

Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS,JP
Room 520, West Wing
Central Government Offices
Hong Kong

May 7th 2008

Dear Mr. Tsang,

I am writing to bring your attention to the lack of parity in service provisions in Hong Kong for non-Chinese speaking (NCS) children with special educational needs (SEN). By not providing equal services in both of Hong Kong's official languages, Cantonese and English, a de facto discrimination is being perpetrated by the administration against its own populace. Every child residing in Hong Kong is entitled to an appropriate education, regardless of their ethnicity, financial circumstances or native language, the lack of which leads to a divisive and segregated society, where any minority that does not speak Chinese is separated from the system instead of being integrated into the whole. How does Hong Kong reconcile this discrimination with its obligations as a signatory to the United Nations' Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities?

On April 3, 13 organizations and 6 individuals presented their views regarding this issue to the Subcommittee Studying Issues Relating to Provisions for Children with SEN. Growing Together, a group advocating an inclusive society for people of all ages with SEN, submitted a position paper to the Subcommittee and the administration recommending specific actions that should be taken to address and eliminate this discrimination:

a. Parity with Chinese Speaking students with SEN

The Hong Kong Government should make financial support available to NCS children with SEN in a manner similar to that provided under the Education Department's New Funding Mode (NFM). Although Hong Kong claims to be an English and Chinese cultural environment, the services it offers to the community are imbalanced. Why don't Chinese and English speaking children with SEN receive the same subvention from the government for their education?

b. Establish an Independent Authority for NCS students with SEN

A foundation should be established to oversee relevant educational matters which would also offer a comprehensive resource centre for parents, educators and students. This Foundation would also be responsible to liaise with all the international schools regarding the provision of SEN programs.

c. Education Continuum

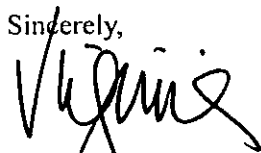
The government should explore options for continuum services as students reach their adult years including employment opportunities and residential care facilities to support independence.

At the Subcommittee meeting, the EDB's representative made clear the administration's position on NCS children with SEN as stated in LC Paper No. CB(2) 1465/07-08(02): "NCS children are encouraged to attend local kindergartens using Chinese as a medium of instruction." Internationally accepted best practices for the education of children with SEN state that these children should be educated in their native language. Is the Education Department disputing the research substantiating these practices?

The Chairman of the Subcommittee, Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung, has requested the Education Department to respond to the concerns raised at the 3 April meeting within 2 months. To ensure that all viewpoints are taken into account, the members of Growing Together humbly requests the opportunity to attend the 12 June Panel meeting to provide depositions and supporting documentation.

We look forward to working with you and to the favor of your reply.

Sincerely,



Virginia Wilson
Chairman

Growing Together

Attachments:

Press Clippings from LEGCO

Submission to EDB and LEGCO on non Chinese speaking SEN

Letter to Donald Tsang

SEN group steps up schools campaign NGOs to inundate chief executive's office with letters

Mimi Lau

A special-education pressure group plans to bombard Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam-kuen with letters as part of its campaign to secure funding parity for students with special needs who do not speak Chinese.

Growing Together chairwoman Virginia Wilson said the group was launching the letter-writing campaign this week.

"We want to inundate Donald Tsang's office with letters," she said.

Growing Together is an umbrella group representing five NGOs that provide special-education services for non-Chinese-speaking children, and has more than 200 members.

She said the campaign's aim was to catch Mr Tsang's personal attention to look into inadequate schooling and services for the students.

Teachers, therapists, parents and siblings of children with special needs were being called upon to tell Mr Tsang about their personal struggles to get services and schooling.

"We hope the government will actually reply, especially to the children who will be writing."

The group's target is to send 300 letters by end of this month before the bureau is due to submit a revised standpoint on the issue to the Legislative Council next month.

The group raised its concerns in a

We hope the government will reply, especially to the children

Virginia Wilson, head of Growing Together



Legco's special-education panel meeting last month, during which the government came under fire for failing to address the problems and telling parents they could integrate their non-Chinese-speaking children into local public schools, where there would be sufficient places.

Currently, the English Schools Foundation provides 126 places for children capable of learning in ordinary classrooms with learning support, and there are 60 places in the Jockey Club Sarah Roe School for

those needing intensive special support. But there are two- to three-year waiting lists for the limited places.

Parents of many students who could not wait that long had either chosen to leave Hong Kong or decided not to come, Ms Wilson said.

Hoping to change the government's perspective, she said special-needs children must be educated in their native languages.

"The government's position on integration into the Chinese mainstream is fundamentally wrong."

She felt English speakers or other ethnicities were being segregated and it was up to the government to define where Hong Kong should stand as an international city.

"Right now, the policies do not reflect the advertising," she said. "Hong Kong has already lost pools of international talent by not addressing the issues of non-Chinese-speaking children with special-education needs."

She called on the government to make financial support for these students who could not speak Chinese equivalent to that for those who do.

Frustrated by the government's lack of understanding, Ms Wilson said parents could take the issue to the streets or take legal action against the government.

"It's something we will have to consider although this would be at the bottom of our list."

Young entrepreneurs see results

Lai Ying-kit

More than 1,600 secondary school students have put their business

sponsored by HSBC. More than 150 volunteers acted as advisers to guide students through a complete business cycle, from setting up to liquidation.

Winnie Yu Tsz-shan, 17, company chief executive, said she and her classmates had learnt that success depended on communication.

A special case for special-needs education

Robyn Joseph

Although the right to education for all children is enshrined in Hong Kong law, there are still vulnerable youngsters slipping through the education net. Last month, a special subcommittee of the Legislative Council education panel, chaired by Fernando Cheung Chiu-hung, heard submissions on behalf of non-Chinese-speaking students with special education needs.

Both the Legco floor and public galleries were full. Hong Kong's non-Chinese-speaking communities had come together, on behalf of their students with special education needs, to ask the government for parity with Cantonese-speaking students with special education needs. Parity means the ability to apply for the same aid; establishing a foundation to co-ordinate funds; early assessment and intervention; and family counselling; and helping teachers and school administrators improve their skills and understanding of special education needs.

In Hong Kong, Cantonese-speaking families with children with special education needs receive support for early assessment and funding and are guaranteed a place in a mainstream or special school. For non-Chinese-speaking minorities, parents are left alone to assess, and pay for, the special education needs of their children. And pay they do; some as much as HK\$50,000 a month for privately run services.

Additionally, there is little chance of gaining a place in mainstream or special schools. Very few of the mainstream non-Chinese-speaking, international schools offer places for

special-needs students. It is too expensive to develop programmes and employ specialist teachers as well as classroom staff.

And what has been the Education Bureau's response to the lack of non-Chinese-speaking special education needs? Take a government-paid, 60-hour immersion course in Cantonese with a view to joining the Cantonese education system. It may be well intentioned, but this policy is flawed. Children with special education needs struggle to learn in their own language. How could they possibly be expected to learn Cantonese? Children with special education needs often require support in and out of the classroom. It is the child's family that most often provides this ex-classroom support. So if a child is learning in Cantonese, how is a non-Chinese-speaking family expected to be able to support this learning?

In Hong Kong, as in many places, the incidence of special education needs is growing. Much research is being conducted to determine the cause of these special education needs for a range of disorders.

There are both short- and long-term implications for Hong Kong. In the long run, if Hong Kong wishes to be known for its excellent education, we must benchmark against global standards that indicate no child must receive anything less than the most appropriate education to help them reach their full potential.

In the short term, Hong Kong is losing some of its best talent, or turning it away, because of a lack of support for their children with special education needs.

Robyn Joseph is chairwoman of the board of the Hong Kong Academy

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Non-Chinese-speakers neglected: NGO HK 'failing its vulnerable needs pupils'

Mimi Lau

Hong Kong is failing to care for its "most vulnerable" residents, the head of a special needs pressure group claimed this week.

"The forgotten one is the non-Chinese-speaking child with special educational needs. The forgotten child is segregated, discriminated against and ostracised from our school systems and our society," Virginia Wilson, chairwoman of Growing Together, said.

"If Hong Kong is Asia's World City, then why are there so many forgotten children?" she asked.

Growing Together represents more than 200 concerned parents and five non-governmental organisations providing limited services, mainly for English-speaking students with special needs.

Educators, lawmakers and government representatives are due to discuss the special needs issue next Thursday at a Legislative Council sub-committee meeting.

Government figures show there are 13,000 students with special education needs studying in mainstream classrooms and another 7,800 attending 61 special schools as at last September. However, there is no data to show how many of these students are English- or Chinese-speaking.

Of the 61 special schools only one – the English Schools Foundation's Jockey Club Sarah Roe School – caters for non-Chinese-speaking students. The English Schools Foundation also provides 126 places for students with special education needs able to learn in ordinary classrooms, with a waiting list of two to three years and at a cost ranging from just over HK\$5,000 to about HK\$8,500.

Civic Party lawmaker Fernando Cheung Chiu-hung said the situation faced by non-Chinese-speaking children from low-income families would be even worse.

"Most of them are Pakistani and Nepalese and don't speak Chinese or

If Hong Kong is Asia's World City, why are there so many forgotten?

Virginia Wilson, of Growing Together



English at home," Dr Cheung said. "Although their English is better, they have no choice but to purchase the English-speaking special education services, like others.

"These children are forced to attend mainstream special schools where Cantonese is used as the medium of instruction."

Ms Wilson, who is also the chairwoman of the Jockey Club Sarah Roe School Council, said Hong Kong was too results-oriented.

"Undeniably, the Hong Kong school system excels at preparing students for standardised testing, however, it fails its most vulnerable citizens."

She said many parents were pushed to the edge by the shortage of school places and services, and either left Hong Kong or became activists, fighting for the rights of their children.

Kerry Valentine, former principal of the international section of Korean International School and ex-head of ESF Educational Services' English language section, moved her family to Perth, Australia, last year because of the lack of special needs facilities

Long wait
for care
E6

for non-Chinese-speaking children. She said the needs of her seven-year-old autistic son were not being addressed at a reasonable cost. "I was told that if Matthew couldn't get into a school at the age of five, then 'you're just going have to leave'," she said.

John Greene, father of a 10-year-old autistic son born in Hong Kong, said "government leadership is not apparent" as care, education and intervention in the public sector was "negligible".

He said the need for more "special needs facilities, services and qualified staff in normal schools" as well as special schools was desperate.

"Do we have to wait until a senior government official or celebrity of huge political influence suddenly has a special needs child of their own before any reasonable initiative is taken by government?"

Liberal Party lawmaker Selina Chow Liang Shuk-ye said the need to address the inadequacy of school places and services was obvious because Hong Kong needed to "attract and retain" talented people to maintain its competitive edge.

"The official languages in Hong Kong are Chinese and English. It's unreasonable for us to not provide enough special education services in English," Mrs Chow said.

She said while the shortage of international schools for normal children was apparent enough, "it will be even more inadequate for children with special education needs".

"The government needs to ensure the services are there, be it subvented or privately provided."

An Education Bureau spokeswoman said non-Chinese-speaking students were encouraged to enrol in local schools.

"In Hong Kong eligible children, irrespective of ethnic origin and physical or intellectual ability, have the right to enjoy basic education in public-sector schools," she said.

SCMP Friday, April 4, 2008

Students with special needs 'driven away'

Mimi Lau

Hong Kong's reputation as Asia's world city is threatened because a shortage of school places for English-speaking students with special education needs is driving away international talent, lawmakers were told yesterday.

Addressing the Legislative Council's education subcommittee, American Chamber of Commerce president Richard Vuylsteke said the lack of places was more than just an educational and social issue.

"We also see this as a reputation and practical issue for Hong Kong, both as a world city and also a place that attracts international talent," Dr Vuylsteke said.

"People who have children with special education needs can't come here because their needs cannot be met. That's a serious issue."

The English Schools Foundation (ESF) has eight schools providing 126 places for children capable of learning in ordinary classrooms with learning support, and 60 places in the Jockey Club Sarah Roe School for those needing intensive special support.

However, there are 103 students, mostly aged between 4½ and six, waiting for school places, with the waiting time between two and three years.

Half of the students are non-Chinese and the rest are Chinese with English as their first language.

ESF chief executive Heather du Quesnay told the subcommittee the foundation's schools "have to advise parents who want to come to Hong Kong that the provision is simply not enough" and that "the pressing situation" would need to be addressed. "This is a very tragic situation; there is nothing they can do," Ms du Quesnay said.

Education Bureau principal assistant secretary Wu Po-ling said the parents of non-Chinese speaking children had the option of integrating their children in local public schools where there would be enough places. But she came under fire for the comments and the government was criticised for failing to address the problem.

The chairwoman of the special needs pressure group Growing Together, Virginia Wilson, said the shortage of ESF places was a just part of the overall problem.

"ESF is just one part of the bigger picture because there are children who will not even wait for ESF knowing the wait-list is so long," she said.

"They either leave Hong Kong or try to find other schools that will take them, depending on the children's abilities. Sometimes it happens, sometimes it doesn't."

國際校特教學額嚴重不足



■多名關注非華語學童特殊教育需要問題的家長組織代表，昨「拉隊」到立法會反映不滿，批評政府支援不足。

逾十個家長組織昨於立法會為特殊教育問題而設的小組委員會上批評，有特殊教育需要的非華語兒童，往往要輪候兩至三年才能入讀有提供支援的國際學校，教育局卻漠視有關學童問題，有外籍家長甚至因而憤然離港。各家長組織更表明，不排除控告政府歧視非華語學童。

外籍家長憤然離港

前韓國國際學校校長Kerry Valentine越洋寄來的控訴信，批評有教育局官員只着有特殊教育需要的外籍學童，如未能入讀國際學校，便轉讀本地學校，未有積極為學生提供協助，令她對香港教育制度死心，「面對這麼不尊重你的答案，你便知這個制度毫無希望……我們決定離開香港，這是我們最明智的決定！」

曾居港十九年的Kerry在信中表示，四歲的兒子患有自閉症，若入讀本地華語學

校，會面對更大的溝通問題；然而國際學校提供的特殊教育學額嚴重不足，學校又得不到政府足夠支援；到了去年，她決定舉家搬離香港。

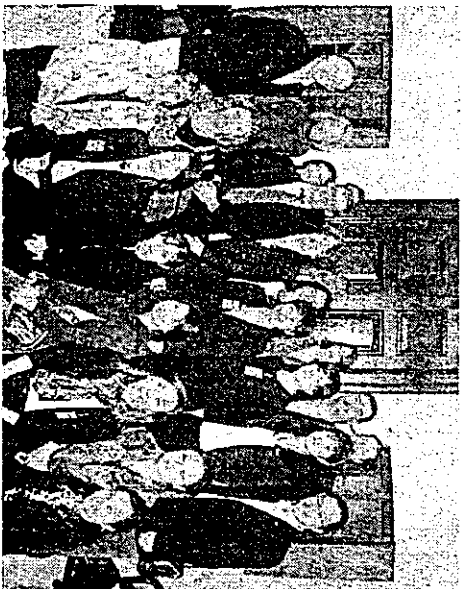
多位泛民主派立法會議員在會上批評，港府忽視非華語學童的需要，愧稱為國際城市。委員會主席張超雄謂，會代表家長組織去信平等機會委員會，要求教育局正視問題；各家長組織又不排除，會控告政府歧視非華語學童。教育局首席助理秘書長胡寶玲承諾，會研究處理有關問題的方案。

特教幼師流失率高

此外，社會服務聯合會代表昨在同一個委員會上表示，該會去年的調查發現，特殊幼兒工作人員流失率高達三成二，嚴重影響教學質素，相信是因為學券制未能惠及特殊教育機構，令教師紛紛轉往工作前景較佳的幼稚園任教。

社會福利署助理署長袁錦儀回應，署將於〇八／〇九年起，每年增撥五百萬元，資助特殊幼兒教育工作者接受

記



國際教育團體批評，政府對非華語的特殊兒童支援不足 (本報攝)

英基特殊學額 輪候需時三年

【本報訊】雖然政府早於二〇〇六年撥款二百萬元，為英基學校協會增加二十一個非華語特殊學額，不過有子女就讀英基的家長梁民威，昨日出席立法會會議時嘆謂，英基的特殊學額仍嚴重不足，輪候學額多達一百零三人，特殊學童需等候三年才能入讀。

英基屬下學校當中，只有寶馬會商業學校提供六十個特殊學額，其餘開辦學習支援班的主流學校，提供約一百二十個特殊學額。梁民威昨日說，申請特殊學額的學童逐年上升，現有一百零三人輪候，平均需等二至三年。

教育局首席助理秘書長（學校行政及支援）胡寶玲出席立法會時表示，政府鼓勵非華語學生融入本地教育體系，亦有為非華語特殊學童提供支援。一批國際學校辦學團體昨日組織多名外籍家長，批評政府對非華語特殊學童支援不足，更拒絕非華語特殊學童「融入」華語學校，認為這是歧視。立法會議員張文光建議政府撥款一千萬元，解決一百零三名的輪候學額。他批評本港特殊教育制度落後，有損國際城市之名。

外籍學童特殊教育 港府被批支持不足

一批國際學校辦學團體及多名外籍家長，批評港府對外籍學童的特殊教育（我國稱為“特別教育”）支持不足。他們指出，非華語而有特殊需要的學童，被要求入讀以中文為教學語言的普通學校，是一種歧視。

立法會“研究為有特殊教育需要的兒童提供寄宿學額、高中教育及就業機會的有關事宜小組委員會”，昨日舉行會議，重點討論非華語而有特殊需要的學童。

港府重申，其一貫政策是幫助非華語學生盡早融入本地教育體系，因此鼓勵他們（包括有特殊教育需要的兒童）入讀公營學校，以便他們盡早融入香港社會。

不過，有關政策不但被批評為“歧視”，而且，更可能造成人才流失，迫使跨國企業人才因沒法得到足夠支持，而考慮遷離香港。

其中，來自新加坡的Jo，過去數年就一直就要為兒子尋找英語特殊學校。她表示，正考慮把丈夫留在香港，帶兒子返回新加坡的特殊學校，或者索性連丈夫也放棄工作，舉家離開香港。

Jo表示，曾安排兒子在私人機構接受英語的自閉症治療，例如訓練專注力等，每月花費近3萬港元（約5300新元），最近已轉至非牟利機構，每星期費用減至約1000港元。

教育局首席助理秘書長胡寶玲指出，有特殊教育需要（包括視障、肢體傷殘、自閉症和注意力缺乏或多動症）的非華語學生，在臨□評估時，需考慮他們的文化和經驗背景，以作調整。

她說，港府鼓勵非華語兒童入讀以中文為教學語言的本地幼兒園；而弱能的學前兒童可視乎其殘疾程度，入讀社會福利署屬下的特殊幼兒中心。

至於小學及中學階段，非華語兒童可通過小一入學統籌辦法或中學學位分配辦法入讀公營學校，他們也可要求教育局協助安排學位。

另外，英基學校和其它國際學校，則為非華語學生提供香港教育體系內的另一選擇。目前，香港共有15所英基學校和38所國際學校。

其中，需要在學與教方面作最大程度的調適才能配合其特殊教育需要的學生，可在英基開辦的一所提供60個學額的特殊學校就讀。

為解決學生的輪候問題，港府已批出200萬港元的整筆撥款，讓英基自上學年起提供額外21個學額，另外，在本學年進行的調查顯示，香港的國際學校提供了該類學額總共有89個。

立法會議員張超雄指出，現時香港雖然提供特殊教育，但英語特殊學校嚴重不足，僅有約有100個特殊班學額，而等候名單長達103人，須輪候三年或以上。

他強調，要求有特殊需要的外籍學生入讀以中文為教學語言的普通學校，確是不公平，而且，也變相減低跨國企業高級行政人員到香港工作的意欲。

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外籍學童難受惠特殊教育

教育局近年積極推行融合教育，然而，一批有特殊教育需要的非華語的兒童卻被忽略，有家長投訴，指主流學校為他們提供的支援嚴重不足，加上不諳中文，須輪候長達三年才可入讀國際學校。家長又批評，社會福利署轄下的特殊幼兒中心多以廣東話主導，令他們求助無門。

讀國際校須輪候三年

本港有特殊教育需要的非華語學生，可選擇入讀英基學校協會轄下學校或其他國際學校，但英基開辦的學習支援班只有不足二百個學額，輪候名單長達一百零三名，輪候時間可長達兩年至三年。其他國際學校能提供的相關學額也不足一百個。

Eva Griffiths育有一名患有魯賓斯坦泰比症候群及青光眼的六歲兒子。其子曾入讀心光盲人院暨學校，卻因他不懂中文，未能有效學習。Eva及後去信

教育局和平機會反映，當局只建議她入讀主流學校。苦候兩年半後，其子才於今年二月入讀英基轄下學校。她批評，政府提供的支援不足，根本不知道如何求助。

語言不通 求助無門

此外，社署轄下的特殊幼兒中心多以廣東話主導，而聘請私人治療師進行自閉症治療，每月費用可高達十萬元，社福界議員張超雄指，不少南亞裔人根本沒有經濟能力支付有關費用，只有被逼接受政府以廣東話主導的服務或入讀主流學校。「政府常言要匯聚國際人才來港，卻忽略這群外籍弱勢人士的需要，變相趕走人才。」他將於今日立法會「研究為有特殊教育需要的兒童提供寄宿學額、高中教育及就業機會的有關事宜小組委員會」會議上提出討論。



■非華語特殊兒童的家長Jo（左）和Eva（右）批評，政府為她們提供的支援不足，使她們被歧視，子女沒法如其他香港小朋友般獲得合適的治療和教育。
張曉怡攝

社署發言人回應指，若特殊幼兒中心取錄非華語學生，便應以適合該學生的語言提供服務。教育局發言人表示，為解決英基的特殊學生輪候問題，已批出二百萬元撥款，讓英基於上學年起，增加二十一個學額。

記者 張曉怡

英語特殊教育需輪3年

小學學額嚴重不足 議員促檢討

【明報專訊】由於以英語作教學語言的特殊教育學位有限，非華語的特殊兒童需等候近3年才獲小學學位而「有書讀」。立法會今日將首次討論這批被忽略兒童的學習機會，有立法會議員批評，本港特殊教育制度落後，有損國際城市之名，不少家長更因此選擇離港。

不少跨國企業員工都會帶同家眷到本港工作，來自新加坡的Jo約7年前隨丈夫來港，在香港出生的4歲半兒子於20個月大時證實是自閉症患者，當時她不知所措，兜兜轉轉帶過兒子到不同團體接受治療，現在雖然替兒子報了小一的特殊教育學位，仍擔心他將來無學位，壓力甚大。

不少家長選擇離港

英基學校協會屬下學校中只有一間賽馬會善樂學校提供60個特殊教育學位，另有多間主流學校提供學習支援班約126個特殊教育學位。英基指出，申請人數逐年上升，現有103人等候學位，但預料今年8月只有兩個空缺，平均需等候約24至36個月。而私人的國際學校，大部分因為資源問題，多不會接收智障兒童。

為這些兒童提供學前教育的明德兒童教育中心執行董事韋珍妮說，有時收到海外家庭查詢，都會叫他們先想清楚再決定是否來港定居，因智障的非華語兒童會面對很大的困境，不少已來港的家庭為了子女着想亦選擇離開。

身為律師、育有一子一女的中澳混血兒Eva表示，6歲的兒子患上罕有的綜合症，除了有青光眼問題，體能、智力發展亦比常人慢，更不會說話，為了令兒子「有書讀」，她去信教育局、平機會等機構，亦曾想過帶兒子離開香港，把丈夫與女兒留在香港繼續生活，兩年半後終為兒子爭得一個學位，但她認識一些南亞裔的父母，最終還是無可奈何下把子女送到一般中文特殊學校，「用中文教，隔離感更大，孩子已不懂表達自己，父母也不了解他學習的語言，怎辦？」

立法會議員張超雄說，香港作為一個國際化城市，但特殊教育的制度卻遠落後其他國家，最終這些兒童的父母會選擇離港，流失人才，他認為政府應檢討資源分配，亦希望社會多關注這些兒童。

教局：政府已增撥款支援

教育局在回應文件中指出，已在07/08學年撥款增加非華語兒童特殊教育學位，會按需要在適當時候檢討，鼓勵有特殊教育需要的兒童入讀普通學校。社署則預算由08/09年度起每年增撥580萬元，為特殊幼兒工作人員及幼兒中心主任提供更多培訓機會。



來自新加坡的Jo(右)和香港土生土長的Eva，兩人的兒子均因智障及自閉症問題，需就讀英語授課的特殊教育課程，但學位僧多粥少，Jo非常擔心兒子日後分配不到學位。(李紹昌攝)

營養標若通過

【明報專訊】營養標籤及營養標示例刊憲，規定所有食品，必須標示能對營養素的成分標註有稱譽的營養素。例將於下周三提議通過會在2年

2010年7月1日至

須標示能量7

有關強制性預先營養資料標籤制度，營養素須包括蛋白質、脂肪總量、反式脂肪、鈉及糖。日本港貨量是3者，如小量製造及食品、有機食物或則可獲豁免，不過品本身有營養素是低脂、不含反式不能獲豁免。

雖然食品法典委就反式脂肪聲稱指引，但港府亦容許含反式脂肪「作製關食品每100克的量少於0.3克，且

3/4/08

日四月九兒兒4十午木 月化5萬八入百原

特殊教育不足 跨企專才擬離港

政府積極納納時國專才，卻忽視其子女接受英語特殊教育需要。有跨國機構專才一直無法為患自閉症的兒子找到英語特殊學校，須月付3萬元聘私人治療，更考慮因此離港。

有非牟利機構指出，每月均有外籍人士查詢本港英語特殊教育情況，當中有人見資源缺乏，放棄來港發展。

本報記者 張淑瑜、伍運輝、王嘉嘉、沈怡

立法會議員張超雄指出，現時教育局雖然提供特殊教育，但英語特殊學校嚴重不足，只有英基學校協會Sarah Roe School的60個學額，另外英基多間學校約有100個特殊班學額，但等候名單長達103人，輪候以年計，對有特殊需要的外籍學生不公平，亦與相減低跨國企業高級行政人員來港的意欲。

來自新加坡的Jo是其中一位受害者。「兒子Meyx患有自閉症，今年4歲半，但即便問他今天做了甚麼，都不懂回答。」Jo的丈夫7年前接受跨國企業的聘書，從新加坡來港發展，Meyx一歲時被評為有自閉症後，一家便為尋找英語特殊學校苦惱。

僅英基開辦 輪候以年計

除了英基，似乎沒有其他選擇，也曾安排兒子入讀九龍塘一間國際幼稚園，但老師根本不懂照顧自閉症兒童，讀了年多便退學。」Jo以往安排兒子在私人機構接受英語的自閉症治療，例如訓練專注力，每月近3萬元，最近轉到非牟利機構，每星期費用約1,000元。

Jo現正輪候英基特殊學校，但擔心遙遙無期，考慮離港，「可能丈夫留在香港，我帶兒子返回新加坡的特殊學校，或者丈夫放棄工作學業離港。」Jo對教局忽視英語特殊教育無奈。



Jo (左一) 的丈夫7年前受聘跨國企業東港，但一直無法為自閉症兒子找到英語特殊學校，考慮離港；而Eva (左二) 也考慮攜子返回澳洲接受教育。圖為議員張超雄早前與她們會面。(張超雄提供圖片)

廣進社(Growing Together)是其中一間提供英語特殊教育的非牟利機構，該會主席章珍妮接受本報查詢時指出，每月接獲一至兩名外籍人士查詢本港英語特殊教育情況，當中有人因為本港缺乏配套，放棄來港發展，也有人受不了忽視外籍特殊學童政策，最後離港。

自閉症增 150人有1個

自閉症問題全球日趨嚴重，青山醫院高級精神科醫生范德蘭表示，根據歐美研究，以往一萬人之中只有3至5人患有自閉症，近年增至150人中有一人。

由英語治療師主理的非牟利機構「自閉症復康網絡」負責人鄧創表示，難評估有多少居港外籍人士子女是自閉症患者，以該機構為例，80名接受治療者中，約10至15人來自外地，即佔一至兩成。

教局倡洋童讀中文校

對於被評英語特殊學校不足，教育局回應，鼓勵非華語學童入讀中文學校，非華語學童可與本港學童一樣，參加小學或中學的派位，家長可列明子女需要，方便局方調配，而教育局亦會為非華語有特殊需要的學童提供支援。

但事實上，本港的自閉症母親與海外人士一樣叫苦(見表)，不少媽媽稱曾被主流學校拒絕其孩子入學。

教育局稱，現時香港有2,597名自閉學童，當中963人(37%)入讀主流學校，而有特殊學習需要學童有1.3萬人。分

自閉症新症數字



註：過去10年衛生署兒童發展測驗服務處錄得自閉症個案
資料來源：衛生署

我的孩子是否自閉？

問卷

1. 喜歡你搖他，在你膝上跳或類似動作嗎？
2. 喜歡和其他孩子玩耍？
3. 喜歡舉球或拋球等物件嗎？
4. 喜歡玩「叭叭叭」或「推呢呢」嗎？
5. 喜歡假想遊戲，如煮飯仔等遊戲嗎？
6. 有否用食指指物件來表示想要？
7. 有否用食指指物件來表示對該物有興趣？
8. 懂得正確把玩細小玩具，而非拆、咬或扔掉它們？
9. 會否親自拿物件給你看看？

觀察項目

1. 孩子與你有眼神接觸嗎？
2. 先吸引孩子注意，再指向物件，孩子會否轉移視線？
3. 先吸引孩子注意，給他玩具杯及茶壺，說「倒杯茶看看」，觀察孩子能否模仿你的動作。
4. 孩子能否以食指指出你說的物件位置？
5. 孩子能否指著3塊積木？

分析結果：如孩子未能做到問卷的2、4、5、6、7和9條及觀察項目的2、3、4項，且言語能力弱，應諮詢醫生

註：原版本是Baron-Cohen, 1992——自閉症幼兒甄別評估(18個月以上幼兒適用)

資料提供：臨床心理學家朱嘉麗

自閉症互助組織及治療機構

圖庫 2776 3111



昨日是聯合國首屆「世界提高自閉症意識日」，青山醫院高級精神科醫生范德蘭表示，根據歐美研究，近年患有自閉症者已增至150人中有一人。(林宇翔攝)

過來人苦讀 盼做社工助病童

出一分力

「以前好似遊魂野鬼，根本無意識自己在做甚麼！」現年22歲的黃宏基，4歲時被診斷有自閉傾向，不會說完整句子，今天的他，志願成為社工，為自閉症患者出一分力。

昨春黃味味峰風雨而談的黃宏基，表達能力與一般人無異，但其實經歷了近20年的艱難日子。

黃媽媽說，很早就察覺兒子有點奇怪，「返完幼稚園，表達不了在學校做過甚麼，又不肯說話，好難專心做事，令我好擔心！」

心理壓力大 慈母不言棄

經多年訓練，兒子4歲那年確診為「阿氏保加症」患者，有自閉傾向，開始進行長期

學生，身兼多職自閉症團體的義工及工作人員，志願成為社工，為自閉症患者出一分力。

他最希望自閉症人士可投入社會，不受歧視。「我覺得政府給予自閉症人士的支持不夠，我希望可以幫人，向政府爭取更多服務和資源！」

廖太太的8歲兒子患有自閉症，視見兒子情況，擔心他日後自力更生，故夫婦二人已為兒子設立基金，「我們希望基金滾存下去，他日後有錢可以開麵包店，學做麵包，同時店舖又可收留其他自閉症的患者，令他們有謀生的能力。」

自閉症學童入學途徑

轉診自閉症

入讀社會下特殊幼兒中心 (一般以廣東話為主)	入讀非牟利教育或治療中心 (提供英語治療，每小時200至700元，每月2.4至8萬元不等)
參加小一入學統籌辦法，學額可待時配到取錄大量非華籍兒童學校 (免費)	改善溝通技巧後，可融入主流教育，非華籍學生可入讀國際學校 (各國際學校收費不一)

若無法融入主流學校，可申請入讀英基特殊學校Sarah Roe School，每年學費約7萬元，學額60個，現時候選名單約103人

教育局並非鼓勵學童入讀以中文為主學校，因此入學途徑與學童學童一致

資料來源：教育局「自閉症復康網絡」



**A Submission to the Hong Kong Legislative Council Subcommittee
to Study Issues Relating to the Provision of Boarding Places,
Senior Secondary Education and Employment Opportunities for Children
with Special Education Needs**

**Hong Kong's Forgotten Child
The Non-Chinese Speaking Child with Special Education Needs**

**By Hong Kong's International,
Special Education Needs Education Community
April 2008**

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GROWING TOGETHER 康進社

Growing Together advocates for appropriate provisions for ethnic and language minorities with special needs.

Our member charities include

Children 0-6 years
Subvented by SWD



Helping special needs children fulfill their potential at their earliest possible age. Watchdog provides early intervention and education programmes for Hong Kong's developmentally delayed children under the age of six. www.watchdog.org.hk

Children 0-6 years
Subvented by SWD



Established over 30 years ago, the CDC's goals are to enable children to achieve their full potential through educational and therapeutic intervention in order to access appropriate primary schooling. www.cdchc.org

Children 3-11 years
No government
subvention

The Rainbow Project



Our mission is to establish and maintain appropriate education facilities for children with autism and related disorders in the Hong Kong S.A.R. and, by drawing on expertise from the USA and Europe, to establish in Hong Kong a centre of excellence and a blue print for the establishment of similar schemes throughout the S.A.R. www.rainbowproject.org

Children & young
adults 5 - 21 years
No government
subvention



Springboard's charter is to nurture, educate and empower young people with special needs. We offer primary, middle school and life skills programmes. In addition, we provide a youth club for students to socialise in a supervised environment. www.springboardhk.org

Adults 16-40 years
Subvented by SWD



The Nesbitt Centre provides an English speaking educational programme for adults with learning disabilities - also a respite and residential facility, which helps to achieve independence and development of their own potential and opportunities within the community. www.nesbittcentre.org.hk

Executive Summary

The Hong Kong school system excels at preparing students for standardized testing. However, it has forgotten one of its more vulnerable citizens. While other developed nations continue to seek social growth and change through integrated and inclusive education systems, Hong Kong continues to overlook the needs of non-Chinese-speaking children with special education needs.

This paper addresses the concerns of the non-Chinese speaking Special Education Needs (SEN) community, and calls upon the Hong Kong Government, and the Education and Social Welfare Departments, specifically, to consider:

- funding for non-Chinese speaking children with Special Education Needs in the same manner as is offered to Chinese speaking children with Special Education Needs through the Education and Social Welfare Departments and
- to work with the International School Community to establish and fund an independent Authority that will be responsible for overseeing the development of funding, early assessment and intervention, family counselling, ongoing training support for schools and teachers, and coordinated placement of children with special education needs within the international school sector in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong has two official languages – English or Cantonese – but it is really only responsible for the Cantonese school system. Due to historical circumstances the international school system is largely independent. But there are children with Special Education Needs in the non-Chinese speaking community that need help now.

Therefore it is imperative, for the sake of these children and their families, and for Hong Kong, that the Government and International School Sector agree to work together, to develop and implement an integrated education system for the children who have special education needs and who live in Hong Kong today.

Once these immediate needs are met, issues regarding education continuum and the integration of young non-Chinese speaking adults with special education needs into Hong Kong society can then be addressed.

1. Introduction and Background

In her paper entitled Multiple Identities: Disability, Cultural Diversity and Income Deprivation, Anuradha Naidu from the University of Hong Kong asked:

How can children's multiple identities, including disability, be addressed and celebrated to ensure inclusion in mainstream classrooms?

The international Special Education Needs (SEN) community in Hong Kong deals with this question daily. Similarly, academics, governments, and the Special Education Needs communities throughout the world continue to try to identify and redress barriers to inclusive education.

Presently leading world nations consider Special Education Needs as part of a single mainstream education framework, as described by the model outlined by the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994).

The Salamanca Statement proclaims that:

- Every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning.
- Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs.
- Education systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs.
- Those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs.
- Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.

Despite that Hong Kong, as a Special Administration Region of China, is a signatory to the Salamanca Statement, Ms Naidu argues that in Hong Kong, Asia's World City, children with a disability who belong to ethnic minority groups are, "at risk" of being excluded from the mainstream education system, due to institutional barriers, linguistic disadvantage and/or financial disempowerment.

Ms Naidu argues that:

- Institutional barriers in Hong Kong can give rise to schools' reluctance to admit children who are unable to conform to the minimum benchmark requirements (not necessarily academic) for admission;
- Children from some linguistic minority groups struggle to be understood with their inadequate knowledge of either the official language of the State (in this case Chinese)

or English and

- Children with a disability whose problem is compounded by parent disempowerment and poverty are more likely to remain struggling learners.

It is for these, and several other reasons, that the international SEN community in Hong Kong aspires for all SEN of non-Chinese speaking children to be capable of being met in accordance with global best practices as defined in the Salamanca Statement. With too few SEN places available within Hong Kong's international (non-Chinese speaking) school community, achieving this goal is not currently possible.

In the following document the international SEN community of Hong Kong is pleased to be able to provide recommendations to the Legislative Council and Government of Hong Kong, in order that the objectives of the Salamanca Statement might be better achieved for the non-Chinese speaking SEN community of Hong Kong.

2. The Issues

a. The Right to Education

The right to education for all children is deeply enshrined in our laws. The Hong Kong Government has, for quite some time, held education and training in high regard and has spent considerable time and resources in reviewing our education system and making available (particularly to able-bodied residents) subvented programmes encouraging the use of English in Hong Kong. In addition to legislative recognition of these rights the Hong Kong Government has taken on-going steps to ensure that the basic education needs of the society are met. In the mainstream education sector, the Government has addressed the needs of Chinese speaking and non-Chinese speaking children. In the special needs education sector, the various needs of Chinese speaking, disabled children are provided for through 62 aided special schools and 641 special education classes in the mainstream schools.

b. The Forgotten Children

Every child is entitled to free education in Hong Kong and this should be a right without any kind of discrimination. However, children who are both members of a minority (therefore non-Chinese speaking) and disabled, are still not given equal opportunities (when compared to other children) to fully develop their individual potential.

Existing barriers for non-Chinese speaking students with SEN include:

- No free education;
- Limited provision of paid services, which are fragmented and inefficient. Parents of children with special education needs, need to source and coordinate these services, in most instances, without professional assistance;
- High cost of paid services – a burden that must be borne entirely by parents;
- No education continuum – through secondary and vocational schools – for non-Chinese speaking children with special education needs, so that they may live a purposeful, and to the maximum extent possible, independent life; and,
- No programmes that assist non-Chinese speaking children with special education needs to integrate within mainstream community when they become adults.

Education Opportunities for children in Hong Kong

Provision		Chinese Speaking Children			Non-Chinese Speaking Children		
		Mainstream	Special Needs		Mainstream	Special Needs	
			Mild	Moderate to Sever		Mild	Moderate to Sever
Primary							
Government		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	NONE
Aided		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	NONE
paid services	ESF	N/A	N/A	N/A	✓	✓	✓
	DSS	✓	N/A	N/A	✓	N/A	N/A
	Private	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓	✓
Secondary							
Government		✓	✓	✓	✓	NONE	NONE
Aided		✓	✓	✓	✓	NONE	NONE
paid services	ESF	N/A	N/A	N/A	✓	✓	✓
	DSS	✓	N/A	N/A	✓	N/A	N/A
	Private	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓	NONE

Presently Hong Kong's education playing field seems unfairly balanced when it comes to Government and community support for SEN. This is in contrast to current international thinking that stipulates the following provisions are the responsibility of the entire community irrespective of the child's academic ability:

- An appropriate education for every child;

An appropriate education is defined as meeting a child's unique needs, in order to prepare that child for employment and independent living.

- The least restrictive environment for every child to learn;

In the United States IDEA defines the least restrictive environment as: To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

- Education in a child's mother tongue;

The past decade has provided more evidence that good quality early childhood care and education, both in families and in more structured programmes, has a positive impact on the survival, growth, development and learning potential of children. They should be provided in the child's mother tongue and help to identify and enrich the care and education of children with special needs.

c. Limited Places Among International Education Options

Hong Kong's international SEN community supports the Hong Kong Government's stated policy to cater for its non-Chinese speaking community's SEN by integration with mainstream schools. It also recognises that due to historical circumstances the international school system is largely independent, which in turn has led to an inequitably disproportionate amount of attention, funding and resources for non-Chinese speaking children with SEN.

The Hong Kong Government's focus has always been and continues to be the Cantonese school system. Consequently the Government expects for all non-Chinese speaking children with SEN to learn the Cantonese language – and there are many services available for this – so that they might integrate with the mainstream school community. However, a child that struggles to learn in his or her mother tongue, is never going to be able to learn a new language, in order that he or she might learn join a mainstream school for SEN. All research shows that if a child with SEN is to learn, he or she must be taught in his or her mother tongue. If the Government is to successfully implement its policy to integrate mainstream and special education needs students, it will need to facilitate implementation by:

- acknowledging the issue of lack of places, resources and facilities for special education needs in the non-Chinese speaking education sector;
- recognising that integration in the Cantonese system is not a reality;
- increasing awareness among the international education community that solutions to satisfy non-Chinese speaking, special education needs, need to be found;
- supporting those international schools already developing and implementing integrated special education needs programs; and
- working with the international education community to increase the number of places, facilities, funding and resources available for SEN in mainstream international schools in Hong Kong.

d. Overcoming Barriers to Increased SEN Mainstream Places

International best practice indicates a ratio of 10 percent special education needs students to 90 percent mainstream students to be the most effective integration mix. In order to achieve this ratio, or as close as possible to this ratio, the international SEN Community in Hong Kong aspires for more, ideally all, mainstream international schools to be able to offer places for students with special education needs. In order to facilitate this goal it is important to understand current barriers that exist for integration of children with SEN, into existing schools that provide mainstream education in Hong Kong. Research would indicate the primary barriers in Hong Kong are:

i. Cost

Historically, parents of children with SEN who wanted English, or language services other than Chinese, have had to arrange for themselves by setting up special needs schooling and training. Without much help from the Government, these efforts become costly and inefficient. Additionally, programmes competing for limited resources (such as space and English speaking therapists) further push up the costs of these SEN services, resulting in them becoming unaffordable for members of low income groups.

Currently there are three financial options for non-Chinese speaking students with SEN in Hong Kong. The first is Government-funded schools working to a Hong Kong curriculum and education model. The language of instruction is English. The second is the English Schools Foundation (ESF) sub-vented model. Language of instruction is English. Sixteen of the ESF schools offer some SEN integration, while Sarah Roe is dedicated to those students with extensive special needs that limit their independent ability. The final model is a totally private model where parents pay fees for all the additional professional education support needs as determined by the student's needs. The language of instruction is dependent on the nationality of the school, but most international schools have English language streams. Even with these three options the number of places is limited and continuation of the current programmes without support from the Government is questionable.

ii. Individual School Mandate

The second barrier to integration of SEN in mainstream schools is individual school mandates. Traditionally, the objective of international schools in Hong Kong was to provide expatriate students with a 'home country' education with the view that the students would return to their home country to work or undertake further tertiary studies. The objective of Hong Kong's international schools remains largely unchanged. The biggest difference is that local Chinese-speaking families have seen these international schools as an opportunity for their children to be eligible for overseas universities, resulting in much higher enrolment of local students. The majority of private international schools in Hong Kong continue to cater specifically for students – both Chinese and non-Chinese speaking - who wish to undertake international tertiary studies.

Attracting primarily students who are capable of higher academic achievement, these schools do not seek to offer inclusive programming. This is disappointing given that many of these schools have received land or financial grants of support from both the Hong Kong Government and/or their own Governments with a view that they will cater for all the education needs of their 'national' community. Clearly there are those schools that will always seek the more academically capable, and it is their right to do so. However, under the Basic Law and certain international conventions and treaties, Hong Kong has obligations to all children that must be fulfilled.

3. The Right Support and Tools for Families, Schools, Teachers and Students

While the non-Chinese speaking, SEN community recognises the effort that is being made by those private and charitable organizations offering SEN assistance, it is essential, if Hong Kong is to improve services, that the current lack of co-ordination and the fragmentation and inefficiencies of existing services be addressed.

a. Students and Families

The success of the inclusive school depends considerably on early identification, assessment and stimulation of the very young child with special educational needs. Early childhood care and education programmes for children aged up to 6 years ought to be developed and/or reoriented to promote physical, intellectual and social development and school readiness. These programmes have a major economic value for the individual, the family and society in preventing the aggravation of disabling conditions. Programmes at this level should recognize the principle of inclusion and be developed in a comprehensive way by combining pre-school activities and early childhood health care.

Early identification of SEN needs requires close integration of family, school and medical facilities. The family must be able to, in conjunction with professional help, identify the need and have access to the support necessary for their family and child in order to manage the special needs. Teachers require on-going education to provide excellent integrated teaching classrooms and schools require support in order to cover the cost of on-going teacher training, management training and resource and material development associated with SEN learning.

To achieve this integration, the international SEN community in Hong Kong proposes the establishment of an independent authority that would centralize the following functions:

- Assessment and identification of Special Education Needs;
- Coordination with Government financial agencies on behalf of families;
- Coordination of therapeutic intervention prior to school age and with Schools after placement;
- Family counselling;
- Assistance with school placement; and
- Community integration of SEN.

b. Schools and Teachers

To support the ongoing development of mainstream classroom teachers, special education teachers and SEN management, the international SEN community in Hong Kong proposes the establishment of a coordinated education program. Ideally, this role would be fulfilled by the independent authority established to support families with Special Education Needs. This authority would be responsible for identifying existing courses for schools utilizing resources from education institutions both in Hong Kong and overseas. Based on the needs of the Integrated International Special Education Needs community, the authority may see fit to develop courses in conjunction with participating schools and vocational and/or tertiary institutions to meet the community's professional development needs.

4. The Education Continuum

An education continuum must be developed that enables children with SEN to live independently and productively within the Hong Kong community. The continuum would include the following:

- Scope of need and nature for an educational continuum through secondary and into vocational education;
- Identification of where and how educational needs could be met by the international community in Hong Kong; and
- Identification of the scope for community integration by way of supported living and suitable employment opportunities for children with SEN who would otherwise not achieve this independently.

Ideally these responsibilities would be part of the remit of the independent Authority that would have responsibility for oversight of non-Chinese speaking Special Education Needs.

5. Recommendations

a. Parity with Chinese Speaking SEN Students

To overcome the cost barrier, the international SEN community recommends that the Hong Kong Government agree to make financial support available in a manner similar to that provided under the Education Department's New Funding Mode (NFM); and the Social Welfare Department's Grants for services for individuals with Special Education Needs.

i. New Funding Mode

Schools that are part of the New Funding Mode (NFM) are offered an intensive learning support grant according to the students in need. These schools are provided with greater autonomy and flexibility in resource deployment and are required to adopt the strategies that foster:

- Early identification;
- Early intervention;
- Whole school approach;
- Home school cooperation; and
- Cross-sector collaboration.

NFM participating schools are required to set up a Student Support Team and coordinate the teaching staff and parents to provide the students with systematic and appropriate school-based support.

Grants under the New Funding Mode are made to a child after assessment by an authorised professional. The grant is made available to the school or professional for the additional services provided to the child with Special Education Needs. Similarly, funding for non-Chinese speaking students with SEN would be associated with the child (not a specific educational institution, thereby providing funding for those schools prepared to provide support services for SEN students within mainstream classrooms) and made available to the school providing the service. The amount of funding available for each student would be determined by the nature of the special need. This special need would be assessed by a Foundation responsible for, amongst other things, centralised assessment of special education needs. (See below).

ii. The Social Welfare Department

The Social Welfare Department offers a number of grants to assist children with Special Education Needs, and families of children with Special Education Needs. These grants include:

- Residential special child care centres;
- Supported employment;
- On the job training programmes for People with disabilities;
- Support hostels for children over 15 years of age; and,
- Others.

The international SEN community seeks parity so that those families with Special Education Needs who are non-Chinese speaking, but still contributors and taxpayers to Hong Kong society, might receive financial support. In this way non-Chinese speaking Hong Kong residents will not have to abandon their lives, careers, families and friends to make a new life in a country

that provides more affordable SEN care.

b. An Independent Authority for Non-Chinese Speaking SEN

i. Student and Family Support

To coordinate early identification of non-Chinese speaking children's SEN, an independent authority should be established and endowed with the power to:

- Arrange SEN assessments and identification of student needs;
- Coordinate with Government financial agencies, making funding recommendations, and support the SEN child's family through the process of application for financial support;
- Coordinate therapeutic intervention by a full range of physical, psychological and educational professionals;
- Offer/Facilitate counselling for Family and care-givers of SEN children; and
- Devise and implement community integration and education SEN programs.

The Authority would also be responsible to liaise with all the international schools providing SEN programs, and those schools that do not provide formal programs, with a view to providing guidance regarding placement opportunities for SEN students.

ii. School and Teacher Support

The Authority's mandate should also include the coordination of on-going improvement of services and standards amongst the international SEN education community. It is envisaged that this might involve partnerships with Hong Kong academic institutions and overseas academic institutions with a view to providing training for things such as:

- Integrated teaching skills for mainstream teachers
- Professional development for existing SEN teachers
- Professional development for teaching support staff and SEN coordinators
- SEN management skills for school administrators

The Authority's international school liaison role might also extend to include working with the international school community with a view to developing proposals that would lead to increasing the number of places that could be provided within mainstream classrooms; the range of services that could be provided by, or shared by, the international education community; and, additional methods of finance for these places and services.

c. Education Continuum

Clearly, the current priority is the immediate need of Hong Kong's SEN community. Firstly, to implement funding and coordination services that will improve the existing services being provided by international education institutions. This should lead to the creation of working models that will then facilitate the expansion of these models to other institutions willing to implement SEN programs within mainstream classrooms.

Once this initial need is fulfilled, it will be imperative to look beyond early childhood identification and intervention. Hong Kong's Social Welfare and Education policy makers will need to review the type of society to which Hong Kong aspires and develop and implement strategies that achieve education through middle and possibly high school age groups, ultimately deciding what type of inclusive options, Hong Kong will be able to provide the SEN members of our community, for independent living and meaningful contribution to our society.

By Mail & Email
ceo@ceo.gov.hk

The Hon Donald TSANG Yam-kuen, GBS, JP
Chief Executive of the HKSAR People's Republic of China
5/F, Central Government Office
Main Wing, Lower Albert Road
Hong Kong

30 April 2008

Dear Mr. Tsang,

On April 3, 13 organizations and 6 individuals presented their views regarding this issue to the Subcommittee Studying Issues relating to Provisions for Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Growing Together (representing over 200 members), a group advocating an inclusive society for people of all ages with SEN, submitted a position paper to the Subcommittee and the administration recommending specific actions that should be taken to address and eliminate this discrimination. These recommendations are:

a. Parity with Chinese Speaking students with SEN

The Hong Kong Government should make financial support available to non Chinese speaking children with SEN equivalent to any child who speaks Chinese.

b. Establish a foundation or Independent Grants Committee for international schools

A foundation similar to the University Grants Committee established to oversee relevant educational matters which would also offer a comprehensive resource centre for parents, educators and students. This foundation would also be responsible to liaise with all the international schools regarding the provision of SEN programs.

c. Education Continuum

The government should explore options for continuum services as students reach their adult years including employment opportunities and residential care facilities to support independence.

The EDB has made clear its position on non Chinese speaking children with SEN (LC Paper No.CB(2) 1465/07-08(02)): "NCS children are encouraged to attend local kindergartens using Chinese as a medium of instruction." For NCS students with SEN, many of whom struggle with verbal communication in any language, forcing them to adapt to a system where the medium of instruction is Chinese clearly does not meet the needs of the child or international good practice. Rather, this effort to teach a child in a language that neither the child nor the family understands results in a deprivation of service and a de facto discrimination.

I implore you to review the Growing Together position paper with all due haste. Every child has a right to an appropriate education. In a World Class City like Hong Kong, why do we ask some of our society's most vulnerable to adapt to a system that, as structured, will not provide the maximum benefits? Hong Kong's resources are abundant and its policies, if not their implementation, do support best practices for the education of children with SEN, just not ALL children. It is incumbent upon the government to effect changes to the system that will ensure all students with SEN receive the education they are entitled to.

The existing families of Growing Together needs your help, and all non Chinese speaking children with SEN who come after them also needs your help. Please implement these recommendations and provide that help. I look forward to working with you and your administration, and your reply.

Sincerely,



Virginia Wilson
Growing Together

cc

LEGCO Panel on Education - Chairman and all Members of the Panel
Education Bureau - Mr. Michael Suen, , Secretary for Education edbinfo@edb.gov.hk, Mr. Raymond Wong, Permanent Secretary for Education raymondhwong@edb.gov.hk, Mr. M. Y. Cheng, Deputy Secretary (Ed) 3 School Administration and Professional Development Branch mycheng@edb.gov.hk, Miss WU Po-ling Principal Assistant Secretary (SAS) passas@edb.gov.hk

Attachments:

Press Clippings from LEGCO

Submission to EDB and LEGCO on non Chinese speaking SEN