

**Panel on Education
Subcommittee on Integrated Education**

Summary of views/concerns raised at the meeting on 30 April 2013

Identification of students with special educational needs ("SEN students")

1. The Comprehensive Child Development Service (a referral mechanism developed by the Hospital Authority ("HA"), Education Bureau ("EDB") and Social Welfare Department) assists pre-primary institutions in early identification of pre-schoolers with physical, developmental and behavioural problems for referral to the Maternal and Child Health Centres ("MCHC") of the Department of Health ("DH") in the respective districts for assessment.
 - (a) The deputations opined that kindergartens were not provided with effective and adequate support in identifying children with SEN.
 - (b) The deputations deplored the long waiting time required before the pre-school age children could receive assessment at MCHC, not to mention further referral or placement of the children in relevant education and training services. They were concerned that young children would miss the prime time for effective assistance.

2. Under the existing arrangements, three months after the start of a school year, primary school teachers use the norm-referenced "Observation Checklists for Teachers" developed by EDB to identify Primary 1 students with learning difficulties for referral to specialists, notably Educational Psychologists ("EP") for consultation and individual assessment.
 - (a) Some deputations reported that due to the shortage of EP, students had to wait for at least six months or even up to two years for assessment by EP. It was noted that the assessment report was vital for the provision of support such as adaptation measures by schools.
 - (b) While parents might seek assessment from non-government organizations ("NGOs") or private-sector service providers, it appeared that there was no regulation over the level of fees

charged, nor any accreditation/quality assurance over the service provided.

- (c) Parents were only provided with a summary report of the assessment which did not contain sufficient information on the development needs of their children.
 - (d) The Administration was urged to take active steps to increase the number of professionals including medical doctors and EPs with a view to shortening the waiting time for consultation and assessment.
 - (e) A standardized format for assessment reports should be adopted and parents should be provided with a copy of the detailed assessment report.
3. Currently, the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Services of HA provide early identification, assessment and treatment of children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorders ("ADHD").
- (a) As reported by some deputations, the waiting time for new cases of ADHD was two years or more while that for old cases was no less than one year. Children were unable to receive early diagnosis and timely treatment. Excessively long waiting time, insufficient psychiatrists and the short time spent on consultation and assessment were of grave concern.

Support from schools in implementing integrated education ("IE")

4. Ordinary schools have been encouraged to adopt a whole school approach ("WSA") and a three-tier Intervention Model in supporting SEN students. Under the IE policy and the "Code of Practice on Education" issued by the Equal Opportunities Commission in 2001, schools should not discriminate against students with disabilities and should provide reasonable accommodation for SEN students, including adaptations to teaching, communication and assessment methods.
- (a) According to some parents, they had encountered difficulties when applying for admission because some schools were reluctant to admit SEN students.

- (b) To pool resources for more effective use, there was a suggestion that EDB should examine the feasibility of designating certain schools in each district to cater for specific types of SEN.
- (c) According to some parents, notwithstanding the "Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education" ("Operation Guide") and numerous other guidelines issued by EDB, the schools attended by their children had been unwilling to implement the necessary adaptation measures in teaching and examination arrangements to cater for their special needs.
- (d) To strengthen the support for SEN students and enhance the understanding and skills of teachers and parents in assisting SEN students, some deputations suggested that EDB should extend school-based occupational therapy service to cover all primary and secondary schools.
- (e) The deputations urged EDB to step up its work in monitoring the effective and equitable implementation of IE at the school level.
- (f) It was proposed that each SEN student should be provided with an individual education plan ("IEP") and that small class teaching should be practised in classes with SEN students.
- (g) Owing to the difficulties in implementing IE in the past decade or so, there was a view that the Administration should consider an alternative arrangement of placing SEN students who were unable to integrate into ordinary schools into designated special schools.

Allocation of resources

5. On top of the regular subvention for mainstream schools, additional resources provided by EDB include the Learning Support Grant ("LSG") the ceiling of which will be raised to \$1.5 million per school per annum from the 2013-2014 school year, Enhanced Speech Therapy Grant and funding for implementing remedial teaching, additional teachers to cater for students with low academic

achievement. Schools are advised to pool together the various resources for holistic and flexible deployment.

- (a) As reflected by the school sector, the subsidies/resources provided by the Government were far from sufficient. The existing level of LSG, for example, would only enable a secondary school to engage three new teachers at point 17 of the Master Pay Scale.
- (b) The School-based Educational Psychology Service provided by EDB could hardly meet the current demand for service at the student, teacher and school levels.
- (c) Some parents questioned whether individual schools had spent the additional resources (e.g. LSG) for the direct benefit of SEN students.
- (d) It was suggested that EDB should review in conjunction with the school sector whether and how the existing provision of resources should be improved, as well as the cost-effective use of resources.
- (e) In the absence of any dedicated post, the school teacher entrusted with the responsibility to head the Student Support Team could only spend a limited amount of his time amidst his other duties to oversee and co-ordinate the work of supporting SEN students in the school.
- (f) A dedicated teaching post should be created in schools to oversee and co-ordinate the provision of support measures and implementation of IE.

Professional development of teachers

6. In accordance with the five-year teacher professional development framework put in place in 2007-2008, EDB has commissioned structured training courses pitched at the Basic, Advanced and Thematic levels. In addition to the requirement that at least 10% of the teachers in a school should have completed the Basic Course, schools should arrange for at least three teachers to attend the Advanced Course, and at least one Chinese Language and one English Language teacher to attend the Thematic Course on Specific

learning Difficulties. At least one teacher should attend the Thematic Course on ADHD where the school has admitted these students.

- (a) The deputations shared a general view that the aforesaid targets were unrealistic. Even if they were attained and the number of trained teachers increased steadily, the percentage of teachers well-equipped to handle SEN students remained far from adequate.
- (b) Given the heavy teaching and administrative duties of many teachers, schools had difficulty in releasing their serving teachers to attend the on-the-job training course.
- (c) There was a view that EDB should work with the tertiary institutions to include training on IE as part of the pre-service teacher training programmes, instead of relying mainly on in-service training.
- (d) EDB should formulate plans to encourage teachers to undertake IE-related training and to increase the number of teachers equipped with the necessary training in IE.

The New Senior Secondary ("NSS") curriculum

7. The NSS curriculum is made up of three components, namely, (i) four core subjects of Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies; (ii) a choice of two or three subjects from 20 elective subjects, a range of Applied Learning ("ApL") courses and other languages; and (iii) other learning experiences.
- (a) There was grave concern that students with specific learning difficulties were disadvantaged under the NSS curriculum since the four core subjects placed heavy emphasis on students' language abilities and timed written assessments, in which these students were relatively weak.
 - (b) According to some parents, certain schools only allowed students to choose from the ApL courses offered by the schools, thus depriving SEN students of the opportunity to pursue courses of interest to them. Some schools had not

made available to students/parents in good time the information on the full range of ApL courses.

- (c) Some SEN students had encountered difficulties in seeking admission to ApL courses offered by institutions such as the "Bakery and Pastry" courses offered by the Vocational Training Council ("VTC"). The selection interview was said to be too stringent and too formidable.
- (d) The Administration should review whether certain adaptations should be made to the NSS curriculum to reduce the emphasis on language competency to accommodate the learning needs of SEN students.

Special examination arrangements

8. To provide schools with practical guidance, EDB published the "Guidelines on Special Examination Arrangements for Students with Special Educational Needs in Internal Assessment" in 2009. As regards public examinations, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority ("HKEAA") has set up the Committee on Special Needs Candidates and the Task Group on Special Examination Arrangements for Candidates with Specific Learning Disabilities. Special arrangements adopted by HKEAA include extended examination time, and providing candidates with dyslexia with question papers in enlarged print and allowing these candidates to write on alternate lines or pages of an answer book. Candidates applying for special examination arrangements are required to provide supporting documents with recommendations by psychologists.

- (a) According to some parents, the schools attended by their children had ceased the special examination arrangements available to students with reading and writing difficulties without notifying parents in advance.
- (b) There was concern that when some students diagnosed with specific learning difficulties in reading and writing were assessed under the "Hong Kong Test of Specific Learning Difficulties in Reading and Writing for Junior Secondary School Students", they were assessed as not fulfilling the diagnostic criteria of dyslexia. As a result, they became no

longer eligible to apply to HKEAA for special examination arrangements.

- (c) Some deputations urged EDB/HKEAA to consider their suggestion to provide additional special examination arrangements, such as scribe and dictate answers and the feasibility of using speech-to-text conversion software.

Opportunities for higher education or training

9. Under the New Academic Structure, all secondary students take only one public examination, i.e. the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education ("HKDSE") Examination upon completion of Secondary 6. The general entrance requirement for local undergraduate programmes was attainment of Levels "3-3-2-2" in the four core subjects. The minimum general entrance requirements for sub-degree programmes are five subjects at Level 2 or above (including Chinese Language and English Language) in the HKDSE Examination. It is noted that the number of publicly-funded undergraduate places falls short of the number of students fulfilling the minimum entrance requirements.
 - (a) The deputations noted with grave concern the keen competition for local undergraduate places and the limited opportunities for SEN students. There was a suggestion that post-secondary institutions should suitably adjust their admission criteria, reserve a certain quota of its places for SEN students and provide the necessary accommodation measures.
 - (b) According to some parents, a number of SEN students had been offered places by Taiwan universities where the learning environment was more favourable. However, some of them could not take up the offer due to a lack of financial means, as the grants/loans currently administered by the Government did not cover overseas studies.
 - (c) The Administration was asked to consider providing financial assistance for higher studies in Taiwan so that SEN students would be able to benefit from university education.
 - (d) According to some deputations, although VTC had put in place a special admission mechanism for students with SEN,

the support available to SEN students to facilitate their learning and satisfactory completion of studies was inadequate.

Home-school communication/cooperation and public education

10. According to EDB, schools are urged to establish a regular communication mechanism with parents in accordance with the Operation Guide, such as engaging parents in devising support plans and monitoring their children's learning progress and the effectiveness of the support measures. Schools are also required to elucidate their policies, additional resources and support measures on IE in their annual school reports.
 - (a) The deputations had cited examples on the lack of communication between the school and parents of SEN students over the adaptation and support measures and in reviewing the effectiveness of these measures.
 - (b) EDB should require schools to formalize and strengthen the existing communication mechanism between schools and parents.

11. In its papers provided to the Subcommittee, EDB has given a summary of the major public education activities implemented over the last five years via different media.
 - (a) The deputations shared the view that discrimination against SEN students still prevailed at the school and community levels. The Administration should step up public education initiatives at all fronts.

Support service for parents

12. The parents of SEN students shared their frustrating experience and difficulties encountered when seeking assessment and support services, applying for admissions to schools, and taking care of their SEN children. Family problems arose and some parents had to quit their jobs. The Administration was urged to strengthen support for these parents, such as counseling, organizing training/sharing sessions and introducing necessary support measures for families with SEN children.

Cross-sector collaboration

13. According to EDB, it has engaged tertiary institutions in the development of screening/assessment tools and teaching materials for use by teachers and parents. EDB has also pointed out that the support and participation of various sectors, in particular the collaboration of the medical, social welfare and NGO sectors is important. It is noted that in 2005, EDB set up the Task Force on Integrated Education in Mainstream Schools comprising representatives from the education sector, tertiary institutions, other government departments, NGOs and parent groups.
- (a) The deputations considered that the services and support for SEN students were currently taken up by different government departments/agencies and there was a lack of a holistic and well co-ordinated approach catering for the needs of SEN students at various stages.
 - (b) There was a call for the establishment of an interdepartmental body steered by EDB to take forward the implementation of IE in a holistic and well co-ordinated manner.

Legislative approach

14. Some deputations referred to the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 487) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and considered that the rights of children with SEN should be safeguarded by legislation. They urged the Administration to consider introducing legislation on IE so as to ensure that SEN students would have a statutory entitlement to the requisite services and support measures. According to the Administration, for the time being, it did not have any plan to legislate on IE.