

**Progress Report on the Motion on
“Re-formulating the special education policy”
Moved by Hon Cyd HO as amended by Hon Tanya CHAN
At the Legislative Council Meeting on 11 November 2009**

Background

At the Legislative Council Meeting on 11 November 2009, the motion on “Re-formulating the special education policy” moved by Hon Cyd HO as amended by Hon Tanya CHAN was carried after voting. The Administration was urged to re-formulate the special education policy.

2. This progress report informs Members of the follow-up actions taken by the Administration.

Planning special education from a professional perspective

3. The Education Bureau (EDB) has always been formulating and developing its special education policy with education professionalism, focusing primarily on the learning needs of students. There are improvement measures and additional resource input for special schools in recent years, aiming at enhancing the quality of education. There is no question of addressing special education from the welfare perspective. For example, in the 2009/10 school year, we raise the graduate teacher ratios in the primary and secondary sections of special schools to 50% and 85% respectively like their mainstream counterparts; implement the new senior secondary (NSS) academic structure and curriculum in special schools, which will be extended to each class level year by year; and allow special schools for children with mild intellectual disability (ID) to start reducing the class size from 20 to 15 students per class, thus creating more room for teachers to enhance the quality of learning and teaching and enabling students with special educational needs (SEN) to develop their potential. We will continue to uphold our professionalism in planning and developing special education.

Formulating special education policy

4. Our special education policy will continue to be premised on professional research, sectoral collaboration and extensive consultation. The Bureau has established different channels to communicate with the sector,

including regular meetings with the Hong Kong Special Schools Council and various working groups, school visits and liaisons, etc. In the light of the latest development needs, we will continue to seek local and overseas expert advice on specific topics, and organize overseas study tours where appropriate.

5. Take, for example, the development of NSS curriculum for special schools. Since 2006, EDB has been working with special schools as well as local and overseas expert consultants to develop an NSS curriculum for students with ID through the Collaborative Research and Development (“Seed”) Projects. The Supplementary Guides to the Curriculum and Assessment Guides for the three core subjects (Chinese Language, Mathematics, Liberal Studies/Independent Living) and two of the elective subjects (Physical Education, Visual Arts) were completed in June 2009, whereas the curriculum for another two elective subjects (Information and Communication Technology, Technology and Living) is now in the second draft. To provide a reference for special schools, curriculum adaptation of two other elective subjects (Music, Design and Applied Technology) continues in the 2009/10 school year. The Learning Progression Framework (2nd Trial Version) for the three core subjects was also developed in June 2009. It serves as a reference on the learning progression of students under NSS, and helps teachers to set the starting point and decide the next learning step for them.

Facilities in special schools

6. The facilities in special schools will continue to be reviewed on a regular basis. They will be upgraded according to the latest service needs and school operation through conversion, redevelopment and reprovisioning projects. Since the 2009/10 school year, EDB has strengthened the support to special schools. Through regular school visits, we pay special attention to their teaching and learning activities and support measures, and observe whether the facilities can adequately support teaching and learning. Schools may make changes to room use for actual operational needs provided that no changes to the building structure and the subsidy by EDB are involved. Our officers are most willing to explore effective utilisation of school facilities with individual schools to cater for their operational needs.

7. In the 2009/10 school year, we have adjusted the number of five-day and seven-day boarding places in special schools having regard to the demand. We will continue to monitor the boarding demand in special schools on a regular basis and make adjustment to the provision as appropriate. Regarding the boarding

needs of students with physical disability (PD) in special schools, we have reviewed the overall supply and demand of service, and revised the distribution of the service with its extension to the New Territories (NT). Two boarding sections with 60 places each are under planning in the NT East and NT West regions for PD students. The boarding section in NT East is expected to be completed in August 2010. For the project in NT West, the project design has already been completed and funding support will soon be sought from the Public Works Sub-committee of the Legislative Council. Subject to funding approval, the project is expected to be completed in the 2011/12 school year.

School education for students with ID

8. Under the NSS academic structure, students with ID attending special schools will continue to receive 12 years of school education, comprising six years of primary, three years of junior secondary and three years of senior secondary education. We understand that individual students may need to extend their years of study due to various valid reasons. With the implementation of the NSS academic structure, we also consider it necessary to improve the existing arrangements for students to extend their years of study and the school leaving arrangements. In this connection, the Secretary for Education and his EDB colleagues conducted a series of consultation sessions (more than ten formal meetings in total) with the education sector and parent representatives between September and December 2009 to solicit the views of stakeholders on possible improvement measures.

9. We propose improvement measures after consolidating the views collected in the consultation process. The major contents of our proposals are that students with ID in special schools will receive 12 years of school education in principle and graduate after reaching the learning goals set on the basis of their individual abilities, and then move on to the next stage of training or rehabilitation. We propose providing a defined number of additional places in special schools. Schools have to exercise school-based professional judgment on extending the years of study of individual students with valid reasons according to a set of agreed criteria and the actual situation of the students.

10. We propose short, medium and long term plans in implementation. Special schools with adequate facilities immediately available will be the first to provide additional places. In the meantime, we will explore the feasibility of carrying out conversion works for schools in need of more classrooms. For full

implementation of the proposed measures in the long term, we will examine various options, including identifying suitable sites for new school premises and reprovisioning existing schools, to further increase the provision of school places.

11. We have conducted extensive consultation with the special school sector and parent representatives, and have secured their support for the concrete improvement measures. In the course of consultation, we clearly explained to them the difficulties involved in taking forward the proposal, especially limited school space and other development constraints. They realised the difficulties and agreed that improvement measures should be implemented step by step on the basis of mutual understanding. We are now working in accordance with the Government's established procedures with an aim to developing the proposed measures into a policy and are actively seeking resources for early implementation.

Teacher training

12. We have put in place a five-year Teacher Professional Development Framework on Integrated Education ("the Framework") since the 2007/08 school year. We hope that in each mainstream school within the five years from 2007/08 to 2011/12, at least 10% of teachers will complete the 30-hour Basic Course, at least three teachers will complete the 90-hour Advanced Course, at least one Chinese Language and one English Language teacher will complete the 60-hour Thematic Course on Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD), and at least one teacher will complete the Thematic Course(s) on the SEN type(s) that his/her school caters for. Furthermore, we have organized courses targeted at school heads, school management, teaching assistants, etc. to provide school personnel at different levels with training of varying depth and breadth.

13. The Government has committed resources for the Framework in accordance with the above objective to provide adequate training places within the five years from 2007/08 to 2011/12 for teachers to enrol in the Basic, Advanced or Thematic Courses based on their professional needs. We will continue to roll out the training courses as scheduled. Trained teachers are expected to promote collaboration with their colleagues in support of students with SEN under the Whole School Approach. We are now in the process of developing a database on special education teacher training to facilitate our review on the progress of special education training for teachers in each school. We will remind the schools concerned to speed up teacher training where necessary.

14. We are now proceeding with the interim review on the courses offered under the Framework to examine, inter alia, whether there is a need to adjust the training modes and contents of the three-tier framework, and how we can better meet the training needs of teachers in special schools.

Early identification, early intervention, and assessing the number of students with SEN

15. It is Government policy to support children with SEN through “early identification” and “early intervention”. Under the current mechanism, medical professionals work in partnership with parents to monitor the development of children from birth to the age of five and to identify any possible developmental problems. To further enhance the surveillance, EDB joined the Department of Health (DH), the Hospital Authority (HA) and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) in a pilot programme on child development called the Comprehensive Child Development Service (CCDS) by phases as early as in 2005. CCDS enables pre-primary educators to identify and refer children with health, developmental and behavioural problems to respective Maternal and Child Health Centres for assessment and timely assistance. It also provides comprehensive and integrated support for parents in need. A referral and feedback system has been developed under CCDS and extended to cover all pre-primary institutions since December 2008.

16. EDB has developed the “Development and Behaviour Management of Pre-primary Children – A Resource Kit for Teachers” in collaboration with DH and SWD. The kit contains textual and visual information to give teachers a better understanding of the service mode and referral system of CCDS as well as the common developmental and learning problems of pre-primary children so that they can identify those requiring assessment and specialty care, and make referrals the soonest possible. The Resource Kit was distributed to every kindergarten/child care centre by EDB in November 2008. The online version is also available at EDB website for easy access by all pre-primary institutions. Further to this, EDB distributed the booklet “Understanding Your Child’s Development – For Parents of Preschool Children” prepared by DH to parents of nursery class pupils in October 2009 for early identification of small children with developmental problems.

17. Each year, EDB operates the Early Identification and Intervention of Learning Difficulties Programme for Primary One Pupils in all public sector primary schools. Teachers are provided with the “Observation Checklist for

Teachers” and the “Hong Kong SpLD Behaviour Checklist for Primary School Pupils” to facilitate early identification and intervention for Primary One pupils with learning difficulties. Those making poor progress in learning despite extra help or having severe difficulties will be provided with further assessment and support by educational psychologists. EDB has also developed the “Observation Checklist for Students with Speech and Language Problems” to assist teachers in identifying primary school pupils with speech and language impairments and referring those in need to school-based speech therapists or EDB for assessment and therapy service.

18. The number of identified SEN cases has been rising in recent years. This reflects that the current assessment mechanism and tools as well as the communication between government departments and related organisations such as DH and HA, are effective, and that there is increasing awareness of parents. We will continue to collaborate with tertiary institutions to improve and develop assessment tools for teachers and other professionals. We will also further enhance the understanding of special education among parents and members of the public. Our aim is to facilitate early identification of students with SEN by various stakeholders for timely and appropriate support.

19. In order to capture the number of students with SEN in public sector primary, secondary and special schools more effectively and accurately, EDB developed and commissioned the computerised Special Education Management Information System (SEMIS) in mid-2005. Upon assessment of students with SEN or receipt of assessment reports from DH, HA and other professional institutions, the specialist staff of EDB will input students’ SEN information into SEMIS. In the 2008/09 school year, all public sector primary, secondary and special schools submitted the information on their students with SEN to EDB through SEMIS.

20. To conclude, with the cooperation of schools and parents, EDB basically captures the number of students with SEN in public sector primary, secondary and special schools through various channels. We will continue to upgrade the function of SEMIS to ensure data accuracy for more effective planning, implementation and review of our special education policy.

Non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students with SEN

21. It is EDB's prevailing policy to facilitate early integration of NCS students (including those with SEN) into the local education system. We thus encourage NCS students with SEN to study in public sector schools and provide extra support to cater for their SEN. For NCS students studying in special schools, like other students, the schools will design individualized education programme for them to cater for their SEN. Furthermore, international schools and English Schools Foundation (ESF) Schools also provide an alternative in the Hong Kong education system for NCS students. EDB has allocated extra resources to ESF Schools to increase the school places in the learning support classes to provide appropriate support for students with SEN.

Supporting schools in implementing Integrated Education (IE)

22. The implementation of the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education in Hong Kong is in line with the global trend. The aim is to enhance ordinary schools' capability of supporting student diversity through establishing the inclusive culture, policy and practices.

23. The implementation of integrated education and its effectiveness are directly related to teachers' professional standard of special education. The overall school policy, practices and resource deployment are also important. As such, EDB adopts teacher training and professional support as the major strategies to support schools to implement integrated education. Relevant information about teacher training can be found in paragraphs 12 to 14.

24. EDB provides additional resources and professional support to schools in accordance with the students' SEN. As regards additional resources, we provide various funding modes in conjunction with our promotion of a 3-tier intervention model to assist schools in supporting students according to their needs, including those with multiple disabilities. These additional resources include: Intensive Remedial Teaching Programme for Primary Schools, Integrated Education Programme, Enhanced Speech Therapy Grant, Learning Support Grant, etc. Schools can pool together and deploy various resources flexibly, having regard to their school-based situation to implement various measures, such as employing additional teachers or teaching assistants and hiring professional services to provide services appropriate to the need of students. As for professional support, we

provide schools with educational psychology service and speech and hearing service. Based on the needs of the students with hearing impairment, hearing aids and FM System will be provided to enhance their hearing capability. We will increase gradually the number of educational psychologist posts both within the Bureau and in schools so that more and more schools can receive school-based educational psychology service. Our Inspectors and Special Education Support Officers pay regular visits to schools to render professional advice on school's special education policy, measures, teaching strategies, resources deployment, home-school co-operation, etc. to ensure that the resources are used and students are being catered for appropriately. Also, professional staff of the Bureau helps schools to formulate concrete individualised educational plans by attending meetings of the school's student support team and case conferences. At the same time, we have established inter-school professional sharing and support network to facilitate experience sharing within the sector, such as Special Schools cum Resource Centres, Resources Schools on Whole School Approach, District-based School Development and Support Network, etc. If schools have hardcore cases requiring highly intensive support, we will consider providing additional teaching assistants to school. For difficult cases who showed no improvement upon receiving school-based support services, they will be referred to receive more intensive pull-out remedial support in the Adjustment Programme run by EDB or short-term attachment programmes run by Special Schools cum Resource Centres. This way, we can make good use of the expertise of special schools in supporting ordinary schools. In addition, we also provide Enhanced Support Service for Hearing Impaired Students and Resource Support Programme for Visually Impaired Students for students with hearing impairment and visual impairment studying in ordinary schools who require support respectively. Through remedial teaching by experienced resource teachers, the learning, language and communication of these students can be enhanced. EDB not only assists schools to develop school-based support measures that are geared towards the SEN of their students, but also requires schools to have an established communication mechanism with parents, to help them understand the support measures and foster better home-school co-operation to assist and enhance the learning of students.

25. Furthermore, we have, in collaboration with tertiary institutions, developed various assessment tools and diverse teaching resource packages for use by teachers. Under the "READ & Write: A Jockey Club Learning Support Network", the School-based Tier Intervention Model published two sets of evidence-based resource CD and packages for junior primary classes in 2008 and 2009 respectively. In the 2009/10 school year, EDB is collaborating with the project team concerned to support more schools in the application of these

resources to promote quality Chinese literacy teaching for students. For secondary schools, EDB disseminated to schools in July 2009 the Hong Kong Behaviour Checklist of Specific Learning Difficulties in Reading and Writing for Junior Secondary School students (BCL-JS) for teachers to identify secondary students with dyslexia, a CD-Rom for teachers entitled “Overcoming the Barrier: how to support secondary school students with dyslexia”, and a reading and writing resource package for teachers to support students with dyslexia at Secondary One. EDB will continue to advise schools on the effective application of these new resources in the current school year to enhance student support. Since quite a number of schools need to implement special examination arrangements (SEA) for students with SEN, EDB has revised its existing guidelines for schools. In November 2009, we published the new guidelines on “SEA for Internal Exams in Schools” and organized briefing sessions for teachers. This new guideline has been uploaded onto the EDB website.

26. When necessary, EDB officers will refer students for other professional services, such as child psychiatry, medical social service, occupational therapy and physiotherapy, etc. for comprehensive assessment, diagnosis and therapeutic treatment/support services.

Stepping up public education to tie in with the implementation of IE

27. Besides providing different resources and professional support, EDB actively strengthens public education and promotes parental involvement, in order to build up the concerted efforts of the public, parents and various sectors to implement IE jointly with the schools.

28. EDB has produced a “Whole School Approach to IE Operation Guide” and a “Whole School Approach to IE Parent Guide” for schools and parents respectively, which introduce principles and good practices of IE. Recently, the EDB website has been revamped with more information on IE, so that the public can browse and search for the relevant information more efficiently and effectively. Moreover, we regularly publish an online IE Newsletter named ‘融情’, to provide parents and the public with updated special education information and promote IE experiences.

29. We understand that the key to success of IE is an inclusive and harmonious school culture. As such, EDB promotes actively the development of mutual respect and acceptance of individual differences among students through

moral and civic education. In this connection, a series of 10 TV episodes entitled “Parenting” on IE has been produced jointly with the Radio Television Hong Kong and the Department of Health in the 2008/09 school year. “An Inclusive School - It All Begins with Our Hearts” IE publicity drive was also jointly organized by EDB, the DH and the Primary Schools Councils. In addition, we organized inclusion activities in the “Autism Awareness Week” with the Hong Kong Autism Awareness Alliance to promote an inclusive community. In the 2009/10 school year, we have produced DVDs on “An Inclusive School - It All Begins with Our Hearts”. We have also made use of the TV episodes “Parenting” to develop a teaching package with suggestions on extended class activities. These DVDs have been distributed to schools for further promotion of inclusive culture. They will also be broadcast in the Child Assessment Centres of DH as well as uploaded onto the HKedCity website to further promote the public’s understanding and acceptance of students with SEN.

Education Bureau
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