

**For information
on 17 June 2014**

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

**Issues Related to Training in Special Education for Teachers and Creation of the Post
of Coordinator for Special Educational Needs in Schools**

Purpose

This paper provides details on issues related to training in special education for teachers and creation of the post of Coordinator for special educational needs (SEN) in schools.

Training in Special Education for Teachers

2. To implement integrated education (IE) effectively, teachers' professional capability in catering for students with SEN is crucial. As such, the Education Bureau (EDB) has been providing teachers with professional training to equip them with the respective knowledge and skills and to tie in with the 3-Tier Intervention Model¹ advocated by the EDB. Starting from the 2007/08 school year, the EDB has been providing training courses on catering for students with SEN pitched at Basic, Advanced and Thematic levels (BAT Courses) for in-service teachers of public sector schools. Training targets have been set so that schools could arrange for teachers to attend different courses in a systematic manner. It was expected that a critical mass of teachers having received related training would be formed in each school and those teachers would lead the continuous professional development of the school and guide their counterparts to implement IE through the Whole School Approach (WSA). To support schools in arranging teachers to attend the BAT Courses in a systematic manner, regular teachers of government and aided schools (including special schools) are granted paid study leave for attending these courses, and supply teachers are provided accordingly.

3. The EDB has been monitoring regularly the progress of teacher training in catering for students with SEN. We provide public sector ordinary schools with written updates on

¹ The EDB 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, individual education plans are developed for students with persistent and severe learning difficulties.

their teacher training situation at the end of each school year to facilitate their planning for professional development of teachers.

4. Subsequent to the review of the BAT Courses with positive feedback from school personnel and other stakeholders, the EDB launched a new round of BAT Courses in the 2012/13 school year, with the training contents (detailed at paragraph 5 below) and targets adjusted. We expect each public sector ordinary school to achieve the following targets by the end of 2014/15 school year:

- (i) at least 10% to 15% of teachers will complete the 30-hour Basic Course;
- (ii) at least three to six teachers will complete the 90-hour Advanced Course; and
- (iii) at least three to six teachers will complete the 90 to 120-hour Thematic Courses.

5. In consideration of the international trend of supporting students according to their educational needs instead of the types of their SEN, starting from the 2012/13 school year, the EDB re-categorised the elective modules of the Advanced Course and the Thematic Courses under the BAT Courses into (i) Cognition and Learning Needs; (ii) Behavioural, Emotional and Social Development Needs; and (iii) Sensory, Communication and Physical Needs. Teachers completing these courses should be able to understand the learning and developmental needs of the students more so as to provide them with appropriate support.

6. Apart from the BAT Courses, the EDB also holds thematic courses on specific topics from time to time. For example, a 120-hour thematic course on Psychological Approach to Effective Strategies in Handling Students' Challenging Behaviour is arranged for teachers annually to enhance their professional capacity in helping students handle crises that they may face in different stages of development. Also, we organise various kinds of thematic training activities from time to time, including talks, workshops and sharing sessions, to keep teachers abreast of the latest development in special education and to enable them to share good practices.

7. The EDB also offers training courses for school heads, school management and teaching assistants to ensure that school staff at different levels may receive relevant training. Moreover, we have incorporated topics on catering for learner diversity and spearheading the implementation of IE into the training programme for aspiring school principals and induction training for newly-appointed school principals to enhance their capacity in steering the implementation of WSA to IE.

8. The EDB also attaches great importance to pre-service training for prospective teachers. On this front, we have maintained communication with teacher education institutions to encourage them to make “supporting students with SEN and diverse learning needs” a core module for the pre-service teacher training programmes. Currently, the institutions have included this module in their pre-service teacher training programmes to enhance prospective teachers’ knowledge in this area.

Creation of the Post of Coordinator for SEN in Schools

9. All along, the EDB has encouraged schools to adopt a WSA in implementing IE and requested schools to form student support teams to coordinate various support measures to cater for students’ SEN. In the 2008/09 school year, the EDB created a deputy headship post in primary schools, the duties of which are, among others, to steer and coordinate efforts to support students with SEN. In fact, with the EDB’s promotion over the years, primary and secondary schools have generally formed student support teams or dedicated teams, and, on EDB’s advice, assigned vice-principals or senior teachers where possible to lead and coordinate the task for effective engagement of the teaching force in implementing IE. Schools may also consider deploying their manpower as appropriate so that senior teachers are designated to assist their principals and vice-principals in coordinating and implementing the WSA to IE.

10. We are aware of the various challenges faced by ordinary schools in catering for students with SEN. To facilitate ordinary secondary and primary schools in taking care of students with SEN, the EDB has been, on top of the regular subvention, providing schools with additional resources, professional support and teacher training. Furthermore, we also encourage schools to cater for students’ learning needs by adopting the 3-Tier Intervention Model. The additional resources provided by the EDB to schools include the Learning Support Grant, Capacity Enhancement Grant, Enhanced Speech Therapy Grant, additional teachers under various programmes such as the Integrated Education Programme and Intensive Remedial Teaching Programme, and additional teachers to cater for academically low achievers in secondary schools. Schools may, having regard to their specific needs, deploy and pool together various resources flexibly to employ additional teachers/ teaching assistants or to hire services for supporting students with SEN and share the workload of teachers.

11. We are aware that schools and teachers are concerned about the staffing and workload. Over the past decade, the EDB has incessantly sought to strengthen the manpower of primary and secondary schools. The additional teachers provided have not only helped raise the quality of education, but also enabled teachers to render enhanced support to students with SEN. In fact, the respective student-to-teacher ratios of public

sector secondary and primary schools have improved from 18.1:1 and 19.1:1 in the 2004/05 school year to 13.8:1 and 14.2:1 in the 2013/14 school year. Furthermore, small-class teaching is being implemented in public sector primary schools by phases and will cover all levels from primary one to primary six in the 2014/15 school year. Small-class teaching gives teachers more room to cater for students' diverse learning needs, including their SEN.

12. To conclude, the current practices allow schools to utilise resources effectively and flexibly to support students in accordance with their SEN. At present, the Administration does not have any plan to create the post of Coordinator for SEN in schools.

Way Forward

13. To sum up, the EDB will continue to review and enhance the delivery mode and contents of teacher training courses in consultation with teacher education institutions. Starting from the 2014/15 school year, the EDB will further strengthen the practicum of the advanced and thematic courses with a view to giving the teachers more opportunities to apply the knowledge they acquire. In the future, we will adjust the contents, delivery mode and targets of teacher training courses as and when necessary having regard to teachers' training positions and training needs. We will also keep in view the implementation of various support measures and optimise them as feasible and appropriate in order to further enhance the effectiveness of IE.

Views Sought

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

Education Bureau

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