

**For discussion on
20 June 2017**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS**

Support for Children with Hearing Impairment

Purpose

This paper sets out the support services taken by the Government for children with hearing impairment (HI).

Background

2. The relevant Government bureaux and departments, as well as the Hospital Authority (HA), have been working closely to provide a series of required services for children with HI, including identification and assessment, education, medical and rehabilitation services. HA and the Department of Health (DH) identify and assess children with HI, make referrals and arrange appropriate medical and rehabilitation services for these children; the Education Bureau (EDB) provides learning support for school-aged children with HI; HA provides appropriate medical services for children with HI; and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) provides rehabilitation services for children with HI from birth to six years old.

Identification and Assessment

3. To facilitate early identification of children with HI, HA would conduct neonatal hearing screening while the Maternal and Child Health Centres of DH would provide Otoacoustic Emissions hearing test to newborn babies who have not been screened in their birthing hospital. Babies suspected to have HI will be referred to specialists for further assessment and follow-up. In addition, in respect of children under 12 years of age who are suspected to have developmental problems, the Child Assessment Service (CAS) of DH provides comprehensive assessment and diagnosis, formulates rehabilitation plan, provides these children and their families with interim support and reviews evaluation, and conducts public health education activities. CAS will arrange assessments (including hearing assessment) for children depending

on their specific circumstances and individual needs, and refer them to appropriate units for support services including treatment, rehabilitation and special education etc.

4. As to children studying at schools, Student Health Service (SHS) of the DH provides annual health assessment for enrolled students at Student Health Service Centres (SHSC) to receive services addressing the health needs at various stages of their development. Among these services, hearing screening is provided to students aiming at early identification of various hearing deficits among students and to provide timely medical and educational supports, in order to avoid the adverse effects of these problems on personal development and learning. Hearing screening is routinely conducted for all primary one and secondary two students; students attending the SHS for the first time; and students who have missed the screening opportunities in primary one and secondary two. Other students who have hearing concerns may also request hearing screening during annual health assessments. Students suspected to have hearing problems will generally be referred to the SHS audiologist for comprehensive audiological assessment or to otorhinolaryngologists of HA direct as necessary. Following audiologist assessment, the audiologist will arrange supportive service to be provided by other organizations, e.g. refer to otorhinolaryngologists of the HA, and Speech and Hearing Services Section of EDB, as well as provide informative counselling for students and their families, according to individual's hearing conditions and service needs.

Education Services

5. The Government is adopting a “dual-track” approach in implementing special education. For students with HI, EDB would, subject to the assessment and recommendation of specialists and the consent of parents, refer students with severe or profound HI or those who cannot construct knowledge because of inadequate speech abilities (i.e. 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 would attend ordinary schools.

Learning Support for Students with Hearing Impairment

6. EDB has all along been encouraging teachers to adopt the most appropriate mode to teach and to communicate with students with HI having regard to their abilities and needs. Taking into account the abilities of students, as well as their learning and communication needs, special schools (including HI schools) would

adopt the most appropriate communication modes (including oral, sign and total communication, etc.) in teaching students with HI. Teachers of special schools would also train students with HI to use their residual hearing for listening in order to help them mastering the skills in communicating with other people with HI and with normal hearing. For students with HI attending ordinary schools, after fitting with assistive hearing devices, they could learn and communicate with other people in oral language. Having regard to the abilities and needs of students with HI, teachers will use oral language with the support of visual strategies, contextual cues, body language, written text and gestures, etc. to communicate with and teach these students.

7. If ordinary schools opt to use sign language in providing support for students with HI in need, schools should have appropriate arrangements, such as formulating the criteria of using sign language by students with HI, arranging subject teachers and teaching assistants to learn sign language, reviewing regularly the abilities in using sign and oral language of students with HI, keeping in view the development in using sign language in education and sign language itself, training students to utilize residual hearing for listening, assisting students with HI to acquire skills in communicating with other people with HI and with normal hearing, etc. Schools could also utilize the Learning Support Grant (LSG) and other school resources to employ teaching assistants who know sign language to assist students with HI in learning. At the same time, schools should also enhance the understanding of other students with normal hearing and their parents on HI and sign language, for example, arranging related inclusive activities, extra-curricular activities and interest groups on sign language, etc.

8. Other than daily learning support, students with special educational needs (SEN) need appropriate special examination arrangements (examination accommodations). EDB published the information leaflet on “Whole School Approach (WSA) – Assessment Principles and Strategies” in 2004 and the “Guidelines on Special Examination Arrangements for Students with SEN in Internal Assessment” in 2009, which introduce to schools the general principles and strategies on internal special assessment arrangements, including detailed special assessment arrangements for students with HI. The related information has been uploaded onto the EDB website. In addition, EDB officers organize talks and workshops for schools on a regular basis to assist schools in continuously fine-tuning the policies and measures of their school-based special examination arrangement.

9. Besides, EDB encourages schools to organize sign language promotion activities according to the needs of students, parents and staff, for example, to collaborate with the HI school or non-governmental organizations to conduct inclusive activities, to enhance the understanding of HI and sign language among students, parents and staff. The Quality Education Fund has also granted funding to a HI school to integrate and develop new sign vocabulary to cope with the curriculum requirements for teachers, and enhance the effectiveness in using sign language to assist teaching so as to enhance the quality of teaching. The HI school also conducted a variety of activities, such as sign language workshops, sign language talks, "Inter-school Sign-a-Song Contest", "Information Day for Hearing Impaired" and "Sign Language and Deaf Culture Day", etc., and invited ordinary school teachers and students to participate so as to promote sign language and inclusive culture to them.

10. Post-secondary educational institutions provide special arrangement and support services according to the needs of students with SEN. As for students with HI, some institutions provide them with professional sign language interpretation service. Some institutions also provide other support measures to students with HI, including Frequency Modulation (FM) system, assistance in developing social networks, teaching accommodations and/or special examination arrangements, etc.

Support for Schools

11. To help ordinary schools cater for students with SEN (including HI) on top of the recurrent subvention for ordinary schools, EDB has been providing schools with additional resources, professional support and teacher training. Schools should pool and deploy these school-based resources flexibly to provide appropriate support for students with SEN (including HI).

Additional Resources

12. EDB provides schools with additional resources, including LSG, the Enhanced Speech Therapy Grant, the Integrated Education (IE) Programme, the Intensive Remedial Teaching Programme in Primary Schools and the provision of additional teachers for schools with Territory Band Three and bottom 10% junior secondary students, the Top-up Fund for purchasing special furniture and equipment (such as the FM System for use by students with HI and teachers in class) and carrying out minor conversion works for students with disabilities, etc.

Professional Support

13. Specialists of the EDB visit schools regularly to provide professional advice on matters such as IE and support for students with SEN. Officers will also introduce related resources and recommend appropriate support strategies in relation to the listening environment, listening strategies, use of hearing aids, speech and language skills, social adjustment and learning for students with HI.

14. Should the learning and communication problems of students with HI in ordinary schools persist after school-based support, EDB will refer the students to receive the Enhanced Support Service (ESS) subject to the consent of their parents. Under the ESS commissioned by EDB, experienced resource teachers (RTs) from the school for children with HI (HI school) will provide after-school support to students with HI. RTs will also pay school visits to provide guidance to the students and to share different teaching strategies with teachers in ordinary schools through case conferences, workshops, seminars and class observations so as to enhance the learning effectiveness of the students with HI and to facilitate their integration into schools.

15. EDB has also developed various resource packages, information leaflets and guidelines, for example, the resource package on “Hearing Impaired Students Literacy Learning”, the resource package on “Communication Enhancement Strategies for Students with HI”, the “Operation Guide on WSA to IE”, “Understanding and Helping Children with SEN - A Guide to Teaching”, “Special Arrangements for Internal Examinations for Students with SEN”, etc., to provide teachers and parents with knowledge, strategies and skills in supporting their students or children with HI, so as to assist students in overcoming their HI and to enhance the effectiveness in learning and communication. Related information has been distributed to schools as well as being uploaded onto the HKEdCity (<http://www.hkedcity.net/>).

Professional Development

16. Starting from the 2007/08 school year, EDB has been providing serving teachers with structured training courses pitched at Basic, Advanced and Thematic levels on supporting students with SEN. The core and elective modules of the Advanced Course cover all SEN types, including elective modules focusing on the learning and teaching of students with HI. For schools having admitted students with HI, they are required to arrange teachers to attend the Thematic Courses relating to education for students with HI. Besides, EDB organizes from time to time workshops, seminars, talks and experience sharing sessions, etc., for school heads,

teachers, teaching assistants and professionals to enhance their awareness and understanding of students with different types of SEN.

17. Overall speaking, the Government encourages schools to adopt the WSA in implementing IE. In recent years, there are schools which have accumulated successful experience in assisting students with HI to integrate in learning in ordinary schools. In fact, no matter which mode of support is adopted in supporting students with SEN (including HI), schools need to have comprehensive policies, plans and arrangements, such as resources allocation and utilization, teacher training, curriculum accommodation, etc.

Medical Services

18. HA has a professional team comprising medical specialists, audiologists, speech therapists and nursing staff etc. to provide screening, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation services for children with HI. Its Audiology Centre provides patients of different age groups with audiological services, including hearing assessments and counselling. Its Speech Therapy Department provides speech therapy service for pre-school children with HI where necessary.

19. HA has been performing cochlear implant surgeries for clinically eligible patients with HI since 1991. For children confirmed to be suffering from profound HI, HA will assess whether cochlear implant will further improve their hearing ability. If assessment results are affirmative and consents are obtained from their patients or guardians, HA will perform cochlear implant surgeries for them.

20. Cochlear implant is made up of an implant and an external speech processor. Under normal circumstances, the implant can last for lifetime. The current supplier of cochlear implants of HA provides ten-year warranty for occasional malfunctioning of the implant. Within the warranty period, the supplier is responsible for repair and maintenance of the implant. In case the implant malfunctions after expiry of the warranty, since the implant has to be replaced together with the external speech processor, HA will provide the clinically eligible patients with a full set of cochlear implant at standard fees and charges.

21. As for external speech processors, like other medical items of similar nature (e.g. prostheses), they are not covered by the standard fees and charges of HA. The current supplier of external speech processors of HA provides three-year warranty. Upon expiry of the warranty period, patients are responsible for the repair and

maintenance of the external speech processors. Since April 2013, HA has included the replacement of external speech processors of cochlear implants to the non-drug subvented items under the Samaritan Fund (SF) to provide financial assistance to patients in need. In assessing patients' eligibility for SF subsidy, the SF would consider both the clinical and financial conditions of patients. For cases with overriding social grounds, the SF would exercise discretion in their consideration of individual cases. With a view to providing patients in need with comprehensive support, HA would regularly review the eligibility criteria, approving procedures and subvented items of the SF. In the past 3 financial years, the SF has approved 28 applications with a sum amount of \$1,199,630 subsidy granted.

Rehabilitation Services

22. SWD provides subvented pre-school rehabilitation services, including the Early Education and Training Centre (EETC) and the Special Child Care Centre (SCCC), for children from birth to six years old who are assessed with HI. Apart from normal rehabilitation services (such as basic physical, intellectual, sensory-motor training), EETCs and SCCC specially set up for children with HI provides more intensive aural, pronunciation and language training to assist children with HI to make use of their residual hearing to communicate in oral language in their early development stage; some centres will provide sign language training based on the need of individual children. Children with HI waiting for subvented pre-school rehabilitation services could also make use of SWD's training subsidy to acquire self-financing pre-school rehabilitation services from Recognized Service Providers as soon as possible. Since October 2016, SWD has increased the level of training subsidy for eligible children waiting for SCCC from \$3,867 per month to \$5,995 per month, with a view to increasing the training hours from four sessions per month to six sessions per month. In addition, starting from 2017/18 academic year, children with HI on the waiting list of SCCC can receive non-means-tested training subsidy.

Way Forward

23. The relevant Government bureaux and departments and HA will continue to work closely together, so that children with HI can obtain the appropriate services as soon as possible.

Advice Sought

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

Labour and Welfare Bureau

Education Bureau

Food and Health Bureau

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