

For discussion
on 12 June 2017

Legislative Council Panel on Education

**Latest Progress of Support Measures for Students with Special Educational Needs and
the Pilot Project on Special Educational Needs Coordinators**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the latest progress of the various support measures for students with special educational needs (SEN) and the Pilot Project on Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs).

Background

2. The Whole School Approach (WSA) to Integrated Education (IE) adopted in Hong Kong is in line with the global trend in the development of IE. The Education Bureau (EDB) provides schools with additional resources, professional support and teacher training for catering for students with SEN. The EDB also reviews the implementation of IE as an ongoing process. In response to the passage of the motion “Report of the Subcommittee on Integrated Education” at the Legislative Council on 10 December 2014, we submitted a progress report to the Legislative Council on 27 February 2015, setting out the views of the EDB, relevant bureaux and departments on the recommendations of the Subcommittee on IE and an overview of the follow-up actions to be taken. The latest progress of the various support measures is set out at Appendix.

3. With increased awareness among schools and parents as well as improvement in identification mechanism, the number of students identified to have SEN has been on the rise. To enhance the support services, the Government has also increased the resources allocated to IE accordingly. In the 2016/17 school year, the corresponding estimated expenditure is about \$1,417 million. When compared to the funding allocated in the 2008/09 school year when the Learning Support Grant (LSG) was first provided to ordinary secondary schools, the increase was about 65%. As regards teacher training, as at the 2015/16 school year, over 40% of teachers in public sector ordinary primary schools and about 25% of their secondary school counterparts have completed 30 hours or more of structured training in special education. In the past few years, we have rolled out a number of new initiatives in respect of professional support and additional resources. A three-year Pilot Project on SENCOs has

been launched. The School-based Educational Psychology Service has been extended to cover all public sector primary and secondary schools, and the ratio of educational psychologist to school in public sector schools with a large number of students with SEN has been improved progressively to 1:4. Apart from the school-based models and strategies developed for supporting students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) at junior primary, senior primary and junior secondary levels, a support model for senior secondary school students with ASD having average to high average intelligence will be developed. Eligible candidates with dyslexia are allowed to use speech-to-text software in taking the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination of Liberal Studies. The LSG provided for public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools will also cover students with mental illness.

4. With years of implementation of IE, the EDB and the sector witness certain progress has been made. There have been quite a number of successful cases of culture building, policy formulation and implementation in schools. An inclusive culture and the WSA have gradually taken root in schools. Education systems around the world have encountered different challenges in the implementation of IE. We will continue to review the implementation of IE and introduce improvement measures if and when necessary, including the arrangement of SENCOs.

Pilot Project on SENCOs

5. In response to the recommendation of the Report of the Subcommittee on IE of September 2014 and with funding provision from the Community Care Fund, the EDB launched a three-year Pilot Project on SENCOs in the 2015/16 school year in 124 schools, including 65 secondary schools and 59 primary schools, benefitting about 10 220 students with SEN. In the paper submitted to the Legislative Council in March 2016 (LC Paper No. CB(4)729/15-16(05)), the EDB states that an overseas consultant with rich relevant experiences has been commissioned to provide SENCOs with professional training. It has also engaged a consultant to conduct a study on the implications and effectiveness of the pilot project, with specific focus on the impact of the creation of the SENCO post to WSA to IE and the duties of SENCOs. Based on the actual situation of primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong, the study adopts both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, together with an extensive range of assessment tools, to collect information and statistical data of participating schools and seek the views of different stakeholders. The progress of the pilot project is set down in the ensuing paragraphs.

Latest Progress

Duties and Professional Training

6. Participating schools are entitled to an additional grant, which is equivalent to the mid-point salary of an Assistant Primary School Master/Mistress or a Graduate Master/Mistress, for recruiting additional manpower for strengthening the teaching force so that a suitable teacher can be assigned to take up the duties of the SENCO. The SENCO would take up a certain amount of the teaching load in order to keep him/her abreast of the learning of students. The duties of the SENCO include coordinating matters related to the support for students with SEN, assisting the school management (i.e. principals and vice-principals) in planning the development of WSA to IE in school, leading the student support teams in the promotion of the WSA model, cultivating an inclusive whole school culture, supporting the learning needs of students with mental illness in collaboration with school guidance teams, and implementing promotional and developmental tasks and other system level work, such as teacher training.

7. To enhance the professional capability of SENCOs in leading the student support team of their schools to formulate, implement and review the school-based IE policy and support measures, the EDB has commissioned an overseas consultant to provide them with professional training. To date, the consultant has conducted a three-day induction course, including a half-day session for principals on the first day, and advanced courses for 6 days. SENCOs have commented positively about these courses. They considered the courses insightful, helpful in discerning their roles and duties as well as enhancing their capability in leadership and management. SENCOs have extensively applied the strategies learnt to their schools and have achieved encouraging results. The consultant has also carried out two networking activities for principals. There were principals indicating that the networking activities helped them understand how the school could facilitate SENCOs in performing their functions effectively at the administrative level.

8. In addition, the EDB has organised seven networking activities for SENCOs for building and strengthening their regional support network and promoting professional exchanges and sharing of experiences. Curriculum leaders, vice principals or senior teachers responsible for coordinating educational matters or curriculum development of participating schools have been invited to attend one of the networking activities to strengthen their collaboration with SENCOs. School personnel, local tertiary institutions, and non-governmental organisations have also been invited to share topics of particular concern to

SENCOs, such as monitoring the utilisation of resources and evaluating the effectiveness, making good use of community resources and strengthening of home-school co-operation.

Outcome Evaluation

9. The EDB-commissioned consultant has used methodologies such as surveys, questionnaires, focus group interviews and class observation to collect information and statistical data of participating schools, and to gauge the views of different stakeholders, including SENCOs, principals, teachers, students and parents. In the light of the data gathered, the consultant will assess the implications of the creation of the SENCO post on the implementation of WSA to IE, and explore school-based measures that can facilitate SENCOs in performing their functions more effectively to provide better support services for students with SEN.

10. Specifically, we have embarked on a three-year longitudinal data tracking in the 124 participating schools, collecting basic school information, examination results of core subjects of about 20% of students with SEN (about 2 250 students) and findings of questionnaire surveys of about 2 480 stakeholders. Apart from the above-mentioned quantitative information, the consultant also arranges for qualitative assessment for 40 schools through individual and focus group interviews with SENCOs, principals, students and parents, as well as class observation. By integrating and corroborating both quantitative and qualitative data, the on-going implications of the creation of the SENCO post on the implementation of WSA to IE can be evaluated comprehensively. Moreover, staff of the EDB have visited participating schools to discuss with principals and SENCOs about their work and the implementation of the pilot project. Support has been provided when necessary.

Observations

11. Based on the experience of participating schools in the first year of the pilot period, and the preliminary findings from the data and information collected by the consultant and us, we have the following observations:

- (i) The participating schools have, taken into account their individual situation and school-based needs, assigned teachers of different ranks to take up the SENCO role. For primary schools, the majority of SENCOs are at the rank of Assistant Primary School Master/Mistress (around 40%), with the rest being Certificated Master/Mistress, Assistant Master/Mistress and Primary School Master/Mistress. In secondary schools, the number of teachers at the

rank of Graduate Master/Mistress or Senior Graduate Master/Mistress taking up the post of SENCO is more or less the same (around 40% respectively), with the rest being Certificated Master/Mistress and Principal Graduate Master/Mistress. These schools are at different development stages in respect of IE. The number of students with SEN that they have to cater for and students' support needs are also different. Yet, the study shows that active participation and supervision of the school management (i.e. principals and vice-principals) in providing steer is an important success factor.

(ii) There have been positive changes in the implementation of IE in participating schools. For example:

- enhanced strategic planning and evaluation of SEN-related measures;
- increased concern about SEN matters at the school management level;
- improved communication among teachers, students and parents;
- enhanced teachers' awareness and understanding of the need to accept and support students with SEN;
- greater willingness by teachers to attend SEN-related training courses to enhance their professional capacity; and
- strengthened manpower for the student support teams to provide enhanced support for students with SEN.

(iii) SENCOs have worked with other units of their schools for provision of better support services for students with SEN, for example assisting teachers in deploying appropriate teaching strategies and assessing the effectiveness of teaching through lesson study. SENCOs in collaboration with school guidance teams also support the learning needs of students with mental illness by giving input from the perspectives of teaching and learning as well as resource deployment.

(iv) Teachers assigned as SENCOs under the pilot project have completed the Basic, Advanced and Thematic levels of training in special education. To help them perform their duties more effectively, SENCOs have been

attending training courses (details in paragraph 7) provided by the consultant under the pilot project. It is noted that the various strategies learnt from the SENCO training courses have enabled SENCOs to better understand students' support needs, and facilitate the provision of appropriate support services for the students by the school. Additional professional training is essential to the effective performance of the duties of SENCOs.

12. The pilot project has been implemented for about two years. The EDB will closely monitor its effectiveness with the consultant, and continue to provide SENCOs with training and support.

Advice Sought

13. Members are invited to note the progress of support measures for students with SEN and the pilot project.

Education Bureau
June 2017

Latest Progress of Support Measures for Students with Special Educational Needs

Early identification and early intervention for students with special educational needs (SEN)

Shortening the waiting time for assessment

1. The Child Assessment Service (CAS) provides comprehensive assessment and diagnosis for children under 12 years of age who are suspected to have developmental problems. After assessment, follow-up plans will be formulated according to the individual needs of children. In the past three years, nearly all new cases were seen within three weeks after registration. Due to the continuous increase in the demand for services provided by the CAS, the rate for completion of assessment for new cases within six months has dropped from 83% in 2014 to 61% in 2016. CAS has adopted a triage system to ensure that children with urgent and more serious conditions are accorded with higher priority in assessment. The actual waiting time depends on the complexity and conditions of individual cases.

2. Besides, the Department of Health (DH) has started preparing for the establishment of a new Child Assessment Centre (CAC) with a view to strengthening the manpower support and enhancing the service capacity to meet the rising demand of referred cases. As an interim measure, the DH will set up a temporary CAC in existing facilities to help shorten the waiting time. The DH is currently working closely with the Architectural Services Department on the preparation of fitting-out works for the temporary CAC.

3. At the primary and secondary school levels, school personnel who have concern about the learning, emotional and behavioural problems of their students may consult the educational psychologists on the formulation of appropriate strategies for early intervention. Among the cases referred to educational psychologists for assessment each year, an average of about 80% of the cases are assessed within two months while about 10% within two to four months. The waiting time for the remaining cases is longer due to some specific circumstances. There are cases in which the parents have requested to defer the assessment and cases in which assessment has to be held up pending the students' medical treatment. In any circumstances, schools adopt the principle of "intervention before assessment" approach to render support to their students to facilitate their learning and development.

Support for pre-school children with special needs

4. The Community Care Fund supported the programme of “Training Subsidy for Children who are on the Waiting List for Subvented Pre-school Rehabilitation Services” in December 2011 to provide subsidies for pre-school children in need so that they can acquire services provided by recognised service providers as soon as possible. The programme was incorporated into the Government’s regular assistance programme in October 2014. Since October 2016, the Social Welfare Department has also increased the training subsidy for eligible children waitlisted for special child care centres from \$3,867 to \$5,995 per month, in order to increase the training hours for these children from four sessions to six sessions per month. From the 2017/18 school year onwards, the Government will waive the service fees of special child care centres and provide a non-means-tested training subsidy for children on the waiting list of special child care centres. To this end, the Government will increase by about 1 500 subsidy places.

5. To strengthen the support for children with special needs, the Government, through the funding of the Lotteries Fund, implemented a two-year “Pilot Scheme on On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services” (Pilot Scheme) in phases since November 2015. Multi-disciplinary teams (comprising occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech therapists, clinical/educational psychologists, social workers and special child care workers), coordinated by 16 non-governmental organisations with experience in implementation of subvented pre-school rehabilitation services, provide about 3 000 rehabilitation service places for children with special needs who are attending over 480 kindergartens (KG) or kindergarten-cum-child care centres. The teams also provide professional support for teachers/child care workers and parents. The Chief Executive announced in the 2017 Policy Address that the Government will earmark an annual recurrent expenditure of \$460 million to convert the Pilot Scheme into a regular government subsidy programme after its conclusion, and increase the number of service places to 7,000 in phases. The Government has commissioned a consultancy team headed by the City University of Hong Kong to conduct an evaluative study on the Pilot Scheme with a view to formulating the modes and standards of the regularised services.

6. The EDB will also devise a teacher professional development framework to enhance teachers’ understanding of the developmental needs of KG students and their ability to identify and cater for learner diversity, including those at risk of developmental problems. Under the framework, more structured in-service training programmes will be offered for KG teachers. In addition, the EDB will set up a dedicated team of educational psychologists and professional staff to develop appropriate intervention models and teaching resource packages

for KG teachers and parents to support students at risk of developmental delay and deliver relevant professional training for KG teachers.

Resources and support for primary and secondary schools

Enhancing the monitoring of the deployment of Learning Support Grant (LSG) and keeping the existing funding mechanism under review

7. To further enhance the support for students with SEN in ordinary schools, the EDB has raised the ceiling of the LSG for public sector primary and secondary schools from \$1 million to \$1.5 million starting from the 2013/14 school year, and increased the grant rates of the LSG by 30% in the 2014/15 school year. With effect from the 2015/16 school year, the grant rates and ceiling of the LSG are adjusted annually according to the movement of the Composite Consumer Price Index, based on which the grant rates and ceiling¹ for the 2015/16 and 2016/17 school years have been increased by 3.1% and 2.4% respectively. Starting from the 2017/18 school year, the LSG will cover students with mental illness, hence providing schools with additional resources for enhancing their support to the learning, social, emotional and behavioural needs of these students and helping them overcome these transient difficulties. In sum, schools may pool together and deploy flexibly the LSG and other school resources for employing additional teachers, teaching assistants or hiring professional services, etc. to render appropriate support for students with SEN. The EDB has been monitoring schools on the deployment of the LSG. Apart from issuing a circular to advise schools of the guidelines on deployment of the LSG and the claw-back mechanism, the EDB's professional staff conduct regular school visits and organise training and sharing sessions for schools to ensure their proper deployment of resources for supporting students with SEN. Should undesirable situation be detected, we will issue letters to remind the schools concerned to make improvement. We also facilitate the exchange of experience and sharing of good practices in the use of resources, including the LSG, through various activities. We are updating the Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education for providing schools with more detailed guidance on making good use of resources and hire of professional services.

¹ The funding arrangements of LSG for the 2016/17 school year are:

- A basic provision of \$164,700 per school per annum for the first one to six student(s) requiring tier-3 support;
- A grant of \$27,450 per student per annum for the seventh and each of the other students requiring tier-3 support;
- A grant of \$13,725 per annum for each student requiring tier-2 support; and
- A ceiling at \$1,583,616 per school per annum.

School-based Educational Psychology Service (SBEPS)

8. Since the 2016/17 school year, the SBEPS has covered all public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools. For public sector schools with a large number of students with SEN, the ratio of educational psychologist to school has been improved progressively to 1:4 so that schools can provide more comprehensive and regular follow-up and intervention services for the students concerned and strengthen the preventive and developmental work. The EDB will continue to review the implementation of the SBEPS and enhance the service aptly so as to further improve the effectiveness of integrated education (IE).

9. The EDB is aware that schools and teachers are concerned about the staffing and workload. Over the past decade, we have incessantly sought to strengthen the manpower of primary and secondary schools for enhancing the quality of education and helping teachers strengthen their support to students with SEN. In fact, the respective student-to-teacher ratios of public sector secondary and primary schools have been improved from 18.1:1 and 19.1:1 in the 2004/05 school year to 11.9:1 and 14.2:1 in the 2016/17 school year. Furthermore, small class teaching has been implemented in public sector primary schools by phases and full implementation has been achieved since the 2014/15 school year. Small class teaching gives teachers more room to cater for students' diverse learning needs, including their SEN. Moreover, schools currently have professional teams, including guidance and counselling teachers, school social workers and educational psychologists who can take care of students with diverse needs in their respective professions.

Improving support for students with hearing impairment (HI)

10. The EDB has been keeping in view local and international researches and development in relation to teaching modes for students with HI. However, there is yet to have a teaching/support mode (such as sign bilingualism) been proved to be effective for students with HI. The EDB will continue to gauge views of stakeholders, and collaborate with professional organisations and schools to assist teachers in catering for the educational needs of students with HI more effectively. The EDB also works with tertiary institutions to explore ways to strengthen the support strategies for students with different types of SEN and to develop theory-driven and evidence-based teaching models for continuous improvement of the support services for students with SEN (including HI). Furthermore, schools may deploy various school-based and additional resources flexibly for supporting students with SEN (including HI). If additional resources are needed to try out school-based support models, schools may apply for various funding.

11. To ensure that the performance of hearing aids meet the needs of students with HI, the EDB has been reviewing from time to time the types, specifications and functions of hearing aids. For example, we have provided two hearing aids to those students with bilateral HI in need, enhanced the specifications of hearing aids, and increased the choices of hearing aids models.

Professional development of teachers

In-service teacher professional development

12. With a view to enhancing the professional capacity of teachers in catering for students with SEN, the EDB has launched training courses pitched at basic, advanced and thematic levels (BAT Course) back in the 2007/08 school year. The training targets and content have been reviewed regularly. To provide teachers with more opportunities to apply the knowledge acquired from the training courses, we have further enhanced the practical elements of the Advanced and Thematic courses starting from the 2014/15 school year. In the light of the position of teachers trained and the types and number of students with SEN enrolled in public sector ordinary schools, we updated in the 2015/16 school year the training targets² to be achieved by individual public sector ordinary schools by the 2019/20 school year in order to groom more teachers with the professional capacity of supporting students with SEN in each school.

13. As at the 2015/16 school year, 42% of teachers in public sector primary schools and over 24% of teachers in public sector secondary schools have completed 30 hours or more of structured training in special education. In terms of schools, nearly 100% of public sector primary schools and about 98% of public sector secondary schools have 10% or more of their teachers completed the special education training. About 87% of public sector primary schools have 30% or more of their teachers completed the said training.

14. In addition, the EDB also conducts school-based training on a need basis, such as workshops and seminars hosted by educational psychologists, to equip teachers with knowledge and skills to support students with SEN.

² The training targets to be achieved by each public sector ordinary school by the 2019/20 school year are as follows:

- (i) at least 15% to 25% of teachers will have completed the Basic Course;
- (ii) at least six to nine teachers will have completed the Advanced Course; and
- (iii) at least six to nine teachers will have completed the Thematic Courses (with at least one teacher completed the course(s) under each category as far as possible).

Pilot/experimental support programmes collaborated by the specialists of the EDB and teachers to explore effective ways to support students with SEN

15. Launched in the 2011/12 school year, the project on the Tiered Intervention Model on the Learning and Teaching of Chinese Language in Primary Schools (the Model) has been proceeding smoothly. To date, the professional support offered under the project has benefitted a total of 213 schools. On the whole, participating schools have mastered the strategies adopted by the Model, thereby enabling more students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) in reading and writing to receive early and appropriate intervention. To enhance the sustainability of the project and facilitate more extensive implementation of the Model by schools, the teaching resources and computerized assessment tools in reading and writing developed for the Model were revised and distributed to all the primary schools in January 2017.

16. We have consolidated effective practices for enhancing the support for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) at junior primary level from the Pilot Project on Enhancement of Support Services for Students with ASD. These practices have been compiled into an operational manual and distributed to all primary schools. With a view to facilitating schools' mastery of the evidence-based support model and strategies, the EDB has extended the Pilot Project from the 2014/15 to 2016/17 for its further development. Under the extended pilot, the Comprehensive School Support Model for senior primary and junior secondary levels has been developed and tried out. From the 2017/18 to 2018/19 school years, we will continue to develop a support model with strategies and related teaching and learning resources for supporting the learning and development of senior secondary school students with ASD having average to high average intelligence.

17. To enhance the support for students with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD), the EDB has launched the "Development of Executive Skills: Resource Package" for primary schools and "Coaching Programme on Executive Skills" for secondary schools respectively to enhance the executive skills and self-management ability of students concerned. Moreover, we have also produced a resource package based on the effective practices identified in the pilot project on "Enhancement of Executive Skills: A Classroom-based Approach" for supporting students with AD/HD at primary school level. The resource package was distributed to all primary schools so that schools can enhance the learning and classroom performance of their students through enhanced learning and teaching and classroom management strategies.

18. To support the learning of students with language learning difficulties, we have implemented the Curriculum-based Language Support Programme in secondary schools. The programme facilitates the integration of language learning strategies in daily teaching through collaborative lesson planning, lesson observation and experience sharing activities. The resources developed from the programme were compiled and disseminated to teachers and speech therapists through an online platform in early 2016.

19. To enhance the discourse comprehension of students with language learning difficulties, a resource package on Discourse Comprehension Strategies was developed. The resource package was distributed to schools for use by teachers and speech therapists. Workshops on the application of the discourse comprehension strategies in daily teaching have been conducted for teachers on a regular basis since February 2015.

Senior Secondary Curriculum and assessment

New Academic Structure (NAS) Medium-term Review and strengthening support for students with SEN

20. The NAS medium-term review was completed and the Report on the New Academic Structure Medium-term Review and Beyond was published in November 2015. Under the principle of “One Curriculum Framework for All”, the EDB has implemented a series of measures to cater for learner diversity, including the provision of adapted curriculum, special examination arrangements and professional development activities for teachers to facilitate schools in catering for students’ learning needs.

21. To cater for the learning needs of senior secondary school students with SEN, the EDB is updating curriculum guides of different Key Learning Areas and the Secondary Education Curriculum Guide. The section on learner diversity of these guides will be enriched as appropriate with additional information on, among others, support for students with SEN. The updating of these guides will complete in 2017 for schools’ reference.

22. The Task Group on Special Examination Arrangements for Candidates with Specific Learning Disabilities of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) has completed a pilot study on the use of speech-to-text software by candidates with dyslexia in public examinations of the Liberal Studies subject. In the light of the recommendation of the task group, eligible candidates with dyslexia having severe difficulties in reading and writing can apply to use speech-to-text software in taking the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination of Liberal Studies from 2017. Regarding the

scope of application of the said software (e.g. extending to subjects other than Liberal Studies), the HKEAA will gauge the views of different stakeholders and examine the assessment objectives of different subjects in order to ensure that the arrangements are fair to all the candidates.

Establishing funds for developing and acquiring assistive technologies for students with SEN

23. Currently, the EDB has put in place various funding schemes to support the learning needs of students with SEN, including the provision of assistive technologies needed. For example, the EDB provides public sector primary and secondary schools as well as special schools with the Composite Information Technology Grant every year specially for meeting the diversified needs of schools on e-learning, including procurement of information technology facilities for students with SEN. Moreover, as one of the key measures of the Fourth Strategy on Information Technology in Education, Wi-Fi infrastructure will be set up in campuses of primary, secondary and special schools by phases to facilitate e-learning through the use of mobile learning devices. Students with SEN can also benefit from this measure.

Higher education

Implementing IE in the higher education sector

24. To facilitate students with SEN to pursue University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded programmes and adapt to campus life, the UGC approved in September 2014 to set up a \$20 million one-off funding scheme for the eight UGC-funded universities to purchase necessary study aids and equipment for students with SEN; strengthen training among the academic and administrative staff to enhance their awareness towards students with SEN; and support student bodies to organise events and activities to promote the integration of students with SEN. After careful consideration of the proposals, the UGC has disbursed funding to universities to implement the approved initiatives for two years from 1 July 2015. The scheme will complete in mid-2017. The UGC-funded universities have published on their websites their existing policies, services and support for students with SEN, which are subject to review from time to time.

Public education and complaint handling

Stepping up public education

25. The EDB is fully aware of the importance of public education in promoting IE and has been conducting publicity activities systematically through different media and channels. Relevant activities held by the EDB in the past year include the following:

- In October 2016, an ETV Programme titled (《家校同心 畫出彩虹》) on the theme of home-school collaboration was broadcast.
- In December 2016, the EDB participated in the “Learning and Teaching Expo 2016” to introduce the Whole School Approach to IE and the Resource Schools on Whole School Approach, showcasing these schools’ support measures for students with SEN and their support services provided to other schools.
- Pamphlets on various topics, including the one on Early Identification and Intervention Programme for Primary One Students with Learning Difficulties which is available in Chinese, English and seven ethnic minorities languages, have been produced and uploaded onto the website of the EDB. In addition, from November 2016, a series of ten articles providing tips for nurturing children with SEN were published in a local parenting magazine.
- An online Special Education Newsletter (titled 《融情》) has been published regularly on the EDB website to promote the concept and measures of IE, the good support strategies adopted by the sector, and the learning characteristics of students with SEN so as to help parents and the public gain a better understanding of IE policy and support measures. Up to March 2017, 40 issues of the Newsletter have been uploaded online for viewing by the public.

Enhancement of complaint-handling mechanism

26. The “Enhanced School Complaint Management Arrangements” (Enhanced Arrangements) will be fully implemented in all public sector and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools starting from 1 September 2017. Schools are required to establish/enhance their school-based complaint handling mechanisms with reference to the “Guidelines for Handling

School Complaints” provided by the EDB, consult teachers and parents, seek the endorsement of the school-based complaint handling mechanisms by the Incorporated Management Committees/School Management Committees and arrange for staff to attend the relevant training programmes. Schools are also required to inform their stakeholders about the school-based mechanisms and procedures for handling complaints through appropriate channels, such as circulars, staff meetings, Parent-Teacher Association and school websites, etc. The above-mentioned mechanisms and procedures are also applicable to matters related to students with SEN.

Further support for students with needs

Formulating individual education plans for students with SEN

27. Currently, various government departments are performing their respective functions and have strengthened collaboration with each other in different ways for specific areas/issues in supporting students with SEN. Actions have also been taken jointly to improve/refine the existing mechanism where necessary. Different countries or regions have different arrangements. In view of the difference in education systems, contexts and culture, different systems and practices may give rise to different problems.

28. After making reference to evidence-based research findings and reviewing the practices in different countries/regions, the EDB is of the view that whether a student with SEN is in need of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is subject to the student’s support need, which is a professional judgment and decision of the school concerned. The EDB advises schools against formulating IEPs for all students with SEN as a rule regardless of the circumstances of the students. With the efforts of the EDB, the 3-Tier Intervention Model is generally adopted by schools to support students with SEN, with IEPs formulated and implemented for students where necessary. Schools review the progress of students regularly, adjust the support level accordingly and arrange for timely and structured support so as to provide the most appropriate resources and services to students with varying needs. In fact, schools also develop individual support plans for different types of students in the light of their needs. For example, there are the “Coaching Programme on Executive Skills” for students with AD/HD, the Speech Therapy treatment plan for students with speech and language impairment, and individual teaching plans for students with ASD. It is more effective for schools to implement IE through the Whole School Approach to improve their culture, policy and practices, hence enhancing the efficacy of support for students with SEN. We will continue to closely monitor the implementation of IE and prudently consider all feasible improvement measures by making reference to the developments of other places.

Strengthening the support for students with mental derangement under the existing IE system

29. The multi-disciplinary teams of the Hospital Authority (HA) provide a series of appropriate treatment and training for children with mental health needs with a view to enhancing their ability in communication, socialisation, emotion management, problem solving, learning and life skills, etc. Knowledge about the diseases is also provided to the parents and carers concerned in order to enhance their understanding of the symptoms and treatment needs of the patients. Currently, HA provides early identification, assessment and treatment services for about 7 000 new patients every year. The HA has put in place an established referral and triage system at psychiatric specialist out-patient clinics to ensure that patients are provided appropriate support and timely medical attention according to their conditions. The HA has further strengthened the child and adolescent psychiatric services in each cluster in the past few years, and will continue to review and monitor its services to ensure that they suit the needs of patients.

30. The EDB has promoted the mental health and well-being of students and supported students with mental health needs at three levels, namely “Universal”, “Selective” and “Indicated”. The objective of the universal level of work is to promote the mental health and well-being of students. The EDB has been launching various mental health programmes and other school-based programmes aiming to increase students’ resilience and adversity coping skills, and promoting mental health and well-being as well as life and death education in schools through value education. As for the selective level of work, the EDB will arrange relevant professional development programmes for teachers, which include elementary training for teachers at large and in-depth training for designated teachers. We will also develop screening tools and resource teaching materials to enhance teachers’ awareness of the mental health of students, and help teachers identify students with mental health needs for providing necessary support at an early stage. On the indicated level of work, schools will arrange multi-disciplinary case conferences when necessary for health care professional (such as psychiatrists, and nurses), educational psychologists and school personnel (including school social workers and student guidance personnel) to jointly consider appropriate supporting strategies for students. In addition, as mentioned in paragraph 7 above, starting from the 2017/18 school year, the LSG for public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools will cover students with mental illness in order to help schools cater for their learning, social, emotional and behavioural needs.

31. The EDB will continue to work with the HA for the appropriate coordination, review and enhancement of the existing support services as and when necessary.