



**Submission by Labour Party on Issues related to the difficulties in implementing integrated education with respect to students with hearing impairment**

**Legislative Council Panel on Education  
Subcommittee on Integrated Education  
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Our current education system and services has failed to support students with hearing impairment effectively. Not only are students suffering, but their parents and teachers are unable to find the right resources to help them face the challenges of meeting the children's needs. According to the *Operation Guide on The Whole School Approach to Integrated Education* of EDB, one of the aims of integrated education is to "help all students/teachers/parents recognize, accept and respect individual differences". However, according to the experiences shared by parents, teachers and professionals, we do not see how the current system is leading our education towards this objective.

This paper highlights some of the issues related to the services provided to students with Hearing Impairment, which the Labour Party would like to address here.

**1. Needs of Professional and Technological Support**

At the moment, early identification has been more effective. However, early identification may not lead to effective early intervention and support. The long-wait for services may have children missing the golden period of potential development.

Assistive Technology is essential to students with hearing impairment, from academic and social development to helping them achieve a more independent life. However, the apparatus (hearing aid, FM Transmitter Systems, cochlear implant, etc.) are often very expensive and may require long-term maintenance and the users would need professional support.

The students are not getting effective support, due to the limited resources available and lack of understanding of professionals around them: hearing aids are often not optimal for students' conditions, faulty or damaged hearing aids are not repaired/replaced, teachers are refusing to use FM systems, etc. Even with the right tools, the students may still need professional support, including speech and language therapy, which most schools are not given the resources to provide.

## **2. Social Difficulties and Bullying**

Social development is always a challenge for children with hearing impairment, as hearing is one of the key elements of the development of social skills and awareness of our environment. Even for children with mild hearing impairment, their social development is challenged by the effectiveness of their communication with others. As teachers and fellow students lack the awareness of the needs of the hearing impaired, students with hearing impairment commonly find it difficult to develop their social network. They feel isolated, and often have low self-esteem.

Bullying is also an important issue. Very often, children are teased for their differences, from accuracy of pronunciation and use of words, to their difficulties of understanding others. They are often the target of verbal and even physical violence, because of their difficulties in communicating to others and their low self-esteem. Many students also have revealed that their hearing aids have been damaged by other students.

Teachers are often the "bullies" by refusing to address the students' needs, such as not speaking in ways to help them hear or not using the FM systems. Students may feel ignored or humiliated by teachers, or worse, feel that they are a burden to the class.

It is very important to raise the awareness of the needs of hearing impaired students in order to achieve an inclusive environment in our schools, and hence in the future, an inclusive society as a whole.

## **3. Lack of support for families**

Understanding the characteristics of the hearing impairment of their children is essential for parents to develop effective ways of communication with their children, and a long term plan for parenting. However, many parents do not understand the audiograms or other results, even years after diagnosis. This is one of the many discrepancies between the family needs and the current services offered by the government.

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 (especially mothers) of children with special needs face lots of difficulties and pressure. This pressure may in long term cause emotional and marital problems. Therefore it is important to provide them with information about their children's characteristics and help them develop effective parenting, as well as family counselling services to help them face the emotional and relationship challenges.

#### **4. Teaching and Assessment Methods in Schools**

Despite years of talking about introducing Multiple Intelligences and Digital Technology, our education system still relies heavily on auditory means of teaching, with outdated curriculum not being flexible enough to accommodate the specific needs of different children. Together with the lack of knowledge of teachers about special needs, children with hearing impairment are disadvantaged, and their potential wasted.

The government is also very reluctant to introduce sign language into our system. In many countries, not only are hearing impaired children provided with signing interpretation, sign language is also one of the optional language classes other students can take.

#### **5. Lack of Research**

One of the reasons why our integrated education is so inadequate and so slow in development, is the lack of research. Without adequate research funding, and the collaboration between research facilities and the government, experiences of parents and teachers, as well as the progresses of other countries, cannot be reflected into our education and service systems.

#### **6. We need 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 problem oriented mentality of the education and services is discouraging, and children with hearing impairment feel that they are the "outsider", a burden to the system. They often feel helpless, or even believe they are less worthy than others.

Children should be given learning experiences that encourage them to further develop themselves, rather than face endless defeats and disappointments.

To achieve the basic goals of integrated education, our education system and services for students with Special Education Needs (SEN) requires fundamental changes. Current services are problem-oriented and fail to help children and their families understand the children's strengths, characteristics, and their needs as a whole person.

Legislation shall be a very important step in achieving this long-awaited change. The guidelines for schools and professionals are not only outdated, but lack the corresponding resources and support. Without a legal system acting as a final guard, children with hearing impairment or other SEN would only continue to be discriminated

against, and disadvantaged. Our education would continue to be outdated, failing to treat all students fairly.

We are still a long way from realising the spirit of inclusion for our next generation. The government has the responsibility to take a more active role to achieve this goal.

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