

**For information
on 18 February 2014**

**Legislative Council Panel on Education
Subcommittee on Integrated Education**

The Role of Former Skills Opportunity Schools

Purpose

This paper briefs Members of the background of the setting up of the former Skills Opportunity Schools (SOSs) and the current situation of these schools.

Background

2. The Education Commission (EC) published the Education Commission Report No. 4 (ECR4) in 1990, in which issues about the school curriculum and students' behavioural problems in schools were examined in the context of nine-year free and compulsory education, including the support measures for students with severe learning difficulties.

3. The EC pointed out in ECR4 that the learning capability of students with severe learning difficulties was very low. The EC proposed that the Government should set up special SOSs for junior secondary (secondary one to secondary three) students to help these students develop vocational and social skills so that they could be self-sufficient and well-adjusted individuals in society. In the SOSs, skills-related subjects (such as Woodwork and Metalwork) would be taught with the objective of enabling students to further their training at operative level in skills centres run by the then Technical Education and Industrial Training Department. Other programmes on self-help and social skills would also be offered to equip students to look after themselves upon leaving school. In addition, complementary studies such as ceramics, silk-screen printing and basic furniture making would be organised outside school hours. To enable teachers to give students the necessary attention and support, the EC recommended that the class size of SOSs be capped at around 20 students. Another recommendation was that only those students identified by professional staff (such as student guidance officers, student guidance teachers and educational psychologists) as likely to

benefit from schooling in SOSs be so placed subject to parental consent.

4. Following the recommendations in ECR4, the Government established seven aided SOSs¹ between 1993 and 1998. The curriculum of these schools comprised 60% academic subjects and 40% cultural, practical and technical subjects. Schools would adapt the course contents of various subjects according to students' abilities and aptitude. Complementary studies were organised outside school hours with a view to enriching students' practical skills and enhancing their understanding of various vocations.

5. The Sub-committee on Special Education (The Subcommittee) was set up in 1994 under the former Board of Education to review the effectiveness, resource requirements and way forward in respect of the development of special education. The Sub-committee studied matters relating to SOSs in 1996 and 2000 respectively. In its report published in 2000, the Sub-committee stated that implementation of integrated education (IE) was a global trend and the Government should as far as possible provide support to students with special educational needs (SEN), and arrange for them to study in ordinary schools rather than in segregated settings. In addition, the Government should enhance teacher training and promote curriculum reform². In the long-run, all SOSs should be mainstreamed. The Government accepted the recommendations made by the Subcommittee.

Changes of the Former SOSs

6. Of the seven former SOSs, apart from three which ceased operation in the 2004/05 school year³, one completed mainstreaming in the 2004/05 school year while the remaining

¹ The seven SOSs included The Church of Christ in China Nim Tsi School, Yuen Long Catholic Secondary School, Fortress Hill Methodist School, Yan Chai Hospital No. 5 Secondary School, Chi Lin Buddhist Secondary School, Po Leung Kuk Tsing Yi Secondary School and Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Mr & Mrs Kwong Sik Kwan College.

² As mentioned in the report, the successful implementation of the Curriculum Development Institute's proposed key learning areas with one curriculum framework for all coupled with graded learning schedules would enable students with learning difficulties to receive more appropriate adaptations in ordinary schools.

³ Including Yan Chai Hospital No. 5 Secondary School, Po Leung Kuk Tsing Yi Secondary School and The Church of Christ in China Nim Tsi School

three completed the mainstreaming in the 2005/06 school year. Students could choose to study in the mainstreamed ex-SOSs through the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) System, at both the discretionary places stage and the central allocation stage. As part of the agreed arrangements on mainstreaming between the Government and the three ex-SOSs, the “No Choice No Allocation” principle would be adopted at the central allocation stage (i.e. students would not be allocated to these schools unless parents have included them as school choices), and to facilitate schools’ continued support to students with learning difficulties, these schools would enrol not more than 30 students per class (which was lower than the maximum enrolment of 40 in ordinary secondary schools at that time). Following the downward adjustments in the number of students allocated to ordinary secondary schools, the number of secondary one students allocated per class to these three ex-SOSs had been reduced progressively in subsequent years. The number of places per Secondary 1 class under 2013 SSPA is 24⁴, and the basis for calculating the number of approved Secondary 1 classes is further reduced to 20 students per class. Similar to other ordinary schools, these three schools offer adapted curricula to cater for the diverse learning needs of their students with SEN. Some school-based or practical subjects, such as Catering Services and Business Fundamentals are also offered.

7. As for the other ordinary schools, the Education Bureau (EDB) has been providing the above-mentioned schools with additional resources, professional support and teacher training to help them cater for students with SEN. In terms of resources, like other ordinary schools, the EDB has, on top of the regular subvention, provided the mainstreamed ex-SOSs with the Learning Support Grant (LSG), additional teachers to cater for academically low achievers in junior secondary students, and Top-up Fund, etc. In addition, for students with severe emotional and behavioural problems, the EDB provides additional funding where appropriate for schools to employ teaching assistants to assist teachers in providing such students with intensive individualised support. Should problems of the students concerned persist despite the school-based support, the EDB may, subject to parental consent, refer the students to the Adjustment Unit run by the EDB or short-term attachment programmes run by

⁴ Including two school places for repeaters.

the Special Schools cum Resource Centres for pull-out intensive remedial support.

8. On professional support, the professional staff of the EDB pays regular visits to schools to render professional advice on their policies, support measures on IE, teaching strategies, resource deployment, and home-school cooperation, etc. With the implementation of the School-based Educational Psychology Service (SBEPS), school-based educational psychologists have also been providing the above-mentioned schools with case assessment, consultation and professional support services, etc.

9. The Whole School Approach (WSA) to IE currently implemented in Hong Kong is in line with the global trend in the development of IE. The EDB has been encouraging schools, including the three former SOSs mentioned above, to adopt the WSA in implementing IE to provide appropriate support to students with SEN. Building on the existing strengths and practical experience, schools are in general ready to develop appropriate and diversified school-based support modes according to the learning needs, interests and abilities of different students. To enable the inclusive culture to take root, the schools have also actively encouraged students to accept, and take the initiative in helping, students with SEN.

Current Situation

10. Currently, the education structure of these three mainstreamed ex-SOSs has been extended from three-year (i.e. secondary one to secondary three) to a complete six-year secondary schooling, in which adapted curricula are offered to make available a complete secondary education to students with learning difficulties. As mentioned in paragraph 6 above, to cater for the diverse learning needs of students with SEN, these schools offer adapted curricula, and some school-based or practical subjects, such as Catering Services, Business Fundamentals, Tourism and Hospitality Studies, Business Accounting and Financial Studies, Health and Beauty Keeping in Traditional Chinese Medicine, Events Planning and Operation, etc. Moreover, practical learning and training such as pre-vocational training and trial placement scheme are also made available to enhance the self-care ability and social

adaptability of students with SEN.

11. The three ex-SOSs have set up student support teams to coordinate various support measures to cater for student diversity. On professional support, they have been provided with SBEPS for the provision of more comprehensive support for their students. As these schools are admitting a greater number of students with SEN, they have been receiving more additional resources for enhancing the support to meet their students' needs. These include the provision of more additional teachers to cater for academically low achievers, and the provision of ceiling amount of LSG which can be used to employ teachers and teaching assistants or arrange learning and social training groups through procurement of professional services, etc. They have also made good use of the Top-up Fund to provide supporting facilities such as FM systems and CCTV, etc. for students with SEN. Regarding teacher training, these schools have actively arranged teachers to attend appropriate courses in accordance with the training targets set by the EDB with a view to enhancing their professional capacity to cater for students with SEN.

Views Sought

12. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Education Bureau

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