

Motion on “Report of the Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to the Provision of Boarding Places, Senior Secondary Education and Employment Opportunities for Children with Special Educational Needs” moved by Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung at the Legislative Council Meeting on 2 July 2008
Progress Report

Background

At the Council meeting of 2 July 2008, the following motion moved by Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung was carried:

“That, this Council endorses the Report of the Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to the Provision of Boarding Places, Senior Secondary Education and Employment Opportunities for Children with Special Educational Needs, and urges the Government to implement the recommendations therein.”

2. This progress report sets out the follow-up actions taken by the Administration for Members’ information.

Integrated Education

3. With a view to further facilitating schools to implement integrated education, the Education Bureau (EDB) has enhanced the funding arrangements for the Learning Support Grant for Primary Schools, and newly introduced the Learning Support Grant for Secondary Schools as from the 2008/09 school year according to schedule. Schools are provided with additional resources according to the number of students with special educational needs (SEN) admitted and the level of support required by the students. Schools may deploy the resources flexibly to recruit teachers, teaching assistants or arrange other support measures according to the actual needs of students. We are also exploring with schools in the North District the launching of a pilot project of district-based school development and networking, for developing their expertise in catering for students with various types of SEN.

4. EDB has been offering Basic, Advanced and Thematic Courses under the Teacher Professional Development Framework on Integrated Education since the 2007/08 school year. EDB has set aside sufficient funding for government and aided primary, secondary and special schools to provide supply teachers for regular teachers attending these courses. Teachers concerned are hence granted paid study leave and can concentrate on their studies in these courses.

5. In respect of the development of teaching materials and teaching strategies, EDB distributed the Hong Kong Chinese Reading and Writing Abilities Assessment for Secondary School Students (for use by teachers) to all secondary schools in April 2008 for language teachers to conduct initial screening of students with specific learning difficulties. To assist secondary school teachers to provide remedial support for students after initial screening, EDB has planned to produce a related teaching resource kit. EDB is inviting tenders and plans to distribute the resource kit to schools in the 2009/10 school year.

6. As for the promotion of integrated education, in the second term of the 2007/08 school year EDB elucidated to various stakeholders through different channels, including cross-sector professional sharing, teacher sharing, principals' forum, parent seminar and EDB homepage, on the various support services available for students with SEN, among which how to choose a suitable school for their child and the school transfer mechanism were covered. In September 2008, we shall upload to the EDB Homepage the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education - Parent Guide, in which we shall list out in detail the support services provided for students with SEN, including the mechanism of referral for school placement. Moreover, in planning for public education and parent education activities, EDB is exploring with other government departments, education bodies and non-government organizations the possibility of co-organizing activities to promote integrated education.

Education for students with specific learning difficulties (SpLD)

7. As for assessment arrangements for student with SpLD, EDB and the Department of Health (DH) have reached a consensus that EDB is responsible

for assessing cases related to learning difficulties and DH is responsible for assessing cases with multiple developmental disorders. The related work flow as agreed by the two parties has already been put into practice. In regard to the working group set up for reviewing the assessment criteria on SpLD, its initial draft report was completed in early August 2008. The report will be submitted to EDB and DH for consideration.

8. EDB uploaded the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education - Operation Guide and Whole School Approach to Integrated Education - Parent Guide onto the EDB Homepage in June and September 2008 respectively. Both documents advise schools to report students' progress to parents regularly, and to review and discuss support measures with parents concerned. Parents are also encouraged to cooperate with schools actively.

9. EDB plans to organize a series of district-based workshops in the 2008/09 school year for teachers and student guidance personnel on strategies and skills in conducting case conference, including how to devise support strategies for students with SEN and strengthen home-school cooperation.

Education for Non-Chinese Speaking (NCS) students with SEN

10. NCS children (including children with SEN), like the local students, may receive various modes of support in the local education system. In addition, we are further exploring the possibility of increasing the school places and support for NCS students with SEN under the English Schools Foundation system.

New academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education

11. Through different professional development programmes including seminars, workshops and experience sharing sessions conducted since 2006, EDB has explained to school leaders, middle managers and subject teachers the aims of the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum for students with intellectual disability. It aims to enhance their understanding and mastery of the ways of making appropriate adaptations of the curriculum (a combination of the core subjects, elective subjects and other learning experiences) in the

light of the expected learning outcomes of the students, with a view to improving the students' adaptability and independent living ability and stretching their potential to the full. EDB will also provide a preliminary draft of the learning outcomes frameworks of the three core subjects for special schools and supplementary notes of curriculum and assessment guides for the teaching of students with intellectual disability in the 2008/09 school year. EDB will also develop more learning and teaching resources in future.

12. EDB has organized the School Leaders Workshops and Middle Managers Workshops for special schools and promoted the concept of resources sharing among schools. Special schools are encouraged to consider collaborating with neighbouring special and ordinary schools whenever possible to provide a wider spectrum of choices of senior secondary subjects for their students. The Regional Education Offices of EDB will continue to organize professional development activities for ordinary schools and special schools to share their teaching strategies and teaching resources for students with SEN. At present, some special schools have already established a support network through sharing activities. EDB will continue to encourage schools to enhance their collaboration.

13. Under EDB's pilot Applied Learning Courses for students with intellectual disability, the number of courses offered has increased from four in the first cohort (2006-08) to six in the last cohort (2008-10). EDB will evaluate the whole pilot project and collect views from various sectors in the 2009/10 school year. EDB will also continue to collaborate with course providers of Applied Learning to offer more courses that suit the ability and interest of students with intellectual disability under NSS.

14. Individual special schools need to carry out conversion works to tie in with the development of the NSS academic structure. As such, EDB has visited the schools with relevant government departments and made suggestions on the conversion works. Some conversion works are expected to be completed this year or in two to three years. It will take a longer time for other schools which require construction works. EDB officers are liaising with the schools concerned and providing timely advice to facilitate them to devise workable contingency plans for the transition period towards the NSS academic structure.

Boarding service

15. To meet the demand for boarding service, EDB has adjusted the number of 5-day and 7-day boarding places of special schools for the 2008/09 school year. EDB will continue to review the demand for boarding service regularly and adjust the number of 5-day and 7-day boarding places as appropriate.

16. The extension project for provision of additional classrooms and a boarding section to a special school for students with physical disability in New Territories East was approved by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council on 4 July 2008. The Architectural Services Department is inviting tenders for the construction works, which are expected to commence in November 2008 and complete in July 2010.

17. Regarding the school building project for reprovisioning and providing a boarding section to a special school for students with physical disability in New Territories West, the Architectural Services Department has completed the Technical Feasibility Statement and consultancy contract is expected to be awarded in September 2008.

Residential respite service

18. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) has provided additional resources to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for extending residential respite service, provided through their SWD-subvented residential care homes for persons with disabilities, to those aged 15 or below. The additional resources include one additional programme worker for every two residential respite places and Lotteries Fund Grant of \$13,600 for each residential care home to purchase appropriate furniture and equipment. Where necessary, SWD would also support the NGOs to apply for Lotteries Fund Grant for the modification of children's toilets. In addition to the provision of residential respite service to persons with disabilities aged 15 or below in existing residential care homes, SWD would also request residential care homes commencing service in April 2008 or afterwards to provide relevant residential respite service in order to increase the number of service places for meeting service needs.

Employment opportunities

19. As the largest employer in Hong Kong, the Government fully recognises the importance of taking the lead in employing persons with disabilities to promote equal opportunities for employment. Applicants with disabilities considered suitable for taking up a specific position would be accorded suitable priority for appointment. Over the years, the percentage of employees with disabilities in the civil service has been around 2%.

20. As regards government subvented organisations (GSOs) and statutory bodies, we have been encouraging them to adopt a series of measures to further promote the employment of persons with disabilities. These measures include setting up indicators for the employment of persons with disabilities on a voluntary basis; formulating policies and procedures regarding employment of persons with disabilities by drawing reference to those for the civil service; and publishing the numbers of employees with disabilities in their annual reports. To keep track of the progress of these measures undertaken by GSOs and statutory bodies, the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) conducts tracking surveys at regular intervals.

21. As requested by the Subcommittee, we have already provided detailed findings in the latest survey to the Legislative Council in May 2008, including the names of the surveyed GSOs and statutory bodies and their responses as well as the names of the organisations and bodies that had not responded. A summary of the responses from 1 066 public schools, included for the first time in this exercise, was also provided for the Subcommittee's information.

22. On the Subcommittee's proposal to prescribe a mandatory 2% target for employing persons with disabilities to be reached by those organisations by phases, the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee (RAC) and its Subcommittee on Employment had discussed the issue and advised that a better approach should be to adopt positive measures to encourage cross-sector collaboration and to recognise good employers who reached the target for employing persons with disabilities.

23. To this end, we have implemented a series of follow-up measures. The Secretary for Labour and Welfare (SLW) has encouraged in person the

major welfare organisations subvented by SWD to take the lead in employing more persons with disabilities, and has followed up on his request in writing. SLW, the Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare and the Chairman of the RAC have also written to the Secretaries of all policy bureaux and NGOs in the welfare sector to urge them to join hands in promoting the cause and employing more persons with disabilities. In parallel, the RAC has also embarked on visiting all 18 District Councils, major business associations, professional bodies and NGOs to share with them the benefits and experience of employing persons with disabilities. The exercise aims to encourage various sectors to collaborate in promoting the employment of persons with disabilities.

24. On Government service tenders, measures oriented towards the capabilities of persons with disabilities would be more effective in promoting employment of persons with disabilities. Therefore, Government bureaux and departments would identify service tenders which offer work suitable for persons with disabilities for contracting out to rehabilitation NGOs through restricted tender.

25. In response to the Director of Social Welfare's request, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) has set aside the refreshment outlets/refreshment kiosks in nine of its venues for restricted tender by the 36 organisations on a predetermined list of rehabilitation NGOs drawn up by the SWD. Following the same procedure, the Education Bureau and Home Affairs Department have each offered a similar venue respectively for restricted tender by these 36 rehabilitation NGOs. In addition, other Government departments, such as the Home Affairs Department, Hong Kong Police Force and Civil Service Training and Development Institute, have also invited bids exclusively from rehabilitation NGOs for service contracts identified as suitable for persons with disabilities.

26. We note the proposal put forward again by Members for the Government to actively consider providing tax incentives to private corporations to encourage them to employ persons with disabilities. Under the existing provisions of the Inland Revenue Ordinance, all costs related to the employment of staff (for both able-bodied people and persons with disabilities) are already deductible in calculating the employers' assessable profits. The Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau considered that any enhanced tax deduction for the employment of persons with disabilities would go against the

basic taxation principle. In any case, tax savings generated by such tax incentives are unlikely to be significant under the low-tax regime of Hong Kong.

27. Apart from the tracking surveys conducted by LWB, the Government also undertakes regular exercises to follow up on the employment situation of persons with disabilities. The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) conducts a special topic enquiry on “persons with disabilities and chronic diseases” under the General Household Survey every few years. The latest enquiry was conducted in 2007 and its field work has already been completed. After collating the data, C&SD will prepare a consultation document on its findings to seek views from relevant bodies. It is expected that the survey report will be published by the end of this year. The next round of enquiry will commence in around 2012.

28. Information on strengthening support for persons with disabilities in seeking open employment, reinforcing public education on the abilities and employability of persons with disabilities, and establishing an inter-departmental team to coordinate and oversee vocational training for persons with disabilities has been provided in detail in the paper entitled “Written Response to Views and Suggestions raised by the Deputations and Members at the Meeting on 28 January 2008” (LC Paper No. CB(2)2031/07-08(01), presented by the Government to the Subcommittee in May 2008.

Education Bureau
Labour and Welfare Bureau
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