


[Go to CS Voice Index](#) Issue 018
2017 March

Views

Looking forward to a reform on early childhood education

In September 2017 the government will implement free early childhood education for children aged 3 to 6. That said it will be formally included in the education subvention scheme. However, it only applies to children of half-day mode, for whole day and long whole day mode, parents still have to pay some school fees. It is still quite far away from diversified free education. Hong Kong needs a comprehensive review and planning on early childhood education: little has been done to support education and caring for children aged 0 to 3; the government fails to come up with detailed planning and development for special pre-school education; the lack of accurate information on parenting and necessary space for educational parenting activities; parents are running into snags amidst the piecemeal and other so-called parenting information.

To encourage young couples to have children, let young women can choose between family and work, working parents can work with their mind at ease, all depends on whether our childhood education policies are in place. The development of kindergartens for children aged 0-3 has been stagnant for 20 years. There are only 12 government subsidised childcare centres in all 18 districts, its quota is few and waiting time is long. The subsidy has been maintained at a level of less than 10%; related legislation and requirement for facilities is still at the standards of the 70s. Moreover, long-whole day mode kindergartens which was intended for working parents and needy families has been stagnant since the last decade. Raising children is family-based but it has become the sole responsibility of the family as there is no related community support.

For children aged 0 – 6 with special needs, although the government implemented the Pilot Scheme on On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services in 2016 to shorten the waiting lists that exceeded 7000 people, the list has now reached 9000. With regard to this experimental service model, its necessary manpower and venue arrangements still have a lot to improve. Furthermore, coordination among other related pre-school services such as early education training centres, special child care centres, kindergarten-cum-child care centres, subsidised training projects for children, speech therapists and Central Support Services have all to be addressed to in order to maximise community resources.

A higher level of platform for children development and education must be set up whether to review or plan that professionals from various disciplines can be drawn together to integrate and balance families' and children's needs in terms of medical, educational, environmental and community facilities etc.

We also look forward to setting up a data bank for children aged 0-8 for a comprehensive review for policies on young children that is based on data. The data bank provides information for Hong Kong-wide and district based analysis and research for the sector to understand needs of local children and their parents and provide innovative and appropriate services accordingly.

Lastly, we advocate to setting up young children parent-child centres in various districts to address to family needs. Children can participate in games for functional development under the monitoring of staff for timely intervention, while parents can take a break there, to share, to learn and consult professionals for information on raising children, to relish on quality parenting courses and to establish supportive networks with other fellow parents.

It needs support from early childhood education professionals, commitment from cross-disciplinary professionals, listening and collaboration from government to bring forth a macro and comprehensive early childhood education reform. We look forward to a bona-fide cooperation from all sectors to work for the benefit of our children.

[Back to Top](#) 