

Integrated education

A. Introduction

The Audit Commission ("Audit") conducted a review of the Education Bureau ("EDB")'s work in the implementation of integrated education.

2. Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him declared that he was the Chairman of Board of Governors of English Schools Foundation and a council member of the St. Stephen's Girls' College.

Background

3. In accordance with the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 487) 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").

4. In September 1997, the Administration launched a two-year pilot project on integrated education under which participating schools were required to provide an accommodating learning environment for students with SEN. After the two-year pilot project, integrated education was extended to all public sector ordinary schools from the 1999-2000 school year (all years mentioned hereinafter refer to school years unless otherwise stated) onwards.

5. The Government adopts a dual-track mode in implementing special education. For students with more severe or multiple disabilities, EDB will, subject to the assessment and recommendations of specialists and the consent of the parents, refer them to special schools for intensive support services. Other students with SEN, who do not need to attend special schools for intensive support services, may attend ordinary schools, so that they can interact with ordinary students and benefit from mainstream education.

Students with special educational needs

6. Students with SEN refer to students who need special educational support because of learning or adjustment difficulties. EDB classified SEN into nine types, namely, specific learning difficulties ("SpLD"), attention deficit/hyperactivity

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disorder ("AD/HD"), autism spectrum disorders ("ASD"), speech and language impairment ("SLI"), intellectual disability, hearing impairment, physical disability, visual impairment and mental illness ("MI") (included as a type of SEN from 2017-2018 onwards).

7. According to the Administration, in 2016-2017, there were about 42 890 students with SEN in 844 public sector ordinary schools, representing 7.8% of total number of students in the public sector ordinary schools (551 091 students) in Hong Kong.

Support measures to schools

8. On top of the regular subventions provided to all public sector ordinary schools, EDB provides schools with additional resources (in the form of cash grant and additional teaching staff), professional support and teacher training to help them cater for students with SEN. EDB's expenditure on additional resources and professional services for integrated education increased by \$408.6 million (41%) from \$1,008.5 million in 2012-2013 to \$1,417.1 million in 2016-2017.

9. The Committee held two public hearings on 21 May and 12 June 2018 to receive evidence on the findings and observations of the Director of Audit's Report ("Audit Report").

The Committee's Report

10. The Committee's Report sets out the evidence gathered from witnesses. The Report is divided into the following parts:

- Introduction (Part A) (paragraphs 1 to 18);
- Identification and admission of students with special educational needs (Part B) (paragraphs 19 to 42);
- Additional resources provided to public sector ordinary schools (Part C) (paragraphs 43 to 64);
- Teacher training and professional support (Part D) (paragraphs 65 to 80); and

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- Conclusions and recommendations (Part E) (paragraphs 81 to 83).

Speech by Director of Audit

11. **Mr David SUN Tak-kei, Director of Audit**, gave a brief account of the Audit Report at the beginning of the Committee's public hearing held on 21 May 2018. The full text of his speech is in *Appendix 6*.

Opening statement by Secretary for Education

12. **Mr Kevin YEUNG Yun-hung, Secretary for Education**, made an opening statement at the beginning of the Committee's public hearing held on 21 May 2018, the summary of which is as follows:

- EDB had implemented a number of improvement measures in recent years so as to facilitate schools in supporting students with SEN, including:
 - (a) regularizing the Enhanced Speech Therapy Grant for public sector primary schools;
 - (b) increasing the amount and ceiling of the Learning Support Grant ("LSG");
 - (c) extending the School-based Educational Psychology Service ("SBEPS") to all public sector schools;
 - (d) providing each public sector ordinary school with one additional teaching post by phases in three years to allow schools to arrange a designated teacher to serve as the Special Educational Needs Coordinator ("SENCO"); and
 - (e) including students with MI under LSG so that schools could have additional resources to enhance the care for these students; and
- EDB had been launching a series of review of the implementation of tasks on integrated education, including LSG, Intensive Remedial Teaching Programme ("IRTP") and SBEPS.

The full text of Secretary for Education's opening statement is in *Appendix 7*.

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13. At the Committee's request, **Secretary for Education** provided the direction and progress of the review on the implementation of tasks on integrated education in his reply dated 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*).

Types of special educational needs

14. At the Committee's request, **Secretary for Education** provided in his letter of 7 June 2018 (*Appendix 9*) background information on the inclusion of eight categories, namely, SpLD, AD/HD, ASD, SLI, intellectual disability, hearing impairment, physical disability and visual impairment, as SEN in 2003-2004 as well as the decision to add MI as a type of SEN in 2017-2018.

15. As MI was added as a type of SEN in 2017-2018, the Committee questioned about the adequacy of the supports provided for students with MI before 2017-2018, **Mr Godwin LAI Kam-tong, Principal Assistant Secretary (Special Education)**, replied at the public hearings and **Secretary for Education** explained in his letter of 7 June 2018 (*Appendix 9*) that:

- school professionals (including student guidance teachers/personnel, school social workers, and educational psychologists ("EPs")) had been providing guidance to students with MI according to their conditions and needs. If needed, multi-disciplinary case conference would be arranged by different disciplines (including EPs and psychiatrists) to discuss a support plan;
- EDB had laid down in its School Administration Guide a guideline entitled "How Schools can Help Students with Mental Health Problems" for schools' reference;
- EDB and the Hospital Authority jointly organized relevant thematic courses and seminars to enhance the knowledge and skills of guidance personnel and professional support personnel, and reviewed and discussed ways to strengthen the existing notification and support mechanism to ensure effective cross-disciplinary collaboration and communication; and
- for students with significant adjustment difficulties, including those having severe emotional and behavioural problems induced by their mental health problem, EDB would consider providing schools with a time-limited grant where appropriate for employing teaching assistants

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to help the students concerned follow classroom routines and learn effectively.

16. At the Committee's request, **Secretary for Education** provided the number of cases of students suspected of committing suicide as reported by secondary and primary schools to EDB from 2012-2013 to 2017-2018 (up to May) in his reply dated 7 June 2018 (*Appendix 9*).

Students with special educational needs in Direct Subsidy Scheme schools

17. The Committee enquired about the distribution of students with SEN in Direct Subsidy Scheme ("DSS") schools and the Administration's measures to support students with SEN in these schools.

18. **Secretary for Education** explained in his letter of 7 June 2018 (*Appendix 9*) that under the current policy, the subsidies and teacher provision relating to the support for students with SEN had been included in the recurrent DSS subsidy provided for DSS schools. The DSS subsidy was calculated based on the average unit cost of an aided school place and the number of students enrolled in DSS schools. EDB did not have information on students with SEN in DSS schools. DSS schools were required to exercise their professional judgment in deploying school resources flexibly and diligently for educational and school needs in the best interest of their students (including those with SEN).

B. Identification and admission of students with special educational needs

19. The Committee noted from Table 2 of paragraph 1.6 of the Audit Report that, during the period from 2012-2013 to 2016-2017, the number of students with SEN in public sector ordinary schools increased due to the significant increase in number of students with SpLD, AD/HD, ASD and SLI. In this connection, the Committee enquired about the monitoring mechanism on the progress of these students, and whether a review mechanism was in place through which these students would be removed from the Special Education Management Information System ("SEMIS") when, for example, some of these students had made significant progress.

20. **Secretary for Education** explained in his letter of 7 June 2018 (*Appendix 9*) that currently, information of students with SEN requiring Tier-2 or

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Tier-3 support was reported to EDB by the schools via SEMIS annually. Schools were also required to have regular reviews of the support needs of students and adjust their tier-level of support as necessary. At the end of each school year, the student support team would review the progress of each student to ascertain the tier-level of support that he/she needed in the new school year. When the school updated EDB with student information in the new school year, the respective column in SEMIS would also be updated for the students whose tier-level of support had been adjusted, e.g. those who had made good progress and were no longer in need of Tier-2 or Tier-3 support. Nevertheless, the students with SEN might still require Tier-1 support despite their significant progress, as teachers had to continue supporting them with quality classroom teaching.

21. In reply to the Committee's enquiry about SEMIS of EDB, **Principal Assistant Secretary (Special Education)** replied at the public hearings and **Secretary for Education** explained in his letters of 7 and 26 June 2018 (*Appendices 9 and 8 respectively*) that:

- SEMIS was a computerized information management system of EDB for collecting and managing the information of students studying in aided special schools and students with SEN studying in public sector ordinary schools to facilitate the understanding and following-up on students with SEN by EDB and public sector schools;
- the system mainly contained information of referral and placement arrangement for special schools and information of student schooling, related information of students with SEN in ordinary schools, information on additional resources obtained by ordinary schools, information on special education training of teachers, etc., with a total of about 4 000 data items. The system had about 400 pre-set reports of various nature for compiling and accessing related information. Most of the information in SEMIS was for internal use by EDB;
- EDB also used the system in calculating and managing the related additional resources for schools. Regarding the detailed information of support for students with SEN by schools, such as the details of the services or plans and the analysis of the effectiveness, etc., it was managed and recorded by the school-based mechanism and was not recorded in SEMIS; and
- EDB would review how SEMIS could be further enhanced to respond to Audit's recommendations so that EDB and schools could process and

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analyse the data collected in SEMIS efficiently and systematically, which would help EDB and schools provide more specific support for students with SEN. EDB would work in consultation with information technology professionals about the feasibility and priorities of the functions, and then make a plan for enhancement during this summer period for implementation in 2018-2019 subject to resources availability.

22. According to paragraph 2.5 of the Audit Report, of the 6 131 students assessed by school-based EPs for the first time and diagnosed as students with SEN or academic low achievers ("ALAs") in 2016-2017, 992 (16.2%), 726 (11.8%) and 232 (3.8%) were diagnosed in Primary Three to Primary Six, Secondary One to Secondary Three and Secondary Four to Secondary Six respectively. The Committee sought the reasons for 31.8% of students with SEN being identified after Primary Two, and measures taken/to be taken to ensure that students with SEN were identified at the earliest opportunities so that timely support could be provided to them.

23. **Secretary for Education** explained at the public hearings and supplemented in his letter of 7 June 2018 (*Appendix 9*) that:

- certain SEN difficulties were usually manifested in class levels higher than Primary One or Primary Two, such as mental health issues or emotional and behavior difficulties in adolescence. Some students newly arrived at Hong Kong or their parents newly gave consent for service also accounted for their assessment at higher class levels. These students would be referred for assessment services as soon as they were identified by schools or parents; and
- in each school year, EDB arranged regular school visits by professional staff to understand the identification and support services provided for students with SEN and reminded schools to refer students for assessment service as necessary with the emphasis of the importance of early identification and intervention via various means, such as leaflets, seminars, workshops, etc.

24. At the Committee's request, **Secretary for Education** provided in his reply dated 7 June 2018 (*Appendix 9*) the criteria adopted by school-based EPs in assessing students suspected of having SpLD, AD/HD, ASD and SLI, and the average waiting

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time of students suspected to have learning or emotional, behavioural and adjustment difficulties referred to school-based EPs for assessment in 2016-2017.

25. With reference to paragraph 2.10 of the Audit Report, the Committee enquired whether the Administration had conducted any study to understand the reasons for parents of students with SEN not giving consent to transfer their children's information to secondary schools, and the measures taken/to be taken to encourage these parents to give consent for transfer of their children's information between schools.

26. **Secretary for Education** explained at the public hearings and supplemented in his letter of 7 June 2018 (*Appendix 9*) that:

- EDB had been collaborating with schools to encourage parents of students with SEN giving consent to transfer their children's information to recipient schools. Schools should abide by the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Cap. 486) in processing students' personal information, including information pertaining to SEN. Schools were required to obtain parents' prior consent for processing a student's SEN information and transferring the information to the recipient school upon the student's change of school. Premised upon the principle of respecting parents' will, EDB did not request schools to ask the parents why they refused to give consent for transfer of their children's information between schools;

Upcoming Primary One students with special educational needs

- for pre-school children admitted to Primary One of public sector ordinary schools, EDB and the Child Assessment Centres of the Department of Health and the Hospital Authority had a mechanism for the transfer of assessment information of pre-school children with special needs to primary schools with a view to facilitating schools' early arrangement of support for those children with SEN. Under the prevailing practice, the Child Assessment Centres would, upon seeking the consent of parents, send the assessment information of the upcoming Primary One students to EDB for onward transmission to the recipient public sector primary schools before the commencement of the new school year;

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- EDB had been collaborating with non-governmental organizations in running annual seminars for parents of lower kindergarten children with special needs on the support services available at public sector ordinary primary schools, the importance of home-school cooperation, and the sources for acquiring school information. EDB also encouraged parents to indicate the Special Education Code which fitted their children's developmental needs on the Primary One Admission System Application Form when they applied for a Primary One place for their children. This would facilitate the collaboration of EDB and other departments under the aforementioned mechanism to transfer the assessment information of their children to the recipient primary schools for better planning and providing early support. Seminars were also organized for kindergarten teachers to enhance their knowledge of the support for students with SEN offered by public sector ordinary primary schools and special schools respectively, so that they could provide practical advice to parents on helping their children adapt smoothly to the primary school life;

Upcoming Secondary One students with special educational needs

- primary schools were requested to transfer, upon obtaining parental consent, relevant information of these students to the secondary schools concerned. EDB issued a letter in May every year to remind the primary schools about the arrangements as detailed in a circular entitled "Transfer of Information of Students with Special Educational Needs" (EDB Circular No. 9/2013). A template form was provided for primary schools to record the statistics of information transferred to secondary schools; and
- EDB's staff would advise schools about the transfer of information for students with SEN, the types of documents to be sent and the timeframe for sending the information. EDB also collaborated with non-governmental organizations in running an annual seminar for parents of Primary Six students with SEN promoting to Secondary One to offer professional advice and encourage parents to give consent to the primary schools to transfer relevant information of their children with SEN to the secondary schools.

27. In response to the Committee's enquiry on whether consideration would be given to adopting an "opt-out arrangement" to facilitate the giving of consents by parents, **Secretary for Education** explained at the public hearings and advised in his

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letter of 7 June 2018 (*Appendix 9*) that for some parents, SEN information of their children was important personal data. EDB needed to let parents understand thoroughly the purpose and function of transferring the respective information and let them make an informed choice on whether to let the recipient schools have the respective information. Therefore, EDB considered that the prevailing practice appropriate and more proper as compared with an "opt-out arrangement".

28. According to paragraph 2.13 of the Audit Report, EDB did not record in SEMIS the dates on which the post-assessment meetings were held by EPs and the assessment summaries and the assessment reports were issued. In this connection, the Committee sought the reasons for not recording such information in SEMIS, how EDB would monitor the timeliness of issuing assessment summaries and reports, and whether consideration would be given to uploading the whole or parts of the assessment summaries and assessment reports onto SEMIS.

29. **Secretary for Education** explained at the public hearings and supplemented in his letter of 7 June 2018 (*Appendix 9*) that:

- as the dates of post-assessment meetings and issuance of assessment summaries and assessment reports would not affect the support given to students, such information had not been recorded in SEMIS;
- EDB required schools to follow the principle of "Intervention before Assessment" by providing intervention to students as soon as they were identified to have difficulties without the need to wait for assessment results. Upon completion of assessment, EPs would discuss with school personnel and parents the support measures in post-assessment meetings, so that schools and parents could adjust the support in accordance with the discussion results and EPs' recommendations. Usually, assessment summaries were issued within three months upon completion of the assessment while the assessment reports would take a longer time to write up;
- according to the principle of "Intervention before Assessment", schools would continue or adjust the support for students in accordance with the discussion results at the post-assessment meetings, whilst not waiting for the issuance of assessment summaries or assessment reports before providing support to the students. The SBEPS Guide contained general guidelines on the time expected of EPs to issue assessment summaries and assessment reports. Hence, basically the

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support offered to the students would not be affected by the dates of issuance of the assessment summaries or assessment reports;

- with the input of the major assessment results and related information in SEMIS provided by EPs, it was sufficient for EDB to manage related tasks. As the assessment summaries and assessment reports were restricted documents which also contained information of the students' parents and family, EDB considered it not appropriate to file and upload such information onto SEMIS for the protection of privacy and to respect EPs' professional responsibility; and
- EDB would review and record information about the dates of post-assessment meetings held at schools, as well as issuance of assessment summaries and reports furnished by school-based EPs. The views of the school-based EPs and other stakeholders would be consulted with a view to accomplishing the task concerned within 2018-2019. New guidelines would be issued on any new arrangements.

30. At the Committee's request, **Secretary for Education** provided a sample of the assessment summary and assessment report in his reply dated 7 June 2018 (*Appendix 9*).

31. According to paragraph 2.15(a) of the Audit Report, a mechanism was agreed between EDB and the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") to ensure pre-school children with special needs under the On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services or SWD's other subvented rehabilitation services would be given appropriate support when they proceed to primary schooling. The Committee sought information on this new arrangement and the previous arrangements before this new mechanism was implemented.

32. **Secretary for Education** explained at the public hearings and supplemented in his letter of 7 June 2018 (*Appendix 9*) that:

- in view of the regularization of the On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services since 2018-2019, EDB and SWD had agreed on a collaborative mechanism. The specialists and special child care workers of the On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services and the other rehabilitation services under SWD would offer their professional

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advice on the progress of children with special needs they were serving by completing a report form before the children began primary schooling. With the coordination of SWD and EDB and subject to parental consent, the progress report of individual children would be sent to SWD which would pass the reports to EDB for onward transmission to the children's designated public sector primary schools before September; and

- based on the progress information provided and the assessment information, the primary schools would plan and provide appropriate support services for the respective Primary One students at the earliest time possible. The above mentioned mechanism would take effect from 2018-2019 for children promoting to Primary One.

33. The Committee noted from paragraph 2.18 of the Audit Report that, in the profiles of schools published by the Committee on Home-School Co-operation, schools disclosed only three pieces of information on support for students with SEN, including percentage of teachers with special education training, support facilities available for student with SEN in the schools (e.g. accessible lift and accessible toilet) and an account of school's approach to cater for student diversity. The Committee enquired about the measures taken/to be taken to encourage schools to release more information on support for students with SEN to facilitate parents of students with SEN in selecting schools.

34. **Mrs Ingrid YEUNG HO Poi-yan, Permanent Secretary for Education**, replied at the public hearings and **Secretary for Education** supplemented in his letter of 7 June 2018 (*Appendix 9*) that:

- EDB staff would, during school visits, continue to encourage schools to release more information about the support for students with SEN for parents' reference, for example, to set out in the school report how resources were deployed to provide support services for students with SEN and upload such information onto the school website. EDB had also provided a sample in the "Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education" to facilitate schools' understanding that they should illustrate their implementation of integrated education in the school report;
- apart from requiring schools to publicize the percentage of teachers with special education training in the School Profiles, EDB had

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proposed to the Committee on Home-School Co-operation to assign a separate column in the Primary and Secondary School Profiles for schools to elaborate on the implementation of the Whole School Approach to integrated education. The arrangement had been approved by the Committee on Home-School Co-operation and the respective information would be provided in the School Profiles to be distributed in 2018; and

- EDB had also been uploading information on schools' Open Days onto the website of the Committee on Home-school Co-operation so as to enable parents (including parents of students with SEN) to pay on-site school visit(s) to acquire more school information before making school choices.

35. According to paragraph 2.22(a) and Appendix B of the Audit Report, under the School Development and Accountability Framework, schools were required to self-evaluate their practice and to give an account in the School Report which would be uploaded to school website before end of November annually for public information. In this connection, the Committee sought the guidelines on conducting self-evaluation by schools, and whether EDB would verify the information in the School Reports which were uploaded onto the school websites.

36. **Secretary for Education** explained at the public hearings and supplemented in his letter of 7 June 2018 (*Appendix 9*) that:

- in addition to the "Year-end Evaluation Form at School Level on Whole School Approach to Catering for Students with Special Educational Needs", there was another tool named "Catering for Student Differences - Indicators for Inclusion"¹ for schools to conduct self-evaluation to assist schools to set targets and define observable success criteria in the school self-evaluation and school development process; and
- under the implementation of the school-based management, schools had to devise School Development Plan, Annual School Plan, report on the progress made in the School Report, and conduct a holistic evidence-based review of their School Development Plan at the end of

¹ "Catering for Student Differences - Indicators for Inclusion" can be downloaded from the EDB website (<http://www.edb.gov.hk>).

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their school development cycle (self-evaluation). The self-evaluation reports had to be discussed and endorsed by the Incorporated Management Committee/School Management Committee. Although the reports would not be verified by EDB, the Regional Education Offices of EDB would provide support and advice to schools on their daily operation and continuous development.

37. The Committee noted from paragraph 2.25 of the Audit Report that EDB issued circular memorandum in around April and May each year to invite applications from aided schools for installation of lifts in the following financial year under the major repairs ("MR") exercise. As at 28 February 2018, of 42 approved lift installation applications, the related works of one application were expected to be completed by April 2018. Another 10 were in the construction stage and the remaining 31 were either under the statutory submission, planning or detailed design stage. The Committee enquired about the processing time of lift installation applications from schools, average completion time of lift installation works after approval and any written guidelines on the consideration and approval of lift installation applications.

38. **Secretary for Education** explained at the public hearings and supplemented in his letter of 7 June 2018 (*Appendix 9*) that:

- EDB had taken up the MR works of non-estate and estate aided schools since April 2010 and April 2014 respectively. In accordance with the established mechanism, schools might apply for installation of lifts through the annual MR mechanism. Since April 2010, EDB had approved a total of 46 lift installation applications through the annual MR mechanism, with another 68 pending approval;
- since April 2010, EDB had approved at least five lift installation applications each year. The yet-to-be approved applications would be re-considered together with new applications (if any) in the subsequent funding allocation exercise. Among the 46 approved applications, over 60% (29 applications) were approved in the same year of application or within the next year, whereas the rest had a waiting time ranging from two to seven years. The average waiting time for all applications was 1.5 years; and
- lift installation works generally involved complicated work stages. From conducting preliminary technical feasibility studies, discussing

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with schools over lift location, preparing drawings for submission to relevant departments for approval, coordinating with schools on works arrangements and schedule to completing the works, it normally took at least four to five years. Should the works involve more complicated technical issues (for example, limited space available for lift installation), or the schools could only make available limited time slots for the works, it would take an even longer completion time. For the four schools with lift installation works completed by the time the Audit Report was prepared, the average time required from application to works completion was around six years.

39. The Committee further sought information on the updated progress of the 42 approved lift installation works as set out in paragraph 2.25 of the Audit Report, measures to be taken to expedite the installation processes with a view to meeting the target of completing all the school lift installation works by 2026-2027 financial year, and the interim measures taken/to be taken to facilitate the access of persons with disabilities to the facilities in schools which had not installed lifts.

40. **Secretary for Education** explained at the public hearings and supplemented in his letter of 7 June 2018 (*Appendix 9*) that:

- regarding the 42 approved lift installation projects, the relevant works progress as at end-May 2018 was as follows:
 - (a) one project had been completed by end-April. It was envisaged that the relevant lift could be put to use by June 2018 pending the issuance of the Occupation Permit from the Buildings Department;
 - (b) 10 projects were at the construction stage. Based on the latest works progress, three of them were expected to be completed within 2018; and
 - (c) the remaining 31 were either under submission of plans for approval by relevant departments, planning or detailed design stage;
- to expedite the lift installation works for schools without such provision, the Financial Secretary announced in the 2018-2019 Budget that the Government would make a provision of \$2 billion and set up a

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dedicated team to handle the lift installation works for schools, including those which had submitted applications through the existing mechanism but pending approval. In order to collect the latest information on school premises and ascertain the schools' needs for lifts so as to take forward the works, EDB sent a letter to all aided and DSS schools on 1 March 2018 to explain the objective of the relevant scheme and invite applications from schools which had no lifts and had not made any installation requests through the existing mechanism;

- EDB had received around 100 replies, including schools which had already submitted applications through the MR mechanism; schools seeking to replace existing lifts; and schools that had lift installed at certain teaching blocks but seeking to have lift installed at other teaching blocks. EDB was following up with these schools on the information provided to verify the circumstances at the schools and to arrange subsequent follow-ups. EDB planned to arrange newly engaged consultants to conduct preliminary technical feasibility assessment for these schools from the first quarter of 2019 onwards; and
- pending completion of the lift installation works, schools might make use of LSG as necessary to fund supporting measures for students with physical disability. If schools still required financial assistance after utilizing its resources, they might apply to EDB for the Top-up Fund for procurement of special furniture and equipment or carrying out minor conversion works to facilitate the mobility and improve learning environment of students with physical disability within the school premises, such as constructing ramp, procuring stair-climbing machine, converting toilet or ordering tailor-made desks and chairs.

41. In reply to the Committee's enquiry about whether consideration would be given to allocating students with physical disability to certain public sector ordinary schools, so that priority could be given to installing lifts for these schools, **Secretary for Education** explained at the public hearings that the concept of integrated education was to help students with SEN to integrate into ordinary schools. The installation of lifts in all public sector schools was to create barrier-free campuses, so that students with SEN could choose to attend any public sector ordinary schools without having any access difficulties.

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42. At the request of the Committee, **Secretary for Education** provided in his reply dated 7 June 2018 (*Appendix 9*) the annual expenditure for the installation of lifts in public sector ordinary schools from 2013-2014 to 2017-2018.

C. Additional resources provided to public sector ordinary schools

43. The Committee noted from paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5 of the Audit Report that unlike IRTP under which the provision depends on the number of ALAs, students with intellectual disability and students with SpLD, LSG which was launched in 2003-2004 is a recurrent cash grant calculated according to the number of students with SEN enrolled at a school and their required level of support. LSG should be used for supporting students with SEN in both primary and secondary schools. For primary schools, LSG can also be used to support students who are ALAs. In this connection, the Committee sought the reasons for using LSG in supporting students ALAs in primary schools only but not in secondary schools, and whether there was any grant for supporting ALAs in secondary schools.

44. **Secretary for Education** explained at the public hearings and supplemented in his letter of 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*) that:

- since 1983, Resource Class was one of the intensive remedial services for ALAs in public sector ordinary primary schools. From September 2000, Resource Class was renamed as IRTP in primary schools, under which schools were encouraged to abolish the concept of "a separate class" and support ALAs, students with intellectual disability and students with SpLD, through the Whole School Approach. In 2003-2004, EDB implemented a new funding mode to provide public sector ordinary primary schools with LSG for students with eight types of SEN as well as ALAs; and
- starting from 2006-2007, EDB had been providing public sector ordinary secondary schools with a large intake of Territory Band 3 and bottom 10% secondary students with additional teachers in Secondary One to Secondary Three, with a view to allowing schools to deploy their resources flexibly based on schools' needs in supporting ALAs. Therefore, LSG provided to secondary schools starting from 2008-2009 did not cover ALAs as it did in primary schools.

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45. With reference to paragraphs 3.9 of the Audit Report regarding the rates of grant² under LSG for each school, the Committee asked about the basis for setting the rates of grant for each tier of support and the ceiling of LSG per school when LSG was launched, the changes made to the rates in subsequent reviews, and whether EDB would review the rates of grant for each tier of support as well as the ceiling of LSG per school taking into account the changes in price level and the changes in the number of students with SEN and ALAs.

46. **Secretary for Education** explained at the public hearings and supplemented in his letter of 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*) that:

- in setting the grant rates of LSG, EDB took into account factors like the numbers of students with SEN at schools in general and the level of support they required, other resources schools could deploy to support students with SEN and the financial position of the Government. When LSG was launched, the grant rates of \$10,000 per student requiring Tier-2 support and \$20,000 per student requiring Tier-3 support were assessed as appropriate. EDB also reminded schools to pool together and deploy flexibly various school resources according to the principle of "individual calculation and holistic deployment" to cater for the needs of students with SEN. EDB also encouraged schools to adopt the Whole School Approach to provide students with SEN different levels of support taking into account their individual needs through the 3-Tier Intervention Model;
- for the purpose of effective utilization and management of resources, EDB had set a ceiling for the provision of LSG, and had been adjusting the grant rates and the ceiling of LSG with a view to enhancing the support for schools to cater for the needs of students with SEN;
- in 2008-2009, EDB had raised the ceiling of LSG from \$0.55 million to \$1 million for each school per annum, and further raised its ceiling to \$1.5 million in 2013-2014. The grant rates had been increased by 30% in 2014-2015. Starting from 2015-2016, the grant rates and ceiling were adjusted annually according to the changes in the

² In 2016-2017, the rates of grant for each school were as follows: students requiring Tier-1 support did not affect the amount of grant; \$13,725 per annum for each student requiring Tier-2 support; a basic provision of \$164,700 per school per annum for the first one to six students requiring Tier-3 support; and \$27,450 per annum for each student requiring Tier-3 support other than the first six such students. The ceiling of LSG per school per annum was \$1,583,616.

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Composite Consumer Price Index. In 2017-2018, the ceiling of LSG for each school per annum was \$1,613,705;

- EDB was considering to re-structure the additional resources provided for all public sector schools under LSG, IRTP and the Integrated Education Programme with a view to strengthening the stability of schools' teaching force and allowing schools to deploy resources flexibly in supporting students with SEN. The re-structuring of resources should help schools reaching the ceiling of LSG and with relatively more students with SEN to alleviate the difficulties they encountered; and
- EDB would revamp the mode of basic provision for Tier-3 support under LSG and consider whether the grant rates of LSG needed to be adjusted.

47. In view of the large number of students with SEN in the 56 schools which had reached LSG ceiling in 2016-2017 as revealed in paragraph 3.13 of the Audit Report, the Committee asked whether the Administration had provided additional support for these schools. **Principal Assistant Secretary (Special Education)** explained at the public hearings and **Secretary for Education** supplemented in his letter of 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*) that:

- additional resources available to schools to support students with SEN included the Enhanced Speech Therapy Grant, the additional teachers and grant provided under IRTP or the Integrated Education Programme, the additional teachers provided for secondary schools in supporting ALAs, top-up fund for procurement of special furniture and equipment, intensive support grant for hardcore cases of students with SEN, etc.; and
- professional support was also provided for schools on an ongoing basis which included assessment and consultation services provided by EPs, speech therapists and audiologists. Under the School Partnership Scheme, ordinary schools which had proficient experience in implementing the Whole School Approach to integrated education were invited to serve as Resource Schools on Whole School Approach to share their good practice with other ordinary schools.

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48. The Committee noted from paragraph 3.10 of the Audit Report that the tier of support a student with SEN needed was determined by the school concerned based on the student's support needs and taking into account EP's assessment, and that EDB would review the school decisions during school visits. In this connection, the Committee asked why EPs did not state in the assessment report or assessment summary the recommended tier of support for students with SEN.

49. **Dr Verena LAU Wing-yin, Principal Education Officer (Special Education) of EDB**, replied at the public hearings that the assessment report or assessment summary were compiled according to the needs of each student with SEN and to facilitate the provision of the necessary support measures by teachers. Although EPs did not explicitly state the recommended tier of support a student with SEN needed in the report/summary, the recommendations made by EPs in the report/summary had reflected the tier of support a student with SEN needed.

50. In reply to the Committee's enquiry about the frequency of regular school visits conducted by EDB, **Principal Assistant Secretary (Special Education)** explained at the public hearings and **Secretary for Education** supplemented in his letter of 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*) that staff of the Special Education Division of EDB would conduct at least three regular school visits in a school year to advise schools on issues like the policies and measures on integrated education, teaching strategies, resources deployment and home-school cooperation. The number of school visits would increase as appropriate to ensure schools would provide appropriate support for students with SEN. For resources deployment, during the first visit at the beginning of the school term, EDB would understand the school year plan on the deployment of resources to support students with SEN. During the mid-year second school visit, EDB would follow up on the use of resources of schools. In the final school visit at the end of the school year, EDB would discuss the effectiveness on the use of resources with school personnel.

51. According to paragraph 3.15 of the Audit Report, in 2015-2016, of the 692 schools which had received the LSG allocation, 366 had surplus fund. Of the 366 schools, 122 (33%) had surplus fund of more than 10% of the annual allocation. Surplus fund exceeding 30% was required to be returned to EDB. The Committee sought the reasons for these schools to have a surplus of more than 30% and the measures taken/to be taken to further encourage schools to fully utilize the LSG fund allocated to them in each school year.

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52. **Principal Assistant Secretary (Special Education)** explained at the public hearings and **Secretary for Education** supplemented in his letter of 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*) that:

- as at March 2018, there were 33 schools with LSG clawed back at the end of 2015-2016 (aided and caput schools)/2015-2016 financial year (government schools), and the amount of LSG clawed back was around \$1.4 million which was less than 1% of the total LSG expenditure of the respective school year;³
- individual schools having underspending leading to claw back were generally due to some unexpected circumstances, e.g. inviting bids took time or early resignation of staff, failing to hire the desirable professional services, the actual expenditure was lower than the estimated expenditure upon the completion of the bidding process, etc.; and
- EDB adopted various measures to alleviate the claw-back situation from schools which included providing schools with guidelines on the deployment of LSG and claw-back mechanism, conducting regular school visits to advise on the deployment of resources for supporting students with SEN, organizing experience sharing activities among schools, incorporating contents related to utilization of additional resources and evaluation of effectiveness, issuing reminders to individual schools concerned for making improvement should undesirable situation be detected, etc.

53. At the request of the Committee, **Secretary for Education** provided in his reply dated 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*) the number of schools with the LSG clawed back, the total amount and percentage of the grant clawed back relative to total LSG expenditure from 2013-2014 to 2015-2016.

54. According to paragraph 3.20 of the Audit Report, EDB encouraged schools implementing IRTP to switch to LSG as soon as possible. In addition to switching

³ According to EDB, the above figures for 2015-2016 (aided and caput schools)/2015-2016 financial year (government schools) were different from those in Table 7 of paragraph 3.15 of the Audit Report. The reason was that the LSG claw-back information that Audit obtained from the School Audit Section of EDB during the investigation denoted the position as at December 2017 whereas the above figures reported by EDB denoted the position as at March 2018.

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direct from IRTP to LSG, EDB offered the Mixed Mode starting from 2003-2004 and the Migration Mode starting from 2009-2010. However, according to paragraph 3.21, by 2016-2017, there were still 242 schools participating in IRTP. Only 35 schools had switched from IRTP to LSG. Of the 242 schools, 140 had not even joined the Mixed Mode or the Migration Mode. In this connection, the Committee sought the reasons for the low response of schools in switching from IRTP to LSG, the details of the Migration Mode and the measures taken/to be taken to speed up their switch from IRTP to LSG.

55. **Secretary for Education** explained at the public hearings and supplemented in his letter of 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*) that:

- according to EDB's communications with schools and analyses, the schools in general acknowledged the benefits of using LSG. However, there had also been concerns over the stability of teaching force as the employment of the contract teachers by LSG should be reviewed every school year and there was a possibility of contract termination. While for schools under IRTP, there was relatively greater stability in the teaching force as they were provided with a regular teacher in the staff establishment;
- to encourage schools switching from IRTP to the full adoption of LSG, starting from 2003-2004, EDB had introduced the Mixed Mode under which schools could have one IRTP teacher and at the same time receive LSG capped at \$0.35 million. In view of the lukewarm response from schools, the Migration Mode was introduced in the 2009-2010, where schools could have one IRTP teacher and receive LSG with a ceiling raised to \$0.6 million during a grace period of six school years to fully adopting LSG; and
- in 2016-2017, 10 primary schools beginning their adoption of the Migration Mode in different school years (i.e. 2014-2015, 2015-2016 or 2016-2017) would fully adopt LSG in 2020-2021, 2021-2022 or 2022-2023. Two of these primary schools had informed EDB of their early full adoption of LSG, where one had begun the full adoption of LSG in 2017-2018 and the other would begin in 2018-2019.

56. The Committee noted from Table 9 in paragraph 3.22 of the Audit Report that there were 3 792 students with SEN in 140 IRTP schools but they were not the target students of IRTP. The Committee enquired about the resources provided to

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the relevant schools for these students. **Secretary for Education** replied in his letter of 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*) that EDB had been encouraging school to implement the Whole School Approach to integrated education holistically and flexibly deploy additional resources and manpower to render appropriate support to, apart from the target students of IRTP, other students with the SEN types stipulated in Table 9 in paragraph 3.22 of the Audit Report, regardless of whether they were the target students of IRTP.

57. According to paragraph 3.25 of the Audit Report, each public sector ordinary school was required to review the student progress and collect the comments and suggestions of parents on the school support for the students with SEN. Schools might gather and compare the students' overall performance and review the effectiveness of all support measures so as to formulate the support mode for the next year. The Committee noted with concern that according to paragraph 3.26 of the Audit Report, EDB's summary on the self-evaluation results of all public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools for the three years from 2014-2015 to 2016-2017 revealed that the majority of schools had rated their progress on catering for students with SEN as "satisfactory" or "highly satisfactory", but notable number of students with SEN had been rated as showing "no improvement". The Committee asked whether EDB would review the existing mechanism for analysing the school year-end self-evaluation with a view to better understanding the challenges and achievements of the support measures, in particular the performance of students with SEN.

58. **Principal Assistant Secretary (Special Education)** explained at the public hearings and **Secretary for Education** supplemented in his letter of 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*) that:

- the year-end self-evaluation form at school level was for schools' self-evaluation on integrated education. The first part was about schools' self-evaluation of their inclusive culture, inclusive policies and inclusive practices. In the second part, schools assessed the overall performance of students with SEN premised upon the data collected from the year-end evaluation forms for individual students in social adjustment, learning performance and learning attitude/motivation. This perception was often based on the school personnel's comparison between the progress of students with SEN and that of typically developing students, or between the performance of students with SEN and the progress indicators the school personnel had in mind;

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- students with SEN had different starting points in various learning domains. The pace of their progress would also vary according to their SEN and degree of difficulty. Even if individual students had made relatively good progress in comparison with themselves, their performance was not up to the level of the average students. Therefore, it might be hard to reflect the progress of individual students through a global evaluation of their performance;
- when a school implemented different support plans for students with SEN, the objectives would usually be more concrete and specific, and the evaluation items would also be more differentiated and focused so as to measure student performance and progress more accurately. Instead of solely relying on the year-end evaluation form on individual students to assess their performance and progress, schools would also refer to students' internal academic results, and pre-test and post-test data of school-based support programmes to obtain a more detailed understanding of the learning progress of students with SEN;
- EDB would review the existing mechanism for analysing the school year-end self-evaluation results to better understand the effectiveness of the support measures. EDB would also explore the possibility of enhancing the functions of SEMIS so as to systematically analyse the data provided by schools which would in turn provide useful references for professional staff of EDB to render focused advice and support to schools; and
- EDB would also review and update the "Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integration Education" to provide more specific guidelines to help school personnel and relevant professionals (such as EPs) work out the required tier of support for students and record students' progress. EDB would continue to conduct sharing sessions and on-site consultation meetings to emphasize that schools should systematically collect students' specific performance or data before and after additional group training in order to objectively evaluate the effectiveness of Tier-2 support. Schools should also set the success criteria of different support domains for the individual education plans of students receiving Tier-3 support and examine the effectiveness of the plan regularly.

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59. The Committee noted from paragraph 3.32 of the Audit Report that, in phases over a three-year period (2017-2018 to 2019-2020), EDB would provide each public sector ordinary primary school and secondary school with an additional teaching post to facilitate school's assignment of a designated teacher to take up the roles of SENCO to support integrated education. However, according to paragraph 3.37, as at January 2018, 56 (23%) of 244 SENCOs were still attending the required Basic, Advanced and Thematic ("BAT") Courses⁴ on supporting students with SEN. In this connection, the Committee enquired about the reasons for allowing these teachers to take up the SENCO posts before completing the required training and the measures to be taken to increase the number of teachers having completed the BAT Courses to stand ready to serve as SENCOs.

60. **Secretary for Education** explained at the public hearings and supplemented in his letter of 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*) that:

- the provision of SENCO in each public sector ordinary primary and secondary school the soonest possible was the demand and consensus of the education sector for years. As such, while allowing SENCOs to carry out their work to support integrated education at school, EDB requested them to complete the remaining courses within the first year of service, which was a flexible practice that could meet the sector's expectation;
- to help SENCOs discharge their roles effectively, EDB provided them with a two-year professional training course (the training course under the pilot project lasted for three years, but the contents and training hours were similar), focusing on leadership, planning and management, support strategies based on student-centred approach, etc. EDB also organized professional development activities for SENCOs to promote professional exchanges in order to enhance their professional competence; and
- EDB would continue to encourage schools to plan for the SEN-related training for SENCOs as appropriate.

⁴ In 2007-2008, EDB launched a teacher professional development framework on integrated education. Under the framework, BAT Courses are conducted for serving teachers and training targets are set for schools with a view to enhancing the capacity of their teachers in catering for students with SEN.

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61. At the Committee's request, **Secretary for Education** provided the responsibilities and duties of SENCO in his reply dated 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*).

62. According to paragraph 3.35 of the Audit Report, the number of students with SEN among schools varied. In 2016-2017, 469 (55.6%) of 844 schools each had fewer than 50 Tier-2 and Tier-3 students with SEN while 45 (5.3%) schools each had 100 or more such students. The Committee sought the measures taken/to be taken to address the large disparity in the ratio of SENCO to students with SEN among different schools.

63. **Secretary for Education** explained at the public hearings and supplemented in his letter of 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*) that:

- all stakeholders (including school staff, parents and students) should clearly understand that the support for students with SEN was not to be taken up solely by SENCO and all school staff were responsible for supporting students with SEN under the leadership of SENCO. EDB also requested the school principals to encourage all school staff to actively cooperate with SENCO and the student support team that he/she led in supporting students with SEN. In this regard, the number of students with SEN in school should not be used to reckon the workload of SENCO; and
- regarding the effectiveness of SENCO in schools with a great disparity in the number of students with SEN, EDB would examine the consultative evaluation report on the pilot project on SENCOs to be released at the end of 2018 to consider the arrangement of SENCO provision for implementing Whole School Approach to integrated education in schools with different number of students with SEN. EDB would continue to explore the possibility of adjusting the teaching load of SENCO and consult the views of the education sector.

64. In reply to the Committee's enquiry about the measures taken/to be taken to strengthen the training and knowledge of SENCOs on the needs of students with MI, **Principal Assistant Secretary (Special Education)** explained at the public hearings and **Secretary for Education** supplemented in his letter of 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*) that:

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- supporting students' social, emotional and mental health was an important topic embedded in the training activities for SENCOs organized by EDB. Some related foundation theories, various tools with person-centred approach, reference materials and assignment designed for SENCO to practise what they learnt, were included in the training content for enhancing their understanding and skills in supporting students with MI;
- EDB had also arranged network activities "How to Support Students with Mental Illness in Schools" for exchange of professional views by invitation of professionals, schools and SENCOs with successful experience to explore the way to support students with MI through Whole School Approach;
- from 2017-2018 onwards, EDB conducted the "Professional Development Programme for Mental Health" for primary and secondary school teachers to raise their awareness of mental health and enhance their professional knowledge and capacity to identify and support students with mental health needs. The programme included elementary course for teachers at large and in-depth course for designated teachers; and
- in each school year, EDB also organized seminars, workshops, experience sharing sessions, etc., on supporting students with mental health needs for teachers and SENCOs to equip them with the knowledge and capacity to support students with mental health needs.

D. Teacher training and professional support

65. The Committee noted from paragraph 4.3 of the Audit Report that the contents of the BAT Courses on supporting students with SEN did not specifically cover the needs of students with MI, and EDB had separately conducted a professional development programme for mental health "Elementary and In-depth Courses on Mental Health Promotion at Schools and Support Students with Mental Health Needs" from 2017-2018⁵ to raise teachers' concerns on mental health. In this connection, the Committee asked whether consideration would be given to including the mental health programme in the Basic or Advanced Courses on catering for diverse learning needs with a view to strengthening serving teachers' knowledge on the needs of students with MI.

⁵ MI was added as a type of SEN in 2017-2018.

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66. **Principal Assistant Secretary (Special Education)** explained at the public hearings and **Secretary for Education** supplemented in his letter of 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*) that some modules of the BAT Courses covered MI. The teachers who studied these courses could have more understanding of supporting students with mental health needs. The "Professional Development Programme for Mental Health" was mainly designed for the teachers who were tasked with the related responsibilities, such as teachers of Guidance Team, to enhance their professional knowledge and capacity to identify and support students with mental health needs. The BAT Courses and "Professional Development Programme for Mental Health" could create synergies so that schools could arrange their teachers to attend suitable training courses according to the needs of teacher development.

67. According to paragraph 4.5 of the Audit Report, based on the training position of schools as at end of 2016-2017, of the 844 public sector ordinary schools, 37 (4%), 83 (10%) and 47 (6%) did not meet the training targets of the Basic Course, the Advanced Course and the Thematic Courses respectively applicable for the second cycle from 2012-2013 to 2014-2015. Moreover, 219 (26%), 572 (68%) and 326 (39%) schools did not meet the training targets of the Basic Course, the Advanced Course and the Thematic Courses respectively set for the third cycle from 2015-2016 to 2019-2020. In this connection, the Committee sought the reasons for the schools not meeting the training targets of the BAT Courses and the measures to be taken to encourage schools to meet the BAT Courses training targets.

68. **Secretary for Education** explained at the public hearings and supplemented in his letter of 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*) that:

- schools were in general supportive for their teachers to receive continuous professional development on catering for students with SEN. However, some schools might not be able to meet the training targets due to reasons such as teachers in general engaging in teaching and other duties, and schools had difficulty in arranging teachers to attend full-time special education training courses, especially for the courses with longer duration;
- EDB hoped that each school would aggregate a critical mass of teachers with relevant training to guide their counterparts in school to implement integrated education through the Whole School Approach; and

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- EDB would inform public sector ordinary schools of their teacher training situation on an annual basis to facilitate their school-based planning and review through a notification letter. When necessary, EDB would render appropriate support and intervention measures, including scrutinizing the school-based teacher professional development plan with schools so as to help them make timely improvement and follow up.

69. The Chief Executive announced in the 2016 Policy Address that the Government would further enhance SBEPS by progressively improving the ratio of EP to school to 1:4 for public sector primary and secondary schools with a large number of students with SEN. However, according to paragraph 4.10(c) of the Audit Report, the limited supply of EPs posed difficulties in catering for the increase of schools to be served by the enhanced SBEPS. In this connection, the Committee enquired about:

- the number of EPs required if the enhanced SBEPS was extended to all public sector ordinary schools, i.e. the ratio of EP to schools was 1:4;
- the measures taken/to be taken to address the manpower shortage problem of EPs in order to achieve the ratio; and
- whether EDB had a timetable for extending the enhanced SBEPS to cover more schools.

70. **Secretary for Education** explained at the public hearings and supplemented in his letter of 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*) that:

- for full implementation of the enhanced SBEPS to all public sector primary and secondary schools at the EP to school ratio of 1:4, a total of 211 EPs were needed as projected from the number of schools in 2017-2018, i.e. 454 public sector primary schools and 389 public sector secondary schools. However, this figure had not included the manpower necessary for the monitoring of service quality, coordination and development of SBEPS and professional development of EPs, as well as the development of effective models and resources for supporting students with various SEN types. The actual number of EPs required would vary according to various factors, including the number of schools and the service model;

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- currently, The University of Hong Kong and The Hong Kong Polytechnic University each provided a two-year Master degree in educational psychology (professional practice) training course. EDB was liaising with the other local institutions to encourage them to offer degree programmes in educational psychology with a view to increasing the supply of EPs in Hong Kong;
- EDB had communicated with the University Grants Committee the expectation to increase the number of EP training places in the 2019-2020 to 2021-2022 triennium;
- EPs trained in overseas might also be qualified as local EPs subject to satisfying certain conditions; and
- expansion of the enhanced SBEPS would not only hinge on the supply of EPs but also to a large extent be affected by the great increase of demand for EPs by other service providers in implementing various programmes (such as the Pilot Scheme on On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services in kindergartens). In 2017-2018, the enhanced SBEPS had covered 80 primary and secondary schools as scheduled. EDB had planned to expand the enhanced SBEPS to about 120 primary and secondary schools in 2018-2019. A detailed timetable regarding the pace of expansion of the enhanced SBEPS in the years beyond 2018-2019 was not available. EDB would make consideration on the number according to the supply of EPs and the demand from other service organizations of EPs.

71. At the Committee's request, **Secretary for Education** provided in his reply dated 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*) the number of training places of the two local educational psychology (professional practice) training courses from 2013-2015 to 2018-2020 (two-year training programme).

72. The Committee further enquired about the factors in considering applications for the enhanced SBEPS.

73. **Secretary for Education** explained at the public hearings and supplemented in his letter of 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*) that:

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- in assessing schools' needs for the enhanced SBEPS, EDB would make reference to the number of students with SEN and the unique needs of schools, such as the ratio of students with SEN to the student population as well as the overall development needs of the schools; and
- since schools faced greater challenges in meeting the needs of students requiring Tier-3 support, EDB had paid extra attention to this factor when selecting the schools. Students with SEN requiring Tier-1 or Tier-2 support had been considered as a whole.

74. At the request of the Committee, **Secretary for Education** provided in his reply dated 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*) the distribution of the number of students with SEN and the number of students requiring Tier-3 support in the 80 schools which had successfully obtained the enhanced SBEPS at the time of selection.

75. According to paragraph 4.12 of the Audit Report, for schools receiving the regular SBEPS provided by EDB's EPs, in general, each school would have visit days from EPs ranging from 18 to 22 days per school year. For schools receiving the regular SBEPS provided by EPs of school sponsoring bodies ("SSBs"), each school would normally have not less than 14 visit days from EPs per school year. The Committee sought the reasons for the discrepancy and the actions to be taken to rationalize the service level of SBEPS provided by EDB and that by SSBs.

76. **Principal Assistant Secretary (Special Education)** explained at the public hearings and **Secretary for Education** supplemented in his letter of 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*) that SBEPS provided by EDB and SSBs were basically the same. The EP to school ratio was also calculated on the same basis. In 2016-2017, the number of EPs employed by SSBs ranged from 3 to 12. In comparison to SBEPS provided by EDB, SBEPS provided by SSBs was more easily affected by the temporary shortage of manpower. Since the effectiveness of the service rested with the collaboration between school personnel and EP, and as the development of the service was continuous, in order to ensure the stability of the service to individual schools and to avoid frequent change of service providers, SBEPS provided by SSBs had been set at a minimum of 14 days per school year for flexibility in arrangement of manpower where necessary. EDB would keep in view the service needs of schools as a whole and the supply of EPs, as well as the recommendations in the Audit Report, in reviewing and rationalizing the school visit day arrangements for SBEPS provided by EDB and SSBs. Revisions in the SBEPS Guide would be made as appropriate.

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77. At the request of the Committee, **Secretary for Education** provided a breakdown of the expenditure on EPs from EDB and those from SSBs in 2016-2017 in his reply dated 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*).

78. With reference to paragraph 4.14 of the Audit Report, the Committee enquired about the reasons for schools not receiving the required number of visit days by EPs, and the monitoring measures taken/to be taken by EDB to follow up such cases.

79. **Secretary for Education** explained at the public hearings and supplemented in his letter of 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*) that:

- EPs took maternity leave or took leave due to sickness were the reasons for 25 schools which had received less than the required number of visit days by EPs;
- as one SSB was unable to fill the newly awarded EP posts, EDB provided service to some schools on an interim basis. The number of school visit days for nine schools met the general requirement for service provided by SSBs; and
- EDB would review the existing mechanism in monitoring EPs' school visit days. If the reduction of school visit days was unavoidable due to EPs taking leave of sickness or taking maternity/paternity leave, EDB would require the EPs to set the priority of work with the affected schools.

80. In reply to the Committee's enquiry about the criteria used by EDB for evaluating the service provided by EPs for schools under SBEPS, **Secretary for Education** explained in his reply dated 26 June 2018 (*Appendix 8*) that:

- since the effective implementation of SBEPS depended upon the collaboration and coordination between school personnel and EPs, the implementation of the service was different in different schools. It was not appropriate or feasible to use one set of criteria to evaluate the service effectiveness; and
- at present, EDB conducted an annual review through a questionnaire survey to schools and EPs at the end of each school year to gauge

feedback from different stakeholders. The content of the survey was mainly on the implementation and effectiveness of service at the three support levels, i.e. school system level, teacher support level and student support level. EDB also collected from EPs annual progress reports, in order to review the contents of work of EPs at different schools and the ratio of different nature of work. EDB also held meetings with SSBs each year to review service planning and coordination.

E. Conclusions and recommendations

Overall comments

81. The Committee:

- notes that:

- (a) there was a 37% increase in the number of students with special educational needs ("SEN")⁶ from 2012-2013 school year (hereinafter all years are school years unless otherwise stated) to 2016-2017 and there were about 42 890 students with SEN studying in 844 public sector ordinary schools in Hong Kong in 2016-2017, representing 7.8% of total number of students in the public sector ordinary schools;
- (b) the Administration is only providing dedicated support for students with SEN in public sector ordinary schools but not for those in non-public sector schools;⁷

⁶ Students with SEN refer to students who need special educational support because of learning or adjustment difficulties categorized as: (a) Specific Learning Difficulties; (b) Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder; (c) Autism Spectrum Disorders; (d) Speech and Language Impairment; (e) Intellectual Disability; (f) Hearing Impairment; (g) Physical Disability; (h) Visual Impairment; and (i) Mental Illness ("MI") (included as a type of SEN from 2017-2018 onwards). For students with more severe or multiple disabilities, EDB will, subject to the assessment and recommendations of specialists and the consent of the parents, refer them to special schools for intensive support services.

⁷ Some examples of non-public sector schools are private schools and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools.

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- (c) the Education Bureau ("EDB")'s expenditure on resources and professional services for integrated education increased by \$408.6 million (41%) from \$1,008.5 million in 2012-2013 to \$1,417.1 million in 2016-2017;
 - (d) EDB is reviewing the implementation of various measures under integrated education, including the Learning Support Grant ("LSG"),⁸ the Intensive Remedial Teaching Programme ("IRTP")⁹ and the School-based Educational Psychology Service ("SBEPS"), with a view to improving these measures when necessary and practicable; and
 - (e) mental illness ("MI") was not classified by EDB as a type of SEN until 2017-2018;
- emphasizes that:
- (a) appropriate assistance should be given at schools for children to suit their different abilities and educational needs so that they have equal learning opportunities to develop their potential to the full;¹⁰
 - (b) integrated education which has been adopted in Hong Kong for all public sector ordinary schools since 1999-2000 plays an important part in the development of children with SEN;
 - (c) EDB, as the government department responsible for implementing integrated education, assumes a vital role to support and facilitate

⁸ LSG was launched in 2003-2004. It is a recurrent cash grant calculated according to the number of students with SEN enrolled at a school and their required level of support.

⁹ Since 1983, educational provision for children of low academic achievement has been provided through a range of intensive remedial services, including Resource Class in primary schools which was renamed as IRTP in 2000. Under IRTP, primary schools are provided with additional teachers in the establishment and a class grant for each additional teacher. The target students counted for provision are Academic Low Achievers, students with intellectual disability and students with specific learning difficulties.

¹⁰ In accordance with the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 487) 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 SEN, and it would be unlawful for any educational establishment to discriminate against a student with a disability (e.g. student with physical disability or SEN) by denying or limiting that student's access to any benefit, service or facility provided by the educational establishment or by subjecting that student to any other detriment.

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schools in the provision of an accommodating learning environment for students with SEN; and

- (d) whilst schools should be given some flexibility to use the resources provided for them to cater for students with SEN, EDB should also ensure that schools are using the resources in a systematic and effective manner for the benefits of students with SEN;
- expresses concern that the inadequacies identified by the Audit Commission ("Audit") in the Director of Audit's Report ("Audit Report"), such as lift installation in schools, the implementation of LSG and the provision of SBEPS, have reflected that more resources are required for the effective implementation of integrated education;
- urges the Administration to:
 - (a) allocate more resources to enable EDB to improve and expand the coverage of existing measures under integrated education, including LSG and SBEPS, at a faster pace, given the significant increase in the number of students with SEN in the past few years;
 - (b) enhance the identification mechanism for students with SEN to differentiate the needs of different types of SEN and ensure that resources are channeled to those students with SEN as needed;
 - (c) further enhance the support to students who are diagnosed with MI with reference to the fact that there were more suspected cases of students committing suicide in recent years; and
 - (d) consider allocating dedicated resources to non-public sector schools to cater for students with SEN;
- cautions that EDB should be mindful of and minimize any possible adverse labeling effect associated with students with SEN;

Processing of lift installation applications from aided schools

- expresses concern about the long time taken by EDB in processing the lift installation applications from aided schools. While EDB aims to install lifts in public sector schools to create a barrier-free physical

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environment for students with disabilities, as at 28 February 2018, 68 lift installation applications received under the annual major repairs exercise had not yet been approved and 30 (44%) of them were received before 2012-2013 financial year;

- notes the Administration's announcement in February 2018 that it would make an additional provision of \$2 billion to expedite installation of lifts for public sector schools as needed to build barrier-free campuses;
- urges EDB to:
 - (a) take measures to expedite the installation of lifts for public sector schools and monitor closely the progress with a view to meeting the target of completing all the school lift installation works by 2026-2027 financial year as envisaged by EDB; and
 - (b) liaise with schools to ensure the proper maintenance and safety of lifts installed in their premises;

Implementation of the Learning Support Grant and performance management

- expresses serious concern about the inadequacies in the implementation of LSG and performance management as evidenced by the following:
 - (a) the revisions of LSG ceiling since 2015-2016 based on the change in the Composite Consumer Price Index had not catered for the significant increase in the number of students with SEN and Academic Low Achievers ("ALAs")¹¹ for some schools and 56 schools had reached LSG ceiling in 2016-2017;
 - (b) in 2015-2016, of the 692 schools which had received LSG allocation, 366 did not fully utilize the fund;
 - (c) EDB encourages schools under IRTP to switch to LSG but the response was far from satisfactory. In 2009-2010, there were 277 schools participating in IRTP. By 2016-2017, there were

¹¹ ALAs in primary schools refer to those students who are backward by two or more years in academic attainment in at least two of the three key learning areas (i.e. Chinese, English and Mathematics) as assessed by teachers using the measurement kit developed by EDB.

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still 242 schools participating in IRTP. Only 35 schools (out of 277 schools) had switched from IRTP to LSG; and

- (d) according to EDB's summary on the self-evaluation results of all public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools for three years from 2014-2015 to 2016-2017, while the majority of schools had rated their progress on catering for students with SEN as "satisfactory" or "highly satisfactory", notable number of students with SEN had been rated by their schools as showing "no improvement";
- urges EDB to:
- (a) review the rates of grant for each tier of support as well as the ceiling for LSG periodically taking into account the changes in the number of students with SEN and ALAs and also consider the necessity and justifications for retaining a ceiling for LSG;
 - (b) take measures to further encourage schools to fully utilize LSG allocated to them in every school year;
 - (c) identify the underlying reasons for the 242 schools which have not switched from IRTP to LSG and consider, in consultation with the schools and other relevant stakeholders, whether a new scheme which combines the strengths of both LSG and IRTP should be introduced. Since according to the Administration, schools operating IRTP showed concern about the stability of the teaching force in school, consideration could also be given to designating part of LSG for the employment of one additional teacher for supporting students with SEN if these schools have a certain number of, say, over 50, students with SEN;
 - (d) review the existing mechanism for analysing the school year-end self-evaluation with a view to better understanding the challenges and achievement of the support measures and the performance of students with SEN; and
 - (e) consider developing education programmes/guidelines or curriculums with more realistic and achievable targets of improvement to suit individual students with SEN so as to capture accurately the progress made by these students during the school year;

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Provision of the School-based Educational Psychology Service

- expresses serious concern about the inadequacies in the provision of SBEPS as evidenced by the following:
 - (a) in 2016-2017, of the 844 public sector ordinary schools, 42 (5%) received fewer Educational Psychologist ("EP") visit days than required; and
 - (b) in 2016-2017, only 80 (21%) of the 381 schools applied for the enhanced SBEPS¹² succeeded in their applications. The remaining 764 (91%) of the 844 schools were not provided with the enhanced SBEPS. Among these 764 schools, 74 (about 10%) schools each had more than 80 students with SEN;
- notes that:
 - (a) the limited supply of EPs in Hong Kong poses difficulties in catering for the increase of schools to be served by the enhanced SBEPS;
 - (b) EPs trained in overseas may also be qualified as local EPs subject to satisfying certain conditions; and
 - (c) EDB has liaised with the local tertiary institutions to increase the EP training places in order to increase the supply; and
- urges EDB to:
 - (a) step up measures to ensure that schools receive the required number of visit days by EPs;
 - (b) expedite the liaison with the local tertiary institutions to increase the supply of EPs to cater for the long-term manpower needs and formulate a plan to extend the enhanced SBEPS to all schools as soon as practicable; and

¹² The Chief Executive announced in the 2016 Policy Address that the Government would further enhance SBEPS by progressively improving the ratio of EP to school to 1:4 for schools with a large number of students with SEN. From 2016-2017 onwards, EDB had provided the enhanced SBEPS to schools with a large number of students with SEN by phases.

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- (c) strengthen the communication and collaboration among EPs, teachers, parents of students with SEN and, when appropriate, school social workers with a view to enhancing their joint efforts in providing the best support for students with SEN.

<p>Specific comments</p>

82. The Committee:

Identification and admission of students with special educational needs

- expresses serious concern that:
- (a) of the 6 131 students assessed by school-based EPs for the first time and diagnosed as students with SEN or ALAs in 2016-2017, 992 (16.2%), 726 (11.8%) and 232 (3.8%) were only diagnosed in Primary Three to Primary Six, Secondary One to Secondary Three and Secondary Four to Secondary Six respectively. More efforts need to be made to ensure that students with SEN are identified at the earliest opportunities so that timely support could be provided to them;
- (b) although the number and percentage of parents of SEN students who refused to give consent to the primary schools for transferring their children's information to the recipient secondary schools had decreased from 925 (25%) in 2013-2014 to 775 (17%) in 2017-2018, there were still a notable number of parents (e.g. 775 cases representing 17% of the total number of Primary Six students with SEN in 2017-2018) who declined to give consent;
- (c) while EDB recorded in the Special Education Management Information System ("SEMIS") the dates of referrals of cases from schools to school-based EPs for assessments and the dates of assessments, the system did not record the dates on which post-assessment meetings were held and the assessment summaries and the assessment reports were issued. Hence, SEMIS was not able to facilitate EDB's monitoring of the timeliness of issuing assessment summaries and reports; and

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- (d) while the profiles of primary schools and secondary schools published by the Committee on Home-School Co-operation each year are important sources of information about the schools, schools only disclosed limited information on support for students with SEN in the profiles. There is a need for schools to release more school information on support for students with SEN to facilitate their parents in selecting schools;
- urges EDB to:
 - (a) explore the feasibility of adopting an "opt-out mechanism" to facilitate the giving of consents by parents for transfer of the information of their children with SEN between primary schools and secondary schools and during transfer of schools; and
 - (b) make enhancements to SEMIS to facilitate the monitoring and follow-up on the students with SEN by EDB, schools and EPs by inputting additional information, such as the dates on which the post-assessment meetings were held and the assessment summaries and the assessment reports prepared by EPs were issued as well as uploading the relevant medical and assessment summaries/reports onto SEMIS;
- notes that Secretary for Education has agreed with Audit's recommendations in paragraphs 2.14 and 2.21 of the Audit Report;

Additional resources provided to public sector ordinary schools

- expresses serious concern that:
 - (a) the amount of LSG per year provided to each school is calculated annually based on the number of ALAs (applicable to primary schools only) and students with SEN enrolled at the school and the tier of support the students require. The tier of support a student with SEN needed was determined by the school concerned based on the student's support needs and taking into account EP's assessment. EDB did not spell out clearly in its Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education the criteria that schools could make reference to when determining the tier of support of students with SEN;

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- (b) in the four-year period from 2013-2014 to 2016-2017, the number of Tier-2 and Tier-3 students with SEN (i.e. those in need of more learning support) and ALAs had increased by 29% from 37 188 in 2013-2014 to 47 937 in 2016-2017. The number of schools reaching LSG ceiling had increased by 13-fold from four in 2013-2014 to 56 in 2016-2017. However, the revisions since 2015-2016 of the ceiling had only catered for change in price level but not the significant increase in the number of students with SEN and ALAs;
- (c) while it was stipulated by EDB that schools should fully utilize LSG fund allocated in every school year, in 2015-2016, of the 692 schools which had received LSG allocation, 366 had surplus fund. Of the 366 schools, 122 (33%) had surplus fund of more than 10% of the annual LSG allocation;
- (d) under IRTP, the number of additional teacher posts granted to schools is based on the number of ALAs, students with intellectual disability and students with specific learning difficulties. An analysis of the profiles of students with SEN of the 140 IRTP schools in 2016-2017 revealed that these schools had a total number of 3 792 Tier-2 and Tier-3 students with SEN other than intellectual disability and specific learning difficulties. These students were not the target students of IRTP. Resources provided to IRTP schools might not be adequate if they had many such students;
- (e) in 2016-2017, 469 (55.6%) of the 844 public sector ordinary schools each had fewer than 50 Tier-2 and Tier-3 students with SEN while 45 (5.3%) each had 100 or more such students. As the number of students with SEN is not evenly distributed among schools, Special Educational Needs Coordinators ("SENCOs") at different schools would have very different workloads. There is a need to take measures to address the large disparity in the ratio of SENCO to students with SEN among different schools; and
- (f) as at January 2018, 56 (23%) of the 244 SENCOs had not completed the required Basic, Advanced and Thematic ("BAT")

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Courses¹³ on supporting students with SEN. In 2019-2020, all public sector ordinary primary schools and secondary schools will each have a SENCO. There is a need to take measures to increase the number of teachers having completed BAT Courses to stand ready to serve as SENCOs;

- urges EDB to:
 - (a) consider requiring EPs to provide recommendations on the required tier of support for students with SEN in their assessment reports to facilitate schools' determination of the tier of support their students with SEN require. Should the above recommendation be implemented, the schools concerned should also be required to provide explanation if they do not adopt the support levels recommended by the EPs concerned; and
 - (b) consider allocating more resources to improve the provision of SENCO for schools with a relatively higher number of students with SEN;
- notes that Secretary for Education has agreed with Audit's recommendations in paragraphs 3.16 and 3.41 of the Audit Report;

Teacher training and professional support

- expresses concern that:
 - (a) based on the training position of schools as at end of 2016-2017, of the 844 public sector ordinary schools, 37 (4%), 83 (10%) and 47 (6%) did not meet the training targets of the Basic Course, the Advanced Course and the Thematic Courses respectively applicable for the second cycle from 2012-2013 to 2014-2015. Moreover, 219 (26%), 572 (68%) and 326 (39%) schools did not meet the training targets of the Basic Course, the Advanced Course and the Thematic Courses respectively set for the third cycle from 2015-2016 to 2019-2020;

¹³ In 2007-2008, EDB launched a teacher professional development framework on integrated education. Under the framework, BAT Courses are conducted for serving teachers and training targets are set for schools with a view to enhancing the capacity of their teachers in catering for students with SEN.

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- (b) based on the training position of schools as at end of 2016-2017, of the 844 public sector ordinary schools, 11 schools did not meet any of the training targets for BAT Courses applicable for the second and the third cycles;
 - (c) the contents of the BAT Courses on supporting students with SEN did not specifically cover the needs of students with MI. EDB had separately conducted a professional development programme for mental health "Elementary and In-depth Courses on Mental Health Promotion at Schools and Support Students with Mental Health Needs" from 2017-2018¹⁴ to raise teachers' concerns on mental health;
 - (d) while each school receiving the regular SBEPS provided by EDB's EPs in general will have visit days from EPs ranging from 18 to 22 days per school year, each school receiving the regular SBEPS provided by EPs of the school sponsoring bodies will normally have not less than 14 visit days from EPs per school year. There is a need to rationalize the service level of SBEPS provided by EDB and school sponsoring bodies; and
 - (e) school sponsoring bodies or their base schools were not required to submit supporting documents to validate the qualifications of EP supervisors. In addition, EDB had not set up a robust mechanism to monitor the service provided by EP supervisors;
- urges EDB to:
- (a) understand the difficulties faced by those schools which could not meet the BAT Courses training targets and implement measures to assist schools to address such difficulties; and
 - (b) consider including the "Elementary and In-depth Courses on Mental Health Promotion at Schools and Support Students with Mental Health Needs" in the Basic or Advanced Courses on catering for diverse learning needs with a view to strengthening serving teachers' knowledge on the needs of students with MI; and
- notes that Secretary for Education has agreed with Audit's recommendations in paragraphs 4.6 and 4.18 of the Audit Report.

¹⁴ MI was added as a type of SEN in 2017-2018.

Follow-up action

83. The Committee wishes to be kept informed of the progress made in implementing the various recommendations made by the Committee and Audit and the results of the reviews undertaken by EDB on integrated education.