

INTEGRATED EDUCATION

Executive Summary

1. In accordance with the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 487) and the Code of Practice on Education issued by the Equal Opportunities Commission, all educational establishments have the obligation to provide equal education opportunities to eligible students, including students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Students with SEN refer to students who need special educational support because of learning or adjustment difficulties categorised as: (a) Specific Learning Difficulties; (b) Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder; (c) Autism Spectrum Disorders; (d) Speech and Language Impairment; (e) Intellectual Disability; (f) Hearing Impairment; (g) Physical Disability; (h) Visual Impairment; and (i) Mental Illness (included as a type of SEN from 2017/18 onwards — unless stated otherwise, all years mentioned hereinafter refer to school years). In September 1997, the Government launched a two-year pilot project on integrated education under which participating schools were required to provide an accommodating learning environment for students with SEN. Integrated education was extended to all public sector ordinary schools from 1999/2000 onwards. The targets and beneficiaries of integrated education are not only the students with SEN but also other students, school staff, parents and even the whole society. The Government adopts a dual-track mode in implementing special education. For students with more severe or multiple disabilities, the Education Bureau (EDB) will, subject to the assessment and recommendations of specialists and the consent of the parents, refer them to special schools for intensive support services.

2. In 2016/17, there were 844 public sector ordinary schools comprising 454 primary schools and 390 secondary schools. About 42,890 students with SEN studied in the 844 schools. On top of the regular subventions provided to all public sector ordinary schools, the EDB provides schools with additional resources (in the form of cash grant and additional teaching staff), professional support and teacher training to help them cater for students with SEN. The Special Education Division of the EDB is responsible for the provision and administration of support measures for implementing integrated education. The EDB's expenditure on additional resources and professional services for integrated education increased by \$408.6 million from \$1,008.5 million in 2012/13 to \$1,417.1 million in 2016/17.

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The Audit Commission (Audit) has recently conducted a review on the EDB's work in the implementation of integrated education.

Identification and admission of students with SEN

3. *Need to enhance measures to identify students with SEN as early as possible.* In 2016/17, 6,159 students were assessed by school-based Educational Psychologists (EPs) for the first time. Of them, 6,131 were diagnosed as students with SEN or Academic Low Achievers (ALAs). Of these 6,131 students, while 4,181 (68.2%) were diagnosed in Primary One and Primary Two, 1,950 (31.8%) were diagnosed at higher class levels. As early identification of possible learning difficulties would enable parents and teachers to provide the appropriate support to the students as soon as possible, all efforts should be made to ensure that students with SEN are identified at the earliest opportunities (paras. 2.5 and 2.7).

4. *Need to strengthen measures in obtaining consents from parents to transfer information of students with SEN.* It is essential to have an effective mechanism to ensure that information of students with SEN can be made available to schools as early as possible so that timely and appropriate support can be provided. Primary schools are required to obtain consents from parents of upcoming Secondary One students with SEN before transferring to the recipient secondary schools the relevant information of the students with SEN. Although the percentage of parents who refused to give consent to the primary schools for transferring their children's information to the secondary schools had decreased from 25% in 2013/14 to 17% in 2017/18, there was still a notable number of parents (775 cases in 2017/18) who declined to give consent (paras. 2.8 and 2.10).

5. *Need to monitor the timeliness of assessment service.* According to the School-based Educational Psychology Service (SBEPS) Guide: (a) through post-assessment meeting, the EP should explain to parents and school personnel the assessment results and discuss the educational support for every student who was given an individual assessment; (b) EPs should provide parents with an assessment summary containing key information on intellectual functioning, learning difficulties and recommendations for support for every case given psychometric assessment, normally within three months; and (c) for every referral given assessment, EPs should send a copy of the assessment report to the school concerned for arrangement of appropriate supportive service, normally within three months. Audit noted that the

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EDB did not record in its computer system the dates on which the post-assessment meetings were held and the assessment summaries and the assessment reports were issued (paras. 2.12 and 2.13).

6. *Need to release more school information on support for students with SEN to facilitate parents of students with SEN in selecting schools.* Parents of students with SEN may, based on their own choice, apply for a place in ordinary schools for their children through the established mechanisms. The profiles of primary schools and secondary schools published by the Committee on Home-School Co-operation are important sources of information about the schools. Audit noted that in the profiles, schools disclosed only three pieces of information on support for students with SEN. There is other school information on support for students with SEN that would be useful to parents of students with SEN, e.g. how resources are allocated to and amongst students with SEN, and school-based support services for students with SEN (paras. 2.16 to 2.19).

7. *Need to expedite installation of lifts in schools to create a barrier-free physical environment for students with disabilities.* Barrier-free access facilities (e.g. lifts) are needed for students with Physical Disability. Aided schools without lift may apply for lift installation after taking into account their individual school-based needs under the annual major repairs exercise. As at 28 February 2018, 110 applications received by the EDB had not been completed. Of the 110 applications, only 42 were approved. Of the 42 lift projects approved, the related works of one application were expected to be completed by April 2018. Another 10 were in the construction stage and the remaining 31 were either under the statutory submission, planning or detailed design stage. The Government announced in February 2018 that it would make an additional provision of \$2 billion to expedite installation of lifts for public sector schools (paras. 2.23 to 2.26).

Additional resources provided to public sector ordinary schools

8. *Need to improve the administration of the Learning Support Grant (LSG).* The LSG was launched in 2003/04. Schools should deploy the LSG flexibly and strategically to support ALAs (applicable to primary schools only) and students with SEN. Under the 3-Tier Intervention Model, students are provided with three levels of support ranging from Tier-1 (for students with less severe learning difficulties) to

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Tier-3 (for students with more severe learning difficulties). Subject to a ceiling, the amount of the LSG per year provided to each school is calculated annually based on the number of ALAs and students with SEN enrolled at the school who require Tier-2 or Tier-3 support. In 2016/17, 696 of the 844 public sector ordinary schools received support from the LSG and \$539 million was allocated to the 696 schools. Audit identified the following room for improvement: (a) the tier of support a student with SEN needed was determined by the school concerned. To facilitate schools to cater for the needs of students with SEN, the EDB has provided guidelines to schools on the level of support according to the performance of the students under the 3-Tier Intervention Model. However, the guidelines did not explicitly spell out the criteria that schools could make reference to when determining the tier of support of students with SEN; (b) the ceiling was increased to \$1.5 million per school per year in 2013/14. Starting from 2015/16, the ceiling has been adjusted annually based on the change in the Composite Consumer Price Index but not the change in the number of students with SEN and ALAs. In the four-year period from 2013/14 to 2016/17, the number of Tier-2 and Tier-3 students with SEN and ALAs had increased by 29% from 37,188 to 47,937. The number of schools reaching the LSG ceiling had increased by 13-fold from 4 in 2013/14 to 56 in 2016/17; and (c) the EDB stipulated that schools should fully utilise the LSG fund allocated in every school year. In 2015/16, of the 692 schools which had received the LSG allocation, 366 had surplus fund. Of the 366 schools, 122 (33%) had surplus fund of more than 10% of the annual allocation (paras. 3.4, 3.5 and 3.8 to 3.15).

9. ***Slow progress of schools in switching from Intensive Remedial Teaching Programme (IRTP) to LSG.*** Under the IRTP implemented in 2000, schools are provided with one to three additional teachers in the establishment and a class grant is given for each additional teacher. With the introduction of the LSG in 2003/04, schools that have not participated in the IRTP can only apply for the LSG. Schools that are under the IRTP may continue to receive support under the IRTP. According to the EDB, the provision of the LSG enables schools to pool school resources together and deploy them more holistically and flexibly to render appropriate support services to students with SEN and ALAs based on their needs. Under the IRTP, the number of additional teacher posts granted to schools is based on the number of ALAs, students with Intellectual Disability and students with Specific Learning Difficulties but not other types of SEN. The EDB encourages schools implementing the IRTP to switch to the LSG as soon as possible. However, the response from schools was far from satisfactory. Over the eight-year period from 2009/10 to 2016/17, only 35 (13%) of 277 schools switched from the IRTP to the LSG. The remaining 242 schools were still participating in the IRTP (paras. 3.18 to 3.21).

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10. *Need to address the large disparity in the ratio of Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) to students with SEN among schools and the training of SENCOs.* In phases over a three-year period (2017/18 to 2019/20), the EDB will provide each public sector ordinary primary school and secondary school with one additional teaching post to facilitate school's assignment of a designated teacher to take up the roles of SENCO whose responsibility is to steer and coordinate services and support for students with SEN. In 2017/18, only 244 of 844 schools were each provided with a post for SENCO. By 2019/20, when the provision of SENCO is extended to the remaining schools, all public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools would each have a SENCO. The annual recurrent expenditure would amount to about \$550 million in financial year 2021-22. Audit analysis on the distribution of students with SEN among schools in 2016/17 revealed that of the 844 schools, 469 (55.6%) each had fewer than 50 Tier-2 and Tier-3 students with SEN while 45 (5.3%) each had 100 or more such students. As the number of students with SEN is not evenly distributed among schools, the ratio of SENCO to students with SEN varies among schools. Moreover, the EDB stipulated that a SENCO should have completed the Basic, Advanced and Thematic (BAT) Courses on catering for students with SEN. As at January 2018, 56 (23%) of the 244 SENCOs were still attending the required BAT Courses on supporting students with SEN (paras. 3.31 to 3.37).

Teacher training and professional support

11. *Need to encourage schools to meet training targets.* In 2007/08, the EDB launched a teacher professional development framework on integrated education. Under the framework, BAT Courses are conducted for serving teachers. Since the launch of the framework, the EDB has launched three cycles of BAT Courses with training targets set for each school to attain in each cycle. Audit examined the attainment of BAT Courses training targets by all 844 public sector ordinary schools in the second and the third cycles based on the training position of schools in the end of 2016/17. Audit found that of the 844 schools: (a) 37 (4%), 83 (10%) and 47 (6%) did not meet the training targets of the Basic, Advanced and Thematic Courses respectively applicable for the second cycle from 2012/13 to 2014/15; (b) 219 (26%), 572 (68%) and 326 (39%) did not meet the training targets of the Basic, Advanced and Thematic Courses respectively applicable for the third cycle from 2015/16 to 2019/20; and (c) there were 11 schools that did not meet any of the training targets for the BAT Courses applicable for the second cycle and the third cycle (paras. 4.2, 4.4 and 4.5).

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12. *Need to step up measures to ensure that schools receive the required number of visit days by EPs.* Audit examined the number of EP visit days of the 844 schools in 2016/17 and found that: (a) for 27 (8%) of the 330 schools that received the regular SBEPS provided by the EDB, each received less than the required 18 visit days per school year; (b) for 11 (2%) of the 484 schools that received the regular SBEPS provided by the school sponsoring bodies (SSBs), each received less than the required 14 visit days per school year; and (c) for 4 (13%) of the 30 schools that received the enhanced SBEPS, each received less than the required 30 visit days per school year. As the numbers of visit days were less than required, the educational psychology service provided to the schools might have been affected (para. 4.14).

13. *Need to strengthen monitoring of SBEPS provided by SSBs.* The SBEPS is provided to schools either by the EDB direct or the SSBs. In 2016/17, there were 11 SSBs that provided the SBEPS. Each of the 11 SSBs hired an EP supervisor. According to the SBEPS Guide, the EP supervisor must be an experienced EP generally with six years or more of EP experience and is required to provide about 130 supervision hours to each EP under his supervision each year. The EDB has not required the SSBs to submit proof of the qualifications of their EP supervisors. In addition, the EDB has not set up a robust mechanism to monitor the services provided by the EP supervisors (paras. 4.8, 4.16 and 4.17).

Audit recommendations

14. **Audit recommendations are made in the respective sections of this Audit Report. Only the key ones are highlighted in this Executive Summary. Audit has recommended that the Secretary for Education should:**

Identification and admission of students with SEN

- (a) **review the timeliness of identifying students with SEN (para. 2.14(a));**
- (b) **in collaboration with schools, further encourage parents of students with SEN to give their consent to transfer related information from primary schools to secondary schools (para. 2.14(b));**

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- (c) **record the dates on which the post-assessment meetings are held and the assessment summaries and the assessment reports are issued in the EDB's computer system to facilitate the monitoring of the timeliness of issuing assessment summaries and reports (para. 2.14(c));**
- (d) **urge schools to release more school information on support for students with SEN to facilitate parents of students with SEN in selecting schools (para. 2.21);**
- (e) **closely monitor the progress of the works of the 42 approved lift installations and expedite the lift installation works for schools without such facility under the new lift-installation programme announced in February 2018 (para. 2.27(a) and (b));**

Additional resources provided to public sector ordinary schools

- (f) **consider issuing more specific guidelines to schools to facilitate their determination of the tier of support their students with SEN require (para. 3.16(a));**
- (g) **review the ceiling for the LSG periodically taking account of the changes in price level and the changes in the number of students with SEN and ALAs (para. 3.16(b));**
- (h) **take measures to further encourage schools to fully utilise the LSG fund allocated to them in each school year (para. 3.16(c));**
- (i) **take measures to address the concerns of the schools with a view to speeding up their switch from the IRTP to the LSG (para. 3.23);**
- (j) **take measures to address the large disparity in the ratio of SENCO to students with SEN among different schools (para. 3.41(a));**
- (k) **take measures to increase the number of teachers having completed the BAT Courses to stand ready to serve as SENCOs (para. 3.41(b));**

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- (l) **take measures to encourage schools to meet the BAT Courses training targets (para. 4.6);**
- (m) **step up measures to ensure that schools receive the required number of visit days by EPs (para. 4.18(c)); and**
- (n) **step up its monitoring of the SBEPS provided by the SSBs (para. 4.18(d)).**

Response from the Government

15. The Government welcomes the audit review and agrees with the audit recommendations.