

**For information
on 23 April 2014**

**Legislative Council Panel on Education
Subcommittee on Integrated Education**

Provision of Individual Education Plans for Students with Special Educational Needs

Purpose

This paper outlines the provision of individual education plans (IEP) for students with special educational needs (SEN) in ordinary schools.

Background

2. At present, there is no uniform definition and arrangements of IEPs. The Department of Education of the United States of America (USA) defines an IEP as a written statement formulated, reviewed and revised in a meeting for a child with a disability. The IEP includes such information as the child's present levels of academic achievement and other functional performance, measurable annual goals, specific teaching strategies and accommodations, measurement of progress made by the student and timeframe for reviewing/reporting progress. The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (2001) issued by the Department for Education and Employment of the United Kingdom (UK) states that an IEP should only record the arrangements other than differentiated teaching, and should include information about the short-term learning targets of the student, teaching strategies, related provision, review timetable, criteria of success and expected outcomes. The Enforcement Rules to the Act of Special Education of Taiwan stipulates the procedures and contents of an IEP which includes the student's current abilities and family background, needs in special education and related services, and the corresponding support strategies, learning goals in the school year and semester, and the method, date and criteria for assessing such goals, as well as functional interventions and administrative support for students with emotional and behavioural problems.

3. On the implementation of integrated education, the Education Bureau (EDB) of Hong Kong encourages schools to adopt the 3-Tier Intervention Model to cater for students with SEN. Tier-1 support is quality teaching in the regular classroom to help students with mild or transient learning difficulties. Students with persistent learning difficulties are provided with Tier-2 support, including "add-on" intervention. Under Tier-3 support, IEPs are developed for students with persistent and severe learning difficulties.

4. The abovementioned 3-Tier Intervention Model is underpinned by the 'Response to Intervention' (RTI) approach for determining the tier of support provided for students with SEN. The RTI approach was introduced by the British scholar Dr Rea Reason in her consultancy report for the former Education and Manpower Bureau in 2005. In the report, Dr Reason suggested that Hong Kong should learn from the experiences of the UK and USA, arranging timely and structured intervention for the students and adjusting the tier of support according to their RTI in regular review. This arrangement is so designed to ensure the most appropriate resources and services can be made available to students with diverse support needs.

Arrangements on Provision of IEPs

5. Students with SEN studying in ordinary schools in general have the basic abilities to cope with the demands of the mainstream curriculum. Schools have set up Student Support Teams (SST) to plan, implement and review support services for students with SEN. The SST will determine the tier of support of the students having regard to their needs. Accommodations in teaching, curriculum and assessment will be made accordingly. Most students are able to learn effectively upon receiving Tier-1 and Tier-2 support. For students whose needs cannot be met by Tier-2 support and who need further support in the form of special guidance and individualised learning programmes, IEPs will be developed for them by their schools.

6. The SST in consultation with professionals and parents will decide on the need to formulate IEPs, which cover measurable learning targets, specific teaching strategies, accommodations required, success criteria and review timetable, etc. Expectations of parents, student and school as well as views of professionals are taken into account in the course of developing the IEPs, which can help students improve academically and/or behaviourally and develop their potential. To facilitate the smooth implementation of an IEP, the SST will inform all school staff concerned of its targets and implementation plan.

7. A school is required to invite parents to meetings for reviewing the effectiveness of an IEP at least twice per year. This can ensure provision of appropriate support for the students and proper implementation and adjustment of the IEP. Regarding students who require Tier-1 or Tier-2 support, schools are required to maintain student support registers and record the support and accommodations offered to each student as well as their performance and progress for regular review and adjustment of their required level of support.

EDB's Support for Schools

8. The EDB has been providing schools with additional resources, professional support and teacher training to assist schools in implementing the 3-Tier Intervention Model. Additional resources are provided in the form of the Learning Support Grant (LSG), additional teachers under the Integrated Education Programme/Intensive Remedial Teaching Programme, Enhanced Speech Therapy Grant, Top-up Fund and additional teachers to cater for academically low achievers in secondary schools. Schools may pool together and flexibly deploy the resources made available to them for employing additional teachers/teaching assistants and hiring professional support services to enhance the learning effectiveness of students with SEN (including students in need of IEPs).

9. On professional support, specialist staff, such as educational psychologists (EPs), assist SST in carrying out annual review of the need for support required by students with SEN. The tier of support for the students can be flexibly adjusted in accordance with their response to intervention. If a student with SEN is in need of an IEP, EPs will attend relevant IEP development and review meetings to offer their professional advice. They will also assist in revising IEPs in the light of the formative and summative assessments of the students.

10. On teacher training, the EDB provides serving teachers with training courses pitched at basic, advanced and thematic levels to enhance their professional capacity in catering for students with SEN in a structured manner. Workshops on how to develop and implement IEPs are also organised annually for teachers to equip them with the necessary skills. In addition, tips, samples and specimens concerning IEP development and implementation can be found in the Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education compiled by the EDB for teachers' reference and use.

Needs for Schools to Develop IEP for Every Student with SEN

11. Some countries and places have established legislation for schools to develop IEPs for all students with SEN. Overseas experience suggests that legislation can merely ensure that students are provided with a written document. It cannot guarantee that students are given the support services most appropriate to their actual needs. There are comments¹ that the need to handle the paperwork required under various legislation has strained teachers at the expense of teaching quality; computer-programmed IEPs adopted by some teachers have failed to meet the individual needs of their students; and some teachers have gone to such

¹ Huefner, D. S. Requirements Under IDEA '97, *Journal of Special Education*, 2000, 33, 195-204; Gallagner, T. & Desimone, L. Lessons Learned from the Implementation of the IEP : Application to the IFSP, *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 15, 3, 1995; Lingard, T. Does the Code of Practice help secondary schools SENCOs to improve learning? *British Journal of Special Education*, v 28, n4, 187-190, 2001.

lengths that they applied a single IEP to all the students with SEN in a class. These cases have aroused discontent among parents and prolonged legal actions in some regions which are a waste of social resources.

12. According to the observation of EDB's specialist staff, schools in Hong Kong have generally developed a good grasp of the operation of the 3-Tier Intervention Model and kept the progress of their students and needs for support under regular review. They are also prepared to develop and implement IEPs for their students if necessary. Hence, the EDB is of the view that the need to develop IEPs should be subject to students' needs for support based on professional judgment and decision of schools. There is no need for schools to develop an IEP for every student with SEN. As a matter of fact, an IEP is only one of the many strategies for supporting students with SEN in ordinary schools. Other evidence-based and effective teaching strategies, such as differentiated teaching, collaborative learning and assistive technologies, are also used by teachers to support students with SEN. Indeed, an IEP should not be regarded as the panacea for every student with SEN.

13. Regarding the proposal of allocating additional resources for supporting students with SEN, the EDB will keep the support services for these students under constant review and will introduce improvement measures where necessary and feasible. The EDB will continue to support schools in implementing the 3-Tier Intervention Model and provide training to teachers to help them acquire the latest, effective and evidence-based support skills. Also, the EDB will continue its collaboration with tertiary institutions to develop more assessment tools and teaching resources for teachers to help them provide quality teaching and learning to students with SEN.

Views Sought

14. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

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