

# **立法會**

## ***Legislative Council***

LC Paper No. CB(1)1673/2024(02)

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### **Subcommittee on Issues Relating to the Support for Persons with Disabilities**

**Meeting on 17 December 2024**

### **Background brief on education support services for students with disabilities/special educational needs**

#### **Purpose**

This paper summaries Members' discussion on the education support services provided for students with disabilities/special educational needs ("SEN").

#### **Background**

2. The Government has been offering support services for children with special needs through cross-sector collaboration. Specifically, the Health Bureau ("HKB") and the Hospital Authority ("HA") deliver assessment and medical services; the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") offers pre-school rehabilitation services; and the Education Bureau ("EDB") provides learning support.

#### Pre-school rehabilitation services

3. SWD provides subvented pre-school rehabilitation services for children aged 0 to 6 assessed mainly by the Child Assessment Centres ("CACs") of the Department of Health ("DH") as needing early professional intervention. Services are provided mainly through Early Education and Training Centres ("EETCs"), Special Child Care Centres ("SCCCs"), Integrated Programme in Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres ("KG-cum-CCCs") and On-Site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services ("OPRS"), details of which are in [Appendix 1](#). For those awaiting assessment by CACs or assessed as having borderline developmental issues, SWD has launched the "Pilot Project on Tier-1 Support Services in Kindergartens ("KGs")/KG-cum-CCCs"<sup>1</sup> ("the Pilot Project")

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<sup>1</sup> Funded by the Lotteries Fund, the Pilot Project, which commenced in the 2020-2021 school year and was regularized in 2023-2024, provides consultation, training, and support for children with special needs, as well as their parents, carers, teachers, and childcare workers.

through project teams operated by non-governmental organizations to provide early intervention services in about 80 KGs/KG-cum-CCCs participating in OPRS.

### Support for school-age children

4. EDB has adopted a dual-track approach to special education. Students with severe or multiple disabilities, upon specialist assessment and parental consent, are referred to special schools for intensive support. In the 2023-2024 school year, there are 62 aided special schools in Hong Kong serving approximately 8 750 students. Other students with SEN attend ordinary schools, where EDB promotes a whole school approach to integrated education (“IE”). Schools have to set up a student support team and motivate all teachers to adopt the “Three-tier Intervention Model”<sup>2</sup> to cater for students with SEN.

## **Deliberations by Members**

### Assessments and rehabilitation services

5. Members raised concern that **long waiting times for assessments** by CACs and pre-school rehabilitation services had hindered professional intervention for children with special needs. They emphasized the importance of **early intervention during the crucial learning period** and enquired about the Administration’s measures to reduce waiting times and achieve zero waiting time for pre-school rehabilitation services.

6. The Administration advised that it aimed to provide necessary services to children with special needs promptly after assessment by CACs. In 2021-2022, SWD added 390 places for pre-school rehabilitation services, increasing total service places in EETCs and SCCCs by approximately 1 200 from 2019-2020 to 2021-2022. Moreover, the average waiting time for OPRS had decreased to 4.3 months in 2021-2022. The Administration increased OPRS places to over 10 000 in the 2022-2023 school year and aimed for zero waiting time by the 2024-2025 school year.

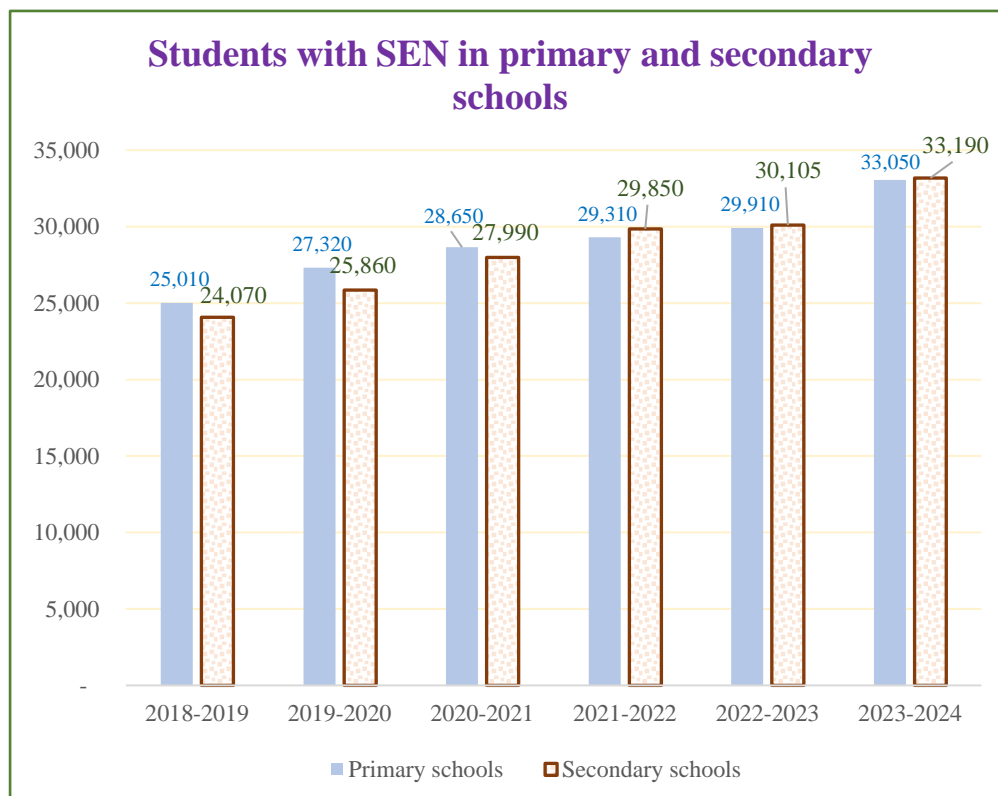
### Learning support

7. Members noted a **significant increase** in students with SEN in public primary and secondary schools for 2023-2024, with **primary students** rising by **32.2%** and **secondary students** by **37.9%** since 2018-2019. They stressed the

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<sup>2</sup> Tier-1 support involves quality teaching in regular classrooms for students with mild or transient learning difficulties. Tier-2 support offers “add-on” interventions for those with persistent difficulties, while Tier-3 support includes developing Individualized Education Plans for students with persistent and severe learning challenges.

need for strategic planning and resource allocation to provide appropriate support to students.



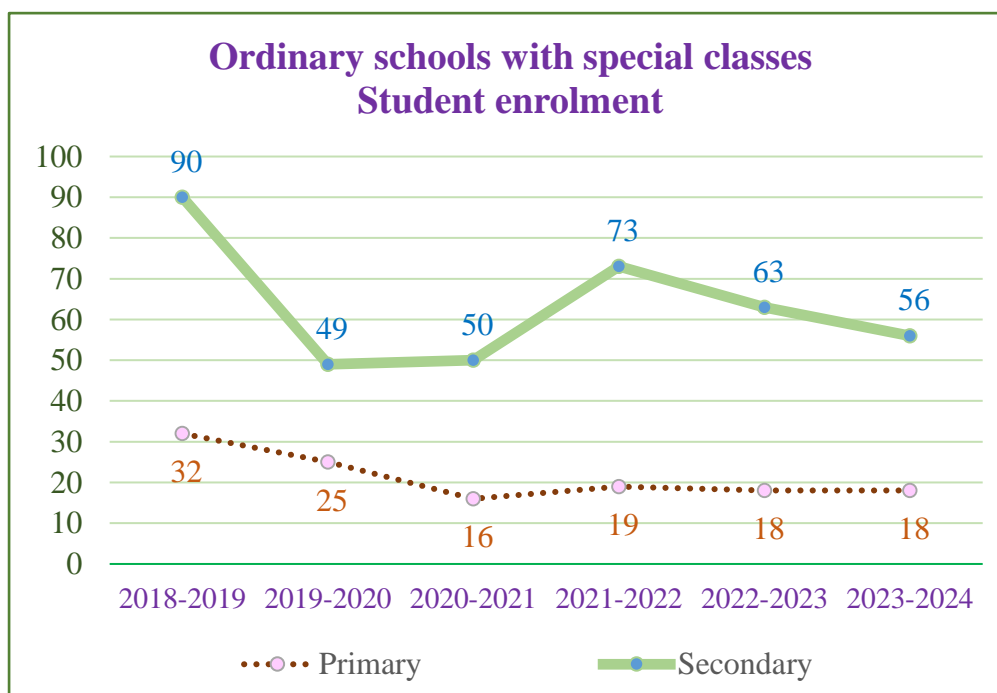
8. The Administration advised that it provided the “One-off Grant for Purchase of e-Assessment Tools” in March 2024 to help schools acquire professional e-assessment tools for educational psychologists to better analyse students’ capabilities and needs. The data from these tools would be used to strengthen the support for students’ learning and emotional or behavioural adjustment. Moreover, EDB launched the “[SENSE](#)” website in September 2021 to provide schools, parents, and the public with easy access to the latest information and resources on integrated and special education for supporting students with SEN.

9. Members raised concern about the assistance provided to public sector ordinary schools for implementing information technology and education policies that facilitated the **application of artificial intelligence** (“AI”) in teaching and learning, particularly to help all students, including those with SEN, to engage with AI. The Administration advised that the Quality Education Fund had earmarked \$500 million for the “e-Learning Ancillary Facilities Programme” to enhance e-learning and promote blended learning. A total of 22 projects covering innovative and AI technologies were expected to be implemented in schools during the 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 school years.

10. Members suggested allocating additional resources to encourage collaboration among schools, tertiary institutions, IT sector, and professional education organizations to **develop educational technology programmes that complemented mainstream courses** for students with SEN. The

Administration advised that to better support special schools in catering to students with more severe or multiple disabilities, EDB provided a one-off Grant on New Technology in Classroom, ranging from \$300,000 to \$700,000, in March 2023. This grant could enable schools to use technology for tailored teaching activities and to work with tertiary institutions or organizations to develop suitable learning software or equipment, thereby enhancing learning effectiveness and skills development of students with SEN.

11. Members were concerned about the **grouping of students of different ages/grades in the same class** in special schools, which would hinder their learning and development. The Administration explained that special schools generally adopted the Hong Kong school curriculum framework to develop a school-based curriculum tailored to students' abilities and needs. EDB would allow flexibility in the grouping of students to address diverse learning needs. Special classes had been arranged for students with special needs, with the following enrolment situations:

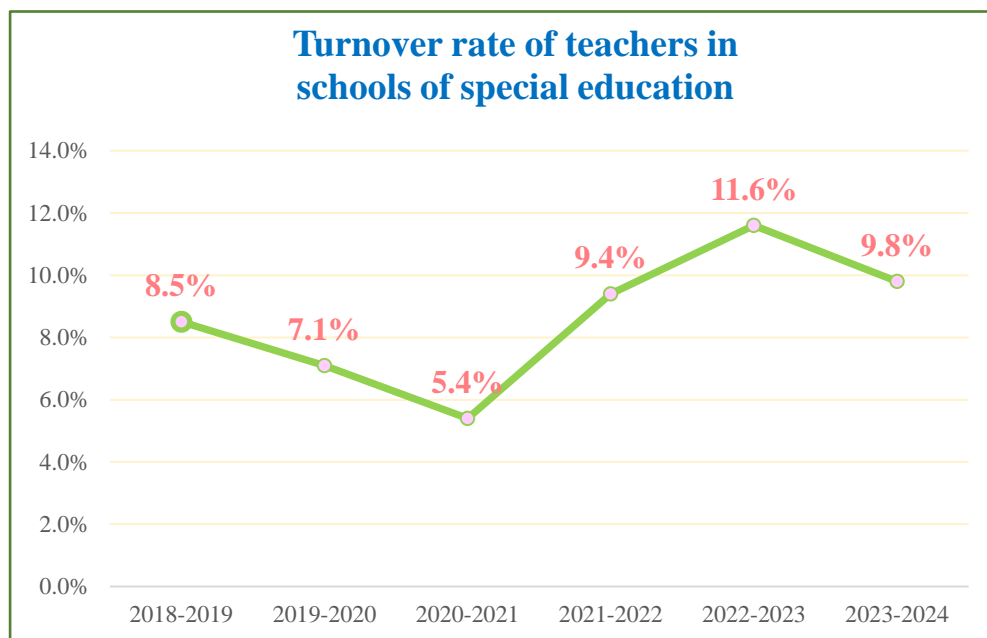
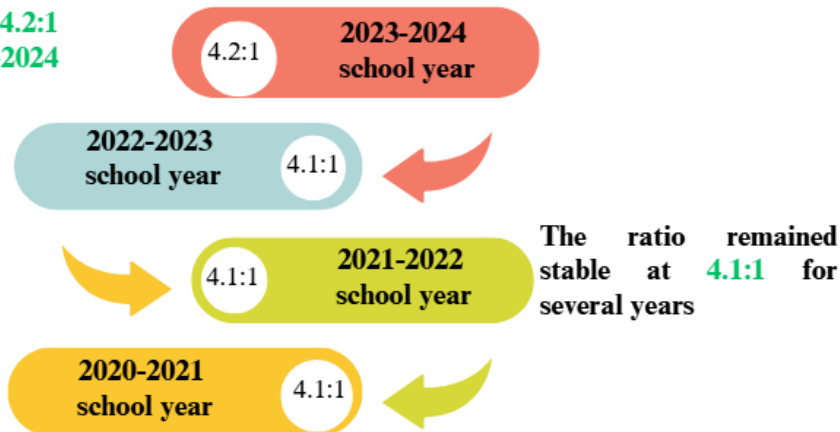


#### Manpower supply for special schools

12. Members expressed concern about the **volatility of teacher turnover**, which reflected ongoing challenges of retaining special education teachers. Despite this, the **student-teacher ratio** had remained stable for several years, with a **slight increase from 2023-2024**. To ensure adequate supply of teachers, Members suggested that EDB should collaborate with the University Grants Committee-funded institutions and self-financing post-secondary institutions to **increase special education programmes** and training places, thereby attracting more teachers to the profession.

### Student-teacher ratio of schools of special education

A slight increase to **4.2:1** occurred from **2023-2024** school year



13. The Administration indicated that all local universities offering teacher education included special education modules in their pre-service teacher training courses. Self-financing post-secondary institutions would also organize relevant programmes as needed. Moreover, measures had been implemented to enhance the manpower in special schools, including reducing class sizes and improving the teacher-to-student ratio. Training for prospective teachers had been strengthened to better equip them to meet the needs of special school students.

#### Professional support for implementation of integrated education

14. Members urged EDB, the Labour and Welfare Bureau and HHB to work closely to provide holistic support for students with SEN and their families, focusing on **medical-educational-social integration** and **mental health**. Members also stressed the need for sufficient **medical professionals in schools**, such as speech therapists and clinical psychologists, to deliver professional services. They also called for enhanced training for teachers in identifying and

teaching students with SEN, and support for secondary schools to offer Qualifications Framework-related courses.

15. The Administration advised that public sector ordinary schools implementing IE had been working closely with specialists to identify and diagnose special needs, design educational programmes, and place students with SEN in suitable educational settings. Various measures had been introduced to assist teachers in supporting students with SEN and preparing them for future pathways. These included commissioning local tertiary institutions and non-profit-making organizations to provide structured training for teachers, comprising basic, advanced and thematic courses, as well as specialized training for special school teachers and professional development programme for Special Educational Needs Coordinators.

#### Transition to mainstream schools

16. Members raised concern about the **smooth transition and adaptation** of pre-school children with SEN to **mainstream primary schools**. The Administration advised that a collaborative mechanism among EDB, SWD, DH and HA could ensure that when children with special needs transitioned from pre-school centres/KGs to primary schools, recipient schools were informed of their needs early and could arrange support. With parental consent, CACs and SWD would send assessment information to recipient primary schools, enabling them to understand students' special needs and arrange appropriate support for a smooth transition.

#### Support for parents

17. Realizing the stress faced by many parents of students with SEN, Members urged the Administration to enhance support for them by providing training to **help parents work with schools to support their children's development**. The Administration advised that EDB had created a parent education website, "[Smart Parent Net](#)", offering useful resources, such as video on parenting and information about parent education programmes/activities organized by different government bureaux/departments and tertiary institutions. In addition, the Hong Kong Special Schools Council had established a communication platform for parents to exchange their views.

### **School-based support on integrated education in Finland and Taiwan**

18. The Research and Information Division of the Legislative Council Secretariat conducted [a study in November 2024](#), focusing on school-based support for students with SEN in Finland and Taiwan. **Finland's** education system is renowned for its **multi-tiered support approach**, providing assistance to many students with minor learning challenges without requiring a disability diagnosis. In contrast, **Taiwan** adopts a **legislative approach** that emphasizes

early childhood intervention and offers multiple educational placement options and individualized support for students with SEN, without tiered support services.

### Latest developments

19. As pledged in the **Chief Executive's 2024 Policy Address**, the Administration will implement the following measures to strengthen support for students with SEN:

- (a) providing about **1 040 additional places** for day, residential and **pre-school rehabilitation services**, and exploring the establishment of **Special Child Care Centres** on vacant kindergarten premises;
- (b) providing additional resources for publicly-funded primary and secondary schools (including special schools) to **enrich the Putonghua language environment** and enhance the Putonghua learning atmosphere; and
- (c) **strengthening support** for students with SEN and continuing to provide subsidies, such as textbook assistance, for students with financial needs.

### Relevant papers

20. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in [Appendix 2](#).

## Pre-school rehabilitation services

Service type	Early education and training centre	Special Child Care Centres	Integrated Programme in Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres (“KG-cum-CCCs”)	On-Site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services
<b>Service brief</b>	Provides early intervention programmes	Provides whole-day training and care to facilitate children’s growth and development and prepare them for primary education	Provides training and care to facilitate children’s integration into mainstream education and society	Provides on-site training and support under a school-based integrated approach
<b>Users</b> ( <i>Age</i> )	Children with disabilities ( <i>Below 6</i> )	Children with moderate to severe disabilities ( <i>2 to under 6</i> )	Children with mild disabilities in ordinary KG-cum-CCCs ( <i>2 to under 6</i> )	Children with mild disabilities attending participating KGs or KG-cum-CCCs ( <i>Below 6</i> )
<b>No. of service places *</b>	4 393	2 456	1 980	10 124
<b>% increase of service places</b> (Between 2019-2020 and 2024)	<b>16.4%</b>	<b>21.6%</b>	<b>0%</b> ( <i>service places remained at 1 980 for the past 4 years</i> )	<b>43%</b>

\* as at 31 December 2023



**Relevant papers on education support services for students with disabilities/special educational needs**

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>Paper</b>
Panel on Welfare Services	14 January 2019	<a href="#">Agenda</a> Item IV: Evaluation Study of the Pilot Scheme on On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services  <a href="#">Minutes</a>
	13 March 2023	<a href="#">Agenda</a> Item IV: Support services for children (including pre-school children) with special needs and their parents  <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Education	24 March 2023	<a href="#">Agenda</a> Item III: Operation of special schools  <a href="#">Minutes</a>
	1 March 2024	<a href="#">Agenda</a> Item IV: Professional support provided to ordinary schools for implementing integrated education  <a href="#">Minutes</a>
	7 June 2024	<a href="#">Agenda</a> Item III: Implementation of IT in education in primary and secondary schools  <a href="#">Minutes</a>
	1 November 2024	<a href="#">Agenda</a> Item III: Briefing by the Secretary for Education on the Chief Executive's 2024 Policy Address  <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Subcommittee on Issues Relating to the Support for Persons with Disabilities	26 July 2024	<a href="#">Agenda</a> Item I: Implementation situation of the Persons with Disabilities and Rehabilitation Programme Plan  <a href="#">Minutes</a>

Finance Committee	17 April 2023	<a href="#">Replies to initial questions raised by Legislative Council Members in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2023-2024</a> (Reply Serial Nos.: EDB130, EDB193 and EDB252)
	15 April 2024	<a href="#">Replies to initial questions raised by Legislative Council Members in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2024-2025</a> (Reply Serial Nos.: EDB130, EDB279, EDB282 and EDB288)

Council meeting	Paper
8 February 2023	<a href="#">Question 4</a> : Student with special educational needs
18 October 2023	<a href="#">Question 4</a> : Special education
8 November 2023	<a href="#">Question 11</a> : Measures to support persons with hearing impairment
6 December 2023	<a href="#">Question 2</a> : Support for students with special educational needs
3 July 2024	<a href="#">Member's motion</a> : Supporting students with special educational needs and improving the policy on integrated education in Hong Kong  <a href="#">Progress report</a>
23 October 2024	<a href="#">Question 11</a> : Supporting students with special educational needs

Date	Research publication
30 December 2022	<a href="#">Statistical highlights on special educational needs</a>
26 November 2024	<a href="#">Information note on school-based support on integrated education in Finland and Taiwan</a>