



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部教育局
Education Bureau
Government Secretariat, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

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29 July 2019

Ms Angel WONG,
Clerk to Panel on Education,
Legislative Council Complex,
1 Legislative Council Road,
Central,
Hong Kong

Dear Ms WONG,

Panel on Education
Follow-up to Meeting on 3 May 2019

Thank you for your letter dated 7 May 2019. The Education Bureau's response to the four motions passed under the agenda item of "Enhanced support measures for schools to cater for students with special educational needs and proposed Member's Bill on special educational needs" is set out at the Annex.

Yours sincerely,

(Verena LAU)

for Secretary for Education

Response by the Education Bureau

(1)

Since 1983, the former Education Department has provided a range of intensive remedial services for students with significant low academic achievement, including the operation of Resource Class in public sector ordinary primary schools. Starting from September 2000, the Resource Class was renamed as Intensive Remedial Teaching Programme (IRTP) to encourage schools to get rid of the concept of “class” and to enhance the support services through the Whole School Approach. Similarly, the target students of IRTP are academic low achievers (ALA), including students with specific learning difficulties and students with intellectual disability (ID). The Integrated Education (IE) Programme was implemented in 1997. The target students are students with hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical disability, ID and autism spectrum disorders. Under IRTP and IE Programme, schools are provided with additional manpower to support the students in need. In view of the fact that the two programmes are not designed to cater for all types of students with special educational needs (SEN), the Education Bureau (EDB) launched the New Funding Mode in the 2003/04 school year and provided schools with the Learning Support Grant (LSG) according to the number of students with SEN and ALAs (applicable to primary schools) and the tier of support they require. Schools may flexibly deploy the grant to provide students with various support services. We have been encouraging schools to switch to the use of LSG in supporting students with different types of SEN.

Starting from the 2019/20 school year, the EDB will consolidate various subvented programmes for IE. LSG will replace IRTP and IE Programme and be extended to all public sector ordinary schools. Under the enhanced LSG, each public sector ordinary school will be provided with a grant for flexible deployment according to the number of students with SEN enrolled and the tier of support they require. About 80% of schools will be provided with regular teaching posts converted or created on account of LSG, amounting to about 1 000 teaching posts in total. The restructuring of various subvented programmes for IE and enhancement of LSG involve an additional expenditure of about \$300 million. For schools operating IRTP and IE Programme, the EDB has put in place a special arrangement for retaining all the teachers under these programmes in the establishment. Specifically, in the 2019/20 school

year, if the additional teaching post(s) to be created through conversion or provision under LSG is/are insufficient to retain all the IRTP or IE Programme teachers, schools with teaching post vacancies within the staff establishment, including frozen teaching post vacancies in the establishment or vacancies arising from wastage (such as retirement or resignation of serving teachers) or increase in the number of classes, should make rectification as soon as possible. This is a long-established practice. If schools do not have any teaching post vacancies, part of the LSG can be converted into additional regular teaching post(s) for retaining teachers in the establishment. Overall speaking, public sector ordinary schools will have enhanced provision of additional resources and a stable teaching force to enhance the effectiveness in supporting students with SEN.

The EDB conducted a series of consultations with stakeholders before formulating and implementing the above enhancement measures. From October 2017 to June 2018, we consulted school sponsoring bodies, school councils, school head associations, the Task Force on Integrated Education in Mainstream Schools, parent groups, public sector primary and secondary schools as well as Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), etc. On 2 March 2018, we briefed the Panel on Education of the Legislative Council of the review and directions of enhancements with regard to IE. Basically, mainstream views concurred that providing schools with a stable teaching force and flexibility in deployment of additional resources should be the principles underpinning the EDB's implementation of the enhancement measures. The current series of enhancement measures was drawn by the EDB after taking into account the mainstream views of stakeholders, as well as the recommendations on IE put forward in Report No. 70 of the Director of Audit and Report No. 70 of the Public Accounts Committee.

To let schools understand of the implementation arrangement of the enhancement measures to be introduced in the 2019/20 school year, briefing sessions were held for public sector ordinary schools from late October to early November 2018 to explain the details. In addition, views from schools were gauged for fine-tuning the implementation details. We also sent a letter to public sector ordinary schools on 10 December 2018 to explain the preparation work to be made for the 2019/20 school year, with briefing materials attached, for them to make early preparation. Our inspectors have, during their school visits, further explained to schools the LSG arrangements for the coming school

year according to individual schools' situation. On 29 March 2019, we issued a circular setting out the details of the enhanced LSG was issued. In the light of the above, the enhancement measures on IE to be introduced in the 2019/20 school year were formulated after in-depth and extensive consultations and careful detailed planning. Throughout the process, we maintained communication with schools to let them get prepared for the deployment of stable teaching force, and the flexible deployment of additional resources and enhanced professional support to cater for their students with SEN.

(2)

With the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Ordinance and the Code of Practice on Education issued under the Ordinance, students with SEN are protected from disability discrimination. Educational institutions should not discriminate against students with disabilities, and should provide reasonable accommodation for students with special needs, including making adaptations to teaching, communication and assessment methods. The EDB has been actively promoting IE in accordance with five basic principles, namely “early identification”, “early intervention”, “Whole School Approach (WSA)”, “home-school co-operation” and “cross-sector collaboration”, in the hope of enabling ordinary schools to provide a least restrictive learning environment for students with SEN, so that they are offered equal opportunities to learn, thrive and unleash potential together with other students.

In addition, to help schools implement the WSA to IE, the EDB has been providing public sector ordinary schools with additional resources, professional support and teacher training on top of regular subvention. In parallel, the effectiveness of the implementation of IE policy is reviewed on an on-going basis. Starting from the 2019/20 school year, we will implement a series of IE enhancement measures to ensure that schools will be provided with a stable teaching force, resources for flexible deployment and enhanced professional support to cater for students with SEN, and create an inclusive culture and campus.

Under the 3-Tier Intervention Model, schools will arrange for students with SEN different tiers of support that correspond to their individual support needs, such as quality learning and teaching strategies and small group training. Regular review on students' progress will also be conducted to flexibly adjust the tier of support and relevant measures provided for them according to their response to

intervention, so as to ensure that their needs for support are addressed. Students with severe and persistent learning or adjustment difficulties will be provided with intensive individualised support, including drawing up of Individual Education Plan (IEP). With the implementation of a series of IE enhancement measures starting from the 2019/20 school year, a “Summary of Support for Student” will be issued by schools each year to inform parents of students with SEN of the support measures available in schools, so that they know how to work in unison to achieve the best support results. Generally speaking, these measures include the adoption of elements of Universal Design for Learning, differentiated instruction, assistive technologies and positive behaviour support strategies in classroom teaching, as well as other supplemental after-school group training on social adaptation and learning skills to enhance students’ learning effectiveness.

We note that there has been enactment of legislation on special education in some countries and regions. However, their experience reveals that while stipulating the issue of a written document on behalf of students, the legislation fails to ensure that students receive support services most appropriate to their actual needs. Some commentators also indicate that the paperwork needed to satisfy various legal requirements has strained teachers to such an extent that teaching quality is compromised. There are also cases that the IEPs designed by some teachers using computer software fail to cater for students’ individual needs. In certain cases, some teachers just develop one IEP for all students with SEN. All these have triggered discontent among parents in some places. The long-lasting legal proceedings have also drained social resources. In addition, some schools in places with the above legislation enacted would persuade students assessed as having SEN to change to another school. Such a move has discouraged parents from having their children undergo assessment.

To ensure students with SEN are provided equal opportunity to education, it is of the utmost importance that there are specific requirements in respect of admission arrangements, teaching and accommodation standards, professional training for teachers on special education, protection of equal opportunities, provision of enhanced support, etc. It is in this direction that the EDB has been making pragmatic efforts and seeking continuous improvement to cater for students with SEN. We consider it more appropriate for the sector to focus, at this stage, on exploring how school-based support measures can be further advanced and how the enhancement measures can be effectively implemented

so as to enhance the effectiveness of IE. The EDB will continue to encourage schools to adopt the WSA to implement IE, under which school policies and practices will be aligned with school culture for enhancing the efficacy of support for students with SEN. To us, this is the imminent task in question.

(3)

The relevant bureau and departments of the government have been working together through a multi-disciplinary mode to provide various services for children with special needs or at risk of developmental delay. Specifically, the Food and Health Bureau provides assessment and medical services to children in need, while the Labour and Welfare Bureau provides rehabilitation and welfare services. EDB is responsible for providing public sector ordinary schools with various additional resources, professional support and teacher training to help them cater for students with SEN. For instance, to further enhance the effectiveness of transition mechanism from pre-school to primary schooling, the EDB and the Social Welfare Department (SWD), together with the Child Assessment Centres under the Department of Health (DH) and the Hospital Authority, have strengthened collaboration since the 2017/18 school year. When children with special needs proceed to primary schools from pre-school centres/kindergartens, their assessment information and progress reports will be transferred to the primary schools they will attend so that the schools can timely understand the conditions of and provide support for the children, so as to foster their smooth integration into primary school learning. To sustain its efforts in supporting students with SEN, the EDB will continue to communicate with relevant bureaux and departments and deliberate and follow up on potential areas for enhancement.

Besides, the EDB has all along been communicating with the sector and relevant stakeholders and reviewing the effectiveness of the implementation of IE and special education on an on-going basis. The EDB set up the Task Force on Integrated Education in Mainstream Schools and the Task Force on Provision of Education in Special Schools as early as 2005 and 2006 respectively. Regular meetings with representatives from the school sector, territory institutions, other government departments (including DH and SWD), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and parents groups are held to update them on the progress in IE and special education and listen to their views on various measures. We will also liaise with school councils, NGOs, tertiary institutions and parents groups, and strengthen communication and co-operation with various

stakeholders where necessary through different platforms to continuously improve the education and support services for students with SEN. In fact, the enhancement measures on IE and special education launched in recent years were formulated and put in place after thorough examination and discussion by the relevant task forces and extensive consultation with different stakeholders.

In sum, the existing communication and review mechanisms on IE and special education have been effective. The Government will continue to listen to the views of the sector and different stakeholders so as to introduce improvement measures where necessary and practicable. We therefore do not have plans to separately set up a committee on issues relating to SEN.

(4)

To effectively cater for students with SEN, professional competence of teachers is crucial. Hence, the EDB formulated a structured teacher training programme as early as the 2007/08 school year to enhance the professional capacity of teachers in catering for students with SEN. Starting from the said year, we have been providing serving teachers with structured training courses on catering for students with SEN pitched at Basic, Advanced and Thematic levels (BAT Courses), and training targets have been set. The EDB keeps reviewing the progress in providing training for teachers in public sector ordinary schools, and set higher training targets for special education teachers in the 2012/13 and 2015/16 school years to facilitate schools in arranging their teachers to receive suitable training in systematic manner so that each school will aggregate a critical mass of teachers with relevant training to guide their counterparts in school to implement integrated education through the Whole School Approach to IE. To encourage schools to arrange teachers to attend the BAT Courses, regular teachers of public sector schools are granted paid study leave and schools will be reimbursed the expenses for hiring supply teachers.

In addition, the EDB organises different forms of training activities including seminars, workshops and sharing sessions for teachers each year to enhance teachers' knowledge of good practices in catering for students with SEN and update teachers on the development trends in IE and special education, as well as the pedagogies appropriate to different types of SEN. The EDB has all along been communicating with teacher education institutions (TEIs) to encourage them to include training on supporting students with SEN as a compulsory module in their pre-service teacher training programmes. Currently, all local

TEIs have already included such training in their pre-service teacher training programmes to enhance prospective teachers' knowledge in catering for students with SEN. Therefore, teachers who have not yet attended the structured BAT Courses are still appropriately equipped to support students with SEN.

Moreover, the EDB provides special education training programmes in addition to the BAT Courses for primary and secondary school teachers in light of their actual needs. For example, the Professional Development Programme for Mental Health has been introduced starting from the 2017/18 school year to raise teachers' awareness of mental health and enhance their professional knowledge and capacity in identifying and supporting students with mental health needs. With the creation of SENCO posts in schools, we have also organised Professional Training Programmes for SENCOs, which cover topics on leadership, planning and management, student-centred support strategies, lesson study, provision mapping and management, etc.

As at 2017/18 school year, about 42% of teachers in public sector ordinary primary schools and 30% in public sector ordinary secondary schools have received 30 hours or more structured special education training. With various training programmes mentioned above taken together, the number of teachers in public sector schools with knowledge of supporting students with SEN should be greater. The five-year training cycle commenced in the 2015/16 school year will come to an end in the 2019/20 school year. By then, there will be a greater number of teachers who have received structured special education training. In this school year, we have started to consult relevant stakeholders about their views on the next training cycle, which include training targets, training content and mode of instruction. Basing on the views collected, we will organise e-learning courses so as to allow greater flexibility in study and enable more teachers to acquire the basic knowledge and skills for supporting students with SEN. We will also set higher training targets so that in each school, there will be more teachers who have received structured special education training and their professional capacity in supporting students with SEN will be further enhanced. Upon confirmation of the proposal for new SE teacher training cycle, we will announce the details so that schools can make early planning of their teacher training arrangement.