Study on Challenges, Effective Policies, and Best Practices of Ordinary Schools in Educating Students with Special Educational Needs in Hong Kong

Equal Opportunities Commission

I N 1994, the UNESCO Salamanca Statement was announced at the World Conference on Special Needs Education held in Spain by the UNESCO. It was the first United Nations document addressing special educational needs (SEN) and inclusive education. The statement emphasized the importance of recognizing the right to education for all children, including those with SEN, and advocated against limiting educational opportunities for children (UNESCO, 1994). The statement called for the inclusion of inclusive education in the discussions on education and urged society to address the needs of students with SEN to ensure that their learning opportunities are not compromised by their needs. In response to the principles outlined in the Salamanca Statement, Hong Kong initiated a pioneering research in inclusive education.

Another significant legislation that accelerated the promotion of inclusive education (IE) in Hong Kong was the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO) enacted in 1996. The DDO clearly states that educational institutions cannot reject admission applications or deny participation in any activities within the institution based on the disabilities of students, unless the institution can demonstrate unreasonable difficulties or inability to provide necessary activities or curriculum for students with SEN. To fulfill the obligations and responsibilities outlined in the aforementioned documents, the Hong Kong Government began to implement inclusive teaching in the public education system and launched a pilot programme for IE in 1997.

1997 Pilot Project on Integrated Education and the Code of Practice on Education in 2021

In 1997, the Hong Kong Government launched a pilot project on IE in seven primary schools and two secondary schools. The programme focused on "whole school approach" (WSA) with the goal of "creating an inclusive school culture" (Education Bureau, 1999). The related documents indicated that the pilot project aimed to encourage all stakeholders in the school to work together to promote individual education plans (IEPs) and enable students with SEN to receive education within the ordinary school environment through guidance teachers, accommodations to the curriculum and teaching content, and assistive devices. The end-of-term evaluation report of the programme after two years showed that the IE programme performed well, but improvement was needed in areas such as leadership and teacher training. The report also stated that the interaction mechanism between teachers and parents, as well as the division of responsibilities among stakeholders in the school, were important for IE. Based on the report, the programme was expanded to twenty primary and secondary schools in the 1999/2000 academic year and increased to forty in the 2000/01 academic year with the support of school management, teachers, students with SEN, and parents.

At the same time, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) published the "Code of Practice" in 2001, attempting to clarify the legal responsibilities of educational institutions under the DDO, explain how to develop equal opportunity policies, and provide examples of the roles and responsibilities of school management and teachers.

Intensive Remedial Teaching Programme in 2001 and Learning Support Grant in 2003

The Intensive Remedial Teaching Programme (IRTP) was launched by the Hong Kong Government as a follow-up initiative to the Pilot Project on Integrated Education in 2001, after the latter ended. The IRTP was mainly divided into two parts. It allowed each school to set up additional classes for eight to fifteen eligible students and allowed the school to retain one "enhanced class" teacher and grant. The goal was to provide schools with an opportunity to move away from the traditional class-based teaching mode and use additional resources to allow students with SEN to get the help

they need (Education Bureau, 2019a).Starting from 2003, the Hong Kong Government suspended the provision of the IRTP to primary schools. Schools that had adopted the IRTP could retain the programme, but new schools or those that had not used the IRTP before had to use the Learning Support Grant (LSG) to hire staff and purchase services (Education Bureau, 2019a). The LSG subsidy level was divided into three levels according to the severity of students' SEN, with more resources allocated to students with more severe needs. However, there was a limit on the amount of subsidy for each school, with a maximum allocation of HKD 1.65 million.

"Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education" in 2008.

In 2008, the Education Bureau (EDB) launched the "Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education" (the Guide) to further assist schools in promoting the WSA model. The Guide included multiple areas of school operation, including school management and organization, learning and teaching, student support and performance, collaboration with external stakeholders, as well as monitoring and pro-moting effectiveness (Education Bureau, 2020). The Guide was also updated and some content was removed according to the Government's funding model for special education and IE.

2019 Learning Support Grant Updated Measures

According to an EDB document in 2019, the EDB believed that the current system lacked flexibility and failed to provide appropriate adjustments for students with SEN. As a result, they proposed a reconfiguration of IE, merging the IRTP and LSG into a single funding model. The schools fully adopt the LSG model. This would enable schools to adopt a more flexible and efficient approach to funding allocation (Legislative Council, 2019).

Support for Students with Special Educational Needs

Three-tier Support Model

According to different EDB documents, Hong Kong currently adopts a three-tier support model, which provides support to students based on their individual situations (Education Bureau, 2020):

Tier 1 - Students with mild or short-term learning or adaptation difficulties will be identified early and their needs will be addressed through optimized teaching.

Tier 2 - If students continue to experience learning and adaptation difficulties in classroom learning or daily life, the school will arrange group training, additional support or counseling for them. Teachers should allow students to practice the skills and knowledge acquired in Tier 2 in regular and   Tier 1 support classes.

Tier 3 - If students have persistent and severe learning or adaptation difficulties, the school will plan the students' individual learning goals through an IEP, and repeatedly allow students to apply the knowledge and skills learned in Tier 3 support classes in Tier 1 and 2 support classes (Education Bureau, 2020).

Individualized education system refers to the use of systematic assessments, including questionnaires filled by teachers, scales filled by parents, and observations of relevant education workers, to develop a tailored learning plan for the student. Each student will have corresponding cross-disciplinary professionals to assist in analyzing the data and defining suitable learning goals for the student (Education Bureau, 2020). In order to help Tier 3 students apply the skills they have learned in different situations, the IEP is not limited to one-on-one counseling, but is a plan that spans the three-tier support structure, ensuring that students can use the skills they have learned in regular classes, specially designed support groups, and individual counselling. At the same time, parents can use the tools developed by professionals at home to practise and train their children in different skills. Through individualized intensive and specialized support and training, the individualized learning system hopes to supplement the shortcomings of students in Tier 1 and 2, ensuring that students can practise, apply, and master skills in different situations.

The EDB stated that the three-tier support model aims to identify students in need early so that teachers do not have to wait for assessment and funding before providing assistance. Some scholars also agree that such arrangement can address the issues of "Test and Treat" and "Wait-to-Fail" in the past, thus providing better quality education and practicing IE in Hong Kong (Lu Xiuxia and Cheng Peiyun, 2009; Education Bureau, 2020). However, there have been cases reflecting loopholes in the three-tier support model,

including the fact that the model is mainly based on school-based support and cannot provide individualized assistance to students. Classes that offer additional training also require a certain number of students to be opened, and complaints have been made about the lack of transparency in these classes. The school may also not proactively report to parents the level of support their child is receiving, the services they have received, and whether the grant has been used on their children, raising doubts about whether the services can effectively improve the learning experience and outcomes of students with SEN (Oriental Daily, 2019).

Whole School Approach

According to the Guide, WSA refers to the coordination of school policies, culture, and measures (Education Bureau, 2020), and it has seven major characteristics:

Table 1. Characteristics of Whole School Approach proposed in the "Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education"

Characteristics of WSA	
Whole School Consensus	All staff of the school acknowledge the responsibility of establishing an inclusive environment to cater for the needs of all students;
Curriculum Accommodation	The school curriculum can be adjusted or expanded to cater for students' diverse learning needs;
Accommodations in Teaching	Diversified teaching techniques and assistive equipment to cater for students' diverse learning needs;
Peer Support	Learning groups, peer tutoring and circles of friends are strategically organized;
Teacher Collaboration	Teachers work together and support each other, for example, by collaborative teaching;
Classroom Support	Specialists collaborate with teachers in improving the learning environment, e.g., arrange collaborative teaching for the benefit of all students;
Assessment Accommodation	Assessment methods are adjusted to facilitate students' demonstration of their learning outcomes.

The Guide also lists various performance indicators for schools and how to achieve a culture of inclusion, clearly indicating that the EDB hopes that every member of the school community can be respected and the differences among different members are understood. Through integrated measures, students, whether with or without SEN, can receive quality education. The Guide provides the basis for schools to promote IE, such as what

measures to take, what documents to compile, and what professional personnel to hire, so that schools can start with the basics, assign roles to all educators in the school, and enable students with SEN to integrate into ordinary schools.

The EDB has also developed various tools to identify students with learning difficulties, including the "Checklist", the "Observation Checklist for Identifying Students with Speech and Language Impairment", the "Chinese Literacy Assessment", the "Child Assessment" and other assessment tools. Regarding students transitioning to secondary school, schools can also obtain "the specialist assessment reports" and the scores of "Pre-Secondary One Hong Kong Attainment Test" from primary schools for a detailed understanding.

It can be seen that the EDB has already provided a timetable for schools to identify and assist students with SEN, as well as providing multiple tools to help teachers identify students in need as early as possible. However, this system cannot avoid being questioned by many parties. First, the current SEN assessment procedure is mainly through teachers' observation before referral to professionals. If teachers have not received relevant professional training, some students may be overlooked, or some students' problems may be exaggerated, thus delaying their learning. Moreover, because some students did not study in Hong Kong in their early years and are often ignored when they transfer to primary schools in higher grades, students are only identified when they enter secondary school, reflecting the loopholes in the current system - only identification during the initial stages of Primary 1 and Form 1, ignoring transfer students or students who enter higher grades (Hong Kong Economic Journal, May 21, 2018).

Establishment of "Student Support Team" and Special Educational Needs Coordinator

Members of the "Student Support Team"

As mentioned above, the school will be advised to establish a student support team, whose main members include the principal and vice-principal, the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and SEN support teachers (SENSTs), the school-based speech therapist, teaching assistants responsible for supporting students with SEN, subject teachers responsible for related students, curriculum development director, counseling director, counselors and school social workers. Educational psychologists

(EPs) or other professionals dispatched by the EDB will attend when needed (Education Bureau, 2020).

Home-School Cooperation

An important part of IE is to ensure good cooperation between schools and parents for accommodating information exchange about the student's situation and developing the most appropriate strategies. To maintain good operation of home-school cooperation, each school should establish a continuous communication mechanism. At the beginning of the semester, teachers will explain the "Three-tier Support Model" to parents, provide detailed information, and establish contact channels. During the semester, if students are identified as being in Tier 2 or Tier 3, meetings with professionals will be arranged as needed, and progress reports, such as reporting student progress on parent day, will be used to report student progress and explain relevant information. At the same time, the school will also encourage parental involvement, proactively contact parents and express understanding, care, and sympathy for their performance (Education Bureau, 2020). The home-school mediation mechanism will also be an effective mediation channel when there is any conflicts or disputes between the two parties. The school will also follow the consistent personal data privacy protection system to protect the rights and interests of parents and students.

Home-school cooperation plays an important role in the promotion of IE because communicating with parents helps to ensure that any adjustments to the curriculum, teaching, and assessment can incorporate parents' opinions. In addition, parents generally accept IE, believing that it helps their children to interact with different people and develop good qualities such as care, tolerance, and responsibility (Hong Kong Institute of Education Special Educational Needs and Inclusive Education Centre, 2012). However, insufficient channels for parents to receive information can prevent students from receiving corresponding services. Even though the EDB now provides schools with different levels of support, establishes a SENCO, provides subsidy support, and arranges professional services, some schools may be concerned about their reputation and may not want outsiders to know that there are students with special needs in the school, thereby choosing not to disclose the information (Lu, 2016). This situation was also reflected in the report of the Audit Commission (2018), which showed that the School Profiles published by the "Committee on Home-School Co-operation" only

disclose a small amount of information about supporting special education, making it difficult for parents to find suitable schools and adding another layer of difficulty to home-school cooperation. In short, the most important issue with home-school cooperation is actually related to public perception. Parents   and the public lack understanding of special education needs, and even if their own children may have different learning difficulties or special needs, parents may refuse to recognize or avoid discussing them, resulting in students not being diagnosed and intervened in a timely manner.

Current Situation and Data of Integrated Education in Hong Kong

The number of students with SEN in Hong Kong has been steadily increasing in recent years, from around 43,000 students in the 2016/17 academic year (Figure 1), to nearly 60,000 students in the 2021/22 academic year, of which approximately 40 percent are students with specific learning difficulties (SLD) and the rest have other types of SEN (Legislative Council Secretariat, 2022).

Figure 1. Number of students with SEN in Hong Kong Public Sector Ordinary Schools (Legislative Council Secretariat, 2022)

No. of SEN students in public sector ordinary schools

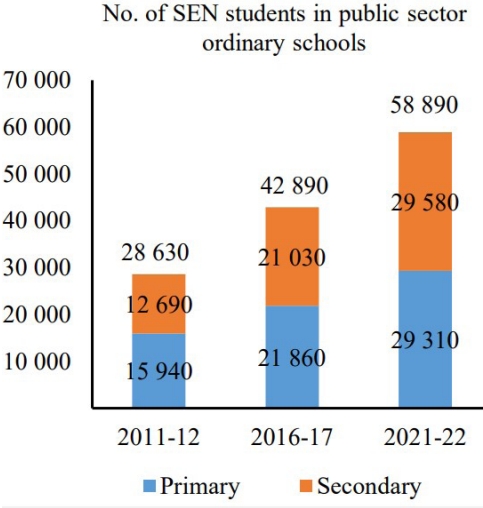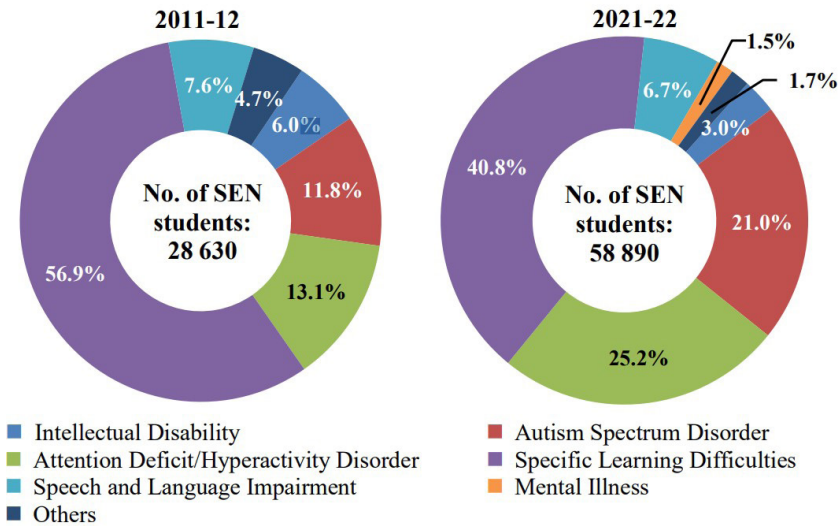|	2011-12	2016-17	2021-22
Total	28 630	42 890	58 890
Secondary	12 690	21 030	29 580
Primary	15 940	21 860	29 310

■ Primary   ■ Secondary

Figure 2. Types of SEN students in public sector primary and secondary ordinary schools (Legislative Council Secretariat, 2022)

In addition, the number of students with SEN participating in public examinations has also increased. According to data from the EDB, the number of students who applied to be special needs candidates in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination, and requested special arrangements such as modified test papers and response formats, assistive devices, and extended examination time, has increased from approximately 2,700 in 2018 to about 3,200 in 2020, accounting for an increase in the proportion of the total number of candidates from 4.5 percent to 6 percent (Education Bureau, 2021b).

Distribution of students with Special Educational Needs

In the IE model currently promoted by the Hong Kong Government, the "three-tier support system" is an important tool for supporting students with SEN. The number of students who continue to have special needs in the Tier 2 and Tier 3 is an important indicator for understanding and observing the overall distribution of students with SEN in Hong Kong and their integration into ordinary schools.

In terms of the number of Tier 2 students in each primary and secondary school, the number of students in primary schools has increased

from just under 28,000 in the 2019/20 academic year to over 30,000 in the 2021/22 academic year. For secondary schools, the number of students has increased from over 21,000 in the 2019/20 academic year to over 24,000 in the 2021/22 academic year (Education Bureau, 2023) (Table 2). The number of Tier 3 support students has increased from just under 2,100 in primary schools in the 2019/20 academic year to over 2,300 in the 2021/22 academic year, and from over 1,500 in secondary schools in the 2019/20 academic year to over 1,800 in the 2021/22 academic year. This reflects that more schools are accepting students with more severe SEN, and more schools are implementing IE. (Education Bureau, 2023)

Table 2. Number of Tier 2 and Tier 3 students with SEN in Hong Kong Public Sector Ordinary Schools (Education Bureau, 2023)

Tier of support required by students	No. of students					
	2019/20		2020/21		2021/22	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
Tier-2 support	27,959	21,502	28,609	23,033	30,028	24,377
Tier-3 support	2,094	1,552	2,252	1,671	2,324	1,836

In terms of the number of schools, the overall figures were lower before the 2018/19 academic year as schools could support students with SEN from other resources. In the 2018/19 academic year, only three hundred eighty-one primary schools provided Tier 2 support services and three hundred forty-nine primary schools provided Tier 3 support services. However, as of the 2020/21 academic year, the numbers had increased to four hundred fifty-four primary schools providing Tier 2 support services and four hundred thirty-one primary schools providing Tier 3 support services (Education Bureau, 2022) (Table 3). In secondary schools, there were three hundred eighty-four schools providing Tier 2 support services and three hundred thirty-five schools providing Tier 3 support services in the 2018/19 academic year. However, in the 2020/21 academic year, these numbers had slightly increased to three hundred eighty-nine schools providing Tier 2 support services and three hundred forty-two schools providing Tier 3 support services (Education Bureau, 2022) (Table 3). This reflects that more ordinary schools are gradually accepting more students with SEN requiring Tier 3 support, while also illustrating the continuous increase in the overall number of students with SEN in Hong Kong.

Table 3. Number of public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools providing Tier 2 and Tier 3 support (教育局，**2022)**[1]

Tier of support required by students	No. of schools					
	2018/19		2019/20		202/21	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
Tier-2 support	381	384	455	389	454	389
Tier-3 support	349	335	427	340	431	342

Study on Challenges, Effective Policies, and Best Practices of Ordinary Schools in Educating Students with Special Educational Needs in Hong Kong

In view of the fact that IE has been implemented in Hong Kong for some time, the EOC has commissioned the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching from the Education University of Hong Kong (referred to as the research team below) to carry out a project entitled "Study on Challenges, Effective Policies, and Best Practices of Ordinary Schools in Educating Students with Special Educational Needs in Hong Kong". This Study collected data and stakeholders' opinions through methods such as questionnaire surveys, focus group interviews, individual interviews, and case studies, to thoroughly examine the overall effectiveness of IE in primary and secondary schools at present, and to provide relevant policy recommendations for the future development of IE. The entire Study began in October 2019. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2019, all research data collection was completed in December 2021.

Key Findings of School Questionnaire Survey

The entire school survey was conducted from October 2020 to November 2021, and the collected data was based on the 2020/21 academic year. After the data compilation, a total of one hundred forty-one ordinary schools participated in this Study, with sixty primary schools and eighty-one secondary schools. There were one hundred forty-one principals, one hundred forty-one SENCOs and 1,532 teachers participated in the questionnaire survey, including seven hundred four primary school teachers and eight hundred twenty-eight secondary school teachers.

Challenges of Implementing IE and effectiveness of support measures

The majority of the school principals (81.6 percent), teachers (85.3 percent) and SENCOs (85.8 percent) surveyed agreed that the most difficult aspect of implementing IE was the tight teaching schedule/heavy teaching workload. Besides, over 70 percent of principals (70.2 percent) and SENCOs (70.9 percent) expressed that the administrative work brought about by IE was heavy, while 68.8 percent of the teachers surveyed considered the lack of manpower as the second difficulty in implementing IE.

Principals thought that the setting up of the post of SENCO was the most effective support measure with the overall mean score of 3.48 (in a 4-point scale from 1 to 4, where 3 represents that the policy/support measure is helpful). SENCOs considered that the promotion of School-based Educational Psychology services and the provision of more systematic and adequate teacher training were the most effective support measures with the mean scores of 3.48 for both items. Yet, teachers considered adding the post of School-based Speech Therapist as the most effective support measure with the highest mean score of 3.21, while primary school teachers rated a higher mean score of 3.24.

Stress Level Perceived when Handling Students with SEN

According to the survey, both SENCOs and teachers pointed out that they felt quite stressed when facing students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). While taking care of students with mental illness, the stress experienced by SENCOs was significantly higher than that of teachers.

Findings of Individual and Focus Group Interviews with School Stakeholders

The research team conducted interviews with various stakeholders involved in IE, including principals, SENCOs, frontline teachers, professional support personnel, and parents, to collect their opinions on the implementation of IE and explore the overall policy effectiveness and the impact of support measures on schools, teachers, students, parents, and professional support personnel. In addition, individual and focus group interviews were analyzed through triangulation analysis to provide preliminary

interpretation of the questionnaire results. Therefore, this Study had a multi-category design, conducted focus group interviews with different stakeholders and had a sample size that is representative to a certain extent.

Interview Samples

The research team interviewed a total of one hundred six stakeholders from twenty-seven schools, including fifteen primary schools and twelve secondary schools. Half of the schools were considered more successful in implementing IE, while the other half still had room for improvement. The team conducted individual interviews or focus group interviews starting in June 2021 and completed them in December 2021. The details are as follows:

Table 4. Sample details of interview respondents

Stakeholder	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools	Total No. of Respondents
Principals	15	12	27
SENCOs and SENSTs	15	16	31
Professional Support Personnel	15	13	28
Parents	10	10	20

The interview transcripts quoted below (information within parentheses) are coded using the combination of the school code and participant code, representing individual schools and participants.

Individual Interview and Focus Group Interview Findings

Status of Curriculum Implementation (Teaching, Learning, and Assessment)

Curriculum and Assessment in Secondary Schools

Stakeholders in both primary and secondary schools (including principals, SENCOs, and teachers) clearly pointed out that the biggest problem in the current implementation of IE is the tight schedule of the existing curriculum, which makes it difficult for schools and frontline teachers to allocate sufficient resources to effectively address the needs of students with SEN.

"Our timetable is packed, completely packed, and the biggest problem we face is that in a classroom, the class timetable

is very intense, and basically there is no free time." (Secondary school principal) (SS02-PR)

"In schools, lessons are resources that colleagues notice. If you allocate some of the lesson periods to support moral education, and you allocate some of them to [IE], instead of telling teachers to teach outside of their normal classes, it affects the moral education of some students, and I did allocate a lesson period, so I know you value it." (Secondary school principal) (SS01- PR)

They also unanimously agreed that requiring students with SEN to simultaneously receive mainstream education courses and assessment criteria is the root cause of educational inequality in Hong Kong.

"Our principle for extra time [during exams] is that for students in Form 1 to 3, if there is a medical certificate and a request from their parents, basically we would approve it and arrange a special room for them with extra time. However, for Form 4 students who are considering extra time, they need to think again if they really need it for their DSE (Diploma of Secondary Education) [examination]. Even if they are in a lower form, if they don't take extra time, they can still rejoin this line (apply for extra time) later, but whether it is approved or not is up to the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority." (Secondary School SENCO) (SS02-SE)

Currently, secondary school students still need to take the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE). This not only brings heavy pressure to schools but also prevents students with SEN from keeping up with the curriculum and affects their overall learning effectiveness throughout their secondary school years.

"The teachers have high expectations for themselves and hope that their students excel. They also feel that going to university is the only way to a good future. Sometimes, teachers themselves think that going to university is the only option. Students with SEN reflected to counselling teachers and social workers that 'Teachers always told us to enter university at lessons and which subject to study. I feel like they are letting everyone down because they cannot get into university'. Some students may even lose motivation and feel like it's not worth trying. So it is important for teachers to understand that there are different pathways available for students." (Secondary School Principal) (SS03-PR)

"If a family sees that a certain subject or career path is suitable for their child with SEN, [they should think] whether [the child] should be able to take the public exams. There are some cases where students with anxiety or physical conditions may struggle to cope with the stress of exams at the expense of their health. It would be good to give parents some choices, say in Form 3, that are widely accepted and recognized by everyone." (Secondary School SENCO)(SS04- SE+SW+ST)

"There are challenges in terms of academic performance for students with SEN. Their abilities are limited and there are gaps in their learning. It is especially difficult for higher grade students, even with all the support provided by teachers such as study groups and tutoring from alumni. This may not necessarily result in a significant improvement in their grades and performance, and it may be difficult for them to pass the DSE exam and enter university." (Secondary School SENCO) (SS05-SE)

"We know that they are a bit behind others, they are backward, not just two years of difference. Some of them may only be at the level of junior primary school when they enroll in secondary school. If you make them take the DSE exam, you're basically pushing them too hard." (Secondary School SENCO) (SS16-SE)

Teachers also cannot adjust their daily assessments given the difficulty of the content in public exams, which further undermines their students' motivation to learn.

"Hong Kong places too much emphasis on academic performance. I think if we can change this mindset— there are many ways to learn, right? Each student with SEN has [his/her] own strengths. For example, we know that some students with SEN may have weak reading skills, but they may be good at drawing…. If you ask them to take the DSE exam and answer so many questions, they will definitely fail. No matter how you adjust it, it's not about their ability. I think what you need to do is give them something they can excel at, rather than something they know they will fail. It's about changing our mindset."(Secondary School SENCO) (SS16-SE)

Although students with SEN can apply for various exam accommodations, they are not very effective for them.

"Although you provided resources, does it mean that a student with MI in an ordinary school can definitely handle the DSE? I don't think so. They still have to study the DSE curriculum,

which I think is quite challenging." (Secondary School senco) (SS16-SE)

"Actually, for students who are weaker in terms of learning abilities, extra time and other accommodations may not get many scores for them. In contrary, sen may imply some behavioural problems or relatively complicated family backgrounds, support [in this regard] is more inadequate. For them, there are more problems, most likely about emotions or behaviours." (Secondary School Social Worker) (SS09-SW)

Primary School Curriculum and Assessment Situation

In primary schools, due to the need to regularly take the Territory-wide System Assessment (tsa) and the Pre-Secondary One Hong Kong Attainment Test (Pre-S1 hkat), the curriculum schedule is also very tight, and teachers have actual difficulty in having sufficient room to effectively cater to the learning diversity of students with sen.

"I think sometimes teachers' primary concern is not to hinder classroom progress, of course, if it seriously affects the progress, I understand. Or sometimes they may not have the time or willingness to deal with it, because teachers have to deal with TSA, Pre-S1 (hkat), and various assessments. If there is a problem, it may take half a lesson to handle, and teachers may not want to lose this half lesson and affect the progress afterwards." (Primary school senco) (PS04-SE)

However, as the school has a curriculum development leader (CD), the interviewed senco stated that the Tier 1 (T1) assistance of the CD in improving classroom support effectiveness is crucial and helps improve overall teaching outcomes.

"The new CD was willing to think together on how to improve lessons of all colleagues to reduce individual differences, and the EP is also very helpful." (Primary School senco) (PS02-SE)

"So I think the CD is promoting the T1 support, helping to address the learning diversity in T1, promoting a positive school, putting people first...and can take care of the learning diversity of students. So, the first step is to adjust the learning when the subject ability is not good. Then, we can focus on improving the abilities of the top students. Because I think this is what they want to do. If I can also help with this, they will be very moti-

vated to start, and it will also make the teacher feel better and have a sense of ability and success in teaching." (Primary School senco) (PS06-SE)

Impact of Current Education System and Environment on the Implementation of Integrated Education

Some interviewed primary and secondary school principals believe that the current school system lacks space and flexibility in curriculum accommodations. Relying solely on daily homework and exam accommodations do not help improve the learning effectiveness of students with sen.

> "As for class hours, our timetable in Hong Kong is fixed, or what is called flexible class hours, it is a concept that is flexible to the extent that the students know how to move around automatically. It's like some kindergartens I've seen, where once you enter, the children know exactly what they want to do and move on to the next activity. Can this degree of freedom be introduced into our primary and secondary schools, which have very structured systems?" (Primary school principal) (PS06-PR)

> "In the overall [educational] environment, teachers face certain difficulties, especially in how to help these students [with sen]. It seems to me that controlling them in the classroom for ordinary learning is a huge [challenge]."(Secondary school principal) (SS01-PR)

The interviewed sencos, social workers, and clinical psychologists from primary and secondary schools further emphasized that due to the overcrowded curriculum in Hong Kong, subject teachers often say that classroom progress cannot be hindered, or there may not be too much time to care for students with sen. The relationship between teachers and students is mostly built in the classroom and in learning, lacking other exchange opportunities. Teacher-student dialogue is focused only on learning and it is difficult to establish good communication with students, and support for students is not comprehensive enough. This is indeed an unsatisfactory situation at present.

> "I think that for the T1 support, I may not really be able to support teachers in learning. Maybe in terms of student behavior, for example, he may have asd or adhd, I have some feasible solutions for colleagues, but in actual teaching, how to teach, maybe I majored in Chinese and I can help with Chinese, or our CD can help. But maybe for colleagues who teach English or mathematics, it is difficult for them to effectively take care of

the differences in classroom, and the curriculum is too rushed, so they feel the difficulty, which is understandable." (Primary school SENCO) (PS03-SE)

"The teaching and learning aspect are actually something we have always struggled with. The EDB may hope that we can do it well, but it really depends on the situation of each school. While we understand that learning diversity can be promoted, simply sharing the message doesn't mean it can be implemented or that certain teachers, who may have had exposure to training and so on, can [try to] carry out the practice in their own classrooms or subjects.... It can be difficult for them to try it out, unless they are, say, already a subject head. So, I find this aspect challenging." (Secondary School SENCO) (SS02-SE)

"However, within the entire education system, there is no place for teachers to relieve some of their workload and provide more space for teachers and students to have some informal communication, instead of just exchanging knowledge from textbooks. I am certain that this can reduce many cases of emotional difficulties and the negative effects of hyperactivity disorder." (Primary school social worker) (PS08-RSW)

"I actually reflect on the concept of inclusion, the whole idea of IE, when I look at clinical practice. I personally think that this is a vision. That is, we actually hope for social inclusion, that some students with learning difficulties can also learn in the same environment. However, from actual observations, I feel that different schools will share: some students, or actually the students' behavioral problems are not too serious. When teachers may not be able to handle them, it not only affects the individual students themselves but also affects the learning of the whole class. Maybe after the teacher spent half of the class time dealing with their emotional problems, there are only 15 minutes left." (Secondary school clinical psychologist) (SS02-CP)

In addition, SENSTs interviewed also said that some teachers have reported losing a sense of success when teaching students with SEN, which is consistent with the survey data and an area for improvement in the future.

"Half of the class are students with SEN. How can we teach? Many colleagues say they do not feel successful in their teaching, because no matter how much effort they put in, the students still end up with a U grade (ungraded). For example, there are some "helicopter parents" (parents who excessively intervene in their children's lives).They always ask me, 'please tell them not

to take the exam, or ask them to be absent?'" (Secondary School SENCO) (SS15-SE)

Based on the above interviews, in terms of curriculum arrangements, both primary and secondary schools face the problem of a tight curriculum and difficulty in accommodating, making it difficult for teachers to care for students with SEN in their daily teaching. In terms of assessment arrangements, both primary and secondary schools make accommodations for students with SEN, such as extra time, reading papers, etc. However, due to the restrictions of the HKDSE, secondary schools face greater constraints in making accommodations for exams, while primary schools still have some flexibility. However, such flexibility may not be a real help for students, as using the same exam to assess students with SEN is inherently unfair, and accommodations are merely a "fair" arrangement in terms of policy.

In the implementation of IE, education is the key. However, the exam culture and curriculum arrangements established in Hong Kong for many years have made it difficult for schools and teachers to improve the effectiveness of education under the policy of IE. For secondary schools, they have to face the HKDSE, and some compulsory courses and designated skills have become content that students must learn in secondary school. In order for students to be in line with the public exam, schools and teachers are unable to make curriculum cuts in the form of school-based curriculum. For primary schools, facing the TSA and the Pre-S1 HKAT, the curriculum frameworks and teaching objectives set by the EDB in the curriculum guidelines of various subjects also limit the accommodation of primary school curriculum. Based on the curriculum and policies established over the years, the inclusion of IE at present has not given primary and secondary school teachers room to make changes in the existing curriculum, and it is the tight curriculum that makes it difficult for teachers to do the "education" work in IE, and also makes it difficult for teachers to abandon the elitist thinking that has been established for many years.

Effectiveness of Government's Continuous Investment in Integrated Education

Functions and Roles of SENCO

With the development of IE, the EDB began to establish the position of SENCO in every school starting from the 2017/18 school year to sup-

port students with SEN. However, the scope of work involved in the role of SENCO is extensive and the workload is enormous. It is difficult for a SENCO to handle everything alone. The interviewed SENCOs reflected that the work involved in supporting students with SEN is diverse, including early identification, planning support, and setting up IEPs. The work cannot be done independently by the SENCO alone and requires the support of students, parents, teachers, and other professional support personnel to implement the WSA.

> "Because SEN work involves many interconnected aspects. After identifying a Primary 1 student with SEN, you need to provide support, and after providing support, you need to form a support group. Within that group, some students may have practical needs, such as ADHD or autism. There are many things that are interconnected. When I need to create an IEP, for example, I may not be able to do it alone. I need to train my colleagues on how to create an IEP and how to handle different types of students. There may not always be support from colleagues, but that does not mean I have completed everything. When I need to follow up, I need to communicate with colleagues A, B, C, or the whole school on how to adjust for exams or how to handle difficulties encountered in assignments. Most of the time, colleagues or parents will come to me for help." (Primary school SENCO) (PS03-SE)

In addition to being responsible for serving as a bridge to communicate and negotiate with stakeholders, the time, skills and effort required for SENCOs to handle complex administrative work has been a long-term source of pressure. Based on the need to coordinate the opinions of various stakeholders and support students with SEN according to the EDB's procedures, SENCOs' work often require a long-term effort to gradually take effect.

> "The SENCO really has to take care of everything. I have to follow up on the curriculum, but I can only slowly learn something, and I can't follow up in depth. I'm just a bridge to coordinate things, such as exam adjustments. My team has someone who goes into the exam committee, and I have a colleague who specializes in exam accommodations for students with SEN, including DSE arrangements." (Secondary School SENCO) (SS06-SE)

In interviews, SENCOs in primary and secondary schools also indicated that current school policies and support staff are insufficient to meet their work demands. Within the schools, SENCOs often need to collaborate with subject teachers or administrators to provide students with different accommodations, but they lack the ability to strengthen collaboration among teachers.

> "In fact, the learning support team is in the academic side of EDB...it requires some effort to push forward... I asked for a mathematics vice teacher, a Chinese vice teacher, and a support teacher for English. For Chinese, English and Mathematics, I can push forward in junior forms, but for some curriculum-related matters, I need to rely on the three subject panel [heads], but how do I get them to listen to me?" (Secondary School SENCO) (SS09-SE)

Interviewed primary and secondary school principals agreed that caring for students with special learning needs should not be the sole responsibility of the SENCO, but rather should involve the participation and promotion of all teachers in the school. The SENCO needs to be empowered to enhance their coordination ability to promote the overall development of IE in the whole school.

> "I think it is important for all colleagues to agree to a mindset that we need to join forces to teach students with SEN, not just the responsibility of the SENCO, but also for all colleagues to have the heart to make our school inclusive. In addition, in the past, everyone was very taboo about privacy, but if we know the symptoms of the child's syndrome to some extent, we will be able to handle it better. All teachers in the school know about it, so when it comes to handling it, we understand it somewhat and reduce conflicts." (Primary School Principal) (PS05-PR)

In addition, general teachers also have the responsibility and awareness to assist the SENCO in providing early support for students with special learning needs so that students can feel the care and assistance of the school as a whole.

> "I think communication in terms of information is very important. Because if there are some more severe cases, sometimes even students with self-harm tendencies, it is only a momentary thing, so we need to grasp [the situation] more to provide sup-

port. I understand that it is really difficult to handle in private, but I think if the teacher often meets this student, they actually need to know." (Secondary School Social Worker) (SS15-SW)

From the interviews, it can be seen that the EDB has established the position of SENCO in each school, and has formulated relevant work guidelines and procedures. SENCOs in primary and secondary schools also expressed that they can clearly understand the criteria and arrangements for their work. However, the relevant work cannot be completed solely by themselves, and the lack of understanding among other teaching staff also hinders support for students.

At the secondary school level, the needs of students with SEN are not limited to learning, and may involve emotional management, social skills, etc. All teaching staff need to participate and prevent dangerous situations in order to effectively support students in need. However, SENCOs lack sufficient ability to promote cooperation among teachers. Most of the support is still led by the SENCOs, which makes their situation very difficult. The problem faced by primary schools is to identify students who need support early. The identification process also requires the participation of all teaching staff, including daily observation, communication with parents and students, etc. However, teachers are burdened with the busy teaching work and do not have time to establish good communication with students beyond teaching, which also affects the efficiency of identification. After identification, various support work and plans also require the implementation by all teaching staff together. However, ordinary teachers still rely on the SENCO's planning and instructions, rather than supporting students' needs based on their own understanding.

Current School Support on Integrated Education

Although different professionals, such as EPs and speech therapists, regularly visit schools to provide professional assistance, resources are still insufficient. EPs reflected in interviews that due to inadequate visits to schools, they were unable to meet the needs of too many students with SEN, which prevented students with special learning needs from receiving continuous assessments and made it difficult to adjust their support according to students' changes.

"Perhaps the work of EPs is also limited, that is, now EPs serve alone, with a ratio of one to seven. Therefore, what can be done must be limited to the emergency cases. Then, when

it comes to schools hoping to implement something, after they listen to my advice on how to do it, they can work in pairs with them or I can demonstrate it, and then they try to do it themselves. At least, I think that more confidence in the overall teachers will make it easier for them to implement in their own classes or with their own students... If the ratio of EPs in schools continues not to decrease, and the number of students with SEN in a school is so high, the ratio of one EP to students is constantly increasing. Therefore, I believe that more manpower is more important than money." (Secondary school EP) (SS01-EP)

Interviewed social workers also stated that because EPs are not able to be stationed at schools, sometimes teachers and social workers at the school need to replace EPs to provide support, but the different professional skills weaken the effectiveness of support.

"The division of labor on SEN work may belong to the group of EPs, with more support available. There is also a SENCO, and on our social work level, we also have EPs. Unlike in the past where EP was full-time at school, our division of labor does not have such a distinction. But now in schools, EPs only visit school according to schedule. So I think, in this situation, students with SEN will be taken cared of by teachers or supported by in-school social workers." (Secondary School Social Worker) (SS05-SW)

"That is to say, I guess now only a psychiatrist can diagnose whether a student has MI [mental illness], EP, CP (clinical psychologists), we all can't do it. Waiting for this takes the longest time, and I can only refer them to some very urgent services. Some students, I cannot immediately make referrals and can only chat with them, provide some temporary support, or refer them to go to public hospitals and wait, etc." (Secondary School Social Worker) (SS01-SW)

Regarding IEPs, the SENCOs interviewed stated that the plans can bring significant impacts on students. However, IEPs require the participation of different stakeholders to achieve its ideal effects.

"Because we have three meetings a year, the first one is actually for planning, and the second and the third one are for reviewing how the first half of the year went or the progress for the second half of the year. We need to adjust our support direction among us, which I think is very important. It's more systematic to plan some support for the students, different units also know how to cooperate with systematic support to review how each

unit is doing, how students' progress is adjusted, whether it's goals or strategies, we will try to do it again, I think it's very important in the process." (Secondary School EP) (SS03-EP)

"Actually, the Tier 3 of IEP is necessary because some students may not really benefit from Tier 2 support, or we used to only provide some individual counseling, which is not perfect. In fact, IEP needs to be complemented with many things, including regular meetings, regular contact with parents, and EPs, maybe together with writing some learning plans for each case, so the plan actually sets some small goals for the students. IEP is a focused project that can help children, especially cases of ID [intellectual disabilities] and ASD, where progress is significant." (Primary School EP) (PS01-SE)

The SENCOs of primary and secondary schools interviewed stated that in order to ensure that students can receive practical support, schools will select students based on their urgent needs and circumstances to ensure that IEPs can be effectively implemented. In primary schools, schools tend to prioritize students who have difficulties in both academic, self-care, and personal growth aspects, such as students with autism or ADHD, while students with only special learning needs are usually not the first choice.

"For IEP to be opened, it is best to provide individual support, but I don't want to open it and then fail to provide the quality of Tier 3 support that he needs. Because there are many meetings to follow up on for IEP, and the current staff of our support team cannot handle IEP." (Primary School SENCO) (PS02-SE)

Secondary school SENCOs stated that due to restrictions of public examinations, IEPs are mostly for students in Form 1 to Form 3 to provide more time for support.

"For students in Form 1 to Form 3, emotional management, daily routine, and interpersonal relationships may require [IEP], for example, for students with ADHD, ASD, or MI, there is a chance that they may be the target of our IEP. For SLD, we may also consider whether we can help them while promoting their personal growth. We don't want to waste the positions for IEP, but we can't be excessive. Because an IEP is not just written, we examine several categories, so colleagues are busy, our subject teachers need to help, our Resource Teacher needs to support subject teachers, sometimes some parts may require SENST to help, and sometimes social workers are needed, such as personal emotions or communication with family members. So we cannot be excessive. If not, if you write so much, everyone cannot do it, it is meaningless." (Secondary school EP) (SS01-EP)

Regarding the Tier 3 support model in IE (i.e., IEP), both primary and secondary schools agree that the plan can effectively provide students with more comprehensive support, and this kind of support needs the joint efforts and implementation of different staff within the school to achieve results. However, primary and secondary schools also face a common problem, that is, the shortage of resources and staff, which leads to the need for schools to make choices when implementing the Tier 3 support in order to ensure the effectiveness of the support plan. In particular, secondary schools need to make choices in response to the restrictions of public exams, and student academic performance may also be a factor to consider. Primary schools tend to choose based on the student's personal growth and self-care abilities. These criteria are also based on the school situation and the school's approach to decide which students to support, which means that this effective support model cannot be widely used in more students.

For primary and secondary schools, the role of EPs is to assess students and provide professional support and advices. However, both primary and secondary schools have reported that EPs visit schools infrequently, and often rely on teachers or social workers to provide support measures for students. The difficulty is that social workers do not have publicly recognized qualifications in student assessment, and all support plans are only recognized with reports from EPs or psychiatrists. This situation means that the most commonly engaged professionals (such as social workers), who know students and understand their needs best, must wait for the judgments of other professionals before they can provide further support. This has a greater impact on primary schools, as the focus of primary education is to identify and support students early, and the need for long-waiting professional reports makes it difficult to achieve this "early" support. Therefore, teachers and social workers who work at the school can only identify individual cases early and provide support as soon as possible.

Resource Deployment and Flexibility

Stakeholders in primary and secondary schools, including principals, SENCOs, teachers, and various professional support personnel, have all indicated that the Government's sustained increase in resources has helped schools promote IE. Schools can use LSG to employ different professional support personnel, which can be used for different students, such as non-Chinese speaking students.

"For example, when you talk about NCS (non-Chinese speaking students), it is also a way of caring for diversity... Personally, I think that non-Chinese speaking is also a branch of IE. If we have some funding or professional support that can be flexibly used according to the school's situation and needs, I think it would be ideal." (Secondary school principal) (SS03-PR)

"We use funding of LSG to hire some support teachers and assistants. I mainly coordinate the work of these teachers, ask them to divide the administrative and in-class support work. In addition, basically all students and support group administrative work have to be handled. The most time-consuming thing is contacting parents and meeting with parents, as well as contacting parents of students with SEN, which takes up more time." (Primary school SENCO) (PS02-SE)

However, when utilizing related LSG, the SENCOs pointed out that they are constrained, and the SENSTs they hire may not be able to fully support their work because it is difficult to find suitable staff to assist schools in implementing IE, especially the lack of professional support personnel specialized in caring for a certain type of students with SEN.

"Nowadays, the Government's IE is mainly in ordinary schools. The benefit is that they can integrate into mainstream society and live with ordinary people. This can enhance their social skills. However, on the other hand, although the Government has provided a lot of resources in recent years, we still lack the so-called expertise to take care of a certain type of students. It depends on the overall school atmosphere and team because if it is not handled properly, it is easy to have bullying, but if handled properly, of course, it can achieve their educational goals." (Secondary school principal) (SS15-PR)

"Is it really that way? The current policy is to give you money to solve it anyway, but the problem is that I can't find it in the community, not that I can't find the people, but whether I can find suitable people who have the willingness and ability to help with IE." (Primary school principal) (PS06-PR)

Moreover, most of the resources are used to hire professional support personnel, which does not help solve the problem that SENCOs have too many administrative tasks but insufficient working hours.

"There is a lot of paperwork involved in our work, such as helping students with their DSE. The process of obtaining exemp-

tions involves a lot of paperwork and is very time-consuming." (Secondary school principal) (SS15-PR)

Therefore, to address the issue of staffing, it is recommended to establish permanent positions for professional support personnel to attract relevant professionals to join schools and provide support. This can help create a supportive atmosphere on campus and achieve a more ideal model of WSA.

> "If this [position] is not stable and is always filled through contracts, it is not enough to simply increase LSG and hire more teachers to deal with the increasing number of SEN paperwork. Students and parents require support, and using contracts is not ideal." (Primary school SENCO) (PS06-SE)

In addition, some school principals pointed out that simply increasing resources without changes in the education system does not help improve the difficulties faced by IE.

> "In fact, for everything to be implemented, it is said that the whole school should participate. I think the EDB should offer some flexibility to schools. The EDB has implemented so many policies. Will there be priorities? We are not saying that we won't do the others, but we will gradually do them. Because there are too many things, our teachers don't have enough time. Sometimes teachers say, 'to take care of students' mental health, I also have to take care of my own mental health.' So one of our staff development is to take care of teachers' mental health." (Secondary school principal) (SS03-PR)

From the above interviews, it can be seen that the Government's increase in resources for IE allows primary and secondary schools to have more funding to hire additional teachers or assistants. Secondary schools will use these resources to support more student groups, such as non-Chinese speaking students, while primary schools will use the resources to handle time-consuming administrative work.

Although primary and secondary schools have more human resources to support IE, they still face the challenge of finding support teachers or assistants with professional knowledge in IE, which hinders the optimal use of funds. This situation is related to the establishment of relevant positions. The EDB allocates funds for schools to hire teachers or assistants, which only allows primary and secondary schools to hire relevant person-

nel on a contract basis. Such instability results in high turnover rates for these positions and affects the continuity of support.

Professional Development of Teachers in Integrated Education

All interviewed principals believed that enhancing teachers' awareness is an important factor in implementing IE. Through training, teachers can deepen their understanding of IE, improve their skills in caring for students with SEN, and help teachers in different roles, including discipline/guidance team, career planning teams, and class teachers, understand how to support students in different roles. This reduces the over-reliance of teachers on student support team or SENCOs and promotes the participation of the whole school in implementing IE.

> "In fact, everything we do, such as the whole school lesson planning system we just talked about, is based on Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Because we know that our professional development as educators will inevitably involve CPD at a certain stage. The most important thing about CPD is that you learn while doing it, and it's not just about you as an individual, but your team as well. So our belief is that the team is very important. We have put in a lot of effort in the past few years in building the team, and we believe that if we integrate students with SEN into it, it will be easier to achieve our goals." (Secondary school principal) (SS01-PR)

> "WSA means a role for everyone. Everyone has something to contribute, and there is a whole-school policy. Every year, the EDB provides some SEN training, even mental health training, and NGOs also have similar training. We arrange colleagues to attend these training sessions, not just in the counseling team or SEN team, but gradually in other teams such as the discipline team, career planning team, class teachers, and even other colleagues. We have invited relevant professionals such as psychiatrists, social workers, and clinical psychologists to come and talk to us about how teachers should deal with students' growth problems and mental health issues." (Secondary school principal) (SS03-PR)

For teachers, encountering students with special learning needs at campus and in classroom is common and inevitable. Therefore, the interviewed principals stated that most teachers are willing to attend various training to help themselves deal with the possible situations they may face.

"They are very cooperative with the school's arrangements. When colleagues in charge require other colleagues to take courses on Tier 1, 2 and 3 or special courses on SEN, generally speaking, colleagues are very willing, possibly because they know there is a real need. In class teaching, they will definitely have the opportunity to encounter these students. Therefore, when they know that it is helpful to strengthen SEN teaching, colleagues are very willing to comply with the policy." (Primary school principal) (PS07-PR)

However, interviewed teachers also expressed some pressure on training. Currently, in-service teachers mainly improve their skills through training courses offered by tertiary institutions. But the quality and content of the courses can affect their effectiveness. The EDB and different tertiary institutions organize various types of training activities, including sharing sessions and lectures, but some teachers expressed that some course content overemphasizes theory and lacks practical applications in teaching. Teachers can only use the case sharing in the course as a "reference", but they may not be able to apply it in daily teaching, especially since course instructors have limited subject expertise and find it difficult to provide practical support to teachers of different subjects.

"To be honest, after completing the SENCO course, I even took the online version. At most, I could only talk about things like differentiated worksheets and visual strategies, but I haven't really implemented them. Maybe I've used them in mathematics or business, accounting and financial studies, but how do I apply that specialized knowledge to English, Chinese, and mathematics?" (Secondary school SENCO) (SS09-SE)

"I had been SENST for two years, we took a lot of courses, but none of them were really formal, and I believe they wouldn't have helped me much. Because they were still categorized, and they taught you how to do things, the sharing methods used by the public may not have as much theoretical support." (Secondary school SENST) (SS09-ST)

As society and the education sector increasingly value IE, the interviewed primary and secondary school principals believe that it is worth considering adding IE as a core subject in teacher training. This will enable teachers to have a deep and professional understanding of caring for stu-

dents with special learning needs and IE before entering the profession, and to understand the characteristics and needs of different students with special learning needs. This will help them to identify students' needs early in their teaching, and to collaborate with in-school support personnel in handling student situations in WSA during the theoretical and practical stages of their employment.

> "I think that in teacher training, we should add basic training for taking care of students with SEN. Taking care of different students with SEN can be an elective, but at least you need to know about it. Knowing that it is common, you should learn it. You don't have to worry about chasing the standard all the time." (Secondary school principal) (SS04-PR)

> "Just as in teacher training, now that IE has become mainstream, the SEN course will be a core subject. It is a must-read." (Primary school principal) (PS09-PR)

In the WSA, the awareness of teachers is important, but the IE policies and beliefs of decision-makers are equally important. Some EPs have pointed out that while training courses to support students with SEN have been implemented for several years, the courses also need to be updated in a timely manner to keep up with policy changes, increase in awareness as well as improvements in treatment methods and standards, so that frontline personnel can improve the situation more effectively and accurately.

> "A few years ago, mental health issues were included in SEN, which increased the focus in training and education. During their studies, they should have less exposure to real cases with mental health problems. EPs should handle some subclinical cases, even some standard cases of depression or anxiety, and have the ability to do so. Therefore, they will spend extra time after graduation to learn about different treatment methods and make up for the lack of experience in this area, so that they can do it with confidence. I think this is one of the areas that can be improved." (Secondary school EP) (SS11-EP)

Some interviewed parents believe that the success of IE in schools depends on the belief of the principals. If schools lack an open and long-term vision in the development of IE, the effectiveness of policy implementation will be weakened.

> "I think the Government needs to educate school principals to accept [IE]. Secondly, they need to be open-minded. How much resources the school has received and spent on SEN

from the Government and how those resources are allocated should be transparently monitored, so that we can make sure that children are not mistreated. I think monitoring is necessary.

If schools use this money, the role of SENCO needs to be clear. Parents, teachers, and even training teachers should be educated too." (Primary school parent) (PS-PA02)

SENCOs also believe that the Government can collaborate more with universities to conduct research on IE and review the effectiveness of implementation at local schools. Principals also agree that such research is useful for schools to learn from and review their own measures, in order to further improve their own development.

"I know some research is conducted by universities, or the EDB itself has a team to conduct such research. I think these studies need to be localized. Different NGOs such as the Jockey Club have also invested in trying out some work. We need to summarize our local experiences and find our own methods, because our environment is unique." (Secondary school principal) (SS02-PR)

For principals of primary and secondary schools, they believe that teacher participation is an important factor in implementing IE. Professional training not only helps schools establish a team consistent in its vision, but secondary school principals also believe that it contributes to the continuous development of individual teachers. The interviews show that in addition to recommending individual teachers to participate in external training, primary and secondary school principals also organized whole-school teacher training to provide teachers with more opportunities to access relevant information. Given the current lack of IE training, primary and secondary school principals also suggest that relevant teacher training should be extended to pre-service teacher education programmes so that every prospective teacher has a certain understanding of students with special learning needs before entering the workplace. This would enable them to have certain abilities and skills to provide support in actual classroom situations and instructional design, while also alleviating the pressure brought by teacher development programmes.

For primary and secondary school teachers, in the context of IE, some teachers also agree that development programmes can help improve or support their teaching in the classroom, such as enhancing their understanding of students with special learning needs and understanding

various accommodation strategies. However, the quality of courses offered by external organizations varies.   Even after spending time studying, teachers may not be able to apply what they have learned in their own teaching. After all, IE is a whole-school policy, and the entire school team should continue to   progress with policy development in order to achieve more ideal results. For secondary schools, the special learning needs that schools often face are mental health issues among students. Although mental health issues have been included in the scope of support in recent years, there is a lack of related professional training, which puts professionals in a "learning while doing" situation and affects   the effectiveness of support. Therefore, secondary school EPs suggest that when implementing various support measures at the frontline, relevant training should also be added to training courses   to allow professionals to be better prepared for support work.

Impact of Cross-Professional Support on Integrated Education and Creation of Inclusive   Campus

Situation and Support for Students' Mental and Emotional Health in General and During the Epidemic

The mental health of students is closely related to their personal growth, and both students themselves and parents and teachers should pay attention to their mental health. In order to enhance school's attention to mental health, according to interviews with primary and secondary school principals, schools will conduct mental health education for students, parents, and teachers through various activities in daily life, to increase stakeholders' awareness, and support students' mental health with preventive strategies.

> "Especially in the past year, we have done more preparatory work rather than defensive work. In education, we give students more understanding of their emotions and let them know that it is not taboo to talk about their difficulties and troubles. Sometimes they really cannot concentrate and sleep, which makes it difficult for them to return to school. It is not about avoidance, but about seeking help.... In recent years, the counseling team and SEN groups have made efforts to help students understand their emotions." (Secondary school principal) (SS03-PR)

However, with the changes brought about by the epidemic in recent years, such as the reduction of face-to-face communication opportunities and changes in lifestyle habits, students' emotional problems have worsened. Especially during online learning periods, students in need may not actively seek help, making it more difficult to provide professional support which entails parents' insight and assistance to a larger extent.

> "For students with emotional issues, it is even more difficult because they may not be willing to seek help themselves and can only rely on others to actively ask them. However, during the pandemic, they may be even less willing to actively seek help, making the situation more difficult." (Secondary School EP) (SS03-EP)

> "The first is mental health. For some people, face-to-face communication is very important. With fewer opportunities for this during the pandemic, many students, whether they have emotional problems or not, may face difficulties with their mental health. During the pandemic, many of their daily routines were disrupted, and they might not be able to master some of the self-care skills. From our observations, especially every time we resumed classes, they were very confused and unable to grasp the rhythm of going to school. This can also affect many other things, such as their emotions in learning, which I think is a difficult area for both secondary and primary school students." (Secondary School EP) (SS02-EP)

Based on the above situations, most of the interviewed social workers also believe that parental involvement is an important factor in supporting students' emotions, and continuous parental education can help parents understand mental health-related information, such as symptoms of MI, how to identify students' mental needs, etc.

> "The school counseling team continuously holds some mental health lectures. For example, if you are studying in junior forms here, there may be three or four times when mental health is discussed, which enables students to learn about relevant knowledge, such as symptoms. There are also some large-scale programmes that the entire grade may participate in. The school also sets up booths and holds many different activities to give students some concepts of MI and mental health." (Secondary School Social Worker) (SS02-SW)

The school can also provide more opportunities and platforms for parents to openly discuss mental health issues so that all stakeholders can face

mental health problems and make it easier for students with mental health needs to receive support and assistance.

> "I think what needs to be done is to at least make the whole thing more normalized. For example, enhance everyone's acceptance level of mental health and emotional distress, because some students cannot accept these names, or parents cannot accept these names, and they are unwilling to seek treatment. Everyone thinks they have this need, but they are unwilling to face it, thinking that such things are weird, like monsters, so they are unwilling to see a doctor. Therefore, I think that if we can popularize these things and let everyone know that these things are normal and many people have them, when their acceptance level is higher, it will be smoother and easier for them to receive support." (Secondary School Social Worker) (SS01-SW)

Regarding parental education methods, interviewed parents also agree that some activities organized by institutions or universities, such as talks and training, can help them and their children, while also establishing a sense of community support.

> "We definitely cannot rely solely on schools, we also need support from doctors, nurses, social workers, and the community. [I hope that if the community] has more [lectures], just like Baptist University has a subject on early childhood education [and] does a lot of research and holds many of these talks. I think the talks are very helpful because they have a lot of data that can quickly support me in finding ways to help my child." (Primary school parent) (PS-PA03)

In terms of supporting students' mental health, in addition to improving the identification skills of students, parents, and teachers, more professionals are needed to assist parents and teachers after identifying students with needs early on. Social workers interviewed in this Study indicated that identifying students in need of mental health support often requires the observation of people around them and early evaluation and referral, which also depends on the level of awareness of mental health of people around them.

> "First, it's observation, to see if there are any students that the teacher has noticed or sometimes it may be a classmate who noticed that this student is a bit different, or it may be the parents. When we receive this information, the first thing we do is ask for more information, that is, to understand their perfor-

mance at school and at home, and then we will contact the student to understand if they have any symptoms of MI. If so, after we complete the evaluation and think that he may have some mental health problems, we will make some referrals. If it is urgent, there are some community services that will be faster for him to see a psychiatrist; for those who may not be so urgent, they may be referred to public hospitals and other services. If he is diagnosed with some emotional problems, he can discuss with the school what accommodations can be made when he talks to the school and students." (Secondary school social worker) (SS01-SW)

"The changes in MI cases are significant. Even if students experience the same low mood, their symptoms and conditions may be very different. Therefore, it is crucial to provide adequate training for teachers to support these students. We are used to providing Tier 2 or Tier 3 support for students, but there are many resources available for students with MI. We may only intervene when their condition worsens and sounds an alarm. Regarding exam and homework accommodations, I think we provide relatively little support for students with MI compared to Tier 2 support." (Secondary school EP) (SS01-EP)

Although primary and secondary schools now have professionals supporting students, such as social workers, counsellors, and EPs, mental health issues involve more privacy concerns, making it more difficult for social workers to collaborate with the student support team in schools. Therefore, they are unable to provide comprehensive support to students' study, emotional, and personal growth needs.

"The tension level of MI cases is higher than the other eight categories, but because of privacy concerns, many people are unaware. When fewer people know, the support for these cases is unknown. The student support team is not responsible for these cases. Usually it goes to social workers. However, collaboration is difficult to define, such as how we support students in learning, and how social workers support them in mental health. It is challenging to know how to handle this type of students." (Secondary school social worker) (SS15-SW)

In addition, social workers interviewed in primary and secondary schools all reflect that the long waiting time for psychiatric diagnosis and assessment currently hinders immediate support for students. The diagnosis by doctors only confirms the student's condition and may not neces-

sarily provide support and accommodation methods for the student's psychological problems, which makes it difficult for schools to provide support.

> "If there is a medical certificate the success rate is higher, that is, if the doctor states clearly, when the school sees the medical certificate, it will be easier to accept, and the success rate will be higher. But sometimes, there are some psychological problems which doctors may not be able to provide too much support or accommodation methods, which will make it more difficult." (Secondary school social worker) (SS01-SW)

> "As far as mental health issues are concerned, if there can be more resources to shorten their time to wait for a doctor, it would be a great help, because it really takes too long in terms of diagnosis and assessment. Some students doubt whether they have emotional problems, and in areas where the boundaries are unclear, it takes a long time for us to take them to see a doctor. I think that if we can reduce the wait, it will be much better for supporting them." (Secondary school social worker) (SS01-SW)

From the above interviews, primary and secondary schools are committed to enhancing the attention of students, parents, and teachers to mental health. Through educational activities, they increase the awareness of all stakeholders in order to identify and support students in need early, and to establish an open and inclusive environment for students and parents who are in need. School principals are also committed to creating a caring learning environment to reduce the chances of students experiencing emotional problems and taking preventive measures. However, in recent years, due to the impact of the epidemic, there have been significant changes in students' learning environment, from school learning to home learning, which has reduced opportunities for group life at campus and also affected schools' support for students. Due to the lack of direct interaction opportunities, schools have difficulties in providing timely support to students and need to rely on students or parents to actively seek help before remote support can be provided, greatly weakening the effectiveness of support.

However, in the support process, primary and secondary schools also need the help of professional staff. Currently EPs or psychiatrists have not been able to provide comprehensive support in either diagnosis or support. This situation means that although schools have spent a lot of effort and time preparing for parents and students, they still lack sufficient resources, especially professional human resources, to provide further support, resulting in schools being in a situation where they need to identify cases

and then wait for support together, which affects the effectiveness of support and gradually affects the progress and results of support.

The interviews show that people whom students come into contact with in their lives should also have a certain awareness of mental health, which is closely related to the understanding of schools and society. Improving the public's awareness of mental health can help build a shared participation and early support environment. The above interviews also show that primary and secondary schools have been committed to gradually establishing an inclusive school environment through various educational work and then promoting it to the community. However, the changes in mental health cases are great, and symptoms or conditions can be very different for students with emotional needs, which is also a severe challenge for parents and teachers. Schools often only provide individual support when students raise an alarm, which is not ideal.

Inclusive and Healthy Campus

Schools are places for group activities. School atmosphere and mutual support among students are extremely important. In interviews, primary and secondary school principals also mentioned that they actively promote mutual assistance among students at campus, establish integrated and positive values, and allow students to learn more comfortably and feel more at ease at school. They also try to make good use of peer support to handle students' emotional problems.

> "We are very accommodating to students with SEN, and there is no discrimination among students because of SEN. First of all, we won't tell students that this classmate has SEN, but students can recognize it, especially those with mild ID. In implementing IE, it's not just about supporting students, but caring policies should also take care of their health, assistance, and even discipline. The discipline and counseling team is not just handling the problems of students with SEN. Basically, some students with mild ID are very well-behaved, but there are cases of bullying towards these students. Our policy is not to punish the bullying students, but to persuade them and encourage mutual support and help among classmates." (Secondary school principal) (SS14-PR)

> "From the perspective of ordinary students, their mentality is very pure, without the complexity of adults. They just think that the classmate occasionally can't sit still or is sometimes noticed more by the teacher. We try to maintain a non-labeling

campus, which is also the campus atmosphere we want to create. For parents who enroll their children in a school, for the school to admit students, and for the life of students with SEN on campus, not labeling is the basic premise. We will treat them as a family and not particularly label two-thirds of the family as 'ordinary family members' and one-third as 'special family members.'" (Primary school principal) (PS07-PR)

Establishing a good school atmosphere relies on the participation of teachers. Interviewed teachers indicated that all parties should equally value the mental health of teachers and address their needs, in order to gradually instill positive values in students during daily teaching, allowing them to grow up in an open environment, appreciate themselves, and develop their strengths from a young age.

"I think it should start with the teachers, because if teachers themselves are under great pressure or often look worried, they won't be happy either. So, I would step back and first address the mental health of teachers, and then think about the students and how to instill positive values in them. It's something that needs to be done slowly, and holding large-scale activities can leave a deep impression on them. Also, the teacher's personal charm and how to manage the class are also important." (Secondary school teacher) (SS06-CL)

With the development of IE, teachers need to face the learning diversity among students. However, teachers in the classroom need to spend more time dealing with the special learning needs of students, making it difficult to care for all students in the class, which is also unfair to students who do not have special learning needs. Some interviewed primary school principals also believe that while promoting IE, the teacher-to-student ratio and student-to-class ratio should be emphasized, allowing every student to receive comprehensive care.

"In the classroom, there are students with different types of SEN. How to help them is a challenge because each type of students has different needs. I can help one type of students with educational accommodations, but [I] may not be able to help the second type of student, yet they are all in the same classroom. The most difficult situation for teachers is when there are two or three students with ASD and 8-10 students with ADHD in the same classroom. It's not just about taking care of them, but it's also

difficult to [do] normal teaching." (Secondary school principal) (SS02-PR)

"The Government wants to promote IE throughout Hong Kong, but they should also consider whether there are enough teachers to support this. Many special schools have already been closed. So, how do you use your resources? Can the overall ratio of students to teachers get better?" (Primary school principal) (PS05-PR)

In terms of mode of integration, both primary and secondary school principals and support teachers interviewed believe that placing students with different types of SEN in the same classroom is not always ideal. Instead, when students have similar needs and characteristics, they can be taught together using more accommodating teaching methods. For example, if there are students in the class with poor concentration and a need to move around, teachers can design interactive activities in the classroom to facilitate learning in a more suitable environment.

"If we idealize it, we can put children of similar categories and situations in the same class, which would make it easier for us to handle... For example, if there are children with attention deficit in the class, who need to move around, the teacher should incorporate more movement activities in the lesson design, and even have them do some exercises such as jumping during class." (Primary School SEN) (PS02-ST)

The above shows that primary and secondary schools are committed to building an inclusive campus and creating an "education for all" school. Primary and secondary schools also start with teachers to change their attitudes and mental health, so as to create conditions for promoting caring and inclusive culture at school. At the same time, primary and secondary schools are committed to building a social circle for students, using peer support to help all students grow in a caring environment, where peers can also be aware of each other's needs and seek help early.

The "Catering for Student Differences - Indicators for Inclusion" established by the EDB indicates that the values of inclusion require all teachers and staff, students, school management committees, and parents to work together to create an integrated, collaborative, and stimulating campus. From the interviews, it can also be seen that primary and secondary schools are striving to establish this ideal vision in terms of culture, policies, and measures according to the indicators. However, during the process in which

schools have made dedication and efforts, the implementation has made them powerless even with good intentions. Facing the diversity of special learning needs of students, handling the special situations of students in class, especially taking care of the learning differences is the most challenging part for teachers. If a student with special learning needs affects the class, the teacher needs to deal with their problems or situations first, then take care of other students' learning, and at the same time, also think of appropriate methods to ensure that students have some learning effectiveness. This increases the pressure on teachers in the classroom. Overwhelmed teachers also find it difficult to cater to the needs of each student, and can only make trade-offs and sacrifices, which also affect the establishment of an inclusive culture.

Status of Parental Care for Children with SEN and Home-School Cooperation

Situation of Family Support

Regarding parental attitudes, based on the results of interviews with parents, secondary school parents are more accepting of their children's special learning needs than before and are willing to actively seek help and cooperate with relevant support. However, primary school parents are still relatively resistant to accepting that their children have special learning needs.

> "Six years ago, parents were more conservative about the individual needs of students. Many times, we would take a more proactive role and ask students if they have any learning needs that we can support. Then, parents would start to submit reports to the school. But now, many times on registration day, parents are already very proactive and want you to know about their children's situation so that they can receive appropriate help. This situation is really different from before. Now, parents are much more proactive." (Secondary school social worker) (SS15- SW)

> "If the school only refers students in Primary 1, there is a gap in the acceptance level of parents, their willingness to participate, and their ability to provide support at home. They may still not accept that their child has some special learning needs or that they are different from other children in their grade. In this aspect, we need to convince parents and children to practise." (Primary school support teacher) (PS03-ST)

During the interviews, some parents were found to have not let their children receive support early enough during their primary school years,

causing them to miss the golden period of professional therapy. Therefore, interviewed sencos and social workers pointed out that parental education is indispensable, and early strengthening of parents' understanding of special learning needs can help reduce their wariness and enable their children to be assessed and receive treatment as early as possible.

> "In fact, we need to educate both parents and students because parents often have a huge influence on their children. For example, a friend recently discovered that her child has autism, but the mother was very out of control and would say negative things. It may be necessary for professionals to provide relevant knowledge and advice to parents as soon as they get hold of their children's diagnosis, as it can actually affect the student's growth." (Primary school social worker) (PS13-SW)

A primary school principal also stated that there have been parents who did not recognize their children's special learning needs outside of academic achievements, which shows that parental education is necessary to change their mindset.

> "I have seen students who have special learning needs but have not been reported. It is very obvious, especially for those with autism. Their family members refuse to report it, and there is not much we can do to help. So the student continues to attend school without much progress because their mother does their homework for them, and their family does not have high expectations for their learning. Therefore, I think parental education is very important." (Primary School Principal) (PS01-PR)

> "Basically, he doesn't have any talent in studying, or maybe his talent is not in academics, but rather in crafts or sports. But parents might think that crafts and singing are not useful at all. They might wonder what's the use of being able to run fast on a sports field if you can't do well in academics. This can cause frustration for the child, as parents may not be satisfied because they focus on the child's grades, which the child is unable to produce." (Primary School Principal) (PS08-PR)

> "I have also seen some new arrival mothers say, 'we have never encountered such things before. Perhaps our child misbehaved and didn't listen to us before.' Therefore, I think parental education is important, and it should start early, not just in secondary school. We hope to identify and provide support to students earlier, rather than waiting until problems arise before remedying them. We need to take action in all areas, and parental education should start early, even in primary school. Sometimes

we request parents to give us the records of their child in primary school." (Secondary School ѕеnсо) (SS04-SE+RSW+ST)

Quality and Waiting Time of Professional Support Services

   Primary school parents interviewed indicated that the waiting time for government services is too long and the other private therapeutic services are also very expensive. Apart from affordability, it also results in their children with special learning needs being unable to receive timely service support. For example, children with Asperger's syndrome may need long-term treatment. If parents cannot afford private therapeutic services, it will affect their growth.

> "Because I am a single parent, I know that there are some services available outside, but many of them are very expensive, so I cannot afford them. The government services are not available to me either because of long waiting time. In fact, there are difficulties in this regard." (Primary school parent) (PS-PA06)

> "My son started music therapy from Primary 2 onwards, it was private and referred by the principal. It was helpful to the brain of children with Asperger's syndrome. Listening to frequencies, it costs $700 per session, and we spent a lot of money [on] listening [sessions] for several years." (Primary school parent) (SS-PA05)

> "My son was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, and new environment would cause him a lot of stress, which I also have to bear…. If he stays in the community where the previous kindergarten was, it might be better for him to study in the same school with the kindergarten classmates. Everyone would feel more comfortable, and the transition would be better. They are willing to accept that he has Asperger's syndrome, and I am more willing to accept it too. In the end, there are some resources that allow us to let him receive treatment at the Heep Hong Society. Looking back, the resources around us were sufficient, including occupational therapy and physiotherapy until he was in Primary 5, and later transferred to [Prince of] Wales Hospital." (Primary school parent) (SS-PA05)

   In addition, the lack of suitable support services is also a weakness of the current overall professional   support services.

> "In fact, there was a community center downstairs from my home, and they tried their best to help my son with his homework. During the process of registration, I told the staff that he has dyslexia. I understood that as a tutor, it might be frustrating

to teach him as a regular student, but I couldn't find any other suitable services back then...so we went with it. But who knew that my son only started going in June, and by August it closed down. The reason was that the center had been relying on government subsidies, which were just barely enough, but when the rent went up, they couldn't sustain it." (Primary school parent) (PS-PA0)

Home-School Cooperation

Regarding home-school cooperation, parents stated that if there is regular and good communication with the SENCO, they will have greater confidence in the school and allow their children to receive support at school. SENCOs also stated that gaining the trust of parents is an important part of promoting home-school cooperation and makes it easier to begin supporting students with SEN.

"The parents like me very much and they even added me on WhatsApp. No wonder we have parents willing to volunteer. I have my own parent group, and parents like to see the one called coordinator...When I have a good relationship with parents, I am very honest and say, 'Mom, you're not doing it quite right'. Actually, parents are receptive because we have a good relationship. These are built on relationships." (Secondary School SENco) (SS15-SE)

"The vast majority of parents are clearly starting from scratch, and they are the most difficult to deal with. If we can contact them well at this stage, it will be very easy for us to refer them to relevant resources. Basically, most parents have agreed in recent years, but there are three who didn't agree this year. However, I will call each of them and say, 'What will be the consequences if you don't do this? When you get to secondary school, the teacher won't know anything, there won't be timely support, you'll have to queue up to see an EP again. When they get to secondary school, they have a chance to get exam accommodations, which are even more necessary, and it will affect their university entrance.' When I talk about these things, they get scared, and then they agree!" (Primary School SENCO) (PS02-SE)

"I have a work phone and communicate with others through WhatsApp. I think WhatsApp is a great instant messaging tool because you don't have to coordinate times like you used to with phone calls. Sometimes when parents are busy, they might not have time to answer our phone calls, but with WhatsApp, I can leave a message or a voice recording and they can respond to me

later when they have time. I think my communication with parents is good and very close. They can also contact me through WhatsApp if they have any issues and don't have to worry about me being off duty. Of course, I may not be able to respond immediately during holidays, but most of the time, they don't have to wait too long. These communication tools are very useful." (Secondary school teacher) (SS06-CL)

The interviewed principals also indicated that the key to promoting home-school cooperation is to gain parental support, which relies heavily on the efforts of the SENCOS. In addition, EPs believe that there is an increasing trend of parent-child conflicts during the school suspension period due to the epidemic. How parents can improve their communication and interaction with their children in the future is a major challenge for promoting home-school cooperation, as it will affect the behavior of students with special learning needs in school and have an impact on the school.

"Firstly, parents may not necessarily know how to handle students with SEN. During the school suspension period, both parents and students are at home, so there may be more friction. Besides dealing with how students socialize and communicate, we also have to handle some parent-child conflicts, such as how to help students with hyperactivity to concentrate. Therefore, this has become even more difficult. Secondly, some schools or organizations provide some training online, but most responses believe that face-to-face interaction is better. Of course, it is not completely ineffective, but the effectiveness of face-to-face training is greater than that of online training. So I think this is a bigger challenge. (Secondary School EP) (SS02-EP)

In summary, parents of primary school students have insufficient understanding and tolerance towards students with special learning needs. Even if primary schools provide assistance, the parents may not accept their children situation and needs. It affects the support and growth of students. On the other hand, parents of secondary school students are more proactive in seeking assistance when their children are promoted to secondary school, making it easier for secondary schools to respond to students' needs and situations, and establish a good home-school cooperation relationship. In order to improve parents' understanding of special learning needs, principals and social workers in primary and secondary schools unanimously believe that parental education needs to be strengthened to help parents ac-

cept their children's needs and dispel stereotypes about students with special learning needs. In addition to enabling students to receive appropriate support as early as possible, a culture of appreciation and care should also be established for parents to appreciate students' talents beyond academics, so that students with special learning needs can also develop their potential and showcase their strengths.

In terms of parental support, some parents expressed their willingness to seek various forms of support, such as government and external organizations' therapy. However, government treatment has a long waiting time, and parents need to seek services from other organizations. The cost of these services is high, and parents have difficulty affording them. Also, suitable services for students' needs are lacking, and they cannot provide effective support for students. This forces parents to rely on school assistance, affecting the effectiveness of support and preventing the promotion of inclusive culture from schools to communities.

When promoting IE, schools and parents should understand each other's roles and responsibilities and actively strengthen communication and cooperation to provide appropriate support for students with SEN. The actual situation in primary and secondary schools shows that effective home-school cooperation can establish a relationship of mutual trust, enabling schools to help students connect with secondary schools early and receive support early after their transition to secondary school. For secondary schools, real-life cases illustrate the importance of communication with parents. In addition to working together to support students, a relationship of mutual trust can enable schools to support parents, deescalate parent-child conflicts, and allow students to grow up in a positive and healthy family atmosphere.

Certain Social and Cultural Beliefs Remain Deep-Seated

Hong Kong's Exam-Oriented Culture

At the school level, some secondary school teachers still view attending university as the only way out, which puts a lot of pressure on students with special learning needs. They may become demotivated because they cannot keep up with the learning pace. Moreover, the entire Hong Kong society places too much emphasis on academic achievement, which loses sight of the personal abilities of students with special learning needs.

> "In fact, Hong Kong has a relatively special situation, which is that we place more emphasis on grades. So parents are very nervous about this, and they are not willing to make accommodations... even if you offer them a chance, they will not want it, especially in some elite schools... Some children clearly need to go to special schools, but parents still want them to try, and the school has no right to refuse them. [Schools would say] 'We will take care of them'. However, the problem is that when parents realize that they cannot force their children, they want to go back to special schools, but they may have to wait in line for a long time and waste several more years." (Primary school principal) (PS01-PR)

Some parents even claim that their children are more enthusiastic about taking the HKDSE than they are, which shows the great impact of the exam-oriented culture. At the primary school level, the principals say that the current education system requires primary school students to face various assessments, exams, and tests, the only thing the school can do is to try to make them not hate studying. In the long run, in an exam-oriented culture, whether it is students, teachers, or schools, all may be losers.

> "Actually, sometimes I would just cheer up teachers and students. In primary school, you have to make them hold a pen and do your best to make them not hate studying, because we have to take the Pre-S1 HKAT to evaluate our school. And there's TSA tests, some of which even force the students to take it, especially the difficult ones, like for non-Chinese classes." (Primary School Principal) (PS06-PR)

Level of Social Acceptance and Growth of Students with SEN

Although society's tolerance for students with SEN has significantly improved, there is still room for improvement in overall social acceptance. During interviews with primary school parents, some mentioned that other parents were unhappy with their children being disturbed by students with special learning needs during class.

> "Of course, parents want their children to learn in a good environment. There are a few students in the class who are assumed to be prone to violence or emotional outbursts, or they don't follow the rules in class, which prevents their children from learning or make them feel disturbed during class...The contradiction is the view of other parents to this student. If the teacher accommodates this student, the teacher or school will face great pressure and need a long time to figure out how we

can accept this student. This is more difficult." (Primary School Principal) (PS08-PR)

Interviewed principals, SENCOs, and social workers also reported instances where parents falsely declared their children as having SEN in order to gain an advantage during exams.

> "I used to teach a student whose mother gave them medication to improve their concentration, which resulted in them performing well in their studies. When they were in Primary 5 and 6, I didn't think they had ADHD, and many of my colleagues also didn't think so. But the mother was determined to make them an ADHD student... if a well-intentioned educator sees this, they will not only shed tears but also feel very heartbroken." (Primary school principal) (PS06-PR)

In a fiercely competitive environment, some parents still insist on placing their children with severe SEN in ordinary schools, ultimately wasting their entire primary school years. The actual social atmosphere has not yet become truly inclusive, as some parents still do not accept their children attending special schools.

> "In my district, some parents think, 'Oh, you want my child to attend a special school? I won't transfer them, or are you labeling my child?' The overall social atmosphere has not yet reached true inclusion. So when adults are not thinking in this way, how can children easily accept and discover each other's strengths?" (Primary school SENCO) (PS06-SE)

The current examination system in Hong Kong creates a culture where society and parents place a strong emphasis on obtaining good grades. Primary and secondary schools are required to conduct various assessments and examinations according to the standards set by the EDB and society. This leads to schools and parents placing a high value on exams and training students for the sake of good grades. Primary schools focus on improving students' performance in the territory-wide system assessment to achieve good ratings and analysis. For secondary schools, the Pre-S1 HKAT serves as a placement test and also analyzes the abilities of students to reflect whether their level matches the school's standards. As public exams result in relevant score analysis and data, schools compete with each other, and these data become a bargaining chip for attracting students. Therefore, primary and secondary schools strive to improve exam results, forming a

learning culture focused on grades, which requires students with special learning needs to receive exam "training". As for parents, the exam culture also makes them focus on grades, and they need to act according to the school's level and development, viewing grades as the key to their children's learning. Parents' attention to grades also prompts schools to make more accommodations to meet parental expectations and societal expectations, forming a vicious cycle.

As a result, the existing examination system influences parents, teachers, and schools, promoting the emergence of exam culture, which makes students more focused on grades than learning itself. The development of knowledge and skills becomes a tool for achieving good grades, which also makes stakeholders strive to improve students' grades while ignoring their other potentials and strengths. With the development of IE, parents can see that the Government and schools are investing a lot of resources in students with special learning needs, but they have different attitudes towards special arrangements for students. Regardless of their views, parents see their children's learning as a kind of interests, linking learning, grades, and future prospects, neglecting the purpose of learning for students' growth. Parents who accept IE only see the measures as beneficial, while those who oppose it resist their children learning together with those students, creating conflicts that frontline teachers and schools must bear. The policy of integration only puts students in the same space, and parents and students cannot truly view students with special learning needs as their peers. The atmosphere of integration often only remains in the classroom and the school. Therefore, changes need to be made at the parental and societal level to achieve true integration.

Key Findings of School Case Study

Through conducting case studies with schools (including four primary schools and four secondary schools) with relatively successful implementation of IE, it was found that the good exemplars of IE in primary schools include the adoption of a small-class teaching approach, rescheduling teachers' timetables to allow them more spare time, inviting parents to join class activities for observation and more interaction, explaining students' performance with parents to reduce their doubts and resistance, and cooperating with professional groups to provide comprehensive support.

As for the good exemplars of IE in secondary schools, the success factors include adopting a pull-out approach through co-teaching (1:4 or 1:5; Teacher: Students with SEN), encouraging teachers to participate more in training of IE, conducting research to review and improve teaching and learning effectiveness of students with SEN in tier-1 support and promoting cross-disciplinary cooperation for whole-person development.

Full Report of the Study

Readers may refer to the full report of the Study, including its recommendations at https://www.eoc.org.hk/Upload/files/research-report/SEN%20 Study%20(Jun%202023)/SENREP~4.PDF.

Endnote

1. In the 2018/19 school year and before, ordinary schools were provided with additional resources under various modes, including the LSG, the Integrated Education Programme and the IRTP, to support students with SEN. Since such additional resources were provided under different modes, some of the schools (e.g., primary schools adopting IRTP) were not required to report to the EDB on the tier of support of each student. Hence, the figures for the 2018/19 school year are lower than the actual figures.