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Advocacy

Integrated Education- inadequacy of school based support service

The Hong Kong Government has been promoting Integrated Education for more than 20 years since 1997, mainstream schools are given a free hand to promote school based integrated education, however, the school based support service lacks transparency and parents are not informed of its specific details.

The Director of Audit's report 4/2018 criticized the Education Bureau for insufficient school support in promoting integrated education; namely, (1) integrated education training did not reach the training target (note 1); (2) 53% of the schools did not fully utilize the Learning Support Grant, schools need to improve the administration of the Grant; (3) there were 20-30% SEN students whose performance were assessed "no improvement" on the following 3 aspects: social adjustment, learning performance, learning attitude or motivation, it revealed that primary school SEN students did not receive timely assistance and consequently their learning and potential are affected.

The Chih Ai Parent Association of Hong Kong Christian Service always concerns about the developments in promoting integrated education, its related policy in primary schools as in practice, and the students' rights to learn. A survey was conducted from December 2017 to January 2018 on "SEN students to Primary one - school based support service", 114 parents whose children were going to primary one in September 2017 were interviewed. It was found that: about 85% of the parents did not know to which tier (note 2) of support service their children belong; 62.1% parents did not submit the special education number as they were worried about primary one allocation; about 86.7% parents felt that the school was not transparent enough regarding measures for integrated education and more than 71.7% parents felt that the school did not allow them to participate as a result they did not know how their children were doing at school. About 48.7% parents were of the opinion that there was no specific staff with whom they could liaise and over 40.8% parents expressed that the school did not listen to them or pay attention to students' needs.



Based on the above findings and personal experiences, the Chih Ai Parents' Association has the following suggestions to perfect the integration education policy and its support service:

(1) To improve the reporting system of special education number, the Education Bureau should review and improve the reporting mechanism: the primary one application form and special education number should be handled separately, or to report the latter after the student is offered a place.

(2) To improve the transparency of information relating to the school-based support service: the Education Bureau should enhance the monitoring of the school-based support service and provide clear and detailed guidelines so that the school could offer the appropriate support accordingly and parents would know to which category their children belong, thus the necessary support and arrangement.

(3) To enhance home school collaboration: with a humane and people-oriented approach, schools should be stipulated to arrange specialized staff to reach out to the parents proactively at least twice a year to discuss and keep the parents informed of what support and ancillary facilities are given to their children. Furthermore, it is also suggested to make the best use of year end evaluation of individual student to enhance mutual communication between home and school for parents to have a good grasp of what support is rendered to the students and parents could complement the school accordingly.

(4) To guarantee the quality of support service: the Education Bureau should establish a clear and specialized role for SENCO and work out a reasonable man power ratio for a long term support plan and strategy to ensure every student has his individual education plan. SENCO should look into and monitor collaboration between outsource service and school, collect parents feedback regularly. Parents' representatives should be invited to help with monitoring to alleviate their pressure and have more confidence in the school.

(5) To set up a special education central database: the Association hopes that in the long run the government should set up a central database for SEN students and to make SEMIS available for all government departments so that information of students are stored systematically and cross departmental collaboration strengthened. It is also suggested to



expedite “legislation for special education” among government departments and “support and bridging service for SEN students to mainstream schools”, and to work closely with the Children Commission with the Children-oriented concept in mind, to formulate and implement the related policies to ensure SEN students’ rights and interests are fully protected at school.

To conclude, there should be a long-term planning and review mechanism for the development of Integrated Education Policy to ensure quality and effectiveness of its support service. The Association hopes the government could fine-tune the mechanism and policies to minimize parents’ worries and advocate for a humane and people-oriented home-school collaboration model, improve transparency of related information for parents to have trust in the school. It is also hoped that the government could establish a central database for SEN students in the long run to enhance cross departmental collaboration so that students’ data are stored systematically and promote bridging service at the best interest of the students so that they could get the necessary support.

Note 1: the training targets set for each public sector ordinary school to achieve by 2019/20 are: (i) at least 15% to 25% of teachers who have completed the basic course; (ii) at least 6 to 9 teachers will have completed the advanced course; and (iii) at least 6 to 9 teachers will have completed the thematic courses (with at least one teacher completing the course(s) under each category as far as possible).

Note 2: 3-Tier Intervention Model. Tier 1 support: this refers to quality teaching in regular classroom for supporting students with transient or mild learning difficulties. Tier 2 support: this refers to “add-on” intervention for students with persistent learning difficulties. Tier 3 support: this refers to intensive individualized support for students with severe learning difficulties. (Whole school approach to integrated education operation guide, Education Bureau, August 2014 3rd edition).