

For discussion
on 2 March 2018

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Support to students with special educational needs in the transition from kindergarten to primary school and possible areas of improvement in Integrated Education

Purpose

This paper aims to brief Members on (a) the arrangement for students with special educational needs (SEN) regarding their transition from kindergarten (KG) to primary school, (b) the related support to them under the Integrated Education (IE) policy, (c) the initial assessment of our review of various support initiatives under the IE policy and (d) the direction of improvements.

Background

2. To support KG students with special needs or at risk of developmental delay, the Government has been providing different services through the collaborative efforts of various bureaux/departments. The Food and Health Bureau and Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) are responsible for assessment and rehabilitation services respectively for the students in need of such services. The Education Bureau (EDB) arranges teacher training to enhance teachers' professional capacity to identify KG students with developmental needs early and to provide them with appropriate support.

3. The LWB launched a two-year Pilot Scheme on On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services (the OPRS Pilot Scheme) since the 2015/16 school year, providing about 3 000 training places covering more than 480 KGs or Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres through 16 participating non-governmental organisations (NGOs), under which on-site services are provided by the multi-disciplinary service teams from NGOs to participating KGs. Under the OPRS Pilot Scheme, multi-disciplinary service teams of NGOs, which are composed of social workers, speech therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, clinical psychologists/ educational

psychologists and special child care workers, will offer on-site rehabilitation services and training to children with special needs, supplemented by training at centres with rehabilitation facilities. The service teams will also give professional advice to KG teachers to assist them in taking care of children with special needs. They will also provide support for parents in fostering positive attitude and developing effective skills in nurturing their children with special needs. The Government has set aside an additional provision of about \$180 million for subsidising the 16 operating NGOs to continue providing the service places in the 2017/18 school year under the OPRS Pilot Scheme which was announced to be regularized in the 2018/19 school year and the number of service places will be increased from about 3 000 to 7 000 in two years¹.

4. Currently, there is an established collaborative mechanism among the EDB and the Child Assessment Centres (CACs) of the Department of Health (DH) and the Hospital Authority (HA). CACs will, upon seeking the consent of parents, send the assessment information of the upcoming Primary One (P1) students to the EDB for onward transmission to the recipient public sector schools before the commencement of the new school year. CACs will provide/update their findings before passing the children's assessment information to the EDB. In general, the assessment information from CACs would reach the EDB by July every year so that the EDB could send the assessment information to schools in August to facilitate the schools to arrange timely and suitable learning support services for the children.

5. The EDB has also been collaborating with NGOs in running annual seminars for parents of lower KG children with special needs to facilitate their understanding of the support for students with SEN offered by public sector ordinary schools which will in turn enable them to make an informed school choice for their children. Besides, seminars are also organised for KG teachers to enhance their knowledge of the support for students with SEN offered by public sector ordinary primary schools and special schools respectively, so that they could provide practical advice to parents on helping the children to adapt smoothly to the primary school life.

¹ The first phase will take place in October 2018, and the current 3 000 service places will be increased to 5 000. The second phase will take place in October 2019, and the service places will be increased from 5 000 to 7 000.

Enhancement Measures for Transition from KG to Primary School

6. In view of the regularization of the OPRS Pilot Scheme, the EDB and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) have agreed on a mechanism to ensure pre-school children with special needs under OPRS and other subvented rehabilitation services² under the SWD will be given appropriate support when they proceed to primary schooling. Specifically, the specialists and special child care workers of OPRS and the other rehabilitation services will offer their professional comments on the progress of the children with special needs in various developmental domains by completing a report form before the children begin primary schooling. With the coordination of the SWD and the EDB and subject to parental consent, the report form of individual children will be sent from their pre-school centres/KGs to their designated public sector primary schools before September. Based on the progress information provided by OPRS or the other subvented rehabilitation services and/or the assessment information of CACs mentioned in paragraph 4 above, the primary schools will plan and provide appropriate support services for the respective P1 students at the earliest time possible.

7. At the same time, the EDB will strengthen the ‘Early Identification and Intervention Programme for Primary One Students with Learning Difficulties’ (EII) in all public sector primary schools to ensure that those who have received pre-school rehabilitation services can be further assessed if deemed appropriate and supported at an early stage; whereas those not having been identified at the pre-school stage can be identified and provided with suitable intervention. From the 2018/19 school year onwards, professional officers of the EDB will visit the primary schools concerned within six to eight weeks upon the commencement of a new school year. Officers will understand from the primary schools their support services for the respective P1 students with SEN based on the information from CACs and pre-school centres/KGs and will offer advice as appropriate, such as acquisition of relevant services to meet the needs of the students.

8. Furthermore, according to the EII procedure, teachers would start observing the learning performance, social adjustment and self-care abilities of P1 students through classroom interaction, review of homework assignments and individual contact at the beginning of the school year, and

² The other subvented rehabilitation services include early education and training centres, integrated programme in kindergarten-cum-child care centres and special child care centres.

complete an Observation Checklist for Teachers (OCT) during the period from December to January. The student support team, related teachers and the school-based educational psychologist (EP) would hold meetings in January to February for identifying students with mild or marked learning difficulties according to the results of the OCT and learning performance of the students. Under the principle of ‘intervention before assessment’³, they would also formulate and implement intervention plans for the students identified and inform their parents of the results of identification and support arrangement.

Implementation of IE

9. Under the IE policy, public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools are requested to implement the Whole School Approach (WSA) to support not only the P1 students with SEN but also students with SEN at various levels through the 3-Tier Intervention Model⁴. The EDB has been providing schools with additional resources on top of regular subvention, professional support and teacher training for the aforesaid purpose. The estimated additional expenditure in the 2017/18 school year is about \$1,469 million which represents an increase by around 71% as compared to the expenditure of \$859 million in the 2008/09 school year⁵.

10. While details of the support measures for IE are at Appendix, we would like to highlight the recent major enhancements as follows:

- (a) Of the additional resources for public sector ordinary schools, the LSG is the major one. LSG is a per capita grant covering eight types of students with SEN⁶ before the 2017/18 school year. This grant enables schools to pool and deploy resources holistically and flexibly to render appropriate support services to students with SEN based on their needs, including employing teachers and/or teaching

³ Teachers are required to observe students’ performance on an on-going basis and provide intervention once a student is identified to have a learning difficulty without the need to wait for the formal assessment and diagnosis by professionals.

⁴ Tier-1 support refers to the use of quality teaching in regular classrooms to help students with mild or transient learning difficulties; tier-2 support refers to “add on” intervention, such as pull-out or after-school remedial programmes and hired professional services, etc., for students with persistent learning difficulties; tier-3 support refers to intensive individualised support, including drawing up an individual education plan, for students with persistent and severe learning difficulties.

⁵ The 2008/09 school year is the first year when the Learning Support Grant was allotted to public sector ordinary secondary schools.

⁶ Up to the 2016/17 school year, the provision of LSG covered students with specific learning difficulties, intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorders, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, physical disability, visual impairment, hearing impairment and speech and language impairment.

assistants, and/or hire of various professional services. The EDB has raised the ceiling of LSG from \$1 million to \$1.5 million for each school per annum starting from the 2013/14 school year and the grant rates have been increased by 30% in the 2014/15 school year. Starting from the 2015/16 school year, the grant rates and ceiling are adjusted annually according to the changes in the Composite Consumer Price Index (CCPI). In addition, starting from the 2017/18 school year, LSG also covers students with mental illness in order to help schools cater for the learning, social, emotional and behavioural needs of the students.

- (b) Regarding professional support, the school-based educational psychology service (SBEPS) has covered all public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools in the 2016/17 school year. From the same school year, the ratio of EP to school has gradually been improved to 1:4 for schools with a large number of students with SEN. The better ratio enables the schools to provide more comprehensive and regular intervention and follow up services to the students, and to strengthen the schools' preventive and developmental work.
- (c) Starting from the 2017/18 school year, the EDB has regularised the Pilot Project on Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCO) under the Community Care Fund; and will, by phases in three years, provide each public sector ordinary primary and secondary school with an additional post in the teaching staff establishment to facilitate the assignment of a designated teacher in schools as SENCO to support IE. The initiative is so implemented as schools are at different stages in the implementation of IE and differ in readiness to assign a dedicated teacher trained in special education to take up the challenging role of SENCO as well as allowing time of local tertiary institutions to develop local training for SENCOs. We have implemented the provision in 244 public sector ordinary schools (126 primary schools and 118 secondary schools) in the 2017/18 school year. In the 2018/19 school year, the SENCO provision would be extended to about another 35% of schools and the remaining public sector schools would have their SENCO provision by the 2019/20 school year.

Issues relating to Various Support Initiatives under IE

11. The development of IE policy is on-going and there is room for enhancement. We have reviewed the implementation of various support measures and listened to the views of different stakeholders⁷ on an on-going basis, and are prepared to introduce improvement measures when necessary and practicable. We assess that there are areas requiring revamp and improvements:

(a) Learning Support Grant

12. LSG is provided to schools according to the number of students with SEN and academic low achievers (for primary schools) enrolled in the school and the tier of support the students require. Although LSG provides schools with greater flexibility in deploying resources to employ contract teachers and/or teaching assistants and to bring in expertise to offer various support services for students with SEN, there have been concerns over the stability of the teaching force as the employment of the contract teachers by LSG should be reviewed every school year and there is a possibility of contract termination. Continuation of support services for the students with SEN and the skills and experiences transfer among teachers in these schools may also be affected.

13. Besides, there are comments that the capping of LSG at a ceiling may put schools with large number of students with SEN in a disadvantageous position as the additional resources they receive do not correspond to their total number of students with SEN and the tier of support the students require. In secondary schools, those admitting more academic low achievers usually have a higher concentration of students with SEN. These schools, having already reached the ceiling of LSG provision, face the challenge of having to serve more and more students with SEN due to an increasing number of students with SEN identified over the years as a result of the improvement in assessment tools and identification procedures as well as increased awareness among teachers and parents.

⁷ The EDB set up the Task Force on Integrated Education in Mainstream Schools (IE Task Force) in 2005, comprising representatives from the school sector, other government departments, NGOs and parent groups. Through regular meetings, the EDB briefs the members of the IE Task Force on the progress of implementing IE and seeks their views on improvement measures. In addition to this formal communication platform, we also keep in touch and, where necessary, meet with school councils, NGOs and parent groups to strengthen communication and co-operation.

14. Currently a basic provision amounting to six times of the LSG for one tier-3 student will be given to schools with one to six student(s) requiring tier-3 support. The comparatively low number of tier-3 students identified casts doubt on whether the set-up of the basic provision has reduced the incentive for schools to proactively identify students who need tier-3 support. It is necessary to review the effectiveness of the design of the basic provision to ensure that schools having more students identified to be with more challenging problems could receive the appropriate level of support.

(b) Intensive Remedial Teaching Programme and IE Programme

15. More than half of the public sector primary schools and several secondary schools⁸, due to respective school-based consideration, still retain Intensive Remedial Teaching Programme(s) (IRTP)⁹ or IE Programme¹⁰, and yet to adopt or fully adopt LSG, despite repeated appeal by the EDB. It is worth noting that target students of IRTP are academic low achievers, students with specific learning difficulties and students with intellectual disability only while the target students for IE Programme are students with hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical disability, intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorders. In other words, the provision under IRTP and IE Programme, viz. additional teacher(s), is not designed to cater for the needs of students with different SEN across the spectrum. There is a need to review this situation to strengthen the support given by these schools for students with SEN.

16. In the past months, we have conducted several consultation sessions with the schools concerned to gauge their views on possible improvement areas. They in general acknowledge the benefits of using LSG to support the students of SEN. But they show grave concern about the deletion of the IRTP / IE teaching posts should they opt to change to the LSG mode. This concern needs to be addressed should there be any change to the IRTP / IE Programme.

⁸ In the 2017/18 school year, there are 241 primary schools still operating IRTP (including 90 schools under the Mixed Mode, i.e. operating one IRTP and receiving LSG with a ceiling capped at \$0.35 million; 11 under the Migration Mode, i.e. migrating from the Mixed Mode to fully adopting LSG during a grace period of 6 school years with LSG ceiling capped at \$0.6 million; 25 schools also operating the IE Programme) and 8 secondary schools still maintaining the IE Programme.

⁹ Please see paragraph 1.3 under (I) Additional Resources in the [Appendix](#).

¹⁰ Please see paragraph 1.3 under (I) Additional Resources in the [Appendix](#).

(c) School-based Speech Therapy Services

17. Appropriate speech and language development is important to students' learning and social development. Public sector ordinary primary schools are provided with Enhanced Speech Therapy Grant (ESTG) while secondary schools are provided with LSG to provide school-based speech therapy services (SBSTS) for their students with speech and language impairment (SLI). It is noted that primary schools forming school clusters to employ school-based speech therapists (SBSTs) will increase the time the SBSTs provide services at school, and thus the SBSTS can be more comprehensive, diverse and frequent. In addition, employment of SBSTs with the provision of posts, as compared to the provision of grant for schools to arrange SBSTS, will increase the stability of SBSTs and thus the continuity of SBSTS will be enhanced. There have been suggestions to extend the practice of employing SBSTs by clustered schools to all public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools, which will also be conducive to ensuring appropriate and sufficient transition support to students from KG to primary school.

(d) School-based Educational Psychology Service

18. SBEPS has covered all public sector schools in the 2016/17 school year, and we have been enhancing the SBEPS by progressively improving the ratio of EP to school to 1:4 for schools with a large number of students with SEN. We note the increasing demand for expediting the enhanced provision in response to the heightened needs of schools for professional support in catering for students with diverse educational needs at the developmental, preventive and remedial levels.

Direction being taken in formulating the enhancement proposals

19. In response to the above-mentioned assessment of major issues / concerns, we are exploring the feasibility of improving the various measures along the following direction:

- (a) We would consider re-structuring the additional resources provided for all public sector schools under LSG, IRTP and IE Programme. The objective is to help strengthen the stability of schools' teaching force and the capacity of the teachers in supporting students under the IE policy. The re-structuring of resources should also help

address the challenges faced by those schools with a high concentration of students with SEN but with LSG capped at the ceiling.

- (b) We would revamp the mode of basic provision for tier-3 support under LSG to ensure that schools having more students identified to be with more challenging problems can receive the appropriate level of support they need.
- (c) We would consider enhancing the SBSTS with reference to the experience of forming clustered schools to provide a more comprehensive SBSTS for students with SLI to further strengthen the prevention and enhancement domains apart from the remediation work. How the SBSTS can help ensure the timely provision of support services to the P1 students in their transition from KG will also be studied.
- (d) We would further enhance the provision of SBEPS to enable schools to better support their students with diverse educational needs. Specifically, we would consider ways to increase the supply of EPs, which is essential to the extension of the Enhanced SBEPS.

Advice Sought

20. Members are invited to note the content of this paper and offer views on the support to students with SEN in the transition from KG to primary school and advise on the direction of the proposed enhancement of the support measures for the implementation of the IE policy.

Education Bureau
February 2018

Measures to support schools in implementing IE

(I) Additional Resources

1. The additional resources provided for public sector ordinary schools include grants, additional teacher(s) and/or teaching assistant(s). The major items are:

1.1 Learning Support Grant (LSG)

LSG is a per capita grant provided to schools according to the number of students with SEN and academic low achievers (for primary schools) enrolled in the school and the tier of support the students require.

1.2 Enhanced Speech Therapy Grant (ESTG)

Since the 2009/10 school year, the ESTG has been provided as a recurrent grant for eligible public sector primary schools to employ their own speech therapists or procuring school-based speech therapy services to support their students with speech and language impairment (SLI). They are provided with a basic grant according to the number of approved classes each year and a top-up grant based on the number of students with moderate or severe SLI.

1.3 Intensive Remedial Teaching Programme (IRTP) / Integrated Education (IE) Programme

Under IRTP, the target students counted for provision are academic low achievers and students with specific learning difficulties (SpLD) or intellectual disability (ID). Schools are provided with an additional teacher in the establishment and a class grant per IRTP. Under the IE Programme, schools are provided with an additional Certificated Master/Mistress with five or more students with ID, hearing impairment (HI), visual impairment (VI), physical disability and autism spectrum disorders (ASD).

1.4 Additional graduate teacher(s) to support Academic Low Achievers

The EDB provides additional resources for secondary schools to support their students with low academic achievement. In the 2017/18 school year, eligible public sector ordinary secondary

schools have been provided up to about 6 additional teachers.

(II) Professional Support

2. School-based educational psychologists (EPs) provide regular professional support services for schools covering remedial, preventive and developmental work in catering for students' diverse educational needs at the school system, teacher support, and student support levels. Schools with Enhanced SBEPS are provided with more frequent visits by EPs for comprehensive and regular follow-up to students as well as intervention services to the schools concerned based on their needs.
3. Regarding the professional development for school-based speech therapists (SBSTs), other than the regular professional development training seminars and workshops, the EDB arranged Speech Therapists Learning Circle meetings for employed SBSTs to allow a platform for professional learning for better support of students with SLI and implementation of SBSTS. Quality Assurance school visits are arranged to ensure the quality of SBSTS.
4. To support students with SpLD in reading and writing, professional support has been rendered to primary schools adopting the tiered-support model on the teaching of Chinese Language in junior primary classes. The project has been extended in the 2017/18 school year on developing tier-2 resources for P4 / P5 students with literacy problems.
5. To enhance the capacity of schools in catering for students with ASD, (1) the Pilot Project on Enhancement of Support Services for Students with ASD at junior primary level was launched in the 2011/12 school year. The EDB has extended the project from the 2014/15 to 2016/17 school years, under which a Comprehensive School Support Model was developed and tried out at the senior primary and junior secondary levels. (2) The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust and the University of Hong Kong launched the JC A-Connect: Jockey Club Autism Support Network in primary and secondary schools in the 2015/16 school year. (3) An evidence-based model with strategies and related teaching and learning resources will be developed in the 2017/18 and 2018/19 school years for students with ASD having average to high average intelligence in senior secondary schools.

6. For supporting primary school students with AD/HD, the EDB published the Resource Package on “Development of Executive Skills” in the 2009/10 school year to strengthen students’ executive skills through school-based group training programme, and the resource package on “Enhancement of Executive Skills: A Classroom-based Approach” in the 2015/2016 school year. For supporting secondary school students with AD/HD, the EDB published the “Coaching Programme on Executive Skills” to enhance students’ self-management skills as well as the Parents Education Pamphlet Pack for supporting parents whose children are diagnosed with AD/HD in the 2013/14 school year.
7. The EDB has been implementing the Curriculum-based Language Support Programme (CLASP) in secondary schools and school-based programmes on Discourse Comprehension Strategies in primary schools by integrating language learning strategies in daily teaching of teachers. The resources developed from these programmes have been uploaded onto an online platform and distributed to schools and their parent-teacher associations.
8. The EDB has been providing free hearing aids and related services to students with HI. Since the 2010/11 school year, the EDB has provided two hearing aids for students with HI in need of binaural hearing aids for bilateral listening and shortened the replacement period from 5 years to 3 years. Further enhancement measures on the specifications of the hearing aids have been provided since the 2014/15 school year. 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 provided by the schools for children with HI, subject to the consent of their parents.
9. To better support students with VI attending ordinary schools, the EDB provides subvention to the Ebenezer School for operating the Resource Support Programme. Resource teachers and braillists employed under this programme will provide necessary supportive services for students who have moderate to severe low vision or total blindness in ordinary schools.

(III) Teacher Training

10. To enhance the professional capacity of teachers in catering for students

with SEN, the EDB has implemented a teacher professional development framework on IE since the 2007/08 school year. Under the framework, structured training courses pitched at Basic, Advanced and Thematic levels, are conducted for serving teachers and training targets are set. The targets were revised in the 2015/16 school year¹¹ taking into account the position of teachers trained in public sector ordinary schools and the types and number of students with SEN enrolled in ordinary school.

11. Starting from the 2017/18 school year, the EDB conducts professional development programme on mental health. The programme includes elementary training for teachers at large and in-depth training for designated teachers. It is required that in the three-year period as from the 2017/18 school year, at least one teacher and at least one designated teacher per school will have completed the Elementary Course and In-depth Course respectively.

¹¹ All public sector ordinary schools are required to achieve the following training targets by the end of the 2019/20 school year:

- (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 completing the course(s) under each category as far as possible).