

**Submission of Labour Party on Service Support for Children with Attention Deficit/  
Hyperactivity Disorder and Specific Learning Difficulties**

**Legislative Council Panel on Education  
Subcommittee on Integrated Education  
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The support for children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Specific Learning Difficulties (SLD) needs fundamental changes. The services currently are problem-oriented and focus on the “disabilities” of the children, rather than their needs as a whole person. This reinforces the negative labels on the children, and many of the parents find that disabling. Many of the services are not matching the needs of the students and the families, and they are fragmented: professionals do not communicate with each other, sometimes even under the same organisation, and rarely are professionals meeting for case conferences. The provision of the children’s needs are left to the parents. Parents have to make a huge effort to find resources to help their children.

The problem with services has been raised numerous times by different parents and professional groups. The Labour Party would here like to highlight a some of the many aspects that we believe need new directions.

**1. Family friendly services**

The services in Hong Kong focus mostly on the academic performance and behavioural issues of students. However, it is a well-known fact that parents of children with special needs face lots of pressure and difficulties, even before diagnosis. Taking care of children with ADHD often posts a bigger challenge for parents with emotional and behavioural management. Stress not only affects the effectiveness of parenting, but also the marital satisfaction and the mental health of parents are at risk. We believe the services provided should be family-oriented, and to provide the parents not only with adequate knowledge, but also with family counselling services.

**2. Training of professionals**

Many parents know very little about their children’s characteristics and challenges even years after diagnosis. This reflects the quality of services provided. Parents often complain that it is very difficult for them to seek help, or that the social workers and teachers at schools are not helpful or knowledgeable enough. Even

many teachers express difficulties with handling the children with ADHD and SLD. Whether or not the training for teachers is adequate is something we need to question. Also, the knowledge of ADHD and SLD of professionals in the medical, social work and psychological fields all need to be improved, as parents and teachers rely on their support to help the children.

### **3. Teaching and assessment methods in school**

Children with ADHD and SLD perform better with visual means of learning and creative activities. This also matches with the changes of needs of the society. However, our education system still relies heavily on auditory means of teaching. Students are assessed mainly with timed written assessments. Until this is improved, these children will continue to be disadvantaged.

### **4. Empowerment, not problem solving**

We need to help children understand that they are not ill or flawed, but they are just as unique as everyone else. The labelling effect is discouraging, and children with ADHD or SLD feel they are less worthy than others. Services provided are mostly problem-focused: teachers often see them as less able to achieve, medical professionals talk about their "illness" rather than their characteristics, and social workers focus on their behavioural problems rather than their needs. Children should be given learning experiences that encourage them to further develop themselves, not endless defeats and disappointments.

We are not talking about treating patients, curing them from some illness. We are talking about helping children realising their potential, about helping families adjusting to the difficulties they are facing and to help them to achieve a better life they deserve, which is their basic rights. With the current system and the limited support, the students and their families will continue to suffer and feel rejected. To improve the situation, we must not only improve the services, but the mentality behind the services provided. Inclusion is about acceptance and fairness. We are still a long way from realising the spirit of inclusion for our next generation.

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