

## PRE - PRIMARY

### ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

#### FREE PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION – GRANT-IN-AID SCHEME – IMPLEMENTATION

(21.11.2023)

**(No. B/1527) Ms J. Tour (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the free pre-primary education, she will state where matters stand as to the implementation and the defining of the modalities for the Grant-in-Aid scheme thereof.

**The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun):** Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me at the very outset to thank the hon. Member for this question which gives me the opportunity to further elaborate on the free pre-primary education scheme.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Early Childhood Care and Education is the foundation of a child's lifelong learning journey. These years are critical to ensuring readiness for schooling and success in future learning. The provision of an inclusive equitable and quality early childhood education remains at the heart of our action.

The House will recall that the hon. Prime Minister had, on the occasion of the celebrations of the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Independence, announced that the pre-primary education would become free for children aged 3 to 5 as from the beginning of the school year in January 2024. This is in line with the very principle of equity in education. This Government has systematically reinforced an education system that opens the doors of progress and development for all citizens. Free education, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the way to make this realisable for all.

We came up with free tertiary education. It is only natural therefore, that the preprimary subsector be fee-free considering that all the other education subsectors are already free. The loop had to be closed, Mr Speaker, Sir, and that is what this policy sets out to do.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the present scheme covers 651 pre-primary schools. This is 84% of pre-primary schools covering around 19,600 children. As at date, 416 registered private pre-

primary schools have enthusiastically joined the scheme. This Grant-in-Aid scheme covers the operational costs as well as the staff costs of all these schools. The operational cost will be in respect of expenditure incurred on utilities, educational materials, pedagogical resources as well as rental fees where applicable.

A prompt payment of operational expenses will be made on a quarterly basis to the bank account of each school. The annual operational costs based on the school population will range from Rs240,000 to Rs650,000 yearly. All staff costs will be taken over by Early Childhood Care & Education Authority. This will include salaries of managers, assistant managers, teachers, assistant teachers and school attendants. All qualified teachers will be remunerated as per the PRB recommendations thus ensuring that they are all placed at the same footing as teachers in the public sector. The teacher-pupil ratio will be one teacher and one assistant teacher for every 15 children.

You will agree, Mr Speaker, Sir, that a small class size will allow for more personalised attention and care and will also be conducive to catering to specific needs of the children and that is going as per the UNESCO's recommendation and even beyond, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Furthermore, this policy opens up opportunities for young aspirant teachers to join the profession because we have created the post of assistant teachers as well. In addition, each and every school will have a manager and those having more than 101 children will also have an assistant manager. A school having a population of up to 50 children will be entitled to one school attendant and the Grant-in-Aid scheme also provides for one school attendant for every additional 50 children up to a maximum of five.

The salary of the school attendants will be according to the National Remuneration Board's recommendations. Their emoluments and each of the staff members will go directly to their personal bank accounts. Government's funding for this project will be to the tune of Rs1.5 billion. That will include an amount of 30 million that would be earmarked yearly for non-recurrent projects to enhance the school environment for conducive learning. Funds will be released upon application and after necessary verifications, evaluation and endorsement of the project by the ECCEA.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the ECCEA will be responsible for the implementation of the GIA Scheme and Government has decided to invest in the early childhood education so as to ensure successful school journey for our children.