

LCQ9: Special child care centres

Following is a question by the Hon Leung Che-cheung and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (January 15):

Question:

Special child care centres (SCCCs) subvented by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) provide special 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. In the financial year of 2017-2018, the average waiting time for SCCC service was as long as 19.6 months and, as at November 30 last year, there were 1 856 children waiting for this service. Such children, while waiting for SCCC service, may be arranged to receive other pre-school rehabilitation services. It is learnt that quite a number of parents of such children have enrolled their children in ordinary kindergartens in order that their children may have certain physical and mental development while waiting for SCCC service. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) Of the number of children who were removed from the waiting list for SCCC service in each of the past three years on grounds that they had reached six years old, as well as the respective numbers of such children who (i) had been and (ii) had not yet been arranged by SWD to receive other services at the time when they were removed from the waiting list;

(2) In respect of those children who were required to leave SCCCs in each of the past three years upon reaching the age of six, of the longest, shortest, average and median numbers of months for which they had received SCCC service;

(3) Whether SWD will, in the coming three years, provide more suitable transitional services for children waiting for SCCC service (in particular those children with severe disabilities); if so, of the details;

(4) As some ordinary kindergartens have admitted children waiting for SCCC service, of the support provided by SWD to those kindergartens and children; and

(5) Whether SWD has drawn up a long-term plan for SCCC service with the target of zero waiting time; if so, of the details (including the timeframe for meeting this target); if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to the Member's question is as follows:

Special child care centres (SCCCs) aim to provide special training and care for children with moderate to severe disabilities to facilitate their development and growth, and help them prepare for primary education. To enable children on the SCCC waiting list to receive training and support as early as possible, they may simultaneously wait for and receive early education and training centre (EETC) services and/or on-site pre-school rehabilitation services (OPRS) as transitional services (transitional services) until they are allocated SCCC places. EETC and OPRS services are provided by different allied health professionals, covering individual and group training/therapy/programmes for children with special needs as well as support services for their parents. In addition, OPRS support teachers/child care workers in enhancing their knowledge and capabilities of taking care of and handling children with special needs.

Children on the SCCC waiting list not having received any transitional services may apply for training subsidy under the Training Subsidy Programme for Children on the Waiting List of Subvented Pre-school Rehabilitation Services for obtaining self-financed pre-school rehabilitation services provided by recognised service providers as early as possible. The maximum subsidy amount is \$6,075 per month. Besides, if children on the waiting list of subvented pre-school rehabilitation services (including SCCC) have yet to receive such services when they reach the age of five, they may apply for priority placement through a referring social worker for receiving the needed services and support as soon as possible.

As children will normally proceed to primary education at the age of six and receive the needed learning support at primary schools, the target recipients of pre-school rehabilitation services (including SCCC) subvented by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) are children aged below six with special needs. For children with special needs who have reached the age of six as at September 1 of a new school year but are still attending kindergartens, upon assessment that they have the need to continue to receive pre-school rehabilitation services, they may apply for service extension so that they can continue to receive the services during the new school year. In the past three financial years, the number of children who were removed from the SCCC waiting list on grounds that they had reached the age of six (including those proceeding to primary education), and the number of these children who had received transitional services or training subsidy are tabulated below:

	Financial year		
	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Number of children who were removed from the SCCC waiting list on grounds that they had reached the age of six (including those proceeding to primary education)	20	37	50

Number of the above children who had received transitional services/training subsidy	7	16	29
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The average waiting time for SCCC places in 2018-19 was 18.4 months. Generally, children concerned will be discharged from SCCC before primary schooling. As different applicants have started waiting for and receiving SCCC services at different ages, the duration during which they have received the services varies. SWD has not maintained statistics on the duration during which pre-school children have received SCCC services.

To enable pre-school children with special needs to receive support as soon as possible, the Government will keep in view the demand and supply of pre-school rehabilitation services and the manpower supply of allied health professionals concerned, and provide additional places under various pre-school rehabilitation services in a timely manner. The Chief Executive has announced in the 2019 Policy Address and Policy Address Supplement that the Government has planned to provide over 1 200 additional service places in SCCC and EETCs from 2019-20 to 2021-22, and a total of 3 000 additional OPRS places in the 2020/21 to 2022/23 school years.