**Final Evaluation Report of the Pilot Project
on Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs)**

**December 2018
Richard Byers and Kitty Ho**

List of contents

8. Appendix

1. Executive summary

1.1 The SENCO Pilot Project in context

1.1.1 Over recent years, the Education Bureau (EDB) in Hong Kong has provided schools with additional resources, professional support and teacher training to further the development of inclusive education – more usually referred to as integrated education (IE) locally. Schools have been encouraged to incorporate support for student diversity in school policies and in their overall cultures and practices but schools with relatively high populations of students with special educational needs (SEN) have found it challenging to implement IE effectively.

1.1.2 In response, EDB initiated a three-year Pilot Project to assess the impact in schools of the provision of special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs). The project ran from the 2015 to 2016 school year to the 2017 to 2018 school year and EDB recruited 124 public sector schools to join the Pilot Project (59 primary schools and 65 secondary schools). The schools participating in the Pilot Project were selected from those ordinary (that is, rather than special) primary and secondary schools admitting relatively more students with SEN and/or students from challenging financial backgrounds and a cash grant was provided to the schools using resources from the Community Care Fund to enable schools to allow a designated teacher to be deployed as SENCO.

1.1.3 EDB established a range of duties to be undertaken by the SENCOs in carrying out their roles which were intended to occupy each SENCO for between 50% and 70% of their working time. A dedicated programme of professional development was established and new-to-role SENCOs were expected to complete this programme during the three years of the Pilot Project. An evaluation strand was also established and the findings from that evaluation are the subject of this report.

1.1.4 The key objectives for the evaluation included:
- To assess the impact of the provision of SENCO on whole school approaches to IE
- To identify the evolving contribution that the SENCO can make to policy and practice for IE
- To identify factors that facilitate the effective development of the SENCO role
- To identify factors that present barriers to the effective development of the SENCO role.

1.1.5 It was expected that addressing these objectives would enable the evaluation team to make recommendations for the potential future deployment of SENCOs in public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong.

1.1.6 The approach adopted by the evaluation team was based on diversity, using a variety of methods to ensure that data from different sources would be complementary. Thus quantitative data were drawn from all 124 participating schools in order to reveal broad trends. Further contextual data were taken from 19 (15%) of these schools. In-depth contacts, including school visits, were maintained with 27 (22%) of schools to provide qualitative data, including interviews and case studies. Using these combinations of data

enabled the evaluation team to triangulate findings and to illuminate wider issues with fine-grained detail.

1.1.7 The quantitative data obtained from all 124 schools included:
- basic information about students and staff
- data on student attainments in core subjects
- questionnaires to SENCOs, principals, teachers and parents.

1.1.8 The contextual data drawn from a sample of schools included:
- the job specification and work schedule for the SENCO
- the school development plan and the SENCO action plan
- data on SEN provision, interventions and support for students with SEN
- professional development activities related to SEN and IE.

1.1.9 The qualitative data gathered during school visits included:
- interviews with school principals and SENCOs
- classroom observations
- focus groups of students
- focus groups of parents of children with SEN.

1.2 Core findings from the evaluation

1.2.1 Data revealed that there were high expectations for the impact that the introduction of SENCOs might have. SENCOs were viewed as potential 'agents of change' and it was anticipated that their introduction would lead to a 'paradigm shift' in school responses to SEN and IE. To a large extent, these optimistic expectations have been realised.

1.2.2 However, the data also demonstrated that the backgrounds of the SENCOs appointed into schools during the Pilot Project were diverse and that the levels of prior relevant experience of the SENCOs were highly variable. For example, SENCOs were drawn into their new roles from a variety of prior positions in school hierarchies and yet it was acknowledged that proven experience of SEN-related work and involvement in quality teaching helped to establish the credibility of the SENCO.

1.2.3 It also became clear that schools adopted different approaches and deployed SENCOs in a variety of different ways. For example, in some schools, there was a continued reliance upon the SENCO for providing individual support for students with SEN. In other schools, the SENCO was regarded as a member of the leadership team who committed their energies to whole school development. This sense of diversity also extended to practice. The balance for SENCOs in different schools between day-to-day support and strategic work was highly variable. SENCOs in different schools had different ranking, status and seniority. Schools also constructed different responses to workload and teaching commitments for SENCOs.

1.2.4 In spite of this variation, the SENCOs in the Pilot Project have made significant contributions. In general, SENCOs have had a positive impact on IE and on whole school development in their schools. It is also clear that SENCOs are engaging in more strategic

activity as the new role develops and these activities include, for example, curriculum development and monitoring and evaluation activities.

1.2.5 The introduction of SENCOs into schools in the Pilot Project has had a positive impact on learning and teaching. In some schools, SENCOs have promoted deep changes in inclusive classroom practices. These changes have led to improved learning and teaching for all students as SENCOs ensure that curriculum access for all is enhanced through differentiation. In these ways, SENCOs have achieved positive impacts for students, for example, fostering greater personalisation and ensuring that teaching promotes greater student involvement. Data have shown how SENCOs have worked to promote greater diversity in teaching approaches and modes of learning in their schools to the benefit of all learners.

1.2.6 The introduction of SENCOs into participating schools has also yielded benefits for school staff. SENCOs have been found to be involved in providing professional development for their colleagues. SENCOs have been responsible for ensuring that more teachers, in the participating schools, are attending more SEN- and IE-related training courses. SENCOs have also initiated and fostered greater commitment to in-school development, for example, through engaging with colleagues in participative action research. These initiatives have often started in small groups of teachers but have led in time to wider improvements based on evidence established in small-scale enquiry.

1.2.7 Parents have also found that positive changes have been associated with the introduction of SENCOs into schools. The SENCOs in the schools participating in the Pilot Project have become more involved in working with the parents of children with SEN. Data show that there has been greater communication between schools and parents as SENCOs engage with their wider duties and, in some schools at least, the parents of children with SEN are becoming more involved, sometimes effectively as partners, in the education of their children.

1.3 Effective SENCO practices

1.3.1 There has been some evidence, especially during the earlier phases of the Pilot Project, of barriers that have not helped SENCOs to develop their roles effectively. In some schools, for example, the perceptions and attitudes of other school staff have made it difficult for the SENCO to carry out their duties in the ways envisaged by EDB and recommended during the new-to-role SENCO professional development programme. There has been reluctance among some staff to accept their share of responsibility for SEN and IE, rendering whole school approaches (that is, a range of ways of working that contribute towards the whole school approach to IE advocated by EDB) difficult to achieve. In some schools, senior managers have tended to encumber SENCOs with lower-level responsibilities rather than helping them to free up time to devote to more strategic activity.

1.3.2 Becoming aware of these barriers has helped schools in the Pilot Project to focus on those factors that have been demonstrated to facilitate the SENCO role. It must be acknowledged that support from senior staff has emerged from the evaluation as the most

significant single factor in enabling SENCOs to carry out their roles effectively. School leaders understand the importance of whole school culture and ethos and can use their positions to draw SENCOs into activity at these levels. The promotion of participative action research has also proved to be a significant facilitating factor in schools where this has been used, enabling the positive results from small-scale development and enquiry activities to influence wider practices in schools. The results of these kinds of initiatives have often also been shared at the gatherings of SENCOs that have been promoted as part of the new-to-role SENCO professional development programme that has been running throughout the SENCO Pilot Project. Respondents have argued that these kinds of networks among schools have contributed very positively to professional development for SENCOs and other school staff and have proved to be, in themselves, a powerful factor facilitating SENCO involvement in whole school change. SENCOs also report that achieving transparency in SEN systems and funding strategies is another important factor in the successes observed during the SENCO Pilot Project.

1.3.3 It has been possible to draw from the data collected during the SENCO Pilot Project a series of insights into those SENCO practices that are recognised, by SENCOs, senior leaders, school staff and other interested observers, as being effective in terms of their impact upon the whole school approach to IE. These practices are likely to be at their most effective when SENCOs are able to work directly with their colleagues in school on teaching and learning issues. In addition to leading joint curriculum planning and co-teaching initiatives, this might entail SENCOs providing mentoring, training and professional development for their teaching colleagues in relation to IE and SEN provision. SENCOs have, in many instances, also been observed working in close collaboration with staff from other agencies, including therapists.

1.3.4 SENCOs have also worked to review and revise previously existing models of student support. This has often led to SENCOs steering their schools away from individualised or separate models of support for students with SEN and working to make general classrooms, and the teaching and learning opportunities they offer, more inclusive. This has sometimes meant that SENCOs have sought to diversify aspects of the wider curriculum, including extra-curricular activities, other learning experiences and electives. Significantly, SENCOs have also supported their class- and subject-teaching colleagues in the personalisation of learning, for example, using one-page profiles to help teachers effectively to differentiate their classes to produce high quality teaching for all.

1.3.5 SENCOs have also been effective in their work beyond the classroom. There is evidence from the Pilot Project of SENCOs working much more closely with parents in order to generate powerful partnerships for learning at home, in the community and at school. Effective partnerships with students have also become a characteristic of the work of many SENCOs during the Pilot Project. SENCOs have taken leading roles in facilitating the voices of students in their schools and SENCOs have involved learners with SEN actively and productively in dialogue about their learning and about their plans for the future. A focus on transition planning, at various points of change in the lives of students with SEN, constitutes another key characteristic of SENCO effectiveness.

1.4 Discussion, conclusions and recommendations

1.4.1 In the closing section of the full report, we discuss a number of key issues that arise from the Pilot Project, draw conclusions and make a series of recommendations. Our discussions, conclusions and recommendations address the following issues:

1.4.2 Recommendations about broad policy in relation to the provision of SENCOs in public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools:

R1: We recommend that SENCOs should be deployed in all public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong through a phased programme.

R2: We recommend that schools should be provided with a SENCO manual offering clear guidance, including authentic examples of practice, setting out the role of the SENCO in relation to IE and whole school development.

R3: We recommend that a set of indicators of effectiveness should be used in the form of a SENCO or school success planner, together with IE indicators and information about the factors that can facilitate the work of SENCOs, to steer the introduction of SENCOs into all schools.

R4: We recommend that the deployment of SENCOs into all schools should be carefully supported and monitored.

R5: We recommend that expectations of SENCOs should be carefully managed.

R6: We recommend that the introduction of SENCOs should ensure that all schools continue to make progress towards IE in terms of both policy and practice.

1.4.3 Recommendations addressing the positioning of the SENCO post within school leadership structures:

R7: We recommend that ultimately SENCOs should take up a strategic role within decision making, school development and leadership structures in their schools.

R8: We recommend that seniority should be offered as a potential entitlement for SENCOs and that the transition of SENCOs into senior posts should be phased in over time as SENCOs gain in confidence and experience and as schools make plans for enabling SENCOs to engage in more strategic, higher level activity.

R9: We recommend that a set of criteria should be developed that could easily be applied as indicators of the readiness of a SENCO to take on a senior position in school and that these criteria might comprise:
- the prior experience of the SENCO in leading school developments in relation to SEN issues and IE (including time spent in a SENCO post)

- the prior relevant professional development of the SENCO (for example, completing the Basic, Advanced and Thematic (BAT) Courses plus the SENCO professional development programme)
- the level of Learning Support Grant (LSG) received by the school (as a reliable indicator of the range of types of SEN addressed and the numbers of students receiving support at Tier 2 and Tier 3)
- confirmation by school self-evaluation, co-signed by the SENCO and the school principal, of the existence of a budgeted SENCO action plan for IE that is integrated with whole school development.

R10: We recommend that the proposed SENCO senior post should be dedicated to the SENCO position

1.4.4 Recommendations concerning the management of the teaching load of SENCOs at the school level:

R11: We recommend that a significant proportion of each SENCO's workload should be protected for SEN- and IE-related activity on an ongoing basis.

R12: We recommend that SENCOs should always maintain a regular teaching commitment to sustain expertise in high quality teaching.

R13: We recommend that SENCOs, as standard practice, should devote around 70% of their working time to SENCO duties and retain a teaching commitment of around 30%; where schools wish to make adjustments in the distribution of the SENCO's work in recognition of exceptional local circumstances, we recommend that the time spent on SEN- and IE-related duties should not be less than 50%.

R14: We recommend that calculations relating to SENCO teaching workload should be based on total working time of the SENCO during regular school hours.

R15: We recommend that the teaching load of SENCOs in all schools should normally be less than the teaching load of other teachers working at an equivalent rank.

R16: We recommend that some schools should be able to make individual cases in support of applications to vary the standard allocation of SENCO teaching load.

R17: We recommend that, in exceptional situations in which schools seek to increase the SENCO's teaching load beyond 30%, this additional teaching should be devoted to SENCO activity (for example, co-planning, co-teaching, lesson observation and lesson study) focused on developing: quality first teaching for all; enhanced responses in the school to diversity; and more inclusive classrooms.

R18: In future, if schools wish to explore the potential for enabling SENCOs to devote more time (beyond 70%) to their SENCO duties, we recommend that practice should adhere to the position that all SENCOs should undertake some teaching on a regular basis.

R19: We recommend that SENCOs should not be required to carry significant responsibilities in terms of school administration and leadership in addition to their SENCO role.

1.4.5 Recommendations focusing on policy relating to further support for the development of the SENCO role and IE:

R20: We recommend that provision should be made for:
- ongoing processes of induction and initial professional development for new-to-role SENCOs in cohorts beyond the Pilot Project
- ongoing processes of induction and initial professional development for new-to-role SENCOs replacing SENCOs who leave their posts in the years ahead, potentially at a rate approaching 10% of SENCOs each year
- continuing and further professional development for more experienced SENCOs, including networking opportunities and communities of practice.

R21: We recommend that careful attention should be given to the design of proposals for the initial training of further cohorts of SENCOs together with programmes of continuing professional development for established SENCOs.

R22: We recommend that experienced SENCOs should be consulted in the design and delivery of future forms of professional development for SENCOs.

R23: We recommend that the transition from the Pilot Project towards the deployment of full cohorts of SENCOs in all schools should be managed with great care in order to ensure continuity and the promotion of consistent approaches.

R24: We recommend that professional development for SENCOs and other staff should be prioritised as a key aspect in the development of IE and integrated with ongoing work on IE within EDB.

R25: We recommend that the system of networks that brings SENCOs together in communities of practice to facilitate the sharing of the outcomes of school-based practitioner enquiry, reflective practice and lesson study should be continued on an ongoing basis.

R26: We recommend that EDB officers, together with experienced SENCOs from the Pilot Project, should be involved in supporting and participating in networks, lesson study activities, communities of practice and school-based practitioner enquiry along with SENCOs and other staff in schools.

R27: We recommend that EDB should also encourage the attendance at networking events of other members of school staff, and staff from other schools, in order to develop enhanced collaboration within and among schools and in order to facilitate succession planning for staff who may ultimately become interested in taking on SENCO duties themselves.

R28: We recommend that any SENCO manual that is developed and distributed to schools should be a whole school manual for developing IE designed for use in those schools with a SENCO in post.

R29: We recommend that the SENCO manual and any associated set of guidance materials should be written in partnership with the trainers who developed and ran the SENCO professional development programme during the Pilot Project and with experienced SENCOs from the Pilot Project cohort.

R30: We recommend that a dedicated SENCO website, administered by EDB, should be provided so that useful materials such as the SENCO manual, relevant circulars, guidance and professional development materials can be made available as downloads and shared among schools.

R31: We recommend that EDB should ensure that SENCOs have ongoing opportunities, for example, through networking arrangements, to air concerns, questions and queries for comment or to engage in territory-wide discussion and the sharing of new initiatives.

R32: We recommend that future forms of professional development for SENCOs should actively encourage co-teaching, co-planning, lesson study and participatory school-based action research in order to promote more effective collaboration between SENCOs and subject or class teaching colleagues.

R33: We recommend that a focus on developing skills in team work, collaboration and multi-disciplinary work should be included in SEN- and IE-related professional development programmes for SENCOs and other school staff including, for example, educational psychologists, speech therapists, teaching assistants, student counsellors and teachers who work closely with students with SEN.

R34: We recommend that EDB should remain closely involved in negotiating the design and content specification of programmes of professional development for SENCOs in order to ensure that they remain closely aligned:
- with EDB in terms of policy on IE;
- with the role of the SENCO as set out by EDB;
- with the SENCO manual;
- with the content of the original programme of professional development for new-to-role SENCOs.

R35: We recommend that EDB officers should remain involved in co-ordinating developments in IE and in the SENCO role across the Primary and Secondary phases to ensure that:
- there is continuity of approach for students with SEN at different stages of their school careers
- SENCOs in different schools receive consistent support and advice.

R36: In addition to securing the provision of professional development for SENCOs, we recommend that EDB should ensure that professional development related to SEN and IE is provided for other staff in schools.

R37: We recommend that related programmes of training focused on SEN and IE should take account of and foreground the SENCO role.

R38: We recommend that guidance on IE and clarification of the SENCO role should in future be regarded as integral elements in initial teacher education.

R39: We recommend that training related to IE and the role of the SENCO should be provided for principals, vice principals, school leaders and subject panel heads, both at the initial stage of preparing for leadership and in terms of continuing professional development.

R40: We recommend that awareness raising, information sharing and professional development related to the SENCO role should continue to be provided for EDB officers, including advisory staff and staff in Regional Education Offices (REOs); quality assurance (QA) officers; and staff in special education sections who are directly involved in supporting schools involved in developing IE and responses to students with SEN.

1.4.6 Recommendations for policy relating to monitoring and review by EDB:

R41: We recommend that the regular processes of school inspection should, in future, recognise and support initiatives in IE and the activities of SENCOs in relation both to students with SEN and whole school development.

R42: We recommend that, in future, it will become appropriate for some inspections and school development support visits to focus specifically on IE and the SENCO role as areas of exceptional strength in the practice of some schools.

R43: We recommend that the development and maintenance of skills, knowledge and understanding in relation to IE, SEN issues and the role of the SENCO among school inspectors and officers with responsibility for supporting school development is a professional development responsibility to which EDB should respond in the short and longer term.

1.4.7 Recommendations for the wider contributions made by SENCOs at the school level:

R44: We recommend that all SENCOs should be responsible for co-ordinating the development and implementation of an action plan for IE in their schools.

R45: We recommend that all SENCOs should be responsible for managing a budget for SEN- and IE-related activity in their school.

R46: We recommend that a budgeted SENCO action plan for IE should be an integral part of whole school development planning in every school.

R47: We recommend that schools should actively promote collaboration and professional exchange, both in-school between teaching colleagues and among schools.

R48: We recommend that schools should encourage their SENCOs to work with colleagues in school on action research, lesson study, co-planning and co-teaching.

R49: We recommend that schools should share the outcomes of successful small-scale initiatives in order to drive forward wider improvements – within schools and among schools.

1.4.8 Recommendations about broad future policy in relation to IE:

R50: We recommend that central policy on IE should be maintained under a continuing and ongoing process of review and revision in order to foreground, in the *Operation Guide on the Whole-School Approach to Integrated Education* (IE Operation Guide), for example, the contribution of the SENCO.

R51: We recommend that provisions related to the Learning Support Grant (LSG) should be enhanced to provide additional teachers for those schools admitting greater numbers of students with SEN and that support for IE should be improved to offer these schools increased access to professionals from other services.

R52: In order to respond effectively to the needs of students with borderline SEN and complex, combined or co-morbid conditions and difficulties, we recommend that schools should interpret and use the nine types of SEN with greater flexibility.

R53: We recommend that schools should focus their efforts on promoting developments in high-quality, inclusive teaching for all learners so that reliance on individual forms of support for students with SEN can be reduced.

1.4.9 Recommendations relating to the wider context:

R54: We recommend that approaches to assessment, examination and accreditation should, in future, provide enhanced opportunities for students with SEN.

R55: We recommend that the relevant agencies should ensure, in future, that exit pathways provide a wider range of post-school opportunities for all students, including options suitable for students with SEN.

R56: We recommend that inclusive schools should continue to be celebrated publicly as effective schools for all learners.

1.4.10 Policy on IE and provision for students with SEN in Hong Kong have moved forward during the period of the Pilot Project. SENCOs are being introduced into public sector ordinary schools in phases over three years starting from the 2017 to 2018 school year. Agreements have been reached about the distribution of the workload of SENCOs between

whole school SENCO duties and teaching. The introduction of these SENCOs into a wider group of schools will be supported by the use of a SENCO manual. A promotion rank, dedicated to the role of SENCO, is to be made available to schools with higher numbers of students with SEN.

1.4.11 The provision of resources to schools related to SEN and IE will be restructured. This will extend the Learning Support Grant to all public sector ordinary schools and will increase the grant rate for students with SEN in Tier 3. Schools with higher numbers of students with SEN will be able to deploy additional teachers and benefit from enhanced provision of school-based educational psychology services. Further, school-based speech therapy services will also be enhanced.

1.4.12 It is important that these policy initiatives, including the provision of additional staffing in terms of teachers, speech therapists and educational psychologists, should impact upon the whole school approach to IE and whole school development as well as serving the needs of students with SEN. It will be the responsibility of SENCOs to lead their expanded teams in these directions.

2. Background to the SENCO Pilot Project and the evaluation strand

2.1 The context for the SENCO Pilot Project

2.1.1 Over recent years, the Education Bureau (EDB) in Hong Kong has provided schools with additional resources, professional support and teacher training in order to help public sector ordinary (that is, rather than special) schools to cater for students with special educational needs (SEN). As part of this commitment, EDB has encouraged schools to adopt the 'whole school approach' (WSA) to the implementation of integrated education (IE). In order to further the development of IE, EDB has encouraged schools to incorporate support for student diversity in school policies and in their overall cultures and practices. In response, ordinary primary and secondary schools have generally formed student support teams and assigned vice-principals or senior teachers to lead and co-ordinate measures designed to support students with SEN. However, schools with relatively high populations of students with SEN have found it challenging to implement IE effectively.

2.1.2 In response, EDB initiated a three-year SENCO Pilot Project to assess the impact in schools of the provision of special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs). It was decided that this initiative would be evaluated by assessing the impact of the provision of SENCOs on the effectiveness of the implementation of IE as a whole school approach in participating schools. The project ran from the 2015 to 2016 school year to the 2017 to 2018 school year and EDB recruited 124 schools to join the Pilot Project (59 primary schools and 65 secondary schools). The schools participating in the SENCO Pilot Project were selected from those ordinary primary and secondary schools admitting relatively more students with SEN and relatively more students from families in challenging financial circumstances.

2.1.3 As a key feature of the SENCO Pilot Project, a cash grant was provided to the schools participating in the project using resources from the Community Care Fund. This grant was designed to enable schools to strengthen their teaching teams thus allowing a designated teacher to be deployed as SENCO.

2.1.4 It was EDB's intention that the member of staff taking the role of SENCO in each participating school should be a qualified teacher with at least three years' experience in teaching and implementing IE. EDB expected that these SENCOs would also have completed significant levels of training in special education (for example, through the Basic, Advanced and Thematic (BAT) courses provided by EDB or equivalent). The proposal for the project was that the SENCO in each school would assume a leading role in co-ordinating the formulation, implementation and review of support measures for students with SEN and would be tasked with enhancing the effectiveness of the implementation of IE for the benefit of the students concerned.

2.1.5 EDB established a range of duties to be undertaken by the SENCOs in carrying out their roles (see Appendix 1). It was expected that these duties, including leading the student support team in each school, would occupy each SENCO for between 50% and 70% of his/her working time. For the remaining time, it was anticipated that the SENCOs would carry out inclusive teaching duties in their schools.

2.1.6 In order to support the new SENCOs in carrying out their duties, a dedicated programme of professional development was established. The SENCOs in the participating schools were expected to complete this new-to-role professional development programme during the three years of the SENCO Pilot Project. They were also expected to participate in networking activities and to participate in the review and evaluation of the effectiveness of the Pilot Project. This Final Evaluation Report in summary provides a considered response to the data gathered during the evaluation process and highlights some of the issues and practices that have changed during the course of the SENCO Pilot Project.

2.2 The aims and objectives of the evaluation

2.2.1 The evaluation process was guided by a series of key objectives. The key objectives for the evaluation included:

2.2.1a To assess the impact of the provision of SENCO on whole school approaches to IE in schools where there are significant numbers of students:
- with special educational needs (SEN)
- from families in challenging financial circumstances

2.2.1b To identify the evolving contribution that the SENCO can make to the further development of inclusive ethos, culture, policy and practice among all teachers in public sector ordinary schools

2.2.1c To identify factors that facilitate the effective development of the role of SENCO in public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools

2.2.1d To identify factors that present barriers to the effective development of the SENCO role in public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools

2.2.2 It was anticipated that addressing these objectives would enable the evaluation team to make recommendations in relation to a number of key outcomes from the SENCO Pilot Project. These recommendations include:

2.2.2a The contributions that SENCOs can make to whole school approaches towards IE policy

2.2.2b The duties, qualifications and ranking of SENCOs within their schools

2.2.2c The forms of support that enable SENCOs to function effectively – to include:
- training and professional development
- partnerships with EDB officers and professionals from other agencies
- networking and clustering arrangements among schools
- in-school support structures

2.2.2d The way forward for public sector ordinary schools in Hong Kong in terms of considerations to include:

- the contributions that SENCOs can make and whether or not all schools should have a SENCO
- the scope of the SENCO role and options for the potential deployment of SENCOs in schools
- the value for money represented by the SENCO role and whether SENCOs are financially effective.

2.3 The design and methods for the evaluation

2.3.1 The evaluation process was established by EDB as a separate strand of the SENCO Pilot Project. The agreed approach to this evaluation and review process rested on diversity. Use was made of a number of methods in order to ensure that the data gathered using different strategies complemented one another across the three years of the project. Thus quantitative data were gathered to reveal broad trends in practices and outcomes; qualitative data were used to illustrate the trends revealed in the quantitative data in illuminative depth. Inevitably, the samples used in gathering the quantitative data were larger than the samples used in gathering the qualitative data.

2.3.2 The evaluation therefore concerns data in a number of categories, namely:
- contextual quantitative data from participating schools
- additional and more detailed contextual data drawn from a sub-sample of schools
- data drawn from a series of questionnaires to different stakeholders, including SENCOs, school principals, vice-principals, members of student support teams, experienced and less experienced teachers, social workers, educational psychologists, teaching assistants and parents of children with and without SEN
- data drawn from focused samples of participants through individual and group interviews
- data on student attainment that might provide a sense of outcomes for students with and without SEN during the period of the SENCO Pilot Project
- data gathered during classroom observations that would enable the evaluation team to highlight any changes in pedagogies or approaches to learning and teaching associated with the introduction of the SENCO role.

2.3.3 The evaluation team also took account of data drawn from materials generated in the SENCO professional development programme; and data gathered from meetings held with SENCOs, school principals and other relevant groups of colleagues during the period of the SENCO Pilot Project.

2.3.4 Various instruments were used in order to gather quantitative data in each of the three years of the Pilot Project. In brief, these data comprised:
- background information from all 124 participating schools, including data on student attainment and staffing
- questionnaires returned annually by 124 SENCOs, 100% of the sample comprising 59 SENCOs in primary schools and 65 SENCOs in secondary schools
- questionnaires returned by annual samples of members of school staff in a range of posts, totalling 1,601 staff members in the final year of the project (763 from

primary schools and 838 from secondary schools) including all but two of the principals working in the 124 schools in the SENCO Pilot Project
- questionnaires returned by annual samples of parents of students with SEN, including 372 parents of students in all four phases of education in school from Junior Primary to Senior Secondary in the final year of the project
- questionnaires returned by annual samples of parents of students without SEN, including 366 parents of students in all four phases of education in school from Junior Primary to Senior Secondary in the final year of the project.

2.3.5 As part of the qualitative strand of the evaluation, the local consultant visited 27 participating schools in total (12 primary and 15 secondary schools) over the course of the project between November 2015 and June 2018. These 27 schools (eight in Kowloon, five in New Territories East, ten in New Territories West and four on Hong Kong Island) represented more than 20% of the 124 project schools. Six of the schools were case study schools being followed through the entire three-year period of the SENCO Pilot Project.

2.3.6 The local consultant's visits enabled data to be collected from five main sources:
- 39 one-to-one in-depth interviews with school principals
- 39 one-to-one in-depth interviews with SENCOs
- 39 focus group discussions involving 226 students with SEN in total (100 primary and 126 secondary)
- 36 focus group discussions involving 131 parents of children with SEN in total (60 primary and 71 secondary)
- observations of 77 lessons, 12 of which were delivered by SENCOs, with follow-up discussions and debriefings after the observations.

2.3.7 The local consultant also gathered data from two one-to-one interviews with former leaders of student support teams; one further interview with a SENCO who was newly appointed to the post during the project; and one small group interview with five teaching assistants.

2.3.8 Each year, the evaluation also included additional contextual data drawn from 19 schools (nine primary and ten secondary schools) participating in the SENCO Pilot Project. The data drawn from these sources included:
- information about changes in SEN support and adaptations to teaching and assessment
- information about professional development for teachers
- work plans for SENCOs related to school development plans
- case studies of provision for four individual students per school (initially totalling 76 although this number reduced to 70 in the final year of the project as the result of attrition due to students leaving schools or moving).

2.3.9 Background information on the schools participating in the SENCO Pilot Project; the categories of SEN experienced by students in those schools; and the professional backgrounds of the SENCOs appointed into the participating schools is provided in sections 3 and 4 of this report.

3. Developments in the SENCO role during the Pilot Project

3.1 Introductory comments

3.1.1 Clarity about what the role of the SENCO should be has, in general, grown over the course of the Pilot Project. The situation in the first year was characterised by a process of exploration. Evidence of more concrete planning for the implementation of changed practices followed. More recently, SENCOs began to demonstrate their understanding of the differences between the former student support team leader role and the role of the SENCO. By the end of the project, SENCOs in general acknowledge that they should place greater emphasis on higher order duties rather than focusing on administration and bureaucracy.

3.1.2 While the situation in schools is variable, there has been clear evidence in some schools, of the SENCO becoming a leader of a team of people responsible for working with students with SEN. School principals have realised that the SENCO cannot do everything alone and that work on SEN issues must be shared. Many principals have acknowledged that they need to help to promote this sharing culture.

3.1.3 By the end of the project, most respondents in the evaluation strand were expressing the view that all schools should have a SENCO – and further, that the SENCO should occupy an additional senior post in the teaching staff establishment. To some extent, these views have been dependent on school culture: some schools have needed a 'top-down' approach while others have developed a more collaborative culture and depended less on the ranking of the SENCO in any leadership hierarchy. The latter schools have worked effectively with a 'task force' for SEN, with the SENCO as a key member. In these cases, the SENCO might have been a more junior member of staff who gradually became more confident in their role. Many respondents have noted that personality, confidence, commitment, leadership qualities and interpersonal skills may all be as relevant to the success of the SENCO in school as rank or qualifications. However, respondents felt that the SENCO should generally be a suitably senior and experienced colleague with ranking appropriate to a senior post.

3.1.4 The qualitative data have suggested that the expectations of SENCOs, as compared with the former leaders of student support teams, are higher. Principals and SENCOs themselves have reported that SENCOs should go beyond practices that are merely a 'matter of formality' and generate high quality support for students with SEN. SENCOs have been seen as 'experts' in their fields and as a 'resource' for whole school improvement. Indeed, there has been a real sense that the new-to-role SENCOs have been perceived as pioneers and flag bearers for new ways of supporting students with SEN in Hong Kong

3.1.5 There has been significant support in the qualitative data for the prospect of SENCOs being deployed in every school. Further discussion of this issue is provided in section 7 later in this report together with recommendations for future developments.

3.2 Prior qualifications and ranking of SENCOs

3.2.1 The overwhelming majority of the SENCOs in the Pilot Project (90% in primary schools and 92% in secondary schools) had more than ten years' experience of teaching before being appointed as SENCOs. Most of those teachers appointed as SENCOs had previously worked as co-ordinators or members of student support teams. A significant proportion (22% in primary schools and 15% in secondary schools) had been members of a subject panel and 28% of SENCOs in secondary schools had previously worked in the area of counselling, guidance or discipline.

3.2.2 By the end of the Pilot Project, the majority of SENCOs in primary schools (78%) were working at the rank of Assistant Primary School Master/Mistress (51% of primary school SENCOs) or Primary School Master/Mistress (27%). The majority of SENCOs in secondary schools (91%) were working at the rank of Graduated Master/Mistress (46%) or Senior Graduated Master/Mistress (45%). It is worth noting that around a fifth (22%) of SENCOs have been promoted into higher rankings during the three years of the Pilot Project.

3.2.3 More than 10% of the SENCOs in the Pilot Project left their posts during the three years (the actual attrition rate during the project was 12.9%). Of the new SENCOs who were appointed during the Pilot Project to replace those leaving their SENCO posts, most (13 out of 16) came into their posts at the same rank as their predecessor or at a higher rank.

3.2.4 Looking at the academic backgrounds of SENCOs in the Pilot Project, 36% of SENCOs in primary schools had a masters degree prior to becoming SENCOs and 62% had a first degree. In secondary schools, 75% of SENCOs had a prior masters degree and 25% had a first degree. The subject teaching backgrounds of SENCOs in primary schools were consistent. Most SENCOs in primary schools had a background in teaching either Chinese Language (35%); Mathematics (26%); or English Language (17%). While the range of subject backgrounds for SENCOs in secondary schools was greater, most SENCOs in secondary schools had teaching backgrounds in Chinese Language (24%); Liberal Studies (16%); or Personal Social and Humanities Education (16%).

3.2.5 In terms of training in SEN-related practices, 80% of the SENCOs in the Pilot Project had attended the dedicated and structured 30, 60 or 90 hour Basic, Advanced and Thematic (BAT) professional development courses for teachers working with students with diverse learning needs. SENCOs had also attended other forms of relevant training. Some SENCOs had taken first degrees with options in special or integrated education while 4% of SENCOs in secondary schools had a masters degree specifically in special education.

3.2.6 Over the course of the Pilot Project, increasing numbers of SENCOs (up from 42% to 56% in primary schools and up from 46% to 57% in secondary schools) reported that they had had sufficient training to enable them to fulfill their roles as SENCOs. This still leaves just under half (44%) of all the SENCOs in the Pilot Project reporting that they did not feel that had had enough training to do their jobs effectively. Section 7 addresses the further professional development needs of SENCOs.

3.3 The duties of the SENCO

3.3.1 The additional contextual data has shown that most SENCOs in primary and secondary schools spent between 30% and 50% of their time on SEN-related duties at the start of the project as they made the transition to their new SENCO duties; the rest of their time was devoted to teaching and other school commitments. However, the duties reported to be required of SENCOs developed in interesting ways over the course of the Pilot Project. Broadly, the evaluation data have indicated that SENCOs, besides spending more time on SEN-related duties, were expected increasingly to set a strategic direction for SEN and IE in their schools and to engage in higher order activities to include:

- engaging with the development of a more inclusive curriculum and associated teaching and learning or pedagogical issues
- inducting colleagues into SEN-related work and supporting their professional development.

3.3.2 Developments in the SENCO role reported in the qualitative data in the final year of the evaluation included:

- enhanced status and greater access for SENCOs to strategic decision-making structures
- focus shifting towards higher order activities including curriculum adaptation and inclusive teaching and learning
- SENCOs regarded as 'experts' in their field, as 'agents of change' and as valuable providers of ideas for whole school development

3.3.3 Indeed, by the final year of the project, school staff were able to envisage key roles for all SENCOs, regardless of the number of students with SEN in their schools. These roles included:

- implementing developmental tasks at a system level, for example, promoting a culture of IE or cross team collaboration
- providing teacher professional development in relation to IE
- offering more personalised, tailor-made support to students with SEN
- developing home-school cooperation, for example, through parent education and support
- extending the scope of the SENCO's role to cater for greater learner diversity in various domains.

3.3.4 By the end of the project, 14% more SENCOs were reporting being asked to implement, review and evaluate their school's responses to SEN, suggesting an increased focus on the review and evaluation of interventions. In terms of the location of SENCOs within school management structures, the additional contextual data have indicated that most SENCOs in primary schools were located within the Student Support and School Ethos Department in their schools while the situation in secondary schools has been much more diverse and was shifting over time. Examples in secondary schools have revealed SENCOs being located with: SEN Support; Management and Organisation; Student Affairs; Guidance and Discipline; Student Support and Ethos; and, significantly, Learning and Teaching.

3.3.5 By the end of the Pilot Project, most SENCOs in primary schools (around 90%) felt that they had an adequate job description for their role. This figure fell to 66% in secondary schools, suggesting that there is still a need to clarify job specifications for SENCOs in this sector. However, SENCOs' reported sense of the skills and attributes they needed to carry out their roles as SENCOs remained very stable and consistent throughout the Pilot Project. As well as seniority, respondents suggested that SENCOs need:
- passion, drive and commitment
- prior experience
- acknowledged expertise and credibility
- highly developed interpersonal skills.

3.3.6 The major priorities that SENCOs reported themselves to be concerned with remained relatively stable during the project. The most commonly cited area of work reported by SENCOs in primary schools was concerned with implementing, reviewing and evaluating various support measures and resource deployment for the school. Secondary school SENCOs reported slightly different priorities and noted that they were chiefly concerned with devising support programmes, including individual education plans, reading schemes, paired reading, career and life planning, in their schools.

3.3.7 Among all SENCOs, during the course of the Pilot Project, the following areas also became important, suggesting that there has been a shift, as SENCOs settled into their new posts during the project, away from direct support for individual students with SEN and towards more strategic levels of activity:
- making adaptations to curriculum, teaching and assessment
- reviewing the special education training needs of colleagues on the school staff
- promoting home-school co-operation and working in partnership with parents
- providing professional development, support and advice for colleagues
- collaborating with colleagues to promote more inclusive education.

3.3.8 Revised administrative arrangements have been reported in some schools as being helpful in promoting positive school improvement initiatives involving the SENCO. In the qualitative data, it was suggested that the following arrangements have supported collaboration on curriculum matters:
- locating SEN support within the 'Learning and Teaching' domain in school structures
- making the SENCO a key member of the curriculum development team
- expecting the curriculum leader to attend all students support meetings
- creating a task force focused on ensuring that the needs of students with SEN are embedded as a key element in whole school curriculum planning.

4. The impact of the SENCO in schools participating in the Pilot Project

4.1 Introductory comments

4.1.1 As noted in section 3, the situations in which SENCOs have found themselves in the schools in the Pilot Project has remained variable. Policies and practices have evolved differently in different schools. Some schools have embraced radical changes with enthusiasm and energy; other schools have worked on developments more cautiously and steadily. In general, differentiation of the curriculum might have been developed more consistently.

4.1.2 The data gathered in the course of the Pilot Project have not revealed any definitive trends with regard to the attainment scores of students with or without SEN in the participating schools. However, it has been possible to confirm that, in association with the introduction of SENCOs in both primary and secondary schools:
- there has been no dramatic deterioration in the attainment scores of students without SEN
- there has been no dramatic improvement in the attainment scores of students with SEN.

4.1.3 Beyond these broad findings, there have been some signs that attainment scores for students with SEN, in both primary and secondary schools, are beginning to show more improvement in Mathematics and Chinese Language than in English. There has also been confirmation, as might be expected, that gaps in attainment between students with and without SEN generally tend to widen as students make their way into and through the secondary education sector. There is some evidence in the qualitative data, however, to suggest that SENCOs are beginning to report less difference between the attainments of students with and without SEN, including in formal assessments, tests and examinations, and in both primary and secondary schools.

4.1.4 However, the data, as revealed by interviews and by observations, suggest that there have been other widespread improvements over the course of the Pilot Project. The findings from lesson observations carried out during the project, for example, have indicated:
- better organisation of teaching
- better use of teaching materials
- improvements in questioning techniques
- more focus on the development of students' study skills
- lessons that are less dominated by teacher talk
- greater student involvement.

4.1.5 Of course, it is not possible to argue that these changes have occurred as a direct consequence of the introduction of SENCOs into schools. However, these changes have been associated with that introduction and in some schools the correlations have been apparent. Some schools, for example, have implemented strategies directly focusing on

enabling the curriculum team and the SENCO to collaborate. In some schools, the SENCO has been made a key member of the curriculum development team. These examples have demonstrated that the SENCO, used effectively, has been an effective source of support for curriculum development, adaptation and differentiation. While subject leaders have provided expertise in their subject, the SENCO has been able to offer expertise in relation to the needs of students with SEN and their potential responses and to support positive developments in the differentiation of teaching and learning.

4.1.6 The overwhelming majority (119 out of 124) of the schools participating in the Pilot Project were aided schools. No participating schools dropped out of the Pilot Project during the three years.

4.2 Students with SEN in the schools participating in the Pilot Project

4.2.1 Numbers of students with SEN (defined as students receiving support at Tiers 2 and 3 and eligible for the Learning Support Grant) increased in the participating schools during the project (up by 2.1% in primary schools to 11% and up by 5.4% in secondary schools to 18.5%). In the majority of the primary schools in the project (62.7%), more than 10% of students have SEN. More than 10% of students have SEN in all the secondary schools in the project (100%).

4.2.2 The most commonly reported forms of SEN in the primary and secondary schools in the project were, according to schools: specific learning difficulties (SpLD) (53% of students with SEN); attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) (22.2% of students with SEN); and autism spectrum disorders (ASD) (14.4% of students with SEN). It is interesting to speculate why proportions of students with particular types of SEN vary between primary and secondary schools. For example, in the 2017 to 2018 school year, 36.9% of students with SEN in primary schools were reported to have SpLD while in secondary schools students reported with SpLD accounted for 64.2% of students with SEN. School staff indicated that 24.1% of students with SEN in primary schools had ASD but only 7.7% of students with SEN in secondary schools were reported to have ASD.

4.2.3 Reporting from parents of children with SEN broadly agreed with the school statistics in that SpLD and AD/HD were the most commonly reported types of SEN across public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools. The third most frequently reported form of SEN in primary schools in 2017 to 2018 according to parents was ASD. ASD was overtaken in secondary schools by SLI as the third most frequently reported form of SEN according to parents.

4.2.4 Numbers of students with SEN reported to be involved in significant behavioural incidents have remained stable during the project. The correlation between SEN and challenging financial circumstances is unclear. Project data seem to indicate that the number of families receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) has decreased during the three years of the project while the number of students in the project schools receiving Textbook Assistance has increased.

4.3 Involvement of staff in practices related to IE and SEN in Pilot Project schools

4.3.1 Over the course of the project, slight increases in the numbers of staff members involved in working with students with SEN have been reported (up by 1.65% to around 42% of staff in primary schools and up by 4.20% to around 30% of staff in secondary schools). This equates to 112 further members of staff becoming involved in SEN-related work in primary schools and 168 members of staff in secondary schools. The members of school staff most commonly reported to be involved in working with students with SEN in primary and secondary schools, in addition to the SENCO, were senior leaders; teachers in the student support team; support teachers; and teaching assistants. SENCOs also collaborate with school social workers, educational psychologists and school guidance personnel in their work with students with SEN.

4.3.2 If more members of staff are becoming involved in working with students with SEN, it is clearly important that they are in receipt of relevant training and preparation. School staff have reported clear views about the forms of professional development that they wish to receive in relation to SEN and IE. Most school staff seek advice and guidance about supporting students with SEN and understanding and responding to SEN policies and procedures. School principals, in contrast, have reported that they prioritise curriculum adaptation as one of their own IE-related professional development needs. A wider diversity of school staff, including principals, vice principals, teaching assistants and educational psychologists, were reported by primary and secondary schools as attending SEN-related professional development opportunities over the course of the Pilot Project.

4.3.3 Interestingly, the numbers of non-SENCO respondents who reported that they have attended the Basic, Advanced and Thematic (BAT) courses in special education courses are significant (77% of those responding to the project questionnaires in 2017 to 2018) and are increasing (up by 12.6% since the start of the Pilot Project in 2015 to 2016). The proportion of school principals who have attended the BAT courses is lower (68% of respondents in 2017 to 2018) but is increasing faster (up by 13.4% since the start of the Pilot Project in 2015 to 2016) than for other staff. More primary school principals have attended the BAT courses (79%) than secondary school principals (57%) and the rate of increase among primary school principals is also higher at 27.6%.

4.3.4 The qualitative data have revealed that SENCOs were frequently successful in encouraging their school colleagues to become more closely involved in SEN-related work. Interesting examples of items included in school development plans were recorded in the data for both primary and secondary schools that demonstrated a focus on professional development for staff in the domains of SEN and IE and that revealed a shift away from merely sending colleagues on courses towards more school-based activity.

4.3.5 There has also been a growing trend, over the course of the Pilot Project, for SENCOs to make a greater contribution to the development of other teachers and particularly to the design of a more inclusive curriculum and to the improvement of teaching and learning or pedagogical issues. Respondents have noted that SENCOs were increasingly likely to be working in collaboration with other teachers to improve classroom practices by enhancing

participation for students with SEN and encouraging their motivation to learn (for example, by making learning more dialogic).

4.3.6 These collaborative ways of working involving SENCOs were reported to be effective and to yield good outcomes. Teachers in many of the schools in the Pilot Project were reported to have:
- better understandings of the whole school approach to IE
- better attitudes to collaboration and shared responsibility
- improved awareness of the SENCO role and implications for collaborative initiatives in school
- improved awareness of the needs of students with SEN and of appropriate whole class responses.

4.4 Views about the impact of the SENCO on IE in participating schools

4.4.1 SENCOs' views about the potential impact of the introduction of the SENCO into public sector ordinary schools have remained very stable throughout the three years of the Pilot Project. An overwhelming majority of SENCOs (over 96% in primary schools and almost 94% in secondary schools in 2017 to 2018) believed that the introduction of the SENCO would have positive effects on the implementation of IE. If anything, there have been increases in the numbers of SENCOs believing that this effect will be 'very positive' in the final year of the project.

4.4.2 SENCOs have clear and consistent ideas about the ways in which this positive effect can be sustained. The most important structural factors reported by SENCOs to be likely to enhance the positive impact of SENCOs include:
- boosting the ranking of SENCOs
- developing networks for professional development
- the provision of professional support and information, including guidance on the SENCO role
- localising, sustaining and reinforcing training and ongoing professional development for SENCOs
- enhancing supervision arrangements for SENCOs in role
- making SENCO provision permanent.

4.4.3 Practices and opportunities in school that SENCOs considered to be likely to enhance the impact of the SENCO role include:
- reducing teaching loads for SENCOs
- improving training and awareness raising for various stakeholders (including principals, teaching colleagues and parents) in relation to IE and the SENCO role
- improving levels of and forms of support in school for SENCOs (for example, in terms of coherent policy implementation, resource deployment and school leadership)
- increased resource deployment
- reduced administrative burdens
- improved team co-ordination and opportunities for collaboration with colleagues.

4.4.4 Like SENCOs, all school staff have reported that they anticipate that the impact of the SENCO on school responses to SEN and IE will be overwhelmingly beneficial. Over 90% of all staff expect this impact to be 'positive' and the numbers of colleagues expecting the impact of the SENCO to be 'very positive' have increased steadily over the three years of the Pilot Project.

4.4.5 The priorities that school staff have for SENCOs in achieving this positive impact have remained consistent since the start of the project in 2015 to 2016, although school principals have reported an additional priority, namely to lead the development of a whole school approach to SEN and IE within the school. These priorities are:
- to liaise with teachers and other staff in supporting students with SEN and to co-ordinate their responses
- to establish long term policy for the school in relation to SEN provision and IE
- to provide professional advice and support for staff working with students with SEN
- monitoring the effectiveness of SEN provision.

4.4.6 In relation to these priorities, staff in schools have reported that they expect SENCOs to improve the implementation of IE in their schools, Staff have suggested that these improvements can be achieved when SENCOs:
- arrange for support services for students with SEN
- make adaptations to the curriculum
- deploy manpower effectively
- provide direct support for students with SEN

4.4.7 Interestingly school principals reported significantly different expectations of the SENCOs in their schools. Principals expected SENCOs to:
- provide strategic leadership for matters relating to IE
- enhance strategies for teaching and learning.
- develop improved partnerships between school staff, other agencies and parents.

4.5 Evidence of the involvement of SENCOs in whole-school development

4.5.1 The additional contextual data have provided evidence of SEN-related development issues being integrated into school development planning processes in both primary and secondary schools, most frequently in the areas of 'academic support', 'student development' or 'promoting integrated cultures'. In the final year of the project, SENCOs were reported to be more engaged in processes of review and evaluation, for example, making greater use of the inclusive teaching checklist or monitoring intervention programmes through systematic record keeping and provision mapping.

4.5.2 In the final year of the project, there were more concrete examples in the qualitative data of SENCOs engaging with curriculum-related issues and matters of teaching and learning in order to impact whole school approaches, for example:
- strengthening collaboration with curriculum leaders, subject panel heads and subject teachers over curriculum adaptation to enhance the learning of students with SEN

- working with teachers to enhance inclusive classroom practice, for example, through co-teaching, split class arrangements and lesson study
- guiding and supporting the differentiation of teaching resources and materials, including in relation to homework and examinations
- supporting, mentoring and training support staff, including teaching assistants, in order to enhance their effectiveness
- promoting the exchange of ideas and information between teachers and therapists.

4.5.3 Examples of items that primary school SENCOs contributed to their school's development plans over the course of the Pilot Project include:
- develop curriculum access strategies and assignment and examination accommodations to support the involvement and attainment of students with SEN
- enhance teaching strategies through co-planning and peer lesson observation to promote improved learning motivation and interest and higher levels of participation and interaction for students with SEN
- promote self-regulation for students with SEN by encouraging them to apply learning strategies and thinking tools such as pre-lesson preparation, note taking, asking questions and reflection
- use attainment data and lesson evaluation data to improve learning for students with SEN
- promote use of the inclusive teaching checklist to help teachers to prepare lessons that are more effectively differentiated for students with SEN
- provide opportunities for parents, including talks, training courses and workshops, to enhance parents' knowledge about learning for students with SEN and to facilitate home-school co-operation
- use school staff meetings to share with colleagues reports on the school-based learning support scheme, information about students with SEN and the services provided to them.

4.5.4 In secondary schools, there was evidence from interviews and focus groups that SENCOs became more active in the area of monitoring, review and evaluation, using data as a core part of their work in order to inform decisions about future provision focused on SEN issues. Secondary school SENCOs also contributed a wider range of items to the development plans for their schools, including, for example, commitments to:
- work in partnership with universities to enhance collaborative teaching and curriculum adaptation and accommodation
- cater for learning diversity using person-centred approaches
- develop 'buddying' schemes involving students with SEN
- make use of attainment data to drive improvements in lesson adaptation
- establish lesson trials and peer lesson observations to promote enhanced learner motivation
- make use of provision mapping to observe the progress made by students with SEN and to facilitate improved service provision
- make use of the one-page profile with wider group of staff in order to share understandings of students' strengths and weaknesses.

4.6 Evidence of the impact of SENCOs on school policies and classroom practices

4.6.1 Evaluative data gathered during the Pilot Project have indicated that these strategic initiatives have been associated with real changes in classroom practices. It is inappropriate to claim that the positive changes reported here can be attributed directly to the SENCO and lesson observations have indicated that considerable variation between schools and between teachers persists in terms of the pedagogies used in the schools in the Pilot Project. However, the changes noted in the data have occurred in association with the introduction of SENCOs into the schools in the Pilot Project.

4.6.2 Monitoring and review procedures led by the SENCOs in some schools using attainment data have led to an understanding that separate teaching groupings for students with SEN (which respondents have often referred to as 'pull out programmes') have many disadvantages. Respondents have increasingly argued that whole school ways of working should focus on developing high quality whole class teaching for all.

4.6.3 The data revealed instances, for example, in both primary and secondary schools, of teachers organising a variety of activities, including whole class instruction or activity, individual, pair and group work, all closely related to the learning objectives for the lesson. Where these activities were arranged in a smooth, systematic manner, they helped students to grasp the content of the lesson and to consolidate their learning in a range of contexts.

4.6.4 SENCOs were also reported, in the qualitative data in the final year of the project, to be doing more work in the area of personalization, for example:
- planning a greater diversity of activities designed to motivate students by engaging their interests and preferences
- taking a more person-centred approach to planning, for example, supporting the process of reviewing learning with students to consolidate knowledge and understanding
- using one-page profiles as a way to understand and the needs of students and share insights
- listening more actively to the voices of students
- encouraging self-regulation and peer support
- giving increased attention to transition planning.

4.6.5 There were instances, more frequently in secondary schools, of teachers making learning strategies explicit in order to support learning for mixed groups of students. Some teachers worked hard, for example, to cultivate a positive learning atmosphere in their lessons, emphasising that making mistakes need not mean failure and that good learning can follow from carefully reviewing errors. Some teachers made it clear that students who were struggling should seek help from their peers or from staff. Other teachers offered explicit choices for students, enabling them to become more self-regulated and to shape the direction of their own learning

4.6.6 Respondents have identified a further series of pedagogical ideas that originated in the professional development sessions for SENCOs run in association with the Pilot Project and that achieved wider impact in their schools, including:

- developing the 'class dojo' as a whole-school reward system
- wider use of the inclusive teaching checklist when scrutinising lesson plans, observing colleagues' lessons and providing follow-up feedback
- implementing student profiles and the use of one-page profiles in particular
- developing more person-centred approaches to the measurement of impact and progress
- deploying tools for transition planning.

4.6.7 As the Pilot Project proceeded, SENCOs came to regard themselves as being centrally involved in the process of improving teaching for all. SENCOs reported that they had become more likely to offer advice and guidance to their colleagues on classroom practices and to be involved in helping to develop better differentiated teaching resources and materials.

4.6.8 In association with this finding, a greater willingness has developed in schools in the Pilot Project to explore the potential for collaboration in the classroom, using co-teaching arrangements and also the wider deployment of teaching assistants. There was evidence of wider use of varied approaches to student grouping within class teaching, for example, getting students to work in pairs or in small groups.

4.6.9 Evidence has also been gathered, in some schools, of greater exchange of expertise and experience between class or subject teachers and other professionals, with teachers beginning to introduce strategies or personal objectives based on therapeutic approaches into their lessons. There was associated evidence across primary and secondary schools of the extensive use of visual strategies and tangible aids to support teaching and learning. Some teachers, in both primary and secondary schools, were observed making use of effective multi-sensory teaching approaches, including the use of music or video to augment the teaching of key content or concepts.

4.6.10 There have been reports from some schools of SENCOs leading small-scale, action research-style initiatives in order to develop and evaluate new and more inclusive ways of working. These initiatives have included, for example:
- greater use of iPads in class
- collaborative planning and co-teaching to develop better strategies for including students with SpLD in subject lessons
- changing lesson design and the pace of lessons to make phased learning clearer and more available for students with SEN
- using lesson observation throughout the school to improve teaching and learning.

4.6.11 There was evidence in both primary and secondary schools of teachers making more effective use of questioning techniques. Teachers in both primary and secondary schools were observed to be making focused use of scaffolding techniques to support students in their learning. Some teachers in some schools, both primary and secondary, were observed making good use of more interactive strategies to promote student involvement and participation in their lessons.

4.6.12 In some schools, the SENCO has been reported to be involved in making adaptations to schemes of work and homework. These initiatives have included:
- developing graded worksheets for subject teaching
- differentiating learning targets for students with lower prior attainments
- promoting the wider use of accommodations for examinations and assessments.

4.6.13 The additional contextual data on individual student support have revealed increases in teaching adaptation and the differentiation of regular lessons in both primary and secondary schools. Schools have created more opportunities for teaching in integrated smaller class groups and relied less heavily on SEN-specific after-school remedial teaching. There has been evidence of less reliance in both primary and secondary schools on the use of hired-in services to support students with SEN and less emphasis on separate social, behavioural and communication training for students with SEN.

4.6.14 The additional contextual data also showed an increase in the accommodation of assignments, assessments and homework in primary schools, although data from secondary schools revealed a decreasing willingness to adapt or adjust or accommodate assessments as students approached the Hong Kong Diploma in Secondary Education (HKDSE) in Secondary Six. In primary and secondary schools, rates of use of individual education plans (IEPs) remained essentially constant during the Pilot Project, but staff reported reducing levels of reliance on individual case conferences.

4.6.15 In classrooms, however, SENCOs found greater meaning in more personalised approaches. There was evidence of SENCOs paying greater attention to 'student voice' and developing positive strategies with students. Examples of practices found in the Pilot Project schools included:
- involving students in the evaluation of lessons
- using an 'I can' reward booklet to encourage positive behaviour
- helping a student with AD/HD to analyse and organise ideas using 'mind maps' and 'strategies for attentiveness'
- working on the 'one-page profile' directly with students to help to incorporate their ideas and preferences into the arrangement of supportive measures.

4.6.16 In relation to student outcomes, principals and SENCOs noted a series of improvements by the final year of the Pilot Project. These cannot all be attributed directly to the introduction of the SENCO but are associated with intervention programmes, practices and new initiatives implemented recently. These improvements included, in both primary and secondary schools:
- better peer relationships
- better teacher-student relationships
- improvements in social skills
- improvements in behaviours
- the development of greater self-understanding and self-confidence
- improved attitudes to learning
- measurable or observable improvements in learning.

4.6.17 Students themselves reported a range of beneficial outcomes from the Pilot Project, including:
- better peer relationships in some secondary schools
- improved attitudes to learning in both primary and secondary schools
- new SEN-related training programmes and groups in some primary schools.

4.7 The views and experiences of parents

4.7.1 The numbers of parents of children with SEN (around 86%) who have reported that they know who to contact in school in order to discuss their child's needs have not changed significantly during the project nor have the categories of staff members nominated by parents as their first point of contact in school (class teacher, social worker and support teacher or SENCO). The numbers of parents of children with SEN in primary schools who have reported that they are aware that there is now a SENCO in school remained steady through the project at around 75% (76% in the final year). There has been an increase in the numbers of parents in secondary schools who are aware of the SENCO role (up from 61% in 2015 to 2016 to 71% in 2017 to 2018).

4.7.2 Parents' expectations of what the SENCO might actually do for their children with SEN have remained broadly unchanged during the Pilot Project. The two key expectations have consistently been:
- to keep me informed about my child's learning and progress
- to liaise with subject teachers to make adaptations to support my child's subject learning.

4.7.3 Individual case studies gathered from both primary and secondary schools as part of the additional contextual data have revealed greater involvement from parents and more detailed and specific examples of the kinds of liaison work being carried out. Parents of children with SEN in primary schools have noted that they expect SENCOs to involve them in planning how their children's needs will be met. SENCOs in primary schools have reported meeting parents regularly and making home visits in some cases. In other cases, parents were reported to be coming into school more often and regularly in order to support their children through times of the day that were stressful. SENCOs in primary schools were also reported to be working with parents to co-ordinate programmes of support at home for important aspects of learning.

4.7.4 In secondary schools, SENCOs have reported maintaining closer communication with parents and closer co-operation on aspects of learning in particular. Parents in secondary schools have stated that they expect SENCOs to provide support for transition planning and exit pathways for their sons and daughters with SEN.

4.7.5 Responses from participants in the qualitative strand have confirmed that there was greater emphasis on partnerships with the parents of students with SEN over the course of the Pilot Project. Parents have reported:
- having better understanding of school policies and practices

- feeling better informed in their discussions with teachers and therefore more inclined to be involved
- being more aware of the role of the SENCO and the potential outcomes for students with SEN
- feeling more inclined to work directly with the SENCO as a communication route with other teachers in the schools attended by their sons and daughters.

4.7.6 Further, the data indicate that the expectations of parents have been broadly met. Parents themselves have suggested that they are becoming more involved in the education being provided for their sons and daughters. Rates of parental satisfaction remain high where children have SEN. Massive majorities of parents, across primary and secondary schools, have agreed, for example, that:

- teachers are willing to help students with SEN (98%)
- parents are able to approach school staff to discuss any concerns they may have (96%)
- children with SEN are happy at school (95%)
- parents know how their children with SEN are being supported in school (94%)
- children with SEN are making good progress at school (93%).

4.7.7 The data are only marginally less encouraging in the area of parents feeling fully advised about IE in their children's schools. In this regard, 87% of parents have reported that they are kept informed or updated about changes with regard to SEN provision in their child's school. This suggests that parents of children with SEN feel involved in the education specifically of their own sons and daughters but are less confident about their understanding of the broader issues in SEN provision and IE. In making open comments in their questionnaire returns, many parents acknowledged and reported appreciation for the support that schools offer to their sons and daughters, but also asked for even greater communication, for example, between SENCOs and subject teachers and between school staff and parents.

4.7.8 Among parents of children without SEN, there is still some lack of awareness of the SENCO position in schools. In primary schools, 46% of parents of children without SEN reported that they did not know that there is a designated teacher carrying out the role of SENCO; in secondary schools this number rose to 66%. These figures have remained more or less constant since the start of the project in 2015 to 2016.

4.7.9 Very few parents of children without SEN expected that the introduction of the SENCO would have a detrimental or negative effect on their children's education, and these numbers have decreased over the course of the Pilot Project. Some concerns have been expressed (by two parents in 2016 to 2017) about negative impact on learning progress. These doubts were expressed tentatively as questions (for example: 'Would teachers cater for students with SEN and ignore the needs of other students?' 'Would this delay the learning of other students?') or revealed misunderstandings about how SENCOs should be working in schools (for example, suggesting that more SENCOs would be needed where there are more students with SEN, as if SENCOs would bear sole responsibility for these students rather than co-ordinating whole school provision: 'The number of SENCOs should be provided according to the ratio of students with SEN in each school'). The data recorded

no concern at all among the parents of children without SEN about social or emotional harms or unwanted impacts upon social skills.

5. Barriers to the effective development of the SENCO role

5.1 Introductory comments

5.1.1 Data gathered during the Pilot Project indicate that, in general, barriers to the effective deployment of SENCOs have decreased. There have been fewer reports of SENCOs spending time managing crises and 'fire fighting' in relation to incidents or difficulties involving individual students with SEN. However, data have revealed teachers still putting pressure upon SENCOs to provide support with work with individual students and the perceptions and attitudes of teachers have continued to generate difficulties for some SENCOs. For example, many teachers have continued to expect that SENCOs should provide quick ready solutions to classroom problems.

5.1.2 Findings have also indicated reluctance on the part of some teachers to participate in initiatives put forward by SENCO. These teachers may have held different views from SENCOs, for example, on curriculum or differentiation issues or relating to the use of in-class support including teaching assistants (TAs).

5.1.3 Problems have persisted with some teachers struggling to understand the needs of students with SEN and finding it difficult to make appropriate responses to their needs. This situation has been shown to be more acute in upper primary and senior secondary where both teachers and students with SEN can become frustrated with difficulties over the content of the curriculum. In these phases of schooling, the attainment gap has tended to widen and there may be less support. Demands from the assessment and examination of attainment have added pressure to this situation.

5.1.4 A key factor underpinning SENCO confidence and effectiveness has been shown to be support from senior managers in schools (see section 6). However, findings have indicated that school principals may not always be in a position to provide the kinds of informed and engaged support that new-to-role SENCOs require. Some principals, for example, have stated that they have been unable to attend relevant briefing and training sessions and have asked that expectations should be set out clearly in revised and updated policy statements.

5.1.5 SENCOs, in general, have gained understanding, clarity and confidence over the course of the Pilot Project in relation to the nature of their role. However, some SENCOs have reported that they would appreciate still greater clarity about policy towards IE and a better sense of the key purposes driving the introduction of SENCOs into schools.

5.2 Work allocation and support from senior managers

5.2.1 A majority of SENCOs (68% of SENCOs in primary schools and 77% of SENCOs in secondary schools in 2017 to 2018) reported that their work allocation provided them with enough time in which to carry out their duties as SENCOs. Fewer SENCOs in secondary schools reported that having a heavy teaching load was eroding their capacity to carry out their SENCO duties. Indeed, data from interviews and focus groups indicated that the sense of pressure on SENCOs has been diminishing through the period of the Pilot Project.

5.2.2 However, taking on wider and more strategic roles has not always been easy for SENCOs and some SENCOs continue to feel pressured by constraints upon their time. Of those SENCOs who did not feel that their workload offered sufficient capacity to act effectively as SENCO, the three areas most commonly cited as encroaching upon time for SENCO duties were:
- heavy non-SEN related administrative duties and tasks
- demands for individual support for students with SEN
- teaching workload.

5.2.3 Most SENCOs (81% in primary schools and 83% in secondary schools in 2017 to 2018) considered that their school managers had given them adequate support to enable them to carry out their roles as SENCOs. However, not having support from school leaders, or having school leaders with little interest in or empathy for the experiences of students with SEN, has presented some SENCOs with real difficulties. Some principals continue to regard the SENCO as fulfilling a largely bureaucratic student support role and have resisted attempts by SENCOs to become involved in curriculum-related or pedagogical issues.

5.2.4 Where SENCOs did not feel adequately supported, they cited lack of co-ordination or conflict between policy on integrated education and the realities of the ways in which schools are managed as key factors. Other issues noted by SENCOs who did not feel adequately supported included requests for:
- reduced administrative burdens
- more manpower
- improved support from school leaders
- greater opportunities, structured into the working practices of schools, for collaboration between SENCOs and subject leaders and teachers.

5.3 The attitudes and beliefs of teachers

5.3.1 SENCOs have expressed concerns, during the Pilot Project, about the perceived lack of relevant special education knowledge and expertise among colleagues in school. According to the qualitative data, teachers may lack awareness of, or interest in, SEN-related work and these attitudes can present barriers to SENCOs trying to fulfill their duties according to the guidance.

5.3.2 Some teachers have been reported as having negative attitudes towards students with SEN and narrow views about IE and more person-centred approaches. In some schools, far from facilitating a whole school approach, attitudes like this have led to tensions between colleagues with contrasting views about the most effective ways in which to work. In these settings, suggestions about collaborative planning and co-teaching involving the SENCO have been rejected by class and subject teachers and some SENCOs have reported difficulties when working with colleagues to make adaptations to curriculum plans and approaches to teaching and learning

5.4 Perceptions about potential future difficulties

5.4.1 In terms of the difficulties SENCOs anticipated in carrying out their duties in future, all SENCOs, in both primary and secondary schools, had concerns that the working arrangements for SENCOs, together with the deployment and management of resources, might become more problematic. This concern was driven by a perception that there are ongoing increases in the numbers of students with SEN being placed in public sector ordinary schools and that the time devoted to work in the area of SEN is liable to be eroded. Some respondents have suggested that the range of their difficulties experienced by students with SEN is increasing and that this factor, in itself, has created challenges for SENCOs who may be fully occupied with immediate concerns and lacking in capacity to undertake longer-term and higher-order development tasks.

5.4.2 In some schools, these difficulties have appeared to be exacerbated by lack of stability in the staffing devoted to student support. SENCOs have reported being occupied in constantly inducting fresh colleagues into SEN-related work or dependent upon part-time or contract staff who lack long-term commitment to whole school developments. In some schools, perceptions about lack of funding or lack of flexibility in deploying available funds were also reported as presenting barriers to the work of the SENCO.

5.4.3 In addition, SENCOs in primary schools were concerned about their working relationships with parents (for example, in terms of the potentially high expectations of parents or a lack of parental willingness to support their children with SEN). In secondary schools, SENCOs were also concerned about difficulties they anticipated that they might face in working with subject teachers and curriculum leaders in their schools (for example, in order to effect differentiation of subject teaching).

5.4.4 Many respondents in the qualitative strand of the evaluation have noted that the SENCO cannot be expected to resolve all the problems faced by schools and the parents of students with SEN. Some of these wider contextual issues are addressed in section 7 of this report. As the Pilot Project has continued, however, suggestions have been made about wider initiatives to address perceptions concerning:
- the need for greater flexibility in accommodations for assessment and examination
- reductions in the pressures caused for some students by an 'overloaded' curriculum and requests for a slimmer and more adaptable 'framework'
- the availability of a wider range of exit pathways for students with SEN after school
- the development in the long term of schools with different areas of expertise – including schools specialising in pre-vocational, technical or social education.

6. Factors that facilitate the development of the SENCO role

6.1 Introductory comments

6.1.1 The evaluation data have revealed that the numbers of SENCOs who feel adequately supported in their roles as SENCOs have been steadily increasing over the course of the Pilot Project. Responses to questionnaires have shown that 77.4% of SENCOs in 2015 to 2016 and 78.2% in 2016 to 2017 were satisfied that they had adequate support in their roles as SENCOs. In 2017 to 2018, these figures had risen and 81% of SENCOs in primary schools and 83% in secondary schools considered that their school managers had given them adequate support to enable them to carry out their roles as SENCOs.

6.1.2 In summary, those areas of support that were most appreciated by SENCOs included:
- having someone in a leadership role (often the school principal) to listen to concerns and provide encouragement and support
- the deployment of additional manpower, including teaching assistants
- opportunities to contribute to school policy making
- being provided with time and opportunities for attending professional development activities
- reduced teaching load.

6.2 Support within schools

6.2.1 SENCOs have consistently recorded their appreciation for the support that has been provided for them by their senior managers and within their schools. Many SENCOs have continued to value most significantly among other supporting factors the active support of their school principal. Indeed, according to the qualitative data, the active support of the school principal (and/or the vice principal) has continued to be reported as the 'key success factor' for SENCOs in both primary and secondary schools.

6.2.2 The data have further revealed that this strategic relationship can be particularly effective where school principals:
- have direct experience of working with students with SEN in the past
- have attended SEN-focused professional development and training on IE policy and practices
- share vision and a sense of mission with the SENCO
- have a clear understanding of the SENCO role
- place high value on the work of the SENCO.

6.2.3 Reports indicate that this support has been expressed, in schools where there is an effective relationship between the SENCO and the principal, in a number of ways, for example, the principal may have:
- hand picked teachers to work with the SENCO on a variety of activities
- participated directly in open and regular dialogue with the SENCO about priorities for SEN-related work in school

- encouraged other teachers to understand and support the work of the SENCO
- promoted collaboration between the SENCO and other functional teams in school
- devoted manpower and resources to SEN- and IE-related projects
- acknowledged ways of measuring effectiveness other than through raw attainment scores and examination results
- set realistic and holistic targets for outcomes for students with SEN.

6.2.4 Data from interviews and focus groups have indicated that school staff also play an important part in supporting SENCOs in their roles. However, teaching colleagues, in both primary and secondary schools, were reported to require a good understanding of and commitment to advanced concepts of inclusive teaching and learning if they were to be involved in effective teamwork with the SENCO. The data have revealed increasing numbers of instances of SENCOs working directly with subject panel heads in their schools and gaining the support of class and subject teachers in the development of more inclusive curriculum plans and teaching practices.

6.2.5 Clearly SENCOs have appreciated and made good use of reduced teaching and administrative workloads. The deployment of additional staff, including teaching assistants, has often been reported to optimise this situation. By the end of the Pilot Project, there was a widespread sense among SENCOs, in both primary and secondary schools, that the reduction in teaching and administrative work has been an important prerequisite for the effective development of higher-order SENCO duties.

6.2.6 Some schools have also used external expertise to support the SENCO in working on SEN issues, for example, through colleagues from higher education; via EDB; or by using educational psychologists. In some schools, these colleagues have been used to help the SENCO to promote action research with groups of teachers to provide truly local and grounded examples of how teachers can respond effectively to SEN-related challenges.

6.3 Professional development

6.3.1 Professional development has been recognised by respondents in the evaluation strand as a key strategy for promoting improvements in practice in schools. Respondents in the evaluation strand put forward the view, for example, that SENCOs themselves would continue to have professional development needs. It has been suggested that the recruitment of new SENCOs to replace SENCOs moving from their posts should be supported by ongoing and continuing high quality professional development opportunities. Were SENCO provision to be extended, respondents noted, that need would naturally become greater.

6.3.2 Networks constitute one form of professional development that has emerged as being particularly appreciated by SENCOs. Respondents have revealed, in interviews and focus groups, that they have benefited from being involved in continuing SEN networks and communities of practice, including exchanges between schools. Inter-school visits have been reported to focus on a range of productive and timely issues, including:
- managing learning in inclusive classrooms

- the needs of students with specified difficulties (like AD/HD)
- accommodations to assessment and examination processes
- student counseling and discipline.

6.3.3 Looking beyond professional development for SENCOs, respondents in interviews and focus groups also argued that other stakeholders (including school principals and vice principals as well as class and subject teachers) would continue to require professional development focused upon IE and SEN-related issues. By the end of the Pilot Project, many schools were offering in-school SEN-related training for all their teachers; others were sending teachers out onto SEN-related courses taught elsewhere; some schools were doing both.

6.3.4 Respondents were very clear in their view that professional development opportunities should continue to be provided – for SENCOs, for teachers, for school leaders and for members of staff working in the area of student support – so that all colleagues would ultimately be prepared to adopt a whole school approach. Some respondents were of the opinion that current SEN courses (including the programme of Basic, Advanced and Thematic Courses) as well as programmes of initial teacher education stand in need of revision and updating in the light of the SENCO initiative. These and other aspects of professional development are further discussed as a major area for future development in section 7.

6.4 The role of EDB

6.4.1 Respondents in the qualitative strand of the evaluation have confirmed that the support and encouragement of EDB has been central to the success of the SENCO Pilot Project. Principals in both primary and secondary schools have reported that it has been important to acknowledge, as they worked to support their SENCOs, that they were part of an exciting wider project.

6.4.2 Respondents have also argued that EDB's role could be enhanced. In interviews and focus groups, respondents have argued ultimately for the provision of an authoritative sense of strategic direction for the role of SENCO and the development of IE in schools in Hong Kong. Should a territory-wide policy be adopted, they have argued, it must be communicated clearly and in some depth to schools and to the community (including parents of students with and without SEN). Respondents have suggested that, in practical terms, this would entail developing and publishing a revised version of guidance on implementing IE to incorporate the SENCO role and provide a clear 'road map' towards IE. However, respondents have also acknowledged that schools in future may be working towards these outcomes at differing rates and according to different local priorities. Further discussion of these issues and EDB's future role is provided in section 7.

7. Discussion, conclusions and recommendations

7.1 The provision of SENCOs in public sector ordinary schools

7.1.1 The results of the Pilot Project have been remarkably positive. Colleagues involved in the Pilot Project, both in schools and within EDB, have worked very hard to secure this successful outcome. The work of the teams in the Special Education Support (SES) 3 and 4 Sections within EDB in supporting and monitoring the implementation of IE and the SENCO role in schools has been hugely valued. Colleagues in schools and within EDB are to be congratulated on their efforts. This section sets out recommendations, in the light of these successes, about broad policy in relation to the provision of SENCOs. In conclusion, therefore, as **R1: We recommend that SENCOs should be deployed in all public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong through a phased programme.** We note that 'schools', as in the rest of this report, should be taken to refer, in this section and in relation to all our recommendations, to public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools.

7.1.2 Despite this success, implementing this new role in schools has not been easy and our sense is that it would be prudent to ensure that this phased programme takes a number of years. The SENCO role in the Pilot Project schools is still evolving after three years and, as we suggest below, EDB will need to continue to review policy and practice over time in order to ensure the ongoing relevance of the SENCO to changing local situations in Hong Kong. It is also important to ensure that schools deploying SENCOs for the first time during any implementation or regularisation phase should be effectively supported in order to maximise the value of this important new element in school staffing. **R2: We recommend that schools should be provided with a SENCO manual offering clear guidance, including authentic examples of practice, setting out the role of the SENCO in relation to IE and whole school development.**

7.1.3 Data from the Pilot Project indicated that new-to-role SENCOs and their colleagues in schools experienced the greatest sense of pressure and expressed the most urgent requests for guidance during the first year of implementation. There was some uncertainty then about what SENCOs should actually be doing in schools and lack of clarity about how the SENCO's duties should differ from those carried out by the leader of the student support team. It became clear that supportive leadership, and the role of well-informed school principals in particular, was crucial to SENCO effectiveness, as we have confirmed in Section 6 of this report. Now that the initial experiences of the first group of SENCOs deployed during the Pilot Project have to some extent matured, it should be possible to extract from the evaluation data collected a useful range of examples of effective practices that could be used to guide the activities of new cohorts of SENCOs. **R3: We recommend that a set of indicators of effectiveness should be used in the form of a SENCO or school success planner, together with IE indicators and information about the factors that can facilitate the work of SENCOs, to steer the introduction of SENCOs into all schools.**

7.1.4 As well as supporting the introduction of new SENCOs into new group of schools, EDB will want to be confident that these new SENCOs are becoming effective. Sets of indicators can also be used to enable EDB to keep track of these developments. **R4: We recommend**

that the deployment of SENCOs into all schools should be carefully supported and monitored.

7.1.5 Another factor that was clear from the early days of the Pilot Project was that SENCOs were often viewed as having the potential to resolve all of a school's difficulties with great rapidity. It is, of course, unrealistic to place such a burden of responsibility onto any one colleague in school and unhelpful to regard the SENCO role as being a panacea for a wide range of systemic problems. Just as the SENCO role will evolve over time, so new-to-role SENCOs need time and opportunity to grow into their duties and to develop leadership capacity in their schools. **R5: We recommend that expectations of SENCOs should be carefully managed.** Again, school leaders and managers can have a crucial role here by ensuring that the demands placed on SENCOs are realistic. EDB can help to ensure, through guidance, training and advice for school principals, vice principals and members of management committees, that new SENCOs are not placed under undue strain caused by the expectations of their colleagues in school, of parents or of public perceptions.

7.1.6 Despite these cautionary recommendations concerning the implementation phase, we are confident, on the basis of the very positive outcomes from the Pilot Project, that SENCOs, in the long term, will make a strong and highly valued contribution to the development of integrated education in Hong Kong. This will be expressed, in part at least, in the extent to which regular classrooms in ordinary primary and secondary schools become more effectively inclusive. This has been an aspiration of many SENCOs and school principals during the Pilot Project and it is time now that this broad intention becomes an inspiration for all schools. Ultimately, then: **R6: We recommend that the introduction of SENCOs should ensure that all schools continue to make progress towards IE in terms of both policy and practice.**

7.1.7 This will be a societal as well as an educational challenge. Parents and their communities will need to be reassured that inclusive classrooms are learning environments in which all students are stimulated in order to achieve excellence. We suggest that SENCOs are well-placed to play their part in helping society to move towards this recognition.

7.2 Positioning the SENCO post within school leadership structures

7.2.1 Some SENCOs in the Pilot Project already have senior posts in school, as Primary School Master/Mistress (PSM) or Senior Graduate Master/Mistress (SGM) and this section provides recommendations addressing the positioning of SENCOs within school leadership structures. Respondents report that having a senior position is important to enable SENCOs to operate strategically as leaders in their schools and therefore to influence whole school issues, including work on the curriculum and pedagogy. **R7: We recommend that ultimately SENCOs should take up a strategic role within decision making, school development and leadership structures in their schools.**

7.2.2 The situation with regard to the ranking of SENCOs is complex, however. There is some evidence that some senior staff come into the SENCO role with pre-conceptions and established ideas about support for students with SEN and therefore find it difficult to

implement the new role in fresh and inventive ways. It is clear from the evidence that seniority, of itself, does not necessarily make a SENCO effective. At the same time, some schools are appointing relatively junior but enthusiastic and innovative teachers into SENCO posts and supporting these colleagues to develop their skills in the role over time. This is a legitimate option that is likely to become more common. The cohort of current teachers with strong backgrounds in work with students with SEN has largely been deployed already into SENCO posts in schools and this source of potential SENCOs with depth of experience is likely to be rapidly exhausted.

7.2.3 While it will be advantageous ultimately for most schools to deploy SENCOs into senior posts in recognition of the leadership role that SENCOs potentially fulfill, it will also be inequitable simply to give all SENCOs, whatever their levels of experience, a senior position automatically. **R8: We recommend that seniority should be offered as a potential entitlement for SENCOs and that the transition of SENCOs into senior posts should be phased in over time as SENCOs gain in confidence and experience and as schools make plans for enabling SENCOs to engage in more strategic, higher level activity.** This would be more realistic, more fair and would give schools some degree of control over developments, operationalised through senior school leadership and the Incorporated Management Committee (IMC) or School Management Committee (SMC) structures.

7.2.4 Schools will want to have some discretion as to how they implement the SENCO role and who is appointed to that position. IMCs and SMCs as well as EDB will want to be assured that the SENCOs moving into senior posts merit that ranking. It is possible therefore to imagine that a set of criteria could be established to enable schools and EDB to make judgements about the circumstances under which any SENCO should be awarded a senior post. Such multiple criteria might potentially include:
- the prior experience of the SENCO in working with students with SEN
- the prior training of the SENCO in SEN and inclusion
- the prior experience of the SENCO in senior posts
- the leadership experience and professional qualities of the SENCO
- the culture and context of the school in terms of the development of IE
- the degree of support from the school principal for IE initiatives and evidence of the SENCO and the principal working together to develop IE
- the existence of a SENCO action plan as an integral part of a whole school approach for the further development of IE
- the management by the SENCO of a dedicated budget for IE and SEN-related work
- systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of developments in IE by the school using self-evaluation tools such as those proposed in the SENCO professional development programme
- the monitoring of IE and higher-order SEN-related work through quality assurance by EDB as effective
- numbers of students in the school with a range of types and severity of SEN
- numbers of students in the school receiving Tier 3 support
- the level of the Learning Support Grant (LSG).

7.2.5 However, judgements made about the readiness of SENCOs to take on senior positions must be relatively simple and straightforward if they are to be workable so these potential

criteria have been reduced in number to those most easily recognised in practice. The following proposed criteria are therefore designed to support IMCs and SMCs in making these decisions. **R9: We recommend that a set of criteria should be developed that could easily be applied as indicators of the readiness of a SENCO to take on a senior position in school and that these criteria might comprise:**

- **the prior experience of the SENCO in leading school developments in relation to SEN issues and IE (including time spent in a SENCO post)**
- **the prior relevant professional development of the SENCO (for example, completing the Basic, Advanced and Thematic (BAT) Courses plus the SENCO professional development programme)**
- **the level of Learning Support Grant (LSG) received by the school (as a reliable indicator of the range of types of SEN addressed and the numbers of students receiving support at Tier 2 and Tier 3)**
- **confirmation by school self-evaluation, co-signed by the SENCO and the school principal, of the existence of a budgeted SENCO action plan for IE that is integrated with whole school development.**

7.2.6 In future, it may be possible for IMCs or SMCs to use information from External School Review (ESR) inspections; from visits by Regional Education Officers (REOs); and from school visits by officers from the Special Education Division to confirm that SENCOs are actively involved in driving forward whole school initiatives and in higher order strategic activity in their schools in partnership with senior leaders. This could then become a further criterion.

7.2.7 **R10: We recommend that the proposed SENCO senior post should be dedicated to the SENCO position.** It should not be possible for schools to offer this senior post to other staff for other work. It follows, therefore, that schools with a SENCO who already has a senior post will be able to make that pre-existing senior post available to award elsewhere. It also follows that schools should inform EDB when a SENCO with senior ranking leaves his or her post. Under these circumstances, the SENCO senior post would be held in abeyance until such time as a new SENCO has met the criteria listed above.

7.3 The teaching load of SENCOs

7.3.1 Working as a SENCO brings significant burdens of responsibility, for example, those set out in EDB's introduction to the Pilot Project, and this section sets out recommendations for managing the duties of the SENCO that apply at school level. Under most circumstances, these issues relating to the work patterns of SENCOs will be agreed through IMC or SMC structures and managed on a day-to-day basis by the school principal. It follows that colleagues with responsibility for school management will need to understand the role of the SENCO fully and ensure that adequate provision is made for SENCOs to carry out their duties effectively in relation to SEN and IE. **R11: We recommend that a significant proportion of each SENCO's workload should be protected for SEN- and IE-related activity on an ongoing basis.**

7.3.2 While the SENCO role is conceived of as a senior role in schools, it is also acknowledged universally by respondents in the Pilot Project evaluation that SENCOs should

retain some teaching load. **R12: We recommend that SENCOs should always maintain a regular teaching commitment to sustain expertise in high quality teaching.** A commitment to subject-based teaching at some level is regarded as essential in enabling SENCOs to work authentically on classroom level issues of pedagogy, teaching and learning, and in retaining direct contact with students as learners and credibility with colleagues on the school staff. At the same time, SENCOs can develop wider awareness of the needs of students in their schools when they also engage in co-planning, co-teaching, lesson study and observation.

7.3.3 Generally speaking, respondents have noted their approval of the current arrangements, which we broadly endorse. **R13: We recommend that SENCOs, as standard practice, should devote around 70% of their working time to SENCO duties and retain a teaching commitment of around 30%; where schools wish to make adjustments in the distribution of the SENCO's work in recognition of exceptional local circumstances, we recommend that the time spent on SEN- and IE-related duties should not be less than 50%.**

7.3.4 Differences do emerge, however, in the ways in which schools interpret these guidelines. **R14: We recommend that calculations relating to SENCO teaching workload should be based on the total working time of the SENCO during regular school hours.** School timetables can provide a useful starting point for calculations about SENCO workload. Schools will wish to take a more holistic view of teaching and teaching-related activity, however, and produce more sophisticated calculations that take account of other aspects of workload in schools. Nevertheless, the responsibilities of the SENCO towards SEN provision and IE should be regarded as priorities and considered first so that adequate time is firmly established for these duties. **R15: We recommend that the teaching load of SENCOs in all schools should normally be less than the teaching load of other teachers working at an equivalent rank**.

7.3.5 The majority of schools will wish to comply with this agreed arrangement and will be making transitions towards improved conditions for SENCOs. However, there will be exceptional circumstances under which standard practice will be inappropriate – for example, in future in schools where student diversity is limited. When identifying schools to participate in the Pilot Project, EDB deliberately selected schools with higher numbers of students with SEN. In the wider population of schools in Hong Kong, there are inevitably therefore many schools catering for smaller numbers of students with SEN and some schools in which the numbers of students with SEN may be very small.

7.3.6 We would emphasise that there is not necessarily any direct correlation between numbers of students with SEN on a school roll and the workload of a SENCO. The quality of a whole school response to IE may be a much more significant factor. It is the SENCO's responsibility to co-ordinate responses to SEN – not necessarily to undertake the actual support. A SENCO working in a school with high numbers of students with SEN and very effective systems of whole school responsibility in which support for those students is very effectively devolved among all members of staff may find that her work goes smoothly. Conversely, a SENCO working in a school with few students with SEN on roll and in which teaching colleagues are reluctant to include those students in their planning may find that she is overloaded with requests for direct support.

7.3.7 Thus the potential workload of the SENCO is not solely defined by the numbers of students with SEN (for example, those in receipt of support at Tiers 2 and 3) attending the school. However, there is clearly a relationship between a school's commitment to IE and the role of the SENCO. We note, for example, that SENCOs also have responsibility for students at Tier 1 or with borderline or unconfirmed SEN and for responses to student diversity more generally. **R16: We recommend that some schools should be able to make individual cases in support of applications to vary the standard allocation of SENCO teaching load.**

7.3.8 Of course, not all of the SENCO's teaching load will comprise solo subject or class teaching; co-planning and co-teaching in support of IE will already be recognised as major elements in the teaching load allocated to many SENCOs. **R17: We recommend that, in exceptional situations in which schools seek to increase the SENCO's teaching load beyond 30%, this additional teaching should be devoted to SENCO activity (for example, co-planning, co-teaching, lesson observation and lesson study) focused on developing: quality first teaching for all; enhanced responses in the school to diversity; and more inclusive classrooms.** Sound justifications for these variations will be needed and should be approved by the IMC or SMC. School leaders and managers should also ensure that additional teaching will entail the SENCO engaging in more collaborative activity focused on the promotion of IE in partnerships with other members of teaching staff – for example, through collaborative lesson study, participatory school-based action research, co-planning and co-teaching.

7.3.9 Schools have been reluctant to decrease the SENCO's teaching load beyond 30%. School principals wish to strike a fair and equitable balance with the workloads of other senior staff, all of whom carry some teaching responsibility. However, under some circumstances a school may wish to increase the proportion of time a SENCO has for work related to SEN and IE. This may apply, for example, where there are very large numbers of students with SEN or, more significantly, where the proportion of students with SEN and borderline difficulties in learning is high in comparison with the general school population, resulting in a need to further develop whole school approaches to IE. This may also be relevant in schools with significant numbers of students with SEN requiring support at Tier 1; or with students awaiting assessment; or with students causing marginal or borderline concern in terms of the progress they are making. Co-ordinating provision for these students will also be the responsibility of the SENCO. **R18: In future, if schools wish to explore the potential for enabling SENCOs to devote more time (beyond 70%) to their SENCO duties, we recommend that practice should adhere to the position that all SENCOs should undertake some teaching on a regular basis.**

7.3.10 The figures used in this section, whereby SENCOs normally commit around 70% of their working time to SENCO activities and teach 30% of a normal teaching load on a regular basis, should be taken as guidelines that are representative of practice under the majority of circumstances. The real situation in many schools is complicated by the nature of the teaching that SENCOs do. It is clear, for example, that different subjects carry different teaching-related workloads outside the classroom. Additional teaching-related workloads also vary for staff teaching students in different age groups.

7.3.11 In addition to bearing a teaching load, many SENCOs undertake school administrative duties (for example, organising extra-curricular activities or after-school learning support groups) and some SENCOs have additional senior responsibilities (for example, as subject panel heads or vice principals) that they wish to sustain. Under these circumstances, it is again important that schools have some discretion, under the control of the IMC or SMC and the school principal, in relation to the management of SENCOs' duties. However: **R19: We recommend that SENCOs should not be required to carry significant responsibilities in terms of school administration and leadership in addition to their SENCO role**.

7.3.12 The evidence indicates, for example, that it is not possible for a school principal also to function effectively as the school's SENCO – these are two very significant areas of responsibility. It is probably also very difficult to sustain both the responsibilities of a vice-principal and a SENCO. Evidence gathered in the SENCO Pilot Project evaluation reveals instances in which vice-principals who were initially appointed as SENCOs have passed their SENCO duties, in the light of experience attempting to reconcile the two sets of responsibilities, to another colleague. However, it may be entirely appropriate that the vice-principal remains in a supervisory relationship to the SENCO; that the SENCO is directly accountable to the vice-principal; and that the SENCO and the vice-principal work in a strategic partnership on whole school issues related to IE.

7.4 Further support for the development of the SENCO role and IE

7.4.1 It is clear that there will be a need for professional development for SENCOs beyond the Pilot Project and the recommendations in this section focus on policy in relation to that form of support. The deployment of SENCOs into all schools will require further support on a number of levels in the form of professional development. **R20: We recommend that provision should be made for:**
- **ongoing processes of induction and initial professional development for new-to-role SENCOs in cohorts beyond the Pilot Project**
- **ongoing processes of induction and initial professional development for new-to-role SENCOs replacing SENCOs who leave their posts in the years ahead, potentially at a rate approaching 10% of SENCOs each year**
- **continuing and further professional development for more experienced SENCOs, including networking opportunities and communities of practice.**

7.4.2 **R21: We recommend that careful attention should be given to the design of proposals for the initial training of further cohorts of SENCOs together with programmes of continuing professional development for established SENCOs.** A great deal of expertise has been established among the SENCOs who have been appointed to the SENCO role during the Pilot Project. Furthermore, these SENCOs will have great credibility among school staff in Hong Kong as professional who have developed their policies and practices in the local context. It will be hugely advantageous to make use of this significant body of expertise in providing future professional development. **R22: We recommend that experienced SENCOs should be consulted in the design and delivery of future forms of professional development for SENCOs.**

7.4.3 The Pilot Project has confirmed that the introduction of the SENCO involves a paradigm shift in policies and practices in schools. The duties of the SENCO are different from those of the student support team co-ordinator and the SENCO focuses on different issues and works in different ways. **R23: We recommend that the transition from the Pilot Project towards the deployment of full cohorts of SENCOs in all schools should be managed with great care in order to ensure continuity and the promotion of consistent approaches**. Arguably the relevant teams within EDB should each have a group of officers with the appropriate skills and expertise to enable them to co-ordinate SENCO issues; to strengthen support for the SENCO role as a key facilitator of IE; and to mediate the provision of professional development. For example, SENCOs in the Pilot Project evaluation valued the support of EDB officers in taking ideas for innovative practices from the professional development programme and embedding them in schools. **R24: We recommend that professional development for SENCOs and other staff should be prioritised as a key aspect in the development of IE and integrated with ongoing work on IE within EDB.**

7.4.4 There have been very positive responses during the SENCO Pilot Project to the strategy of involving SENCOs in networks, learning circles, inter-school visits and communities of practice. **R25: We recommend that the system of networks that brings SENCOs together in communities of practice to facilitate the sharing of the outcomes of school-based practitioner enquiry, reflective practice and lesson study should be continued on an ongoing basis.**

7.4.5 It is important that EDB should remain involved in these activities so officers can call upon input from, for example, colleagues from special schools with expertise in curriculum adaptation and representatives from outside agencies including NGOs, community organisations and the business sector. It is also important that the reservoir of expertise among SENCOs from the Pilot Project should be valued and nurtured since these experienced SENCOs will have a great deal to offer, for example, to the facilitation of networks and the provision of professional development for new cohorts of SENCOs. **R26: We recommend that EDB officers, together with experienced SENCOs from the Pilot Project, should be involved in supporting and participating in networks, lesson study activities, communities of practice and school-based practitioner enquiry along with SENCOs and other staff in schools.** This will enable networks to model inter-agency multi-disciplinary working and to promote life planning and transitions for students with SEN into their lives beyond school. **R27: We recommend that EDB should also encourage the attendance at networking events of other members of school staff, and staff from other schools in order to develop enhanced collaboration within and among schools and in order to facilitate succession planning for staff who may ultimately become interested in taking on SENCO duties themselves.**

7.4.6 The idea of having a SENCO manual is popular among respondents in the SENCO Pilot Project evaluation. **R28: We recommend that any SENCO manual that is developed and distributed to schools should be a whole school manual for developing IE designed for use in those schools with a SENCO in post.** In other words, the SENCO manual should not merely be a simplistic checklist or 'road map' of SENCO functions and duties.

7.4.7 **R29: We recommend that the SENCO manual and any associated set of guidance materials should be written in partnership with the trainers who developed and ran the SENCO professional development programme during the Pilot Project and with experienced SENCOs from the Pilot Project cohort**. Experienced SENCOs will be able to contribute authentic examples of practice that illustrate key aspects of the guidance, for example, in relation to lesson study, collaborative planning and the use of some of the tools recommended in the SENCO professional development programme.

7.4.8 In addition to a SENCO manual, many SENCOs have asked for web-based support. **R30: We recommend that a dedicated SENCO website, administered by EDB, should be provided so that useful materials such as the SENCO manual, relevant circulars, guidance and professional development materials can be made available as downloads and shared among schools.** It would therefore be possible to ensure that all up-to-date information on SEN-related issues and IE would be available in one location on this website. It would also be helpful if case studies of effective practice, drawn from a range of settings and including video clips, samples of work, lesson plans and schemes of work, could, in future, be made available to SENCOs online via this website.

7.4.9 Respondents in the SENCO Pilot Project evaluation also suggested that SENCOs would appreciate having an interactive online forum for debate. This is clearly more complex, for example, in terms of ongoing management and moderation, but may be useful in future. In terms of the current situation, therefore: **R31: We recommend that EDB should ensure that SENCOs have ongoing opportunities, for example, through networking arrangements, to air concerns, questions and queries for comment or to engage in territory-wide discussion and the sharing of new initiatives**.

7.4.10 Other forms of professional development will also be needed. **R32: We recommend that future forms of professional development for SENCOs should actively encourage co-teaching, co-planning, lesson study and participatory school-based action research in order to promote more effective collaboration between SENCOs and subject or class teaching colleagues.** Working in partnership with other colleagues, for example, in multi-disciplinary teams in wider areas of responsibility or through co-teaching and collaboration in the classroom, requires the development of specific sets of skills and attitudes. Some SENCOs, for example, need to work closely with educational psychologists, therapists and other professionals in order to plan provision after school; to develop programmes of intervention; and to improve classroom practices and pedagogy. SENCOs and other teachers also need to develop skills in functioning collaboratively in the classroom with teaching colleagues and teaching assistants. These skills include opportunities to plan and teach together but also to support students in wider areas, including the management of behaviour and addressing social and emotional difficulties.

7.4.11 Team work is a fundamental dimension in the implementation of whole school approaches, based in policies for IE and inclusive school culture. We suggest that attention must be paid to the more consistent adoption of whole school policies and practices involving shared responsibility for IE and students with SEN. **R33: We recommend that a focus on developing skills in team work, collaboration and multi-disciplinary work should be included in SEN- and IE-related professional development programmes for SENCOs and**

other school staff including, for example, educational psychologists, speech therapists, teaching assistants, student counsellors and teachers who work closely with students with SEN. It is important that all colleagues in school understand:

- the role of the SENCO in implementing whole-school initiatives
- the nature of effective working relationships between SENCOs and other staff
- how to deploy and make use of support staff, including teaching assistants, without over burdening them with responsibilities for students with SEN
- the value of involving non-SENCO teaching staff in collaborative activity and shared responsibility for SEN and IE.

7.4.12 It is likely that the responsibility for providing professional development for SENCOs in Hong Kong will ultimately be assumed by local institutions of tertiary education. This will have the advantage of allowing sessions to be directly relevant to local issues and delivered in Cantonese. This should also allow courses of study to be appropriately accredited, for example, at masters level. However: **R34: We recommend that EDB should remain closely involved in negotiating the design and content specification of programmes of professional development for SENCOs in order to ensure that they remain closely aligned:**

- **with EDB in terms of policy on IE;**
- **with the role of the SENCO as set out by EDB;**
- **with the SENCO manual;**
- **with the content of the original programme of professional development for new-to-role SENCOs**.

7.4.13 Experience in the Pilot Project also confirms that officers from EDB have close relationships with schools which will enable them to ensure that future programmes of professional development provide support for and responses to issues, concerns and dilemmas that arise in practice in schools. **R35: We recommend that EDB officers should remain involved in co-ordinating developments in IE and in the SENCO role across the Primary and Secondary phases to ensure that:**

- **there is continuity of approach for students with SEN at different stages of their school careers**
- **SENCOs in different schools receive consistent support and advice**.

7.4.14 As demonstrated repeatedly throughout this report, other school staff and principals need to enhance their skills, expertise and professionalism in relation to IE and SEN and they will also therefore require further professional development. **R36: In addition to securing the provision of professional development for SENCOs, we recommend that EDB should ensure that professional development related to SEN and IE is provided for other staff in schools**. It is important, for example, that class and subject teachers are equipped to take on the challenge of implementing quality first teaching for all so that teaching students with SEN and the development of IE are realised as a responsibility for all and not just for SENCOs. **R37: We recommend that related programmes of training focused on SEN and IE should take account of and foreground the SENCO role.** We suggest that the philosophies of many pre-existing SEN courses need to be updated to take full account of ways of working that will become dominant in the era of the SENCO.

7.4.15 For example, the work of SENCOs is focused on providing high quality inclusive teaching for all students through strategies such as personalisation, differentiation and the adaptation of the curriculum. Inclusive pedagogies focus on group work, peer interaction and active, deep learning. SENCOs adopt holistic, whole person approaches through co-ordination and team work and they operate in partnerships and in dialogue with parents and students. These approaches stand in contrast to many more traditional models of individual and remedial support and SENCOs in the new paradigm will want to move practice in their schools away from these mindsets and methods.

7.4.16 Wider forms of professional development also need to take account of these new circumstances in schools. We suggest therefore that it would be helpful to review and revise all forms of professional development for school staff in order to reflect the new situation with regard to the contribution of SENCOs. In particular: **R38: We recommend that guidance on IE and clarification of the SENCO role should in future be regarded as integral elements in initial teacher education**. EDB will need to ensure that this message is received and responded to by providers of initial teacher education.

7.4.17 **R39: We recommend that training related to IE and the role of the SENCO should be provided for principals, vice principals, school leaders and subject panel heads, both at the initial stage of preparing for leadership and in terms of continuing professional development**. This will be required to ensure that school leaders are driving whole school approaches to IE in harmony with SENCOs.

7.4.18 **R40: We recommend that awareness raising, information sharing and professional development related to the SENCO role should continue to be provided for EDB officers, including advisory staff and staff in Regional Education Offices (REOs); quality assurance (QA) officers; and staff in special education sections who are directly involved in supporting schools involved in developing IE and responses to students with SEN**. EDB officers now have responsibility for facilitating professional development for staff in schools and there will be a need to develop capacity among these colleagues to work in partnership with SENCOs and other staff in schools on innovative approaches to curriculum planning, pedagogy and assessment.

7.5 Monitoring and review by EDB

7.5.1 It is clear that EDB's structures for supporting school development and providing quality assurance (QA) will need, in future, to take full account of the new aspects of school practice arising from the implementation of the SENCO role in schools and this section offers recommendations for future developments in EDB's relationships with schools. The inspection process needs to encompass more than bureaucratic and administrative issues to focus more positively on the development of IE, classroom practices, teaching and learning, curriculum and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the SENCO role – for example, in terms of using more personalised forms of support and the evaluation of inclusive teaching and learning using a wider range of outcome measures. **R41: We recommend that the regular processes of school inspection should, in future, recognise and support initiatives in IE and the activities of SENCOs in relation both to students with SEN and whole school**

development. Hopefully there can be collaboration between sections within EDB to ensure that this is the case and that school inspections routinely acknowledge developments in IE, such as enhanced transition planning between and beyond schools and pedagogies for more inclusive classrooms.

7.5.2 It may also be useful in future to make SEN and IE a topic for focused inspections and school support. **R42: We recommend that, in future, it will become appropriate for some inspections and school development support visits to focus specifically on IE and the SENCO role as areas of exceptional strength in the practice of some schools.**

7.5.3 If inspections in future are to follow these proposed routes effectively, it is essential that colleagues responsible for QA are kept up to date on developments in IE and in relation to the SENCO role. **R43: We recommend that the development and maintenance of skills, knowledge and understanding in relation to IE, SEN issues and the role of the SENCO among school inspectors and officers with responsibility for supporting school development is a professional development responsibility to which EDB should respond in the short and longer term.**

7.6 Wider contributions made by SENCOs

7.6.1 Data from the Pilot Project and discussions with stakeholders and interested parties suggest that the role of SENCO will need to be further developed as it becomes embedded within schools cultures in Hong Kong. The Pilot Project has demonstrated that the SENCO is a useful addition to the staffing of schools in Hong Kong and that there is enthusiasm for many of the contributions that SENCOs can make to the life of public sector ordinary schools, including offering enhancements in terms of liaison between home and school and learning partnerships with students. However, the role will need to develop further if the SENCO is truly to become an integral part of the leadership capacity of all public sector ordinary schools in Hong Kong and this section makes recommendations that apply at school level.

7.6.2 Involvement in action planning for school development has been one element in the success of the introduction of SENCOs into schools during the Pilot Project. Since the SENCO is expected to provide leadership and co-ordination in the areas of SEN provision and IE, it is logical to expect the SENCO to be centrally involved in school development planning. In some schools in the Pilot Project, this has meant that the SENCO works closely with the school principal and vice-principal on aspects of school development planning. The evidence indicates that this relationship is most effective when SENCOs are given responsibility for leading initiatives in their own domains of activity and for formalising planning for these initiatives. **R44: We recommend that all SENCOs should be responsible for co-ordinating the development and implementation of an action plan for IE in their schools.**

7.6.3 This should also mean that SENCOs take responsibility for elements of the financing of these initiatives. **R45: We recommend that all SENCOs should be responsible for managing a budget for SEN- and IE-related activity in their school.** Schools will want to adjust their ways of working to take account of the seniority and experience of their SENCOs. In some cases, SENCOs might therefore manage relatively small sub-elements of the school budget

in order, for example, to buy in additional support for certain specific SEN-related activities. In other schools, however, a more experienced SENCO might manage a significant proportion of the whole school budget, for example, based on the school's allocation of Learning Support Grant (LSG). As in other areas, schools will wish to determine responses to these recommendations that are relevant to their local circumstances.

7.6.4 SENCOs can usefully be given responsibility for taking the lead in planning, implementing monitoring and reviewing aspects of practice that lead to improvements in SEN provision and the enhancement of IE in their schools. However, any action plan managed by the SENCO must, of course, be thoroughly integrated with planning for improvement across the whole school. **R46: We recommend that a budgeted SENCO action plan for IE should be an integral part of whole school development planning in every school.** This recommendation is designed to secure in policy and practice the core principle that the work of the SENCO should involve whole school development and improvements in teaching and learning for all and should not be regarded as an area of 'additional' or 'supplementary' or 'bolt on' activity. All the best examples of SENCO activity during the Pilot Project have been founded on the principles of inclusive teaching and learning and whole school development.

7.6.5 This implies developments that are characterised by the involvement of wide groups of colleagues within schools. Effective SENCOs do not only work with staff who are identified as providing 'SEN support'; effective SENCOs involve themselves in a wide range of activities in a wide range of domains within their schools, as evidence from the Pilot Project indicates. Further, we would suggest that the SENCO Pilot Project, and the professional development programme associated with it, have clearly demonstrated the value of collaboration between colleagues from different professional backgrounds and from different schools. **R47: We recommend that schools should actively promote collaboration and professional exchange, both in-school between teaching colleagues and among schools.**

7.6.6 Within schools during the Pilot Project, successful developments in IE often began with very small-scale initiatives. In these instances, again often with their origins in the new-to-role SENCO professional development programme, SENCOs would involve a limited number of willing school colleagues in trialing a new or revised way of working designed to make an impact in a discrete and limited area of activity – perhaps in a particular subject in a specific age group in school, for example. **R48: We recommend that schools should encourage their SENCOs to work with colleagues in school on action research, lesson study, co-planning and co-teaching.** Once such initiatives are demonstrated to be effective, SENCOs may take opportunities (through in-school professional development sessions, for example) to recommend them to wider groups of colleagues. This way of working represents the managed evolution of evidence-based practice. In the spirit of collaboration celebrated in the previous paragraph, successful initiatives should therefore also be shared with other SENCOs and other schools so that all learners may benefit. **R49: We recommend that schools should share the outcomes of successful small-scale initiatives in order to drive forward wider improvements – within schools and among schools.**

7.6.7 This locates the SENCO potentially at the forefront of developments in SEN provision, in IE and in schooling more widely for the whole of Hong Kong. This offers an ambitious but not unrealistic view of the further development of the SENCO role in years to come and suggests ways in which SENCOs will be well-placed to make contributions to the review and development of wider policy.

7.7 Future policy in relation to IE

7.7.1 If this vision of the SENCO taking a central role in relation to provision for students with SEN and the whole school approach to IE is to be realised, there will need to be shifts and developments in wider policy and this section provides recommendations focused on broad future policy. **R50: We recommend that central policy on IE should be maintained under a continuing and ongoing process of review and revision in order to foreground, in the *Operation Guide on the Whole-School Approach to Integrated Education* (IE Operation Guide), for example, the contribution of the SENCO.** This will need to involve public consultation about the aspirations of all schools to become more inclusive and review and revision of policy and guidance as provided by EDB.

7.7.2 Of course, not all schools will wish or will be able to make progress in relation to IE at the same pace. The schools involved in the Pilot Project were selected as taking in significant numbers of students with SEN and/or in challenging financial circumstances. They were schools that, in many cases, already had advanced approaches towards provision for students with SEN and IE. As such, these schools were probably among the best prepared to engage with the introduction of a new role dedicated to the co-ordination of provision for students with SEN. Some of these schools have already argued that the established funding arrangements do not provide enough resources to enable highly inclusive schools to meet their responsibilities towards their students most effectively.

7.7.3 We suggest that there will be schools in the new policy regime that will be able to make good use of higher levels of resourcing dedicated to SEN provision and IE. **R51: We recommend that provisions related to the Learning Support Grant (LSG) should be enhanced to provide additional teachers for those schools admitting greater numbers of students with SEN and that support for IE should be improved to offer these schools increased access to professionals from other services.** These enhanced provisions, and the additional staffing associated with them, will be likely to provide support to the SENCO and help to further develop IE in areas such as early intervention, liaison with therapy services and co-operation between home and school. It follows that the SENCO should be responsible for co-ordinating these enhanced provisions together with other services and approaches focused on SEN and IE.

7.7.4 We also note that many schools in the Pilot Project experienced difficulties with the nine established categories or types of SEN. Experience in schools as well as data gathered during the Pilot Project confirm that there are often no hard boundaries between students 'with' and students 'without' SEN. Many children experience challenges in their learning that range over a continuum of possibilities, from mild temporary or fluctuating problems through to extreme and persistent difficulties. A binary model that suggests that such

difficulties can be 'diagnosed' or even assessed as being either present or absent is not reflected in real classrooms. Many learners hover around and across arbitrary boundaries between categories based on typical and atypical patterns of learning – for example, in relation to ordinary difficulties in literacy as opposed to identifiable dyslexia. Further, many students will experience combinations of difficulty – for example, with autistic traits in addition to difficulties with attention and hyperactivity – that are not acknowledged in the system of nine categories. **R52: In order to respond effectively to the needs of students with borderline SEN and complex, combined or co-morbid conditions and difficulties, we recommend that schools should interpret and use the nine types of SEN with greater flexibility.** This situation is likely to become more complex as schools engage with new expectations in relation to students with social, emotional and mental health issues, many of whom will also have co-morbid conditions. We suggest that this will need to be a specific area of development in future.

7.7.5 Turning attention to the wider group of schools that are not currently admitting large numbers of students with SEN and/or from challenging financial circumstances, we suggest that the SENCO role can still be of relevance in these schools. All schools will encounter diversity in some form in their student population and students who learn at different rates and in different styles. The key policy shift is to ensure that these schools use their SENCOs to develop whole school responses to that diversity – responses that emphasise commonality, rather than separating students into 'types' of learners or withdrawing some students for 'special' or 'additional' provision. **R53: We recommend that schools should focus their efforts on promoting developments in high-quality, inclusive teaching for all learners so that reliance on individual forms of support for students with SEN can be reduced.**

7.8 Consideration of the wider context

7.8.1 We have acknowledged that schools will wish to work towards IE at different rates and in different ways. This is true internationally and we regard this as realistic and appropriate. For those schools that wish to make progress with IE at a faster rate, however, and make effective provision for larger numbers of students with SEN and with more severe difficulties, the wider policy context can present challenges and this section provides recommendations relevant to that wider context.

7.8.2 During the Pilot Project, for example, we heard from many senior managers, SENCOs, teachers and parents about the problems that can be caused for students with SEN by rigid and inflexible approaches to curriculum, homework, assessment and examination. Although this is a situation that obtains in many countries around the world, there is a widely held and arguably reasonable view that this situation is driven to a significant extent by the high-stakes assessment and examination regimes that obtain in Hong Kong. There is also a view that there are not enough ways of recognising the progress and attainments that students with SEN can make and that further systems for measuring the value added for these students need to be developed. Again, perceptions about tensions between inclusive practices and academic standards are common to a number of advanced education systems around the world. However, there should be no tolerance of diluted or reduced standards.

On the contrary, any system must enable students to demonstrate their attainments at the highest possible level – but crucially an inclusive system must afford this opportunity to all learners. **R54: We recommend that approaches to assessment, examination and accreditation should, in future, provide enhanced opportunities for students with SEN.**

7.8.3 Data from the Pilot Project also indicate that there is an issue beyond the assessment and examination systems in schools. School staff and parents often note that there are too few post-school opportunities for students with SEN or that the range of opportunities is too narrow. This is demoralising for school staff, disturbing for parents and creates a disincentive for students with SEN to work to produce their best possible outcomes. Again this is a situation that obtains internationally and a perennial challenge for policy makers, service providers and service users in a wide range of contexts. There is no easy solution to this issue and it represents a challenge for the whole of society in Hong Kong, not just for schools and EDB. However, it must be acknowledged that the current situation is unhelpful as schools engage with the challenge of becoming more inclusive. **R55: We recommend that the relevant agencies should ensure, in future, that exit pathways provide a wider range of post-school opportunities for all students, including options suitable for students with SEN.**

7.8.4 We noted above that developing confidence in the effectiveness of inclusive schools will be a societal as well as an educational challenge. All stakeholders will need to feel comfortable that efforts to improve schooling for those students experiencing difficulties in their learning will improve schooling for all. As this report has demonstrated, SENCOs have a key role to play in ensuring that this situation is realised in schools. EDB will have a responsibility, together with schools, to ensure that this message is successfully communicated to the wider populace. **R56: We recommend that inclusive schools should continue to be celebrated publicly as effective schools for all learners.**

7.9 Concluding comments

7.9.1 As a postscript to this report, it is pleasing to note that policy on IE and provision for students with SEN in Hong Kong have moved forward during the period of the Pilot Project. In recognition of the potential value of the SENCO to the development of IE in public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools, SENCOs are being introduced into these schools in phases over three years starting from the 2017 to 2018 school year. Agreements have been reached which are in line with the recommendations in this report about the distribution of the workload of SENCOs between whole school SENCO duties and teaching.

7.9.2 As confirmed in this report, the provision of a permanent SENCO post in every public sector ordinary school has the potential to yield very positive results, for students with SEN and their families and for school development more broadly. We also note that the introduction of these SENCOs into a wider group of schools will be supported by the use of a SENCO manual written by the trainers who provided the new-to-role professional development programme for SENCOs during the Pilot Project. That SENCO manual is supported by a set of examples of effective practices drawn from the experiences of SENCOs

in the Pilot Project cohort. These materials will provide a foundation for the training and further professional development of new cohorts of SENCOs in future.

7.9.3 It has been announced in the 2018 Policy Address that the SENCO post in public sector ordinary schools with comparatively large numbers of students with SEN will be upgraded to a promotion rank and that the upgraded post will be dedicated to the role of SENCO. This will allow schools with experienced SENCOs and significant numbers of students with SEN to recognise the important leadership duties that SENCOs can perform with the award of a senior post. Further, the provision of resources to schools through the Learning Support Grant, the Intensive Remedial Teaching Programme and the Integrated Education Programme will be restructured. This will extend the Learning Support Grant to all public sector ordinary schools and will increase the grant rate for students with SEN in Tier 3.

7.9.4 Significantly, this restructuring will enable schools with higher numbers of students with SEN to be provided with further additional resources so that they will be able to deploy additional teachers in support of the education of students with SEN. In addition, schools will benefit from provision of enhanced school-based speech therapy services. Further, those with higher numbers of students with SEN will also be provided with enhanced school-based educational psychology services. This seems very appropriate since past data show that schools have largely used the Learning Support Grant to employ additional manpower. In effect, this provision formalises and makes permanent the kinds of staffing arrangements that schools prefer while enabling schools to continue to make use of the Learning Support Grant flexibly for procurement of services.

7.9.5 It is therefore very timely and fortunate that there will be dedicated and carefully prepared SENCOs in post in these schools to maximise the efficacy of these generous provisions. It will be the SENCO's task, as set out in the responsibilities of SENCOs (see Appendix 1), to co-ordinate the efforts of these colleagues in relation to SEN provision and IE and to lead what will now be a multi-disciplinary team. It is important that this additional staffing, in terms of teachers, school-based speech therapists and educational psychologists, should impact upon whole school approaches and whole school development as well as serving the needs of students with SEN and it will be the responsibility of SENCOs to lead their expanded teams in these directions.

7.9.6 SENCOs therefore will need to be ready to take on these challenges in leadership, co-ordination, collaboration and teamwork and, as we make clear in the recommendations in this section of the report, all staff will require professional development to enable schools to derive optimal benefit from these provisions. However, there is a huge opportunity now for SENCOs to contribute to whole school development in partnership with school senior leaders and managers. In our view, this will entail SENCOs becoming involved, as a core aspect of their responsibilities, in curriculum adaptation, differentiation and pedagogical innovation in order to cultivate, in partnership with their colleagues, more inclusive cultures in their schools.

7.9.7 The recent policy initiatives summarised briefly in these paragraphs will help to ensure that SENCOs have the resources and the status they need in order to make great progress in their new roles in ordinary schools. We would reiterate our conclusion that this has been a

very successful project. Sound and secure progress has been made on the broad question of the introduction of SENCOs into ordinary schools. The professional development for these new-to-role SENCOs has helped to prepare them for the challenges of their new roles and has set a clear agenda for innovative and far-reaching developments in future. In many instances, pioneering and excellent work has been achieved in the schools. This is fundamentally to the credit of the first cohort of SENCOs appointed during the Pilot Project; the colleagues leading the professional development programme for new-to-role SENCOs; and EDB staff leading the special education support teams and providing support to the professional development and evaluation strands. These partners have all made essential contributions to the high-quality outcomes that have exceeded the expectations established at the start of the project.

7.9.8 We note that it has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with EDB's officers and with staff, students and parents in the participating schools to help to bring this project to fruition. We hope this report serves to summarise the outcomes of this highly successful project and to clarify options for further developments in future.

Richard Byers and Kitty Ho – December 2018

8. Appendix

8.1 Appendix 1: The duties of the SENCO

The duties of the SENCO were set out at the start of the SENCO Pilot Project as follows:

- strategically formulate, implement and monitor, review and evaluate various support measures and resource deployment of the school, including appropriate deployment of the Learning Support Grant and manpower resource, according to the basic principles for the promotion of IE, namely early identification, early intervention, whole-school approach (WSA), home-school co-operation and cross-sector collaboration;

- promote early identification and early intervention for students with SEN through a multi-disciplinary team approach;

- collaborate with other teachers/ functional teams in the school through WSA to devise support programmes, curriculum and teaching adaptations, and special examination and assessment arrangements for students with SEN;

- enhance home-school co-operation and work together with parents to support students with SEN;

- review the special education training needs and profiles of teachers in the school, arrange for teachers to receive relevant training in a systematic manner, and plan and organise school-based professional development activities to enhance the capacity of the teaching team;

- strengthen external liaison with parties such as professionals, community resources providers and parents to support students with SEN collaboratively; and

- encourage fellow teachers in the school to make use of effective support strategies to enhance the learning effectiveness of students with SEN through collaborative lesson planning and co-teaching.

During the course of the SENCO Pilot Project, the following broad responsibilities were delineated for SENCOs:

- coordinating school matters relating to the support of students with SEN; assisting the school management (i.e. the principal and the vice-principal(s)) in planning the development of the WSA to IE;

- leading the student support team in the promotion of the WSA to IE and the cultivation of inclusive school culture; and

- implementing promotional and developmental tasks and other work at a system level such as teacher training.

According to EDB Circular No. 9/2017, an additional duty relating to the mental health needs of students was added and the duties were amended on 20 July 2017 to read as follows:

- according to the five basic principles of the promotion of IE, strategically plan, implement, monitor, review and evaluate various support measures for students with SEN and the resource deployment which would include the appropriate use of the Learning Support Grant and the flexible deployment of the school's manpower resources, etc.;

- promote early identification and early intervention for students with SEN through a multi-disciplinary team approach;

- collaborate with other teachers/functional teams in the school through the WSA to devise support programmes, curriculum and teaching adaptations, and special examination and assessment arrangements for students with SEN;

- guide fellow teachers in the school to make use of effective support strategies to enhance the learning effectiveness of students with SEN through arrangements such as collaborative lesson planning and co-teaching;

- collaborate with the guidance team in the school to cater for the learning needs of students with mental illness by giving input from the perspectives of teaching and learning as well as resource deployment, and to strengthen mental health education;

- enhance home-school co-operation and work with parents to support students with SEN;

- review the special education training needs and profiles of teachers in the school, arrange teachers to receive relevant training in a systematic manner, and plan and organise school-based professional development activities to enhance the capacity of the teaching team; and

- strengthen external liaison with parties such as professionals, community resources providers and parents to better coordinate various parties and resources for supporting students with SEN in the school.