

My name is Kathleen Man. I am the current principal of Autism Partnership School, the first school in Hong Kong that provides education to students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Our school is not funded by the government. We were founded in 2007 out of the concerns of parents whose children with ASD cannot cope with the current system of Integrated Education and Special Needs Education; a system which does not cater to their learning needs regardless of their level of intelligence. We serve both local and expatriate families.

Approximately 10 to 20% of our students are endowed with intelligence of Average or above; and so far we have assisted 20 students to return back to mainstream educational placements without further needs for shadowing support. Amongst our high-functioning classrooms, a majority of our students were referred due to their failure to cope with academic requirements of the current mainstream curriculum or their immature emotional regulation, which can interfere with classroom operation.

Of these students, some of them can be ready for mainstream schooling again after a year of intensive training which equips them with class-related readiness skills, learning-to-learn skills and social-emotional skills. However, some of them will be dependent on the education provided by our school on a longer-term basis, despite their normal level of intelligence. This dependence is due to their unique profiles of learning that mainstream schools cannot provide or accommodate, even with further adjustment or facilitation.

With regard to our specialized experience in teaching students with ASD, and referring to the various examples of successful integration from overseas, we conclude the major problems of the current Integrated Education to be the following:

1. Teachers and other supporting staff are not trained adequately to handle disruptive and interfering behaviours that are specific to the population of ASD;
2. Classroom setup is not flexible to allow evaluation, adaptation and measuring of learning effectiveness;
3. The current mainstream curriculum overly emphasizes academic performance without a well-rounded balance including social and emotional learning;
4. The current arrangement of Integrated Education assumes all students are ready to be taught and does not cater to the curriculum needs of ASD students, such as learning-to-learn skills, peer relational skills, social understanding, emotional regulation skills or play skills;
5. Staff ratio too minimal to allow for skill generalization, monitoring of student's performance or programme adjustment for the sake of tracking the progress of students with ASD.

Based on our experience of successful integration of some students and relating successful stories overseas, as well as scientific evidence from peer-reviewed journals, we conclude a successful approach to meaningful education for ASD students requires a flexible approach that allows for segregation, temporarily or permanently, if needed; and a teaching force with staff highly trained to cater for

the special learning needs of ASD students. In addition, the inclusion of the following elements are recommended:

1. Utilizing a scientifically and research-proven approach to teaching students with ASD, which is Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA);
2. Each ASD student should be entitled to an Individualized Educational Plan that specifies the learning needs and individualized teaching strategies and curriculum for the student;
3. Regular professional consultation and progress tracking by experts in the field of ASD to make sure that the curriculum is implemented according to the IEP and allow meaningful integration in the mainstream environment;
4. Frequent and regular parent-teacher meeting to allow for the development of meaningful and functional curriculum ready for student with ASD to apply at home and in his daily environment;
5. Small class size (maximum of 8 students) with high teacher to student ratio (maximum 1 teacher to 2 students) for a segregated classroom for ASD students, if segregated education is indicated;
6. Curriculum that address the specific deficits for students with ASD, including:
 - a. Spontaneous communication
 - b. Conversation skills
 - c. Play and leisure skills
 - d. Independent training
 - e. Individualized academic curriculum
 - f. Group learning skills
 - g. Emotional regulation
 - h. Learning to learn skills
 - i. Observational learning
 - j. Social relatedness skills
 - k. Social awareness skills
 - l. Social interaction skills
 - m. Social communication skills
 - n. Organization skills
 - o. Community and daily living skills

Prepared by,

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Principal

Autism Partnership School