

WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO INTEGRATED EDUCATION

The Government adopts a dual-track mode in providing special education. Subject to the assessment and recommendation of specialists and the consent of parents, the Education Bureau (EDB) will refer students with more severe or multiple disabilities to aided special schools for intensive support services. Other students with special educational needs (SEN) will attend ordinary schools. Currently, the SEN of students in ordinary schools are mainly categorised into nine types, including Intellectual Disability (ID), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD), Mental Illness (MI), Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD), Physical Disability (PD), Visual Impairment (VI), Hearing Impairment (HI) and Speech and Language Impairment (SLI) .

The EDB has been encouraging ordinary schools to adopt the Whole School Approach (WSA) to integrated education (IE) based on five underlying principles, namely early identification, early intervention, WSA, home-school co-operation and cross-sector collaboration. Premised on the synergy of culture, policies and practices, schools have to set up a Student Support Team (SST) and motivate all teachers to adopt the 3-tier Intervention Model¹ to cater for students with SEN. Schools strive to help these students overcome their limitations and difficulties, attain the learning level in accordance with their abilities, and realise their potential at different developmental stages so that they can gradually become independent persons with adaptability and the learning to learn capabilities to embrace the challenges in life.

Early Identification and Intervention

To enable ordinary primary schools to have an early understanding of the conditions of students with SEN and arrange appropriate support for them in advance, the EDB, Social Welfare Department, Department of Health and Hospital Authority have worked in collaboration to establish an information transfer mechanism for timely transfer of the assessment information and progress reports of pre-school children with special needs to the primary schools they will attend. The EDB has also been implementing the Early Identification and Intervention Programme for Primary One Students with Learning Difficulties (EII Programme) in all primary schools to help teachers identify and support Primary One students with learning difficulties at an early stage. To enable continuation of appropriate support for students with SEN by secondary schools, the

¹ Tier-1 support refers to early identification and catering for all students with diverse learning and adjustment needs, including those with mild or transient learning or adjustment difficulties, through quality teaching in regular classroom. Tier-2 support refers to additional support/“add-on” intervention for students with persistent learning or adjustment difficulties, such as small group learning, after-school remedial programmes and pull-out remedial programmes. Tier-3 support refers to individualised intensive support for students with persistent and severe learning or adjustment difficulties, including drawing up of Individual Education Plans.

EDB has set up another mechanism for transfer of SEN information of the students concerned from their primary schools to the secondary schools to which they will be promoted.

Additional Resources

The EDB has all along been providing schools with additional resources, professional support and teacher training to facilitate the implementation of WSA to IE. Starting from the 2019/20 school year, all public sector ordinary schools have been allotted the Learning Support Grant (LSG) based on the number of students with SEN and the tier of support they require. Schools will have the additional regular teaching post(s), titled Special Educational Needs Support Teacher, converted or provided on account of the LSG reaching the specific threshold. In addition, subject to individual circumstances, eligible schools are provided with additional resources, such as the Grant for Supporting Non-Chinese Speaking Students with SEN, Intensive Support Grant, Top-up Fund, etc. Schools are advised to deploy the additional resources holistically and flexibly, including employment of teachers and teaching assistants, or hiring of professional services, in order to address the needs of students with SEN.

Professional Support

Starting from the 2016/17 school year, all public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools have been provided with the School-based Educational Psychology Service (SBEPS) which covers remedial, preventive and developmental work to strengthen schools' capabilities to cater for students' diverse educational needs at the school system, teacher support and student support levels. For the public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools with a comparatively large number of students with SEN, the EDB has progressively implemented the Enhanced SBEPS to render more support to those schools.

Starting from the 2019/20 school year, the EDB has provided all public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools with a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), who is tasked to lead the SST in planning, coordinating and promoting the implementation of WSA to IE. For the schools with a comparatively large number of students with SEN, the post of SENCO is upgraded to a promotion rank (i.e. Primary School Master/ Mistress in primary schools or Senior Graduate Master/ Mistress in secondary schools) to enable SENCOs to perform their leadership, management and coordination roles more effectively. Starting from the same school year, the EDB has also implemented the Enhanced School-based Speech Therapy Service (Enhanced SBSTS) by phases in the public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools. Schools form clusters to employ school-based speech therapists to assist teachers and parents in the domains of prevention, intervention and development when supporting students with SLI and those with other SEN to develop their communication and language skills.

The EDB has all along been providing additional resources for the school for children with VI and the school for children with HI. The resource teachers of these two types of schools conduct visits to ordinary and special schools to render support to students with VI and HI respectively. Other than that, the audiologists of the EDB provide

hearing aid fitting services for students with HI who need to wear the hearing aids. In addition, they visit schools to offer educational cum audiological services, including professional consultation, teacher training and parental counselling.

To facilitate professional exchanges on catering for students with diverse needs, the EDB has launched the “School Partnership Scheme”. Special schools with rich experience and expertise are invited to serve as Special Schools cum Resource Centres to provide support for ordinary schools, including organising thematic workshops, opening up classrooms and offering short-term attachment programmes for students with ID who display severe adjustment difficulties. Recommendations and experience sharing will also be made available to ordinary schools with a view to enhancing the effectiveness of support provided by ordinary schools for these students.

Training for Teachers

Starting from the 2007/08 school year, the EDB has been providing serving teachers with structured training courses pitched at basic, advanced and thematic levels (BAT Courses) with the training targets set. To increase the effectiveness of the implementation of IE, schools are requested to plan and arrange training for teachers in a systemic manner with a view to helping them enhance their professional capacity in catering for students with SEN. In addition to the BAT Courses, the EDB also organise different training courses in special education in response to the development of IE and the teachers’ professional development needs, such as the “Professional Development Programme for Mental Health” and the “Professional Development Programme for Special Educational Needs Coordinators”. Starting from the 2021/22 school year, the “Professional Development Programme for Mental Health” has been incorporated into the Thematic Courses of the BAT Courses to enhance the entirety of the BAT Courses and further facilitate schools to promote mental health amongst students. To disseminate good practices on catering for students with SEN and share the latest update, the EDB arranges training activities for teachers every school year, which include thematic seminars, conferences, experience sharing sessions and workshops. To build the professional capacity of prospective teachers in catering for students with SEN, local teacher education universities have also put in place modules related to special education or catering for students with SEN in their initial teacher education programmes. This enables pre-service teachers to acquire certain knowledge and skills in taking care of students with SEN before they become teachers.

Teaching Resources and Information for Parents

The EDB has issued the “Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education” and, through cross-sector collaboration with tertiary institutions, developed assessment tools and diversified teaching resource packages for schools. To support parents in looking after children with different types of SEN, the EDB has published the “Parent Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education”, a pamphlet on EII Programme, and a series of pamphlets on nurturing children with different types of SEN. The online Special Education Newsletter is also available to disseminate the information of special education and experiences in promoting IE. In addition, the EDB has developed the “Catering for students with SEN - Joyful Online Learning at Home”

series to help parents and teachers guide students with SEN to sustain learning at home and master more skills in learning and social adaptation.

The EDB launched the “SENSE” information website in September 2021. The website contains the related policies, measures and resources related to IE and the practical experience of schools to further facilitate easy access by schools, parents and the public to the latest information and online resources on IE for supporting students with SEN.

Education Bureau
September 2021