

**A Submission to the Hong Kong Legislative Council Subcommittee
to Study Issues Relating to the Provision of Boarding Places,
Senior Secondary Education and Employment Opportunities for Children
with Special Education Needs**

**Hong Kong's Forgotten Child
The Non-Chinese Speaking Child with Special Education Needs**

**By Hong Kong's International,
Special Education Needs Education Community
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Growing Together advocates for appropriate provisions for ethnic and language minorities with special needs.

Our member charities include

Children 0-6 years
Subvented by SWD



Helping special needs children fulfill their potential at their earliest possible age. Watchdog provides early intervention and education programmes for Hong Kong's developmentally delayed children under the age of six. www.watchdog.org.hk

Children 0-6 years
Subvented by SWD



Established over 30 years ago, the CDC's goals are to enable children to achieve their full potential through educational and therapeutic intervention in order to access appropriate primary schooling. www.cdchk.org

Children 3-11 years
No government subvention



Our mission is to establish and maintain appropriate education facilities for children with autism and related disorders in the Hong Kong S.A.R. and, by drawing on expertise from the USA and Europe, to establish in Hong Kong a centre of excellence and a blue print for the establishment of similar schemes throughout the S.A.R. www.rainbowproject.org

Children & young adults 5 - 21 years
No government subvention



Springboard's charter is to nurture, educate and empower young people with special needs. We offer primary, middle school and life skills programmes. In addition, we provide a youth club for students to socialise in a supervised environment. www.springboardhk.org

Adults 16-40 years
Subvented by SWD



The Nesbitt Centre provides an English speaking educational programme for adults with learning disabilities - also a respite and residential facility, which helps to achieve independence and development of their own potential and opportunities within the community. www.nesbittcentre.org.hk

Executive Summary

The Hong Kong school system excels at preparing students for standardized testing. However, it has forgotten one of its more vulnerable citizens. While other developed nations continue to seek social growth and change through integrated and inclusive education systems, Hong Kong continues to overlook the needs of non-Chinese-speaking, children with special education needs.

This paper addresses the concerns of the non-Chinese speaking Special Education Needs (SEN) community, and calls upon the Hong Kong Government, and the Education and Social Welfare Departments, specifically, to consider:

- funding for non-Chinese speaking children with Special Education Needs in the same manner as is offered to Chinese speaking children with Special Education Needs through the Education and Social Welfare Departments and
- to work with the International School Community to establish and fund an independent Authority that will be responsible for overseeing the development of funding, early assessment and intervention, family counselling, ongoing training support for schools and teachers, and coordinated placement of children with special education needs within the international school sector in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong has two official languages – English or Cantonese – but it is really only responsible for the Cantonese school system. Due to historical circumstances the international school system is largely independent. But there are children with Special Education Needs in the non-Chinese speaking community that need help now.

Therefore it is imperative, for the sake of these children and their families, and for Hong Kong, that the Government and International School Sector agree to work together, to develop and implement an integrated education system for the children who have special education needs and who live in Hong Kong today.

Once these immediate needs are met, issues regarding education continuum and the integration of young non-Chinese speaking adults with special education needs into Hong Kong society can then be addressed.

1. Introduction and Background

In her paper entitled *Multiple Identities: Disability, Cultural Diversity and Income Deprivation*, Anuradha Naidu from the University of Hong Kong asked:

How can children's multiple identities, including disability, be addressed and celebrated to ensure inclusion in mainstream classrooms?

The international Special Education Needs (SEN) community in Hong Kong deals with this question daily. Similarly, academics, governments, and the Special Education Needs communities throughout the world continue to try to identify and redress barriers to inclusive education.

Presently leading world nations consider Special Education Needs as part of a single mainstream education framework, as described by the model outlined by the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994).

The Salamanca Statement proclaims that:

- Every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning.
- Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs.
- Education systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs.
- Those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs.
- Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.

Despite that Hong Kong, as a Special Administration Region of China, is a signatory to the Salamanca Statement, Ms Naidu argues that in Hong Kong, Asia's World City, children with a disability who belong to ethnic minority groups are, "at risk" of being excluded from the mainstream education system, due to institutional barriers, linguistic disadvantage and/or financial disempowerment.

Ms Naidu argues that:

- Institutional barriers in Hong Kong can give rise to schools' reluctance to admit children who are unable to conform to the minimum benchmark requirements (not necessarily academic) for admission;
- Children from some linguistic minority groups struggle to be understood with their inadequate knowledge of either the official language of the State (in this case Chinese) or English and

- Children with a disability whose problem is compounded by parent disempowerment and poverty are more likely to remain struggling learners.

It is for these, and several other reasons, that the international SEN community in Hong Kong aspires for all SEN of non-Chinese speaking children to be capable of being met in accordance with global best practices as defined in the Salamanca Statement. With too few SEN places available within Hong Kong's international (non-Chinese speaking) school community, achieving this goal is not currently possible.

In the following document the international SEN community of Hong Kong is pleased to be able to provide recommendations to the Legislative Council and Government of Hong Kong, in order that the objectives of the Salamanca Statement might be better achieved for the non-Chinese speaking SEN community of Hong Kong.

2. The Issues

a. The Right to Education

The right to education for all children is deeply enshrined in our laws. The Hong Kong Government has, for quite some time, held education and training in high regard and has spent considerable time and resources in reviewing our education system and making available (particularly to able-bodied residents) subvented programmes encouraging the use of English in Hong Kong. In addition to legislative recognition of these rights the Hong Kong Government has taken on-going steps to ensure that the basic education needs of the society are met. In the mainstream education sector, the Government has addressed the needs of Chinese speaking and non-Chinese speaking children. In the special needs education sector, the various needs of Chinese speaking, disabled children are provided for through 62 aided special schools and 641 special education classes in the mainstream schools.

b. The Forgotten Children

Every child is entitled to free education in Hong Kong and this should be a right without any kind of discrimination. However, children who are both members of a minority (therefore non-Chinese speaking) and disabled, are still not given equal opportunities (when compared to other children) to fully develop their individual potential.

Existing barriers for non-Chinese speaking students with SEN include:

- No free education;
- Limited provision of paid services, which are fragmented and inefficient. Parents of children with special education needs, need to source and coordinate these services, in most instances, without professional assistance;
- High cost of paid services – a burden that must be borne entirely by parents;
- No education continuum – through secondary and vocational schools – for non-Chinese speaking children with special education needs, so that they may live a purposeful, and to the maximum extent possible, independent life; and,
- No programmes that assist non-Chinese speaking children with special education needs to integrate within mainstream community when they become adults.

Education Opportunities for children in Hong Kong

Provision		Chinese Speaking Children			Non-Chinese Speaking Children		
		Mainstream	Special Needs		Mainstream	Special Needs	
			Mild	Moderate to Sever		Mild	Moderate to Sever
Primary							
Government		√	√	√	√	√	NONE
Aided		√	√	√	√	√	NONE
paid services	ESF	N/A	N/A	N/A	√	√	√
	DSS	√	N/A	N/A	√	N/A	N/A
	Private	√	√	N/A	√	√	√
Secondary							
Government		√	√	√	√	NONE	NONE
Aided		√	√	√	√	NONE	NONE
paid services	ESF	N/A	N/A	N/A	√	√	√
	DSS	√	N/A	N/A	√	N/A	N/A
	Private	√	√	N/A	√	√	NONE

Presently Hong Kong's education playing field seems unfairly balanced when it comes to Government and community support for SEN. This is in contrast to current international thinking that stipulates the following provisions are the responsibility of the entire community irrespective of the child's academic ability:

- An appropriate education for every child;

An appropriate education is defined as meeting a child's unique needs, in order to prepare that child for employment and independent living.

- The least restrictive environment for every child to learn;

In the United States IDEA defines the least restrictive environment as: To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

- Education in a child's mother tongue;

The past decade has provided more evidence that good quality early childhood care and education, both in families and in more structured programmes, has a positive impact on the survival, growth, development and learning potential of children. They should be provided in the child's mother tongue and help to identify and enrich the care and education of children with special needs.

c. Limited Places Among International Education Options

Hong Kong's international SEN community supports the Hong Kong Government's stated policy to cater for its non-Chinese speaking community's SEN by integration with mainstream schools. It also recognises that due to historical circumstances the international school system is largely independent, which in turn has led to an inequitably disproportionate amount of attention, funding and resources for non-Chinese speaking children with SEN.

The Hong Kong Government's focus has always been and continues to be the Cantonese school system. Consequently the Government expects for all non-Chinese speaking children with SEN to learn the Cantonese language – and there are many services available for this – so that they might integrate with the mainstream school community. However, a child that struggles to learn in his or her mother tongue, is never going to be able to learn a new language, in order that he or she might learn join a mainstream school for SEN. All research shows that if a child with SEN is to learn, he or she must be taught in his or her mother tongue. If the Government is to successfully implement its policy to integrate mainstream and special education needs students, it will need to facilitate implementation by:

- acknowledging the issue of lack of places, resources and facilities for special education needs in the non-Chinese speaking education sector;
- recognising that integration in the Cantonese system is not a reality;
- increasing awareness among the international education community that solutions to satisfy non-Chinese speaking, special education needs, need to be found;
- supporting those international schools already developing and implementing integrated special education needs programs; and
- working with the international education community to increase the number of places, facilities, funding and resources available for SEN in mainstream international schools in Hong Kong.

d. Overcoming Barriers to Increased SEN Mainstream Places

International best practice indicates a ratio of 10 percent special education needs students to 90 percent mainstream students to be the most effective integration mix. In order to achieve this ratio, or as close as possible to this ratio, the international SEN Community in Hong Kong aspires for more, ideally all, mainstream international schools to be able to offer places for students with special education needs. In order to facilitate this goal it is important to understand current barriers that exist for integration of children with SEN, into existing schools that provide mainstream education in Hong Kong. Research would indicate the primary barriers in Hong Kong are:

i. Cost

Historically, parents of children with SEN who wanted English, or language services other than Chinese, have had to arrange for themselves by setting up special needs schooling and training. Without much help from the Government, these efforts become costly and inefficient. Additionally, programmes competing for limited resources (such as space and English speaking therapists) further push up the costs of these SEN services, resulting in them becoming unaffordable for members of low income groups.

Currently there are three financial options for non-Chinese speaking students with SEN in Hong Kong. The first is Government-funded schools working to a Hong Kong curriculum and education model. The language of instruction is English. The second is the English Schools Foundation (ESF) sub-vented model. Language of instruction is English. Sixteen of the ESF schools offer some SEN integration, while Sarah Roe is dedicated to those students with extensive special needs that limit their independent ability. The final model is a totally private model where parents pay fees for all the additional professional education support needs as determined by the student's needs. The language of instruction is dependent on the nationality of the school, but most international schools have English language streams. Even with these three options the number of places is limited and continuation of the current programmes without support from the Government is questionable.

ii. Individual School Mandate

The second barrier to integration of SEN in mainstream schools is individual school mandates. Traditionally, the objective of international schools in Hong Kong was to provide expatriate students with a 'home country' education with the view that the students would return to their home country to work or undertake further tertiary studies. The objective of Hong Kong's international schools remains largely unchanged. The biggest difference is that local Chinese-speaking families have seen these international schools as an opportunity for their children to be eligible for overseas universities, resulting in much higher enrolment of local students. The majority of private international schools in Hong Kong continue to cater specifically for students – both Chinese and non-Chinese speaking - who wish to undertake international tertiary studies.

Attracting primarily students who are capable of higher academic achievement, these schools do not seek to offer inclusive programming. This is disappointing given that many of these schools have received land or financial grants of support from both the Hong Kong Government and/or their own Governments with a view that they will cater for all the education needs of their 'national' community. Clearly there are those schools that will always seek the more academically capable, and it is their right to do so. However, under the Basic Law and certain international conventions and treaties, Hong Kong has obligations to all children that must be fulfilled.

3. The Right Support and Tools for Families, Schools, Teachers and Students

While the non-Chinese speaking, SEN community recognises the effort that is being made by those private and charitable organizations offering SEN assistance, it is essential, if Hong Kong is to improve services, that the current lack of co-ordination and the fragmentation and inefficiencies of existing services be addressed.

a. Students and Families

The success of the inclusive school depends considerably on early identification, assessment and stimulation of the very young child with special educational needs. Early childhood care and education programmes for children aged up to 6 years ought to be developed and/or reoriented to promote physical, intellectual and social development and school readiness. These programmes have a major economic value for the individual, the family and society in preventing the aggravation of disabling conditions. Programmes at this level should recognize the principle of inclusion and be developed in a comprehensive way by combining pre-school activities and early childhood health care.

Early identification of SEN needs requires close integration of family, school and medical facilities. The family must be able to, in conjunction with professional help, identify the need and have access to the support necessary for their family and child in order to manage the special needs. Teachers require on-going education to provide excellent integrated teaching classrooms and schools require support in order to cover the cost of on-going teacher training, management training and resource and material development associated with SEN learning.

To achieve this integration, the international SEN community in Hong Kong proposes the establishment of an independent authority that would centralize the following functions:

- Assessment and identification of Special Education Needs;
- Coordination with Government financial agencies on behalf of families;
- Coordination of therapeutic intervention prior to school age and with Schools after placement;
- Family counselling;
- Assistance with school placement; and
- Community integration of SEN.

b. Schools and Teachers

To support the ongoing development of mainstream classroom teachers, special education teachers and SEN management, the international SEN community in Hong Kong proposes the establishment of a coordinated education program. Ideally, this role would be fulfilled by the independent authority established to support families with Special Education Needs. This authority would be responsible for identifying existing courses for schools utilizing resources from education institutions both in Hong Kong and overseas. Based on the needs of the Integrated International Special Education Needs community, the authority may see fit to develop courses in conjunction with participating schools and vocational and/or tertiary institutions to meet the community's professional development needs.

4. The Education Continuum

An education continuum must be developed that enables children with SEN to live independently and productively within the Hong Kong community. The continuum would include the following:

- Scope of need and nature for an educational continuum through secondary and into vocational education;
- Identification of where and how educational needs could be met by the international community in Hong Kong; and
- Identification of the scope for community integration by way of supported living and suitable employment opportunities for children with SEN who would otherwise not achieve this independently.

Ideally these responsibilities would be part of the remit of the independent Authority that would have responsibility for oversight of non-Chinese speaking Special Education Needs.

5. Recommendations

a. Parity with Chinese Speaking SEN Students

To overcome the cost barrier, the international SEN community recommends that the Hong Kong Government agree to make financial support available in a manner similar to that provided under the Education Department's New Funding Mode (NFM); and the Social Welfare Department's Grants for services for individuals with Special Education Needs.

i. New Funding Mode

Schools that are part of the New Funding Mode (NFM) are offered an intensive learning support grant according to the students in need. These schools are provided with greater autonomy and flexibility in resource deployment and are required to adopt the strategies that foster:

- Early identification;
- Early intervention;
- Whole school approach;
- Home school cooperation; and
- Cross-sector collaboration.

NFM participating schools are required to set up a Student Support Team and coordinate the teaching staff and parents to provide the students with systematic and appropriate school-based support.

Grants under the New Funding Mode are made to a child after assessment by an authorised professional. The grant is made available to the school or professional for the additional services provided to the child with Special Education Needs. Similarly, funding for non-Chinese speaking students with SEN would be associated with the child (not a specific educational institution, thereby providing funding for those schools prepared to provide support services for SEN students within mainstream classrooms) and made available to the school providing the service. The amount of funding available for each student would be determined by the nature of the special need. This special need would be assessed by a Foundation responsible for, amongst other things, centralised assessment of special education needs. (See below).

ii. The Social Welfare Department

The Social Welfare Department offers a number of grants to assist children with Special Education Needs, and families of children with Special Education Needs. These grants include:

- Residential special child care centres;
- Supported employment;
- On the job training programmes for People with disabilities;
- Support hostels for children over 15 years of age; and,
- Others.

The international SEN community seeks parity so that those families with Special Education Needs who are non-Chinese speaking, but still contributors and taxpayers to Hong Kong society, might receive financial support. In this way non-Chinese speaking Hong Kong residents will not have to abandon their lives, careers, families and friends to make a new life in a country that provides more affordable SEN care.

b. An Independent Authority for Non-Chinese Speaking SEN

i. Student and Family Support

To coordinate early identification of non-Chinese speaking children's SEN, an independent authority should be established and endowed with the power to:

- Arrange SEN assessments and identification of student needs;
- Coordinate with Government financial agencies, making funding recommendations, and support the SEN child's family through the process of application for financial support;
- Coordinate therapeutic intervention by a full range of physical, psychological and educational professionals;
- Offer/Facilitate counselling for Family and care-givers of SEN children; and
- Devise and implement community integration and education SEN programs.

The Authority would also be responsible to liaise with all the international schools providing SEN programs, and those schools that do not provide formal programs, with a view to providing guidance regarding placement opportunities for SEN students.

ii. School and Teacher Support

The Authority's mandate should also include the coordination of on-going improvement of services and standards amongst the international SEN education community. It is envisaged that this might involve partnerships with Hong Kong academic institutions and overseas academic institutions with a view to providing training for things such as:

- Integrated teaching skills for mainstream teachers
- Professional development for existing SEN teachers
- Professional development for teaching support staff and SEN coordinators
- SEN management skills for school administrators

The Authority's international school liaison role might also extend to include working with the international school community with a view to developing proposals that would lead to increasing the number of places that could be provided within mainstream classrooms; the range of services that could be provided by, or shared by, the international education community; and, additional methods of finance for these places and services.

c. Education Continuum

Clearly, the current priority is the immediate need of Hong Kong's SEN community. Firstly, to implement funding and coordination services that will improve the existing services being provided by international education institutions. This should lead to the creation of working models that will then facilitate the expansion of these models to other institutions willing to implement SEN programs within mainstream classrooms.

Once this initial need is fulfilled, it will be imperative to look beyond early childhood identification and intervention. Hong Kong's Social Welfare and Education policy makers will need to review the type of society to which Hong Kong aspires and develop and implement strategies that achieve education through middle and possibly high school age groups, ultimately deciding what type of inclusive options, Hong Kong will be able to provide the SEN members of our community, for independent living and meaningful contribution to our society.