

The Director of Audit's Report No. 60
Chapter 3: Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme

Speech by the Secretary for Education

The Education Bureau (EDB) welcomes the Audit Commission's audit report on the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (Voucher Scheme). First of all, we are very pleased that the report acknowledges the contributions of the Voucher Scheme at its beginning by stating that "the Voucher Scheme had contributed to promoting KG education and easing parents' financial burden". The report further points out that "over the years, there had been great improvement in the professional knowledge and qualification of the KG sector" under the Voucher Scheme. It is clear that the Voucher Scheme, which has been launched since 2007/08, has achieved its main policy objectives.

Unlike primary and secondary education, which is either fully or directly subsidised by the Government, kindergarten education in Hong Kong has all along been provided by the private sector and is characterised by great flexibility, diversity, adaptability and vibrancy. The purpose of launching the Voucher Scheme is to ease parents' financial burden while preserving the characteristics of great flexibility and diversity of kindergarten education. All along, the EDB has been implementing the Voucher Scheme in strict accordance with the policy objectives and mandate as endorsed by the Chief Executive-in-Council, and in compliance with the funding criteria and within the ambit approved by the LegCo Finance Committee. It is on this basis that we set up appropriate regulatory and monitoring mechanism.

As kindergartens are not directly funded by the Government under the Voucher Scheme, kindergartens participating in the Voucher Scheme are not subject to the same regulatory control as that for subvented organisations in general. The EDB has put in place a mechanism to appropriately regulate and monitor kindergartens participating in the Voucher Scheme, especially with respect to their collection of school fees and other fees, to safeguard the interests of parents. In addition, we require the kindergartens to disclose certain information to the public to enhance transparency and prevent the abuse of government funds. The EDB has been reviewing on an ongoing basis the effectiveness of the Voucher Scheme since its implementation, and rolled out a series of enhancement measures in 2009 and 2010 in response to the results of the review. We will continue to work with the kindergarten sector so as to make continuous improvements to the Voucher Scheme. The Audit Commission's comprehensive review of the Voucher Scheme has provided a good opportunity for optimising the Scheme. We will carefully study the recommendations of the report and take follow-up actions as appropriate.

Providing 15-year free education and better quality kindergarten education is one of the priorities of the current-term Government. The findings and recommendations in the audit report, including those related to kindergarten governance, are of great reference value. The Committee on Free Kindergarten Education set up on 8 April 2013 will make reference to the recommendations in the audit report in exploring various issues on free kindergarten education, with a view to making concrete recommendations to the EDB on how to practicably implement free kindergarten education.