

**Panel on Education
Subcommittee on Integrated Education**

Difficulties in implementing integrated education with respect to students with :

- (a) Specific Learning Difficulties;**
- (b) Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorders;**
- (c) Austistic Spectrum Disorders;**
- (d) Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties; and**
- (e) Communication Difficulties.**

**Summary of views/concerns raised at the meetings
on 30 April and 27 May 2013**

Identification of students with special educational needs ("SEN students")

1. The Comprehensive Child Development Service (a referral mechanism developed by the Hospital Authority ("HA"), Education Bureau ("EDB") and Social Welfare Department ("SWD")) assists pre-primary institutions in early identification of pre-schoolers with physical, developmental and behavioural problems for referral to the Maternal and Child Health Centres ("MCHC") of the Department of Health ("DH") in the respective districts for assessment.
 - (a) The deputations opined that kindergartens were not provided with effective and adequate support in identifying children with SEN.
 - (b) The deputations deplored the long waiting time required before the pre-school age children could receive assessment at MCHC, not to mention further referral or placement of the children in relevant education and training services. They were concerned that young children would miss the prime time for effective assistance. The promulgated objective of early identification and timely intervention was defeated.
2. Under the existing arrangements, three months after the start of a school year, primary school teachers use the norm-referenced "Observation Checklists for Teachers" developed by EDB to identify Primary 1 students with learning difficulties for referral to specialists,

notably educational psychologists ("EP") for consultation and individual assessment.

- (a) Some deputations reported that due to the shortage of EP, students had to wait for at least six months or even up to two years for assessment by EP. It was noted that the assessment report was vital for the provision of support such as adaptation measures by schools.
 - (b) Parents were only provided with a summary report of the assessment which did not contain sufficient information on the development needs of their children.
 - (c) The Administration was urged to take active steps to increase the number of professionals including medical doctors and EPs with a view to shortening the waiting time for consultation and assessment.
 - (d) A standardized format for assessment reports should be adopted and parents should be provided with a copy of the detailed assessment report.
3. Currently, the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Services of HA provide early identification, assessment and treatment of children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorders ("ADHD").
 - (a) As reported by some deputations, the waiting time for new cases of ADHD was two years or more while that for old cases was no less than one year. Children were unable to receive early diagnosis and timely treatment. Excessively long waiting time, insufficient psychiatrists and the short time spent on consultation and assessment were of grave concern.
4. For students with Autistic Spectrum Disorders ("ASD"), their symptoms are generally apparent before they reach the age of three. In most cases, their disability is diagnosed before Primary 1, and they should have received the pre-school rehabilitative services provided by SWD with a view to enhancing their communication and social skills, as well as behavioural performance through early intervention. Subject to the consent of parents, students with both ASD and intellectual disability are placed in special schools while students ASD having average intelligence will study in ordinary schools.

- (a) According to some deputations, due to inadequate training and over-emphasis on academic performance, teachers often focused on correcting children's behaviour and pushing for better school results, missing the developmental needs of children with ASD, Speech and Language Impairment ("SLI") and Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties ("EBD")

Implementation of integrated education ("IE") at the school level

5. Ordinary schools have been encouraged to adopt a whole school approach ("WSA") and a three-tier Intervention Model in supporting SEN students. Under the IE policy and the "Code of Practice on Education" issued by the Equal Opportunities Commission in 2001, schools should not discriminate against students with disabilities and should provide reasonable accommodation for SEN students, including adaptations to teaching, communication and assessment methods.

- (a) According to some parents, they had encountered difficulties when applying for admission because some schools were reluctant to admit SEN students.
- (b) To pool resources for more effective use, there was a suggestion that EDB should examine the feasibility of designating certain schools in each district to cater for specific types of SEN.
- (c) According to some parents, notwithstanding the "Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education" ("Operation Guide") and numerous other guidelines issued by EDB, the schools attended by their children had been unwilling to implement the necessary adaptation measures in teaching and examination arrangements to cater for their special needs.
- (d) The deputations urged EDB to step up its work in monitoring the effective and equitable implementation of IE at the school level with a view to ensuring that relevant guidelines on IE were properly followed and the requirements, complied with.

- (e) It was proposed that each SEN student should be provided with an individual education plan ("IEP") and that small class teaching should be practised in classes with SEN students.
- (f) Owing to the difficulties in implementing IE in the past decade or so, there was a view that the Administration should consider an alternative arrangement of placing SEN students who were unable to integrate into ordinary schools into designated special schools.

Allocation of resources

- 6. On top of the regular subvention for mainstream schools, additional resources provided by EDB include the Learning Support Grant ("LSG") the ceiling of which will be raised to \$1.5 million per school per annum from the 2013-2014 school year, the Enhanced Speech Therapy Grant disbursed as a recurrent subvention to enable schools to employ speech therapists or procure such service for supporting students with SLI, funding for implementing remedial teaching, additional teachers to cater for students with low academic achievement. Schools are advised to pool together the various resources for holistic and flexible deployment. For students with severe EBD or ASD, EDB will consider providing schools with a time-limited grant where appropriate for employing teaching assistants to help the students concerned establish classroom routines.
 - (a) As reflected by the school sector, the subsidies/resources provided by the Government were far from sufficient. The existing level of LSG, for example, would only enable a secondary school to engage three new teachers at point 17 of the Master Pay Scale.
 - (b) It was said that a school had to admit as many as 75 SEN students to be eligible for the maximum LSG of \$1.5 million. On the funding mechanism, the Administration was asked to provide a higher level of subsidy on a per capita basis.
 - (c) Some parents questioned whether individual schools had spent the additional resources (e.g. LSG) for the direct benefit of SEN students.

- (d) It was suggested that EDB should review in conjunction with the school sector whether and how the existing provision of resources should be improved, as well as the cost-effective use of resources.
- (e) In the absence of any dedicated post, the school teacher entrusted with the responsibility to head the Student Support Team could only spend a limited amount of his time amidst his other duties to oversee and co-ordinate the work of supporting SEN students in the school.
- (f) Many deputations considered it necessary to create a dedicated teaching post in schools to oversee and co-ordinate the provision of support measures and implementation of IE (commonly referred to as a SEN Co-ordinator post).

Professional support

- 7. Educational psychology services are provided for schools to support the implementation of IE at the school, teacher and student levels. According to EDB, School-based Educational Psychology Service will be progressively extended to cover all public-sector primary and secondary schools by the 2016-2017 school year. Besides, school professionals including resource teachers and school social workers also provide support and guidance services for SEN students.
 - (a) The deputations shared a general view that the current School-based Educational Psychology Service was grossly insufficient to meet the current demand for service at the student, teacher and school levels.
 - (b) As reflected by some parents, it appeared that there was no regulation over the level of fees charged, neither was there any accreditation/quality assurance for the service provided by non-government organizations ("NGOs") and private-sector service providers.
 - (c) According to the Division of Educational Psychology of the Hong Kong Psychological Society, the prevailing ratio of EP to schools was 1 : 8 or 10, which was not conducive to quality service. It was suggested that (i) as a short-term goal, the ratio of EP to schools should be improved to 1: 4 or 5, with a

longer-term target of 1 : 2 or 3 as in the United States; (ii) School-based Educational Psychology should be extended to pre-primary levels; and (iii) to ensure the provision of professional service, the Administration should introduce legislation to govern and regulate the registration and practice of EPs in Hong Kong. On average, about four to five complaints relating to services provided by personnel who were not qualified EPs were brought to the attention of the Society each year.

- (d) According to a deputation, there were only 7.2 speech therapists in every population of 100 000 people, as compared to 41.4 speech therapists in 100 000 people in the United States. The Administration should increase funding for the professional training of specialists.
- (e) There was a view that the Administration should collaborate with the NGO and private sectors in the provision of various professional services. Consideration might also be given to the issuance of vouchers to needy parents/SEN students for acquiring the necessary services.
- (f) Some deputations suggested that EDB should take steps to provide school-based occupational therapy service to cover all primary and secondary schools. According to them, occupational therapists could help identify SEN students at an early stage, and provide individual and group therapy. Based on their observations of individual SEN students, school-based occupational therapists could recommend suitable modifications to the teaching environment and pedagogy, as well as provide guidance and training to teachers and parents through seminars, workshops and case studies.

Professional development of teachers

- 8. In accordance with the five-year teacher professional development framework put in place in 2007-2008, EDB has commissioned structured training courses pitched at the Basic, Advanced and Thematic levels. In addition to the requirement that at least 10% of the teachers in a school should have completed the Basic Course, schools should arrange for at least three teachers to attend the Advanced Course, and at least one Chinese Language and one

English Language teacher to attend the Thematic Course on Specific learning Difficulties. At least one teacher should attend the Thematic Course on ADHD where the school has admitted these students.

- (a) The deputations shared a general view that the aforesaid targets were unrealistic. Even if they were attained and the number of trained teachers increased steadily, the percentage of teachers well-equipped to handle SEN students remained far from adequate.
- (b) Given the heavy teaching and administrative duties of many teachers, schools had difficulty in releasing their serving teachers to attend the on-the-job training course.
- (c) There was a view that EDB should work with the tertiary institutions to include training on IE as part of the pre-service teacher training programmes, instead of relying mainly on in-service training.
- (d) EDB should formulate plans to encourage teachers to undertake IE-related training and to increase the number of teachers equipped with the necessary training in IE.

The school curriculum, including the New Senior Secondary ("NSS") curriculum

- 9. According to the Administration, the school curriculum aims at enhancing students' psychological health and promoting healthy living through the acquisition of "knowledge", "skills," and "values and attitudes". They various key learning areas or subjects, such as General Studies in primary education, Life and Society in junior secondary education and Liberal Studies in senior secondary education, help foster students' positive attitudes. The NSS curriculum is made up of three components, namely, (i) four core subjects of Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies ("LS"); (ii) a choice of two or three subjects from 20 elective subjects, a range of Applied Learning ("ApL") courses and other languages; and (iii) other learning experiences.
 - (a) There was grave concern that students with specific learning difficulties were disadvantaged under the NSS curriculum

since the four core subjects placed heavy emphasis on students' language abilities and timed written assessments, in which these students were relatively weak.

- (b) According to some parents, certain schools only allowed students to choose from the ApL courses offered by the schools, thus depriving SEN students of the opportunity to pursue courses of interest to them. Some schools had not made available to students/parents in good time the information on the full range of ApL courses.
- (c) Some SEN students had encountered difficulties in seeking admission to ApL courses offered by institutions such as the "Bakery and Pastry" courses offered by the Vocational Training Council ("VTC"). The selection interview was said to be too stringent and too formidable.
- (d) The Administration should review whether certain adaptations should be made to the NSS curriculum to reduce the emphasis on language competency to accommodate the learning needs of SEN students.
- (e) Students with ASD and SLI were known to perform better with visual means of learning and creative activities. Some students with ASD had exceptional abilities and talents. Many deputations considered that the current education system should provide conditions conducive to nurturing the creativity and non-verbal skills of these students.
- (f) Many deputations shared the grave concern that students with ASD encountered tremendous difficulties in studying and taking examination in LS, as they lacked critical and analytical ability and multiple perspectives in thinking. EDB was urged to develop appropriate course materials and pedagogy to cater for the needs of students with ASD.

Special examination arrangements

10. Special examination arrangements for SEN students are required to ensure that they can enjoy equal opportunities in assessments and can show the subject knowledge they have acquired and the skills commanded. To provide schools with practical guidance, EDB

published the "Guidelines on Special Examination Arrangements for Students with Special Educational Needs in Internal Assessment" in 2009. As regards public examinations, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority ("HKEAA") has set up the Committee on Special Needs Candidates and the Task Group on Special Examination Arrangements for Candidates with Specific Learning Disabilities. Special arrangements adopted by HKEAA include extended examination time, and providing candidates with dyslexia with question papers in enlarged print and allowing these candidates to write on alternate lines or pages of an answer book. Candidates applying for special examination arrangements are required to provide supporting documents with recommendations by psychologists.

- (a) According to some parents, the schools attended by their children had ceased the special examination arrangements available to students with reading and writing difficulties without notifying parents in advance.
- (b) There was concern that when some students diagnosed with specific learning difficulties in reading and writing were assessed under the "Hong Kong Test of Specific Learning Difficulties in Reading and Writing for Junior Secondary School Students", they were assessed as not fulfilling the diagnostic criteria of dyslexia. As a result, they became no longer eligible to apply to HKEAA for special examination arrangements.
- (c) Some deputations urged EDB/HKEAA to consider their suggestion to provide additional special examination arrangements, such as scribe and dictate answers and the feasibility of using speech-to-text conversion software. Many parents opined that the mere extension of examination time might not be a sufficient adaptation measure.
- (d) Some deputations considered that while HKEAA provided special examination arrangements to enable candidates with SEN to be equitably assessed under suitable conditions without having an unfair advantage over other candidates in public examinations, it was unfair that the performance of these candidates were assessed according to the same marking scheme/assessment criteria applicable to other candidates.

Opportunities for higher education or training

11. Under the New Academic Structure, all secondary students take only one public examination, i.e. the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education ("HKDSE") Examination upon completion of Secondary 6. The general entrance requirement for local undergraduate programmes was attainment of Levels "3-3-2-2" in the four core subjects. The minimum general entrance requirements for sub-degree programmes are five subjects at Level 2 or above (including Chinese Language and English Language) in the HKDSE Examination. It is noted that the number of publicly-funded undergraduate places falls short of the number of students fulfilling the minimum entrance requirements.
 - (a) The depositions noted with grave concern the keen competition for local undergraduate places and the limited opportunities for SEN students. Very few SEN students could manage to gain admission to universities. There was a suggestion that post-secondary institutions should suitably adjust their admission criteria, reserve a certain quota of its places for SEN students and provide the necessary accommodation measures. There was a view that the implementation of IE should be extended to higher education sector.
 - (b) To ensure equal opportunity for students with ASD for higher education, there was a suggestion that in deserving cases as recommended by EPs or clinical psychologists, these students should be exempted from taking the LS examination. Some depositions also suggested that when considering applications for admission, higher education institutions should not take into account the grade attained by ASD students in LS in the HKDSE Examination.
 - (c) According to some parents, a number of SEN students had been offered places by Taiwan universities where the learning environment was more favourable. However, some of them could not take up the offer due to a lack of financial means, as the grants/loans currently administered by the Government did not cover overseas studies.

- (d) The Administration was asked to consider providing financial assistance for higher studies in Taiwan so that SEN students would be able to benefit from university education.
- (e) According to some deputations, although VTC had put in place a special admission mechanism for students with SEN, the support available to SEN students to facilitate their learning and satisfactory completion of studies was inadequate.

Home-school communication/cooperation and public education

- 12. According to EDB, schools are urged to establish a regular communication mechanism with parents in accordance with the Operation Guide, such as engaging parents in devising support plans and monitoring their children's learning progress and the effectiveness of the support measures. Schools are also required to elucidate their policies, additional resources and support measures on IE in their annual school reports.
 - (a) The deputations had cited examples on the lack of communication between the school and parents of SEN students over the adaptation and support measures and in reviewing the effectiveness of these measures.
 - (b) EDB should require schools to formalize and strengthen the existing communication mechanism between schools and parents.
- 13. In its papers provided to the Subcommittee, EDB has given a summary of the major public education activities implemented over the last five years via different media.
 - (a) The deputations shared the view that discrimination against SEN students still prevailed at the school and community levels. The Administration should step up public education initiatives at all fronts.
 - (b) A deputation referred to the designation of 2 April each year as the World Autism Awareness Day by the United Nations, and urged the Administration to formulate a comprehensive public education strategy to promote greater understanding and support in the community.

Support service for parents

14. The parents of SEN students shared their frustrating experience and difficulties encountered when seeking assessment and support services, applying for admissions to schools, and taking care of their SEN children. Family problems arose and some parents had to quit their jobs. The Administration was urged to strengthen support for these parents, such as counseling, organizing training/sharing sessions, helping them to manage the challenges faced by the family, and introducing necessary support measures for families with SEN children.

Cross-sector collaboration

15. According to EDB, it has engaged tertiary institutions in the development of screening/assessment tools and teaching materials for use by teachers and parents. EDB has also pointed out that the support and participation of various sectors, in particular the collaboration of the medical, social welfare and NGO sectors is important. It is noted that in 2005, EDB set up the Task Force on Integrated Education in Mainstream Schools comprising representatives from the education sector, tertiary institutions, other government departments, NGOs and parent groups.
 - (a) The deputations considered that the services and support for SEN students were currently taken up by different government departments/agencies and there was a lack of a holistic and well co-ordinated approach to cater for the needs of SEN students at various stages.
 - (b) The Subcommittee passed a motion urging, amongst others, for the establishment of an interdepartmental body steered by EDB to take forward the implementation of IE in a holistic and well co-ordinated manner.

Legislative approach

16. Some deputations referred to the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 487) and the United Nations Convention on the

Rights of the Child, and considered that the rights of children with SEN should be safeguarded by legislation. They urged the Administration to consider introducing legislation on IE so as to ensure that schools will be under a statutory duty to implement IE in accordance with the guidelines/requirements promulgated by the Administration, and that SEN students would have a statutory entitlement to the requisite services and support measures. According to the Administration, for the time being, it did not have any plan to legislate on IE.

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
24 June 2013