

Honourable Legislative Councillors,

We are a group of KGV parents whose children have special educational needs (SEN). First of all, we would like to thank you for giving us this valuable opportunity to put forward our proposal on the amendments of the ESF Ordinance Bill.

To begin with, we would put our proposal against the backdrop of the provision of special education within the ESF, which has in the past aroused a great deal of concern among the SEN parents. Overall, it was felt that the provision of SEN education had a lot of room for improvement. In view of this, in 2005 a comprehensive review of special education needs provision was conducted by the ESF (commissioned by the ESF from Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) in the UK), and as a result, the SEN Review Report was published in April 2005. The report highlighted a number of major weaknesses in SEN education within the ESF, including the following:

1. The ESF SEN policy was outdated.
2. There were doubts about the transparency of SEN budgeting and the effectiveness of resource allocation.
3. There was a great deal of variation among SEN students' learning outcomes, partly due to an inadequate system of monitoring and evaluation.
4. Low satisfaction level among SEN parents was noted, and there was a lack of opportunities for parents to meet with ESF leaders to discuss issues relating to their children's education.

The SEN Review Report has made a number of recommendations to address the problems identified. Unfortunately, despite these recommendations to improve the quality of SEN education and the ESF's pledge to implement the recommendations¹ within a year and a half, very little has been achieved since 2005. Worse still, ESF has not committed itself to a timeline to see to the implementation of the recommendations.

In a bid to enhance the quality of SEN education within KGV School, a Parent Support Group comprising parents whose children study in the school's Learning Support Centre (LSC) was formed in 2003. In the past few years, our parents have worked very hard to get the school to listen to our views and to improve the quality of SEN education in KGV. However, our experience has further uncovered the limitations of the special education (SEN) provided by the ESF, including but not

¹ ESF: Special Educational Needs Action Plan, 2005-2007.

limited to the following:

1. Lack of transparency in the curriculum of the LSC, as a result of which parents are ill-informed about their children's learning progress.
2. Lack of a communication channel for SEN parents to express their views and a platform for SEN parent participation. In March 2007, this group of KGV parents (comprising about half of the LSC population) lodged a formal complaint against the Head of the LSC and some related teaching/learning issues. The Principal of KGV School responded by sending the LSC parents a letter that outlined a number of retaliatory measures, including forbidding them to enter the school premises to pick up their children. However, other parents and their domestic helpers were allowed to do so. It was only after the intervention of some LegCo members that the Principal finally agreed, rather reluctantly, to withdraw the letter. On the other hand, although the ESF management responded to the complaint by acknowledging it within a short time, they have not addressed the issues parents raised but instead adopted a delay tactic. Consequently, six months have passed but an inquiry about the complaint has not yet been made. When the Vice Chairman of the PTSA who was then one of the parents involved in the complaint attempted to explain to the other members about the matter at the PTSA Executive Committee, she was silenced and asked to step down as the Vice Chairman.

Given such a background, we believe that the reform of SEN education within the ESF has to start with the fundamental principles, and hence we propose three amendments to the existing ESF Ordinance Bill:

1. Adding to the objects of the ESF a clause that includes “without regard to disability”, apart from race and religion

We believe that such an addition in the mission statement of the Foundation is only an attempt to putting its commitment to special education needs on paper. There should be no misunderstanding that an added clause like means that the ESF will have to accept any student with any degree of SEN, since in admitting SEN students the Foundation has its own criteria and its admission quota. Just as the Foundation can turn away an ethnic minority student because of the shortage of places, it can decide not to admit a SEN student for the same reason without being accused of failure to adhere to the mission statement. Furthermore, as inclusive education is advocated in the educational community locally and internationally, it is high time the ESF reviewed its mission statement to include a clause on “without regard to disability” to reflect the changing times and to keep itself abreast of the local and international trend.

2. Adding a SEN parent representative to the Board of Governors

This proposed amendment is a direct response to one of the major problems identified by the SEN Review Report – namely lack of a communication platform for SEN parents. Since SEN parents have first-hand knowledge of the needs and learning difficulties of SEN students², their representation on the Board of Governors can ensure that the voice of SEN parents be heard by the Foundation and that its policies can better address the needs of SEN students.

3. Adding a SEN parent representative to the School Council of each ESF school

This amendment follows closely from the previous one. If there is a SEN parent representative on the Board of Governors, it only makes sense to have a SEN parent representative on the School Council of each ESF school. This can allow schools to operate with independence and autonomy as far as SEN education is concerned. Also, through SEN parent participation, there can be more effective deployment of resources by ESF schools, which will in turn enable the Foundation to operate more smoothly.

To conclude, we strongly believe that the above proposed amendments will lead to a win-win situation benefiting the Foundation, the schools, teachers, students and parents. We also believe that such a proposal will provide a sound basis on which we can establish a stronger partnership between parents and the Foundation / ESF schools.

Last but not least, we would once again thank the Honourable Legislative Councillors for allowing us the opportunity to state our views on the ESF Ordinance Bill. We sincerely hope to have your full support on our proposed amendments. Thank you!

A Group of KGV SEN Parents

8th October, 2007

² SEN (Special Educational Needs) students include Special Educational Needs (SEN), Individual Needs (IN) and Gifted students. It is about 10% of the ESF total student population.