

**For discussion on
1 March 2024**

Legislative Council Panel on Education

**Professional Support Provided to Ordinary Schools
for Implementing Integrated Education**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the latest development of the measures and services provided by the Education Bureau (EDB) for supporting students with special educational needs (SEN) in public sector ordinary schools.

Background

2. The Government adopts a dual-track mode in providing special education at the primary and secondary levels. Subject to the assessment and recommendations of professionals and with the consent of parents, EDB will refer students with more severe or multiple disabilities to aided special schools for intensive support services. Meanwhile, other students with SEN will attend ordinary schools to receive integrated education (IE). Currently, the SEN of students in ordinary schools are mainly categorised into nine types under the IE policy, including intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, mental illness, specific learning difficulties (SLD), physical disability, visual impairment, hearing impairment and speech and language impairment (SLI). With the increasing awareness of SEN amongst schools and parents, and the continuous improvement in the identification mechanism, the number of students with SEN identified has been on the rise in recent years. In the 2023/24 school year, there are around 64 220 students with SEN in public sector ordinary schools. For the number of students by SEN types, please refer to Table 1 of the Annex.

3. The Government attaches great importance to IE, which is based on the spirit of “equal opportunities and teaching students in accordance with their abilities”, enabling students with SEN to integrate into mainstream schools. Schools must fully utilise their internal and external resources and adopt various adaptation and support strategies to cater for the different learning needs of students and help students with different abilities transit to multiple pathways. EDB has all along been encouraging ordinary schools to adopt the Whole School Approach (WSA) in accordance with five basic principles, namely early identification, early intervention, WSA, home-school co-operation and cross-sector collaboration, to cater for students with SEN. Schools should provide appropriate support to students based on their individual situations and SEN by adopting the 3-tier Intervention Model¹ in order to effectively cater for their diverse learning needs. Under the 3-tier Intervention Model, the tier of support provided for students with SEN will be adjusted from time to time according to their learning progress and learning needs at different stages of development. Schools should decide on the tier of support required for students, having taken into consideration students’ needs, and make adjustments with respect to teaching, curriculum and assessment. In the 2023/24 school year, upon the review by EDB on the types of SEN and the tier of support required for students submitted by schools in the middle of the school year, the number of students with SEN receiving Tier-2 and Tier-3 support in the public sector ordinary schools are set out in Table 2 of the Annex.

4. Starting from the 2017/18 school year, EDB has progressively launched a series of enhanced measures to strengthen the implementation of IE. EDB’s expenditure on IE has increased substantially from \$1.5 billion in the 2017-18 financial year to \$3.8 billion in the 2023-24 financial year, representing an increase of around 150%. The ensuing paragraphs elaborate on the latest situation of the relevant enhanced measures launched by EDB in relation to five aspects, namely additional resources and manpower, professional support, early identification and transition, professional training and support for parents.

¹ Tier-1 support refers to catering for the diverse learning and adaptation needs of all students at an earlier time through quality classroom teaching; Tier-2 support refers to arranging additional support, such as small group tutoring and after-school remedial programmes, for students with persistent learning or adaptation difficulties; and Tier-3 support refers to providing individualised support for students with persistent and severe learning or adaptation difficulties, including drawing up of individual education plans.

Additional Resources and Manpower

Learning Support Grant (LSG) and Special Educational Needs Support Teachers (SENST)

5. EDB provides public sector ordinary schools with additional resources to help them cater for students with SEN. LSG is a major additional resource, the provision of which is based on the number of students with SEN in a school in each school year and the unit grant rate corresponding to the tier of support they require. EDB requires schools to flexibly and strategically deploy LSG according to the principle of “individual calculation and holistic deployment”, pool together various school resources (such as the Capacity Enhancement Grant) and tap resources available in the community, so as to provide more comprehensive and flexible services and make timely adjustments to the support measures for students with SEN according to the tier of support they require.

6. EDB has continuously refined its arrangements for LSG. Starting from the 2017/18 school year, students with mental illness have been included in the coverage of LSG to enable schools to strengthen support in catering for their learning, social, emotional and behavioural needs. Meanwhile, from the 2019/20 school year, EDB has consolidated the various subvented programmes for IE. LSG has since been extended to all public sector ordinary schools, while LSG unit grant rate for Tier-3 support has increased significantly to four times the rate for Tier-2 support². Furthermore, schools have an additional one to three regular teaching post(s) converted/provided on account of LSG reaching the threshold(s). Those teaching posts are titled SEN Support Teacher (SENST). The remaining amount of LSG will still be disbursed in the form of cash grant. In the 2023/24 school year, a total number of 1 355 SENST teaching posts have been created by EDB in 751 public sector ordinary schools (304 secondary schools and 447 primary schools).

7. With the introduction of the enhanced measures, schools are provided with a more stable teaching force to offer support services, while

² In the 2023/24 school year, the Tier-2 unit grant rate of LSG is \$15,779 and the Tier-3 grant rate is \$63,116.

making use of LSG and other subsidies holistically and flexibly to provide appropriate and diversified support based on the needs of students, such as employing additional teachers and teaching assistants, procuring outside professional services or organising integration activities, with a view to strengthening learning support for students with SEN through diversified modes.

Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO)

8. Starting from the 2017/18 school year, EDB has provided, by phases in three years, each public sector ordinary primary and secondary school with an additional graduate teaching post at basic rank on the staff establishment to facilitate the school's assignment of a designated teacher to take up the role of SENCO. The main responsibilities of a SENCO include leading the student support team to continuously plan, implement and review various support measures and resources deployment, as well as to work in close collaboration with other subject panels and professionals (including members of the student support team, school-based educational psychologists (EPs), school-based speech therapists (STs), social workers, guidance personnel and teachers) through a multi-disciplinary team approach so as to enhance the effectiveness of support . For example, through arrangements of collaborative lesson planning, co-teaching and lesson study, teachers are encouraged to incorporate elements of support for students with SEN into the domains of curriculum design and learning and teaching, and guide fellow teachers in employing effective support strategies to enhance the learning effectiveness of students with SEN. In addition, SENCOs are also responsible for making systematic arrangements for teachers to receive training on special education and promoting home-school co-operation. Starting from the 2019/20 school year, the SENCO posts in schools with a comparatively large number of SEN students have been upgraded to the promotion rank so as to enable SENCOs to perform their leadership duties more effectively. In the 2023/24 school year, a total of 751 public sector ordinary schools (304 secondary schools and 447 primary schools) have their SENCO posts upgraded to the promotion rank.

Grant for Supporting Non-Chinese Speaking (NCS) Students with SEN (NCS-SEN Grant)

9. Starting from the 2019/20 school year, schools admitting NCS students with SEN have been provided with additional resources in three tiers³ for supporting students in adapting to school life and undergoing smooth transition across different stages of learning by, among others, employing teaching assistants to help teachers design activities and teaching materials, procuring outside translation services or providing social and emotional management training, so as to strengthen the emotional, communication and social support for the students concerned. In the 2023/24 school year, a total of 357 public sector ordinary schools (140 secondary schools and 217 primary schools) have been disbursed with the NCS-SEN Grant, benefitting about 1 250 students.

Professional Support

School-based Educational Psychology Service (SBEPS)

10. Starting from the 2016/17 school year, the provision of SBEPS has covered all public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools. In the same year, EDB has progressively provided the Enhanced SBEPS for public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools with a comparatively large number of students with SEN by increasing the EPs to schools ratio step by step to 1:4, in order to provide more comprehensive and regular case follow-up and intervention service for schools and students, as well as to strengthen the preventive and development work of schools. According to the WSA principle, EPs would collaborate with teachers, social workers, etc., to jointly cater for students' diverse educational needs, and enhance the effectiveness of the support rendered by schools through strengthening the school support systems and teachers' knowledge and skills in catering for students' diverse needs. In the 2023/24 school year, the Enhanced SBEPS has been provided to 448 public sector schools (244 primary schools and 204 secondary schools), i.e. more than 50% of the public sector primary and secondary schools have been provided with the Enhanced SBEPS. It is

³ In the 2023/24 school year, the respective rates of the three tiers of subsidy under the NCS-SEN Grant are \$105,191, \$210,382 and \$315,573.

hoped that 60% of the schools will be provided with the Enhanced SBEPS in the 2024/25 school year.

11. EDB arranges for school-based EPs to participate in different professional development activities annually as and when necessary, with a view to enhancing their knowledge and skills on a continual basis. School sponsoring bodies (SSBs) are required to arrange EP supervisors for EPs under their charge so as to provide professional supervision and support for them, and to advise SSBs on service development. A quality assurance mechanism has been put in place by EDB to evaluate service effectiveness and to ensure service quality. Under the mechanism, EDB conducts annual reviews through questionnaire surveys targeted to participating schools and the EPs at the end of the school year to gauge feedback from different stakeholders. EDB also conducts school visits to review deliverables and to hold meetings with EPs and school personnel to advise on issues related to the implementation of SBEPS. In addition, EDB holds regular meetings with the SSBs providing the service to review service planning and co-ordination.

12. To enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of EPs' assessment on students with SEN, ordinary primary and secondary schools serving as base schools of SBEPS will be provided with the One-off Purchase of Electronic Assessment Tools Grant of \$80,000 in March 2024 for procuring new electronic assessment tools and related equipment. Details will be announced in due course.

Enhanced School-based Speech Therapy Service (SBSTS)

13. Starting from the 2019/20 school year, EDB has implemented the Enhanced SBSTS in the public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools by phases to enable schools to form clusters and create school-based ST posts. The Enhanced SBSTS has been fully implemented in the 2023/24 school year, with a total of about 410 SBST posts created to provide more stable, sustainable, diverse and intensive SBSTS for students with SLI and assist them and other students with SEN to develop their speech, language, communication and language-related learning abilities. Schools that have not yet employed their school-based STs may adopt the established practice of supporting students with SLI by procuring service to

arrange transitional SBSTS. By adopting the WSA, schools plan, promote and implement SBSTS in the three domains of prevention, intervention and enhancement of language and communication skills in light of their school context. School-based STs will collaborate closely with teachers or other school personnel to increase teachers' awareness on speech and language problems, as well as to collaborate with teachers in teaching, sharing strategies on enhancing speech and language abilities, and incorporating such strategies into everyday teaching, so as to ensure that students with SLI will receive timely and appropriate support.

14. To enhance the knowledge and skills of school-based STs in supporting students with SLI, EDB organises various regular professional development activities every year, including arranging professional learning communities meetings and thematic support networks for school-based STs to provide them with a professional learning platform, as well as organising induction programmes for those school-based STs new to the post. The Specialists (Speech Therapy Service) of EDB also pay regular visits to schools to offer them professional advice on the implementation of SBSTS and render professional support to school-based STs, including observing speech therapy services, understanding the treatment progress of individual students and discussing the direction of therapy and more complicated cases, to ensure that students in need are given appropriate support.

Early Identification and Transition

From Pre-school to Primary Schooling

15. To enhance the effectiveness of the transition from pre-school to primary schooling, a collaborative mechanism has been put in place among EDB, the Social Welfare Department (SWD), the Department of Health (DH) and the Hospital Authority (HA) to ensure that when children with special needs promote to primary schools from pre-school centres/kindergartens, the recipient primary schools can take note of their special needs early and arrange support for them. With the assistance of EDB and the consent of parents, the Child Assessment Centres under the DH and the HA will send the assessment information of the pre-school children with special needs to the primary schools they are going to attend.

On the other hand, EDB has enhanced the SEN information transfer mechanism since the 2019/20 school year, enabling the pre-school rehabilitation service units subvented by the SWD to log into an online platform provided by EDB, prepare and store the electronic version of the Comprehensive Development Progress Report for Pre-school Children (Progress Reports) with the consent of parents. EDB will transmit the Progress Reports through the Special Education Management Information System (SEMIS) to the public sector or Direct Subsidy Scheme primary schools based on their lists of Primary One students. The recipient primary schools have to make appropriate support arrangements for students according to their actual needs, and provide the “Summary of Transition Support for Primary One Student” to parents to help them understand the support arrangements provided by schools and make suitable complements to enhance the effectiveness and promote home-school communication. Apart from this, EDB has been implementing the Early Identification and Intervention Programme for Primary One Students with Learning Difficulties in all public sector primary schools to ensure that students who have received pre-school rehabilitation services can be provided with further assessment and follow-up services as and when necessary, and students with learning difficulties but have not been identified at the pre-primary level are identified and supported at an early stage.

Primary to Secondary Schooling

16. To enable secondary schools to take note of the learning needs of students with SEN and arrange appropriate support as early as possible, for those Primary Six students who promote to secondary schools, EDB will, upon the annual release of the results for the Secondary School Places Allocation, send the basic SEN information, including SEN type and tier of support required, of students who have confirmed their enrollment to their recipient secondary schools electronically via SEMIS according to the options of parents. Also, primary schools should seek parents’ consent and transfer the information of the students concerned (e.g. medical reports, assessment reports, summary of the support rendered, succinct learning records and teaching strategy suggestions) to their recipient secondary schools, so as to ensure that the secondary schools will take note of their

special needs and arrange appropriate support as soon as possible, with a view to facilitating their smooth integration into secondary school life.

Secondary Schooling to Post-Secondary Education or Training Institutions

17. To ensure that secondary school leavers with SEN can receive appropriate support as they pursue further studies in local post-secondary institutions/related organisations (institutions/organisations), schools will, with the consent of both parents and students⁴, liaise with the student affairs offices or the designated officers of related departments of the institutions/organisations to work out arrangements for the transfer of SEN information of the students concerned. To further enhance the information transfer procedures, a SEN information transfer mechanism between secondary schools and institutions/organisations was established under SEMIS in the 2021/22 school year. With the consent of both parents and students, schools may directly transfer the SEN information of the school leavers (including SEN type, tier of support required, summary of the support rendered, recommendations on special examination arrangements and medical reports) to their recipient local institutions/organisations via the Online Platform for Transferring SEN Information of Secondary School Leavers (Online Platform) under SEMIS, thereby further enhancing the effectiveness of transition and adaptation of secondary school leavers to post-secondary education. In the 2023/24 school year, a total of 66 major local institutions/organisations have utilised the Online Platform. Also, to facilitate contacts, EDB compiles an updated contact list of local institutions/organisations annually and uploads it onto the “SENSE” information website for schools’ and parents’ reference.

Professional Training

Basic, Advanced and Thematic Courses

18. To tie in with the 3-tier Intervention Model advocated by EDB for supporting students with SEN and to enhance teachers’ professional capacity to cater for these students, EDB has launched the Framework for

⁴ If the students concerned are aged 18 or above with normal intelligence and are not mentally incapacitated, schools have to seek their consent as well.

Teachers' Professional Development on IE since the 2007/08 school year. Under the Framework, structured training programmes pitched at three levels, i.e. Basic, Advanced and Thematic Courses (BAT Courses), are provided for teachers and training targets are set. Schools are required to arrange teachers to take the BAT Courses in a systematic manner so as to enhance the effectiveness of implementing IE in schools.

19. EDB has been closely monitoring the training progress of teachers in public sector ordinary schools and collecting views from stakeholders, so as to continuously review and enhance the contents and arrangements of the in-service training programmes on IE to meet the needs of schools, teachers and students. In the 2021/22 school year, upon consultation with the sector, we further raised the training targets by requiring each public sector ordinary school to have at least 80%, 20% and 25% of its teachers completed the Basic Course, the Advanced Course and the Thematic Courses respectively by the end of the 2026/27 school year. To support schools in achieving the training targets, we have organised online Basic Course starting from the 2021/22 school year to enable teachers to take the courses more flexibly. In addition, we have increased the number of training places for the BAT Courses so that schools can arrange more teachers to receive structured training in special education. To further enhance teachers' professional capacity to support students with SEN, we have also offered nine types of Thematic Courses based upon students' SEN, helping teachers focus more on understanding different support strategies. Besides, we have also incorporated the Professional Development Programme for Mental Health into the Thematic Courses making the BAT Courses more comprehensive.

Professional Development Programme for SENCOs

20. EDB has been organising the Professional Development Programme for SENCOs, with a duration of approximately 120 hours, to enhance the professional competence of new-to-role SENCOs. The Programme covers leadership, planning and management; support strategies based on student-centred approach; lesson study; resources provision mapping and management; continuing professional development for teachers etc., enabling SENCOs to effectively perform their leadership role, arrange appropriate support for students strategically, strengthen

collaboration with other subject panels in various aspects, as well as further promote home-school co-operation and develop an inclusive school culture. Meanwhile, EDB arranges, on a regular basis, professional development activities such as seminars and networking activities for serving SENCOs every year to promote professional exchanges and continual sharing of practical experiences among schools.

Pre-service Teacher Training

21. On pre-service teacher training, regarding teacher education programmes on special education under the 2022-25 triennial planning cycle, the University Grants Committee-funded institutions provide about 38 places for part-time Postgraduate Diploma in Education programme and 130 places for mixed-mode Bachelor of Education programme annually. In addition, EDB introduced the Guiding Framework for Teacher Education Programmes jointly with teacher education universities (TEUs) in 2023, incorporating the knowledge and skills in supporting students with SEN as core elements of the programmes. The TEUs have also enriched the contents relating to special education of their teacher education programmes in order to equip pre-service teachers with the knowledge and skills in catering for students with SEN. The related programmes will be vetted by EDB and graduates who have completed the programmes and fulfilled respective courses requirements will be deemed to have obtained a qualification equivalent to the Basic Course level of the BAT Courses under the Framework for Teachers' Professional Development on IE of EDB.

Support for Parents

Home-school Co-operation

22. Home-school co-operation is one of the elements that contribute to the success in the implementation of IE. EDB has urged schools to establish a regular mechanism to enhance communication and co-operation with parents, and invite parents to give views on the strategies of supporting students with SEN and their effectiveness. Schools are required to follow the recommendations set out in the *Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education* to brief newly admitted students and their

parents on their IE policy and strategies for supporting students with SEN, so that parents may know how to complement schools in this regard. Schools should, in light of the needs of individual students, invite parents to attend case meetings, post-assessment meetings and individual education plan conferences to review regularly the learning progress of their children. Schools are also required to provide parents of students with SEN with a “Summary of Support for Student” every year to help them understand the schools’ support measures and complement aptly to enhance the effectiveness of support.

23. To improve transparency, schools, as required by EDB, have to provide information on their adoption of WSA in implementing IE in the School Profiles. Schools also have to set out in their annual School Reports the policies, additional resources obtained, support services provided to the students, etc. for implementing IE and upload the School Reports onto their school websites for viewing by stakeholders (including parents).

Information for Parents

24. EDB launched the “SENSE” information website (sense.edb.gov.hk) in the 2021/22 school year to provide information on the policies, measures and resources related to IE and sharing of practical experiences among schools to facilitate parents’ easy access to the latest information and online resources on IE for supporting students with SEN. In particular, the “Catering for students with SEN - Joyful Online Learning at Home” series provides parents with useful resources to guide students with SEN to sustain learning at home and master more skills in learning and social adaptation. In addition, to support parents in taking care of their children with SEN, EDB has published the *Parent Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education*, a pamphlet on *Early Identification and Intervention Programme for Primary One Students with Learning Difficulties*, and a series of pamphlets on nurturing children with different types of SEN. These publications have been uploaded onto the SENSE website for parents’ reference.

25. To provide detailed information on special education and promote IE practices to parents and members of the public, EDB has launched the

“Integrated Education in Practice” webpage, featuring practical experiences of schools in implementing IE and footage of school interviews, with a view to enhancing awareness of IE among parents and the general public. We have also produced a video clip, namely the “Development of Integrated Education in Hong Kong and Support Measures for Students with Special Education Needs” to provide a brief history of the development of IE in Hong Kong, and a series of short videos under the theme of “A Day of a SENCO” to introduce the main duties and tasks of a SENCO, with the aim of promoting understanding of the policies on IE among parents and the general public. The said video clips have been uploaded onto the SENSE website for viewing by parents and the general public.

26. EDB set up a one-stop parent education website “Smart Parent Net” (www.parent.edu.hk) in 2018 to disseminate timely important messages on supporting physical and psychological development of students, which include parent-child relationship, parenting skills, and emotional management of parents. The website also provides parents with practical information on supporting children with SEN, such as articles on “Supporting children with SEN in their integration into school life”, “How to support children with ASD” and “How to support children with SLD in reading and writing”, as well as a video clip of “The Secrets of SEN Parents” to help them establish good parent-child relationship and nurture children’s physical and psychological development.

The Way Forward

27. EDB has all along been allocating resources and formulating enhanced measures to assist public sector ordinary schools in supporting students with SEN. Schools are provided with resources, manpower, professional support and teacher training with a view to providing diverse and comprehensive support services for these children. In recent years, many countries or regions have been applying new technology in developing learning and teaching tools to support the learning of students with SEN. In view of this, EDB is planning to develop learning and teaching resources using information technology strategies, such as multimedia learning and teaching materials and tools, digital interactive teaching platforms, digital learning games and software, to help schools and

parents effectively support students with SEN in respect of their social communication skills, emotional regulation skills, as well as reading and writing abilities. In addition, the Government will keep reviewing the implementation of IE, and listening to the views of the sector and different stakeholders, so that improvement measures can be launched wherever necessary and feasible to further enhance the effectiveness of IE.

Advice Sought

28. Members are invited to note and comment on the contents of this paper.

Education Bureau
February 2024

**Number of Students with SEN in Public Sector Ordinary Schools
in the 2023/24 School Year**

Table 1: Number of students by SEN types ^{Note 1}

SEN type	Primary school	Secondary school	Total
Intellectual Disability	1 170	850	2 020
Autism Spectrum Disorder	6 970	6 310	13 280
Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder	5 670	9 650	15 320
Mental Illness	170	1 110	1 280
Specific Learning Difficulties	12 920	14 040	26 960
Physical Disability	80	130	210
Visual Impairment	40	50	90
Hearing Impairment	360	290	650
Speech and Language Impairment	3 650	760	4 410
Total	31 030	33 190	64 220

Note 1: Figures showing the situation as at September 2023.

Table 2: Number of students receiving Tier-2 and Tier-3 support ^{Note 2}

	Tier-2 support	Tier-3 support	Total
Primary school	32 084	2 358	34 442
Secondary school	27 260	1 916	29 176
Total	59 344	4 274	63 618

Note 2: Figures showing the number of students receiving Tier-2 and Tier-3 support upon review by EDB in January 2024.