

**Legislative Council Panel on Education
Subcommittee on Integrated Education Meeting on 28 May 2014**

Regarding the follow-up questions raised by Hon Fernando CHEUNG as detailed in his letter of 4 June 2014, the Administration's reply is as follows:

Current Special Education Policy

1. The Government is adopting a “dual-track” approach in implementing special education. For students with hearing impairment (HI), the Education Bureau (EDB) would, subject to the assessment and recommendation of specialists and parents' consent, refer students with severe or profound hearing loss or those who cannot construct knowledge because of inadequate speech abilities, that is, those students who may need to use sign language in communication and learning, to special schools for children with HI to receive intensive support services. Other students with HI who can benefit from learning in mainstream schools would attend ordinary schools.

Learning and Communication Mode of Students with HI

2. The EDB has all along been encouraging teachers to adopt the most appropriate mode to teach and to communicate with students with HI according to the students' abilities and needs. For students with HI who are suitable for attending ordinary schools, with the use of amplification devices, they are able to learn and communicate with people orally. Teachers will use oral language, supplemented with visual strategies, contextual cues, body language, written text, and gestures, etc., when teaching and communicating with the students with regard to their abilities and needs. Special schools (including special schools for children with HI) would use oral language, sign language, and total communication, etc., when teaching and communicating with students with HI. Teachers, and school-based speech therapists, etc. in special schools or ordinary schools would help students with HI make use of their residual hearing to enhance their listening and oral communication abilities, and to master the skills required in communicating with other HI or hearing people.

Supporting Students with HI Attending Ordinary Schools

Whole School Approach (WSA) in Implementing Integrated Education (IE)

3. The EDB has all along been encouraging schools to adopt a WSA in

implementing IE and form student support teams to coordinate various support measures to cater for the learning diversities of students. Under the WSA, we encourage schools to adopt a 3-Tier Intervention Model according to different levels of special educational needs (SEN) of students (including students with HI) in providing appropriate support to them.

4. In recent years, there are schools which have accumulated successful experience in assisting students with HI to integrate in learning in ordinary schools. The EDB had attempted to arrange a visit to such a school for the members of the Subcommittee on Integrated Education, yet a suitable time slot was not available. As such, the visit could not be made within this legislative year. The schools have indicated that they adopt a WSA in providing support for the students. They endeavour to provide an inclusive learning environment and cultivate a caring and inclusive atmosphere for students with HI in order to help these students participate in school life. The schools are also concerned about the learning situation and the learning effectiveness of students with HI. Before- and after-class remedial sessions are provided to students with HI so as to assist them in acquiring the subject knowledge. At the same time, the schools recognize the importance of oral communication abilities of the students with HI in their adaptation to the society in future. Teachers use FM systems in classes and encourage students to use amplification devices for perception and comprehension of the teaching contents. Teachers also use visual strategies, body language, written text, and gestures, etc., in communicating with students and in teaching.

Providing Sign Language Support for Students with HI

5. To support ordinary schools in catering for students with SEN (including HI), on top of the regular subvention for ordinary schools, the EDB has been providing schools with additional resources (including the Learning Support Grant (LSG)), professional support and teacher training. Schools should provide the required support for students according to their different needs. School should also review and adjust the tier of support for students with SEN (including HI) of their schools on a regular basis, and to pool and deploy school-based resources flexibly in order to provide adequate support for students according to their needs.

6. Schools have to adopt the most appropriate school-based support strategy with regard to the needs of students. The EDB would offer professional advice in this regard. On this basis, a few ordinary schools having admitted students with HI use sign language in providing support for the students in need. In fact, schools

could utilize the LSG and other school resources to employ teaching assistants (including people with HI or those who know sign language) to assist students with HI, and to procure school-based speech therapy services to provide training for the students on a regular basis. Having regard to the communication needs of their students with HI, schools could provide their subject teachers and teaching assistants with opportunities in learning sign language, for example, arranging them to attend sign language courses organized by special schools for children with HI or other social welfare organizations. Schools could also arrange for their hearing students exposure to sign language through extra-curricular activities and interest groups, and arrange sign interpretation on individual case basis, such as emotion counselling or crisis management, etc. At the same time, the EDB would provide students in need with the “Enhanced Support Service for HI Students Attending Ordinary Schools” (ESS). Please refer to paragraph 7 to 8 below for details. Regarding the details of services provided to students with HI, please refer to the LegCo Paper No. CB(4)777/12-13(01) “Services for Students with Hearing Impairment”.

Enhanced Support Service for HI Students Attending Ordinary Schools

7. Should the learning and communication problems of students with HI in ordinary schools persist after school-based support, the EDB will refer the students to receive the Enhanced Support Service (ESS). Under the ESS commissioned by the EDB, experienced resource teachers (RTs) and speech therapists (STs) of the special schools for children with HI will provide after-school support for students with HI to assist them in mastering learning strategies, enhancing literacy abilities, and enriching speech, language and communication skills, in order to enhance their learning and communication effectiveness. The RTs will use sign language to assist the learning of students where necessary. They will also pay visits to the home schools of the students to provide the students with remediation and to share their experience and different teaching strategies (including the use of sign language to assist teaching) with teachers of the home schools, in order to enhance the learning effectiveness of students with HI and to facilitate their integration in ordinary schools. In the 2013/14 school year, about 230 students received the service and the related expenditure was approximately \$6 million.

8. The EDB is very concerned about the service mode and the quality of the ESS. In order to review the service contents and to enhance the service mode so as to improve the quality of service, a two-year pilot project on Additional Educational Support Service for HI Students (pilot project) was launched in the 2010/11 school year. Stakeholders who participated in the pilot project (including teachers, parents

and students with HI) were highly satisfied with the scope and mode of services of the pilot project. Meanwhile, with the enhanced support mode, positive effects on literacy, as well as speech, language and communication development were noted in students who participated in the pilot project. In view of the results of the pilot project, starting from the 2012/13 school year, the EDB has allocated additional resources to the special school for children with HI, including provision of additional resource teachers, creation of a speech therapist post and an increase in cash grant rate. This is to facilitate the special school for children with HI to adopt an enhanced mode of support in continuing the provision of ESS for students in need. Professional staff of the EDB would keep in view the ESS through school visits, lesson observations, meetings, and follow-up on the attendance records and learning progress of students, etc. At the same time, the EDB would maintain partnership with the schools to facilitate the enhancement of the mode of school visit services, and to promote collaboration between home school teachers and RTs so as to enhance the learning effectiveness of the students.

Assisting Students with HI to Communicate and Participate in Lesson Effectively

9. The EDB is all along concerned with the effectiveness of learning of students with SEN (including HI) and the learning and teaching (L&T) of schools. Professional officers (including audiologists, speech therapists, and educational psychologists, etc.) of the EDB conduct regular school visits and provide schools with professional advice in the areas of resources deployment and grants utilization, L&T, effective teaching and support strategies, communication and cooperation between parents and schools, etc. They will also introduce relevant resources and recommend appropriate support strategies to teachers and parents regarding HI students' listening environment, listening strategies, use of amplification devices, speech and language abilities, social adaptation and learning, etc., so as to assist schools in providing support for students with HI according to their needs. The EDB has also been collaborating with tertiary institutions to develop and strengthen the support strategies for students with different SEN and to develop theory-driven and evidence-based teaching models, so as to further enhance the support for students with SEN (including HI).

10. The EDB has also been providing ordinary schools with additional resources to cater for the specific needs of their students with SEN (including HI). Students with HI have to face different challenges in the course of learning due to their different hearing problems. As such, schools should arrange different modes and

levels of support for students according to their needs. No matter which mode or level of support the school will adopt, they need to have comprehensive plans and arrangements, e.g. allocation and utilization of resources, teacher training, curriculum accommodation, etc. Officers of the EDB have been reviewing together with schools the effectiveness of the implementation of school-based support programmes and the related resources utilization to ensure that the schools arrange appropriate support for the students. The EDB welcomes schools' continued exploration of various effective ways in enhancing the learning effectiveness of students with HI, and sharing with other schools their experience in supporting students with HI.

Researches on the Communication / Support Mode of Students with HI

11. International researches have been investigating the effectiveness of teaching modes of students with HI for extended number of years. Research results indicated that the development of students with HI is affected by a conglomerate of factors, rather than solely the support or communication mode. These factors include school-based support, language environment, involvement of parents, school culture, and home-school collaboration, etc. Overseas and local researches are yet to prove that “sign bilingualism” or “bilingual-bicultural” is the only effective mode in supporting students with HI¹. At present, different countries are adopting appropriate teaching modes having regard to their own circumstances. In fact, most developed countries are providing students with HI with different teaching / support modes in their respective education systems as there is no one particular teaching / support mode that is suitable for all students with HI². The EDB would continue to keep in view local and international researches and development in relation to

¹ Deaf education scholars Professor Marc Marschark and Professor Patricia Spencer (2009) have conducted a thorough review regarding international researches in educating children with HI. Despite the study of the teaching and communication modes for deaf children / children with HI which had been conducted for nearly 200 years, there was no conclusive results indicating that one particular teaching / communication mode is more effective than the others.

(Reference: *Evidence of best practice models and outcomes in the education of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing children: An International Review*, The National Council for Special Education, Ireland, 2009. The executive summary of the report can be located from:

<http://www.ncse.ie/uploads/1/NCSEDeafReportExecutiveSummary.pdf>)

² Deaf education scholars Professor Harry Knoors and Professor Marc Marschark (2012) pointed out that there had not been any evidence-based findings to support the effectiveness of the sign bilingual mode. The two scholars had also concluded in the article their position toward the sign bilingual mode, indicating that there had no “one-size-fits-all” communication / support mode for children with HI. Countries should provide different communication / support modes according to the needs of their children with HI.

(Reference: *Language planning for the 21st century: Revisiting bilingual language policy for deaf children*, *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 2012)

Deaf education scholars Professor Connie Mayer and Professor Greg Leigh (2010) also concluded that the literacy skills / development of children who participated in bilingual deaf programmes were not as positive as expected when bilingual models were implemented.

(Reference: *The changing context for sign bilingual education programmes: Issues in language and the development of literacy*, *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 2010.)

teaching modes for students with HI, gauge views from stakeholders, and keep collaborating with professional organizations and schools so as to assist teachers in catering for the needs of students with HI more effectively.

Learning Effectiveness and Public Examination Result of Students Attending Special Schools for Students with HI

12. Under the School Development and Accountability Framework, schools are required to assess the effectiveness of support for students with SEN through self-evaluation each year so as to be accountable to their stakeholders. Moreover, the EDB requires schools to submit a year-end self-evaluation report on the implementation of the WSA on IE of the school. Public examination result is not the only indicator in evaluating the effectiveness of the learning of students (including students with SEN or HI). Furthermore, as currently there is only one special school for children with HI in Hong Kong (the other one is mainstreaming progressively), providing the relevant information would bring unnecessary pressure to the school and its students, which may affect the development of the school. In this regard, the EDB has reservation in disclosing the information.

Promotion of Sign Language in Schools under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

13. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) has been in force in the People's Republic of China (including the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region) since 31 August 2008. The UNCRPD specifies that States Parties have the obligation to take appropriate measures to promote sign language. In response to the views of the Rehabilitation Programme Plan Review Working Group and to implement the UNCRPD, the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee (RAC) set up a working group in December 2009 to advise the Government on how to promote the use of sign language. The EDB has been acting in concert with the work of the Working Group on Promoting Sign Language under the RAC in promoting sign language.