

I am a parent with a child at the Jockey Club Sarah Roe School which is the only ESF special school and, I believe, the only English speaking special school in Hong Kong. I wish to state my position that I am currently happy with the provision, but that did not come easily. I want to see improvements which have long been on the agenda but, as yet, remain unresolved.

I have read the views of those supporting the Bill and opposing the amendments and I am heartened to learn that there is a strong support for SEN issues and suggestions for improvements to the existing structure to manage the education of children with SEN.

However, at the core of those views is the presumption that, "children with SEN are no different to the rest of the school population and the existing provisions for dealing with their education are adequate."

This is clearly not true. Our children are so different in all aspects of their education and we need to acknowledge this and make provision to manage these differences. It is outside the norm which others are able to perceive. This is clear when the perception of most ESF parents is that our children's needs are like any other special interest group. This perception runs to management as well who have, hitherto, been unable to comprehend the vast difference in the resources needed to implement SEN programmes. It also runs to some professional staff who do not have the training or resources to address the implementation issues.

I support all three amendments to the ESF Bill in principle i.e., Amendments to:

- the Objects and Powers,
- Board of Governors and
- School Council membership.

When seen and taken together, they are wholly supportive of and underpin the ESF's stated desire to provide inclusive education. They are, therefore, a necessary package. I do not believe we can, "cherry pick" and have just one or two of the amendments. I do not believe that these amendments per se will address the issues of SEN in the ESF. That is being addressed by management, professionals and parents elsewhere. These amendments, however, are a necessary impetus to that effort.

1. I support the amendment to the Objects and Powers of the Foundation. This is a leadership issue and I see the amendments as a rare opportunity for the ESF to demonstrate and shout loud and clear to the whole world, its position on inclusive education. It is an opportunity to step forward and champion the rights and privileges of those in society less able to defend them selves. It should not be perceived by the ESF as a challenge to its leadership or management and it should not be perceived as a limitation to its admissions criteria which is not and should not be included in legislation. The criteria for admissions are clearly dependent on many factors; defined elsewhere.

2. I support the amendment for representation on the Board of Governors. How else can SEN/IN issues of policy and implementation be properly debated and agreed unless there is parental representation at the top of the management structure? It is my experience that many SEN/IN have, hitherto, remained unresolved because they were left at school level and there was no proper forum for them to be articulated and understood at the top. It is very much the case that major issues for the minority are often perceived as minor by the majority. This amendment seeks to redress that condition and bring the needs of SEN/IN children into a proper and informed perspective.

3. I support the amendment for representation on School Councils. This is complementary to representation on the Board of Governors. Representation on both ensures a proper flow of information both up and down, to facilitate debate and resolution of important or difficult issues in a uniform manner.

Terry Mountain
Chairman, Jockey Club Sarah Roe School Parent Teachers
Association
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