

For discussion on
5 January 2018

Legislative Council Panel on Education Implementation of Free Quality Kindergarten Education

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the latest development in respect of the implementation of the free quality kindergarten (KG) education policy starting from the 2017/18 school year.

Background

2. With implementation of the free quality KG education policy, the 2017/18 school year is a milestone in the development of KG education in Hong Kong. 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. Key features of the policy and related measures have been set out in LC Paper No. CB (4) 542/15-16(01).

Latest Development

Support from the KG sector

3. In the 2017/18 school year, there are 748 KGs¹ (about 97% of about 770 eligible KGs²) joining the Free Quality KG Education Scheme (Scheme). Among them, about 500 Scheme-KGs are offering half-day (HD) programmes and about 90% of them are free; about 610 Scheme-KGs are offering whole-day (WD) / long WD (LWD) programmes and about 70% of them collect school fees below \$1,000 per month. The percentage increase is significant when compared with the corresponding figure of only 5% in the 2016/17 school year.

¹ As at December 2017

² Non-profit-making KGs offering a full local curriculum are eligible to apply for joining the Scheme. In considering the applications, we will also consider the track records of the applicants in meeting the quality requirement.

4. On WD programmes, we wish to reiterate that existing evidence from researches and studies preclude drawing conclusions that WD programmes are more favourable to young children than HD programmes. Although many countries offer WD services for parents as an option, it is not a common practice internationally to provide free WD KG service for all children from three to six years of age. In light of the above, the basic tenet of the new policy is that Government subsidy would be sufficient for KGs to provide free quality HD services according to the standards prescribed by the Education Bureau (EDB). Notwithstanding this, to unleash the potential of the local labour force under the population policy, we provide an additional subsidy for WD and LWD services on a co-payment basis with parents. Needy families may be granted fee remission.

5. As regard parents' expenses on school uniforms, textbooks, tea and snacks, etc. (generally referred as "miscellaneous charges"), we have stipulated in the circular to Scheme-KGs that Government subsidy and school fees (if any) should have covered all expenses directly related to the learning and teaching of students and school operation. Scheme-KGs should keep sales of school items and services to parents to a minimum and observe the guiding principles set out in EDB circular, including that the purchase must be of voluntary nature, no profit from the sale of textbooks, profit for other items (if any) not exceeding 15% of the cost, etc.. All profit generated must be ploughed back into the KGs for use in school operation and provision of KG education services. To enhance transparency, KGs are required to disclose the fees charged and the list of items in the preceding school year on their school website and in the "Profile of Kindergartens and Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres". Under the free quality KG education policy, an on-going grant is provided to KG students from needy families to defray school-related expenses incurred such as books, stationery, school uniforms, etc..

Students' learning and teaching

(a) Curriculum development

6. The Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide (2017) (Guide) was updated and issued in February 2017. On-going professional development programmes have been organised for KG principals and teachers by EDB, covering themes on whole school curriculum planning, catering for learner diversity, interface between KG and primary education, etc.. Briefing sessions were organised for parents. Resource materials for KGs have been produced. Themes on learning through play, fostering children's physical and health development, promoting language development of children have been included in school-based support services of the 2017/18 school year.

(b) Teachers' training

7. In consultation with teacher education institutions, we are refining the frameworks for Certificate/Higher Diploma (Early Childhood Education) (ECE), Bachelor of Education (ECE) and Postgraduate Diploma in Education (ECE) programmes. The proposed refinements include strengthening the elements of practicum, catering for student diversity (in particular non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students and students at risk of developmental delay), etc.. We will announce the implementation details in early 2018. As for promoting teachers' continuous professional development (CPD), details are at Paragraphs 23 to 26.

(c) Parent education

8. Parents' understanding of the development needs of their children and home-school co-operation are important in promoting effective learning and all-round development of students. In this connection, EDB has developed a framework on parent education to facilitate KGs' planning of their school-based parent education programmes. The framework comprises three major domains with eight themes such as "children's development and learning characteristics – learning through play", "learner diversity of children", "curriculum promoting children's balanced development", etc. In tandem, EDB also organises parent education programmes with reference to these themes. For instance, a series of five seminars, with expert speakers who are clinical/educational psychologists (EPs) and social workers, are being organised from early December 2017 to mid-January 2018.

Support to children with diverse needs

(a) NCS students

9. On curriculum, the updated curriculum guide has included recommendations on how schools could support NCS students. A section specifically on Chinese learning for NCS children is set out. Teachers' training and school-based support are also strengthened. In the 2017/18 school year, tertiary institutions are offering various training courses on NCS students' learning of Chinese in KGs³. School-based professional support is also provided to support KGs in creating a language-rich environment to provide students with authentic, meaningful and developmentally

³ For instance, The Education University of Hong Kong is offering a new Certificate Professional Development Programme on the Teaching of Chinese Language for NCS Children. It will also continue to offer the University Grants Committee-funded programme "Bachelor of Education (Honours) (ECE) in Leadership and NCS children". Besides, The University of Hong Kong is commissioned to offer a series of training courses on NCS students' learning of Chinese in KGs.

appropriate language learning experiences through try-outs, exploration and interpersonal interactions. KGs admitting NCS students (regardless the number) may apply to join these training and support programmes.

10. An inclusive environment is also conducive to NCS students' integration and effective learning. To facilitate KGs' communication with NCS parents, a set of cue cards with audio files on useful phrases in greeting, showing appreciation, care and concern, etc. has been produced in 8 languages (Chinese, English and 6 major ethnic minority (EM) languages), distributed to KGs and uploaded to the EDB website to help teachers foster a caring environment in daily contacts with NCS parents. A set of templates on commonly used school circulars has also been translated into major EM languages to facilitate KGs' communication with NCS parents.

11. For KGs admitting 8 or more NCS students, further support is provided through an additional grant comparable to the salary of one KG teacher. As at December 2017, about 140 Scheme-KGs have been approved the grant. It is encouraging to note from school plans submitted by these KGs that about 94% of the KGs have assigned a teacher to co-ordinate support measures for NCS students. About 97% of them would spend the major portion of the grant on employing teachers and/or teaching assistants. About 75% of these KGs have planned to spend part of the grant on procurement of translation/interpretation services and organisation of cultural integration activities. As observed in our school visits, KGs are adopting diverse means to enhance the support, for example, adaptation of curriculum and teaching strategies, teacher assistants providing in-class support, arranging small group learning activities and individual teaching sessions as necessary.

12. At the community level, with a view to motivating NCS children to learn Chinese through fun activities, such as games and creative arts, etc., the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research has invited, through the use of Language Fund, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to organise district-based programmes for NCS children aged 3 to 9 in localities with a greater concentration of NCS children.

(b) Students at risk of developmental delay/students with special needs

13. The Government has been providing different services for children with developmental delay through the collaborative efforts of various departments⁴.

⁴ Department of Health and Hospital Authority arrange assessment, treatment and referral of rehabilitation services, Social Welfare Department provides pre-school rehabilitation services for children with disabilities from birth to the age of six years, and helps their families meet their special needs and EDB provides training for KG teachers to enhance their capacity in catering for student diversity.

Under the two-year pilot scheme on On-site Pre-primary Rehabilitation Services (OPRS)⁵ launched by the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB), 16 participating NGOs, which are experienced in providing subvented pre-school rehabilitation services, are providing over 2 900 training places covering more than 480 KGs. The Government will regularise the pilot scheme in the 2018/19 school year, and has earmarked an annual recurrent provision of \$460 million to increase the number of service places to 7 000 in phases. LWB is conducting a comprehensive review of the pilot scheme in order to formulate the mode of operation when the scheme is regularised. On the other hand, the enhanced TP ratio of 1:11 for KGs has created rooms for various professional activities (such as professional collaboration and development, communication with parents and catering for the diverse needs of students). In particular, KGs can capitalise on the resources to collaborate with the service teams in catering for the needs of students at risk of developmental delay.

14. EDB has set up a dedicated team of EPs and professional staff to develop appropriate intervention models, identification tools, teaching resource/materials and programmes for use by KG teachers and parents to cater for children at risk of developmental delay. In addition, EDB has devised a teacher professional development framework on catering for learner diversity. Under the framework, more structured in-service training will be delivered for KG teachers by phases⁶. The basic level training which targets KG teachers at large covers fundamental knowledge and skills on fostering supportive and motivating learning environments and early identification and intervention strategies; whereas the advanced level training targets designated KG teachers is designed to introduce advanced knowledge and skills on provision of tiered intervention, application of the response to intervention approach and multi-disciplinary collaboration.

Staffing, remuneration and career ladder for KG teachers

15. Under the Scheme, the overall requirement in TP ratio for Scheme-KGs is raised from 1:15 (including the principal) to 1:11 (principal not included). Flexibility is allowed for KGs to employ additional teachers to meet school-based needs provided that free HD KG services could be provided, and fees for WD services could

⁵ Under the OPRS, the multi-disciplinary service teams, comprising social workers, speech therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, clinical/educational psychologists and special child care workers, are offering on-site rehabilitation services and training to children with special needs, supplemented by training at centres with rehabilitation facilities. The service teams also give professional advice to KG teachers and support for parents in fostering positive attitude and developing effective skills in raising their children with special needs.

⁶ As of 2017/18 school year, EDB has offered about 440 places for the basic level training. It has planned another 160 places for the basic level training and 40 places for the advanced level training to be offered in the 2018/19 school year.

be maintained at a low level. For LWD KGs, given their longer service hours, they may suitably employ more teachers (capped at 40% more than that of WD KGs), having regard to their own circumstances and implications on school fees. For implementation at the frontline, KGs have the flexibility in maintaining the current arrangements in learning and teaching activities, i.e. the minimum number of teachers required to be present and on duty in a KG shall, in relation to the number of pupils present at any time in the KG, be one teacher for every 15 pupils or part thereof⁷. This is to enable KGs to release teachers for various professional activities and collaboration with the afore-mentioned service teams under OPRS.

16. As regard salary arrangement of teachers, starting from the 2018/19 school year, the salary-related subsidies for teaching staff will be adjusted based on the annual civil service pay adjustment on a school year basis. Besides, the two-year tide-over grant will be extended for three more years (i.e. a total period of 5 years from the 2017/18 to 2021/22 school years) such that KGs may retain their long serving teachers with higher salaries within the reference salary range promulgated under the Scheme. Further, we have undertaken to explore the feasibility of putting in place a salary scale for KG teachers. Based on the data of three school years from 2017/18 to 2019/20, we will assess the implications of a salary scale for KG teachers on the stability of the teaching force, sustainable development of quality services, as well as flexibility and diversity of the KG sector. EDB will consult the KG sector and stakeholders and chart the way forward.

17. For retaining and attracting quality teachers and maintaining a stable teaching force, KGs have been recommended to provide three-level teaching staff structure with principal, senior teachers and class teachers. For reference, out of five class teachers, one of them may be upgraded to a senior teacher, and a senior teacher may be upgraded to vice-principal for KGs having three or more senior teachers. It is also preferable to have a senior teacher having relevant professional training in supporting NCS students or students with special needs or at risk of developmental delay. In this connection, we note that about half of the KGs receiving the additional grant to support NCS students have assigned senior teachers to serve as co-ordinators of their school-based support measures.

KG places and facilities

(a) Planning standards

18. To meet working parents' demand for WD KGs, we are revising the relevant

⁷ The principal can be counted as one of the teaching staff and at least one teacher has to be present in a class.

part of the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines to increase the provision of KG places, in particular WD places. Currently, the provision of KG places is 730 HD and 250 WD places for every 1 000 children in the age group of 3 to under 6. The proposal of revising it to provide 500 HD and 500 WD places progressively as a long-term goal has been circulated to Bureaux/Departments concerned. Upon endorsement, the revised standard will be applied to new public housing estates and large-scale private development projects for developing new KGs as appropriate.

(b) Schedule of Accommodation (SoA)

19. To provide a more conducive environment for children's learning, the SoA for KGs has been revised with indoor floor area for each student increased by 20%. Specifically, new facilities of a multi-purpose room/area and a small group teaching room have been included. The revised SoA will serve as reference for reserving space in developing new KGs in public housing estates as far as practicable.

(c) Resource centres

20. As a medium-/long-term measure to meet the needs of KGs for more space for various learning activities, we are actively exploring the feasibility of setting up resource centres for conducting a variety of experiential learning activities for KG students, for teacher training as well as for parent education activities. While we will continue to identify suitable sites, we have kick started a project in collaboration with the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department by capitalising on the resources (in particular the plants, animals and open area) at its visitors' centres to serve the functions of resource centres by providing outdoor environment for students' free exploration and learning through play, and to develop a positive attitude in caring for Nature and appreciation of life. A tertiary institution has been commissioned to develop the related learning and teaching materials, the first batch of which will be rolled out around mid-2018.

Quality assurance

21. All Scheme-KGs are subject to the quality assurance (QA) framework which comprises school self-evaluation (SSE) by the KGs and quality review (QR) by EDB, both of which are conducted on the basis of performance indicators (PIs). To improve the quality of KG education, the QA framework is enhanced by refining the PIs. The Advisory Group on the Review of PIs, comprising ECE experts, frontline ECE educators and lay members, was set up to gauge comments and suggestions from stakeholders. Consultation on the draft refined PIs was conducted from end of May to end of July 2017. Taking into account views collected, the refined PIs were

finalised and released in mid-December 2017. The refined PIs would be used for SSE starting from the end of the 2017/18 school year and used for QR starting from the 2018/19 school year. Also, for examining the overall effectiveness of the provision of quality KG education under the free quality KG education policy, a tertiary institution has been commissioned to conduct a longitudinal study from the 2017/18 to 2019/20 school years.

22. Meanwhile, we are enhancing the transparency of the QA framework. Since the 2013/14 school year, external observers⁸ are recruited to join some QR visits to enhance transparency. They are all experienced ECE experts not serving in the education sector. Drawing reference gained over the past years, we are planning to pilot the inclusion of serving KG principals as external observers to further enhance transparency. Separately, taking into account views from KGs and parents, we will upload both Chinese and English versions of the QR reports starting from the 2018/19 school year, in tandem with the beginning of the use of the refined PIs in QRs and commencement of the new QR cycle⁹.

Further Development

Professional development of principals and teachers

(a) CPD policy

23. While initial professional training in ECE has helped KG teachers build a solid foundation in KG education, the benefits have to be sustained through CPD. To promote principals' and teachers' CPD, we will put in place a CPD policy starting from the 2018/19 school year. It will bear the following major features:

- *A soft target in CPD hours* --- It is appreciated that KG principals and teachers need time to adapt to the changes in the early years of implementation of the new KG policy. Drawing reference from CPD policies in other regions/countries¹⁰ and considering the great diversity of the KG sector, as a start, a soft target will be set at 60 hours of CPD activities in a three-year cycle.
- *Modes of CPD Activities* --- CPD activities may include both “structured

⁸ While they do not assess the performance of the KGs, they share their professional observation with the KGs at the end of the QR visits.

⁹ QR visits are conducted on a 6-year cycle basis. The new cycle will start in the 2018/19 school year.

¹⁰ For instance, in Singapore, taking up CPD activities is not compulsory. KG teachers are encouraged to have 20 hours of CPD activities annually. In South Korea, although there are no specific general requirements on CPD hours, should KG teachers wish to be promoted to a higher rank, they are required to complete 180 hours of CPD activities in a local teacher-training centre. In Mainland China, it is compulsory for KG teachers to take up 360 hours of CPD activities in five years.

learning” such as courses, conferences, higher academic studies, etc., as well as “other CPD activities” such as mentoring, action research, services to KG education and the community, etc.

- *School-based implementation* --- Operational details such as criteria for calculating CPD hours, balance of structured and other CPD activities, support and follow up actions, etc. should be devised on a school basis.

24. The sector generally supports this overall direction, while there is a concern about resources for employing supply teachers. In this connection, we wish to reiterate that the enhanced TP ratio of 1:11 has created room for teachers’ professional development. Element of supply teachers for releasing teachers to attend training has been included in the basic unit subsidy.

(b) Training targets for catering for students’ diverse needs

25. To strengthen support to students with diverse needs, teachers’ training is essential to optimise the benefits of other support measures, such as provision of grant for provision of support to NCS students and the OPRS. In light of this, we will set the following specific training targets:

- For support to students with developmental needs, each Scheme-KG should have at least one teacher having attended the Basic Course as recognised by EDB by the 2020/21 school year.
- For support to NCS students, each Scheme-KG receiving the NCS grant should have at least one teacher having attended the Basic Course as recognised by EDB by the 2018/19 school year; and this will be extended to all Scheme-KGs having admitted NCS students (regardless of the number) by the 2020/21 school year.

EDB will provide training courses as appropriate to enable KGs to meet these targets. Training target for advanced courses will be considered in light of the experience of the Basic Courses and frontline experience of application of knowledge in practice.

26. It is worth noting that the element of supply teacher as mentioned at Paragraph 24 above has not included supply teachers for specified courses on catering for NCS students and students at risk of developmental delay. In this connection, we would create a supply teacher grant starting from the 2018/19 school year. While it is broadly planned to determine the rate of the grant with reference to salary of basic rank teachers, operational details will be mapped out in consultation with major stakeholders in light of the diverse modes of operation of KGs. The estimated expenditure is about \$1 million per annum.

Enhancement of school governance

27. With substantial increase of government subsidy, a more participatory governance framework is needed to enhance transparency, accountability and effectiveness in school operation. While there is no requirement for Scheme-KGs to set up an Incorporated Management Committee in the manner currently practiced in aided primary and secondary schools, the school management committee (SMC) of each Scheme-KG should comprise representatives from different KG stakeholders as appropriate.

28. Taking into account the specific feature of diversity and flexibility of the KG sector and views collected from major stakeholders, the requirements for SMCs of Scheme-KGs are as follows:

- At least one manager is a representative nominated by the operator;
- At least one manager is a representative from other stakeholders of the Scheme-KG (such as parents of current pupils, serving teachers or alumni), OR from the community to serve as an independent manager¹¹;
- The presence of the principal in SMC meetings is mandatory, while whether the principal should serve as an ex-officio manager is a decision of individual management committee;
- The minimum number of school managers shall be three;
- There shall be no restriction on the maximum number of school managers of a Scheme-KG; and
- There shall be no restriction on the number of schools that a manager of a Scheme-KG could serve.

29. EDB is planning to announce the details in mid-2018, so that KGs could take into account their experience of first year implementation of the Scheme in considering their specific plans for meeting the above requirements. We fully appreciate that KGs with different background may progress in different pace. EDB will keep in view the progress, offer support as appropriate, and review the situation in the 2022/23 school year. Starting from the 2019/20 school year, KGs joining the Scheme will be required to undertake the setting up an SMC according to the requirements. To dovetail with the enhanced governance, EDB will organise more structured training programmes for school supervisors and managers. EDB will keep close contact with KG operators to better understand their concerns and cater for their needs as appropriate.

¹¹ An independent manager shall not be a serving teacher, a parent of a current pupil, an alumnus of the Scheme-KG. A person who is a member, the spouse or a grant-parent, parent, brother, sister, child or grand-child of a member, or an employee of the governing body of the Scheme-KG or of the governing body of the operator of the Scheme-KG (if there is) should not be nominated either.

Advice Sought

30. Members are invited to note the latest development in the implementation of the free quality KG education.

Education Bureau

December 2017