

LCQ16: Salary arrangements for kindergarten teachers

Following is a question by the Hon Ip Kin-yuen and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (November 18):

Question:

The Chief Executive (CE) put forward in her election manifesto in 2017 the establishment of a salary scale for kindergarten (KG) teachers with the aim of providing KG teachers with a stable working and teaching environment. The Education Bureau (EDB) has introduced, since the 2017-2018 school year, the KG education scheme (the Scheme), under which eligible local non-profit-making KGs are provided with a direct subsidy and salary ranges have been set for KG teachers. On the other hand, the wastage rate of KG teachers in recent years has remained on the high side, standing at 12 per cent or higher in the past two school years. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that the EDB has, since the middle of last year, started to consult stakeholders on the introduction of a salary scale for KG teachers and the corresponding "basic half-day unit subsidy" arrangements, etc., of the views received and the final proposal of the EDB; the estimated additional recurrent expenditure to be incurred annually for implementing the proposal;

(2) whether it has plans to complete the establishment of a salary scale for KG teachers by the end of the term of the current Government; if so, of the implementation timetable; if not, the reasons for that, and whether it will assess if the CE has failed to honour the relevant pledge she made in her election manifesto; and

(3) given that under the Scheme, the EDB provides a tide-over grant for KGs so that they can retain their long serving teachers, and the grant will cease by the end of the next school year, of the follow-up arrangements to be put in place by the EDB, and whether the EDB will announce such arrangements expeditiously so that KGs' management can make early preparation?

Reply:

President,

The Government attaches great importance to education. In the past three years, the current-term Government has increased over \$13 billion cumulatively in recurrent expenditure on education, particularly in the area of supporting principals and teachers. This aims at providing the education sector with additional resources for improving teaching manpower, creating a stable, caring and rewarding environment to tie in with the enhanced quality of education. Regarding kindergarten (KG) education, the Government has

implemented the new KG education policy starting from the 2017/18 school year, covering measures on improving teachers' remuneration, alleviating the financial burden of school fees on parents and improving quality of teaching. The KG sector is capable of quickly responding to the needs of society given its diversified and flexible characteristics. The mobility of KG teachers is affected by many factors, including pursuing further study, retirement, marriage/child-bearing/child-raising and other family reasons, which may not necessarily be fully related to remuneration.

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Ip Kin-yuen is as follows:

(1) and (2) The EDB has all along been committed to enhancing the KG education policy and implementing new initiatives and increasing appropriations as and when necessary. For instance, the 14-week paid maternity leave has been implemented since January 2019 with the provision of a staff relief grant. The grant for support to non-Chinese speaking students has been enhanced since the 2019/20 school year, with the highest grant rate being doubled to about \$800,000 per annum in this school year. We have also introduced the pilot schemes on relocation grant and renovation grant in the 2020/21 and 2021/22 school years, a one-off website enhancement grant in the 2020/21 school year, etc.

On teachers' salary, the Chief Executive announced in the 2018 Policy Address that the data of the three school years from 2017/18 to 2019/20 would be used as the basis for exploring the feasibility of introducing a salary scale for KG teachers. We started a comprehensive review in mid-2019 on the implementation of the KG education policy and salary arrangements for teachers is one of the key areas for review. During the process of consultation, we arranged meetings with different stakeholders including school sponsoring bodies, KG principals, major KG associations and teachers' unions, tertiary institutions, relevant non-government organisations, teachers and parents, to gauge their views. As the salary arrangements for KG teachers involve operation of KGs and their flexibility in resources deployment, the sector concurs that it should be examined thoroughly and handled prudently in assessing the implications of setting up 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. Based on the data and information in the past few years, we have been studying the feasibility of different options and conducting detailed discussions with stakeholders. The consultation is still ongoing and the review exercise is expected to complete in 2021. The EDB is unable to provide any information on the review results, estimated expenditure and implementation schedule at this stage.

(3) The tide-over grant (ToG) aims to provide short-term additional financial support for KGs, which had more long-serving teachers who were receiving high salaries before participating in the Scheme, in defraying their expenses on such teaching staff in the early period of implementation of the Scheme and enabling KGs to retain these teachers. During the period covered by the ToG provided by the Government, KGs should formulate their school-based financial and staffing policy for migration to the new policy before the lapse of the ToG. Details are set out in paragraph 14 of Appendix 3 in EDB Circular No.

7/2016. In 2017, the Government announced the extension of the ToG from two years (2017/18 and 2018/19 school years) for three more years (from 2019/20 to 2021/22 school years). In reviewing the implementation of the new KG education policy, we will at the same time consider the actual situation of KGs in employment of teachers.