

EDB to provide subsidies to schools and students to fight against epidemic

The Education Bureau (EDB) announced today (February 20) the provision of additional subsidies to kindergartens (KGs), primary and secondary schools and their students to alleviate the burden of schools and parents in defraying extra expenses during the fight against the epidemic and class suspension.

The Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, said that to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus in schools and protect the health of students, all schools have temporarily suspended classes starting from early February. With schools' support, students continue to learn at home during the class suspension period.

"We understand that many parents have to make the usual education-related payments for their children during the class suspension. Some may have to pay for reading and learning materials or e-learning devices for their children. To alleviate parents' burden, a funding of about \$900 million will be allocated from the Anti-epidemic Fund to be set up shortly to provide an additional \$1,000 to each recipient of the Student Grant for the 2019/20 school year, i.e. increase from \$2,500 to \$3,500. This measure will benefit parents of about 900,000 students. No extra applications are necessary," he added.

"We are already processing applications for the Student Grant in accordance with the original schedule. It is expected to effect payment of the first batch of the Student Grant of \$3,500 within a week after the setting up of the Anti-epidemic Fund, followed by subsequent batches." The Education Bureau has announced earlier that the deadline for schools to submit application forms of students would be extended to two weeks after the resumption of classes.

On supporting schools, the EDB has indicated earlier that the bureau will continue to act on medical advice and take into account schools' readiness and the supply of protective equipment in the community in making further assessment and deciding on the date of class resumption. Schools will be informed of the date as soon as possible so that they can make appropriate arrangements in advance.

However, schools should get prepared to guard against future epidemic. In this regard, the EDB will deploy existing resources to provide a one-off grant to all schools offering full and formal curriculum (i.e. all public sector schools, Direct Subsidy Scheme schools, private primary and secondary schools and KGs) to help them replenish their epidemic prevention equipment (such as masks, thermometers, etc) or clean their school premises and pay for other expenses related to epidemic prevention. The provision is estimated to be \$42 million, benefitting some 2,200 schools.

The subsidy rate ranges from \$10,000 to \$ 25,000 per school, depending on the type and size of the school. Details are as follows:

(i) KGs – the amount to be received by KGs joining the KG education scheme (Scheme-KGs) is determined by the number of students, specifically, KGs with 66 or less half-day students will receive \$10,000 (one full-time student to be counted as two half-day students); 67 or more will receive \$15,000. Each non-Scheme-KG will receive \$12,500

(ii) Primary and secondary schools in the public sector (including special schools) and schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme – the amount to be received by each school is determined by the number of approved classes. Specifically, schools with 11 classes or less will receive \$15,000; those with 12 classes to 23 classes will receive \$20,000 and those with 24 classes or more will receive \$25,000

(iii) Boarding sections of special schools – the amount to be received is determined by their approved boarding capacity. Specifically, schools with a boarding capacity less than 40 will receive \$15,000; those with a capacity from 40 to 60 will receive \$20,000 and those with a capacity from 61 or more will receive \$25,000

(iv) Private primary and secondary schools (including private schools offering full and formal curriculum, international schools, private independent schools and schools under the English Schools Foundation) – each school will receive \$20,000

Furthermore, the boarding sections of aided special schools have been operating to cater for students in need of boarding service during class suspension. To enhance the support for the boarding sections to guard against the epidemic and to reduce the risk of the spread of the novel coronavirus, the EDB will provide separately a one-off additional grant for 21 special schools with a boarding section. The amount of the special grant is determined by their approved boarding capacity. Specifically, schools with a boarding capacity less than 40 will receive \$50,000; those with a capacity from 40 to 60 will receive \$100,000; those with a capacity from 61 or more will receive \$150,000. The additional expenditure is estimated to be \$2.25 million.

For KGs, in addition to the above-mentioned grant for epidemic prevention for all KGs, the EDB will implement the following measures to assist the KG sector to tackle the current financial difficulty, including (i) using the number of students in January this year as the basis for calculation of the monthly subsidy for each Scheme-KG during the class suspension period to ensure that there will be no reduction of government subsidies due to withdrawal of individual students during the period; and (ii) providing a lump sum grant for all KGs, incurring an additional expenditure of about \$120 million. Details of the grant rate are as follows:

(i) Scheme-KGs

- KGs with long whole day session: if the number of students is 33 or less (if the school has half day students, two half day students are counted as one student), the grant will be \$120,000 and the grant for those with more than 33 students will be \$160,000
 - KGs with whole day session: if the number of students is 33 or less (if the school has half day students, two half day students are counted as one student), the grant will be \$100,000 and the grant for those with more than 33 students will be \$140,000
 - KGs offering half day course only: \$60,000 per KG
- (ii) Non-Scheme KGs: each KG will receive a grant of \$80,000

As regards student financial assistance schemes, in general, students' eligibility and the amount of subsidy obtained will not be affected by their absence during the school suspension period. However, for some individual schemes such as the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme, KG children are required to have attended school in the respective months in order to be eligible for the fee remission. As the number of school days and the attendance of students may be affected during the school suspension period, the EDB and the Student Finance Office will handle the cases with flexibility so that students' subsidy will not be affected by the school suspension.

The EDB will maintain close liaison with the school sector to continue to understand their concerns, follow up on the details of the above-mentioned measures and other matters, and to provide appropriate support.