

**Report on the Review of
the Kindergarten
Education Scheme**

August 2021

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Content

Chapter 1:	Introduction	1
	Background	
	Consultation	
Chapter 2:	Overview of the implementation of the kindergarten education scheme	5
Chapter 3:	Teacher professionalism	14
	Teacher manpower	
	Teachers' salary	
	Teachers' continuous professional development	
Chapter 4:	Monitoring and quality assurance	31
	Monitoring	
	Quality assurance	
Chapter 5:	School premises and facilities	41
Chapter 6:	Curriculum, students' learning and parent education	47
	Curriculum and students' learning	
	Support to students with diverse needs	
	Parent education	
Chapter 7:	Conclusion	57
Annex 1	Major measures under the kindergarten education scheme	62
Annex 2	Progress on the implementation of the kindergarten education scheme	67

Chapter 1 Introduction

Background

1.1 The Government has implemented the kindergarten education scheme (Scheme) starting from the 2017/18 school year to replace the Pre-primary Voucher Scheme (PEVS)¹ which was implemented from the 2007/08 to 2016/17 school years. The policy objectives of implementing the Scheme are to provide good quality and highly affordable kindergarten (KG) education, and enhance the accessibility of students to different modes of services that suit their specific needs.

1.2 The measures under the Scheme were fully considered through in-depth studies, consultation, discussion² from 2013 to 2015. The recommendations are based on the following principles:

- (a) While KG education should not be compulsory, children aged between 3 to 6 should not be deprived of KG education due to the lack of financial means;
- (b) Quality of KG education is the prime concern;
- (c) The uniqueness, vibrancy and diversity of KG education in Hong Kong must be respected;
- (d) Government funding should be accompanied by good governance on the part of KGs leading to consistent improvement in the quality of education; and
- (e) The policy must be practicable and sustainable.

1.3 The Government announced in the 2016 Policy Address the launch of the Scheme and announced the details of the Scheme³ in July 2016. The major initiatives are summarised below:

¹ Under the Pre-primary Voucher Scheme, the Government provided direct subsidy to parents in form of vouchers to ease their financial burdens.

² The Committee on Free Kindergarten Education, which was set up in April 2013, submitted a report to the Education Bureau (EDB) in May 2015. Details of the report are at <https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/edu-system/preprimary-kindergarten/kg-report/Free-kg-report-201505-Eng.pdf>

³ For details of the Scheme, please refer to the EDB Circular No. 7/2016, the guidelines issued by the EDB and the Kindergarten Administration Guide.

- (a) Basic subsidy: Providing eligible local non-profit making KGs⁴ with a basic subsidy to offer three-year quality half-day (HD) service to all eligible children, and additional subsidies to eligible KGs offering whole-day (WD) and long WD (LWD) services;
- (b) Teacher professionalism (including manpower, salary and professional development): Enhancing the overall teacher-pupil (TP) ratio for eligible KGs substantially from 1:15 (including principal) to 1:11 (not including the principal); providing a salary range for each position for KGs, which would determine the remuneration of their staff within the range; encouraging KGs to establish a career ladder and provide competitive remuneration to attract and retain quality teachers;
- (c) Curriculum and quality assurance: Reviewing the Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum with regard to the learning and teaching experience of KGs and the needs of the community; enhancing the quality assurance framework to strengthen the governance and transparency of KGs; and stepping up the Government's monitoring;
- (d) Catering for diverse learning needs: Strengthening the support to students from needy families, non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students and students with diverse learning needs;
- (e) School premises and facilities: Improving school premises and facilities, and exploring to increase the provision of KG premises;
- (f) Parents' involvement and parent education: Promoting parent education to help parents understand the development needs of their children; encouraging KGs to set up Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) to promote parents' involvement in the learning of their children.

The major measures under the Scheme are detailed at Annex 1.

⁴ To join the Scheme, KGs should meet the following eligibility criteria:

- (a) being a non-profit making KG exempted from tax under Section 88 of the Inland Revenue Ordinance (Cap. 112);
- (b) offering a full local curriculum in accordance with the latest curriculum guide for KGs issued by the Curriculum Development Council; and
- (c) with track records on meeting the quality requirement (i.e. passing the Quality Review).

Consultation

1.4 Since the 2017/18 school year, the EDB has progressively rolled out the initiatives under the Scheme, and put in place some enhancements as necessary. The Scheme signifies an important milestone in the development of KG education. In view that the Government has put in substantial resources and implemented various measures covering different aspects, we considered it necessary to have a timely review to understand the implementation in KGs to ensure that the measures are implemented according to the policy objectives and intended purposes. Meanwhile, we understand that the KG sector (especially teachers) has expressed demand for the establishment of a salary scale for KG teachers. In this connection, the Chief Executive announced in the 2017 and 2018 Policy Address that the data of the three school years from 2017/18 to 2019/20 would be used as the basis to explore the feasibility of introducing a salary scale for KG teachers. The EDB commenced a comprehensive review on the implementation of the Scheme in mid-2019, including the salary arrangements for KG teachers. The review does not aim at making fundamental changes or changes in principle. The objective of the review is to understand the implementation of the Scheme so as to explore refinements on the implementation details as necessary.

1.5 The scope of the review included the funding modes under the Scheme, teacher professionalism (including manpower, salary and professional development), monitoring and quality assurance, school premises and facilities, curriculum and students' learning, parent education, etc. in the three years from the implementation of the Scheme in the 2017/18 school year up to 2019/20 school year. Should relevant information in the 2020/21 school year be available, we also took into consideration to ensure that the findings from the review are still applicable under the latest circumstances.

1.6 The review was conducted mainly through gauging views from different stakeholders and analysing existing data. The EDB conducted more than 60 consultation sessions in total from mid-2019 to mid-2021 with representatives of different stakeholders, including school sponsoring bodies (SSBs), KG principals, KG associations, teacher organisations, relevant non-governmental organisations, as well as parents and KG

teachers. Besides, the EDB commissioned the Faculty of Education of the University of Hong Kong in 2017 to conduct a three-year consultancy study to evaluate the effectiveness of the provision of quality KG education in Hong Kong under the KG education policy. The research team collected information from classroom observation, questionnaire surveys and interviews and the research targets covered KG principals, teachers, parents and children. The preliminary findings of the consultancy study, which is expected to be completed in late 2021, also serve as reference for the review.

1.7 This report provides an overview of the implementation of the Scheme from the 2017/18 to 2019/20 school years, the latest development in the 2020/21 school year, the data the EDB made reference to, opinions of various stakeholders, way forward of the policy and details of the enhancement measures gradually put in place by the EDB taking into consideration the review findings and KGs' developmental needs. We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all stakeholders for their support and assistance.

Chapter 2 Overview of the implementation of the kindergarten education scheme

Overall situation

2.1 The EDB has progressively rolled out the initiatives under the kindergarten education scheme, and put in place enhancements as necessary. Under the Scheme, the Government has substantially increased subsidies to KGs. The Government's commitment in KG education has been substantially increased from about \$4 billion before the implementation of the Scheme to about \$6.7 billion every year. The annual subsidy, irrespective of HD or WD, for each eligible student under the PEVS is \$23,230. In the 2020/21 school year, the HD, WD and LWD unit subsidy for each eligible student is \$36,080, \$46,900 and \$57,730 respectively. Also, we provide school-specific grants to KGs to cater for their special circumstances, including rental subsidy, premises maintenance grant, grant for a cook, as well as grant for supporting NCS students, etc.

2.2 The number of KGs joining the Scheme (Scheme-KGs) has slightly increased as compared to that of joining the previous PEVS with details tabulated below:

	Joining PEVS	Joining KG education scheme			
School year	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Number of KGs	745	748	753	761	763
% among eligible KGs ⁵	96.6%	96.8%	96.7%	96.8%	97%

2.3 On the whole, the Scheme has been implemented smoothly and is widely supported by the sector. Measures implemented are in line with the policy objectives and intended purposes. The policy objectives of providing highly affordable KG education, and enhancing the accessibility

⁵ A non-profit making KG is exempted from tax under Section 88 of the Inland Revenue Ordinance (Cap. 112) and offers a full local KG curriculum.

of students to different modes of services that suit their specific needs have been achieved. The Scheme has maintained the KGs' features of flexibility and diversity, as well as prompt response to social changes and parents' needs. The progress on the implementation of the Scheme is set out at [Annex 2](#).

Flexibility and diversity, responsive to needs

2.4 The KG sector is characterised by flexibility and diversity, flexible operation, as well as prompt response to social changes and parents' needs. The Scheme can effectively cater for school-based circumstances of different KGs. Specifically, the basic HD unit subsidy covers the general needs of all KGs, including the salaries of teaching and non-teaching staff, and related expenses (such as provident fund contributions) and daily operating costs. Additional subsidies are provided to cater for other diverse needs, including additional subsidies to KGs operating WD and LWD programmes⁶, and grant for a cook for WD KGs with a kitchen which complies with the Government's requirements. This not only suits school-based needs, but also upholds the key principle of co-payment between the Government and parents for the additional costs for WD operation. Premises maintenance grant and rental subsidy are provided to cater for the respective needs of KGs operating in self-owned school premises and rented premises. Additional subsidy is provided to KGs to support NCS students, and fee remission and grant for school-related expenses are provided for students with financial needs so as to cater for the needs of students with diverse backgrounds, etc.

2.5 In fact, given the diversity of the KG sector, KGs must be allowed to make flexible arrangements to support the sustainable development of KGs with diverse backgrounds. Taking the operation scale of KGs as an example, the number of students ranges from dozens of students to over one thousand students. In the 2020/21 school year, there were about 100 Scheme-KGs (about 13%) with an enrolment of more than 300 students while around 60 Scheme-KGs (8%) had enrolled fewer than 60 students. No Scheme-KGs ceased operation from the 2017/18 to 2019/20 school

⁶ WD and LWD programmes need more staff and higher operating costs due to the longer service hours. The additional subsidy we provide for WD and LWD programmes are 30% and 60% of the basic HD unit subsidy respectively.

years. This shows that even “small-scale’ KGs (such as those having only dozens of students) can still sustain their development through flexible deployment of resources. In the 2020/21 school year, only two Scheme-KGs ceased operation. One of them was due to the redevelopment of the estate.

2.6 As for operation mode, KGs flexibly deploy their rooms to operate HD programmes, WD programmes or both HD and WD programmes in response to parents’ needs. In the 2020/21 school year, the number of Scheme-KGs operating HD, WD and both HD and WD programmes is tabulated below:

Programmes	Number of Schools
Operate HD programmes only	142
Operate WD programmes only	245
Operate both HD and WD programmes	376

2.7 Besides, most KGs also operate child care centres to cater for children aged under 3. Under the principle of no cross-subsidisation between child care centre and KG portions, KGs can flexibly deploy their manpower and put in place school-based measures.

2.8 In light of KGs’ specific features of flexibility and diversity in operation, should Scheme-KGs be able to provide free HD services and maintain fees for WD services at a low level, they may flexibly employ additional teachers, teaching assistants and other supporting staff. KGs may also draw up school-based policy on remuneration within the prescribed salary range provided by the EDB and remunerate teachers with regard to their qualifications, teaching experience, duties, performance and expertise. While the required TP ratio of 1:11 is used to determine KGs’ overall teaching manpower, KGs have the flexibility to adopt previous practices⁷ in their actual arrangement of learning and teaching activities to

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

make rooms for teachers to have more capacity for various professional activities, such as participating in professional development activities and catering for the diverse needs of students (including those at risk of developmental delay).

School fee at an affordable and low level

2.9 When rolling out the Scheme in the 2017/18 school year, it was estimated that around 70% to 80% of KGs offering HD programmes are free of charge. In practice, in the past four years (from the 2017/18 to 2020/21 school years), around 90% of the Scheme-KGs offering HD programmes are free of charge. For WD programmes, premised on the principle of co-payment between the Government and parents, parents need to pay school fees. With additional subsidy from the Government, the school fees for WD programmes are maintained at a low level (the median school fees per instalment for the 2017/18 to 2020/21 school years were around \$730, \$790, \$820 and \$860 respectively). Families with financial needs may apply for fee remission and the Grant for School-related Expenses for Kindergarten Students⁸. As seen from the above, the Scheme has achieved the objective of providing good quality and highly affordable KG education.

Good governance and quality assurance

2.10 Under the Scheme, the Government has the responsibility to strengthen the quality assurance framework. All Scheme-KGs are required to apply to stay in the Scheme every year and sign an undertaking to comply with the terms and conditions set out by the EDB. When vetting schools' application every year, the EDB would conduct an overall review on the operation of individual KGs, such as the results of Quality Review, any malpractices and non-compliance on financial management, admission arrangement, and whether the irregularities, if any, have been rectified as requested. Besides, KGs are required to submit annual audited accounts for the EDB's review. The EDB would also visit Scheme-KGs in a timely manner to conduct financial audit and review their

⁸ The grant rate approximates to the grant for selected items of school related expenses (i.e. books, stationery, school uniforms, miscellaneous and minor one-off expenses) under Comprehensive Social Security Assistance. In the 2020/21 school year, the full flat-rate grant per KG student is \$4,175.

accounts / systems and internal control. If irregularities are found, the KGs concerned would be required to rectify. Repeated failure to rectify the irregularities notwithstanding prior notice and reasonable time allowed for remedial action, the EDB will take actions, including issue of warning letters and consideration of revocation of its eligibility under the Scheme.

Timely enhancement of grants

2.11 After the implementation of the Scheme, we have kept in view KGs' needs, and enhanced existing grants or provided additional grants. For example:

- (a) Start-up grant: Considering that KGs needed to prepare for the implementation of the Scheme, such as improving the quality of service, strengthening administration, management and accountability, and putting in place a proper internal control and reporting mechanism with rigorous checks and balances for the Scheme, the EDB disbursed in February 2017 a one-off start-up grant ranging from \$200,000 to \$300,000 to KGs joining the Scheme in the 2017/18 school year (i.e. the first year of implementation of the Scheme).
- (b) Tide-over grant: Under the Scheme, Scheme-KGs with a large number of long-serving teachers receiving relatively high salaries were provided with a time-limited tide-over grant for two years (i.e. the 2017/18 and 2018/19 school years) as additional financial support to defray KGs' expenses on teachers' salaries in the early period of implementation of the Scheme. The Government announced in July 2017 that the two-year tide-over grant would be extended for three years (i.e. a total of five school years up to the 2021/22 school year).
- (c) Adjustment of salary-related subsidies: The Government also announced in July 2017 that, starting from the 2018/19 school year, the subsidies related to teachers' salaries⁹ (and the salary ranges for teachers) would be adjusted according to the annual civil service pay adjustment on a school year basis.

⁹ These subsidies include the teaching staff salary portion of the unit subsidy (HD, WD and LWD services), the grant for support to NCS students and the tide-over grant.

- (d) Grant for support to NCS students: Starting from the 2017/18 school year, Scheme-KGs admitting eight or more NCS students are provided with a grant comparable to mid-point salary of the recommended salary range for one KG teacher. With effect from the 2019/20 school year, the EDB has enhanced the original one-tiered grant to five-tiered grant¹⁰ based on the number of NCS students admitted. A KG admitting only one NCS student also receives the grant, and the grant rate for the highest tier is a double of the previous level.
- (e) Staff Relief Grant for staff taking paid maternity leave (ML): The Government proposed in the 2018 Policy Address to extend the statutory ML from 10 weeks to 14 weeks. Notwithstanding that the Government needs time to amend the relevant law, the EDB provides a relief grant from 1 January 2019 onwards for staff taking 14-week paid ML to encourage Scheme-KGs to be good employers. KGs may apply to the EDB for reimbursement of the expenses for employing substitute staff on an accountable basis.
- (f) Supply Teacher Grant: Starting from the 2018/19 school year, the EDB provides a supply teacher grant to facilitate Scheme-KGs to arrange their teachers to attend the specified recognised training courses on supporting students with special needs and NCS students.
- (g) Promotion of Reading Grant for Kindergartens: With effect from the 2019/20 school year, the EDB provides Scheme-KGs with the Promotion of Reading Grant for Kindergartens to step up the promotion of reading and further nurture children's interest in reading.

¹⁰ Details and the grant rate of the five-tiered grant in the 2020/21 school year are as below:

Tier	Number of NCS students	Grant Amount
1	1 to 4 students	\$51,400
2	5 to 7 students	\$198,960 (comparable to the rate of 0.5 KG teacher)
3	8 to 15 students	\$397,920 (comparable to the rate of 1 KG teacher)
4	16 to 30 students	\$596,880 (comparable to the rate of 1.5 KG teachers)
5	31 students or above	\$795,840 (comparable to the rate of 2 KG teachers)

- (h) As announced in August 2021, an additional subsidy is provided for Scheme-KGs to purchase national flags and movable flagpoles so as to facilitate KGs to help students understand the national flag and the etiquette of the flag raising ceremony.
- (i) In tandem with the review, we promptly provided enhanced measures when immediate improvement were found necessary, including providing the Relocation Grant, Renovation Grant, Website Enhancement Grant, etc. in the 2020/21 and 2021/22 school years.

2.12 Besides, the Government provided KGs with additional one-off subsidies when needs arose. Examples include the Special Grant on Typhoon Disturbance¹¹ provided in 2018 because of the damages caused by Typhoon Mangkhut; the Special Anti-epidemic Grant, the Support Grant and the One-off Grants¹² under two rounds of the Anti-epidemic Fund in consideration of the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic; the Gift Book Scheme and Do It Yourself Handicraft and Learning Package Scheme to facilitate children's learning at home, etc.

Views and discussions

2.13 With regards to the current funding modes for Scheme-KGs, stakeholders had the following views:

- (a) There was a unanimous view in the sector that the mode of providing a unit subsidy was conducive to maintaining the specific features of diversity, flexibility and vibrancy of the KG sector, and this mode should be maintained.
- (b) The sector generally agreed that, under the Scheme, the Government had substantially increased subsidies to KGs, and the coverage of the subsidies met the actual needs of KGs.

¹¹ The Special Grant on Typhoon Disturbance was disbursed according to the actual expenses of KGs, basically with a ceiling of \$50,000 per KG.

¹² To support KGs, the EDB has disbursed subsidies to the KG sector three times, including (a) providing each KG with a grant at the rate of \$10,000 to \$15,000 in March and April 2020 for replenishing epidemic prevention equipment, cleaning the school premises and paying for other expenses related to epidemic prevention; as well as the Support Grant ranging from \$60,000 to \$160,000 per school; (b) providing all KGs with a One-off Grant in November 2020 ranging from \$30,000 to \$80,000 per school; and (c) another One-off Grant provided to all KGs in February 2021 ranging from \$60,000 to \$160,000 per school.

- (c) At present, fee-charging KGs collect school fees in 10 to 12 instalments, and the EDB disburses the basic unit subsidy according to the number of school fee instalments. Majority of stakeholders considered the existing arrangement effective, which actually formed the basis for KGs in preparing their annual budget and deployment of resources. Regarding the EDB's proposal of standardising the number of instalments for disbursement of the unit subsidy among KGs, KGs were of the view that it would lead to confusion and KGs would have to start over their planning of financial arrangements or even need to modify the systems concerned. As such, KGs strongly requested to maintain the existing arrangement.
- (d) At present, 60% of the basic unit subsidy is prescribed as teachers' salary portion¹³ which must be used on teachers' salaries and related expenses. KGs may deploy any of the remaining 40% for teachers' salaries and related expenses, but not vice versa. While there were views that the EDB should remove such a restriction to allow schools greater flexibility in deploying resources, some considered that the restriction should be maintained as a means to ensure that teachers were reasonably remunerated.
- (e) With respect to the Special Grant on Typhoon Disturbance provided for Scheme-KGs in 2018, and the various one-off grants disbursed to KGs in light of the COVID-19 epidemic, the KG sector commended the EDB for taking prompt actions to address schools' pressing needs. The sector expected that the EDB would, as before, render timely support to KGs when urgent needs arose.

Way forward

2.14 In sum, measures implemented under the Scheme are in line with the policy objectives and intended purposes. They have helped maintain flexibility and stable development of KGs, provide highly affordable KG education, strengthen the quality assurance and cater for the diverse needs

¹³ KGs are required to demarcate 60% of the basic unit subsidy (including basic HD unit subsidy, additional subsidy for WD and LWD services) as teachers' salary portion and must be used on teaching staff salaries and related expenses (such as mandatory provident fund, long service payment, etc.). The remaining 40% is for other operating costs. KGs may deploy any portion of the remaining 40% for teaching staff salaries and related expenses, but not vice versa.

of students. The process of implementing the measures is smooth and the policy is feasible and practicable. In view of this, the EDB will maintain the current arrangements of subsidy disbursement, i.e. (i) providing unit subsidy based on the number of eligible students while offering additional grants in light of KGs' specific circumstances; (ii) disbursing unit subsidy according to the number of school fee instalments; and (iii) rendering additional support to KGs in light of the circumstances as necessary.

Chapter 3 Teacher professionalism

3.1 One of the major objectives of the KG education scheme is to enhance the quality of KG education and, among others, professional competency of KG teachers (including principals) is most crucial. In this connection, the EDB has put in place a series of enhancement measures in teacher manpower, salary and professional development when implementing the Scheme.

Teacher manpower

Background and current situation

3.2 The overall TP ratio for Scheme-KGs has been enhanced from 1:15 (including principal) to 1:11 (not including the principal). As the TP ratio is calculated based on the overall number of teachers in school, KG may arrange learning and teaching activities flexibly according to school-based needs, including catering for students with diverse needs. KGs may further enhance their TP ratio by flexibly deploying resources to employ additional teachers provided that their HD programmes are free of charge and fees for WD programmes are maintained at a low level. In actual operation, many KGs are maintaining a more favourable TP ratio than 1:11. According to the Survey on Kindergarten Teachers and Child Care Staff, the average TP ratio of AM and PM sessions of Scheme-KGs in the 2019/20 school year was around 1:10 and 1:9 respectively.

3.3 Before implementation of the Scheme, KGs were required to employ sufficient teachers possessing Certificate in Early Childhood Education (C(ECE)) or above qualifications based on the TP ratio of 1:15. With the overall requirement in TP ratio raising to 1:11 under the Scheme, in principle, all teachers employed in a KG based on the TP ratio of 1:11 should be holders of C(ECE) or above qualifications. In the early stage of the implementation of the new policy, as a transitional arrangement, on top of ratio of 1:15 and within the ratio of 1:11, flexibility was allowed for KGs to employ teachers not possessing C(ECE), such as experienced Qualified Kindergarten Teachers already serving in the sector and non-ECE degree-holders. Meanwhile, these teachers should be encouraged to enroll in the recognised ECE courses. The EDB undertook to review the

flexibility in the 2019/20 school year. The results of the study showed that almost all Scheme-KGs (i.e. 99.87%) in the 2019/20 school year employed sufficient teachers possessing the required qualifications based on the TP ratio of 1:11. In other words, there is no need to keep this flexibility.

3.4 On the career ladder for teachers, all along, KGs may determine the rank of teachers by taking into account their school-based needs. Under the Scheme, it is suggested that out of five class teachers, one of them may be upgraded to a senior teacher, and for KGs having three or more senior teachers, one of them may be upgraded to vice-principal. As for the rank of principals, KGs with a vice-principal may set the rank of their principal at Principal I; for KGs with not more than three teachers, the salary range of their principals will be comparable to vice-principal; for the remaining KGs, the rank of their principals may be set at Principal II. According to the annual Survey on Kindergarten Teachers and Child Care Staff in the 2017/18 and 2018/19 school years, about 60% of Scheme-KGs have filled up all of their promotion posts and around 30% had one vacant promotion post.

Views and discussions

3.5 The KG sector agreed that the current TP ratio of 1:11 is an improvement over the past. There were views that the TP ratio should be further enhanced, such as excluding the vice-principal(s) and/or senior teacher(s) from the TP ratio of 1:11 as they are mainly responsible for administration hence taking up less class teaching. In this connection, the EDB clarified that 1:11 is an overall TP ratio, i.e. it is calculated based on the number of students in AM/PM and WD classes. For classroom teaching, KGs may flexibly maintain the existing arrangements¹⁴ so that teachers may have more capacity for various professional activities, cater for the diverse needs of students, handle other issues (such as communication with parents), etc. Moreover, we have made reference to the Education at Glance 2018 released by the Organisation for Economic

¹⁴ 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 thereof. The principal of the KG can be counted as one of the teaching staff and at least one teacher has to be present in a class.

Co-operation and Development and relevant government websites. The current TP ratio of 1:11 in Hong Kong is better than many economically advanced regions.

3.6 As for the qualification requirements of KG teachers, the KG sector agreed that Scheme-KGs are well-equipped to employ sufficient teachers possessing C(ECE) or above qualifications based on the TP ratio of 1:11, and the flexibility arrangement could be ceased. Nevertheless, some opined that opportunities should be provided for university graduates of non-ECE major who aspire to become KG teachers. Besides, there are opinions that many KG teachers are degree-holders and that the EDB should consider an all-graduate teaching force in KG as a long-term goal.

3.7 Regarding the career ladder of teachers, the KG sector expressed that apart from a small number of small-scale KGs, most KGs had followed the recommendation and provided teachers with promotion opportunities so as to retain quality teachers. They also shared the view that the EDB should avoid stipulating mandatory requirements, and KGs should be allowed to make flexible arrangements according to their school-based circumstances, such as appointing level coordinators to coordinate the work of each level.

Way forward

3.8 Considering that the current TP ratio of 1:11 in KGs is on par with international standards and even compares favourably with many economically advanced regions, the EDB will maintain the TP ratio of 1:11. KGs may further enhance their TP ratio by flexibly deploying resources to employ additional teachers provided that their HD programmes are free of charge and fees for WD programmes are maintained at a low level.

3.9 Regarding qualification requirements of teachers, having taken into account stakeholders' views and actual situation (paragraph 3.3 above), all Scheme-KGs will be required to employ sufficient teachers possessing C(ECE) or above qualifications based on the TP ratio of 1:11 starting from the 2022/23 school year. For individual teachers holding non-ECE degree qualifications, they must enroll in recognised ECE courses within two years after they start the employment, and must acquire

the qualifications within three years after they start the ECE courses, or else they will not be counted as teachers within the TP ratio of 1:11 in their KGs. The EDB expects that the above arrangement can uphold professional standards of KG teachers, and at the same time, provide a chance for those who aspire to serve as KG teachers but have yet to acquire the C(ECE) qualification. A circular (EDB Circular No. 12/2020) announcing the above arrangement was issued in the end of July 2020, informing schools of the above arrangement.

3.10 As regards the recommendation on establishing an all-graduate teaching force for the KG sector, the vice-principals in Scheme-KGs should hold a bachelor's degree in ECE or equivalent qualifications. Moreover, for appointment or promotion to senior teacher posts, KGs are encouraged to accord priority to suitable teachers with a bachelor's degree in ECE or equivalent qualifications. At present, various teacher education institutions offer pre-service C(ECE) programmes, of which over 50% of the places are government-funded. Graduates of these programmes are able to discharge their teaching duties effectively. The EDB will closely monitor the development of KG education, the needs of the community, etc., and take appropriate follow-up actions accordingly.

3.11 The sector held the general view that the current practice of offering recommendations on teaching ranks provides flexibility and allows KGs to address their own circumstances. Such an arrangement will remain unchanged. As a matter of fact, the ranks as mentioned in paragraph 3.4 above are provided for KGs' reference only. In actual operation, as KGs vary greatly in their scale and mode of operation, they are provided with ample flexibility to make their own school-based arrangements.

Teachers' salary

Background and current situation

3.12 Before the implementation of the Scheme, teachers' salary is fully determined by market force and school-based decisions. The committee set up and consultancy study commissioned by the EDB had conducted in-depth studies on the issue, carefully listened and considered the views from

stakeholders. On balancing different views and proposals, it was agreed that competitive remuneration should be provided to attract and retain quality teachers, and a salary range should be set for each position of teachers and major supporting staff (clerk, janitor and cook) for KGs' reference. Setting a salary range for each position not only ensures the competitiveness, it also allows the KG management to flexibly determine the salary of teachers according to their teaching experience, performance, additional duties, qualifications, training received, special skills possessed, etc. This should be more appropriate for KGs. In comparison, a mandatory salary scale determines teachers' salary according to teaching experience only. Notwithstanding this, with regard to the concerns of KG teachers about their qualifications and experience being not recognised by KGs when determining their remuneration (particularly when changing schools), it was agreed to set out specific implementation guidelines and clear rules and regulations to ensure that KGs properly use the subsidy on teachers' salary. For example, a certain proportion of the Government funding should be designated for the expenses on teachers' salary. Also, KGs should be required to set up a transparent school-based mechanism with checks and balances for determining staff salary.

3.13 To ensure that teachers are reasonably remunerated, the EDB has accepted the recommendation of setting salary ranges for teachers of different ranks¹⁵. The recommendation is made after balancing different views and proposals of stakeholders and the salary range is devised based on the recommendation of a consultancy study¹⁶. Scheme-KGs are required to remunerate their teachers who hold a C(ECE) or higher qualifications within the prescribed salary ranges. The salary ranges are adjusted according to the annual civil service pay adjustment on a school year basis. Not only has this arrangement safeguarded teachers to have reasonable remuneration, it also allows the KG management to capitalise on the specific features of flexibility and diversity when flexibly determining the salary of the teachers according to their qualifications, teaching experience, performance, additional duties, training received and special skills possessed.

¹⁵ Including basic rank teacher, Senior Teacher, Vice principal, Principal II and Principal I.

¹⁶ For details, please refer to paragraphs 7.3.12 to 7.3.16 of the "Report of the Committee on Free Kindergarten Education" (May 2015) <https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/edu-system/preprimary-kindergarten/kg-report/Free-kg-report-201505-Eng.pdf>

3.14 Under the Scheme, we put in place various measures to ensure that teachers are reasonably remunerated. First and foremost, KGs are requested to remunerate teachers within the prescribed salary ranges. The EDB conducts annual survey to collect the information about salaries of teachers. We will follow up each case of KGs not remunerating teachers within the salary ranges. Moreover, 60% of the basic unit subsidy is prescribed as teachers' salary portion which must be used on teachers' salaries and related expenses. KGs may deploy any portion of the remaining 40% for teachers' salaries and related expenses, but not vice versa. KGs are required to submit audited accounts annually which are audited by a certified public accountant (practicing) under the Professional Accountants Ordinance (Cap. 50). Besides, the accumulated surplus in the salary portion exceeding the reserve ceiling will be clawed back in order to encourage schools' optimal use of the subsidy on teachers' salary.

3.15 Although the provision of salary ranges and the said requirement have given KG teachers protection in terms of remuneration, KG teachers still hope to have stronger assurance and express the demand for setting up a salary scale for KG teachers. As announced in the 2017 Policy Address, the Government would use the data of the three school years from 2017/18 to 2019/20 as the basis to assess the impact of a salary scale for KG teachers on the stability of the teaching force, the sustainability of quality services, as well as the flexibility and diversity of the KG sector. It was also mentioned in the 2018 Policy Address that we would explore the feasibility of introducing a salary scale for KG teachers. As such, drawing on the information collected in the Survey on Kindergarten Teachers and Child Care Staff every September, the EDB has analysed the salaries of teachers in Scheme-KGs in the 2017/18 and 2018/19 school years¹⁷. Major findings are set out below:

- (a) Before the implementation of the Scheme (in the 2016/17 school year), the average monthly salary of teachers (including Senior Teachers and Vice-principals) was around \$23,000. Upon

¹⁷ The EDB was not able to notify KGs of the salary ranges for the 2019/20 school year until 3 March 2020 because the civil service pay adjustment was only approved by the Legislative Council on 28 February 2020. In KGs' return on teachers' salary submitted in September 2019, some used the salary levels in the 2018/19 school year as the basis, while others made appropriate adjustments in light of school context. Since the data in question cannot accurately reflect the actual situation in the 2019/20 school year, for this analysis, only data on teachers' salary in the 2017/18 and 2018/19 school years was considered.

implementation of the Scheme, the average monthly salary of teachers was around \$25,000 and \$27,000 in the 2017/18 and 2018/19 school years respectively. This showed significant improvements as compared with the situation before implementation of the Scheme. There is also certain annual pay increase. The overall salary adjustment is also reasonable.

- (b) Over 80% of basic rank teachers were remunerated below the mid-point of the salary range concerned. Around half of the KGs employed additional teachers (i.e. exceeding the required TP ratio of 1:11) in these two years. This involved around 1000 additional teachers each year. It shows that KGs have flexibly deployed resources between teacher remuneration and number of teachers employed. For example, a KG may incline to employ additional teachers when the average salaries of its teachers have not reached the mid-point of the salary ranges.
- (c) Among the basic rank teachers changing schools in the 2017/18 and 2018/19 school years, around 10% and 20% of the teachers experienced a pay cut. In tandem, over 85% and 80% had a pay rise when changing schools. As most of the teachers changing schools had a pay rise, this shows that KGs would take into account the teaching experience of teachers when they determine the salary of newly employed teachers. Having a salary cut when changing schools is not a common phenomenon.
- (d) Among the basic rank teachers with salary at or above the mid-point of the salary range in the 2017/18 and 2018/19 school years, about 70% and 90% respectively had a pay rise of more than \$1,000. This shows that pitching the subsidy at the mid-point of the salary range are not driving KGs to set the salary ceiling of their teachers at the mid-point of the salary range.

Views and discussions

3.16 As the salary arrangements for KG teachers involve KGs' operation and flexibility in deployment of resources, we discussed with stakeholders in an in-depth manner. We have also prudently assessed the impact of a salary scale for KG teachers on the stability of the teaching force, the sustainability of quality services, as well as the flexibility and diversity of the KG sector. In this connection, the EDB held over 30

consultation sessions with stakeholders on the salary arrangements for KG teachers. During the consultation, different stakeholders expressed the following concerns over the salary arrangements for KG teachers:

- (a) There was a unanimous view in the sector that changes to salary arrangements for KG teachers should be in line with the merits of flexibility, diversity and vibrancy of the KG sector, provision of affordable quality education, as well as maintaining a stable and high-calibre teaching force.
- (b) SSBs and KG principals generally agreed that the EDB's existing practice of providing salary ranges for KG teachers allows KGs to flexibly determine the salary of the teachers according to their qualifications, teaching experience, performance, additional duties, training received, special skills possessed, etc., maintaining KGs' diversity and flexibility.
- (c) Teachers generally considered a mandatory teacher salary scale would demonstrate recognition of their expertise and experience.

3.17 During consultation, the EDB explained and analysed the teachers' salary data of Scheme-KGs in the 2017/18 and 2018/19 school years with the stakeholders and solicited their overall views on the teachers' salary arrangements. Stakeholders concurred that KG teachers' salary arrangements should fulfill the following basic principles:

- (a) KGs' existing flexibility in student admission mechanism should not be affected;
- (b) KGs' flexibility in teacher appointment, allocation of duties and personnel management should be maintained;
- (c) the subsidy for teachers' salary should continue to be based on the TP ratio of 1:11;
- (d) subsidies on salary for teachers serving in WD and LWD KGs should continue to be calculated on the co-payment basis; and
- (e) in determining the salary of individual teachers, KGs should still be allowed a certain degree of flexibility while teachers' salary is properly protected.

3.18 The EDB had detailed discussion with the KG sector on the feasibility of various options on salary arrangements for KG teachers, including adopting a mandatory salary scale similar to that of aided schools, under which KGs will submit to the EDB salaries of teachers as calculated under a mandatory salary scale and the EDB will provide subsidies on this basis. We have also explored the option of KGs remunerating teachers according to a mandatory teacher salary scale, with the Government providing unit subsidy based on the average salary of teachers under a tiered-subsidy arrangement. We have also considered the option of providing a salary scale for KGs' reference with KGs having full flexibility in determining their school-based arrangements.

3.19 Stakeholders discussed and explored the feasibility of these options. The arrangement of a mandatory salary scale for KG teachers pegged with Government subsidies would mean similar practices as for aided primary and secondary schools. The funding mode for aided schools is tied with several inter-connected components (such as the EDB's annual approval for the number of operating classes and the staff establishment), and subject to the control measures implemented by the Government, and prudent and balanced planning of school places under school places allocation systems. However, KGs' mode of operation is distinctly different from that of primary and secondary schools. Hence, adopting a mandatory salary scale for KG teachers in isolation is not feasible. Should it be adopted, it might do more harm than good to the sector. All along, KGs have been admitting students from all districts and admitting students all year round based on their school-based mechanism. If a mandatory teacher salary scale pegged with subsidy is introduced, for prudent use of public resources, the EDB needs to have planned allocation of school places, approval for the number of operating classes and staff establishment of KGs. In such case, KGs would need a "standard class size" in a similar manner as for primary and secondary schools. However, the accommodation of KG premises vary greatly with the permitted accommodation of each classroom ranges from 10 students or so to over 30 students. It is practically infeasible to have a "standard class size" for all KGs. Besides, the number of students in AM and PM sessions may differ greatly. There are also great differences across KGs on whether they operate WD classes, variation in the enrollment of WD classes, and adjustment in the number of classes in the middle of a school term in light

of the demand. If approval for the number of operating classes and staff establishment is required, KGs' flexibility in adjusting the operating classes would be greatly reduced. When admitting students in the middle of a school term, KGs would be required to fill the vacant school places. This would affect KGs' flexibility in student admission and reduce choices for parents. The sector was of the view that the school places allocation systems and the mechanism of approving operating classes and staff establishment for primary and secondary schools are not feasible in KGs.

3.20 Currently, most KGs flexibly deploy the surplus in subsidy to employ additional teachers. In the 2017/18 and 2018/19 school years, around 1 000 additional teachers were employed by the Scheme-KGs each year. Should a mandatory teacher salary scale be introduced with subsidy pegged with salary of teachers, the salary subsidy for teachers will only be calculated based on the TP ratio of 1:11. More than 1 000 existing additional teachers would become surplus teachers and have to be laid off. Besides, the number of teachers entitled under the TP ratio of 1:11 will be affected by the year-on-year changes in the number of students which will bring adverse impact on the stable development of the schools. With decline in enrollment, packing of classes and teacher redundancy would occur in KGs, undermining the stability of the teaching force. There has been a significant decline in student population in the recent years and it is anticipated that the decline would continue. The practice of approving the number of operating classes and staff establishment would lead to serious problem of teacher redundancy.

3.21 It is noteworthy that certain KGs may have accumulated some surplus in the subsidy for teachers' salary over the past few years. If the subsidy for teachers' salary is pegged with teachers' remuneration, the KGs should not have surplus in principle. Hence, the surplus should not be kept by KGs and should be returned to the Government. Moreover, on the principle of co-payment between the Government and parents for WD programmes, salary of teachers teaching WD programmes should be demarcated into the portion subsidized by the Government and the portion borne by school fees. We need to consider whether the portion of salary borne by school fees should follow the mandatory salary scale as well. If so, the mobility of teachers will have a significant impact on school fees. If not, it is undesirable for teachers of HD and WD programmes

remunerated differently. In actual operation, most KGs operate both HD and WD programmes and their teachers teach both programmes. It is practically difficult to determine the percentage to be paid by Government subsidy and that to be borne by school fees.

3.22 The EDB has also explored the possibility of dividing the salary ranges for KG teachers into certain salary points without altering the existing principle of subsidy calculation and providing the salary scale for KGs as a reference in determining teachers' salaries. KGs will be required to indicate the salary on the "Certificate of Service" issued to leaving teachers. KGs will be encouraged to grant annual increments to the newly-appointed teachers as far as possible. While some KGs and SSBs indicated that they had already adopted similar practices and considered this option in line with their operation, other KGs had expressed worries. Since the Government subsidies will continue to be calculated at the mid-point of the salary range, they may not be able to cover the expenses on salaries of experienced teachers in the long run when teachers' experience progressively increases.

3.23 In conclusion, as regards whether and how to implement a salary scale for KG teachers, the main justification on supporting a mandatory teacher salary scale is to provide better protection to teachers. Nevertheless, after in-depth analyses, it is found that a mandatory teacher salary scale involves matters relating to school places allocation, approval for operating classes and staff establishment, and the problem of surplus teachers. The funding mode of aided schools cannot be applied to KGs in isolation. The sector was also concerned that school operation had been affected by the social turmoil and COVID-19 epidemic in the past two years. The sector needs to recover. In addition, it is anticipated that there will be a decline in enrollment in the coming years. The sector considered it necessary to maintain the stability of the teaching force and avoid any fundamental changes to the policy. It is more flexible to adopt the existing arrangement of providing salary ranges. The KG management can flexibly determine the salary of their staff according to their qualifications, teaching experience, performance, additional duties, training received and special skills possessed. When individual KGs encounter different situations, such as decline in enrollment, they need flexibility in making school-based arrangements to maintain the stability

in school development and the teaching force.

Way forward

3.24 As mentioned in paragraph 3.12, the salary structure under the Scheme is basically based on the recommendations of the Committee and consultancy study. It is proposed after thorough consideration of different options and proposals. It is considered the best option which can maintain KGs' specific features of flexibility and diversity, and ensure their competitiveness. It can also allow the KG management to flexibly determine the salary of their staff according to their teaching experience, performance, additional duties, qualifications, training received, special skills possessed, etc. Hence, it is more suitable for KGs' situation. After implementation for four years, the previous considerations are still applicable.

3.25 The teacher salary data in paragraph 3.15 shows that teachers' salary has improved considerably upon the implementation of the Scheme in the 2017/18 school year and teachers in general have pay rise as appropriate each year. This reflects that, on the whole, the provision of salary ranges for teachers under the Scheme are able to offer salary protection to teachers. In addition, as long as teachers' remuneration is at a reasonable level (i.e. with increment granted within the salary range according to experience), the relevant expenditure can be recognized under fee revision. In fact, KGs should generally have staff with different lengths of service, so it is reasonable for the average salary to be around the mid-point of the salary ranges.

3.26 Under the premise of maintaining KGs' flexibility and diversity, introducing a mandatory teacher salary scale for KG teachers, which may undermine the stability of teaching force, is not feasible. Hence, the EDB will maintain the existing arrangement of providing salary ranges for teachers. As learnt from the consultation sessions, KG teachers urged for a mandatory teacher salary scale not only because of better protection when changing schools, but also to avoid unreasonable pay which make them feel their professional status not recognised. To strengthen the protection to teachers changing schools, the EDB will require KGs to indicate on the "Certificate of Service" issued

to leaving teachers relevant employment information, including the rank (such as teachers, Senior Teachers, Vice-principal, Principal) and monthly salary for the new employer's reference. Provided that KG teachers are remunerated reasonably and the TP ratio is kept within 1:11 (number(s) after the decimal place counted as one teacher), when the subsidy and relevant surplus are insufficient to cover teachers' salaries, the relevant expenditure can be recognised in fee revision.

Teachers' continuous professional development

Background and current situation

3.27 With respect to training for KG teachers, the EDB has refined the frameworks for the C(ECE), Bachelor of Early Childhood Education and Postgraduate Diploma in Early Childhood Education programmes in 2018 in consultation with teacher education institutions. The revised frameworks have stepped up the requirements on teaching practicum and enhanced the elements of catering for student diversity (particularly NCS students and students at risk of developmental delay) in the curriculum. Moreover, the EDB enhanced the framework for the Certification Course for Kindergarten Principals in 2019 to strengthen the contents related to principals' competencies in leadership, knowledge, skills and professional attitude.

3.28 As for continuous professional development (CPD) of KG principals and teachers, they should participate in 60 hours of CPD activities according to their needs in every three-year cycle starting from the 2018/19 school year. The modes of activities include structured learning and other professional development activities. The implementation details are devised on a school basis. The EDB has introduced training programmes of various themes, which cover the aspects of school administration and financial management, schools' self-evaluation and continuous development, child development, as well as curriculum planning and implementation, etc., with a view to meeting teachers' needs and professional development. Moreover, the EDB has provided KG principals and teachers with more Mainland and overseas training programmes, such as visit and exchange programmes to Nanjing, Beijing, Wuhan, Japan and Korea.

3.29 On the other hand, to maximise the effectiveness of other support measures (e.g. grant for support to NCS students and the Pilot Scheme on On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services), the EDB has specified the following training targets:

- (a) Regarding the support to students with special needs, each Scheme-KG should have at least one teacher completed the Basic Course as recognised by the EDB by the end of the 2020/21 school year. According to our estimation based on the current situation, about 90% of the Scheme-KGs will have met this target by the end of the 2020/21 school year. As for the remaining 10% of Scheme-KGs, their major reason for not meeting the target is resignation of the trained one. Hence, they need to arrange another teacher to receive the training. Besides, small-scale KGs may have difficulty in arranging their teachers to receive the training. The EDB will provide support to them as appropriate.
- (b) On the support to NCS students, all Scheme-KGs admitting NCS students (irrespective of the number) should have at least one teacher completed the Basic Course recognised by the EDB before the end of the 2020/21 school year. According to the EDB's record, this target has been met by all Scheme-KGs.

3.30 Regarding the training on catering for students with special needs, starting from the 2018/19 school year, the EDB has offered advanced courses and implemented the "School-based Teacher Development Scheme in Supporting Students with Developmental Needs in Kindergartens: A Positive Classroom". The scheme has provided participating KG teachers with training and school-based consultative services to facilitate their mastery of positive behavioural management strategies on catering for student diversity. The KG sector has actively participated in the teacher development scheme since its launch.

Views and discussions

3.31 During the consultation sessions, participants expressed the following views:

- (a) The sector considered the soft target of 60 hours of CPD activities reasonable and appropriate and hoped that it could remain unchanged. The sector proposed to maintain the current training target for teachers regarding support to NCS students.
- (b) Some stakeholders are of the view that novice teachers should possess certain basic attitudes, skills and knowledge and therefore the provision of some compulsory programmes should be required. The EDB should also adopt a more focused approach in providing diversified training programmes for teachers of different ranks (e.g. Senior Teachers and Vice-principals).
- (c) Upon the implementation of the Scheme, more opportunities have been available for teachers to receive training and schools are more than willing to release their teachers for training. It was suggested that there should be greater flexibility (e.g. provision of different class time, online learning mode, etc.) in the arrangements of training programmes to facilitate teachers' participation.
- (d) Some KGs expressed their wish to deploy subsidies to organise school-based overseas training programmes in order to enhance teachers' understanding of the successful experience of other places.
- (e) In general, the professional development programmes for teachers on catering for students with special needs were well received by the KG sector which agreed that the training frameworks of both Basic and Advanced Courses could meet the different professional development needs of teachers. Some stakeholders suggested that short courses with specific themes for teachers at large be organised by the EDB to enhance their understanding of early identification of, and intervention for, students with special needs.
- (f) If KGs are unable to achieve the EDB's training target because the trained teacher has changed to another school, the EDB should show understanding to the special circumstances of the KGs.

Way forward

3.32 The EDB will continue to provide diverse modes (including workshops, seminars, experience sharing, etc.) of professional development programmes for teachers and principals such as courses on curriculum planning, learning and teaching as well as assessment, school administration and financial management, practical legal knowledge about KGs and catering for children's diverse learning needs. We will also consider providing different modes of delivery (such as different course time, online learning and mixed-mode learning). As for the provision of overseas training by schools, given the relatively large amount of resources involved but only a small number of teachers who can be directly benefited, the EDB reckons that such expenditure should not be covered by Government funding or school funds. The EDB will continue to organise exchange tours in the Mainland and overseas to widen teachers' horizon.

3.33 In addition, the EDB will implement the following new measures to facilitate the sustainable development of teachers and to further enhance the quality of KG education:

- (a) To further strengthen the support for middle leaders in KGs, the EDB will provide structured learning programmes of a longer duration (e.g. lasting for several weeks) for experienced teachers, senior teachers or teachers aspiring for senior posts, for in-depth study on various education issues; and provide subsidies for supply teachers in this regard.
- (b) To support KGs' implementation of school-based projects for facilitating teachers' professional development, the EDB plans to provide a one-off grant for Scheme-KGs in the 2021/22 school year. Successful applicants will receive a subsidy from \$100,000 to \$200,000.
- (c) When providing training in catering for students' special needs in future, the EDB will organise short-term Thematic courses on top of the existing Basic and Advanced Courses. In other words, professional development programmes for KG teachers on catering for the diverse needs of students will be composed of Basic, Advanced and Thematic Courses to address the professional development needs of KG teachers. The EDB will

also review KGs' position in meeting the relevant training targets and consider the need for enhancement.

- (d) As for novice teachers, the EDB considers providing them with specific programmes to ensure that they will possess the requisite attitudes, skills and knowledge.

3.34 In general, after the implementation of the Scheme, there are on-going improvements on salary, manpower and career ladder of KG teachers. The EDB will continue to render support to KGs, enhance the quality of teachers, and retain and attract quality KG teachers.

Chapter 4 Monitoring and quality assurance

Monitoring

Background and current situation

4.1 Scheme-KGs should follow the financial management guidelines issued by the EDB in handling financial arrangements and ledgers, and submit audited accounts to the EDB for inspection every year. As regards their sales of school uniforms, textbooks and refreshment, etc. (generally referred to as “miscellaneous charges”), they should not make profits exceeding the specified limit and should record the income of such charges in the annual audited accounts. Other monitoring measures include prohibiting Scheme-KGs from transferring any surplus (in whatever form, including donation) to their SSBs or other organisations. To meet the requirement of enhancing transparency, KGs should disclose their key operational details (including staff information, school facilities, curriculum, school finance information, and the additional charges for optional activities and items), and give consent to publish such information in the “Profile of Kindergartens and Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres” (KG Profile) released to the public. KGs should apply to the EDB for collection or adjustment of school fees. The EDB will handle the applications in accordance with the established criteria, for instance, the income and expenditure situation of KGs and whether the expenditure items are recognised.

4.2 Families with financial needs may apply for the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme (KCFRS) and the Grant for School-related Expenses for Kindergarten Students under the Student Finance Office to defray school fees and related expenses. Starting from the 2014/15 school year, the fee remission ceiling has been uplifted from the weighted average fees of KGs operating HD and WD programmes under the PEVS to the 75th percentile of school fees charged by these KGs.

4.3 Given that the Government’s recurrent expenditure on KG education has substantially increased under the Scheme, the EDB has the responsibility to enhance the governance and transparency of KGs, and step up monitoring. On financial matters, the EDB must ensure KGs’

compliance with the relevant rules and regulations, as well as proper use of Government subsidies and non-government funds (e.g. school fees and surplus from trading operations, etc.). In this connection, we monitor KGs' operation through various means, including routine inspections, quality review, focus inspection, annual submission of audited accounts audited by a certified public accountant, provision of more information in the annual publication of KG Profile and school websites, and requests for submission of relevant information when vetting various applications, etc. On monitoring of school fees, the EDB rigorously examines every KG's application for collecting school fees. The applications must be supported by sufficient justification and data. The KGs concerned have to prove that each expenditure item is necessary. Moreover, the EDB has set ceilings on school fees. KGs should prudently make use of the income from school fees, and ensure that all expenses are reasonable and appropriate to the needs. In principle, school fees collected should be directly used for learning and teaching, school operation and maintaining education services. In the school years from 2017/18 to 2020/21, Scheme-KGs, regardless of whether they applied for adjusting school fees, were required to submit schedules on details of the proposed school fees, estimated income, expenditure of each item, etc. for EDB's approval for the fees.

4.4 For miscellaneous charges, the EDB has, through issuing circulars, reminded KGs to keep the sale of school items and provision of paid services to a minimum, and observe the guiding principles laid down in the EDB circulars, including purchase entirely on a voluntary basis, no profit from the sale of textbooks, profits from other items (if any) not to exceed 15%, etc. All profits from trading operations must be ploughed back into the KGs' operation and provision of education services.

4.5 In addition, schools are currently required to disclose their key operational details, including school fees, application fee, registration fee and reference prices for school items sold and paid services provided. Scheme-KGs should also give consent to publish such information in the KG Profile and upload such information onto their school websites for parents' reference.

4.6 To effectively monitor schools' financial position, upon the end of each school year, Scheme-KGs should submit the audited accounts to the EDB. When the EDB considers whether a KG is eligible to stay in the Scheme, one of the requirements is submission of the annual audited accounts, follow up actions taken and rectification made in accordance with EDB's requirements. In addition, the EDB also conducts audit inspections in a timely manner. If irregularities are found, the EDB will require the schools to follow up and provide assistance.

4.7 Under the principle of no cross-subsidisation, Scheme-KGs should apportion the income and expenditure among different portions (KG and child care centre), streams (local curriculum and non-local curriculum) and sessions (HD, WD and LWD). For HD and WD/LWD sessions, the ratio of expenditure between a HD student and a WD/LWD student should be, in principle, approximately 1:1.6 to 1:2. The proportion of income and expenditure among different sections and streams could be roughly determined according to the scale.

4.8 As regards the KCFRS, when implementing the Scheme from the 2017/18 school year, the Government followed the prevailing arrangements in fee remission with rates of 100%, 75% or 50% for KG students from families passing the means test and meeting the eligibility criteria under the KCFRS. The fee remission ceiling continues to be set at the 75th percentile of HD and WD school fees charged by the respective KGs.

Views and discussions

4.9 The KG sector generally agreed that, under the principle of prudent use of public funds, the EDB should properly monitor schools' financial management. KGs were concerned about the administrative work and pressure arising from the detailed and stringent requirements in financial arrangements (e.g. procurement, issuing cheques / receipts, the apportionment of accounts, account keeping, etc.). The KG sector hoped that the EDB would understand the difficulties faced by KGs. Taking procurement as an example, KGs are required to follow the Guidelines on Procurement Procedures in Kindergartens in hiring services or making purchases, and preparing separate ledgers for different items. KGs urged

the EDB to explore the feasibility of relaxing the financial requirements, or provide KGs with resources to employ an accounting clerk to assist in the relevant work.

4.10 At present, fee remission under the KCFRS is capped at the 75th percentile of school fees charged by Scheme-KGs. Parents need to pay the difference if the school fee charged by their children's KG exceeds the ceiling. Regarding the applications for school fee revision, KGs generally considered that the information required is excessive and too detailed. In respect of trading operations, KGs opined that sales of school uniforms, textbooks and refreshment on parents' behalf are primarily for parents' convenience and seeking more reasonable prices for parents. The sector considered the existing monitoring adequate, for example, purchase from parents is entirely on a voluntary basis; schools have to adopt procurement procedures that ensure fairness and justice, as required by the EDB; the profits should not exceed 15% of the costs and all the profits generated should be used for school operation. As for whether a ceiling should be set on each miscellaneous charge, the sector generally considered a rigidly fixed ceiling not feasible. It is because each KG has its own school-based needs, and the goods or services provided for the same item (e.g. food for snacks, and types and portions of drinks) may vary greatly among schools, and hence not comparable. Since only a very small number of schools might collect high charges for certain miscellaneous items, it was suggested that the EDB should take follow-up actions on the individual cases concerned. Flexibility and operational needs of the entire sector should not be affected merely because of a few exceptional cases.

Way forward

4.11 To further support families with financial needs and provide them with more school choices, **the Government is seeking to adjust the fee remission ceiling under the KCFRS from the existing 75th percentile to the 100th percentile of the school fees charged by respective HD and WD Scheme-KGs, so that parents receiving full fee remission do not need to pay any difference.** Consequential to raising the ceiling for full fee remission, the remission level for 50% and 75% remission will also be raised accordingly, hence benefitting these students as well. Taking the

2020/21 school year as reference, it is estimated that about 4 800 KG students (including those who are receiving 100%, 75% and 50% fee remission), will benefit from the proposed enhancement.

4.12 Under the EDB's current requirements, the ratio of expenditure between a HD student and a WD/LWD student should be, in principle, approximately 1:1.6 to 1:2. Having reviewed the situation of Scheme-KGs over the past few years, the EDB considers such an arrangement effective, which not only allows sufficient flexibility to cater for school-based circumstances, but also upholds the principle of no cross-subsidisation. As such, the arrangement will continue.

4.13 We will make best endeavours to strike a balance between effective monitoring and streamlining administration. On school fee revision, having regard to the views of the sector, the EDB has introduced simplified procedures to fee revision for the 2021/22 school year, in a bid to reduce schools' administrative work and expedite the vetting process. KGs only need to complete simple forms if they propose freezing or reducing school fees and they could submit more detailed information later, for which the EDB will provide a template for schools' use. We will follow up on a case-by-case basis if irregularities are found in individual KGs. **The EDB will make reference to the experience and explore the feasibility of expanding the coverage of the simplified procedures to KGs proposing fee increase not exceeding a specified percentage.**

4.14 As regards financial management, since public funds are involved, schools should handle procurement and other financial matters in accordance with the relevant requirements. The EDB is of the view that employing additional accounting clerk does not provide a fundamental solution to the problem. Instead, it is more appropriate to look into the streamlining of administrative work and strengthening training. In this connection, the EDB will take forward the following measures:

- (a) Providing more relevant training for school personnel responsible for administrative work and financial management, and providing schools with clearer and more detailed guidelines so that they could have better understanding of the principles, and thus provide the required information as appropriate.

- (b) Reviewing the forms and reports that schools currently need to submit and promoting the use of electronic means in the submission of forms and reports which facilitates easy editing and updating, hence reducing schools' administrative work.
- (c) Enhancing EDB's webpages to facilitate more convenient access to information, tools and templates on financial management so as to better support schools in handling financial matters.

4.15 As regards miscellaneous charges, KGs currently are required to disclose in the KG Profile the cost of school items sold and paid services only if they are sold by the schools or procured on parents' behalf. Yet, from the perspective of parents, the concern is on the charges they need to pay, instead of whether these services are sold by the schools. As such, to further enhance transparency, the EDB will require Scheme-KGs to list in the KG Profile the charges for major school items and services, regardless whether they are directly sold or procured on parents' behalf. To ensure that KGs act in line with the circulars and guidelines under the Scheme when conducting trading operations, the EDB will require KGs to undertake in the application form for joining the Scheme that they would follow the procurement procedures as required and declare any interest involved. If individual schools are found selling very expensive miscellaneous items, the EDB will approach the schools concerned to request for explanations and improvements.

Quality assurance

Background and current situation

4.16 Quality Assurance Framework for KGs comprises School Self-evaluation (SSE) and Quality Review (QR). All Scheme-KGs are required to conduct on-going SSE and undergo QR for promoting sustainable development in schools and accountability. To ensure thorough assessment on school performance, the EDB has formulated a set of comprehensive Performance Indicators (PIs). KGs should conduct a holistic review on their current state of performance with reference to the PIs. They should then compile and analyse their SSE findings to

strategically devise a development plan for the following school year. In the QR process, review teams from the EDB will make professional judgment on the overall school performance by making reference to KG's areas of concern and the PIs. During the on-site QR visits, the review teams will conduct lesson observations, scrutinise children's work, interview principals, teaching staff, parents and children as well as review school documents so as to examine how KGs promote sustainable development through SSE. The QR reports will be uploaded onto the EDB website to facilitate parents' and the public's grasp of the relevant information.

4.17 Upon implementation of the Scheme, the EDB has refined the PIs by taking into account the development of KGs and characteristics in children's development and learning. Under each of the four macro-level Domains, the PIs are subcategorised into tiers of Area, Performance Indicator, Aspect and Evidence of Performance. A set of Guiding Questions has been prepared under each Aspect. Differentiated Evidence of Performance has also been provided as reference to facilitate the sustainable development of KGs. The clearer, more precise and more user-friendly PIs enable KGs to conduct SSE in a more holistic and focused manner.

4.18 Regarding QR, the EDB holistically examines the effectiveness of KGs' development with reference to the refined PIs to assess whether the schools have achieved the prescribed standards. If areas for improvement are identified, the EDB will specify them and offer recommendations in the QR reports so as to facilitate KGs' self-improvement on a continuous basis. Starting from the 2018/19 school year, in addition to the Chinese version, English version of the QR report has been uploaded to the EDB website for reference of the public. When assessing a KG's application for joining the Scheme, the EDB will also refer to the results of QR. To further enhance transparency and capitalise on the professional knowledge and experience of frontline principals, the EDB implemented a pilot scheme from the 2018/19 to 2020/21 school years, under which serving KG principals joined some QR visits as external observers. They would share their observation during the oral feedback session but would not assess school performance.

4.19 Moreover, the EDB conducts focus inspection on a random basis in every school year to understand more about schools' situation in the Domain of Learning and Teaching and to offer verbal and written feedback to schools. In the 2018/19 school year, the EDB doubled the number of focus inspection every year to around 50, so as to strengthen monitoring and ensure the quality of KG education.

4.20 From the QR conducted in the 2017/18 and 2018/19 school years¹⁸, KGs have in general made significant improvement in the following aspects as compared with previous years:

- (a) When formulating policies, most KGs are able to fully consider and address the views of their staff, set up multi-dimensional channels to promote communication among staff and develop team spirit.
- (b) In general, KGs can design their curriculum according to the objectives of education and children's developmental needs. The coverage of the curriculum is comprehensive. Most KGs are able to provide children with opportunities for self-directed and free learning through play by strengthening the element of free exploration. Teachers generally follow the rationale of child-centredness and learning through play when drawing up teaching plans with clear goals and focuses, implementation procedures as well as assessment of effectiveness. The school management and teachers regularly review the implementation of the curriculum, take follow-up actions and make improvement as appropriate.
- (c) KGs have made significant improvement in setting up an environment that is conducive to learning. In general, KGs are aware of the importance of school environment in children's learning. By taking into account children's interests, abilities and learning needs, teachers are able to plan and create a real-life setting and provide diversified materials for children so as to provide ample opportunity for children to undergo exploration activities and interactive games.

¹⁸ As for the 2019/20 and 2020/21 school year, as face-to-face classes were suspended at different intervals in KGs due to social event and COVID-19 epidemic, QR had to be postponed.

- (d) KGs develop students' reading habit by enriching their book collection with diverse themes, launching parent-child reading programmes, organising interesting games, etc.
- (e) KGs create a real-life language environment to facilitate NCS children's learning through ample opportunities for them to interact with Chinese-speaking children. KGs coordinate and optimise the use of internal and external resources, or collaborate with parents and inter-disciplinary service teams to assist NCS children in learning Chinese.
- (f) Most KGs are able to take care of children with diverse needs with well-defined mechanism in place for identifying and supporting children with special needs as early as possible. The school management actively arranges teachers to receive relevant training and encourages teachers to cater for learner diversity by adopting diversified strategies, such as alternative seating arrangements, strengthened peer interaction and design of multi-level games.
- (g) KGs attach greater importance to the communication and connection with parents. In addition to organising various activities to foster home-school co-operation, KGs also strengthen parent education for enhancing parents' understanding of child development and quality KG education. Most KGs maintain close contact with parents and establish multiple channels for parents to learn about their children's performance. Moreover, they set up effective mechanisms to handle and follow up parents' views systematically, and in tandem, enhance the transparency of school management.

Views and discussions

4.21 As reflected from the questionnaires returned by KGs upon completion of each QR, an overwhelming majority of principals and teaching staff considered QR as useful in validating SSE results, facilitating schools to formulate development goals and plans, and providing recommendations that meet the needs of their development.

KGs also agreed that self-evaluation could facilitate school development while QR has a sustainable impact on school development.

4.22 The sector in general shared the view that the refinement of PIs was built on the basis of experience and outcomes of SSE and QR, in line with the implementation of the KG education policy and the use of Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide (Curriculum Guide).

4.23 The interim review of the Pilot Scheme on External Observers in QR shows that stakeholders generally hold a positive view towards the pilot scheme, concurring that it helps enhance the transparency of QR.

Way forward

4.24 The EDB will continue to enhance the governance and transparency of KGs and step up the monitoring through the Quality Assurance Framework. By means of QR, focus inspection, etc., the EDB holistically examines the effectiveness of KGs' development and offers suggestions for improvement in light of school context, so as to facilitate KGs' continuous self-improvement and enhance the quality of KG education. In addition, the EDB will continue to promote the refined PIs to KGs and shares the observations from the QR conducted throughout the year as well as school's good practices with KGs, with a view to facilitating KGs' effective self-evaluation and promoting sustainable development of KGs.

4.25 Upon the completion of the Pilot Scheme on External Observers in QR, the EDB will examine its effectiveness and consider if this scheme should be regularised.

Chapter 5 School premises and facilities

KG premises

Background and current situation

5.1 KGs are operated in different premises, such as self-owned school premises, privately leased premises, public housing estates and premises owned by their SSBs. In general, there is wide diversity in school premises and facilities. The number of classrooms in KGs varies from two or three to over 30. There are also great differences in the quality and quantity of KGs' indoor and outdoor space as well as various types of facilities.

5.2 Before implementation of the Scheme, the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines (HKPSG) stipulated the planning standards as 730 HD and 250 WD places for every 1 000 children in the age group of three to under six. Prior to the commencement of projects on public housing estates or large-scale residential development, space is reserved for education services in accordance with the HKPSG.

5.3 Under the Scheme, the EDB has reviewed the part on the provision of KG places in the HKPSG to provide more KG places, particularly WD places. In July 2018, the relevant standards have been revised from 730 HD and 250 WD places to 500 HD and 500 WD places for every 1 000 children in the age group of three to under six.

5.4 In addition, the EDB endeavours to increase the supply of government-owned KG premises. From 2018 to 2020, a total of 11 KG premises in public housing estates were open for application by eligible SSBs. Besides, we have reserved a site for a pilot run of co-location of a KG and a primary school. School Allocation Exercises are conducted on a fair and competitive basis. The quality of education as shown by SSBs' proposed school plans and their track records in operating schools is the prime consideration. In the 2020/21 school year, around 50% of the Scheme-KGs are operating in KG premises located in public housing estates.

5.5 To improve the environment of KG premises, the EDB revised the Schedule of Accommodation (SoA) for KGs in October 2017, with the indoor floor area for each student increased by 20%. Specifically, apart from an increase in areas for classroom and indoor activity, there are newly added facilities such as a multi-purpose room/area and a small group teaching room. The revised SoA for KGs has been incorporated into the “Operation Manual for Pre-primary Institutions”. The Government will take into account the revised SoA as far as practicable when reserving space for new KGs in public housing estates.

5.6 KG premises are generally small in size, with limited space and facilities for children to learn through play and experiential activities. To address KGs’ need for more space to conduct different activities, the EDB has been actively exploring the feasibility of setting up resource centres as a medium-/long-term measure to facilitate the organisation of experiential learning activities for KG students, teacher training programmes and parent education activities. In this connection, the EDB collaborated with the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and capitalised on its resources to set up KG education resource centres at the Lions Nature Education Centre in Tsiu Hang, Sai Kung and the Hong Kong Wetland Park in Yuen Long in November 2018. The EDB also commissioned the Hong Kong Baptist University to develop relevant learning and teaching resource packages to cultivate children’s positive attitudes towards caring for the nature and appreciation of life as well as leaflets for parents to introduce to them the concepts of free exploration, learning through play and roles of parents, including their proper attitudes towards the modes of play adopted by children, ways to create opportunities for free play, points to note for free play, etc. The relevant materials have been uploaded onto the EDB website for use of teachers and parents. The resource centres have been highly commended by visiting teachers. The EDB and AFCD are planning to expand the resource centre in Tsiu Hang to provide more outdoor areas and indoor spaces in facilitating children’s learning through free play.

Views and discussions

5.7 There were views that KG premises provided by the Government are limited in number. Due to the large number of applicant bodies and

the need to submit detailed proposals and documents in the application, some KGs may choose not to submit their applications given the slim chance of success. With the decline in enrollment, the EDB encourages KGs to relocate to newly developed areas. However, some KGs considered that relocation to other districts would affect their provision of services in the original districts. Besides, in view of the huge expenses involved, many KGs were not interested in relocation. The sector hoped that more government-owned KG premises would be made available for application. Some suggested that the EDB should accord priority to applications for relocation and provide KGs with an additional subsidy for relocation.

5.8 As regards rental subsidy, stakeholders generally opined that the EDB should continue to provide KGs with rental subsidy under the existing arrangements. Yet, KGs operated in private premises are facing pressure from rent increases, and some KGs are suffering from financial hardship because their actual rental cost exceeds the market rent as assessed by the Rating and Valuation Department (RVD) and such difference has to be borne by non-government funds as it cannot be charged to Government subsidy or school fees. Though the EDB encourages KGs to relocate to premises that incur lower costs or apply for school premises provided by the Government, most KGs are not interested in relocation because of the huge expenses involved. As for the KGs currently under the four-year grace period of rental subsidy, they are concerned about the possibility of substantial increase in school fees within a short period of time when the grace period ends at the close of the 2020/21 school year.

5.9 As regards maintenance of school premises, the KG sector was generally of the view that the existing premises maintenance grant can alleviate their financial burden on premises maintenance. However, currently, only KGs operating in self-owned school premises or premises owned by their SSBs / operators are eligible for the grant and the number of KGs so benefited are limited. Besides, premises maintenance grant does not cover renovation works. For renovation works, KGs will have to use the portion of the unit subsidy other than teaching staff salary, accumulated surplus or school fees collected. For KGs with poor premises conditions, it is a financial burden for them.

5.10 The sector agreed that the KG education resource centres at the Lions Nature Education Centre and the Hong Kong Wetland Park are conducive to KG students' learning. Some hoped that more KG education resource centres could be set up in other districts in view of the relatively remote locations of the aforementioned KG education resource centres in the New Territories.

5.11 The Government has been planning to set up a standalone KG education centre. A total of 16 consultation sessions were conducted to collect opinions of stakeholders (including early childhood education experts/academics, professionals from different fields, and frontline early childhood educators) on the design of the centre. The sector was pleased with the proposal, looking forward to funding approval and its early implementation. Stakeholders opined that the education centre should be different from a playground, designed with reference to the KG curriculum, needs from the perspective of children, and cater for students with special needs and NCS students. Regarding the design of the centre, stakeholders made valuable suggestions which included providing sufficient space and diversified materials for students' free play; facilities for activities with elements of science, nature, environmental protection, culture, values education, etc.; promoting an inclusive culture by helping children to have an understanding of China and cultural diversity; and making good use of the latest technology. The sector also expected that the EDB could make use of the resources of the KG education centre to organise teacher training programmes and parent education activities. Parents would better understand the relationship between children's growth and the learning mode through on-site experience, and the effectiveness of learning through play and free exploration, with a view to bringing them away from mechanical drilling and over-teaching.

Way forward

5.12 The Government will continue to earmark sufficient space for KG premises in new public housing estates with new demand, explore ways to provide more government-owned KG premises, and explore the feasibility of co-location of KGs and primary schools.

5.13 We will continue to encourage KGs operating in private premises to apply for relocation to government-owned school premises. To encourage KGs in districts with aging population to relocate to newly developed areas, or KGs at rented private premises to relocate to premises with lower rent or to apply for government-owned school premises, the EDB announced in August 2020 that a two-year Pilot Scheme on Relocation Grant was launched in the 2020/21 school year, under which each successful applicant can receive a one-off grant of \$1.5 million. **To further encourage more KGs to apply for relocation to government-owned KG premises, the EDB will extend the Relocation Grant to the 2022/23 school year.** Furthermore, the EDB has streamlined the mechanism for allocation of KG premises in 2021 with a view to encouraging more KGs to apply for relocation. Priority will be accorded to those applying for relocation. KGs' overall operating standard and needs are the key considerations in considering the applications.

5.14 As regards the rental, about 30 KGs were paying market rent and were eligible for full rental subsidy prior to the implementation of the Scheme. These KGs are currently under a grace period of four years (from the 2017/18 to the 2020/21 school years), after which their rental subsidy is subject to "dual" caps¹⁹, in a similar manner as other KGs paying market rent. The EDB understands that individual KGs might need to increase their school fees due to the reduction in rental subsidy after the end of the grace period. In light that the current economic situation is not yet stable, and to minimise the impacts on parents, **the grace period will be extended for two years (i.e. 2021/22 and 2022/23 school years), during which the amount of subsidy will be decreased by 15% each year to facilitate schools' gradual transition to the new arrangement.**

5.15 Currently, some KGs with the rental cost exceeding the market rent as assessed by the RVD have to deploy non-government funds to make up the difference. The EDB considers that neither the Government's resources nor school fees from parents should be used to subsidise owners' unreasonable rental rates, and thus it is necessary to adopt the market rent as assessed by the RVD as an objective yardstick. At present, there are only a small number (less than 50 KGs) of such schools. We suggest

¹⁹ 50% open market rental as assessed by Rating and Valuation Department (RVD), or 15% of the "basic half-day unit subsidy" for all eligible students under the Scheme, whichever is lower.

these schools to negotiate with the landlords on a reasonable level of rent or relocate to premises leased at a reasonable cost.

5.16 To address the concern about renovation of KG premises, the EDB launched a two-year Pilot Scheme on Renovation Grant in the 2020/21 school year so as to alleviate KGs' financial burden in improving the school environment. Each successful applicant receives a grant of \$0.5 million and the estimated annual quota of the pilot scheme is 50. After the launching of Pilot Scheme on Renovation Grant, it was well received by the KG sector. Taking into account the available resources and needs from the KG sector, **the quota will be increased by 200 in the 2021/22 school year** to benefit more KGs.

5.17 The EDB will spare no effort to take forward the plan for setting up a KG education centre to provide activities which could not be conducted in KGs because of inadequate space. In the meantime, the EDB will continue to explore how to collaborate with other organisations or government departments to assign designated areas suitable for KG students and enhance learning elements for KG students in the existing facilities or venues. The EDB will also provide KGs with information about the government facilities suitable for visits or experiential activities of KG students and encourage KGs to make good use of the existing resources which are suitable for KG students.

Chapter 6 Curriculum, student’s learning and parent education

Curriculum and students’ learning

Background and current situation

6.1 The EDB is committed to providing students with diversified and quality education, developing their capacity in lifelong learning through a broad and balanced curriculum and hence promoting their whole-person development. In February 2017, the EDB issued the updated Curriculum Guide for KGs that, with “child-centredness” as the core value of KG curriculum, promotes learning through play and sets out major curriculum aims, including fostering children’s balanced development in the domains of ethics, intellect, physique, social skills and aesthetics; developing their interest in learning; instilling in them positive values and attitudes; cultivating in them an inquisitive mind and eagerness to explore; and helping them develop good living habits and a strong and healthy body. Since its implementation, the Curriculum Guide is effective in promoting “child-centredness” as the core value of KG curriculum and “learning through play”. In the Curriculum Guide, there is a part dedicated to illustrating practical pedagogy and teaching strategies for teaching Chinese to NCS children, so as to facilitate their integration into school life and mastery of the Chinese language as early as possible. Besides, the Curriculum Guide stresses the interface between KG and primary education, nurturing children’s interest in learning and helping them build a solid foundation for learning. The primary school curriculum should not be advanced to KG. It is also clearly stated in the Curriculum Guide that children in nursery class (K1) should not be required to hold a pencil and write; children in lower and upper KG classes (K2 and K3) should not be required to do mechanical copying and calculation; and KGs should not arrange homework that is excessive, frequent or too difficult, so as not to cause unnecessary pressure and drilling.

6.2 To support KG teachers in implementing “learning through play”, the EDB organises relevant professional development programmes for teachers every year. The EDB has also provided the “Play-based Learning Exemplar”, which includes lesson plans, short videos and learning materials to facilitate KGs in planning the learning activities and

setting up the learning environment, on the EDB webpage for reference. The EDB also offers professional advice on the planning and implementation of the curriculum in KGs, through the provision of on-site professional support, the Mainland-Hong Kong Teachers Exchange and Collaboration Programme and the establishment of professional learning communities.

6.3 If it is discovered in QR that the curriculum or homework of a KG does not meet the abilities and developmental needs of children, such as requiring children to complete excessive or very difficult homework, or do mechanical copying exercises, the EDB will require the KG to stop the arrangements and make rectification immediately. The QR report will be uploaded onto the EDB website for reference of the public. According to the observations from QR in the 2018/19 and 2019/20 school years, most KGs made an effort to enhance the element of free exploration in play and placed emphasis on children's self-directed and free participation in learning, thus providing children with high quality play experiences.

6.4 The EDB renders timely assistance to KGs and parents so as to support children's continuous learning. During the suspension of face-to-face classes due to the COVID-19 epidemic, KGs had to adopt diversified modes to facilitate children's learning at home. As such, the EDB issued a letter to all KGs in May 2020 to introduce the principles and strategies in supporting children's learning at home. A seminar was organised in November 2020 to share the feasible strategies and experience with the sector. Besides, the EDB implemented the Gift Book Scheme and Do It Yourself Handicraft and Learning Package Scheme (Learning Package Scheme) in December 2020. Under the Gift Book Scheme, the EDB provided a subsidy based on the number of eligible students at a rate of \$100 for every student in each of the 2020/21 to 2021/22 school years for schools to purchase the books on behalf of their students. As for the Learning Package Scheme, each of the successful applicants receives a grant capped at \$50,000 or \$80,000, depending on its scale, to implement the home learning programmes.

Views and discussions

6.5 The sector generally supported the principle and rationale of the Curriculum Guide. As observed during school visits, KGs have made good efforts in improving the school environment so as to facilitate children to learn through play. Regarding the implementation of moral education, quite a number of KGs have included enhancement to moral education as their major concern or priority task, and strengthened the element of moral education in the curriculum. They have made use of stories and experiential activities to integrate moral education into their daily teaching. Most KGs would organise activities on promoting smooth interface between KG and primary education, and help children gain some preliminary ideas about primary school life.

6.6 Based on the consultancy study, principals and teachers are having a better grasp of the content of the Curriculum Guide. Nearly all participating teachers agreed to the notion of “learning through play” and have provided students with more opportunities to play and explore through different measures and strategies, e.g. reduction of homework, extension of non-teacher-driven activities and allocation of more time for free play and free choice activities.

6.7 The KG sector generally appreciated the EDB’s support under the Gift Book Scheme and Learning Package Scheme. As for the way to further prevent KGs from excessive drilling, views of the sector are as below:

- (a) Many parents put much emphasis on children’s acquisition of knowledge, particularly those of K3 students, as they are concerned whether their children could adapt to the learning modes in primary schools. Thus, some parents requested KGs to include elements of subject learning and advance the learning at primary schools to KGs. The sector sees the need to enhance parent education, change parents’ mindset, and help parents understand the importance of play in children’s growth and learning as well as the negative impacts of drilling on children’s development.

- (b) Primary schools should understand the abilities of KG children, help smoothen the interface between KG and primary education by helping children gradually adapt to primary school life.
- (c) The EDB should produce videos for schools to introduce to parents the objectives of the KG curriculum and the characteristics of children's development and learning, so as to promote home-school co-operation in fostering healthy and balanced development in children.

Way forward

6.8 The EDB will continue to provide diverse modes of training and school-based support services to help KGs strengthen the leadership in curriculum planning and facilitate the development of school-based curriculum. In order to enhance parents' understanding on children's development and to avoid excessive drilling, the EDB will implement the following measures:

- (a) To continue to examine if any KGs practised drilling through QR and daily contacts with KGs. Also, when considering whether a KG can stay in the Scheme, the EDB will take into account its overall quality, including its performance in learning and teaching.
- (b) To keep reminding primary schools to offer appropriate support to children when they newly transit from KGs to primary schools, including organising activities that involve the participation of both KGs and primary schools, encouraging primary schools not to arrange any dictation or examination for Primary One students in the first school term, etc. It is hoped that concerted efforts will ensure children's smooth transition from KG to primary education.
- (c) To strengthen parent education in KGs, the details of which are set out in paragraphs 6.22 and 6.23 below.

Supporting students with diverse needs

Background and current situation

6.9 On support to students with special needs, the Government has all along been working through the collaborative efforts of various departments for early identification of children with special needs and early provision of support to them. In general, the Department of Health and the Hospital Authority are responsible for assessment, treatment and referral to rehabilitation services. The Social Welfare Department provides pre-school rehabilitation services for disabled children from new born to aged 6, and helps the families of these children cater for their special needs. The EDB provides training for KG teachers.

6.10 Under the Scheme, we strengthen the support to students with diverse needs through diverse modes. To support children with special needs, the Labour and Welfare Bureau has launched the Pilot Scheme on On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services (OPRS) since November 2015. Multi-disciplinary service teams (comprising occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech therapists, clinical/educational psychologists, social workers and special child care workers) provide professional support to children with special needs who are studying in KGs/ kindergarten-cum-child care centres (KG-cum-CCCs). The purpose of the services is to support children attending KGs and KG-cum-CCCs and waiting for subvented pre-school rehabilitation services. The service teams also provide professional support and assistance to parents and KG teachers/child care workers. The Government has regularised the OPRS in October 2018, and significantly increased the number of service places from 3 000 to about 8 000 in the 2020/21 school year, which will be further increased to 10 000 in the 2022/23 school year. In Scheme-KG, the overall requirement in TP ratio has been raised to 1:11 so that teachers could have more rooms for professional collaboration to cater for the diverse needs of students (including those at risk of development delay) and for coordination with the multi-disciplinary service team under OPRS to support students with special needs.

6.11 On support to NCS students, in the 2017/18 and 2018/19 school years, an additional grant comparable to mid-point of the salary range of one KG teacher was provided to Scheme-KGs admitting eight or more NCS students (about \$360,000 and \$380,000 in the 2017/18 and 2018/19 school year respectively). With effect from the 2019/20 school year, the grant has been enhanced as a five-tiered grant for Scheme-KGs with subsidies based on the number of NCS students admitted. A KG admitting only one NCS student also receives the grant, and the grant rate for the highest tier is a double of the previous level. In the 2020/21 school year, the grant rate for KGs ranged from approximately \$50,000 (tier 1) to \$800,000 (tier 5). With the grant provided by the EDB, KGs employ different strategies to support NCS students, such as employing dedicated teachers or teaching assistants to take care of NCS students, purchasing books and teaching materials, and providing parent education and translation services. Through visits to KGs receiving the grant, the EDB provides schools with professional advice and support, monitors their deployment of the grant, and identifies successful experiences for sharing among KGs.

6.12 To encourage KGs to provide more information to parents of NCS children, the EDB has provided a one-off Website Enhancement Grant to all Scheme-KGs in the 2020/21 school year. A grant of \$10,000 has been provided for a school providing basic school information in both Chinese and English on their websites. This should include an introduction to the school, information on admission arrangements, school fees, the school's support for NCS children, etc. Schools that provide all information on their websites in both Chinese and English are provided with the grant at the rate of \$20,000.

Views and discussions

6.13 Stakeholders held the following views on the Government's support to students with developmental needs and NCS students:

- (a) Stakeholders commended the EDB for enhancing the grant to a five-tiered grant to support NCS students starting from the 2019/20 school year, so that KGs admitting a small number of NCS students are also entitled to the additional subsidy.

- (b) The sector opined that the Website Enhancement Grant has helped schools in improving their services and providing more information to parents of NCS children.
- (c) Some stakeholders opined that KGs need to work with outside organisations (e.g. providers of social worker services or OPRS). Hence, it was suggested that designated teachers should be assigned to coordinate the work related to support to students with special needs.

Way forward

6.14 As regards the sector's view of creating rooms for teachers to coordinate the support for students with special needs, the TP ratio has been enhanced from 1:15 (including the principal) in previous years to 1:11 (not including the principal) under the Scheme. This allows teachers to have more capacity to conduct various professional activities and capitalise on the resources to cater for the diverse needs of students. Collaboration with multi-disciplinary service teams of the OPRS is a vital part. The EDB has also enhanced teacher training and set out training targets. In tandem, the EDB continues to develop evidence-based intervention models and teaching resource packages for KG teachers to cater for children with special needs. On teacher training, starting from the 2018/19 school year, the EDB has been organising Advanced Courses. The programmes, comprising both the Basic and Advanced Courses, cover contents on fundamental knowledge and skills in early identification and intervention, multi-disciplinary collaboration and strategies related to coordination of support services. The EDB will continue to promote an inclusive culture in KGs, and make sustained effort to provide more training for KG teachers for catering for children with special needs. The EDB will review the implementation of the training target and consider the need of further enhancement.

6.15 The EDB will continue to keep in view the progress of the measures to support students with diverse learning needs, and consider introducing appropriate and effective improvement measures as necessary.

Parent education

Background and current situation

6.16 Parents not only play a crucial role in nurturing their children in their early life, but also serve as the children's role models. Hence, Scheme-KGs are required to step up parent education to enhance their understanding on children's developmental needs, their roles in supporting their children, and to share good practices in facilitating healthy growth of children through family support. The EDB has all along encouraged KGs to set up Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) to strengthen connection and establish partnership between parents and schools. The EDB provides the Home-School Co-operation Grants to support KGs in organising activities on home-school co-operation or parent education. The number of Scheme-KGs with PTAs has increased from 268 (accounting for 36% of KGs under the PEVS) before the implementation of the Scheme in the 2016/17 school year to 304 (accounting for 40% of Scheme-KGs) in the 2019/20 school year.

6.17 To strengthen parent education, the EDB rolled out a parent education framework²⁰ for KGs in the 2018/19 school year, which serves as reference for schools in planning their parent education activities. KGs are encouraged to draw reference from the framework in organising school-based or joint school parent education activities. The EDB has also drawn reference from the above framework and commissioned tertiary institutions to organise territory-wide parent education talks from the 2018/19 school year onwards to enhance parents' understanding of children's learning characteristics and diversity at KG stage, and promote positive parenting for children's healthy and happy development. Moreover, the EDB has, in collaboration with the Department of Health, organised talks to share with parents the knowledge of child development.

²⁰ With the focus on "Roles of parents with children at KG age", the framework covers three major domains (i.e. (1) Learn more about quality KG education; (2) Understand children's growth; and (3) Respect children's uniqueness), and eight themes (i.e. "Choose a quality KG", "Curriculum promoting children's balanced development", "Home-school co-operation", "Interface between KG and primary education", "Children's developmental and learning characteristics", "Success is not determined at the scratch line", "Learner diversity of children", and "Do not compare children with each other").

6.18 In February 2018, the EDB launched the Smart Parent Net to provide information on parent education to facilitate parents with children studying in KGs and primary and secondary schools to have easy access to information about supporting children’s physical and mental development. In June 2021, a new feature, Parent Education Activity Information Hub, was added to the Smart Parent Net, which serves as a one-stop platform to provide parents with information on parent education courses and activities.

6.19 Moreover, the Education Commission set up a Task Force on Home-School Co-operation and Parent Education (Task Force) in December 2017. The report of the Task Force was released in April 2019. The EDB has fully accepted the recommendations and relevant measures are implemented progressively, among which include:

- (a) Doubling the amounts of the Set Up Grant and Annual Grant that each KG may apply²¹ starting from the 2019/20 school year to encourage KGs to set up PTAs for promoting home-school connection and co-operation.
- (b) Doubling the amount of the Subsidy for Home-School Co-operation Activities and the Subsidy for Joint Home-School Co-operation Project²² that KGs could apply annually. The EDB encourages KGs to make use of the additional resources to organise more parent education activities.
- (c) Launching a territory-wide “Positive Parent Campaign” to facilitate the public’s understanding about the importance of happy and healthy development of children, enhancing parents’ awareness of positive parenting through a series of publicity activities, and disseminating the message on fostering children’s whole-person development as well as avoiding excessive competition.

²¹ The amount of Set Up Grant has increased from \$5,000 to \$10,000, and the amount of Annual Grant has increased from \$5,474 in the 2018/19 school year to \$11,266 and \$11,480 in the 2019/20 and 2020/21 school years respectively.

²² Starting from the 2019/20 school year, the ceiling on these two subsidies has increased from \$5,000 to \$10,000 and from \$10,000 to \$20,000 respectively.

Views and discussions

6.20 The sector recognised the importance of parent education. However, owing to the small scale and limited human resources, many KGs are unable to actively promote parent education in school. They hoped the EDB could enhance support to KGs in promoting parent education.

6.21 Some parents expressed their observations that learning and teaching activities in KGs have become more diversified, with greater emphasis on learning through play. Notwithstanding their appreciation about the benefits of learning through play, many parents worried that their children might display weak academic performance, which would in turn affect their chance of admission to primary schools, and that children might find it difficult to interface with the primary curriculum smoothly. Some parents considered that the EDB should provide more resources to PTAs for promoting parent education.

Way forward

6.22 To further strengthen KGs' parent education, the EDB has commissioned a tertiary institution to develop a curriculum framework on parent education (kindergarten). To encourage schools to strengthen school-based parent education, **an additional one-off subsidy of \$50,000 to \$60,000 will be provided to KGs to kick start structured parent education programmes in the 2021/22 school year.** In this regard, the EDB will assist in liaison with early childhood education experts, SSBs, tertiary institutions, etc. to help KGs as necessary in the design and delivery of structured parent education programmes.

6.23 The EDB will continue to, by different means of territory-wide parent education talks, videos, booklets, educational activities, etc., raise parents' awareness about the importance of fostering children's whole-person development and avoidance of excessive competition.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

7.1 The EDB commenced a comprehensive review on the implementation of the KG education scheme in mid-2019. Stakeholders were consulted. The review covers a broad range of areas. Other than exploring the feasibility of introducing a salary scale for KG teachers, we also reviewed the implementation of the Scheme in different areas including funding modes, teacher manpower, professional development, monitoring and quality assurance, school premises and facilities, curriculum, students' learning, parent education, etc.

7.2 In a nutshell, the EDB is pleased to note that the sector has positive feedback on the Scheme. On the whole, the policy objectives of providing good quality and highly affordable KG education and enhancing the accessibility of students to different modes of services that suit their specific needs have been achieved. The sector also agrees that under the Scheme, the subsidy to schools has substantially increased, while the merit features of flexibility and diversity of the KG sector have been maintained and the quality of KG education has been enhanced. As found from the QR and the interim findings of a consultancy study conducted by the Faculty of Education of the University of Hong Kong as commissioned by the EDB in 2017, the following positive developments have been observed in Scheme-KGs:

- (a) As shown in the interim findings of the consultancy study, participating stakeholders reckon that the general atmosphere in KGs is good, where teachers' views are respected, and some principals engage teachers in the process of decision-making or solicit their opinions on different plans. As observed from QR, most KGs are able to fully consider and address the views of their staff and set up multi-dimensional channels to promote workplace communication and team spirit.
- (b) On learning and teaching, principals and teachers engaged in the consultancy study expressed that they had gained a better grasp of the content of the Curriculum Guide. Nearly all participating teachers agreed with the notion of "learning through play" and had provided students with more opportunities to play and explore

through different measures and strategies.

- (c) On promoting teachers' professional development, most teachers participating in the consultancy study considered the professional development activities appropriate to their needs and useful in curriculum formulation, activity design, classroom decoration, etc. As observed from QR, as KGs are generally aware of the importance of school settings to children's learning, teachers are able to take into account children's interests, abilities and learning needs, when planning and creating a real-life setting environment for students' learning. They provide sufficient opportunities and diversified materials for children to manipulate and explore through various activities and interactive games, thus enhancing learning effectiveness and unleashing children's creativity and potential.
- (d) On supporting children's learning and development, KGs engaged in the consultancy study indicate that with the use of different strategies to support NCS children, they are more able to help NCS children learn the Chinese language. For supporting children with special needs or at risk of developmental delay, KGs maintain close communication with parents and encourage teachers to attend training to better equip them to cater for children's diverse needs. KGs participating in the consultancy study are generally able to establish a good partnership with parents. Besides, there are more KGs setting up PTAs or parents' groups to facilitate home-school communication. With schools' active engagement of parents in voluntary services, parents hold a positive view towards various parent-child activities organised by schools, considering them as useful in enhancing their skills of forging parent-child relationship and parenting. Schools and parents maintain close communication and various channels are in place for parents to learn about their children's performance. Moreover, schools make good use of different resources and arrange teachers to receive training, encouraging them to take care of NCS children and other children with diverse needs through different strategies, so as to cater for learner diversity.

- (e) Regarding teacher training, most KGs proactively encourage teachers to receive training, and some of them make administrative arrangements, such as flexible manpower deployment and hire of supply teachers, to enable teachers to participate in professional development activities. There is a wide array of professional development activities that cover different topics, such as learning through play, catering for learner diversity, and SSE. On support to students with special needs, KGs have indicated that they would, through strengthening teacher training, enhance teachers' capacity in catering for the diverse needs of children. A number of KGs provide novice teachers with various means of support, e.g. induction activities, mentoring by experienced teachers, class observation and after-class discussion.

7.3 The sector indicated that since the implementation of the Scheme, KGs are, by and large, operating in a smooth manner. Though schools have to take on extra administrative work and the EDB's financial monitoring on schools has become more rigorous, schools have gathered certain experience over the past few years. They will be able to gradually enhance the effectiveness in administration and financial management. In tandem, with reference to the past experience, the EDB will streamline procedures and provide templates for schools' use to ease KGs' administrative workload, and to strike a balance between effective monitoring and streamlining administrative work.

7.4 It is the shared goal of the Government, the KG sector and parents to provide children with quality KG education. Beyond doubt, the Government attaches great importance to KG education. Findings from our review that commenced in mid-2019 show that the Scheme is implemented in the right direction. It has received support from the sector and parents. There is room for enhancement in operational details. As a matter of fact, in the process of implementing the Scheme, whenever needs arise and resources are available, support measures are rolled out. During the review, we gathered views from the stakeholders and introduced new support measures, in light of the circumstances, for early and pilot implementation even before the completion of the review. The Pilot Schemes on Relocation Grant and Renovation Grant are examples. Following this approach, we will keep in view the development of KG

education and stakeholders' concerns and needs through on-going communication, so as to continuously enhance KG education in Hong Kong with concerted efforts.

7.5 As regard to the feasibility of introducing a KG teacher salary scale, upon in-depth studies of the different options and their respective merits and drawbacks, as well as the implications on the development of KGs, we consider that the provision of a mandatory teacher salary scale similar to that of aided primary and secondary schools is not feasible under the premise of maintaining KGs' flexibility, diversity, and prompt response to social changes. The existing arrangement of providing salary ranges can maintain KGs' specific features of diversity and flexibility, as well as prompt response to social changes and parents' needs, and be conducive to the sustainable development of the KG sector. As such, we will maintain the existing arrangement of providing salary ranges.

7.6 Under the premise of maintaining KGs' diversity and flexibility, as well as promptly responding to social changes and parents' needs, the EDB will support the sustainable development of KGs and the major new measures are as follows:

- (a) Enhancing teachers' professional development, which includes:
 - (i) providing structured learning programmes of a longer duration (e.g. lasting for several weeks) for experienced teachers, senior teachers or teachers aspiring for senior posts from the 2021/22 school year onwards, for in-depth study on various education issues; and providing subsidies for supply teachers in this regard;
 - (ii) providing a one-off grant for Scheme-KGs in the 2021/22 school year to implement school-based projects to facilitate professional development of teachers or sustainable development of the school. Depending on the school size, successful applicants will receive a subsidy from \$100,000 to \$200,000;
- (b) Streamlining administrative work, which includes:
 - (i) exploring the feasibility of expanding the coverage of the simplified procedures under fee revision to KGs proposing fee increase not exceeding a specified percentage;

- (ii) streamlining the procedures in school allocation exercises, with KGs' overall operating standard and needs of KGs as the key considerations so as to encourage more KGs to apply for relocation;
- (c) Assisting KGs in improving the school environment, which includes:
 - (i) extending the Relocation Grant (\$1.5M for each KG) to the 2022/23 school year, encouraging KGs in districts with aging population, with old school premises or in premises at high rental cost to relocate;
 - (ii) providing 200 additional quotas under the Renovation Grant (\$0.5 million for each KG) in the 2021/22 school year;
 - (iii) extending the grace period for transition from rent reimbursement scheme to "dual" caps under the new Scheme for two years, i.e. 2021/22 and 2022/23 school years. During these two years, the amount of subsidy will be decreased by 15% each year to facilitate schools' gradual transition;
- (d) An additional one-off subsidy of \$50,000 to \$60,000 will be provided to KGs in the 2021/22 school year to kick start structured parent education programmes; and
- (e) The Government is planning to uplift the fee remission ceiling under the KCFRS from the 75th percentile to the 100th percentile of the school fees charged by existing Scheme-KGs, so that parents receiving full fee remission do not need to pay any difference.

7.7 The EDB would like to once again extend our heartfelt gratitude to stakeholders for frankly expressing their views and concerns and providing valuable inputs during the review.

Kindergarten Education Scheme

Major measures

[Extracted from paragraph 3 of Legislative Council Paper dated 1 February 2016.]

The Government has implemented the new kindergarten (KG) education scheme (Scheme) with effect 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. It is estimated that about 70% to 80% of half-day (HD) KG places will be free. The key features of the new policy and funding arrangements are as follows –

(a) Scope of free quality KG education

The Government subsidy would cover HD service in local non-profit-making (NPM) KGs as the basic provision for all eligible KG students. To unleash the potential of the local labour force under the population policy, additional resources will be provided for eligible KGs offering whole-day (WD) and long WD (LWD) services to encourage them to offer more such services at a more affordable rate.

(b) Enhancement to the quality of KG education

(i) Staffing, remuneration and career ladder

The overall teacher to pupil (TP) ratio for eligible KGs would be substantially enhanced from 1:15 to 1:11 (principal not included). A salary range for each position would be provided for KGs, which would continue to have the discretion to determine the remuneration of their staff within the range.

(ii) Quality assurance and curriculum review

The Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum will be reviewed and the existing quality assurance framework be enhanced.

(iii) Teacher professionalism

The enhancement of the qualification requirement of KG teachers to degree level would be a long-term goal. Meanwhile, more support would be provided for KG teachers to upgrade their professional capacity.

(iv) Accommodation and facilities
The Operation Manual for Pre-primary Institutions would be reviewed with a view to enhancing the physical accommodation and facilities of new Government-owned KG premises. As an additional medium-/long-term measure, we will explore the feasibility of setting up resource centres to provide a variety of experiential learning activities for KG students, teacher training as well as parent education activities.

(v) Governance and monitoring
KGs will be required to enhance their administration, management and accountability under an effective governance framework with transparency. The Government will step up monitoring.

(c) Funding arrangement

(i) Mode of funding

We will provide direct subsidy for eligible KGs under the new policy. Funding would be provided basically on a per student basis for supporting students' HD schooling in the form of a basic unit subsidy (basic HD unit subsidy). Some grants on a school-specific basis will also be provided to cater for the special circumstances of the KGs or the students.

(ii) "Basic HD unit subsidy"

The "Basic HD unit subsidy", which is calculated on a per student unit cost basis, will cover teaching staff salary, supporting staff salary and other operating expenses.

(iii) School-specific grants²³ (on top of the "basic HD unit subsidy")

I. Additional resources for WD and LWD services

An additional grant will be provided for eligible KGs offering WD and LWD places.

II. Premises-related support for KGs

Rental subsidy will be provided for KGs joining the new subsidy scheme. For eligible KGs operating in self-owned school premises or premises owned by their school

²³ The subsidy currently available to the child care centre portion of the KG-cum-CCCs under the Child Care Centre Subsidy Scheme will be maintained.

sponsoring bodies with zero/nominal rent, a premises maintenance grant will be provided to alleviate the financial burden arising from major repairs. The existing arrangements for claiming refund of rates and Government rent by NPM KGs will continue.

III. Cook for KGs with a kitchen

A grant comparable to the recommended salary of one cook will be provided for LWD and WD KGs with a kitchen that complies with all the Government requirements.

IV. Non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students²⁴ in KGs

A grant comparable to the recommended salary of one teacher will be provided for KGs admitting eight or more NCS students.

(d) Catering for student diversity

(i) KG students from needy families

Fee remission will continue to be provided under the existing Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme (KCFRS). In addition, a grant will be provided for KG students from needy families to help the parents pay for the expenditure incurred from KG education for their children.

(ii) NCS students in KGs

Apart from providing a grant for KGs admitting eight or more NCS students to strengthen the support for their NCS students, school-based professional support will continue to be provided and further enhanced. Teacher training programmes on the teaching and learning of the Chinese language for NCS students in KGs will also be enhanced.

(iii) KG students with special needs or at risk of developmental delay

Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) has launched a pilot scheme under which on-site rehabilitation service is provided to benefit over 2 900 children with special needs who are studying in KGs or kindergarten-cum-child care centres (KG-cum-CCCs) as early as possible. The services also cover

²⁴ For the planning of educational support measures, students whose spoken language at home is not Chinese are broadly categorized as NCS students.

parents of those children and the teaching staff in the KGs and KG-cum-CCCs. The enhancement of the TP ratio to 1:11 will create more space for KG teachers to collaborate among themselves to take care of the diverse needs of students (including those at risk of developmental delay), and to enable better professional collaboration with the inter-disciplinary teams in the above pilot project to support the students with special needs.

EDB will offer more structured in-service training programmes for KG teachers to enhance their capacity to cater for students' diverse learning needs and to facilitate early identification of children with special needs. The Government will also set up a cross-Bureau/Department platform to give advice on the development of initiatives to cater for KG children with special needs.

(e) Provision of more KG places and KG premises

The planning standards for provision of KG places will be reviewed and revised as necessary as a long-term goal from the present 250 WD and 730 HD to 500 WD and 500 HD places respectively for every 1 000 children aged between three and six. We will also devise feasible policy measures with a view to increasing the supply of Government-owned KG premises which are up to the standard as stipulated by the Government in the long run.

(f) Parents' involvement and parent education

Parent education will be promoted to help parents understand the development needs of their children. EDB will also encourage KGs to set up Parent-Teacher Associations, and promote parents' involvement in the learning of their children.

(g) Local research on KG education

More researches on the latest trends in child development and to examine the impact of the new policy on the quality of KG education will be encouraged.

(h) Other implementation issues

To maintain the flexibility and diversity of the KG sector and free choice for parents, KG students admission will remain a school-based matter. We will issue guidelines to KGs to ensure a proper and transparent student admission mechanism is in place.

**Progress on the implementation
of the kindergarten education scheme
(2017/18 to 2020/21 school year)**

The new kindergarten (KG) education scheme has been implemented smoothly in general over the past four years. While maintaining KGs' flexibility and diversity as well as promptly responding to parents' and social needs, the quality of KG education has been enhanced. Initiatives undertaken under the new policy have been rolled out progressively. Some enhancements have also been put in place as necessary. A gist of progress is given below.

Overall implementation

1. When the policy was rolled out in the 2017/18 school year, it is estimated that about 70% to 80% of half-day (HD) KG places will be free. Over the past four school years (from the 2017/18 to 2020/21 school years), about 90% of the HD KGs are free. The fees of whole-day (WD) classes have been maintained at a low level, the median being around \$730, \$790, \$820 and \$860 per instalment respectively in these four years.
2. Subsidies relating to teachers' salaries have been enhanced in the following ways:
 - (a) Starting from the 2018/19 school year, subsidies on teacher salary portion and the teacher salary ranges are adjusted based on the annual civil service pay adjustment on a school year basis, instead of the Composite Consumer Price Index.
 - (b) The Tide-over Grant is extended for 3 years (i.e. 5 years up to the end of the 2021/22 school year).
3. Teachers are remunerated reasonably within the salary ranges. The Education Bureau (EDB) conducts annual survey to track the situation. Suspected irregular cases are followed up individually and KGs are requested to rectify as necessary.
4. While the minimum requirement in teacher-pupil ratio is 1:11, most KGs have deployed their resources to employ additional teachers. Overall

speaking, among some 750 Scheme-KGs, there are a total of about 1 000 additional teachers.

Curriculum

5. The KG Education Curriculum Guide was reviewed and the revised Guide was released in February 2017. Children’s balanced development, learning through play and the element of free exploration in play are highlighted. It is also explicitly spelt out that KGs should not require children in nursery class (K1) to hold a pencil and write, and not to require children in lower and upper KG classes to do mechanical copying and calculation.

Teacher training

6. On pre-service training, the programme frameworks of the teacher education programmes in early childhood education (ECE), including certificate in ECE, Bachelor in Education (ECE), and Postgraduate Diploma in Education (ECE), have been refined.
7. The framework for the KG principal certification course has also been refined.
8. Enhancements in in-service training have been put in place by:
 - (a) setting a soft training target of each KG teacher to attend at least 60 hours’ continuous professional development in a 3-year cycle;
 - (b) including KG teachers in the initiative of “sabbatical leave” under which KG teachers may apply for the aforesaid leave lasting for one to five months; and
 - (c) organising more study trips to the Mainland and other districts/countries (such as Japan and Korea).

Catering for students’ diverse needs

9. On the subsidy for supporting non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students, it was enhanced in the 2019/20 school year by replacing the flat-rate subsidy with tiered subsidy. School plans and reports are collected and school visits are conducted for monitoring and support purposes.

10. Set up specific targets for training on catering for students' diverse needs:
 - (a) Each Scheme-KG admitting 8 or more NCS students should have at least one teacher completed the Basic Course as recognised by the EDB by the 2018/19 school year. The requirement has been extended to all Scheme-KGs having admitted NCS students (regardless of the number) by the 2020/21 school year.
 - (b) For students with developmental needs, each Scheme-KG should have at least one teacher completed the Basic Course as recognised by the EDB by the 2020/21 school year.

These training targets are broadly met.

11. A project "3Es: Early prevention, Early identification and Early Intervention" has been launched from the 2015/16 to 2020/21 school years to provide school-based support to KGs to cater for students' development in social skills and emotion.

Premises-related measures

12. The planning standards for provision of KG places has been reviewed and revised from 250 WD and 730 HD places to 500 WD and 500 HD places for every 1 000 children aged between three and six.
13. To increase government-owned KG premises so that these KGs will not have to charge any school fees to defray rental expenses, 11 KG premises in public housing estates have been allocated from 2018 to 2020. To explore the feasibility of co-location of KGs and primary schools, a pilot project is in the pipeline.
14. The Schedule of Accommodation for a "standard" KG has been revised with an increase of indoor floor area by 20% for each student.
15. In collaboration with the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, and by capitalising on the existing resources in two of their visitors' centres in Tsiu Hang and Wetland Park, two resource centres for KGs have been set up. A purpose-built resource centre is being planned.

Guidelines and monitoring

16. On quality assurance, the Performance Indicators (Kindergartens) which serve as the basis for KGs' self-evaluation and EDB's Quality Review (QR), have been refined. A pilot scheme on serving principals to join some QRs as external observers has been introduced and will be reviewed.
17. Kindergarten Administration Guide and Procurement Guidelines have been drawn up, and the Operation Manual for Pre-primary Institutions has been updated.
18. Transparency of KG operation is enhanced. For instance, it is mandatory for Scheme-KGs to include their support to NCS students in the "Profiles of Kindergartens and Kindergarten-cum-child care centres", and to upload information, including the prices of fee-charging items or services (generally known as "miscellaneous fees") onto their school website.