

Community Care Fund
“Provision of Funding for Ordinary Schools to Arrange
Special Educational Needs Coordinators” Pilot Scheme
Evaluation Report

Purpose

This paper sets out the evaluation results of the “Provision of Funding for Ordinary Schools to Arrange Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCO)” Pilot Scheme (the Pilot Scheme) under the Community Care Fund (CCF) and the arrangements for incorporating the Pilot Scheme into the Government’s regular assistance programme.

Background

2. The Commission on Poverty approved, on 27 March 2015, the provision of a cash subsidy to ordinary schools with relatively more students with special educational needs (SEN) and financial needs to strengthen their teaching force, so that a teacher can be designated to coordinate matters relating to SEN in school. The Education Bureau (EDB) is responsible for implementing the Pilot Scheme for 3 years starting from the 2015/16 school year.

Target Schools

3. Public sector ordinary schools participating in the Pilot Scheme should meet the following eligibility criteria:

- i. the number of students with financial needs¹ should account for at least 55% of the total number of students of the school in the 2014/15 school year; and

¹ Students with financial needs include students receiving the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance and those receiving full grant or half grant under student financial assistance schemes.

- ii. the school has admitted at least 50 students with SEN requiring Tier-2 or Tier-3 support under the 3-Tier Intervention Model² in the school year concerned.

Funding Arrangement and Use of Subsidy

4. The total funding provision for the Pilot Scheme is \$218.84 million, covering a subsidy of \$211.34 million and an administrative cost of \$7.5 million (the administrative cost, including commission of evaluation experts and three officers on non-civil service contract terms, accounts for about 3.5% of the estimated subsidy).

5. CCF provides each participating secondary/primary school with an annual cash subsidy equivalent to the mid-point salary of Graduate Masters/Mistresses (GM) or Assistant Primary School Masters/Mistresses (APSM)³. Schools are required to deploy at least 90% of the subsidy for employing additional teaching staff so that SENCO may have more capacity to perform the duty of supporting students with SEN. EDB requires schools to designate a teacher with at least three years' experience in teaching and implementing integrated education (IE) who have received training in special education (i.e. having completed Basic, Advanced and Thematic (BAT) Courses⁴ or holding equivalent qualifications) as SENCO⁵.

Implementation in the 2015/16 and 2016/17 School Years

6. A total of 124 schools, including 59 primary schools and 65 secondary schools, participated in the Pilot Scheme. Participating schools were entitled to an additional subsidy³ for recruiting additional manpower to strengthen the teaching force, so that a

² Schools currently adopt the 3-Tier Intervention Model to cater for student diversity. Tier-1 support refers to quality teaching in regular classrooms for supporting students with transient or mild learning difficulties. Tier-2 support refers to “add-on” intervention, such as small group learning and pull-out programmes, for students with persistent learning difficulties, including those with SEN. Tier-3 support refers to intensive individualised support for students with severe learning difficulties and SEN, including drawing up of an Individual Education Plan.

³ The cash subsidy is adjusted annually with regard to the mid-point salary of GM of secondary schools and APSM of primary schools. In the 2015/16 school year, participating secondary and primary schools were each provided with a cash subsidy of \$541,560 and \$472,320 respectively. In the 2016/17 school year, participating secondary and primary schools were each provided with a cash subsidy of \$566,880 and \$494,400 respectively.

⁴ EDB has been providing BAT Courses on catering for students with SEN for serving teachers since the 2007/08 school year.

⁵ SENCOs yet to fulfil the SEN training requirement are required to complete the relevant courses within the first year of the Pilot Scheme so as to meet the specified requirement.

suitable teacher can be assigned to take up the duties of SENCO. The duties of SENCO include: coordinating matters related to the support for students with SEN; assisting the school management (i.e. principals and vice-principals) in planning the development of the Whole School Approach (WSA) to IE in school; leading the student support teams in the promotion of WSA, cultivating an inclusive whole school culture, supporting the learning needs of students with mental illness in collaboration with school guidance teams; and implementing promotional and developmental tasks and other system level work such as teacher training. Besides, SENCO would take up a certain amount of teaching load in order to stay abreast of the learning of students. In the 2015/16 and 2016/17 school years, about 9 700 and 10 220 students with SEN benefited respectively. As at end-June 2017, the total amount disbursed is \$129.61 million and the expenditure on administrative cost is \$4.32 million.

Professional Training

7. To enhance the professional capability of SENCOs in leading the student support team of their schools to formulate, implement and review the school-based IE policy and support measures, EDB has commissioned an overseas consultant to provide them with professional training. Since the 2015/16 school year, the consultant has conducted four training courses, including a half-day session for principals on the first day. SENCOs had positive feedback on these courses. They considered the courses insightful, helpful in discerning their roles and duties and enhancing their capabilities in leadership and management. The extensive application of the strategies covered has produced encouraging results in their schools. The consultant has also conducted two networking activities for principals who agree that such activities help them understand how the school could, at the administrative level, facilitate SENCOs in performing their functions effectively.

8. Besides, EDB has organised eight networking activities for SENCOs for building and strengthening their regional support network and promoting professional exchange and sharing of experiences. Curriculum leaders or vice principals/senior teachers responsible for coordinating educational matters/curriculum development of participating schools were invited to attend one of the networking activities to strengthen their collaboration with SENCOs. School personnel, local tertiary institutions and non-governmental organisations were also invited to share with SENCOs topics of concern, such as monitoring the utilisation of resources and evaluating the effectiveness, making good use of community resources and strengthening home-school co-operation, in order to promote professional exchange among these parties.

Evaluation of Effectiveness

9. The EDB-commissioned consultant has, based on the actual situation of primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong, adopted both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to collect information of the participating schools through diverse assessment tools.

10. In order to collect quantitative information, we have tracked the data of the 124 participating schools, including basic school information, core subject examination results of about 20% of students with SEN (about 2 250 students), and findings of questionnaire survey of about 2 480 stakeholders (including SENCOs, principals, academic staff and parents) regarding their views on SENCOs' duties and training needs, as well as various impacts of SENCOs' implementation of IE in school.

11. As for qualitative information, the consultant has arranged for 40 schools to undergo qualitative assessment. Apart from analysing school-based data, the consultant has also paid visits to schools to have individual and focus group interviews with SENCOs, principals, students and parents, and conducted class observation to study SENCOs' implementation of IE at different levels of the school, such as changes in SENCOs' duties and roles, collaboration between SENCOs and their fellow teachers in school, learning of students with SEN (including their academic and non-academic performance) and home-school co-operation. Upon consolidating the data collected which complement one another, the consultant has conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the continuous implications of the SENCO provision in the implementation of WSA to IE.

Observations

12. Based on the experience of participating schools, and the analysis of information collected by the consultant and EDB staff, we have the following observations:

Ranks of SENCOs

- The participating schools have, taken into account their individual situation and school-based needs, assigned teachers of different ranks to take up the role of SENCO. For primary schools, the majority of SENCOs are at the rank of APSM (around 40%), with the rest being Certificated Master/Mistress, Assistant

Master/Mistress and Primary School Master/Mistress. In secondary schools, the number of teachers at the rank of GM or Senior GM taking up the post of SENCO is more or less the same (both around 40%), with the rest being Certificated Master/Mistress and Principal Graduate Master/Mistress. These schools are at different development stages in respect of IE implementation. The number of students with SEN that they have to cater for and students' needs for support also vary. Yet, the study shows that active participation and supervision of the school management (i.e. principals, vice-principals, etc.) in providing steer is an important factor contributing to success.

Schools' Coordination

- The percentages of teaching staff involved in supporting students with SEN have increased in both the participating primary and secondary schools. In the 2015/16 school year, 40.5% and 26.2% of the teaching staff was involved in supporting students with SEN in the participating primary and secondary schools, and in the 2016/17 school year, the percentages rose to 45.9% and 29.8% respectively, representing an increase of 5.4% and 3.6%. The number of members in the student support teams has also increased. For secondary schools, there has been an increase of 3.5% in the involvement of the management and subject panel heads, which shows that the school management is now more concerned about SEN issues and manpower resources have been strengthened to support students with SEN.
- In respect of work arrangements for SENCOs, about 70% of SENCOs reflect that the existing teaching load (about 30% to 50%) has allowed them to have adequate capacities for performing their duties as SENCOs, while 30% indicate that capacities are inadequate as they need to shoulder other administrative responsibilities not related to supporting students with SEN.

Support Measures

- The various strategies covered in the training courses for SENCOs provided by the consultant have enabled other teachers to better understand the support needs of students with SEN, thus facilitating schools' provision of appropriate support services. For example, schools may, in the form of a "one-page profile", collect students' opinions and views, which will be taken into account when providing support services and deploying resources. Also, schools may utilise both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to assess and monitor the effectiveness of support measures, thereby enhancing the strategic planning and evaluation of SEN-related measures.

Learning and Teaching

- SENCOs have worked more closely with subject panels of their schools in providing more appropriate support services for students with SEN, such as collaborating with teachers to conduct lesson study, assisting them to deploy appropriate teaching strategies in classroom and assessing the effectiveness of classroom teaching.
- SENCOs have strengthened their collaboration with school guidance teams to support the learning needs of students with mental illness by giving input from the perspectives of teaching and learning as well as resource deployment.
- During class observation, some schools have displayed the following positive changes in their teaching strategies:
 - subject teachers have increased the use of differentiated materials and graded worksheets to cater for students of diverse abilities;
 - teachers have made use of visual strategies and realia more extensively to aid their teaching;
 - teachers have assessed students' understanding and learning with effective questioning skills, given students sufficient thinking time, encouraged group discussion, and allowed students to respond in different ways, such as verbally or with the use of drawing or text;
 - teachers have planned their teaching using scaffolding strategies, divided learning contents into smaller parts, and presented information and concepts in a clear, precise and simple manner to help students learn progressively;
 - teachers have arranged diversified teaching activities, including whole-class teaching/activities and group or individual activities, to facilitate students with varying abilities to grasp the learning points of the lesson and consolidate their learning; and
 - teachers have taught learning skills more explicitly to enable students' self-directed learning by, for example, introducing the use of writing frames to inspire thinking, developing students' self-learning skills such as note-taking and pre-class preparation, and promoting peer feedback and assessment.

Student Performance

- Some of the students with SEN consider their motivation for learning has been enhanced, and their overall performance in major subjects has remained steady. Some secondary students think that their relationships with peers have improved.

Some primary students are of the view that more support measures have been made available by their schools.

Home-school Co-operation

- In the 2016/17 school year, around 30% of SENCOs in primary and secondary schools ranked “fostering home-school co-operation” the third among their top three priorities, whereas nearly 40% of SENCOs in primary schools considered the same as the first and foremost.
- Quite a number of SENCOs have spared more time to meet parents, enhancing the communication and co-operation among teachers, parents and students in the following ways:
 - holding talks for parents to raise their awareness of students with SEN;
 - organising reading and writing courses for parents of children with dyslexia to help parents support children’s learning at home; and
 - inviting parents into the class to assist in peer-supported learning.

Awareness of SEN among Teachers

- More teachers have enhanced awareness and understanding of the need to accept and support students with SEN; and
- More teachers are willing to receive SEN-related training in order to enhance their professional capacities.

Incorporating the Pilot Scheme into the Government’s Regular Assistance Programme

13. Given the above positive impact of the creation of SENCO posts on the implementation of IE in participating schools, the Pilot Scheme will be incorporated into the Government’s regular assistance programme from the 2017/18 school year. We will provide each public sector ordinary primary/secondary school with an additional teaching post in the teaching staff establishment (i.e. APSM in primary schools or GM in secondary schools), to facilitate school’s assignment of a designated teacher to take up the role of SENCO. This initiative will be implemented starting from the 2017/18 school year by phases in three years. EDB takes into account a host of considerations, such as the number of students with SEN in the school and their needs for support,

professional training in special education received by teachers in the school, and the support the school could further provide in promoting WSA to IE for phased implementation of the initiative. The 124 schools participating in the Pilot Scheme will be among the first batch of schools eligible for the SENCO provision in the 2017/18 school year. This initiative will bring about an increase of about 840 teaching posts in schools.

14. This initiative is to be so implemented because schools are at different development stages in the implementation of IE and they may not be ready to assign a teacher trained in special education to take up the role of SENCO thereupon. Besides, it takes time for local tertiary institutions to develop local training programmes for SENCOs.

15. Schools should follow the EDB Circular on SENCO to appoint a suitable teacher as SENCO after giving thorough consideration to the teacher's years of teaching experience, work experience and relevant qualifications. Basically, the teacher assuming the role of SENCO should have at least three years of experience in teaching and in promoting IE as well as having received training in special education, such as having completed BAT Courses on supporting students with SEN commissioned by EDB and offered by tertiary institutions, or holding equivalent qualifications.

16. SENCOs should take up a certain amount of teaching duties so that they can continue to enrich their experience in supporting students with SEN in class and applying various support measures. On top of this, SENCOs need to promote WSA to IE by discharging the following responsibilities:

- coordinating school matters relating to the support of students with SEN;
- assisting the school management (i.e. principal and vice-principals) in planning the development of WSA to IE;
- leading the student support team in promoting WSA to IE and fostering an inclusive school culture; and
- implementing promotional and developmental tasks and other system-level work, such as teacher training.

17. We require schools to assign work to their SENCOs appropriately so that SENCOs can use about 70% of their time to perform the duties relating to the support of students with SEN. The rest of their time will then be spent on classroom teaching. As schools are at different development stages in the implementation of IE and the number of students with SEN in school and their needs for support vary, schools may make adjustment to the work allocation of SENCOs in light of school-based needs.

However, the time spent on performing duties related to supporting students with SEN should not be less than 50% of the total time. This is to avoid affecting the effectiveness of SENCO in leading, implementing and deepening the development of IE in school. The recommended adjustments to work allocation have to be approved by the Incorporated Management Committee/School Management Committee.

18. Apart from completing the relevant training in special education, new-to-role SENCOs have to receive the professional training provided for SENCOs by EDB. The duration of training will be approximately 90 to 100 hours, and the areas to be covered focus on leadership, planning and management, support strategies based on student-centred approach, lesson study, resource deployment and management, continuing professional training for teachers, etc. EDB will also organise professional development activities for SENCOs, such as networking activities and sharing sessions, to promote professional exchange and sharing of experiences.

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