

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

**Provisions and Support to
Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Primary Schools**

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to set out the Administration's responses to the major issues raised at the Legco Sub-committee Meeting on 1 November 2005.

Administration's Responses

2. Administration's responses to the major issues are as follows -

(a) *Policy of integration: The pace of integrated education (IE) is too hasty in Hong Kong and there are students not fit for mainstream school setting are found studying in mainstream schools.*

Administration's response:

- The main policy objective of special education is to enable children with special educational needs (SEN) to fully develop their potential. For those who will benefit from mainstream setting, we encourage them to receive education in mainstream schools. The rest should be placed to special schools appropriate to their SEN.

- Since the 1970s, the Government has been supporting integrated education through various funding provisions, remediation programmes, training and professional support for teachers. We also assist parents to make informed choices for placement to either mainstream or special schools that would benefit their children most. The pressure for more rapid integration has largely come from parents' choices of school placement.

- Cross-sector school transfer mechanism is available. If parents choose to opt

out and return to mainstream/special schools, the transfer mechanism would arrange the students for admission to special/mainstream schools to continue their studies.

- We have facilitated special schools to strengthen their role to serve as resource centres in supporting mainstream schools in handling students with SEN.
- We will continue to review and improve on the implementation of integration.

(b) *Provisions to support students with SEN in mainstream schools: EMB should review the provisions for students with SEN having regard to the increasing number of students with SEN attending mainstream schools in recent years. Despite the merits under the new funding mode (NFM), the Intensive Remedial Teaching Programme and IE-related resources are more generous in terms of resources as compared to those provided to schools under NFM. There is the suggestion to relax the maximum provision of \$550,000 per annum per school in enrolment of students with SEN under the NFM and implement integrated education by way of small class teaching.*

Administration's response:

- The SEN-specific resources should not be viewed as the only resources to support integrated education and be used in isolation. Schools are to make flexible use of all existing resources in an integrated manner and formulate consistent policies and measures based on the whole school approach to cater for students' diverse learning needs.
- In addition to the afore-mentioned SEN-specific provisions, resources are available within the overall subvention for schools to help students with SEN, e.g. the capacity enhancement grant, improved provision of student guidance teachers, curriculum leaders to tailor learning resources to suit individual needs.
- Small class teaching should not be regarded as the panacea for all educational issues. Although small class size may intuitively provide a facilitating environment for teachers to cater for individual differences, employment of appropriate teaching strategies and other related provisions and support as mentioned in this paper and the previous one referenced CB(2)186/05-06(01) is the key to successful learning outcomes. In making flexible use of all existing resources, some schools have split class or group

teaching while some employ additional teachers/teaching assistants.

- For schools with particular difficulties in managing students with SEN, special support services are available. In the light of their experience, we will review the NFM including the funding allocation with a view to strengthening our support to students with SEN and enhancing their learning outcomes. It is noteworthy that more and more schools, which previously were not provided with additional resources to cater for students with SEN, can now receive financial assistance under the NFM.

(c) *Monitoring of the SEN programmes: Despite the positive feedbacks on the IE Programme and NFM as reflected in the recent surveys, there is the concern that these programmes are not monitored closely enough to ensure effectiveness of the support for students with SEN.*

Administration's response:

- With a view to building schools' professional capacity to support students with SEN, officers of the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) including school development officers, education psychologists, speech therapists, audiologists and inspectors pay an average of 2 – 3 visits a year to schools to offer professional advice and support on curriculum tailoring, teaching strategies and implementation of the school-based SEN policy under NFM, IRTP or IE Programme.
- During the visits and focus inspections, we do give timely advice and support to schools and also keep track of the schools' deployment of funding, the progress and effectiveness of their student support strategies. Schools are also advised to set up their SEN students register with individual students' profile, report their progress and evaluation results in the Annual Report as an on-going process.
- To enhance home-school cooperation, schools are required to brief parents on the relevant action plans to allow them to understand better the school's arrangements in supporting their children. They should also seek parents' views and feedback periodically on the progress of the students concerned. When their students change school, the original schools are advised to seek parental consent for transferring the profiles of the students concerned to the new schools.

- We will continue to review the existing monitoring mechanism and support measures.

(d) *Training and professional support for teachers: Though teachers agree in principle to the adoption of whole-school approach in supporting the students with SEN, not all teachers are competent to handle students with SEN. Teachers' busy work schedule as well as the perception of some teachers that catering for students with SEN is an extra work may have aggravated the situation. The training courses on SEN are competing with other courses in the teachers' priority for professional development.*

Administration's response:

- We acknowledge the importance of teacher empowerment in handling students with SEN. Apart from the structured training courses on SEN, other modes of teacher empowerment including consultancy service, mentorship, networking, experience-sharing etc are also important to help teachers acquire hands-on experiences and conduct evidence-based researches.
- Under the school-partnership scheme, we have invited 16 special schools and 7 mainstream schools to serve as resource centres for about 100 schools in the 2005/06 school year. These schools help to foster cooperation and a sharing culture between the mainstream and special schools, and promote cross fertilization of professional knowledge and skill transfer among teachers.
- To strengthen SEN training for teachers in both mainstream and special schools, the Hong Kong Institute of Education will continue to run the 120-hour professional development course with an annual provision of 540 training places. In addition, two 30-hour courses on specific learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders are in place in the 2005/06 and 2006/07 school years respectively, providing more in-depth training on specific issues of SEN. Teachers' CPD (Continuing Professional Development) hours will be counted after successful completion of these courses.
- To enhance schools' capacity in catering for students with SEN, we will require schools to arrange at least one teacher to undergo the 120-hour SEN course and a teacher each to attend the theme-based training on the SEN

type(s) that the school needs to cater for.

- To encourage more teachers to attend the SEN courses, we will provide schools with supply teachers when they send their teachers to undertake the above-mentioned structured courses.
 - We will continue to explore the possibility of outsourcing more structured and modular courses on SEN to local and overseas tertiary institutions and introducing more forms of teacher education with a view to enhancing teacher competence in catering for students with SEN.
- (e) *Assessment for students with SEN: There is a misconception that performance of students with SEN in the Basic Competency Assessment (BCA) will affect the overall assessment scores of the school which are to be used for the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA).*

Administration's response:

- We recognize the spirit of assessment for learning which would provide information on the strengths and weaknesses of students, regardless of whether they have SEN or not. It enables teachers to reflect and improve teaching.
- The existing Basic Competency Assessment (BCA) is a low-stake assessment tool to enhance learning and teaching. It is not related to allocation of S1 places under the SSPA mechanism and is not a public examination as such. Teachers can conduct their assessment according to their students' needs and learning progress. It only aims at facilitating schools and the Government to have a general understanding of the students' strengths and weaknesses at the system level so that they may draw up plans to enhance effectiveness in learning and teaching. Schools admitting students with SEN will be given two separate sets of reports: one on all their students' performance and another without the performance of their students with intellectual disabilities.
- Schools are also encouraged to make special arrangements and accommodations in the internal assessments and examinations. The guiding principles and assessment strategies are accessible in the EMB website. For students with intellectual disabilities, schools are encouraged to make effective use of the Individualized Education Plans to monitor their learning

progress as and where appropriate.

- EMB will continue to review the assessment and homework strategies of SEN and give advice/briefing to schools.

(f) *Communication channels relating to integrated education:* Some parents' associations and concern groups opined that since the dissolution of the Task Force on IE, there are insufficient channels of communication with EMB to keep abreast of the progress of IE in Hong Kong.

Administration's response:

- The Task Force on IE was formed in August 1997 to monitor the implementation of the 2-year Pilot Project on IE. The Task Force was disbanded in July 1999 following the completion of the Pilot Project.
- When launching new initiatives, it is the practice of EMB to collect views and feedbacks from stakeholders through consultation meetings, briefing sessions, experience-sharing and questionnaires etc. Take the piloting of NFM for example, we have conducted a number of consultative meetings, briefing, experience-sharing sessions and focus group discussions with parents associations, educational bodies, schools and non-governmental organizations from 2003/04 onwards. Implementation of the NFM was surveyed in 2003/04 and 2004/05 respectively to gather the opinions of parents, school heads and teachers.
- In October 2005, a task group on NFM was established. The main function of the task group is to advise EMB on the promotion and implementation of integrated education and recommend improvement measures for implementing the whole-school approach to cater for students with SEN.
- To strengthen the existing channels of communication, we will consider expanding its membership to include more concern groups. The task group will continue to give views and advice on the implementation of integrated education in schools.

(g) *Public Education:* Some parents were concerned about the possibility of students with SEN that they may become the target of bullying in schools. More

public education to inculcate and promote an inclusive environment is essential.

Administration's response:

- We have grave concern for bullying in schools. Officers of the Guidance Discipline Section have been visiting schools and conducting school-based workshops to create harmonious environment at school for effective learning.
- To communicate the principles and values of equal opportunities to the school management, students, parents and the public, we have also taken a series of supportive measures including the issue of circulars, publication of leaflets and organizing various promotional activities such as:
 - * E-poster Design Project on Equal Opportunities in Education (February 2004)
 - * The launching of E-learning programme on “Equal Opportunities Begin at School” (June 2004)
 - * The 2004 Hong Kong Autism Awareness Week jointly organized with Castle Peak Hospital, NGOs and parents’ associations (October 2004)
 - * A reading scheme 「與光同行」 jointly organized with Castle Peak Hospital, NGOs and parents’ associations to promote public awareness on children with autism (February 2005)
 - * Sharing session on “Creating Caring and Accepting Environment in School” by Peter Yarrow (September 2005)
 - * The 2005 Hong Kong Autism Awareness Week jointly organized with Castle Peak Hospital, NGOs and parents’ associations (October 2005)
 - * “Don’t Laugh At Me” Programme – Local Experience Sharing Session (December 2005)
 - * Perennial launching of TV and radio Announcements of Public Interest on equal opportunities in education
- We will continue to step up the above public education measures to ensure that students with SEN are not discriminated by schools.

Advice Sought

3. Members are requested to note the contents of this paper.

Education and Manpower Bureau
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