

**The Education for non-Chinese children and ethnic minority children with special educational needs : a representation from the ESF**

The English Schools Foundation is committed to inclusive education for pupils with SEN, and receives subvented funds from the Education Bureau for specialist SEN provision. Whilst we appreciate this funding, we are unable to meet the needs of **all** parents of children with SEN whose functioning language is English. We support any proposal that will extend this provision in Hong Kong, whether in International Schools or otherwise.

We wish to clarify a point. The debate is about non-Chinese children and ethnic minority children who have SEN. Just over half of parents who apply to the ESF for special provision for their children are Cantonese, who also have English as their first language, as do their children. Of the 103 children in total on our waiting list for special provision, 51% are Cantonese with English as their first language. 49% are non-Chinese or ethnic minority children with SEN who have English as their first language.

**The SEN provision offered by the ESF:**

- Number of ESF schools: 5 secondary, 9 primary, 2 all age schools, 1 special school
- All ESF schools have either Special Needs Coordinators or managers and SEN teachers.
- ESF caters for the special educational needs of students by providing a range of options with different types and levels of support.
- The Jockey Club Sarah Roe School and the LSCs cater for up to 1.5% of the total ESF student population who require significant levels of curriculum adaptation and support in order to access and achieve at school. These students may have intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, physical disabilities and/or health care needs. In order to achieve and attain these students are likely to require ongoing support throughout their schooling.
- ESF currently has 60 places at Jockey Club Sarah Roe School for those students requiring the most intensive level of adaptation and support .
- We have 126 places in 8 learning support classes, including 2 secondary: (see Appendix 1)

These students need individual education plans, and are integrated into mainstream curriculum on an individual basis, so far as is appropriate for their learning differences. They require significant adaptations to teaching and learning, and a high level of in-class support.

Students whose individual needs require less extensive adaptations to teaching and learning are catered for within mainstream classes in all schools. They may have:

- difficulties in maintaining attention,
- delays in language development,
- delays or difficulties in the development of literacy, numeracy or other academic skills
- difficulties in self regulation or behaviour.

In these settings students may be supported by adaptations implemented by classroom teachers or by direct support for limited amounts of time by specialist teachers or educational assistants. ESF is committed to providing the latter type of support to up to 5% of its total student population while recognizing that a greater number of students, perhaps another 5% are supported by classroom teachers.

### **The ESF Assessment and Referral Panel (ARP)**

Places in both the LSCs and the Special School are allocated by the ARP. The panel is chaired by the Special Needs Adviser, includes Heads of all the learning support classes, deputy from Jockey Club Sarah Roe and up to 2 Mainstream Principal representatives. Its role is to:

- receive and acknowledge applications for places at Jockey Club Sarah Roe and learning support classes
- prioritise these applications based on standard ESF admissions criteria and makes recommendations to Principals and the Head of Jockey Club Sarah Roe
- play a role in reviewing students already in the system to ensure appropriate provision is available

The panel uses a 6 Level of Adjustment matrix to assess children needing placements.

The number of applications for the limited places in the LSCs and the special school has steadily increased over the years, and is currently running at 2 – 3 applications per week. The average waiting time on the list is 24 - 36 months. The majority of the applications in the past months have been for children aged between 4 ½ and 6. Currently the waiting list stands at 93, with a further 10 applications on hold. For August 2008, there are only a further two Primary 1 vacancies to allocate in the LSCs. All other LSC places are currently filled.

The ARP uses the following criteria to prioritize applications:

- English is the proven first language of the child
- Length of time on the waiting list (i.e. date of application)
- A sibling already in an ESF school (not Private Independent Sector)

- Whether the application is for an LSC or the special school
- Whether the applicant requires an LSC on Kowloon side or Hong Kong Island

### **Meeting the needs of pupils with SEN:**

The ESF is experiencing increased pressure for its limited number of special provision places. The apparent reasons are:

- Increasing numbers of children in kindergartens who are on the Autistic Spectrum Disorder continuum who need the support of small classes with highly specialized curriculum support.
- Increasing numbers of children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), who do not need LSCs, but whose needs for support are greater than the ESF mainstream classes are able to provide for.
- A number of children with delayed literacy and numeracy skills, who require extensive catch-up & support programmes, where the Levels of Adjustment assessment would indicate mainstream support, with more intensive input. These children are beginning to fall through the gap between mainstream classes and Learning Support Classes, because of insufficient resources for mainstream support.

### **The support we need**

ESF does its best for children and young people with special needs, but it sometimes feels like holding back a flood. We believe that to maximize the life chances of these children, the following should be addressed. There is a need for;

- A small amount of funding for children who require mainstream support, to reduce the pressure on LSC places
- 2 more LSCs in ESF secondary schools (i.e.: 21 places each = 42 places)
- An increase in the number of Primary LSC places in ESF schools: The current significant increase in applications for P1 places would indicate that a further 40+ places would be filled with no difficulty.
- Other international independent schools in HK to share the responsibility for providing for this group of children. ESF would support any proposal to develop primary and secondary LSCs in these schools.
- ESF already has some links with local Hong Kong SEN support groups, and educational establishments. There is a need for more direct access to local social services, and local therapy services for children with special needs who are not in our LSCs or special school.

Our concern is for the children and families who are currently denied choice or opportunity in seeking any educational provision for the child with SEN, when English is their only functioning language. Increased funding and resources are a priority if they are to have equal opportunities in education and life. Thank you for listening to us.

## Appendix 1: Numbers in ESF LSCs

<u>School</u>	<u>Places</u>	<u>Age Range</u>
1. Beacon Hill	21	Learning Support Class Primary
2. Kowloon Junior	14	Learning Support Class Primary
3. Clearwater Bay	7	Learning Support Class Primary
4. Bradbury	21	Learning Support Class Primary
5. Peak	7	Learning Support Class Primary
6. Quarry Bay	7	Learning Support Class Primary
7. KGV	28	Learning Support Class Secondary
8. South Island	21	Learning Support Class Secondary