

**Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to the Provision of Boarding Places, Senior Secondary Education and Employment Opportunities for Children with Special Educational Needs**

**Meeting 3 April 2008**

**This submission is offered by an English medium, primary section only, private international school.**

The demand for places for students with special educational needs (SEN) falls broadly into four categories:

1. Highly mobile students whose moves from one national system to another at frequent intervals who may develop significant gaps in their learning. Unless addressed with intensive support at each move, the learning gaps widen and by the top of the primary school these can be very significant, hampering their progress in further education. The needs of these students can be very successfully met with additional and specialist teachers. Provision in these cases rarely exceeds three to six months.
2. The significant numbers of students identified with specific learning difficulties; although generally mild, compounded with the mobility of international children, they can significantly hamper the learning process. Generally the needs of these students can be met by specialist trained teachers within the main school setting. Examples falling into this category are dyslexia, dysphasia, and dyspraxia. Within the English National Curriculum context these children would be categorised under the English Special Educational Needs Code of Practice of students requiring school action.
3. The third group of students is those whose needs are more profound. However, with the additional support and the skills of a well trained SEN teacher and good tertiary services needs may be met within the mainstream school setting.

Examples of students falling into this category are high achieving students on the autism spectrum, PPD, asperger's syndrome, students with profound specific learning disorders and those with global developmental delay, profound hearing or sight loss. These students would be classified as "school action plus". Students whose needs fall into the "school action plus" category do require significant resources to enable their needs to be met within the mainstream school setting. This is usually more easily achieved in the primary sector due to the holistic nature of learning. However, for those schools offering only primary sector places it can be particularly challenging to find these children suitable secondary places. Subsequently, schools tend to veer away from admitting such students, particularly in the upper years.

The success of these students education is also dependent on both the mainstream school and the parents obtaining good quality external support and advice. Such support would usually be funded by parents in addition to school fees. The resources needed to support such students are significant. Other fee paying parents are generally happy with the inclusion of SEN "school action plus" students in the community provided that they are confident that their own children's needs are being fully met and that their child's progress is not hampered. Consequently, the numbers of "school action plus students" tend to be limited by a school's capacity to fund additional specialist teaching and the parents ability to fund the tertiary services required.

4. The fourth group of need is those students who within the Code of Practice will receive a statement of educational need setting out the significant and additional provision required to support their learning. These students' needs are usually complex and profound. The expertise to support their needs is rarely found in a mainstream school setting. Additionally the individual students' needs at this level are so complex that each child may require a team of both medical and educational specialists to support the child's education.

It is unrealistic to expect the needs of profoundly learning disabled students needs to be met in mainstream school settings without the additional support of specialist units of expertise. Whilst in general parents are happy to fund additional mainstream support through school fees, they are not willing to meet the expense to provide a full team of specialist support for a very small minority of children.

Outside of Hong Kong, for example England, students with profound needs are often transported daily over long distances to specialist centres. Where daily travel is not possible or the complexity of the need demands it, students may be offered places on a weekly or termly boarding basis. These places are very, very expensive and rarely funded by parents. The costs are met by their local authority under the requirements of the Education Act.

It is worth noting that for children with profound needs the range of specialists required for one student may be completely different for another. For example, the needs of a child with cerebral palsy are quite different to those with profound sight impairment.

The consequences of the lack of special educational needs in HK for non-Chinese speaking parents are significant, especially if their salary does not make provision for school fees.

We are aware that:

- the early indicators of special educational needs are not always picked up prior to kindergarten entry or in some cases within the kindergarten setting. (There is clear evidence that the early identification and remediation of special educational needs can be beneficial in certain cases).
- Parents are often so desperate to find places for children with a known SEN condition that they fail to inform the schools and it only becomes apparent after entry. Where the school offers planned SEN entry, this can place significant strain on the already allocated resources.
- When a child is identified as having SEN needs that require support beyond the mainstream school setting, tertiary English speaking services are both limited and expensive and the full breadth of services is not always available.
- Parents do regularly leave Hong Kong or split their families in order to meet the needs of children with special educational needs. This may be due to either lack of provision in HK or families not able to meet the cost of supporting their child here.

The breadth and complexity of needs is such that even the most developed special educational needs systems are challenged by the needs of some children.

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**27 March 2008**