders before launching such scheme. Besides, the Committee considers that the desirability and feasibility of extending IP to KGs should be examined in the light of the outcome of the scheme.

8.3.14 The Committee also suggests that training places for allied health professionals (e.g. occupational therapist, physiotherapist, speech therapist and clinical/educational psychologist) should be increased for more supply in the long run.

8.3.15 To further empower teachers to cater for learner diversity, the Committee recommends that more structured in-service training programme(s) be offered to KG teachers. With regard to training targets, the Committee is of the view that for a

start, at least one teacher in each KG should receive such training. Moreover, the proposed overall teacher-to-pupil ratio should take into account the need for additional teaching staff so that KGs would have more capacity to cater for the diverse needs of their students and to arrange for their teachers to attend training programmes, as well as organising school-based professional development activities in this regard. The Committee also recommends that the Government consider measures to enhance the provision of quality and targeted teacher training programmes on catering for learner diversity.

8.3.16 The Committee opines that while quite comprehensive support for parents has been provided by the government departments concerned, different community sectors should work together to raise parents' awareness on children's development and acceptance of children's special needs through more publicity about the support services available.

8.3.17 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.

Chapter 9 School Governance, Accountability and Quality Assurance

9.1 Transparency and Accountability in School Operation

Current Situation

9.1.1 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 in areas covering premises design, furniture and equipment, safety measures, health, sanitation, nutrition and diet, curriculum and activities, staffing, etc. to ensure quality service delivery. Also, KGs should formulate their curriculum according to the *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum* (2006) which has been fully implemented in all pre-primary institutions since 2007.

9.1.2 KGs under the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) are required to fulfill a set of criteria and requirements as mentioned in paragraph 2.2(b) above. They are also required to observe various financial and administrative requirements as well as instructions issued by EDB from time to time, such as those on the sale of school items and provision of paid services.

9.1.3 KGs are required to apply to EDB for collection or revision of school tuition fees. EDB will process the applications in accordance with a set of criteria such as the income and expenditure situation of the KGs, and whether the expenditure items are allowable. For collection of any other fees, such as application fee and registration fee, prior approval has to be obtained from EDB.

9.1.4 KGs may also collect charges from parents for the sale of school items such as textbooks and exercise books, school uniforms and school bag, tea and snack, stationery, etc. and provision of paid services, such as school bus services, interest classes and activities outside regular school hours. The sale of these items and services must be on a voluntary basis. While approval of the collection of such fees from EDB is not required, EDB has set rules and guidelines on the collection of such charges from parents.

9.1.5 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 Profile of Kindergartens and Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres issued by EDB annually.

9.1.6 To ensure prudent use of public funds, EDB has instituted a system of regulatory measures on the financial operations of PEVS KGs, including annual review of audited accounts, conducting on-site inspections and surprise headcount inspections.

The Stakeholders' Views and Committee's Deliberations

9.1.7 Members take note of the various measures already put 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 were views that under the future free KG education policy, the Government should consider further strengthening the requirements and guidelines on collection of additional fees or miscellaneous charges. Some opined that to further increase transparency of KG operations, EDB might prescribe a list of key fee-charging items, and require all KGs to provide the information on their school website.

9.1.8 There were 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 were 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. However, EDB should exercise more stringent control on the collection of tuition fees by KGs.

The Committee's Recommendations

9.1.9 The Committee is of the view that the Government would need to step up monitoring and regulation of eligible KGs, and to put in place an effective governance framework. In particular, the governance of individual KGs should be enhanced, and EDB should vigorously vet individual KGs' proposals for revising school fees.

9.1.10 On the collection of additional charges (or the so-called miscellaneous fees) for school items or trading activities, the Committee considers that EDB should strengthen its monitoring role to ensure KGs' compliance with the relevant guidelines and regulations. In this regard, EDB should set out clearer guidelines on trading activities. In addition, EDB should explore ways to further strengthen the monitoring and control over the use of surplus in KGs. To enhance the transparency of KG operations, EDB should encourage KGs to provide key operational information on their school websites. EDB should also consider prescribing the key information or items that all eligible KGs would be required to disclose to the public, such as the types of fees and the amounts collected by KGs, including the miscellaneous charges.

9.1.11 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 free KG education policy would need to be drawn up for compliance by eligible KGs.

9.2 Governance Structure of KGs

Current Situation

9.2.1 Under the Education Ordinance, every school shall be managed by its Management Committee (MC). The MC of a school shall be responsible for ensuring that the school is managed satisfactorily, the education of the pupils is conducted in a proper manner and the Education Ordinance is complied with. Currently, there is no strict requirement for KGs regarding the composition of the MC and the number of managers in MCs varies considerably. In the 2013/14 school year, some local NPM KGs had only one manager, while some had more than ten managers in their MCs.

The Stakeholders' Views and Committee's Deliberations

9.2.2 In the course of members' deliberation, there were views that each KG should set up its MC with well-defined roles and responsibilities for proper management of the school. There were views that the composition of MC in KGs might include sponsoring body managers, parent and teacher manager, the principal and independent manager. Some opined that the inclusion of independent or professional managers in the MC might be considered at a later stage as it would be too demanding for small KGs. While the number of managers in the MC might be decided according to the school size, there were views that in the medium or long-term, representatives of all major stakeholder groups should be included in the MC. Some were of the view that a transitional period should be allowed for KGs to attain the proposed requirements. During the interim period, KGs might be given the flexibility to select their teacher or parent managers either by appointment or election. In this connection, it was considered that EDB would need to provide support for the MC of KGs, such as arranging training for the managers to let them better understand their roles and responsibilities, as well as preparing relevant guidelines and manuals for KG's reference.

9.2.3 Some were concerned that individual KGs, in particular the small KGs, might have difficulty in setting up and running an MC with different categories of managers. They opined that reference could be made to the practice of setting up "central MC" as adopted by some large sponsoring bodies. Under the "central MC" arrangement, there would be central administrative support for individual KGs and resources could be shared among the KGs under the same SSB. However, there were views that the "central MC" arrangement might not always be able to cater for the school-specific requirements of individual KGs.

The Committee's Recommendations

9.2.4 With the substantial increase in government funding under the future free KG education policy, , the governance structure of KGs would need to be strengthened with a well-established structure or system in place to ensure effective management and operation of KGs. The Committee considers it necessary for each KG to have an MC with well-defined roles and responsibilities.

9.2.5 In the medium or long-term, the MC should comprise different stakeholders of the KGs. There should preferably be five or more managers comprising representatives from the school management, SSBs, teachers, parents, and independent or professional members.

9.2.6 The Committee also considers it necessary to enhance the support to KGs in relation to the MCs and administration of KGs. More training for KG staff should be provided to help them better understand the regulations and guidelines from EDB.

9.3 Quality Assurance

Current Situation

9.3.1 The Quality Assurance (QA) Framework was introduced to the KG sector in 2000. Similar to the QA Framework adopted for primary and secondary schools, the QA Framework for KGs was built upon two interactive and transparent mechanisms, namely school self-evaluation (SSE) and external review. With the roll-out of PEVS in 2007, the external review was then formalised as Quality Review (QR). All KGs under PEVS are required to conduct ongoing SSE and undergo QR for sustainable school development and accountability purposes.

9.3.2 Two reviews have been conducted and published during the first 5-year phase of PEVS with a view to evaluating its effectiveness, namely *Review of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme* and *Impact Study on the Effectiveness of Quality Review in Pre-primary Education in Hong Kong*. Both reviews found that the QA Framework as a whole was effective in promoting the sustainable 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, and the majority of KGs have established the SSE mechanism. At the end of the first cycle of QR, EDB fine-tuned the QA Framework on the basis of the recommendations of the two aforementioned reviews as well as the feedback from KGs, with a view to enhancing the effectiveness

of SSE and QR⁴¹. The enhanced QA Framework was implemented in the 2012/13 school year to tie in with the second cycle of QR.

9.3.3 To enable a thorough assessment on the performance of KGs, a set of comprehensive “Performance Indicators (Pre-primary institutions)” (PIInds) has been formulated by EDB. The Impact Study on the Effectiveness of Quality Review in Pre-primary Education in Hong Kong suggested that a review of the PIInds could be carried out with a view to responding to the changes in the KG sector during the past decade and keeping pace with the latest development of SSE and QR. As such, an Advisory Group on the Review of the PIInds was set up in July 2014 to review the PIInds and make recommendations on their refinement.

School Self-evaluation

9.3.4 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 for improvement for sustainable development. KGs should conduct a holistic review on their current state of performance with reference to the PIInds. Schools should then compile and analyse their SSE findings to strategically devise a development plan for the next school year. They can record the findings and the development plan on the School Report template that is available on EDB website. KGs are strongly encouraged to upload their School Reports onto their school website and/or make the document available to their major stakeholders including parents and teachers.

Quality Review

9.3.5 In the QR process, review teams from EDB will take KG’s areas of concern as the starting point and make reference to the PIInds to make professional judgment on the overall school performance. During the on-site QR visit, the review teams will conduct lesson observations, read children’s work, interview principals, teachers,

⁴¹ The School Report template has been modified for better guiding KGs to devise a development plan. The duration of on-site inspection of QR has been revised to 2.5 to 3.5 days.

parents and children, and review school documents so as to examine how KGs achieve sustainable development through the self-evaluation process. The review teams will give oral feedback to the principals and teachers of the KGs at the end of the on-site visit.

9.3.6 The QR reports of KGs under PEVS will be uploaded onto EDB website and linked to the Profile of Kindergartens and Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres to facilitate parents in making informed choices of KG for their children.

9.3.7 During the first 5-year phase of PEVS (2007/08 to 2011/12 school year), all KGs under PEVS (a total of 703) have undergone QR. The second cycle of QR started in the 2012/13 school year.

9.3.8 *The Impact Study on the Effectiveness of Quality Review in Pre-primary Education in Hong Kong* recommended that EDB could co-operate with KG professionals to enhance the effectiveness of QR. EDB are currently exploring ways to enhance the transparency of the QR mechanism and professionalism of the teaching force in the KG sector. A pilot scheme involving an external observer during QR visits is being conducted in the 2013/14 and 2014/15 school years. Subject to the evaluation on its effectiveness, the practice of involving an external observer in QR will be introduced in the 2015/16 school year.

The Stakeholders' Views and Committee's Deliberations

9.3.9 There were views that releasing the QR reports of individual KGs should continue to facilitate school development and enhancement of quality of education. It is considered that the QR report would provide parents with more information on the operation of the KGs. Some expressed that KGs found it very stressful to have their QR reports uploaded on the website as it would have impact on the admission of students. Some others considered that with the substantial increase in government funding under the new policy, the governance and transparency of KGs would need to be strengthened.

9.3.10 On the QR review team, there were views that the inclusion of an external observer would facilitate the professional development and exchange among the

principals and teachers in the KG sector. There were also views that EDB should ensure the external observers would understand the QR mechanism and should be experienced in early childhood education. Some held opposite views and were concerned about the possible conflict of interests between the external observer and the KGs.

The Committee's Recommendations

9.3.11 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 might not be able to reflect their latest developments, the Committee considers that KGs should be given opportunity to publicise their response to the QR reports and the follow-up actions taken in those areas requiring improvement.

9.3.12 The Committee agrees that having an external independent member in the QR review team as external observer will facilitate professional development in the KG sector. EDB should take necessary step to avoid any possible conflict of interests between the external observer and KG concerned in the QR process. The Committee is also of the view that EDB could consider inviting ex-KG personnel who has rich experience in KG education to serve as external observer. To ensure that QR would be conducted in an effective and fair manner, the external observers should have a correct understanding of QR and their role to play.

9.3.13 The Committee agrees that the PInds should be reviewed to keep pace with the development in the field. EDB should continue to provide support for KGs in the use of the PInds to conduct school self-evaluation, including training workshops and sharing sessions, as well as providing school-based support for KGs.

Chapter 10 Parents' Involvement and Education

10.1 The Role of Parents in Promoting Children's Learning and Development

Current Situation

10.1.1 Parents play a very important role in their child's early life and are their role model. Parents, being the child's primary educators at home, can be a major influence on the child's healthy development and effective learning at schools. Their support and proactive involvement with KGs help consolidate the child's learning and development during the schooling in KGs.

10.1.2 Parent education has been promoted collaboratively by different departments and bureau with foci/themes relevant to their policy perspectives. Specifically, EDB has been organising seminars for parents with children at KG age every year with a view to helping parents understand the developmental needs and the age-appropriate expectation of their children aged three to six and what quality KG education is. EDB has also published and distributed booklets to all KG parents to recommend ways to provide children with pleasurable and diversified life experience that meets their developmental needs. Furthermore, EDB provides Home-School Co-operation Grants⁴² to encourage KGs to set up Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs)⁴³ and organises home-school co-operation/ parent education activities such as parent seminars, voluntary work, etc. to promote parent participation in school activities and to support their children in learning.

10.1.3 Parent education has also been promoted by Department of Health and Social Welfare Department. Department of Health's Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) organises parent education activities under its "Parenting Programme" which aims at empowering parents by imparting knowledge and skills on child-rearing; and working in partnership with families, school and the community. Its Family Health Services run a 24-hour hotline which provides information on

⁴² There are three types of grants: Subsidy for PTA, Subsidy for Home-School Co-operation Activities, and Subsidy for Joint Home-School Co-operation Project.

⁴³ In the 2013/14 school year, about 30% of KGs had set up PTA.

common issues of concern and also consultation service during office hours. Social Welfare Department, through its “Family Life Education” programmes and services of its Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres, organises a wide range of educational and promotional programmes such as seminars, talks, groups, family activities and exhibitions, etc. to enhance family functioning.

The Stakeholders’ Views and Committee’s Deliberations

10.1.4 The Committee takes note of the views on parent education collected through focus group meetings as well as views/suggestions received from various concern groups. Stakeholders and concern groups, in general, shared that the Government should allocate more resources to strengthen parent education so as to facilitate parents in making smart choices of KGs for their children. To provide more information on KG education, the Government may consider organising KG exhibition or setting up resource centres. To facilitate children’s learning and development, there were views that key messages about age-appropriateness and children’s developmental needs should be promoted to parents. Some noted that while some parents had access to different information through EDB webpage or other channels on the Internet, a large proportion of parents did not have access to the Internet at all. They thus suggested that in addition to distributing leaflets / publications and organising talks, seminars, etc. for parents, other means of parent education should be used to reach out to more parents.

10.1.5 The Committee shares the view that good parenting requires lifelong learning of the knowledge and skills in child-rearing and nurturing the development of the child. Not only do parents need to learn how to form age-appropriate expectations for their child at the right pace with the child’s development stage so as to provide suitable support to achieve positive educational outcomes, parents also have to provide a safe and nurturing environment for the child at home and provide care for the child’s health, physical and emotional development. It is the responsibility of parents to ensure a balanced development of their child in literacy, aesthetics, physical health and social skills.

10.1.6 The Committee also considers that a close partnership and constant communication between parents and teachers are essential for the child’s learning.

Parents should communicate with the teachers to understand the child’s learning at school and then provide support at home accordingly. Effective KG education requires the parents and the school to work together for the child⁴⁴.

The Committee’s Recommendations

Parents’ involvement

10.1.7 The Committee considers that PTA is an important bridge between parents and teachers to foster communication, understanding and mutual support in promoting the well-being of students. Building on the existing resources and support for parent education, the Committee recommends that parental partnership with KGs should be improved and further enhancement measures should be put in place through three-pronged collaborative efforts among the Government, KGs and the community.

10.1.8 Specifically, the Government, including EDB and other government departments as appropriate, may (i) further encourage KGs to set up PTAs and to offer further support to KG PTAs through organising tailor-made briefing/sharing sessions/workshops on the setting up/running of PTA for KG principals/senior teachers/executive members of individual PTAs; (ii) enhance the accessibility of reference materials and resources through different electronic means such as providing a platform for disseminating the latest development in KG education, school information and parenting skills; and for easy access to relevant electronic resources for parents, the development of e-Apps, etc.; (iii) enrich the resources in the “Parent Corner” at EDB’s Central Resources Centre; and (iv) set up regional parent resource centres in the long run for providing, among others, one-stop access to various educational services/resources on parent education, children’s learning and development and home-school cooperation, etc.

10.1.9 As for the KGs, they should (i) nurture a warm/inviting school atmosphere in order to enhance the sense of belonging of children, parents and teachers; (ii)

⁴⁴ Greenwood, G. E. & Hickman, C. W. (1991). Research and practice in parent involvement: implications for teacher education, *the Elementary School Journal*, Vol. 91, No. 3, pp. 279-288.

encourage and facilitate parent participation in PTAs and school activities; (iii) involve parents as resources, e.g. story-telling for children at KGs; and (iv) encourage parents to get familiar with the operation of the school and learning of their child. In the long run, KGs should involve parents in the school management, such as having parent representatives in the school management committees.

10.1.10 Last but not least, the community, such as early childhood education institutes, NGOs, SSBs, and Federations of Parent-Teacher Associations, etc. may help to (i) develop parent education programmes for KGs and parents (may apply for public funding such as Quality Education Fund if necessary); (ii) conduct researches on partnership with KGs and children learning in KG; (iii) organise theme-based training courses / workshops for KG parents and teachers; and (iv) organise (district-based) Joint KG/Primary School Open Day to facilitate parents in making smart parental choices with better understanding of the characteristics of individual KGs.

Parent education

10.1.11 Having regard to the importance of good parenting on the healthy development of children, parents' misconception about "Losing at the Scratch Line" and stakeholders' concerns about preparing children to progress from KG to primary school as deliberated in Chapter 11, the Committee recommends that important messages relating to (i) "Roles and Responsibilities of Parents in Nurturing Children"; (ii) "Transition from KG to Primary – Ready children, Ready Families"; (iii) "Learning with Pleasure, Learning through Play", and (iv) "Smart Parental Choices of KG" be promulgated in parent education.

10.1.12 To address the diverse educational and social needs of parents and families in Hong Kong, the Committee considers that different strategies, apart from parent seminars/talks, should be deployed so as to reach target parents of different social-economic and cultural backgrounds. In general, mass media promotion is considered effective for reaching a wide audience of families whereas more complex and categorised information would be better received when conveying through the social/online/print media. Furthermore, resource centres or public/ NGOs tend to meet the demand from parents seeking specific information relevant to their individual contexts more effectively.

Chapter 11 Other Important Factors Conducive to Quality Education

11.1 Transition from Kindergarten to Primary School

Current Situation

11.1.1 Moving from KG to primary school is a big step forward. A successful transition from KG to primary school lays a solid foundation for lifelong learning and foster in children the ability and confidence to face the ever-changing world. It echoes well with the goal stipulated in the *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum* (2006)⁴⁵ (the Curriculum Guide).

11.1.2 Internationally, different places have slightly different practices when dealing with the transition from KG to primary school. Many of them, however, have set clear learning outcomes for both KG and primary school teachers' reference: Australia, Scotland, England and mainland China etc. are some examples. Teachers of both levels are encouraged to work collaboratively to share information about each child's knowledge and skills so that learning can build on the basis of earlier learning and a smooth transition is possible. Some countries like China (including Hong Kong) also encourage KG teachers to organise visits to primary schools for their children so as to arouse their interest in the new school life. Others like Norway require KGs to include transition measures in their annual plan to ensure that the issue will be handled with care.

11.1.3 When exploring the issue of transition from an international perspective, members of the Committee were of the view that the concept of *school readiness* proposed by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) would serve as a good reference. It consists of three dimensions – *ready children, ready schools, and ready families*. When children and their families are ready for school and schools are ready for them, children are more likely to succeed in school.

11.1.4 Hong Kong, like other parts of the world, has been working to address the issue of transition for years. A chapter is devoted in the Curriculum Guide and the

⁴⁵ *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum*. (2006). The Curriculum Development Council.

Basic Education Curriculum Guide – To Sustain, Deepen and Focus on Learning to Learn (Primary 1 – 6) ⁴⁶ to address the importance of smooth transition from KG to primary school. It encourages teachers of both levels to communicate well in advance. Parents play an important role and should be well -prepared to support children in dealing with the difficulties that may arise in the new environment. In fact, measures have been taken by the KG and primary school sectors. The Committee identified a number of good practices during a focus group meeting where KG and primary school principals exchanged their views and shared their experiences in handling transition. For example, KG teachers paid visits to primary schools to have a better understanding of primary school life and curriculum, and vice versa. Simulated Primary 1 (P1) classes were organised by KGs towards the end of Upper KG (K3) to familiarise children with some basic routines of primary school. Sharing sessions were also organised where alumni and their parents would share their experiences in primary school with K3 parents. Many primary schools also offered on-site experimental days for their prospective P1 students to familiarise them with the new environment, teachers and classmates.

11.1.5 The Committee notes that Direct Subsidy Scheme primary schools and private independent primary schools may conduct interviews when admitting P1 students. However the main objective of the interview is to enable the school to have a general idea of the child’s overall development. Interviews will be conducted in a relaxing and casual atmosphere. The interviewers will chat with the child and the questions will relate to the child’s everyday experience. They will not ask questions that involve skills or knowledge that have to be specifically learned, such as arithmetical operations, language skills (other than ability to converse) or general knowledge.

11.1.6 Despite the joint efforts of the Government and the KG and primary school sectors, the interface between KG and primary education remains an issue for different stakeholders. For example, parents consider that the curriculum and modes of learning in primary school are so different from those in KG that they are causing a great deal of stress on their children. Children may even develop negative

⁴⁶ *Basic Education Curriculum Guide –To Sustain, Deepen and Focus on Learning to Learn (Primary 1 – 6)*. (2014). The Curriculum Development Council.

attitude towards learning. KG teachers, at the same time, are often pressured by parents and primary school teachers to introduce primary school curriculum in K3 so as to “better prepare” their children for primary school.

11.1.7 Members of the Committee shared some of the concerns of the stakeholders. They concurred that the primary school curriculum should not be introduced at KG stage because it is not developmentally appropriate for KG children. While agreeing that the setting of learning outcomes for KG graduates might give primary school teachers a clearer picture of what to expect from their new P1 students, the Committee believed that the issue had to be handled with caution as the learning outcomes could be wrongly interpreted as the performance indicators of KG children, which might have a backwash effect on KG education, hence resulting in drilling and unnecessary pressure on children. The Committee also considered parent education to be important so that parents would have reasonable expectations towards their children, and be better equipped to support their children during transition.

The Committee’s Recommendations

11.1.8 Taking into account the existing practices of handling the transition from KG to primary school in both local and international contexts, as well as the views of stakeholders and members, a number of recommendations are made below by the Committee. Similar to the model suggested by the UNICEF, the recommendations are classified into three main dimensions – *Ready Children, Ready Schools* and *Ready Families/Communities*.

Ready Children

11.1.9 The Committee is of the view that helping children complete the KG curriculum is a crucial task to facilitate the transition. It is desirable for K3 teachers to make reference to the primary school curriculum in devising their learning activities. However, they should avoid teaching P1 curriculum at KG level in order to uphold the core values of KG education.

11.1.10 The continuity of the KG and primary school curricula should be enhanced.

Some learning outcomes, clear but non-prescriptive for KG graduates, could be formulated so as to raise KG teachers' awareness of children competencies and to give primary school teachers a clearer picture of what to expect from their new P1 students. Teachers could then build upon children's prior knowledge and achievement. Some considerations in setting learning outcomes for KG children are proposed below:

11.1.10.1 There should be clear differentiation of expectations between the KG and P1 levels.

11.1.10.2 The progression from KG to P1 level should be developmentally appropriate.

11.1.10.3 The outcomes should emphasise the personal qualities of children (e.g. self-care skills, social skills, etc.) and be observable or measurable.

11.1.10.4 The outcomes should not be too prescriptive to avoid drilling and unnecessary pressure on children.

11.1.10.5 Children's individual differences should be respected.

11.1.11 Since the issue of the Curriculum Guide in 2006, schools have accumulated a lot of experience and good practices in areas such as adopting a play-based strategy, catering for learner diversity and conducting assessment for learning. The Committee has noted that the Curriculum Guide would be revised by the Curriculum Development Council taking into consideration the experience of learning and teaching in KG, the performance of children, the changes in society and the future needs of children. More elaboration on the issue of transition, in particular the transition arrangements, should be developed with a view to guiding the KGs in providing systemic support to children when they transit to primary school. The revision of the Guide will be completed by 2016 as planned.

Ready Schools

11.1.12 The Committee considers that a transition policy should be in place at both KG and primary school levels so as to systematically prepare children to transit to P1. The continuity and child developmental appropriateness of the practices and measures for transition from KG to junior primary should be recognised.

11.1.13 The Committee also recommends that guidelines to KG and primary school teachers as well as training opportunities for teachers of both levels should be reviewed.

11.1.14 Tertiary institutions might consider reviewing their pre-service teacher training programmes in order to better prepare the prospective KG and primary school teachers in handling transition at both levels, e.g. arranging school attachment for KG teachers at primary schools and vice versa.

11.1.15 Information of students with special needs should be made transparent and accessible for both KGs and primary schools so that timely support could be given to these students. Transfer of children's information from KG to primary school in general should also be enhanced.

Ready Families/Communities

11.1.16 With regard to preparing families and communities for smooth transition, the Committee recommends more home-school collaboration at both KG and primary school levels to assist children in adapting to the new learning environment, e.g., in the form of phone contact or parent meetings/conferences at the beginning of the school year.

11.1.17 The Committee is of the view that more structured approach should be adopted to enhance parent education and involvement. More emphasis should be put on parents' and caregivers' awareness of and involvement in their children's early learning and development, as well as children's transition to primary schools. In this connection, parent education should be further enriched to equip parents with the necessary skills and knowledge to support their children in dealing with the psychological and emotional frustration that might emerge in the transition period. Parent education could also focus on helping parents develop realistic and positive expectations of children transiting to P1.

11.1.18 Public education on the issue of transition should be promoted so as to raise the community's awareness and readiness to help children make a smooth transition to primary schools.

11.2 Strategies for Local Research on Kindergarten Education

11.2.1 The Committee is of the view that currently, local research studies about KG education are limited. More research should be encouraged to help keep the sector better-informed of the latest trends in child development, children’s learning needs and the development of KG education all over the world. Research could also be conducted to examine the impact of the new KG policy on KG education, particularly how the five principles of KG education (as mentioned in paragraph 3.1.9) are upheld and promoted in the sector.

11.2.2 The Committee recommends that the research topics should be policy-oriented with a focus on quality KG education. Possible topics might include

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11.2.2.1 transition from KG to primary school;

11.2.2.2 teacher professionalism;

11.2.2.3 children with diverse needs;

11.2.2.4 longitudinal studies on children’s learning; and

11.2.2.5 effects/impacts of different modes of services (e.g., HD and WD KG services) on children.

11.3 Kindergarten Admission Arrangements

Current Situation

11.3.1 All along, parents have autonomy in choosing a KG suitable for their children with regard to their needs while KGs, being privately run, may handle student admission matters at their own discretion subject to relevant rules and guidelines issued by EDB. In this regard, EDB has issued circulars to remind KGs of important points to note in student admission matters. Among other things, KGs should take positive action to provide parents with relevant school information⁴⁷ through

⁴⁷ The information should include the estimated number of vacancies for application, approved school fee,

different channels such as leaflet, school notice, etc. To help parents make an informed choice of KG for their children, EDB issues the Profile of Kindergartens and Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres annually containing essential information about individual KGs, including their approved school fees, number of teaching staff and their qualifications, teacher-to-pupil ratio, the curriculum, quality review results and reports if any, school facilities, and any additional charges for school items. The Profile can be accessed on EDB website.

11.3.2 To avoid creating undue pressure on young children, KGs are requested to start the recruitment procedure which involves K1 applicants no earlier than November each year. For collection of application fee and registration fee, EDB has set fee ceilings and given blanket approval for KGs to collect application fee and registration fee below the ceilings⁴⁸. KGs wishing to charge a higher fee are required to seek prior approval from EDB.

Latest Development

11.3.3 In 2013, in view of the public concern over the K1 admission arrangements in Tai Po and the North districts, EDB implemented a number of special measures with a view to improving the KG admission procedure and better utilising the KG places in the two districts. In view of the positive results of the measures, the Committee recommended in its progress report in December 2013 extension of the measures to other districts. EDB accepted the recommendation and the measures were implemented in all districts for admission to K1 in the 2015/16 school year. Details were as follows :

(a) Distribution of Application Forms

To avoid the situation where parents had to queue up for a long time for application forms, KGs were required not to limit the number of forms to be distributed. KGs were also required to inform parents in advance the arrangement for obtaining application forms and submitting applications

other approved charges and a list of school items/paid services (which parents may purchase on a voluntary basis) and their charges.

⁴⁸ 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.

so that parents can make due preparation.

(b) School-based Admission Mechanism

To enhance transparency and avoid unnecessary misunderstanding or complaints, KGs were required to introduce a school-based admission mechanism, which should include the admission procedure and criteria, the number of candidates to be interviewed, etc. and keep parents duly informed.

(c) “One Place for Each Child”

To prevent a child from hoarding more than one place at one time, which would affect other children, KGs were required to use the “Certificate of Eligibility for the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme” (hereafter referred as the “2015/16 voucher”) under PEVS as a document for confirming acceptance of an offer. Parents were required to confirm acceptance of only one K1 place with the “2015/16 voucher” during the pre-set “centralised registration dates” in late January 2015.

(d) Release of Information on Vacancies

EDB collected information from KGs on K1 vacancies through an electronic platform, and released the vacancy information of all KGs through various channels, including EDB website, telephone hotline and Regional Education Offices, for parents’ reference.

The Stakeholders’ Views and Committee’s Deliberations

11.3.4 In general, the sector considered the arrangements had facilitated smooth operation of the admission process and parents’ concerns were addressed. It was observed that both the KG sector and parents could benefit at large, saving long queues for application forms and parents could confirm a K1 place for their children early.

11.3.5 Notwithstanding positive feedback from KG sector and parents in general, the sector had concern about the increase of administrative workload incurred by the increase in the number of applications received, and as a result more interviews were

arranged. There were views that adjustment should be made to the admission arrangements to reduce administrative workload. Some opined that the measure should be implemented only in districts where the supply of KG places was more stringent.

11.3.6 Some considered that EDB should impose a central allocation mechanism to place children to KGs near their homes. However, others had grave concern that such a central allocation system would inevitably have a negative impact on parental choice. The Committee notes that in the actual situation, parents may not choose a KG in the district where they live because their children may be taken care of by relatives living in other districts, while other parents may choose a KG near where they work, or have particular preference on the curriculum or other characteristics of a particular KG which suit their children's aptitude, etc. Statistics available showed that the actual KG student enrolment in certain districts significantly outnumbered the corresponding population projection, indicating that some KG students in these districts are residing in other districts. For example, the actual KG student enrolment in Kowloon City in the 2014/15 school year was 22 873 while the projected population size of those aged three to five residing in that district was only 10 100.

11.3.7 Having regard to the above, the Committee was of the view that with a central allocation system, free parental choice and autonomy of the sector in student admission might be jeopardized. Besides, the sector also expressed great reservation about the creation of KG nets under the allocation system, in which all KGs would be divided into a number of school nets in line with the district administration boundaries, and the Government needed to provide sufficient KG places in each school net for all eligible children in the net. Under the Primary One Admission System, there are some 30 school nets, and it is anticipated that for a similar mechanism for KG, more school nets will be necessary to reduce the travelling time for the small children. The system would be very complicated and subject to disputes among the KGs. Moreover, unlike the aided primary schools that are operated mainly in government-owned or rent-free private lands, the operation of KG in commercial premises will render the planning of school places in a holistic manner not viable. Nevertheless, it was recommended that support for parents in securing a KG place should be strengthened.

11.3.8 With regard to the amount of application fee and registration fee to be collected by KGs, there were views that the approved ceiling should be raised to enable KGs to recover the respective costs incurred. On the other hand, some were of the view that the approved ceiling should be at a reasonable level acceptable to parents, and KGs which had to collect an amount exceeding the approved ceiling could apply for approval from EDB individually to meet their operational needs.

11.3.9 The Committee also deliberated on the admission of students in pre-nursery (PN) classes to K1 in the same KG. It was noted that in the KG-cum-CCCs where PN classes are operated, most of the K1 places would be filled by the PN class children and just a few places could be open for other applicants. In this regard, there were views that if children for some reasons or others are not admitted to a PN class, they will be deprived of equal opportunities to access a K1 place with government subsidy. To tackle the issue, some suggested the option of requiring the KG-cum-CCCs to open all K1 places for application. However, the sector had great reservation in introducing such a requirement as it would in effect force some PN students to transfer to other KGs to continue their study in K1. They considered that for such small children, continuing to study in the same school would be more beneficial as they had already adapted to the school environment.

The Committee's Recommendations

11.3.10 In the light of the above deliberation, the Committee considers that a central allocation mechanism is not conducive to the high level of flexibility and vibrancy of the KG sector in meeting the service needs of the parents. It will adversely affect the sector's overall operating flexibility in coping with the rise and fall of students in different districts. The Committee proposes that KG student admission should remain a school-based matter in order to maintain the flexibility and diversity of the KG sector and free choice for parents. The Committee is of the view that the K1 admission arrangements adopted for admission in the 2015/16 school year should be reviewed and enhanced to address the stakeholders' concerns. With regard to providing better support for parents in looking for a K1 place, besides providing timely vacancy information for their reference, EDB could render assistance in various ways as and when required, including liaising with KGs with vacancies and parents on admission matters and ensuring families in need (such as those with

working parents) be given priority in admission to WD/LWD services. As for the application fee and registration fee, the Committee proposes that EDB may conduct regular review of the approved ceiling in order to strike a balance between KGs' operational needs and parents' financial burden.

11.3.11 Regarding the admission of PN class students to K1, the issue has to be addressed by balancing factors such as equitable access to places with government subsidy, KG's discretion in student admission, parental expectation and choice of KGs. In this regard, the Committee suggests that EDB may further study the issue of requiring KG-cum-CCCs to set aside K1 places required for application from non-PN class students.

Chapter 12 Implementation

12.1 The Government, after consideration of the Committee's recommendations, should consult relevant stakeholders in the formulation and implementation of the future quality KG education policy.

12.2 The Committee recommends the appointment by the Government of a Steering Committee consisting of representatives of relevant stakeholder groups, relevant government departments, as well as professionals in overseeing the implementation of the future quality KG education policy.

12.3 In the long run, the 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.

**Membership and Terms of Reference of the
Committee on Free Kindergarten Education**

Membership

Chair:	Dr Moses Cheng Mo-chi	
Vice-Chair:	Mrs Betty Ip Tsang Chui-hing	(Kindergarten Administration – from 23 Jun 2014)
Members:	Ms Liu Fung-heung	(Kindergarten Principal)
	Ms Ho Lan-sang	(Kindergarten Principal)
	Dr Maggie Koong May-kay	(Kindergarten Principal)
	Ms Shek Lai-yee	(Kindergarten Teacher)
	Dr Sanly Kam Shau-wan	(School Sponsoring Body)
	Ms Lam Lai-ping	(School Sponsoring Body – until 31 Dec 2014)
	Ms Liu Mo-yin	(School Sponsoring Body – from 1 Jan 2015)
	Ms Ng Yin-kam	(School Sponsoring Body)
	Mr Sin Kim-wai	(Primary School Principal)
	Prof Nirmala Rao	(Teacher Education Institution)
	Dr Gordon Tsui Luen-on	(Parent)
	Mr Banny Wong Chun-kit	(Parent)
	Ms Chiu Nga-sze	(Parent)
	Mr Walter Chan Kar-lok	(Education Commission Member)
	Mr Tim Lui Tim-leung	(Education Commission Member)
	Ms Dilys Chau Suet-fung	(Education Commission Member)
	Ms Chitty Cheung Fung-ting	(Lay Member – Corporate Communications)
	Ms Susanna Hui	(Lay Member – Finance and Accounting)
	Mr Addy Wong Wai-hung	(Lay Member – Real Estate)
	EDB Representative	

Terms of Reference

The Committee will make concrete recommendations to the Education Bureau on the practicable implementation of free kindergarten education in the context of 15-year free education. Specifically it will

- gauge the views of stakeholders on current practices and the future policy of free kindergarten education;
- identify, examine and assess, with reference to the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme, options of free kindergarten education, issues for possible improvements to kindergarten education and any related measures;
- advise on the setting up of and provide steer for the sub-committees to study certain specific issues in detail; and
- consider options, implications and implementation strategies developed by the sub-committees and conduct consultation with major stakeholders.

**Membership and Terms of Reference of the
Sub-committee on Objectives, Teacher Professionalism and Research**

Membership

Convenor :	Dr Maggie Koong May-kay	(Kindergarten Principal)
Members :	Ms Rosa Chow Wai-chun	(Kindergarten Principal)
	Mrs Mak Tse How-ling	(Kindergarten Principal)
	Ms Man Fung-ming	(Kindergarten Teacher)
	Mrs Sophia Chan Tsang Kin-lok	(School Sponsoring Body)
	Ms Gloria Leung Chi-kin	(School Sponsoring Body)
	Mr Tai Hay-lap	(Secondary School Principal)
	Mr Ho Hon-kuen	(Secondary School Assistant Principal)
	Prof Hau Kit-tai	(Teacher Education Institution)
	Prof Nirmala Rao	(Teacher Education Institution)
	Dr Gail Yuen Wai-kwan	(Teacher Education Institution)
	Ms Chiu Nga-sze	(Parent)
	Mr Wilfred Wong Kam-pui	(Lay Member – Business)
	Mr Yeung Sai-man	(Lay Member – Legal)
	EDB Representative	
Co-opted Member :	Ms Ng Pak-ying	(Kindergarten Teacher)

Terms of Reference

- To review the objectives of kindergarten education, and to study issues related to the kindergarten curriculum and the interface between kindergarten and primary education;
- To study the issues, options and constraints in detail regarding the professional development and training of kindergarten teachers;
- To study the strategies for promoting research on kindergarten education and related issues; and
- To make recommendations to the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education on feasible options to address the issues.

**Membership and Terms of Reference of the
Sub-committee on Operation and Governance**

Membership

Convenor :	Mr Walter Chan Kar-lok	(Education Commission Member)
Members :	Ms Ho Lan-sang	(Kindergarten Principal)
	Ms Mary Tong Siu-fun	(Kindergarten Principal)
	Ms Shek Lai-yee	(Kindergarten Teacher)
	Revd Peter Douglas Koon	(School Sponsoring Body)
	Ms Lam Lai-ping	(School Sponsoring Body – until 31 Dec 2014)
	Ms Liu Mo-yin	(School Sponsoring Body – from 1 Jan 2015)
	Mr Sin Kim-wai	(Primary School Principal)
	Dr Hazel Lam Mei-yung	(Teacher Education Institution)
	Mrs Lo Lee Tsui-mui	(Parent)
	Mr William Chan Fu-keung	(Lay Member – Human Resources)
	Ms Susanna Hui	(Lay Member – Finance and Accounting)
	Mr Addy Wong Wai-hung	(Lay Member – Real Estate)
	Dr Kelvin Wong	(Lay Member – Corporate Governance)
	EDB Representative	
Co-opted Member :	Mrs Lorraine Pak Tang Siu-fan	(Teacher Education Institution)

Terms of Reference

- To study the issues, options and constraints in detail regarding the operation of kindergartens as well as governance and accountability framework for kindergartens; and
- To make recommendations to the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education on feasible options to address the issues.

**Membership and Terms of Reference of the
Sub-committee on Funding Modes**

Membership

Convenor :	Mr Tim Lui Tim-leung	(Education Commission Member)
Members :	Ms Nancy Lam Chui-ling	(Kindergarten Principal)
	Ms Liu Fung-heung	(Kindergarten Principal)
	Ms Chan Shuk-mui	(Kindergarten Teacher)
	Ms Amy Leung Lai-ching	(Kindergarten Supervisor)
	Mr James Chan	(School Sponsoring Body)
	Dr Sanly Kam Shau-wan	(School Sponsoring Body)
	Mr Cheung Yung-pong	(Primary School Principal)
	Mrs Sylvia Cheung	(Teacher Education Institution)
	Dr Li Hui	(Teacher Education Institution)
	Mr Ho Chu-ping	(Parent)
	Mr Banny Wong Chun-kit	(Parent)
	Ms Dilys Chau Suet-fung	(Lay Member – Accountancy)
	Mr Lai Kam-tong	(Lay Member – Human Resources)
	Mr Stanley Lau	(Lay Member – Industrial)
	Mr Jimmy Ng Wing-ka	(Lay Member – Legal)
	EDB Representative	
Co-opted Member :	Mr Addy Wong Wai-hung	(Lay Member – Real Estate)

Terms of Reference

- To study the issues, options and constraints in detail regarding different feasible funding modes for kindergartens; and
- To make recommendations to the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education on feasible options to address the issues.

**Membership and Terms of Reference of the
Sub-committee on Catering for Student Diversity**

Membership

Convenor :	Dr Gordon Tsui Luen-on	(Parent)
Members :	Ms Chan Ka-mun	(Kindergarten Principal)
	Ms Wong Sau-han	(Kindergarten Principal)
	Ms Yip Siu-fun	(Kindergarten Principal)
	Ms Leung Oi-sim	(Kindergarten Teacher)
	Dr Jane C.Y. Lee	(School Sponsoring Body)
	Mrs Judy Mui	(School Sponsoring Body)
	Ms Nancy Tsang	(School Sponsoring Body)
	Prof Cheng Zi-juan	(Teacher Education Institution)
	Mr Cheng Chi-cheung	(Parent)
	Dr Ronnie Hui Ka-wah	(Lay Member – Medical)
	Mr Kwok Lit-tung	(Lay Member – Social Welfare)
	Mr Dipo C. Sani	(Lay Member – Business)
	Dr Shirley Leung	(Department of Health Representative – until 22 Apr 2014)
	Dr Teresa Li	(Department of Health Representative – from 23 Apr 2014)
	Mrs Anna Mak	(Social Welfare Department Representative – until 2 Sep 2013)
	Mr Lam Ka-tai	(Social Welfare Department Representative – from 3 Sep 2013)
	EDB Representative	
Co-opted Member :	Ms Mok Chun-lan	(Kindergarten Teacher)

Terms of Reference

- To study the issues on additional support for specific groups of kindergarten students, such as non-Chinese speaking children, children with special needs and children from needy families; and
- To make recommendations to the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education on feasible options to address the issues.

**Membership and Terms of Reference of the
Sub-committee on Communication Strategy**

Membership

Convenor :	Ms Chitty Cheung Fung-ting	(Lay Member – Corporate Communications)
Members :	Ms Chu Nga-lai	(Kindergarten Principal – until 31 July 2014)
	Ms Kwan Bick-kuen	(Kindergarten Principal)
	Ms Eppie Chan Mei-ho	(Kindergarten Teacher)
	Mr Lee Siu-hok	(School Sponsoring Body)
	Ms Ng Yin-kam	(School Sponsoring Body)
	Mr Kenneth Wu	(School Sponsoring Body)
	Mr Leung Siu-tong	(Primary School Principal)
	Dr Amelia N.Y. Lee	(Teacher Education Institution)
	Mr Jao Ming	(Parent)
	Mr Henry Tong Sau-chai	(Parent)
	Mrs Miranda Leung Chan Che-ming	(Lay Member – Corporate Communications)
	Mr Tai Keen-man	(Lay Member – Media)
	Ms Blanche Tang	(Lay Member – Media)
	EDB Representative	

Terms of Reference

- To study the strategies for promoting kindergarten education-related policies, including dissemination of relevant information, communication, lobbying, consultation and publicity strategies;
- To study the strategies for promoting parent education; and
- To make recommendations to the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education on feasible options to address the issues.

**Follow-up Action on Short-term Measures
Proposed by the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education**

In connection with the short-term measures to provide support for the kindergarten (KG) sector and parents as recommended in the progress report submitted by the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education (the Committee) to the Education Bureau (EDB) in December 2013, the Government accepted the recommendations and has taken follow-up action actively. Details are as follows:

Providing additional subsidy for KGs and parents

1. The Government has increased/will increase the voucher subsidy of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme on a one-off basis by \$2,500 per year in the 2014/15 and 2015/16 school years and lift the fee remission ceilings under the KG and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme.

Enhancing training for KG principals and teachers

2. With regard to the short term measures for the professional development of KG personnel suggested by the Committee in its interim report, the Government took immediate actions, in collaboration with teacher education institutions, and organised a series of thematic professional development programmes (PDPs) on leadership, mediation skills, promoting children's development, supporting children with special needs, etc. EDB also arranged a study visit for KG teachers to Mainland China in April 2014, and arranged another visit for KG principals and teachers to Korea in October 2014. Apart from these immediate actions, other on-going professional development activities are being regularly provided for KG personnel. In 2014, EDB offered around 70 PDPs of various topics such as school self-evaluation, learning and teaching, catering for learner diversity, etc. to help KGs deliver the curriculum effectively for the development and learning of children. School-based support services were also provided for KGs to enhance teachers' capacities in curriculum development and implementation to cater for children's learning needs. Furthermore, expertise from the tertiary sector has

been solicited through the “University-School Support Programmes” to provide intensive on-site support for KGs.

Improving the KG admission arrangements

3. To follow up the recommendation of the Committee on improving the KG student admission arrangements, EDB has implemented special admission arrangements for nursery (K1) classes in all districts in the 2015/16 school year.

Enhancing parent education

4. Based on the Committee’s recommendation on enhancing parent education, regional parent seminars were held in June and July 2014. Experts on child development were invited to share with parents their valuable insights and experiences on quality KG education.

List of Consultation and Engagement Activities conducted by the Committee

Focus group meetings (no. of meetings held)

- October – December 2013 First round (5)
- September – October 2014 Second round (5)

Meetings with various stakeholders, concern groups and political parties (no. of meetings held)

- August 2014 – February 2015 Briefings for school heads associations (13)
- September 2014 – May 2015 Meetings with political parties (15)
- July 2013, November 2014 and May 2015 Meetings with Committee on Home-School Co-operation/Federations of Parent-Teacher Associations (3)
- August 2014 – May 2015 Meetings with various concern groups (13)

More details are at Annex.

International Forum

- October 2013 International Forum on KG Education

Parent Seminars

- October 2013 Parent Seminar on KG Education
- June-July 2014 Parent Seminars on Quality KG Education

Media Briefings

- 30 August 2013
- 20 December 2013

Media interviews (no. of interviews)

- 18 November 2014
- 24 November 2014
- 5 December 2014

- 5 January 2015
- 22 January 2015
- 3 February 2015
- 7 April 2015
- 28 April 2015 (2)
- 14 May 2015

Press Releases/Articles

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------|
| ● 8 April 2013 | Press Release |
| ● 21 May 2013 | Article |
| ● 4 July 2013 | Article |
| ● 20 December 2013 | Press Release |
| ● 10 March 2014 | Letter to KGs |
| ● 23 June 2014 | Press Release |

Written submissions

- 133 written submissions received

Meetings with Various Stakeholders, Concern Groups and Political Parties

	Groups / Parties	Date	Meetings
1	School Heads Associations	29 August 2014	Briefing for The New Territories KG Heads Association
2		23 September 2014	Briefing for Yuen Long KG Heads Association
3		26 September 2014	Briefing for Tai Po & North KG Heads Association
4		26 September 2014	Briefing for Tsuen Wan and Kwai Tsing KG Heads Association
5		17 October 2014	Briefing for Sai Kung and Kwun Tong KG Heads Association
6		4 November 2014	Briefing for Tuen Mun KG Heads Association
7		4 November 2014	Briefing for Wong Tai Sin and Kowloon City KG Heads Association
8		7 November 2014 (AM)	Briefing for Hong Kong Island School Heads Association – KG Principals
9		7 November 2014 (PM)	Briefing for Hong Kong Island School Heads Association – KG Principals
10		14 November 2014	Briefing for Sham Shui Po and Yau Tsim Mong KG Heads Association
11		15 December 2014	Briefing for Diocesan, Caritas and Religious KG Principals
12		17 December 2014	Briefing for Sheung Kung Hui KG Principals
13		6 February 2015	Briefing for Kwun Tong Schools Liaison Committee – KG Principals
14	Political Parties	24 September 2014	Meeting with Liberal Party

	Groups / Parties	Date	Meetings
15		24 September 2014	Meeting with Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong
16		7 October 2014	Meeting with Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union
17		7 October 2014	Meeting with The Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions
18		10 October 2014	Meeting with Dr Hon LAM Tai-fai, SBS, JP (Industrial – Second)
19		10 October 2014	Meeting with New People's Party
20		13 October 2014	Meeting Business and Professionals Alliance for Hong Kong
21		15 October 2014	Meeting with Civic Party
22		16 October 2014	Meeting with Labour Party
23		16 October 2014	Meeting with Democratic Party
24		23 October 2014	Meeting with New Century Forum
25		24 October 2014	Meeting with Professional Commons
26		8 November 2014	Meeting with People Power
27		19 December 2014	Meeting with New People's Party
28		8 May 2015	Meeting with Hon Ip Kin-yuen
29		Committee on Home-School Co-operation/ Federations of	18 July 2013
30	25 August 2014		Meeting with 爭取 15 年免費教育大聯盟
31	6 November		Meeting with Committee on Home-

	Groups / Parties	Date	Meetings
	Parent-Teacher Associations / Other Concern Groups	2014	School Co-operation/Federations of Parent-Teacher Associations
32		10 November 2014	Meeting with Organisation Mondiale pour l'Education Préscolaire – Hong Kong (OMEP – HK)
33		14 November 2014	Meeting with Hong Kong Early Childhood Educators Association
34		20 November 2014	Meeting with Council of Non-profit-making Organisations for Pre-primary Education (CNOPE)
35		21 November 2014	Meeting with Hong Kong Kindergarten Association (AGM)
36		25 November 2014	Meeting with 爭取 15 年免費教育大聯盟
37		27 November 2014	Meeting with Hong Kong Council of Social Service
38		9 December 2014	Meeting with Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers, KG school heads, teachers and parents invited by the 爭取 15 年免費教育大聯盟
39		12 December 2014	Meeting with Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union
40		16 January 2015	Meeting with Hong Kong Early Childhood Educators Association
41		6 March 2015	Meeting with Hong Kong Kindergarten Association
42		23 April 2015	Meeting with Tin Shui Wai Community Development Network
43		9 May 2015	Meeting with Hong Kong, Kowloon, New Territories Kindergarten Education Advancement Association
44		23 May 2015	Meeting with Committee on Home-School Co-operation/ Federations of

	Groups / Parties	Date	Meetings
			Parent-Teacher Associations of Hong Kong Region and Island (HK Island KG Expo)