

Review on kindergarten education scheme completed

The Education Bureau (EDB) announced today (August 25) that the review on the kindergarten education scheme (Scheme) had been completed.

The EDB commenced a review on the implementation of the Scheme in mid-2019, including the funding modes under the Scheme, teacher professionalism (including manpower, salary and professional development), monitoring and quality assurance, school premises and facilities, curriculum development 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.

In this connection, the EDB conducted more than 60 consultation sessions with the representatives of different stakeholders, including school sponsoring bodies, kindergarten (KG) principals, KG associations, teacher organisations, relevant non-governmental organisations, as well as parents and KG teachers.

A spokesman for the EDB stressed, "The KG sector is characterised by flexibility and diversity and it can promptly respond to social changes and parents' needs. The policy objectives of the Scheme 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. Since implementation of the Scheme in the 2017/18 school year, 97 per cent of the eligible KGs have joined the Scheme. Among these Scheme-KGs, around 90 per cent of the half-day programmes are free of charge; as for whole-day (WD) programmes, with additional subsidy from the Government, the school fees for WD programmes are maintained at a low level. Initiatives under the Scheme for enhancing the quality of the KG education have been rolled out progressively and the operation of KGs is smooth in general. The Scheme is well supported by the sector and parents. On the whole, the above-mentioned policy objectives have been achieved."

The spokesman said, "There were only two years or so from the implementation of the Scheme to the commencement of the consultation in mid-2019. 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."

In fact, since the implementation of the Scheme, the EDB has continuously kept in view KGs' needs to enhance the existing grants or provide additional grants to timely respond to the concerns of the KG sector, such as several rounds of additional grants to support KGs in view of the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic. We have also implemented the Gift Book Scheme and Do It Yourself Handicraft and Home Learning Package Scheme to

support students learning at home. Besides, during the review, the EDB proactively engaged with the sector and promptly provided enhanced support measures when immediate improvement was found necessary, for example Relocation Grant, Renovation Grant and Website Enhancement Grant, etc were provided in the 2020/21 and 2021/22 school years.

The spokesman said, "During the process of the review, the KG sector generally considered that the specific features of flexibility and diversity should be maintained, and flexibility in KGs' operation should be maintained so as to promptly respond to social changes and parents' needs. Regarding teachers' salary arrangements, different options had been discussed with stakeholders in details. 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. However, this arrangement is tied with several inter-connected components, including the EDB's annual approval for the number of operating classes and the staff establishment. Currently, KGs are making use of the flexibility under the Scheme to deploy resources to employ additional teachers and around 1 000 additional teachers are employed. Should a mandatory teacher salary scale be introduced and the number of operating classes and staff establishment be approved by the EDB, these teachers will become redundant teachers. With decline in enrollment, the problem of teacher redundancy will become more serious. Moreover, to ensure the optimal use of public resources, when admitting students in the middle of a school term, KGs will be required to fill the vacant school places. This would affect KGs' flexibility in admission and choices for parents will also be reduced. In conclusion, as KGs' mode of operation is greatly different from that of primary and secondary schools, adopting mandatory salary scale for KG teachers in isolation is not feasible."

The spokesman said, "Under the premise of maintaining KGs' flexibility and diversity, as well as promptly responding to social changes and parents' needs, the EDB will maintain the existing arrangement of providing salary ranges for teachers so that KGs can flexibly determine the teacher salaries according to their working experience, performance, additional duties, qualifications, training, special skills possessed, etc to cater for their school situation.

The EDB will support the sustainable development of KGs in various aspects and major new measures ahead 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 those with an aspiration 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 the professional development of teachers or sustainable development of the school. 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 aged population, with old school premises or in premises at high rental cost to relocate;

(ii) providing additional 200 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 more years, i.e. 2021/22 and 2022/23 school years. During these two years, the amount of subsidy will be decreased by 15 per cent year on year to facilitate schools' gradual transition;

(d) Providing an additional one-off subsidy of \$50,000 to \$60,000 to KGs to kick start structured parent education programmes in the 2021/22 school year;

(e) Seeking funding approval to uplift the fee remission ceiling under the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme from the 75th percentile to the 100th percentile of the school fees charged by existing Scheme-KGs, so that all parents receiving full fee remission do not need to pay the difference.

The review report on kindergarten education scheme will be uploaded onto the EDB website in due course and it will be reported to the Panel on Education of the Legislative Council on September 3.