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Panel on Education

Meeting on 3 September 2021

**Background brief on issues related to
the implementation of kindergarten education policy**

Purpose

This paper summarizes the major views and concerns of the Panel on Education ("the Panel") on issues related to the implementation of kindergarten ("KG") education policy.

Background

2. The Government has implemented the new free quality KG education policy starting from the 2017-2018 school year to replace the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme. 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. Under the new KG education policy, the quality of KG education will be enhanced through various means, including, among others, promoting teachers' professional development, catering for students' diverse needs, enhancing Quality Assurance ("QA") Framework, etc. The key features of the policy are in **Appendix I**.

3. According to the information provided by the Education Bureau ("EDB") in December 2020, about 90% of the KGs joining the new scheme ("Scheme-KG") and offering half-day programmes are free of charge in the four school years since the implementation of the new KG education policy from the 2017-2018 school year. The tuition fees of Scheme-KGs offering whole-day ("WD") and long whole-day ("LWD") programmes are also at a low level with the additional subsidies provided by the Government. The median tuition fees per installment in the 2020-2021 school years is around \$860. Needy families can apply for fee remission and a grant to defray the school-related expenses.

Major views and concerns

4. During the current legislative term, the Panel was briefed on issues relating to the implementation of the new kindergarten education policy at its meetings on 14 November 2016, 5 January 2018 and 1 June 2018. The major concerns raised by members are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

Whole-day and long whole-day kindergarten services

5. While appreciating the growing number of WD and LWD KGs which collected school fees below \$1,000 per month with the implementation of the Scheme, members urged the Administration to extend the Scheme to cover WD and LWD KGs. The Administration advised that additional subsidies were provided for WD and LWD services on a co-payment basis between the Government and parents to enable those parents in need of such services to have access to them at a more affordable cost. As these KG services were not considered essential from an educational perspective, the Administration had no plan to provide full subsidies to WD and LWD KGs at this stage, but would keep in view of the developments to meet the need of the society.

6. Some members considered it necessary to increase the number of WD and LWD KG places to facilitate more women to join the workforce and meet the growing demand for such places. The Administration responded that EDB was working in the final stage with the Planning Department to revise the current planning standards for provision of KG places from 730 HD and 250 WD KG places to 500 HD and 500 WD KG places for every 1 000 children in the age group of three to under six. Upon receiving the endorsement from Bureaux/Department concerned, the revised standard would be applied to new public housing estates and large-scale private development projects for developing new KGs as appropriate, and the provision of KG places, especially WD places would increase.

Salary scale for and professional development of kindergarten teachers

7. Members were pleased to note that the Administration would explore the feasibility of putting in place a salary scale for KG teachers, and enquired about the action plans for the review and whether a decision on the establishment of a salary scale would be made during the review. The Administration advised that discussions with KG sector on the operational issues that might arise from the establishment of a salary scale were underway, such as allocation of KG places and rigid number of teachers in each KG. In the coming two to three school years, the Administration would collect relevant data in, such as the latest information on KG teachers' salaries, for the purpose of assessing the implications of a salary scale for KG teachers on the future development of the KG sector. It was expected that, in about three years' time, the Administration would come up with a decision on, and

the timeline if necessary for, the setting up of a salary scale for KG teachers.

8. There was concern that the soft target of 60 hours of continuous professional development activities in a three-year cycle for KG principals and teachers might impose an additional burden on them if they were required to take up such activities after long working hours.

Miscellaneous charges

9. Certain members expressed grave concern over the hefty miscellaneous fees charged by KGs. The Administration was urged to provide financial assistance for needy children to cover expenses on school uniforms, tea and snack, etc., and take suitable regulatory measures to prevent KGs from over-charging.

10. The Administration explained that it was a common practice for KGs to conduct trading operation as miscellaneous charges for school items such as textbooks, exercise books, school uniforms, etc. While concurring with the need for the Government to step up monitoring over such trading operation, the Administration had required Scheme-KGs to observe the guiding principles, including that no profit should be made from the sale of textbooks, and all profit generated from sale of other items must be ploughed back into the KGs for use in school operation and provision of KG education services. KGs were also required to set out the miscellaneous charges and the list of items on their school websites and in the "Profile of Kindergartens and Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres" ("the Profile") to help parents understand the situation.

Support to students with diverse learning needs

11. Members were of the view that additional resources should be allocated to strengthen the support for KG students with special educational needs ("SEN"), in particular the provision of services for early identification. The Administration responded that the pilot scheme on On-site Pre-primary Rehabilitation Services was launched by the Social Welfare Department ("SWD"), with multi-disciplinary service team from non-governmental organizations offering outreaching services, to participating KGs and KG-cum-child care centres with a view to providing timely and appropriate support to children with special needs. According to SWD, the pilot scheme was planned to be regularized from October 2018. Thereafter, the number of service places would be increased from the current 3 000 services places to 7 000.

12. Some members urged the Administration to assist non-Chinese speaking ("NCS") children in applying for admission to local KGs and to avoid concentration of them in certain KGs. In addition, Scheme-KGs receiving additional NCS grant should list out how they used the grant in the Profile for parents' reference. The

Administration advised that EDB had all along encouraged schools to admit local as well as NCS students. KGs were required to put in place a fair admission mechanism for all children. To facilitate NCS parents choosing suitable KGs for their children, KGs had been reminded to provide information in English. Also, EDB would collect information from Scheme-KGs on vacancy situation and provide assistance to NCS children who encountered difficulty in securing a KG place. According to EDB's statistics, NCS students were widely distributed among KGs in different districts. Regarding NCS grant, KGs were encouraged to provide how they used NGC grant in the Profile and review in a year or two.

Quality assurance in kindergartens

13. Members expressed concern about the unhealthy drilling culture in KGs. There were suggestions that the Administration should consider imposing penalty on these KGs and drawing reference from overseas practices in establishing objectives of early childhood education by legislative means; ceasing the provision of resources for KGs which did not make appropriate homework arrangement; and conducting more focus inspections.

14. The Administration advised that the refined Performance Indicators had clearly reflected the requirements set out in the new KG curriculum guide. If KGs were found to drill their students, the relevant observations would be recorded in the Quality Review ("QR") reports which would be uploaded onto EDB's website. Moreover, the Administration would further strengthen parent education and enhance their understanding about the relevant parts in the curriculum guide and issues concerning articulation between KGs and primary schools so as to alleviate the study pressure on students.

15. Some members also raised concern about the additional administrative work arising from preparing school reports and making preparation for QR visits which would impose heavy burden on the workload of KGs, particularly those of small scale without sufficient supporting staff. According to the Administration, KGs had been advised to embed School Self-evaluation in their daily practices to avoid unnecessary documentation and preparation. KGs were only required to submit an annual school report and the school development plan for the next school year. The QA framework had been streamlined and re-organized to reduce the number of days of QR visits according to the school size.

16. Concern was also raised as to whether the self-evaluation findings recorded in the School Self-evaluation ("SSE") report could reflect the actual circumstances of a KG because some KGs were worried that the publishing of the reports would affect their reputation. Furthermore, some members were worried that the publication of QR reports might create "labelling effect" and banding system among

KGs, resulting in unhealthy competition. According to the Administration, SSE were conducted on the basis of KGs' school plans in which they should set reasonable goals and school-specific development plans with monitoring on their development through SSE. On QR reports, it was a standing practice to upload the reports which contained EDB's observations and recommendations for improvement, instead of ratings on school performance or children's academic achievement.

Latest position

17. The Administration will brief the Panel on the progress of the implementation of the kindergarten education scheme at the meeting on 3 September 2021.

Relevant papers

18. A list of relevant papers on the website of the Legislative Council is in **Appendix II**.

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
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Appendix I

Key features of the free quality kindergarten education policy

1. Provide direct subsidy to eligible local non-profit-making KG for the provision of half-day KG services for all eligible children aged between three and six;
2. Provide an additional subsidy, which respectively set at 30% and 60% of the basic half-day unit subsidy, for KG offering WD and LWD KG places;
3. Provide needy families with fee remission and a grant to defray the school-related expenses;
4. Strengthen support to NCS students and students with diverse learning needs;
5. Enhance the overall teacher-pupil ratio from 1:15 to 1:11 and providing more support for KG teachers to upgrade their professional competence;
6. Encourage KGs to establish a career ladder for KG teachers and requiring them to offer teaching staff salaries within the salary ranges recommended by EDB;
7. Revise the Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum to enhance learning and teaching;
8. Refine the QA Framework, enhance the governance and transparency of KG, and step up monitoring by the Government; and
9. Enhance parent engagement and parent education.

List of relevant papers

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	1.2.2016	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Education	14.11.2016	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	11.1.2017	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 86-90 (Question 14)
Legislative Council	7.6.2017	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 151-153 (Question 21)
Panel on Education	5.1.2018	Agenda Minutes CB(4)713/17-18(01)
Legislative Council	10.1.2018	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 118-127 (Question 19)
Panel on Education	1.6.2018	Agenda Minutes CB(4)131/18-19(01)
Legislative Council	9.1.2019	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 116-120 (Question 15)
Legislative Council	18.11.2020	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 104-107 (Question 16)