

**Subcommittee to study issues relating to the provision of  
boarding places, senior secondary education and employment  
opportunities for children with special educational needs**

**Supplementary Information Note on  
Assessment and Support for Students with Specific Learning Difficulties**

**Purpose**

This paper is to provide information on assessment and support for students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD), pursuant to the Subcommittee meeting of 27 June 2005 and the related Information Note circulated in October 2005 (LC Paper No. CB(2)2670/05-06(01)).

**Assessment and Waiting Time**

2. The assessments conducted for students by the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) and schools are related to learning and teaching, whereas the assessment services provided by the Child Assessment Centres of the Department of Health are for medical and diagnostic purposes.

3. The educational psychologists of EMB usually provide consultation services to the teachers within a month upon receipt of the school's referral, with a view to assessing the student's learning needs and advising the teachers on adjustment strategies in teaching.

4. In order to address the needs of the students effectively and efficiently, we advise teachers to conduct 'assessment through teaching', and then provide the necessary adjustments and support in teaching in the first instance according to the students' needs. The educational psychologists provide specialist assessments to those students who

continue to have severe learning difficulties despite remedial support from teachers.

### **Transition to Secondary Schools**

5. To facilitate parents in choosing schools, we have uploaded the list of schools adopting a whole school approach to cater for students with special educational needs. Starting from the 2002/03 school year, we have been issuing a circular to schools annually, reminding them to seek parental consent and send the information about the special needs of P.6 students to the respective secondary schools. EMB also reminds the student guidance personnel to contact the staff of the relevant secondary school to ensure that the students concerned are given the necessary support in the secondary school. However, there are reported cases that some student guidance personnel could not pass the students' information to the secondary schools because of the parents' reluctance to reveal their children's problems to the secondary schools.

### **Adaptation of the Secondary School Curriculum**

6. It is a challenge for many students with SpLD to cope with the secondary school curriculum. Over the past few years, we have been helping those schools with large intake of students with backward attainment to adapt a school-based curriculum to meet the needs of their students. However, at this stage, schools' experience in adjusting their curriculum to meet the needs of individual or a small group of students with SpLD has yet to be accumulated. Some educational psychologists have also started various projects to work with individual subject teachers to help students with SpLD to follow the curriculum. More action research has yet to be carried out to accumulate local experience.

### **Assessment Tools, Remediation Programmes and Resource Packages**

7. To strengthen the understanding, assessment and teaching of students with SpLD, we in collaboration with tertiary institutions and non-governmental organizations, organized a series of three-day seminars

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in early November 2005 for teachers on new educational resources and good practices in local schools. These new resources comprise tools for early identification of learning difficulties and support, computer packages, teaching guides as well as learning support plans for various levels from kindergartens to secondary schools. Details are at Appendix. These seminars were very well received by over 1,700 teachers, parents and relevant professionals. The seminars also received attention from the media, which contributed to raising public awareness on the subject.

8. We plan to publish the “Supporting students with dyslexia in reading and writing: a guide for secondary school teachers” within this school year. The Guide aims to enhance teachers’ understanding of the behavioural characteristics of secondary school students with SpLD in reading and writing, and to provide practical suggestions on how to cultivate a supportive learning environment.

### **Teachers’ Professional Development**

9. In addition to the 120-hour Professional Development Course for Teachers (Catering for Diverse Learning Needs), and the theme-based training programmes/workshops and experience sharing seminars, we have also commissioned another tertiary institution to organise a new 30-hour course on SpLD plus another 12-hour practicum. The new course will provide a total of 240 places in the 2005/06 and 2006/07 school years for the Chinese Language and English Language teachers.

### **Consultancy Study on SpLD**

10. Parents have raised concern regarding the effectiveness of the identification procedure, the waiting time required for specialist assessment and the need for timely school-based support for students with SpLD. In this connection, we have invited a renowned scholar and practitioner in the field of SpLD in the United Kingdom (UK) as the Consultant to advise on the provision of educational services for students with SpLD. The Consultant visited HK in late November and conducted seminars for about 150 participants in the fields of education, developmental paediatrics, rehabilitation and administration.

11. The consultancy report is still under preparation. In the meantime, the Consultant has made some key recommendations as summarized in the following paragraphs.

### *11.1 The concept of SpLD as a Learning Difference*

In UK, SpLD is a general education issue and is regarded as a learning *difference*. This implies that the mainstream language teacher plays an important role in *noticing* young students' individual differences in learning to read and write and subsequently *adjusting* their teaching strategies accordingly to meet their learning needs of their students. Through this “early noticing and adjusting” strategy, the learning needs of most of these students can be met.

### *11.2 A continuum of educational support*

Frequency and intensity of support should vary for students with ‘mild’, ‘moderate’ or ‘severe/persistent’ difficulties. A graduated response to mild SpLD should start as early as possible in regular classrooms by adjusting the daily teaching strategies in regular lessons. Intensive remedial support should be provided for those with moderate difficulties and not responding to the adjusted teaching strategy in regular lessons. For those with severe/persistent difficulties, professional support from specialists may be required.

### *11.3 Teacher Education*

There are important implications for both pre-service and in-service teacher training. Courses may be considered at three levels: (a) short courses on awareness raising; (b) understanding of basic principles and use of ‘teaching / resource packages’; and (c) the development of ‘local expertise’.

### *11.4 Development of “user-friendly” educational resources*

An education policy that regards SpLD as a learning difference

needs to go alongside the development of teaching resources and skills within general education. Teacher workload and stress have to be considered. Materials for teachers need to be clear and simple enough to be perceived as useful.

### ***11.5 Assessment conducted over time in response to teaching***

Teachers play a crucial role in ‘assessment for learning’. The educational psychologists (EP) are to provide consultation service and support to the teachers in assessing the students’ strengths and weaknesses and adjusting teaching strategies accordingly. EPs also carry out individual psychological assessment and programme planning to promote the progress of those children whose difficulties are most severe. Statutory normative assessment procedures in UK have used up much of the EPs’ time on labeling the students rather than supporting the teachers in improving the teaching process.

### ***11.6 Monitoring of Progress***

Accountability for progress is to be considered at three levels: (a) student notebooks; (b) evaluation of teaching targets; and (c) normative assessments. Accountability of schools can be addressed through curriculum-based assessment at the student’s entry to the school and then the demonstration of monitored progress.

## **Way Forward**

12. To better support the students with SpLD, we will continue to collaborate with the tertiary and school sectors and non-governmental organisations to step up the following arrangements:

- Development of identification tools;
- Development of learning materials and resource packages for use by student with reading difficulties;
- Development of teaching skills for language teachers to facilitate early “noticing and adjusting” in teaching;

- Further enhancement of teachers' professional development;
- Public education; and
- Communication with parents and concern groups.

### **Advice Sought**

13. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Education and Manpower Bureau  
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## Appendix

### List of New Teaching Resources on SpLD

- 1 *Supporting students with dyslexia in reading and writing: a guide for secondary school teachers (EMB)*

The Guide, disseminated in the form of CD, aims to enhance teachers' understanding of the behavioural characteristics of secondary school students with SpLD in reading and writing, and provide practical suggestions on how to cultivate a supportive learning environment. In addition to guidelines, the CD also contains video demonstrations of teaching strategies and interviews with students, teachers, parents and celebrities.

- 2 *Enhancing the reading and writing skills of students: a parent training manual (EMB)*

This manual, designed for teachers and school guidance personnel to facilitate their organisation of workshops for parents or parent-volunteers, aims at empowering parents with effective strategies for helping children with SpLD. Ready-to-use resources include session plans, powerpoint presentations, worksheets and video demonstrations.

- 3 *Introduction of English phonics learning software – rebuilding our word-planet “ROW” (EMB)*

This software, designed for students with SpLD to explore and master the relationship between sounds and spelling of English words through simple tips and interesting word games, can be used in either the Adventure Mode or Tutor Guided Mode. It also allows teachers and parents to select lessons and word-lists for individual students.

- 4 *Three multi-media CDs to support the learning of Chinese and English language (Hong Kong Polytechnic University)*

A set of three CDs on the training of morphological awareness (Chinese), listening and reading skills (Chinese), and phonological

awareness (English) is developed to support classroom and individualised teaching, targeted at enhancing the learning of Chinese and English language for primary school students with SpLD.

- 5 *A curriculum for students with dyslexia in chinese reading and writing (Society of Boys' Centres)*

A curriculum designed to enhance the literacy skills of primary students with SpLD in Chinese reading and writing. Two CDs contain the theoretical framework of the curriculum and teaching demonstrations as well as samples of teaching plans and worksheets respectively.

- 6 *The Hong Kong learning behaviour checklist for preschool children (University of Hong Kong and Chinese University of Hong Kong )*

This Checklist aims to facilitate parents and teachers to identify pre-primary children at risk of SpLD, so that early intervention can be provided.

- 7 *Home-school IEP support project for students with dyslexia – primary & secondary schools (University of Hong Kong)*

This study is to try out and promote an indigenous home-school cooperation model in schools in support of students with SpLD.