

**Sustainable Growth of Non-Chinese Speaking SEN Education in
Honk Kong**

Dear Hon. Legislative Council Member(s), parents and representatives,

I speak in favor of an adjustable subvention from Hong Kong Government to schools' that provide education for non-Chinese speaking students with Special Educational Needs (SEN students).

In Hong Kong, English School Foundation (ESF) is the biggest education institute providing education to non-Chinese speaking SEN students. The waiting list is long. It signals a strong demand for such services from local or expatriate parents who contribute their talents, moneys and investments into Hong Kong while wishing their SEN kids to receive a non-Chinese speaking education.

Highly qualified managerial and teaching staff in ESF, many of whom are from an social setting within which special needs people are included naturally among their midst, together with the fact that within ESF's many schools, inclusion or integration just comes naturally, are among the convincing reasons for parents directing their choice to ESF.

The Government subvention to ESF has been frozen since 2000. The subvention money is also in a form of lump sum amount without any specified portion for SEN students.

The HKSAR Government may have served justly and honorably the historical setting of the ESF by freezing the subvention to ESF. However, in an inflationary economy and in particularly with the expense on SEN students 2 to 3 times of that of main stream students, every dollar cost increase would trigger a multiplied dollars increase to cost of providing education to SEN students. International schools are operated on some fundamental business principles such as balancing income and expenditure, with such shrinking subvention in an inflationary economy, their scope and development of SEN education will be seriously limited and restricted.

When we look at other international schools providing similar education to SEN students, they are usually of very small scale for the same reason.

I thereby urge the Government to consider un-freezing the portion of subvention to ESF's SEN students and also provide the same subvention to any international school engaged in the provision of same education. I consider this essential for a sustainable

growth and development of the provision for non-Chinese speaking group of SEN students.

I also speak in favor of a Government subsidized continuous professional training provision to international school teachers who are engaging in the education for SEN students.

SEN teachers of international schools cannot enjoy the paid study leave or the provision of supply teacher while participating into professional development courses organized by the Education Bureau, e.g. Teacher Professional Development Framework on Integrated Education under the EB Circular EDBC013/2007.

Continuous development is of paramount importance to keep teachers update to current development and thereby work coherently towards the same objective. With no subsidy, all the training cost will eventually be borne by the SEN Parents. The natural budgetary option would be to limit such training and henceforth, teachers are deprived of their chance to develop further or broaden their experience.

I sincerely urged the Government to relax its current restriction on providing subsidies to teachers not within their aided or special school and provide the equal opportunity for all SEN teachers participating on relevant professional development.

Finally, I speak in favor of embracing Parents in the SEN education for the sake of maintaining the “development of SEN students” at the heart of all matters.

The personnel of managerial and teaching staff may change, but it's the natural instinct of parents to keep everything to the developmental needs of their kids at the heart of every matters. Schools embracing parents' input are essential for maintaining the direction on the provision of appropriate education to SEN students in every decision. I meant to include ALL parents, not just SEN parents, as the integration or inclusion would inevitably involve the understanding and acceptance of all parents.

I am grateful that ESF embraces SEN parents by having one SEN Parent Governor in the Board. The fact that the SEN Parent Governor will be elected by all parents, the spirit of involving all parents on SEN matters within the school is manifested. I encourage all schools taking up the provision of education to SEN following this good example by ESF.

(Albert LEUNG - ESF SEN Parents Coordinator)