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

June 2023

Background

141 Ordinary schools
60 Primary Schools
81 Secondary Schools
Number of Participating Schools

141 Principals
141 SENCOs
1532 Teachers
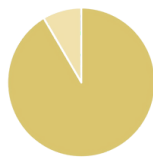**(Primary Schools-704 Secondary Schools-828)**
Survey

106 respondents
(Principals, SENCOs, Parents & Professional Support Personnel)
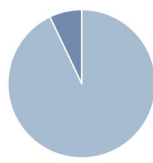**Individual interviews/ Focus group interviews**

8 schools
(4 Primary Schools & 4 Secondary Schools)
Case Studies

Survey Findings

Knowledge of Disability Discrimination Ordinance and Code of Practice on Education

Principals (91.5%)

SENCOs (92.9%)

Teachers (58.6%)

Current status of taking care of students with special education needs (SEN) and stress level perceived by SENCOs and teachers while handling students with SEN

SENCOs

Taking care of students with **Intellectual Disability (ID)**	Primary school SENCOs **(66.7%)** >	Secondary school SENCOs **(52.5%)**
Taking care of students with **Speech and Language Impairment (SLI)** **Hearing Impairment (HI)** **Physical Disability** **Visual Impairment (VI)**	Secondary school SENCOs > Primary school SENCOs.	#The differences were between **3** and **15** percentage points.

SENCOs and teachers feel quite stressful while handling with ASD students or students with AD/HD

SENCOs
Teachers

Handle students with **Intellectual Disability (ID)**	Primary school teachers **(35.1%)** >	Secondary school teachers **(29.4%)**
Handle students with **Mental Illness (MI)**	Secondary school SENCOs **(83.5%)** and teachers **(39.3%)** >	Primary school SENCOs **(55.9%)** and teachers **(11.2%)**
Handle students with **Hearing Impairment (HI)**	Secondary school teachers **(37.6%)** >	Primary school teachers **(27.9%)**

Primary schools SENCOs: Perceived greatest stress while handing students with SLI

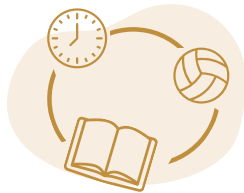**Secondary School SENCOs: Perceived greatest stress while supporting students with MI**

Existing Challenges of Implementing Integrated Education

Over 80% of surveyed principals **(81.6%)**, teachers**(85.3%)**, and SENCOs **(85.8%)** agreed that the most difficult aspect of implementing integrated education was **the tight teaching schedule / heavy teaching workload**

Over **70%** of principals**(70.2%)** and SENCOs **(70.9%)** expressed that the administrative work brought about by IE was heavy.

Compared with their counterparts in secondary schools **(77.8%)**, principals in primary schools **(86.7%)** perceived tight teaching schedule/ heavy teaching workload as the most challenging.

68.8% of the teachers surveyed considered the lack of manpower as the second difficulty in implementing IE.

Effectiveness of Integrated Education Policy Measures

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** (3 represents that the policy and support measures are helpful).

SENCO

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**.

Current Situation of Home-school Cooperation in Integrated Education

Preferred **means of communication** between schools and parents:

Phone calls and other instant messaging channels (92.9%)

Communicating face-to-face on Parents' Days (90.8%)

Arranging professionals to contact parents (88.7%)

Arrange parental seminars/workshops
Primary schools **(65.0%)**
Secondary schools **(42.3%)**

Difficulties in catering for the needs of students with SEN with their parents because :

- Parents were busy to support the needs of students with SEN after school
- Parents lack required skills and knowledge of looking after children with SEN

SKILL

Quotes from Principals, SENCOs, Parents and Professional support personnel

"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]

"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.**

[Secondary school SENCO]

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**.

[Parent of a primary student with SEN from primary school]

Six years ago, **parents were more conservative about the individual needs of students**. We would take a more proactive role and ask students if they have any learning needs that we can support. But now, **parents are already very proactive** and want you to know about their children's situation so that they can receive appropriate help."

[Secondary school social worker]

Good Exemplars in Ordinary Schools

Good Exemplars of Integrated Education in Primary Schools

☐ **Small class teaching approach**

☐ **Rescheduling teacher's timetable (more space)**

☐ **Invite parents to join class activities. (Observation and interaction)**
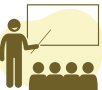
☐ **Schools explain students' performance with parents to reduce their doubts and vigilance**

☐ **Cooperate with professional groups to provide comprehensive support**

Good Exemplars of Integrated Education in Secondary Schools

☐ **Pull-out approach through co-teaching (1:4 or 1:5; Teacher: Students with SEN)**

☐ **Encourage teachers to participate more in training of integrated education**

☐ **Conduct research to review and improve teaching and learning effectiveness of students with SEN in tier-1 support**

☐ **Cross-disciplinary cooperation for whole-person development**

Recommendations

1 Enhancing the flexibility of current school resource utilization and establishing permanent positions for professional support personnel

3 Improving teachers' understanding and skills on Disability Discrimination Ordinance, Codes of Practice on Education, and integrated education and strengthening university-school partnerships and professional development

2 Implementing small-class teaching and increasing the teacher-to-class ratio in every ordinary school for supporting integrated education

4 Strengthening parent-school collaboration and public and parent education and providing more supports to parents of students with SEN
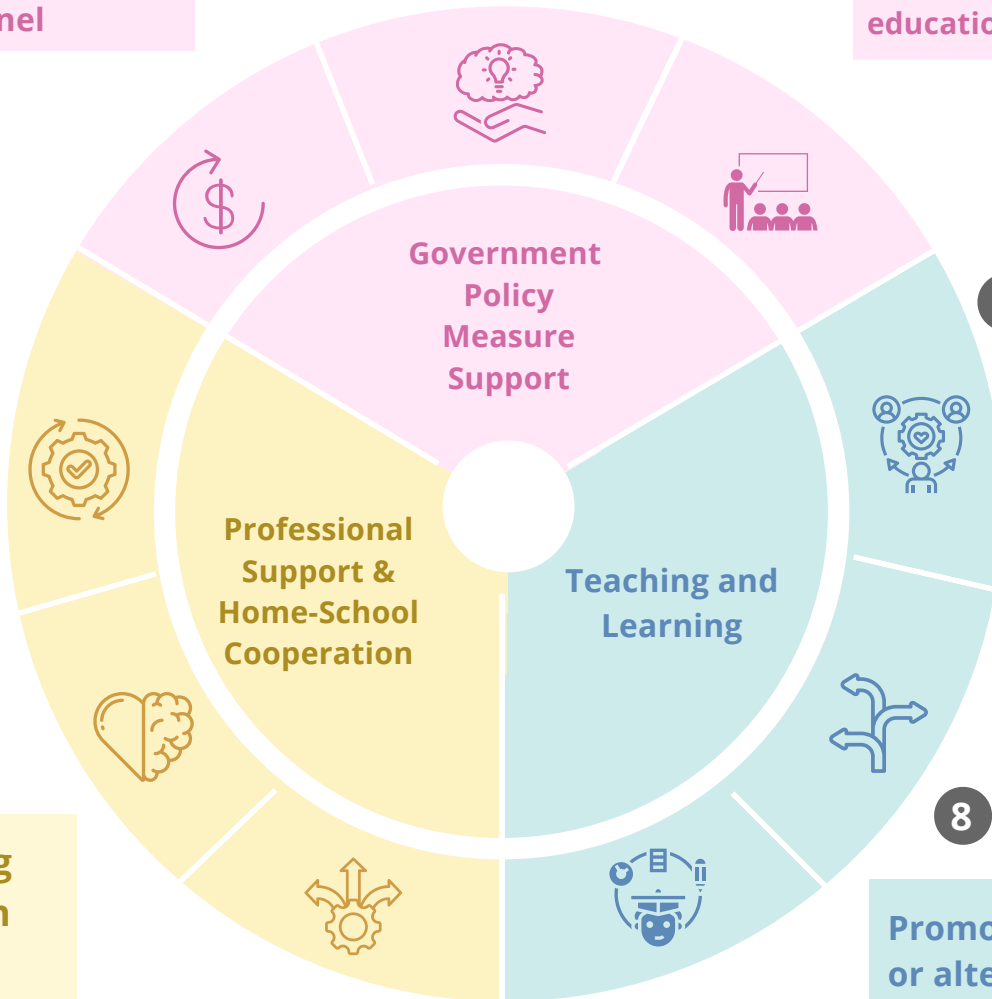
9 Strengthening support for SENCOs to reduce their workload

5 Strengthening mental health supports to students

8 Promoting diversified or alternative assessment methods beyond paper-and-pen assessment

6 Establishing diversified support model for students with SEN and a support network for students with SEN and non-Chinese speaking students and parents

7 Setting up a new post with the title "Curriculum Development Master/Mistress (Integrated Education)" (CDMIE)

Government Policy Measure Support

Professional Support & Home-School Cooperation

Teaching and Learning