



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部教育局

Education Bureau

Government Secretariat, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
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10 April 2014

Clerk to Panel
(Attn: Miss Polly YEUNG)
Legislative Council Panel on Education
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central
Hong Kong

Dear Ms YEUNG

Panel on Education Meeting on 14 April 2014
Views of the Education Bureau on the Proposal to
Set Up a Subcommittee to Study Free Kindergarten Education

In respect of individual Members' proposal to set up a subcommittee under the Legislative Council Panel on Education to study issues on free kindergarten education, the views of the Education Bureau and relevant information are enclosed for Members' reference please.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to be "Hera", written over a faint circular stamp.

(Ms Hera CHUM)
for Secretary for Education

Enclosure

For information on
14 April 2014

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Views of the Education Bureau on the Proposal to Set Up a Subcommittee to Study Free Kindergarten Education

Purpose

In respect of individual Members' proposal to set up a subcommittee under the Legislative Council (LegCo) Panel on Education to study issues on free kindergarten (KG) education, this paper sets out the views of the Education Bureau (EDB) and relevant information for Members' reference. In short, we are of the view that, instead of speeding up the implementation of the relevant policy, the proposal will affect the work efficiency of the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education due to overlapping of the scope of responsibilities.

Background

2. To follow up on the policy formulation and implementation of free KG education, the Hon. IP Kin-yuen and the Hon. Kenneth CHAN Ka-lok proposed setting up a subcommittee under the Panel on Education to study and review the progress, arrangements, policy and related matters on implementation of free KG education; gauge stakeholders' views on the existing measures and future policy to be made on free KG education; and make improvement proposals [vide LC Paper Nos. CB(4)495/13-14(01) and (02)]. Regarding the above proposal, issues of concerns to Members include implementing free KG education expeditiously, enhancing the transparency of the work, studying ways to include whole-day KG into the funding mechanism, and developing salary scale for KG teachers.

Work progress of the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education

3. As mentioned in the paper for LegCo Panel on Education meeting on 10 February 2014 [LC Paper No. CB(4)362/13-14(01)], the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education (the Committee) and its five sub-committees, were established in April 2013 to recommend to the EDB on how to practicably implement free KG education. In the course of one short year, the Committee and

its sub-committees have held more than 30 meetings to study various issues including the objectives of KG education, professional development and training of KG principals and teachers, needs of KGs of different operation modes, funding modes, teacher qualification and salary framework, monitoring and governance framework, catering for student diversity, home-school cooperation, etc. Moreover, the Committee organised between October and December 2013 an international forum on KG education, focus group meetings and a parent seminar, and submitted a progress report to the EDB in late December 2013 putting forward a series of short-term measures for supporting the KG sector. The proposals, including increasing the voucher subsidy of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme in the next two school years, were accepted by the 2014 Policy Address. We are of the view that the Committee has been carrying out its work in a proactive and orderly manner and the progress is good.

Issues to be deliberated by the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education

4. We understand that issues, such as needs of KGs of different operation modes (including half-day, whole-day and “long whole-day” modes), remuneration of KG teachers, rental of KG premises and catering for student diversity, are of particular concern to Members and the sector. These are also the focuses of deliberation of the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education and detailed recommendations on these issues will definitely be put forward in the final report of the Committee. In the course of deliberation, the Committee will continue to listen to the views of different stakeholders and will keep the Panel on Education and the public informed of its work progress.

Representation and transparency of the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education

5. Comprising some 80 representatives of KG principals, teachers, school sponsoring bodies, teacher education institutions, the Education Commission and parents, as well as members from other professions, the Committee and its sub-committees are widely represented. In particular, representatives of the sector have been drawn from KGs of different types and operation modes. The convenor of the alliance for 15-year of free education (爭取十五年免費教育大聯盟) and representatives of various KG education concern groups are also members of the Committee or its sub-committees.

6. The Committee has been liaising closely with stakeholders to seek their views on various issues. In this connection, the Committee conducted in late 2013 focus group meetings with various stakeholders (including school sponsoring bodies, KG principals, teachers, parents and teacher education institutions) to gauge their views on specific topics. Furthermore, the Committee attaches great importance to the transparency of its work and strives to inform the public of its work progress and collect public and stakeholders' views on the implementation of free KG education through various channels and activities, such as issuing press releases, conducting media briefing sessions, setting up a webpage on the EDB website and creating an email box. In the past year, we reported the work progress of the Committee to the LegCo Panel on Education in July 2013 and February 2014. In the coming year, we will continue to collect stakeholders' views through different channels and update the Panel on Education on the work of the Committee. The Committee is expected to submit its final report to the EDB in mid-2015, upon which the EDB will conduct public consultation to provide further opportunities for the community to fully express their views.

Considerations for setting up a subcommittee

7. We understand that it is the expectation of various sectors of the community to implement free KG education as soon as possible. Yet, in considering whether to set up a subcommittee to study free KG education, we have to take account of the following.

Overlapping of scope of responsibilities

8. As mentioned above, the proposed terms of reference and work plans of the proposed subcommittee obviously overlap with those of the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education. If the proposed subcommittee looks at the same issues and the outcome of the study turns out to be different from the views, approach and details put forward by the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education, matters will become more complicated and this in turn will delay the implementation of the relevant policy.

9. As aforementioned, the Committee is widely represented and is capable of conducting discussion from various perspectives, with expert advice provided by its members. Moreover, a number of organisations concerned with KG education have representatives participating in the work of the Committee to ensure that diverse views are heard in the course of deliberation. Apart from having members from a

wide spectrum to give inputs and conducting focus group meetings, the Committee also listens to the views of stakeholders through different channels and discusses their views in a comprehensive and objective manner.

Implications on the work progress of the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education

10. If the LegCo Panel on Education decides to separately set up a subcommittee to discuss the same issues, the Government will have to allocate resources to cope with and support the work of the new subcommittee. Since there is only one year or so before the expected submission of the final report by the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education, in view of the tight timeline and the manpower constraint of the EDB, the work progress of the existing Committee is likely to be adversely affected. As a matter of fact, Members of the Panel on Education may decide whether to set up a subcommittee or not after the submission of the final report by the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education.

Way Forward

11. Looking ahead, despite the intricacies of the new policy on free KG education, the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education and its Sub-committees will continue to study how to practicably implement free KG education in Hong Kong. It will also continue to maintain communication with various stakeholders, and keep the public informed of their work progress.

Views Sought

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

Education Bureau
April 2014