

Legco – Education Affairs Committee - Meeting on 10 April 2006
Hong Kong Kindergarten Association Discussion Paper (English Version)

Kindergarten Subsidy

1. This is an important priority of launching “free preschool education” policy in terms of extending the free education from 9 years to 12 years. Currently nearly all kindergartens in Hong Kong are running a 3-year system, i.e. 3-4, 4-5, 5-6 years old classes. If the free education for preschool only covers 2 years, parents may tend to defer the admission age of their children which may lead to deterioration of early childhood development.
2. In facing the problems of dwindling birth rates and rising of costs, more kindergartens may close if 2 years of free education policy may apply.
3. Our first challenge is to try to make better use of these resources. The moves to rationalize funding streams, planning arrangements should provide greater flexibility to enable these resources to be used better. We all need to make sure we get best value for that expenditure.

Our association suggests the following strategies:

- 3.1 Direct payment to the child/parent – The government will subsidize each eligible child for paying his/her school fee. It can be done in a direct payment mode to the benefit of the child as it is fair to all citizenship to enjoy the benefit of free preschool education.
- 3.2 Capital Grant Mode – Can take the same subsidy scheme as it is now applying to all aided schools in Hong Kong. Salary of all staff in non-profit-making kindergartens will be borne by the government whereas those in private independent kindergartens can be looked after by applying the “Direct-Subsidy Scheme”.
- 3.3 Improving Teacher Quality – Put more funding to tertiary education organizations especially those who run programs for preschool teacher training, to allow them to be well resourceful for accelerating both the quality and quantity of teacher training courses, like Certificate of Education and further on the Bachelor of Education. Thus the status of preschool teachers will be upgraded at the same time.
- 3.4 Extra Funding to preschool teachers – to allow more qualified professionals to stay in the preschool education field to yield higher recognition and self value-added.

Fee Remission

1. There are concerns for having difficulties in applying the fee remission. We urge the government to help to lighten the additional burdens placed upon parents with financial worries.
2. For full day program users, it is really hard to meet with the criterion drawn up by EMB in relation to “Society Needs”.
3. If the government will put the priority in subsidizing the preschool education, it will platform a good atmosphere for young couples to raise children for a high yield return of future development in Hong Kong.

Conclusion

1. Will the government be making additional funding available to develop local preventative services? The funding of tax-payers should be properly allocated for the benefit of all citizens. It is about time to channel the right path to deeper care of preschool education. The government should lead to reduced costs in both human and economic terms. However, in the short term, some additional resources will be required to enable the shift from crisis intervention to prevention. Consultation from the field and public is a crucial act.
2. All preschool teachers would have to be degree holders in the long run is another important focus to be looked after. In comparing to other countries, preschool teachers are professional upgraded to own certain status and being respected. ~End~