

For information on
16 July 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 10 February 2014 [LegCo Paper No. CB(4)362/13-14(01)].

Progress of Work of the Committee

2. To date, the Committee and its five sub-committees have held over 40 meetings since their establishment. The Committee has also met with various kindergarten (KG) stakeholders to gauge their views on free KG education. Moreover, the Committee has maintained communication with the KG sector and kept the public informed of the progress of its work through various channels and activities, such as issuing press releases, conducting media briefing sessions and releasing relevant information on a designated webpage on the Education Bureau (EDB) website.

3. The Committee proposed some short-term measures in its progress report issued in December 2013 to address the imminent needs of the KGs and parents. As set out in LegCo Paper No. CB(4)362/13-14(01), the EDB has been following up the implementation of these measures. Among others, the Government will increase the voucher subsidy of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) 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. This amounts to additional funding of \$893.65 million. Details of the follow up work are in Appendix 1.

4. Meanwhile, the Committee has continued with its study on various issues related to free KG education with a view to formulating practicable proposals in its report. The Committee is of the view that its proposals need to be implementable in

the short or medium-term and sustainable in the long run. On such basis, the Committee has developed some initial views/proposals on the framework of free KG education and other major issues. These will be detailed in subsequent sections of this paper. In developing the proposals, consideration has to be given to the huge diversity among the KGs in terms of their operating scale, school premises and facilities, rent and other operating costs, qualifications and number of teachers, staff salaries and school fees charged, etc. For instance, local half-day KGs currently charge a wide range of school fees from about \$10,000 to \$100,000 per student per annum. The monthly salaries of teachers working whole-day in KGs under the PEVS range from about \$8,000 to over \$70,000. The scale of KGs also varies greatly, with the enrolment ranging from less than 20 to over 1 400.

Proposed Framework of KG education in Hong Kong

5. The Committee has proposed a framework of KG education in Hong Kong which encompasses the vision and mission as well as the objectives of KG education. An integral part of the framework are five principles which the Committee believe can help guide the deliberation on the implementation strategies to achieve the objectives of KG education. These five principles are uniqueness, equity, quality, diversity and sustainability. Details of the framework are at [Appendix 2](#).

Proposed Scope of Free KG education

6. The Committee has come to a view that free KG education should aim to enable children aged 3 to 6 to benefit from a KG education system that continues to develop in a sustainable, diversified and quality manner. There are also the following views –

- ✧ The basic provision should cover expenses directly related to the teaching and learning activities, school operation and provision of the education services of the school.
- ✧ The miscellaneous charges collected by KGs from parents for various school items, paid or above-standard services should not be covered noting the diversified activities offered by different KGs.
- ✧ In line with the existing practice, local non-profit-making (NPM) KGs should be covered under the free KG education policy while non-local KGs would not.

7. The Committee acknowledges that some families may need extra service. There are views that whole-day (WD) (and “long WD”) KG places should be provided

free or subsidized on a need basis for children who meet certain prescribed criteria. The eligibility criteria will be subject to further deliberation, and consideration could be made to the family income and social needs, etc.

Manpower requirement

8. There are views that the existing requirement of a 1:15 teacher-to-student ratio should be improved to provide more capacity for KGs to employ additional teachers to enhance the curriculum, and to create space for teachers for professional development, etc. The requirements for additional teaching and non-teaching staff, and provision of proper career ladder as well as competitive remuneration for KG teachers are subject to further deliberation and consultancy studies.

Planning standards for KG premises and WD places

9. The Committee has also critically explored various premises-related issues which are crucial to the successful implementation of free KG education. While recognising the scarcity of land in Hong Kong, the Committee is of the view that some enhancement of the physical accommodation and facilities of KGs should be desirable though the precise extents of enhancement remain to be deliberated. The Committee also proposes that the planning standards for WD KG places be reviewed to increase the provision of such places to meet the increasing demand.

Rental subsidy

10. There are views that some forms of rental subsidy could be considered for KGs. In this regard, there are also the following views –

- ✧ The existing operation of the rent reimbursement scheme for NPM KGs would need to be reviewed.
- ✧ KGs should be required to meet certain criteria in order to be eligible for the subsidy.
- ✧ Taking into account the fact that the rental charges among different KGs vary significantly and to ensure proper use of public funds, there should be a ceiling on the amount of subsidy to be provided for each eligible KG. The eligibility criteria and subsidy ceiling are to be further deliberated and studied by consultants.
- ✧ As a long-term strategy, the possibility of co-location of KGs and primary schools should be explored. .

Support for non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students and students from needy families

11. On the support for NCS students, there are views that the Government should consider providing a programme grant for KGs admitting NCS students so as to provide extra support for the students and their parents. For the eligibility criteria and amount of the grant, reference might be made to the number of NCS students admitted by the KG and other relevant staffing-related considerations.

12. As for KG students from needy families, the Committee is of the view that the existing KG and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme should be maintained. There are views that a grant might be considered for needy families to defray KG education related expenditure. Reference might be made to relevant existing schemes such as the above-mentioned fee remission scheme for setting the eligibility criteria and amount of grant.

Teacher professionalism

13. To upgrade the professionalism of KG principals and teachers, there are views that the following should be developed:

- (i) a continuous professional development policy;
- (ii) a teacher competencies framework; and
- (iii) a principal competencies framework.

14. The Certification Course for KG Principals should also be revised with changes in course requirement, admission criteria and validity period, etc. In the long run, the Government should consider raising the entry qualification of KG teachers.

Transition from KG to primary school

15. To help children adapt to the changes that they will face in entering primary schools, the Committee has discussed in detail various strategies regarding transition from KG to primary school under the dimensions of KG children, schools and families/communities and has the following views:

- (i) Ready children –
Some learning outcomes could be set for KG graduates. The outcomes should emphasise the personal qualities of children (e.g. self-care skills, social skills, etc.) and should be observable or measureable.

(ii) Ready school –

A transition policy should be in place at both KG and primary school levels so as to systematically support children in their transition to primary one. Tertiary institutions might consider reviewing their pre-service teacher training programmes in order to better prepare prospective KG and primary school teachers for handling the issue at both levels, e.g. arranging school attachment for KG teachers at primary schools and vice versa. Besides, transfer of children's information from KGs to primary schools should be enhanced.

(iii) Ready families/communities –

Parent education could focus on helping parents develop realistic and positive expectations of children as they transit to primary one.

Parent Education

16. The Committee is of the view that parent education and parent involvement is essential for the delivery of quality KG education. Apart from suggesting the EDB to enhance parent education by conducting regional parent seminars as a short-term measure (four seminars have been/will be held in June and July 2014), the Committee will also deliberate how parent education and parent involvement could be enhanced.

Way Forward

17. The Committee will conduct another round of focus group¹ meetings on a regular basis on various KG-related themes/topics as from September 2014 to gauge the views of relevant stakeholder groups on the above views/proposals. How the proposals may be implemented are to be worked out in parallel. The Committee will also continue to study issues outlined above with a view to realising the proposed framework of KG education. How to resource and quality assure KGs and how to better support KG students with special needs, etc. will also be an integral part of the deliberation. The Committee will conduct further engagement activities to solicit views from stakeholders and keep the Panel as well as the public informed of its work progress from time to time.

Views Sought

¹ Five focus groups have been set up with different stakeholder groups, including school sponsoring bodies, KG principals, teachers, parents and teacher education institutions. Meetings are held with the groups to gauge their views on specific issues. The previous round of focus group meetings was held between October and December 2013.

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

Education Bureau

July 2014

**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 has accepted the recommendations and taken follow-up action actively. Details are as follows-

Providing additional subsidy for KGs and parents

2. The Government 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

3. In addition to the on-going professional development activities for KG personnel, EDB also arranged a study visit for KG teachers to Mainland China in April 2014, and will arrange another visit for KG principals and teachers to Korea in October 2014.

Improving the KG admission arrangements

4. To follow up the recommendation of the Committee on improving the KG admission arrangements, EDB has finalised the admission arrangements for nursery (K1) classes in the 2015/16 school year and announced the implementation details to KGs and parents through various channels.

Enhancing parent education

5. Based on the Committee's recommendation on enhancing parent education, regional parent seminars have been/will be held in June and July 2014. Experts on child development are invited to share with parents their valuable insights and experiences on quality KG education.

Committee on Free Kindergarten Education
The Proposed Framework of Kindergarten Education in Hong Kong

1. Vision and Mission

Our Vision: **Children First: Right Start for All**

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

2. Objectives of kindergarten education

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

3. Principles of kindergarten education

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

3.1 Uniqueness

Kindergarten 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.

3.2 Equity

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

3.3 Quality

Quality kindergarten education, with professional teachers, sound regulations and appropriate funding mode, should provide a child-centred curriculum, quality pedagogy and learning opportunities, in turn, will ensure all-round and balanced development of children. It is also dedicated

to developing respectful and engaging relationships between children and stakeholders.

3.4 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.

3.5 Sustainability

A coherent infrastructure to achieve the objectives of kindergarten education has to be sustainable in the long run to maximize the benefits of kindergarten education.