

LCQ22: Special child care centres

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (March 27):

Question:

Special child care centres (SCCCs) subvented by the Social Welfare Department provide whole day training and care services for children with moderate to severe disabilities who are aged two to under six and have not yet started primary school education. It is learnt that as at November 30, 2023, the last application dates of selected cases for SCCC services in the Tuen Mun District were February and March 2021, representing a longer waiting time as compared to most districts. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the average waiting time, number of service places and number of persons waitlisted for SCCC services in each of the 18 districts across the territory in each of the past five years (set out in a table);

(2) of (i) the number of persons waitlisted for SCCC services in each of the 18 districts across the territory who received cross-district services, and (ii) the number of persons waitlisted for SCCC services in the Tuen Mun District who received services in other districts, in each of the past five years (set out in a table);

(3) whether it has plans to shorten the waiting time of persons waitlisted for SCCC services in the Tuen Mun District, such as by setting up more SCCC in the Tuen Mun District; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) of the plans and measures in place to provide support for (i) children waitlisted for SCCC services, and (ii) ordinary kindergartens that have admitted children waitlisted for SCCC services?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Holden Chow is as follows:

(1) In the past five years, the numbers of service places and waitlisted children for the Special Child Care Centres (SCCCs) based on the 11 administrative districts of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) are set out in Table 1 and Table 2 respectively at Annex. The average waiting time for SCCC is set out in Table 3. The SWD does not keep information on the waiting time by district.

(2) There is no locality restriction on the application for SCCC services. Parents may choose to receive services at an SCCC outside their district of residence having regard to individual circumstances, such as the availability of transport facilities, location of their work/carers' residence and characteristics of various SCCC. The SWD will allocate service placement according to parents' prioritised choices of SCCC/districts/areas. The SWD does not keep information on the number of cross-district places allocated to waitlisted applicants by district.

(3) The Government has been keeping in view the waiting time for SCCC, and adopting a multipronged approach to increase the provision of pre-school rehabilitation service places. The Government has since March 2022 incorporated the planning ratios of various rehabilitation services into the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines. Among them, the planning ratio for pre-school rehabilitation services is 23 service places per 1 000 children aged 0 to 6 so as to facilitate the continual development of the services. In 2022-23, the SWD established a new SCCC-cum-Early Education and Training Centre (EETC) in Tuen Mun District to provide 60 SCCC places and 96 EETC places as planned. The EETC commenced operation in March 2023 while the SCCC is expected to commence operation in the second quarter of 2024. Moreover, the SWD has also planned to establish a new SCCC at the Wu Shan Road Public Housing Development in Tuen Mun to provide 60 SCCC places. The SCCC is expected to commence operation in 2027-28.

(4) To enable children on the SCCC waiting list to receive training and support as early as possible, they may concurrently apply for and receive EETC services or On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services (OPRS) as transitional services, pending placement of SCCC service. The multi-disciplinary service teams of the OPRS will also provide support services for teachers/child care workers of kindergartens/kindergarten cum child care centres participating in OPRS.

Waitlisted children not receiving transitional services may, without being subject to any means test, apply for a training subsidy under the Training Subsidy Programme for Children on the Waiting List of Subvented Pre-school Rehabilitation Services, with a view to enabling them to receive training as early as possible by acquiring self-financing pre-school rehabilitation services run by recognised service providers.