

For information on
10 February 2014

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Progress of Work of the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education

Purpose

This paper informs Members of the progress of work of the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education (the Committee), further to the update at the Panel meeting of 9 July 2013 [LegCo Paper No. CB(4)852/12-13(01)].

Progress of Work of the Committee

2. Since their establishment in April 2013, the Committee and its five sub-committees have held nearly 30 meetings to deliberate on various issues relating to free kindergarten (KG) education. Following the visit to Korea in late May 2013, the Chairman of the Committee and the Convenors of the Sub-committees visited Singapore and Melbourne in late July 2013 to learn about their latest development in KG education. The Committee also organized an international forum on KG education and a parent seminar in late October 2013, which provided a platform for professional exchange among local and overseas experts as well as education workers on KG education.
3. For the purpose of public engagement and consultation, the Committee has conducted between October and December 2013 the first round of focus group meetings with various stakeholders including school sponsoring bodies, KG principals, teachers, parents and teacher education institutions to gauge their views.
4. The Committee has also maintained communication with the KG sector and informed the public of the progress of its work through various channels and activities, such as issuing press releases and conducting media briefing sessions. A webpage on the EDB website has also been set up, through which relevant information on the Committee is released to the public from time to time. Furthermore, an email box has been created for collecting opinions from the public.

Proposed Short-term Measures

5. Through focus group discussions, exchanges with the stakeholders and various other means such as school visits and meetings, the Committee has obtained views of the KG sector and noted the difficulties faced by them. The Committee submitted a progress report to EDB in December 2013. The report also proposes the implementation of short-term support measures in the following five aspects ahead of its submission of the final report in 2015:

- (a) Providing additional subsidy for KGs and parents;
- (b) Enhancing training for KG principals and teachers;
- (c) Improving the KG admission arrangements;
- (d) Enhancing support for catering for student diversity; and
- (e) Enhancing parent education.

6. For details of the progress of work of the Committee and its proposed short-term measures, please refer to the progress report at [Annex](#).

EDB's Follow-up Action

7. We have accepted the Committee's recommendations after careful consideration. Our follow-up action on the short-term measures proposed by the Committee is outlined in the ensuing paragraphs.

Providing additional subsidy for KGs and parents

8. As announced in the 2014 Policy Address and set out in LegCo Paper No. CB(4)323/13-14(01) dated 27 January 2014, we plan to increase the voucher subsidy of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) by \$2,500 per year in the 2014/15 and 2015/16 school years to help alleviate the financial burden on parents, and at the same time help KGs meet the expenditures on teachers' salaries, other staffing and operating costs (including rental). In addition, we plan to lift the fee remission ceilings under the KG and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme from the weighted average fees of PEVS KGs to the 75th percentile of the school fees of the respective KGs to provide greater assistance to needy families in facilitating their children's access to quality KG education.

Enhancing training for KG principals and teachers

9. To further enhance the generic skills and widen the exposure of KG

principals and middle management, we would arrange professional development programmes on related themes such as communication skills, human resources management, crisis management and legal matters. Study tours to the Mainland and overseas countries would also be organized.

Improving the KG admission arrangements

10. In view of the recommendation of the Committee, EDB is actively exploring means to enhance the admission arrangements for nursery (K1) classes in the 2015/16 school year. The following short-term admission arrangements were discussed in the Committee meeting on 21 January 2014:

- (i) To avoid hoarding of more than one place for an unduly long time by one applicant, the EDB proposes using the “Certificate of Eligibility for the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme” (the voucher) under the PEVS as a document confirming the acceptance of offer. To do so, we shall align the timeline of the processing of the voucher with that of application for KG admission. Specifically, we will request parents to submit application for the 2015/16 voucher to Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA) in July to August 2014. The voucher will be issued to the applicants by November 2014, i.e. when the KGs usually start interviewing the children. KGs will notify the applicants of the application results by mid/end December. Parents will be required to confirm acceptance of a K1 place by submitting the voucher for registration at a KG of their choice during a registration period in January 2015 (the exact dates to be determined in consultation with the KG sector).
- (ii) To avoid the situation of parents queuing up for application forms, we will request KGs to upload their application forms onto their websites and not to limit the number of application forms to be distributed. It is expected that some KGs would receive a large number of applications and would understandably need to consider introducing some forms of screening/selection mechanism including possibly a quota of candidates for interview. We stand ready to work with and advise KGs, where appropriate, on issues to note when putting in place such a mechanism, such as the need for objective criteria and to inform parents in advance what the criteria are.
- (iii) To enhance the support for parents in securing a K1 place for their children, EDB will collect the vacancy situation of KGs after the

registration period and provide related information to parents who have yet to secure a KG place for their children.

We will consult the KG sector in working out the implementation details. We are also mindful of the need to have the details disseminated to the stakeholders, including KGs and parents, as soon as possible.

Enhancing support for catering for student diversity

11. While the long-term measures for providing additional support for students with diverse learning needs are subject to further deliberation by the Committee, in the short-term, we will encourage KGs to make better use of the existing means and resources available (e.g. the school-based support services, Quality Education Fund and various support projects, etc.) to enhance their capacity of catering for the diverse learning needs of their students, including the non-Chinese speaking children and children with special educational needs (SEN). We will also conduct training for teachers on practical skills in handling students with SEN in their KGs.

Enhancing parent education

12. As proposed by the Committee, we will arrange regional parent seminars in mid-2014 to help parents better understand what quality KG education is with reference to the concept of age-appropriate expectation and how to choose a suitable KG for their children.

Way Forward

13. We understand that the short-term measures may not address all the concerns of the KG sector immediately. However, we believe that the measures are practicable and could be implemented quickly to provide immediate assistance to the KG sector ahead of the formulation of the long-term policy on free KG education. It is expected that the Committee would submit the final report to EDB in 2015.

14. The Committee will continue to listen to different opinions on how to enhance KG education, maintain communication with the KG sector, gauge the views of stakeholders holistically and objectively, and inform the public of the progress of work of the Committee on a regular basis.

Views Sought

15. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Education Bureau

January 2014

Annex

Committee on Free Kindergarten Education – Progress Report

December 2013

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 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 was extended to 12 years covering senior secondary levels. Kindergarten (KG) education, which refers to the 3-year KG programme for children from aged three to six before primary education, is not part of compulsory education. That notwithstanding, the participation rate is over 100%, meaning that virtually all parents enroll their children in the KG programme.

1.1.2 The Government introduced the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) in the 2007/08 school year. The PEVS provides a non-means-tested direct fee subsidy for eligible children attending eligible local non-profit-making 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 facilities of eligible KGs. Please refer to [Appendix 1](#) for an overview of KG education in Hong Kong.

1.1.3 Providing practicable 15-year free education and better quality KG education is one of the priorities of the current-term Government. As announced in the 2013 Policy Address, the Committee on Free KG Education (the Committee) was set up in April 2013 to examine the various related issues and recommend specific proposals on how to practicably implement free KG education. Five Sub-committees have also been 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

1.1.4 In view of the intricacies of the issues involved and the far-reaching implications of the new policy on free KG education, the Committee will take about two years to complete its tasks and make recommendations to the Government. During this period, the Committee has committed to exploring short- and medium-term measures to help KGs meet their imminent challenges.

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

1.2.1 The Committee comprises 20 members including the 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 an EDB representative. The membership and terms of reference of the Committee are at [Appendix 2](#).

1.2.2 The Sub-committees will study in detail specific areas relating to free KG education, including the objective of KG education and teacher professionalism, funding modes, the different needs of whole-day and half-day KGs, teacher qualification and salary framework, teacher-student ratio, monitoring and governance 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 3](#).

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Given the huge diversity among KGs and the different views and expectations of stakeholders on how to further enhance KG education, the Committee decided to take a prudent and evidence-based approach in considering how to implement free KG education so that the KG sector's flexibility and diversity of services would be preserved.

1.3.2 In formulating recommendations for the practicable implementation

of free KG education, the Committee will review existing policy initiatives on KG education in Hong Kong, draw reference from overseas experiences and practices, and study if the international best practices in KG education can be applied in the Hong Kong context.

1.3.3 Public engagement and consultation constitute an integral part of the study. Focus groups have been formed with various stakeholders, including school sponsoring bodies, KG principals, teachers, parents and teacher education institutions. Focus group meetings are held on a regular basis to gauge the stakeholders' views on the current practices and the future policy of free KG education.

1.3.4 This report serves to provide an update on the progress of work of the Committee as well as making proposals on short-term measures for consideration of the EDB to address the imminent needs of the KG sector.

Chapter 2 Progress of Work

2.1 The Committee on Free KG Education

2.1.1 Since establishment, the Committee has held five meetings between April and December 2013 to deliberate on various issues relating to free KG education and provide steer for the Sub-committees. The Committee has also organized and taken part in various activities as set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

Overseas Visits

2.1.2 The benefits of early childhood education (ECE) to individual, social and economic development have been recognized worldwide. Numerous research findings indicate that quality ECE is essential for building a strong foundation for lifelong learning. It helps strengthen educational outcomes and bring female labour force into the market. It is also recognized that improving ECE availability needs to be accompanied with improving quality in order to ensure good individual and social outcomes. The ECE systems in different countries differ greatly due to their socio-cultural, socio-economic and political contexts. Despite these national and regional differences, issues such as well-structured governance, sufficient financial support, proper teacher professional development, well-balanced and holistic curriculum, and interface with primary education are common concerns across countries.

2.1.3 To learn about the latest development and good practices of KG education, representatives of the Committee joined visits organised by the EDB to several overseas countries/places, including Korea, Singapore and Melbourne, earlier this year. The visits comprised a number of visits to KGs and teacher education institutes as well as meetings with government officials in charge of ECE and academics from tertiary institutions.

2.1.4 All these places share the common goal of providing quality pre-primary education. The governments are also putting in more resources in ECE in recent years, and have introduced some new initiatives. The visits enabled the Committee representatives to have in-depth exchanges with

overseas ECE experts and government officials. Through these visits, the Committee could have better understanding of quality practices in overseas countries, which would serve as useful references in mapping out the way forward for implementing free KG education in Hong Kong in various aspects, such as –

- ✧ The direction of integration of education and care services.
- ✧ The funding arrangements for half-day and full-day services.
- ✧ The quality and curriculum frameworks for KG education.
- ✧ The professional development and qualifications of KG teachers.
- ✧ The assistance and support services to cater for student diversity and students from needy families.

International Forum on KG Education

2.1.5 The Committee organized the International Forum on KG Education with the theme “Investing Early and Wisely” (the Forum) on 24 October 2013. Five overseas experts on ECE including Professor Kathy Sylva (the United Kingdom), Professor Sharon Lynn Kagan (the United States), Dr John Bennett (France), Dr Mugyeong Moon (Korea) and Dr Khoo Kim Choo (Singapore), as well as three local academics, including Professor Nirmala Rao, Professor Tse Shek-kam and Professor Richard Wong Yue-chim, shared their insights and experiences on KG education from various perspectives with participants comprising different KG stakeholders. Members of the Committee and its five Sub-committees also met with the overseas experts on 25 October 2013 to exchange views on various issues relating to KG education.

2.1.6 In connection with the Forum, a parent seminar on KG education was also conducted for the five overseas experts to share with local parents on issues related to parenting and the developmental needs of children at KG stage. Both the Forum and the parent seminar were well received by the participants. Feedback from the participants was also very positive. Topics discussed in the Forum and the seminar are set out in [Appendix 4](#).

Public Communication

2.1.7 The Committee believes that successful implementation of the future free KG policy would not be possible without active participation of the KG sector as well as the support and recognition of parents and the community.

Hence, the Committee has maintained communication with the KG sector and informed the public of the progress of work of the Committee through various channels and activities, such as issuing press release and media briefing sessions. We have also set up a webpage on the EDB website and released relevant information about the Committee from time to time. Moreover, an email box has been created for collecting opinions from the public.

2.2 Sub-committee on Objectives, Teacher Professionalism and Research

Issues Studied

2.2.1 The Sub-committee has had four meetings and developed a framework of KG education in Hong Kong. The Sub-committee has also discussed issues relating to the leadership and professionalism of KG educators.

2.2.2 The framework of KG education is mapped out with full consideration of the latest development of KG education locally and internationally. Under the framework, the vision and mission of KG education, objectives as well as the principles for implementation of free KG education are proposed as follows:

(a) **Vision:** Children First: Right Start for All

(b) **Mission:** To provide a *sustainable* policy that respects the *uniqueness* of KG education as well as the *diverse* needs of children and provides *equitable* access to *quality* holistic KG education to promote lifelong development of a person.

(c) **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; and

- ✧ the ability and confidence to adapt to the ever-changing world.

(d) Principles

The following five principles lay a foundation for working out various implementation strategies and measures to achieve the aforementioned objectives.

- ✧ **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.

- ✧ **Equity**

All children between the age of 3 and 6 should have equitable access to quality KG education.

- ✧ **Quality**

Quality KG education, with professional teachers, sound regulations and appropriate funding mode, should provide children with a child-centred curriculum, quality pedagogy and learning opportunities, in turn, will ensure all-round and balanced development of children as well as a respectful and engaging relationship with stakeholders.

- ✧ **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.

- ✧ **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.

2.3 Sub-committee on Operation and Governance

Issues Studied

2.3.1 The Sub-committee has held four meetings to examine various issues on the operational needs of KGs of different operating scales and modes, including teacher-child ratio, the number and types of supporting teachers and non-teaching staff, the duties of management personnel, etc. The varied needs of half-day and whole-day KGs as well as KGs of different sizes are also examined in detail. With a view to understanding the actual operation of KGs, the Sub-committee has also visited three KGs and kindergarten-cum-child care centre (KG-cum-CCC).

2.3.2 The Sub-committee is aware that KG education in Hong Kong is provided by the private sector, and all along parents may choose a KG suitable for their children with regard to their needs, while admission is at the discretion of individual KGs according to their school-based criteria. Nevertheless, it is noted that some issues arising from the existing KG admission arrangements, such as parents queuing up for application forms and one child holding more than one place, are undesirable. In this regard, the Sub-committee noted that special arrangements have been made for admission to K1 in the 2014/15 school year in the Tai Po and North districts to help alleviate parents' worries. The Sub-committee suggests that the EDB should devise measures to further improve the existing KG admission arrangements for the 2015/16 KG admission exercise and consider applying the improvement measures in all districts. The long-term KG admission arrangements will be subject to further deliberation in tandem with the practicable implementation of free KG education.

2.4 Sub-committee on Funding Modes

Issues Studied

2.4.1 The Sub-committee has held four meetings and work priority has been accorded to exploring feasible short-term measures to address the imminent needs of the sector which are, among others, mainly attributed to the rising operating costs, particularly in teachers' salary and rental of school premises.

2.4.2 In the course of deliberation, the Sub-committee noted the following major concerns of the KG sector –

- ✧ The annual adjustment in voucher value (under PEVS) according to the Composite Consumer Price Index (CCPI) could not meet the growing operating expenses of KGs.
- ✧ The same rate of voucher subsidy for half-day (HD) and whole-day (WD) KGs under the prevailing PEVS makes the WD KGs, in particular the former aided child care centres (FACs) which operate longer hours and throughout the year, experience greater financial difficulties.
- ✧ There should be means for KGs to raise the salary of teachers to create a more stable working environment for the KG teachers.
- ✧ Financial assistance should be provided for those KGs which do not have rental reimbursement.

2.4.3 In proposing the short-term measures, the Sub-committee considers that the following guiding principles and criteria should be observed –

- ✧ The proposed measures can be implemented rapidly to address the imminent needs of the KG sector. As such, the short-term measures should not depart fundamentally from the existing funding policy;
- ✧ The financial implications for Government are affordable; and
- ✧ The proposed measures should not pre-empt the recommendations of the Committee in its final report.

2.4.4 In short, it is expected that the proposed short-term measures should achieve the following objectives –

- ✧ Enable PEVS KGs to meet the rising operating costs;
- ✧ Enable PEVS KGs to increase teachers' salary, manpower support and relieve the pressure and workload of teachers; and
- ✧ Alleviate financial burden of KG education on parents, particularly the needy families.

2.4.5 The Sub-committee also noted the KG sector's call for more assistance to cater for the needs of increasing number of students with special educational needs (SEN). In this regard, though assistance in the form of additional manpower or grants for hire of services would be helpful to relieve the pressure on KG teachers, there is a shortage in the supply of teachers or

specialists with the relevant expertise to provide the support. Currently, as the funding and support for catering for students with SEN aged 3 to 6 falls under the purview of Social Welfare Department (SWD), the Sub-committee would be in discussion with the SWD on the need to increase the provision of rehabilitation services for students with SEN at KG levels. The Sub-committee is of the view that, as a short-term measure, it would be helpful to better equip the current teachers with the skills to teach and look after students with SEN enrolled in KGs.

2.5 Sub-committee on Catering for Student Diversity

Issues Studied

2.5.1 The Sub-committee has held three meetings to study issues in respect of support for KGs to cater for their students' diverse needs. In this regard, the Sub-committee decided to focus on the support for non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students, students from needy families and students with SEN. It was also agreed that the Sub-committee would first embark on the discussion on additional support for NCS students.

2.5.2 In order to familiarize members with the actual situation of KGs in catering for student diversity, in particular the NCS students, the Sub-committee has visited two KGs, one with a high concentration of NCS students and the other with less than 10 such students.

2.5.3 The Sub-committee noted that under the existing open and flexible curriculum framework, there is ample room for teachers to make adjustment or adaptation in the teaching and learning having regard to the learning differences of the students. With a view to supporting KGs in catering for the diverse learning needs of their NCS students, the EDB has been providing training programme (both pre-service and in-service) for teachers to enhance their professional capacity. School-based support is also provided by a dedicated professional team of the EDB as well as the University-school Support Programme¹ under the Education Development Fund to help KGs implement an effective curriculum appropriate to their settings.

¹ Namely "Supporting Kindergartens in the Teaching and Learning of Chinese for Non-Chinese Speaking (NCS) Children".

Furthermore, additional resources are available to fund various projects on catering for student diversity. They include the Language Fund which has been supporting district-based programme to help NCS students learn Chinese through interesting and interactive ways, and the Quality Education Fund, under which one of its priority themes is “Promoting Whole Child Development in Kindergarten Education”. In order to help parents of different ethnic groups understand the education services available for them, the EDB has translated the NCS Parent Information Package, leaflets on PEVS, the booklet “Helping Your Children of Kindergarten Age”, etc. in different languages for distribution through District Offices, Maternal and Child Health Centres, etc.

2.6 Sub-committee on Communication Strategy

Issues Studied

2.6.1 The Sub-committee has held three meetings to discuss the strategies for the dissemination of relevant information to the stakeholders, parent education and public engagement. The Sub-committee had suggested publicity strategies to facilitate the promotion of the International Forum and parent seminar held in late October so as to encourage participation. To gauge stakeholders’ views on issues relating to free KG education, meetings with the Federation of Parent-Teacher Associations and focus groups of various stakeholders (school sponsoring bodies, KG principals, teachers, parents and teacher education institutions) were held over the past few months.

2.6.2 To ensure the views of different stakeholders are fully reflected, the representation in the different focus groups involves a good mix of different types of KGs, including local and non-local KGs, PEVS and non-PEVS KGs, NPM and private independent KGs, large and small size KGs, etc.

Chapter 3 Work Plans in the Coming Months

3.1 The Committee expects that the final report would be submitted to EDB in 2015. Meanwhile, the Sub-committees will continue to study in detail various issues such as –

3.1.1 Transition from KG to primary school

Children entering primary schools might encounter difficulties in the early stage, which can be attributed to the change in the mode of learning such as differences in curriculum and teaching approach. The Sub-committee concerned will study the strategies, particularly the proper roles of schools and parents, and the school-readiness of children for primary schooling, which would facilitate a smooth transition to the primary school and relieve unnecessary pressure on the children.

3.1.2 Core elements of free KG education

Some stakeholders have expressed the need for whole-day KGs to be provided with a higher rate of subsidy. There are also views that from the educational perspective, half-day schooling would suffice at the KG level, and that the needs of some families for extra child care services could be catered for separately. The Sub-committee concerned will continue to listen to different views of stakeholders and study the core elements of free KG education. We will also study the needs of KGs of different operating modes to tie in with the population policy of releasing women to the workforce.

3.1.3 Stabilizing the supply of KG premises and related expenses

There are views that the Government should fully subsidise rental expenses of all KGs. However, some are concerned that this might not be a cost-effective way to use public money, as it might induce an increase of rent inadvertently. Besides, in view of the huge diversity among KGs in terms of their rent, the Sub-committee concerned needs to be prudent in considering how to tackle with rental expenses of KGs.

3.1.4 Attracting talents to join the KG teaching profession

In relation to teachers' salary, a consultancy study on the job duties and career

prospects of the profession of a KG teacher would be conducted to provide the basis of remuneration. This would be a more active approach compared with a salary scale set by the Government, and allow greater flexibility. In addition, the Sub-committee concerned will also study how to subsidise teachers' salaries.

3.1.5 Catering for student diversity

On the support for NCS students and students with SEN, the Sub-committee concerned will review the existing policies and practices, discuss with other relevant government departments, and study the strategies for providing appropriate support for KGs, teachers and students. The Sub-committee concerned will also study how to provide additional support for children from needy families.

3.1.6 Parent Education

The Sub-committee concerned will study effective strategies for further promoting parent education, so as to enhance parents' understanding on the developmental and learning needs of young children, and to foster home-school co-operation. It will also continue to support the Committee in public engagement strategies and activities, including focus group meetings.

Chapter 4 Proposed Short-term Measures

4.1 Through focus group discussions, previous exchanges with the stakeholders and various other means such as school visits and LegCo meetings, the Committee has obtained views of the KG sector and noted the difficulties and challenges faced by them. Hence, the Committee hereby proposes for the consideration and implementation by the government some short-term measures to address the imminent needs of the KG sector.

4.2 In proposing the short-term measures, the Committee considers that the following guiding principles and criteria should be observed –

- ✧ The proposed measures can be implemented rapidly to address the imminent needs of the KG sector. As such, the short-term measures should not depart fundamentally from the existing funding policy.
- ✧ The financial implications for Government are affordable.
- ✧ The proposed measures should not pre-empt the recommendations of the Committee in its final report.

4.3 The Committee recommends that short-term measures in the following five aspects should be implemented –

(a) Providing additional subsidy for KGs and parents

4.3.1 In the coming two years (2014/15 and 2015/16 school years), EDB should provide PEVS KGs with additional subsidy, possibly in the form of increased voucher value, one-off grants, etc. It is noted that there has been a strong call from both the KG sector and the parents in the past few months for increasing the voucher value.

4.3.2 Regardless of the means for enhancement, the proposed amount of subsidy should be considered with reference to teachers' salary and other operating costs of KGs (including rental). In the case of increase in voucher value, the rate of increase is proposed to be not less than 10% each year in the 2014/15 and 2015/16 school years.

4.3.3 EDB should provide students from needy families with greater

financial assistance so that they will not be deprived of the opportunity for KG education due to lack of means. For example, consideration may be given to enhancing the existing fee remission scheme for KG children.

4.3.4 It is recognized that many families need to send their children to KGs which provide WD or extended-hour services. These KGs are faced with greater challenges and they require additional support in their operation. It is proposed that EDB should consider providing support for them with the available resources under the existing mechanism.

(b) Enhancing training for KG principals and teachers

4.3.5 In the course of various meetings and discussions with the focus groups, it has been gathered that the sector has an urgent need to further enhance some of their generic skills and widen their exposure. To this end, it is proposed that EDB should consider providing relevant professional development programme for principals, middle management and teachers. Themes of the programme may include communication skills, human resources management, crisis management, legal matters, etc. Study tours to the Mainland and overseas should also be organized.

(c) Improving the KG admission arrangements

4.3.6 In the light of the views collected from various meetings and discussions, it is proposed that the EDB should review the arrangements to address the problems and issues before the 2015 admission exercise commences. Among others, the proposed measures include –

✧ Application forms

To save parents the trouble of queuing for application forms, the arrangements for distributing application forms will need to be reviewed.

✧ Administrative workload in handling applications

With the increase in number of applications, KGs may use various forms of interview to reduce the administrative workload in handling admission applications.

✧ One-child-one-place

To prevent a child from holding a number of places at any one time,

the issue of a “Registration Letter” by the EDB for each student is considered a feasible option. In this regard, the administrative procedures could be further streamlined.

✧ Support for parents

To facilitate parents who have difficulty in securing KG places for their children, the EDB should enhance its enquiry and coordination services to provide them with relevant information and assistance.

(d) Enhancing support for catering for student diversity

4.3.7 EDB should continue to encourage KGs to make use of existing means and resources available (e.g. school-based support services, Quality Education Fund, etc.) to cater for the needs of their students. Further training/professional development activities to enhance KG teachers’ capacity in catering for the diverse learning needs of their students should be organised. In particular, school-based support and teacher training programme should be enhanced to help KG teachers acquire practical skills to cater for the needs of students with SEN.

(e) Enhancing parent education

4.3.8 It is recommended that EDB should consider organising seminars for enhancing parent education in mid-2014, before application for K1 places for 2015/16 school year commences, to help parents choose a suitable KG for their children and to avoid having unnecessary pressure on their children.

4.4 The Committee understands that the proposed short-term measures may not solve all the difficulties faced by the KG sector immediately. However, we believe that the measures are practicable and could be implemented rapidly to provide immediate assistance to the KG sector before the long-term policy on free KG education is formulated.

4.5 The Committee will continue to listen to different opinions on how to enhance KG education, continue to maintain communication with the KG sector, gauge the views of stakeholders holistically and objectively, and inform the public of the progress of work of the Committee on a regular basis.

An Overview of Kindergarten Education in Hong Kong

Background

- ✧ The KG education sector in Hong Kong has long existed as a vibrant private sector to flexibly cope with parents' diverse demands and varied needs of children. Since the roll-out of the Reform Proposals for the Education Systems in Hong Kong in 2000, much has been done by both the Government and the sector to enhance the quality of KG education.
- ✧ Before 2005, all of the pre-primary institutions in Hong Kong were monitored by two departments, namely the then Education Department and Social Welfare Department (SWD), depending on whether they are KGs or child care centres. In an attempt to eliminate the disparities in the delivery of service and financial assistance to children and the inconvenience and confusion to school operators and parents, harmonisation of pre-primary services was implemented in 2005. A Joint Office for Kindergartens and Child Care Centres, staffed by both the EDB and SWD officers, was set up to monitor and support kindergartens and kindergarten-cum-child care centres (hereafter collectively referred to as KG).

Resources Provision

- ✧ The Hong Kong Government has long been financially supporting the KG education sector, with gradual increase in its financial commitment over the years. For example, the Government has been providing non-profit making (NPM) KGs with rate and rent reimbursement since 1982. Financial support has also been given to needy families with children of kindergarten age.
- ✧ In 1995, the Kindergarten Subsidy Scheme was introduced to subsidise NPM KGs to employ more qualified teachers to meet the required teacher to student ratio without having to increase school fees substantially.
- ✧ The roll-out of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) in 2007 not only further reduced the financial burden of KG education on families, but also provided financial support for teachers and principals to upgrade their professional qualifications. Low income families can apply for extra fee remission under the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency.

Teacher Qualifications

- ✧ Recognising that teacher professionalism is critical to the quality KG education, the Hong Kong Government has taken active measures in the past decade to enhance the professional competence of the teaching force. The Reform Proposals for the Education Systems in Hong Kong (2000) emphasised the need to upgrade the professional qualification of teachers and principals for the betterment of children. Since 2003, all newly appointed KG teachers must have achieved five passes in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (including both Chinese and English) and the Qualified Kindergarten Teacher training.
- ✧ With the introduction of the PEVS, on the basis of the teacher to student ratio of 1:15, all KG teachers must have pursued the Certificate of Education in early childhood education C(ECE). In addition, all newly appointed principals from the 2009/10 school year must have a Bachelor's degree in early childhood education, one-year post-qualification experience and have completed the principal certification course. As at the 2012/13 school year, about 97% of KG teachers have obtained C(ECE) qualification or above.

Curriculum

- ✧ Curriculum documents for KG education have been issued and revised since the 80's. In line with the latest developments in education worldwide as well as the momentum of the Hong Kong education system and curriculum reforms in 2000, the latest version of the Guide to Pre-primary Curriculum was prepared and launched in 2006. It emphasises the importance of child-centeredness as the core value of pre-primary education which should be implemented through a comprehensive and well-balanced curriculum with play as the learning strategy. A diversified learning environment should be provided for children to develop their multiple intelligence and various potentials.

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

Membership

Chair:	Dr Moses Cheng Mo-chi	
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)
	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)	
	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 Dipoo C. Sani	(Lay Member – Business)
	Dr Shirley Leung	(Department of Health Representative)
	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 educational 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)
	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.

**International Forum on Kindergarten Education
“Investing Early and Wisely”
24 October 2013**

Topics	Speakers
● What brain research tells us about early development and learning	Professor Kathy Sylva
● Investing early for “Exceptional Returns”	Dr John Bennett
● Family matters: Early childhood education starts at home	Dr Khoo Kim Choo
● Kindergarten education in Hong Kong: Strive for excellence	Professor Nirmala Rao
● Innovative financing	Professor Richard Wong Yue-chim
● Enhancing and ensuring quality with equity	Professor Sharon Lynn Kagan
● Teacher preparation, qualifications and retention	Dr Mugyeong Moon
● Supporting early language learning	Professor Tse Shek-kam

**Parent Seminar on Kindergarten Education
26 October 2013**

Topics	Speakers
● Selecting a kindergarten: What every parent should expect from a high quality preschool education	Professor Sharon Lynn Kagan
● Should I send my child to a half-day or full-day programme?	Dr Mugyeong Moon
● How can I support my children’s learning at home?	Dr Khoo Kim Choo
● When and how should we introduce a second and third language to a young child?	Professor Kathy Sylva
● Can children really learn through play?	Dr John Bennett