

For discussion on
10 June 2013

Legislative Council Panel on Education
New Measures for Pre-primary Education

Purpose

The Chief Executive in his Policy Address 2013 announced the proposal of providing kindergartens (KGs) under the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) with an additional one-off grant to help them further enhance the quality of KG education. This paper sets out the details and relevant administrative arrangements of the proposal.

Proposal

2. We propose that each KG under the PEVS in the 2013/14 school year (including KGs, KG-cum-child care centres and schools with KG classes) be given a One-off School Development Grant (One-off Grant) in an amount ranging from \$150,000 to \$250,000 to improve school premises, facilities and learning resources, with an aim to enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

3. A basic grant of \$150,000 will be disbursed to each of these PEVS KGs (by school registration) in the 2013/14 school year. On top of this, it is proposed that the sum of One-off Grant disbursed to each KG be determined according to its number of pupils enrolled in September 2013 at the rate of \$750 per eligible pupil, with the ceiling capped at \$250,000 per school. In other words, for a KG with 134 pupils, the One-off Grant will amount to \$250,000 at the maximum [i.e. \$150,000 + \$750 x 134].

4. The One-off Grant should be used to meet expenses involved in maintenance, repair or improvement of school premises / facilities, procurement of furniture and learning resources (e.g. books, teaching materials and computers, etc.) and hiring of additional personnel / services on a temporary and project basis, to develop teaching resources. The One-off Grant may be spent over a span of three school years and any unspent amount at the end of the 2015/16 school year must be returned to the HKSAR Government.

5. KGs should be accountable to the public for their procurement / employment / tendering arrangements and relevant expenses. In the spirit of fairness and impartiality, KGs should draw up a set of procurement / employment / tendering procedures that are in line with the guidelines of the Education Bureau (EDB), having regard to their individual needs, to ensure the procedures be conducted in a proper and accountable manner.

Justification

6. In the past six months, we have had quite a number of meetings and sharing sessions with various stakeholders of the KG sector and visited KGs of different operating modes and scales in order to have a firm grasp of their operation and needs. Many KGs told us during these interactions that, following the implementation of PEVS, the quality of KGs was improving in tandem with rising expectations and demands from teachers and parents; and it necessitated them to put in more resources to improve their premises and facilities as well as teaching resources. However, they were unable to make the necessary improvements due to the great costs involved and their reservations about passing the cost onto parents by increasing tuition fees. While KGs are supposed to operate on a self-financing basis with the operating costs to be borne by them, the EDB considers the requests of the KGs valid and agrees that it is necessary to provide PEVS KGs with the One-off Grant now for their flexible deployment to address their school-based needs and achieve immediate improvement in their teaching environment and resources.

Financial Implications

7. Of all the KGs covered by PEVS in the current school year, 716 (by school registration) have already submitted applications for continuing to join the PEVS in the 2013/14 school year and the processing of these applications is near completion. According to our estimate, a small number of new KGs will join the PEVS while some KGs will cease operation between now and September 2013. Thus the actual number of PEVS KGs for the 2013/14 school year will still be subject to adjustment.

8. Based on the 716 KGs that have submitted applications under the PEVS and the number of KG pupils for the current school year, we estimate that nearly half of the KGs will be provided with the maximum amount of the One-off Grant at \$250,000. The total amount involved for the disbursement of the One-off grant will be about \$165 million.

Way Forward

9. Providing practicable 15-year free education and better quality kindergarten education is one of the priorities of the current-term Government. In the light of the huge diversity among KGs and the different views and expectations among stakeholders on free KG education, we need to study prudently how to take forward free KG education in a practicable manner. To this end, the EDB set up a Committee on Free KG Education (the Committee) on 8 April 2013 to examine various issues related to free KG education and make practicable recommendations for implementing free KG education.

10. In view of the intricacies of the issues involved, our current assessment is that the Committee will take two years to complete its tasks. In the meantime, the Committee will maintain communication with the KG sector to gauge their views and will explore short-and medium-term measures to help the KG sector meet their existing challenges. The Government will actively consider providing support in this regard.

Advice Sought

11. Subject to the views of Members, approval of the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council will be sought for this proposal. Upon obtaining approval of the Finance Committee, we will inform KGs of the relevant details and arrangements in August 2013 and proceed to disburse the One-off Grant to PEVS KGs at the beginning of the 2013/14 school year.

12. Members are invited to comment on the proposed measures set out in paragraphs 2 to 5 above.

Education Bureau

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