

**The Provision of Appropriate Matching Education
for Children with Reading and Writing Difficulties**
(Discussion Paper for LegCo Panel on Education)

1. Introduction

In the past, children with special learning difficulties were mostly mistaken for being dull, lazy, slow and careless. They were generally given up if they could not make any improvement. However, according to overseas experience, about 5% of school children on average have severe special learning difficulties which are identifiable. In other words, there could be as many as two children with learning difficulties in each class in Hong Kong based on an average class size of 40. Many educational psychologists, scholars, specialized in studying the intellectual development among children, and doctors are actively exploring various teaching methods and courses suitable for these children's physical and mental development. The Administration should therefore enhance its support in this respect so that children with special learning difficulties will be identified at an early stage and appropriate counselling courses can be arranged to help them overcome their difficulties.

2. Problems

2.1 A lack of proper understanding among both parents and teachers

The causes which contribute to these children's special learning difficulties are complicated, among them are difficulties in reading which results in an unbalanced ability to learn; dysphasia which makes them difficult to express themselves properly; the development of coordination problems which makes them difficult to coordinate their eyes with their hands; special difficulties in doing mathematical calculations which affect their abilities to calculate and deduce. The traditional learning methods mainly emphasize the abilities to read, write, listen, talk and do mathematical calculations. Both parents and teachers tend to show inadequate understanding and care for these children who are generally mistaken for being dull, lazy and unable to concentrate on their studies. Their problems are usually identified very late or not identified at all due to a lack of attention on the part of both the Education Department and schools, resulting in these

children not being able to receive proper counselling and treatment at an early stage.

2.2 Expensive assessment services

Although some organizations are now providing assessment services and treatment for children with special learning difficulties, the quality of such services, levels of charges and effectiveness of treatment differ quite significantly. Parents are always helpless when it comes to seeking professional assessment even if they have identified their children's special learning difficulties at an early stage.

3. Suggestions

3.1 Promotion and education should be enhanced

The Education Department should allocate more resources for promotion and education in this respect to enable parents to identify their children's special learning difficulties at an early stage; be aware of these difficulties and symptoms; show more understanding and patience; and realize that their children's special learning difficulties can be overcome as long as appropriate teaching methods are used.

3.2 Training for teachers

Apart from parents, these children's teachers are those who know the best about their studies. If they fully appreciate these school children's learning difficulties and the symptoms, they will be able to identify these school children at an early stage, refer them for assessment and follow up with their studies. Therefore, the Education Department should arrange more seminars and training courses on this subject for teachers and provide more information so as to enable teachers to understand and identify these school children's special learning difficulties at an early stage, and to acquire the techniques for providing counselling and help to these children.

3.3 The provision of assessment and appropriate educational services

3.3.1 The ability to identify and assess the crux of these school children's special learning difficulties is essential to the provision of effective and suitable counselling services as these children's special learning difficulties could be caused by a single factor or a combination of many factors. Therefore, the Education Department and the Department of Health should consider providing assessment services for school children at an early stage. For example, the Department of Health can, in addition to providing mental test,

make an assessment of school children's ability to learn in the course of medical check-up for junior primary school children, while the Education Department can provide professional and detailed assessment for those school children referred by their schools, in order to develop an effective and suitable treatment.

- 3.3.2 Meanwhile, the Education Department must start work on the provision of suitable and matching education for school children who have been identified as having special learning difficulties in a professional assessment, enhance counselling and supporting services, encourage the participation of both teachers and parents so that these children can receive education in schools happily and effectively and their special learning difficulties will not affect their study and the intellectual development. If the Education Department and organizations providing counselling service can provide appropriate education and other services, plus the support and cooperation from both parents and schools, it will be of great help to these children in overcoming their learning difficulties.

The Office of Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong

29 January 1999