

**A brief account of Chapter 3 of Report No. 70
“Integrated education”
by the Director of Audit
at the Public Hearing of the Public Accounts Committee
of the Legislative Council on Monday, 21 May 2018**

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for inviting me here to give a brief account of Chapter 3 of Report No. 70 of the Director of Audit, entitled “Integrated education”.

This Audit Report comprises four PARTs.

PART 1 of the Report, namely “Introduction”, describes the background of the audit.

In accordance with the Disability Discrimination Ordinance and the Code of Practice on Education issued by the Equal Opportunities Commission, all educational establishments have the obligation to provide equal education opportunities to eligible students, including students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), in other words, those who need special educational support because of learning or adjustment difficulties. In the past five school years, the number of students with SEN in public sector ordinary schools had a significant increase of 37%. The SEN types that had a significant increase in the number of students were Specific Learning Difficulties, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Autism Spectrum Disorders, and Speech and Language Impairment.

In the 2016/17 school year, there were 844 public sector ordinary schools (comprising 454 primary schools and 390 secondary schools). About 43,000 students with SEN studied in these schools, amounting to 7.8% of the total student population. The Education Bureau (EDB) provides schools with additional resources, in the form of cash grant and additional teaching staff, as well as professional support and teacher training to help schools cater for students with SEN. The expenditure on these measures increased by 40% from \$1,000 million in the 2012/13 school year to \$1,400 million in the 2016/17 school year.

PART 2 of the Report examines the EDB’s work on identification and admission of students with SEN.

In as early as the 1980s, the EDB put in place at all public sector ordinary primary schools the Early Identification and Intervention Programme for Primary One Students with Learning Difficulties. Through observation and identification by teachers, and the assessment by school-based Educational Psychologists (EPs), follow-up and support measures

are provided to students with SEN. The Audit Commission (Audit)'s examination revealed that in the 2016/17 school year, 6,131 students were diagnosed as students with SEN or Academic Low Achievers (ALAs) when they were assessed by school-based EPs for the first time. Of them, 4,181 (68%) were diagnosed in Primary One and Primary Two, and the remaining 1,950 (32%) were diagnosed at higher class levels. Early identification of possible learning difficulties, as well as provision of more school information on support for students with SEN to parents would enable teachers and parents to provide support to the students as soon as possible. In this connection, Audit has recommended that the EDB should further encourage parents to give consents to schools to refer their children for assessment at an early stage, enhance the training of teachers on the identification of students with SEN, and urge schools to release more school information on support for students with SEN.

PART 3 of the Report examines the administration of support measures provided to public sector ordinary schools for integrated education.

Since 1983, support for children of low academic achievement has been provided through a range of intensive remedial services, including the Intensive Remedial Teaching Programme (IRTP), under which a school will be provided with one to three additional teachers, subject to the number of target students in the school. To provide enhanced support for integrated education, the EDB has introduced the Learning Support Grant (LSG) since the 2003/04 school year, with a view to enabling schools to deploy the grant flexibly and strategically to support ALAs and students with SEN. However, the amount of the LSG provided to each school per annum is subject to a ceiling, which was about \$1.58 million in the 2016/17 school year. Audit examination revealed that while the amount of the LSG provided to a school was calculated annually based on the number of students concerned, this is not the case for the ceiling. Consequently, the amount of LSG could not be adjusted in response to the significant increase in the number of these students. In fact, the number of schools reaching the LSG ceiling increased considerably from 4 in the 2013/14 school year to 56 in the 2016/17 school year. Audit examination also revealed that in the 2015/16 school year, 366 recipient schools had surplus fund and among them, 122 had surplus fund of more than 10% of the annual allocation.

Since the introduction of the LSG, the EDB has been encouraging schools under the IRTP to switch to the LSG, with a view to enabling these schools to pool resources together and deploy them more flexibly. For example, recipient schools of LSG may employ teaching and non-teaching staff, and hire various professional services, to cater for year-on-year change in the profile of SEN students and their respective support needs. However, Audit noted that at the end of the 2016/17 school year, of the 454 public sector ordinary primary schools receiving additional resources from the Government, 140 have yet to switch to the LSG.

In phases from the 2017/18 to 2019/20 school years, the EDB will provide each public sector ordinary primary school and secondary school with one additional teaching post to facilitate school's assignment of a designated teacher to take up the roles of Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO). The EDB stipulated that a SENCO should have completed the Basic, Advanced and Thematic (BAT) Courses on catering for students with SEN. However, as at January 2018, 56 (23%) of the 244 SENCOs have yet to do so.

Audit has recommended that the EDB should follow up these issues and enhance the effectiveness of the support measures for integrated education provided to public sector ordinary schools.

PART 4 of the Report examines the management of teacher training and professional support provided by the EDB.

The EDB introduced the BAT Courses under the teacher professional development framework on integrated education in the 2007/08 school year. Since then, three cycles of BAT Courses have been launched, with training targets set for each school to attain in each cycle. Audit examined the attainment of training targets by all the 844 public sector ordinary schools in the second and the third cycles, based on the training position of schools in the end of the 2016/17 school year. We found that many schools did not meet the training targets, and 11 of them did not meet any of the training targets for the BAT Courses applicable for the second cycle and the third cycle.

The School-based Educational Psychology Service (SBEPS) is an integrated educational psychology service provided to public sector ordinary primary schools and secondary schools. The objectives of SBEPS comprise supporting schools in developing school policies and mechanism to meet the diverse educational needs of students, supporting teachers in early identification and intervention of at-risk students, and supporting students with SEN. Audit examined the number of EP visit days of the 844 schools in the 2016/17 school year and found that the number of visit days received by 42 schools (5%) were less than required.

Audit has recommended that the EDB should encourage schools to meet the BAT Courses training targets, and step up measures to ensure that schools receive the required number of visit days by EPs.

Our views and recommendations were agreed by the EDB. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge with gratitude the full cooperation, assistance and positive response of its staff during the course of the audit review.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.