

For discussion on
14 November 2016

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Migration to Free Quality Kindergarten Education

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the latest development in respect of the migration of kindergartens (KG) to the free quality KG education policy that will be implemented in the 2017/18 school year, and seeks Members' views on the proposal to provide a one-off start-up grant to KGs to facilitate their smooth preparation for the implementation of the new policy.

Latest Development

KGs' Participation in the New Policy

2. As announced in the 2016 Policy Address, the free quality KG education policy will be implemented starting from the 2017/18 school year. The policy objectives are to provide good quality and highly affordable KG education, and enhance the accessibility of students to different modes of services that suit their specific needs. The new policy will involve substantial increase in government commitment in pre-primary education from an estimated expenditure of about \$4 billion in 2016-17 to about \$6.7 billion in the 2017/18 school year. Key features of the new policy and related measures have been set out in LC Paper No. CB (4) 542/15-16(01). The Education Bureau (EDB) has been actively engaging major stakeholders with over 50 meetings and briefing sessions with school sponsoring bodies (SSBs), KG principals and teachers, parents, educational organisations, non-governmental organisations, etc. to collect their views when formulating the implementation details. Taking into account the views collected, EDB issued a circular to KGs on 20 July 2016 to announce the implementation details and to invite KGs to apply for joining the Free Quality KG Education Scheme (the Scheme)¹. About 740 KGs (around 96% of about

¹ EDB Circular No. 7/2016 "Free Quality Kindergarten Education"

770 eligible KGs²) submitted their applications for joining the Scheme in the 2017/18 school year (KG applicants). The list of KG applicants has been uploaded to EDB website. We are processing the applications including checking the information submitted, liaison with KGs for clarification if necessary, and consideration of the quality of their education services. The list of KGs approved to join the Scheme (Scheme-KGs), together with their initial proposed school fee level, will be uploaded to EDB website at the end of November 2016 for parents' reference. Among the KGs approved to join the Scheme, we estimate that 70% to 80% of the subsidised half-day KG places in the 2017/18 school year will be free of charge.

Curriculum Development

3. With a substantial increase in government commitment in KG education, the quality of KG education is expected to be enhanced in various areas. Among others, review of the "Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum" (the Guide) is one of the key areas. Building on existing strengths and taking into account the experience of learning and teaching in KGs, changes of the society and future needs, the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) is reviewing and revising the Guide. The consultation document was issued in June 2016 to collect views from stakeholders through various means, including seminars, questionnaires, etc. In gist, the majority of KGs and primary schools in Hong Kong have expressed their views towards the review of the Guide through filling out the seminars' evaluation forms and/or the questionnaires. It was found that they generally agreed with the key emphases of the review, and expressed their concerns over the issues of catering for learners' diversity and the interface between KG and primary education. Their views will be taken into consideration by the CDC and the revised Guide is planned to be launched in early 2017.

Quality Assurance Framework

4. In tandem, the existing Quality Assurance Framework for KGs is being enhanced. The Performance Indicators (PIs)³, which form the basis of school self-evaluation (SSE) and Quality Review (QR), are being refined to tie in with the review of the Guide and the new policy as a whole. Under the steer of an Advisory Group comprising representatives from SSBs, frontline KG principals and teachers,

² To be eligible to apply for joining the Scheme, the KGs should be non-profit-making and offering a full local curriculum.

³ The PIs comprise four Domains, namely (1) Management and Organisation, (2) Learning and Teaching, (3) Support to Children and School Culture, and (4) Children's Development.

experts from academic institutions and lay members, the framework of PIs have been refined and the Evidence of Performance was enhanced for the domains on management and organisation, learning and teaching and support to children and school culture. Refinement of PIs for the domain on children's development is also in progress. KG principals and teachers were initially briefed on the progress of the refinement of the PIs in the Annual Briefing on QR organized in September 2016. Feedbacks were positive. Upon further refinement in light of views collected, the KG sector will be formally consulted on the specific details in the first quarter of 2017. On the other hand, in order to enhance the transparency and effectiveness of the QR, External Observers will be involved in the QR by a step-by-step approach. In this regard, it is planned to involve External Observers in about 25 QRs for the 2016/17 school year.

5. Under the free quality KG education policy, EDB is also enhancing the Focus Inspection. While QR adopts a whole-school approach, Focus Inspection is conducted as another form of quality assurance measure in fostering KGs' continuous improvement in learning and teaching and in addressing areas of concerns. Oral feedback will be given immediately at the end of inspection and a letter of recommendations for improvement will be issued to the KG after the visit for their reference and follow up. Besides, to further promote the sustainable development of KGs, we will continue to compile KGs' experience as collected during QR and Focus Inspection and identify good practices for dissemination.

Teacher Professionalism

6. The professional capability of KG teachers and effective leadership of KG principals are crucial to the provision of high-quality KG education, and we continue to enhance the training for KG teachers and principals. In addition to broadening the range of local and non-local professional development programmes, specific courses focusing on catering for learner diversity have also been enhanced. For instance, an organisation with expertise in catering for students with special needs has been commissioned to operate courses for KG teachers on catering for learner diversity. Besides, two new University Grants Committee-funded courses, focusing on catering for children with special needs and non-Chinese speaking students respectively, have been offered starting from the 2016/17 school year⁴.

⁴ The two courses are the Bachelor of Education (Honours) (Early Childhood Education) in Leadership and Non-Chinese Speaking Children and Bachelor of Education (Honours) (Early Childhood Education) in Leadership and Special Needs offered by The Education University of Hong Kong.

7. On the way forward, we will, in consultation with major stakeholders, develop a continuous professional development policy meeting the specific needs of the KG sector.

Student Admission

8. As regards admission of students, while student admission will continue to be principally a school-based matter, under the new policy, we have advised KGs to give due priority to children from families in need of whole-day services in light that the additional subsidy for whole-day and long whole-day aims at unleashing the potential of the local labour force. Besides, should individual students (such as students at risk of developmental delay) encounter difficulties in applying for admission, EDB will make referrals to Scheme-KGs with vacancies as appropriate⁵. In tandem, we will continue to promote parent education to help them understand the developmental needs of their children, and encourage KGs to promote parents' engagement in their children's learning.

Administrative Guidelines for KGs

9. To ensure that KGs have well-established mechanism in handling various administrative matters, an operation manual is being drawn up for compliance by KGs. We target to issue the manual to KGs for use in the second quarter of 2017.

Proposed Additional Support for KGs

10. Scheme-KGs are expected to improve the quality of their KG services, enhance their administration, management and accountability, and put in place a proper internal control and reporting mechanism with rigorous checks and balances. Many of the KGs are actively preparing for the implementation of the Scheme, particularly in considering resource deployment to meet the requirements under the Scheme, for instance, redeployment of teachers to meet the improved teacher-pupil ratio, to better cater for student diversity, etc. and setting up school-based mechanism to enhance the quality of KG education. However, some KGs may have resource constraints as preparation for joining the Scheme may not be budgeted for in the finances of the KGs. To ensure smooth implementation of the Scheme, it

⁵ For details, please refer to Appendix 9 in EDB Circular No. 7/2016 "Free Quality KG Education" issued on 20 July 2016.

is necessary to provide financial assistance to Scheme-KGs to facilitate their holistic planning and preparation before implementation in the 2017/18 school year.

One-off start-up grant

11. To help Scheme-KGs devise school-based administration procedures / guidelines to help ensure enhancement in the quality of KG education services and management and set up internal monitoring mechanism, it is proposed that a one-off start-up grant be provided for Scheme-KGs in the 2016/17 school year. We note that (i) all Scheme-KGs, regardless the size, may need some basic funding to take forward the afore-mentioned tasks by hiring additional supporting staff or procuring relevant services, (ii) such work may be more complicated and involve more workload for Scheme-KGs of larger scale, and (iii) funding required for preparatory work for some initiatives will increase with the size of KGs, for instance, improvement in teacher-pupil ratio (from 1:15 to 1:11) may require additional furniture and equipment for additional teachers, provision of a career ladder for teachers may require alteration/renovation work to provide facilities like Senior Teacher's/Vice-principal's room, better catering for student diversity may require alteration/renovation work as well as additional furniture and equipment to provide a small room for small group activities and meeting parents, etc. In light of (ii) and (iii), the amount of the start-up grant should increase with the size of the Scheme-KGs which can be reflected in terms of student enrolment.

12. Hence, it should be fair to work out the start-up grant on a per school and a per capita basis so that needs of Scheme-KGs of different sizes could be catered for. Specifically, we propose that the start-up grant should comprise a per school grant of \$200,000 for each Scheme KG and a per capita grant of \$800 for each eligible student based on the enrolment in each Scheme-KG in the 2016/17 school year which generally refers to the position as at September 2016. The total amount of the grant will be capped at \$300,000 per Scheme-KG. Taking a Scheme-KG with 60 students as an example, it will be eligible for a grant of \$248,000 (including per school grant and per capita grant) which will enable even a small KG to employ additional staff, for instance an administrative assistant or an accountant clerk for one year, and purchase some necessary furniture and equipment for additional teachers under improved teacher-pupil ratio, conduct small-scale renovation, etc.

Usage of the grant

13. Scheme-KGs are expected to deploy the grant in preparing for the

implementation of the Scheme from the 2017/18 school year, and subsequent adjustment of school-based procedures/guidelines as necessary. Scheme-KGs may use the grant for employing additional staff, hiring services, procuring furniture and equipment for additional teachers, etc. for implementing the Scheme. Some examples for the use of the start-up grant are listed at Annex. To allow more time for KGs to plan and adjust school-based procedures and guidelines as necessary in the initial years of implementation of the new policy, they may have up to 3 years (i.e. from the 2016/17 school year to the 2018/19 school year) to make use of the start-up grant. Guidelines will be issued to Scheme-KGs on the use of the start-up grant. Scheme-KGs' use of this grant will be subject to similar monitoring as other purpose-specific subsidies under the Scheme, including reflecting the income and expenditure in the audited account to be submitted to EDB annually. Any unexpended amount of the grant by the end of the 2018/19 school year will be clawed back.

Financial Implications

14. For budgeting purpose, we assume all of the about 740 KG applicants will be approved to join the Scheme. Based on the information of KG applicants as at end-September 2016, the estimated expenditure for the proposed one-off start-up grant, taking into account the possible adjustments to the number of Scheme-KGs and student enrolment later, will be about \$220 million in the 2016-17 financial year.

Advice Sought

15. Members are invited to note the latest development in migration to free quality KG education, and comment on the proposal on provision of a start-up grant as set out in paragraphs 10 to 14. Subject to Members' views, we will seek funding approval for the proposed one-off start-up grant from the Finance Committee (FC) of the Legislative Council in December 2016 and the payments will be disbursed shortly after the FC's approval.

Education Bureau
November 2016

Examples for the Use of the Start-up Grant

Kindergartens may deploy the start-up grant to employ additional staff, hire services, procure furniture and equipment, etc. to put in place school-based initiatives for migration to the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme. Some examples of deploying the one-off grant are as follows:

(i) Hiring of additional staff/services to handle relevant tasks

- to assist in preparing/refining accounting guidelines for recording respective incomes and expenditures of different sessions (half-day and whole-day/long whole-day), sections (kindergarten and child care centre) and streams (local and non-local curriculum) under government and non-government funds accounts separately;
- to assist in setting up/refining assets register system for recording and differentiating the furniture, equipment, teaching aids, computer hardware/software, etc. purchased by government funds and non-government funds;
- to assist in refining school-based procurement procedures as well as refining related guidelines and quotation document templates so as to comply with the guidelines issued by the Education Bureau;
- to assist in revamping school's website to enhance the transparency of school operation; and
- to assist in arranging translation services with regard to admission arrangements as well as school circulars.

(ii) School facilities

- to carry out renovation/alteration work to the school premises, or procure additional furniture and equipment to accommodate the additional teachers arising from the enhanced teacher to pupil ratio (from 1:15 to 1:11) and provide facilities like Senior Teachers'/Vice-principal's room; small room including additional furniture and equipment for small group activities to better cater for student diversity and meeting parents, etc. under the new Scheme.