

For discussion on 21 April 2006

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

Progress Report on Review of Implementation of Integrated Education

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to inform members of the progress of a review of the implementation of integrated education (IE)¹ and the way forward.

Background

2. A Task Force has been set up since December 2005 to advise the Administration on matters relating to the implementation, promotion and improvement of IE in schools. The Task Force meets on a monthly basis and comprises representatives from school councils, resource schools, parents' groups, the Social Welfare Department, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and tertiary institutions.

3. As part of the review, the Administration has collected views on IE and suggestions on possible improvements through the following means:

- a literature review on special education services in various countries;
- overseas expert advice and consultancy;
- focus group discussions with schools, school councils and other stakeholders;
- school visits; and
- a questionnaire to better understand the implementation of IE in primary schools, the difficulties encountered, and the demand for teacher training and support services.

Note 1: In general, IE refers to education for students with special educational needs (SEN) studying in ordinary schools. The types of SEN that are mainly referred to include: Hearing Impairment, Visual Impairment, Physical Disability, Intellectual Disability, Autism, Attention Deficit & Hyperactivity Disorder, Specific Learning Difficulties and Speech & Language Impairment.

Development of IE

4. The overarching objective of IE is to enable students with special educational needs (SEN) to maximise their potential to the fullest possible extent, to achieve as much independence as they can, and to become well-adjusted individuals and contributing members of the community. However, for students with severe, profound or multiple disabilities who cannot benefit from ordinary school settings, they will be placed in special schools where their disabilities, impairments and learning difficulties will be more appropriately catered for, while opportunities will be arranged for them to interact with ordinary students in other settings to enhance learning and social integration.

5. Since the 1980's, additional teachers have been provided to schools through various programmes such as the Intensive Remedial Teaching Programme (IRTP) for primary schools, School-based Remedial Support Programme and School-based Curriculum Tailoring Scheme for secondary schools to cater for students with low achievement and/or disabilities. In 1997, the government launched an IE programme in public sector schools following the recommendations of the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee in 1996. The policy is that public sector schools should try their best to provide adaptations and accommodations for students with SEN in support of their learning in school. The IE programme² covered five SEN types with additional teachers / teaching assistants for schools to adopt the Whole School Approach (WSA)³ to provide the support so required for the students. In the 2003/04 school year, a New Funding Model (NFM), based on a per capita grant for each student identified to have learning difficulties or SEN, was introduced in primary schools. The NFM streamlines the existing resources for supporting SEN, provides more flexibility as well as a more comprehensive coverage for students with SEN.

Note 2: IE Programme covers five disability types namely, mild intellectual disability, autism, visual impairment, hearing impairment and physical disability.

Note 3: WSA to SEN is a step forward towards inclusive education where every person in the school has a part to contribute in supporting students with SEN. It requires schools to have a clear policy on SEN support, pooling of resources for flexible deployment, continuous staff development, teacher collaboration and parent participation.

6. In addition, resources for student support in general also benefit students with SEN, e.g. student guidance personnel, curriculum development leaders, the Capacity Enhancement Grant, funding for hire of specialist services, seed projects for dissemination of good practices, network support from special schools, teacher training, provision of top-up fund to enable schools to procure special furniture and equipment or carry out minor conversion works to provide reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities, as well as school-based support services from EMB. Furthermore, we have developed various resource materials such as assessment tools, resource kits, training packages and teaching guides. Catering for students with SEN is part and parcel of the overall strategy to cope with students' diverse needs through WSA.

7. In empowering schools to adopt WSA to cater for students with SEN, we have geared our efforts to the following seven areas:

- inculcating an inclusive culture;
- empowering teachers;
- establishing school networks and facilitating professional sharing;
- providing professional support;
- promoting parent involvement and organizing parent education activities;
- enhancing provision to schools; and
- promoting cross-sector collaboration.

8. Details of WSA and the provision for SEN as well as support to schools can be found in our earlier submissions [LC Paper No.CB(2)1130/04-05(01), LC Paper No. CB(2)186/05-06(01) and LC Paper No CB(2)443/05-06(01)] to the Subcommittee.

Progress to date

9. In the current school year, 334 schools practise WSA to cater for students with SEN. These schools have each set up a Student Support Team (SST) which consists of the school heads/senior teachers, the guidance personnel and relevant subject teachers. The SST co-ordinates the efforts of different teachers and implements measures to cater for students' diverse needs. Officers from EMB have participated in many of these SST meetings to provide advice and support. It is encouraging to note that more schools are making progress on their inclusive culture, policy and practices. Success stories testify to the dedication of schools and teachers in making IE deliver the desired results. Students have improved in their

academic work, social adjustment and self esteem. Mutual support among students and teachers is seen in many schools where teacher-parent collaboration is the routine.

10. Currently, 23 schools are serving as resource schools to provide support to ordinary schools on matters relating to SEN. Of these schools, 7 are ordinary schools which have good practices in WSA to share. The rest are special schools which provide services such as staff development, consultation, on-site support and sharing of resource materials.

11. A questionnaire survey on primary schools in February 2006 indicates that schools, in general, support the concept of WSA in catering for students with SEN. Schools that are practising WSA are building up an inclusive culture so that all parties in the school, including teachers, parents and students, respect individual differences and hold the belief that every child can learn. Teachers are now more ready to accept children with physical impairments and of normal intelligence but less confident to handle those with intellectual disability, specific learning difficulties (SpLD) or those with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

12. Based on the experiences of schools and making reference to international findings, we identify three success factors for IE:

13. First, there must be an inclusive culture whereby all students, irrespective of their abilities and needs, enjoy equal opportunities and treatment.

14. Second, there should be a clear policy on catering for SEN. For this policy to take root, teachers should be helped to appreciate that SEN falls within the continuum of learning needs in the school. A clear SEN policy also increases the transparency of the school in the utilization of resources and the outcome expectations. Parents should be informed of the school policy and involved in the process of helping their children progress. Such a policy should be able to support a 3-tier intervention strategy at school:

- ✧ tier 1 is “quality first teaching” and an entitlement for all students, especially those showing early signs of learning difficulties. Differentiated classroom practices to address the diversity of progress in learning are required;
- ✧ tier 2 consists of “add-on” intervention programmes such as group teaching and pull-out programmes. Qualified teachers and teaching assistants undertake the group work and monitor the progress; and

❖ tier 3 targets at students who would need more intensive support and special accommodations in their learning.

15. Third, there should be established practices for SEN in the school to implement WSA. These comprise the effective use of individualized education programmes (IEP) for special cases, peer support among students, parent involvement in setting expectations and facilitating student learning, structured staff development, accommodations in curriculum and student assessment, collaboration with professionals and other schools, and regular reviews of the process.

16. At this stage of development of IE, we appreciate that there are areas for improvement. In this respect, we have identified the following issues of concern.

Issues of concern

17. Given the long established culture of heavy emphasis on academic achievement, there is a tendency for schools to provide a special service for a minority group instead of an integrated approach to enhance the effectiveness of the whole school in accommodating SEN. In schools where home-school co-operation and peer support are inadequate, there also runs the danger of students with SEN being marginalized in their learning and/or becoming victims of student bullying.

18. Not many teachers have acquired structured special education training and most teachers do not accord priority to attending training on SEN nor have the opportunity to consolidate what they have learnt about SEN by practising and sharing with others at school. Some teachers believe that SEN belongs to a minority of the student population and should be handled by a few designated teachers in the school. As a result, teachers rely heavily on the specialist support by EMB and demand more assessment tools, remedial packages and kits. Lack of expertise among teachers also hampers early identification and early intervention.

19. When working with parents, schools often find parents of children with SEN face exceptional pressure. Some parents may lack the necessary knowledge, skills and time to engage in an effective dialogue with schools on their children's needs and progress, hence, often resulting in miscommunication and misunderstanding between home and school. Extra time and efforts are often required to come to a mutual agreement on supporting the child with SEN.

20. We have been advising schools to spell out their policy on catering for SEN

in their school development plans and report progress in the annual school reports which are to be uploaded onto the websites of the schools for information of parents and the general public. Also, schools should deploy resources to support SEN and have regular meetings with parents to agree on the IEP and review the progress of their children. However, some parents have asserted that unless such requirements are made mandatory, the progress of their children cannot be closely monitored.

21. To help schools understand the problems and needs of students especially those with SEN upon admission, it is important that parents should give consent to transfer students' assessment reports and learning profiles when they change schools. However, quite a number of parents are reluctant to release such information.

22. Schools with a large number of students with various disabilities have complained about insufficient resources to cater for their needs. Some schools have also suggested that there should be special arrangements to help schools sustain their efforts in implementing IE such as flexibility in the school places allocation systems to ensure their continued viability against the backdrop of declining student enrolment.

Way Forward

23. Having regard to the pre-conditions for IE and the above issues of concern and based on findings with stakeholders, survey, overseas practices, and recommendations of international experts / consultants, we would like to propose the following framework for enhancing the capacity of schools in implementing IE.

Culture

24. It is important that key stakeholders acquire a positive attitude towards IE and schools develop a culture of accepting students with SEN. In particular, teachers need to have a clear understanding of the success criteria for IE and the 3-tier intervention strategy. To this end, there should be more dissemination of success stories which show that both students with and without SEN have benefited from IE. The evidence of the success stories and trained skills will help boost the confidence of teachers who will then show more positive responses in respect of their role in IE. Besides, recognition shall be given to schools with good performance.

Policies

25. Over the years, we have issued a number of guidelines, references and leaflets on matters relating to SEN. To help schools devise their policy to support SEN, we shall compile a comprehensive document comprising a policy manual and

an operation guide. The document will be uploaded onto EMB's website for easy access by schools and parents.

Teacher training

26. If teachers are ready to apply the basic learning theories and teaching strategies learnt in the initial teacher education, they can tackle most of the students' learning difficulties at the first and second tier support. To help teachers build up their confidence in practising WSA to support SEN, we shall step up the teacher training which will strike a good balance between theory and practice for specific types of SEN needs and help teachers to reflect on their own belief system and teaching strategies.

27. Knowing that teachers have competing training priorities, we will discuss with the profession and teacher education providers in order to draw up a realistic teacher training framework with a structured training programme and a targeted number of teachers for the different types of training within a specified period. We will also explore the provision of supply teachers for the structured training on SEN. Initially, we plan to restructure the training courses into basic, advanced and thematic levels, targeting at different groups of teachers. There will be various modes of delivery to suit the needs of teachers.

Parent involvement

28. To empower parents to work effectively with schools in taking care of their children with SEN, we propose to collaborate with the social welfare and rehabilitation sectors as well as NGOs in organizing short-term training programmes for parents. The training should be timely upon their children having been identified with SEN and at different stages of schooling, such as pre-primary, primary and secondary.

29. We shall step up publicity to release information to help parents choose schools for their children with SEN and understand their role in working with schools. On service delivery, it is recommended that schools hold review meetings on the progress of students with SEN twice a year and involve parents in the meetings. Thus, parents are kept informed of the progress of their children at school. Besides, we will continue our efforts to educate parents of able-bodied students and the community to inculcate an inclusive culture.

Cross-sector collaboration

30. We shall liaise with the Hospital Authority and Department of Health to make every endeavour to convince parents to give consent to pass the necessary information about the SEN of their children to schools. This is particularly important in the case of students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), since a good alert system is crucial for the school to ensure a smooth transition and proper handling of the student in school/class.

31. NGOs have a role to play in supporting schools on intervention skills, development of resource kits as well as direct service to children with SEN. We will continue to liaise with them on areas of collaboration.

32. There will be continuous co-operation with tertiary institutions and overseas professionals on teacher training, and development/refinement of assessment tools and learning kits to facilitate identification and teaching.

Professional support

33. To ensure that our support meets the needs of individual schools, we shall organise workshops for all schools that have admitted students with SEN to listen to their problems, find out the support that they need most and conduct a professional dialogue on the objectives of IE, and the necessary supporting conditions. We shall also make use of the opportunity to clarify misconceptions, if any, and disseminate good practices. Starting with primary schools, we plan to organise about 50 workshops in the coming four months. The key personnel of each school, including the school head/deputy head, coordinator for SEN policy or Student Support Team, as well as class/subject teachers in charge of IRTP or class/language teachers of students with SEN will be invited to attend. At the end of the workshop, we shall conduct a questionnaire survey to assess the readiness of schools and find out the support required. Based on the feedback collected, we shall map out our support strategies to enhance the capacity of schools in catering for students with SEN.

34. Over the years, we have developed a number of teaching guides and checklists, pamphlets, leaflets, resource packages and teaching kits including CD-ROMs. An assessment tool for SpLD at secondary level is in the pipeline and teachers will be trained to use it. Development of a norm-referenced attainment test kit for the three basic subjects at primary levels to assess those students whose learning is at risk is also in progress. Teachers may use them to provide the first-tier support. With all the resource materials produced over the years and the new

accessions in the pipeline, we will provide our teachers with a rich repertoire of learning and teaching resources to facilitate their work at school.

Quality assurance

35. We shall require schools to draw up an SEN policy, to involve parents during the process, to conduct year-end evaluation and to report results in the annual school reports. EMB will continue to visit schools to advise on the delivery of service, resource deployment and the use of the “Indicators for Inclusion” in school self-evaluation. Follow-up visits will be paid if need warrants.

Resources

36. As for the secondary schools with territory Band 3 and/or bottom 10% students at the junior secondary levels, many of whom are students with SEN. We will provide additional teachers by phases starting from the 2006/07 school year at a rate of 0.7 additional teacher per class of bottom 10% students (making a total of 2 teachers per class) and 0.3 additional teacher per class of other Band 3 students (making a total of 1.6 teachers per class). Schools may deploy these additional teachers to provide extra support to students in need such as small group teaching. For the more severe SEN cases, we will continue to provide professional support and extra funding under the existing IE programme.

37. For primary schools, we shall continue to provide schools with the existing provision under the Intensive Remedial Teaching Programme, IE programme and NFM to cater for students with SEN. Apart from these, we will enhance the provision of student guidance personnel in the 2006/07 school year and turn the time-limited posts for specialized teaching and curriculum development leaders into permanent establishment in the 2006/07 and 2007/08 school years respectively.

38. For schools with a large cluster of students with SEN, we shall line up professional support and second our professionals to station in the school to supplement the resources already provided. On top of this, we shall continue to strengthen the support and network services provided by the Resource Schools on WSA and special schools cum resource centres. We shall also solicit overseas consultancy to provide support to schools in catering for students with SEN.

Special concerns for students with ASD and students with SpLD

39. To step up the support for schools with clusters of students with ASD and students with SpLD, EMB has commissioned a 42-hour training course on SpLD and this course has been evaluated favourably by the participants. Besides continuing with this training for language teachers, we are in the process of developing an assessment tool for SpLD in secondary schools, and will conduct further research on teaching pedagogies, provide school-based support, explore other accommodation alternatives in examinations / homework, and develop after-school support programmes for students to enhance their learning skills.

40. As for supporting students with ASD, we have also commissioned a 60-hour training course, on a pilot basis, in order to help more teachers better cater for these students. In the case of those students with severe difficulties, we shall step up our onsite specialist support for schools.

41. In developing resource materials to help schools cater for students with SEN, we shall accord priority to the areas of ASD and SpLD as many schools have expressed concerns in supporting students with these two types of difficulties.

Advice sought

42. Members are invited to note the progress on the review of implementation of IE and comment on the elements of support proposed above. A holistic support strategy will be devised following the series of workshops for schools.

Education and Manpower Bureau
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