

Executive Summary

A. Research Background, Objectives and Methodology

1. The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) commissioned the research team of the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, the Education University of Hong Kong, to conduct a project entitled “Study on Challenges, Effective Policies, and Best Practices of Ordinary Schools in Educating Students with Special Educational Needs in Hong Kong” in 2019. This research employs a mixed-method approach to collect data and opinions from different stakeholders through questionnaires, focus group interviews, individual interviews, and case studies to examine the effectiveness of the current integrated education (IE) in primary and secondary schools in-depth and to provide relevant policy suggestions for the future development of IE.
2. The purpose of this Study is (i) to review literature and research materials on local and overseas practices and strategies for providing IE to students with special educational needs (SEN); (ii) to assess the understanding of school principals, school administrators, and teachers regarding the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO), the Code of Practice on Education under the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (Code of Practice on Education), and students with SEN; (iii) to collect the views of school principals, school administrators, and teachers in ordinary schools on implementing IE for students with SEN; (iv) to explore the challenges faced by ordinary schools in implementing IE and supporting students with SEN; (v) to evaluate the effectiveness of government policies in promoting IE and providing equal learning opportunities for students with SEN; (vi) to identify good practices initiated by in-school professionals to achieve IE, support students with SEN, and provide them with equal learning opportunities through case studies; and (vii) to make policy recommendations based on the collected data and information to ensure that students with SEN can get access to and receive fair treatment in the mainstream school system.
3. The school survey started in October 2020 and was finally completed in November 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. 141 ordinary schools participated in this Study, of which 60 were primary schools, and 81 were secondary schools. The school principal and one Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) of each participating school were invited to fill out the questionnaire. The total number of teachers surveyed was 1 532, of which 704 were primary school teachers and 828 were secondary school teachers.
4. Based on the data collected from the school survey, the research team adopted purposive sampling in selecting 15 primary schools and 12 secondary schools to participate in individual interviews and focus group interviews. Half of them were “relatively successful schools”, while the other half were “relatively less successful schools” in IE implementation. Interviews began in June 2021 and were completed in December 2021. In total, there were 106 respondents. 15 individual interviews with primary school principals and 12 individual interviews with secondary school principals were conducted. 15 individual interviews with primary school SENCOs and 16 individual interviews with secondary school SENCOs were arranged. A total of 28 clinical professionals (15 from primary schools and 13 from secondary schools) were interviewed, including social workers, school counselors, educational psychologists (EPs), clinical psychologists, and speech therapists. 10 parents of students with SEN in primary schools and 10 parents of students with SEN in secondary schools were interviewed.
5. Based on the data collected from the school survey, the research team selected 8 schools with relatively successful implementation of IE (including 4 primary schools and 4 secondary schools) for case studies in June to July 2021 with the aim to identify good exemplars of IE in primary and secondary schools and the key factors for the success and obstacles in achieving good practices of IE.

B. Literature Review and Key Findings of Questionnaire Surveys

From the literature review, successful governing factors affecting the implementation of IE include comprehensive support programmes and the use of integrated databases to deepen parents' understanding of their children's growth. From a policy perspective, emphasis should be placed on teacher professional development, with teacher training helping frontline teachers deal with daily teaching challenges. Finally, an inclusive society relies on the tolerance and acceptance of students with SEN and parents, and strengthening mutual trust and understanding among different stakeholders.

The main results of the overall questionnaire survey are as follows:

i) Understanding towards DDO and Code of Practice on Education

All three stakeholder groups admitted their understanding of DDO and Code of Practice on Education. But overall, teachers had a lower understanding than SENCOs and principals.

1. Over 90% of the interviewed primary and secondary school principals (91.5%) and SENCOs (92.9%) agreed that they understood DDO and the Code of Practice on Education. Among teachers, approximately 60% (58.6%) of the respondents believed that they understood this ordinance and Code of Practice.
2. Regarding the understanding of IE, the average agreement level of the description of IE among primary and secondary school principals and SENCOs was 3.01, indicating their overall agreement on the description of IE, whereas the average agreement level among teachers was 2.88.

ii) Current Practices and Evaluation of Integrated Education in Schools

The three stakeholders had an overall good understanding of SEN type classification. However, teachers were slightly less aware that Mental Illness (MI)¹ has been classified as one of the SEN categories, and there were also concerns regarding the pressure on SENCOs and frontline teachers to provide support for different types of students with SEN.

3. In general, the three major stakeholders had a profound understanding of the current classification of students' SEN. Over 80% of principals, SENCOs and teachers were aware of the eight general categories, except principals and teachers had relatively limited understanding of the inclusion of MI as a category of SEN. Comparing with more than 95% (96.5%) of SENCOs who knew that MI is one of the SEN types, only approximately 76% of teachers (76.1%) knew about it. It is worth noting that 35.0% of SENCOs and 21.8% of teachers in primary schools thought that academic underachiever is one of the SEN types.
4. In general, SENCOs in primary and secondary schools have to take care of various types of students with SEN. Primary school SENCOs (66.7%) had to take care of students with Intellectual Disability (ID) more than secondary school SENCOs (52.5%), while secondary school SENCOs had to take care of students with Speech and Language Impairment (SpLI), Hearing Impairment (HI), Physical Disability (PD), and Visual Impairment (VI) more than primary school SENCOs. The differences of the four types of SEN were between 3 and 15 percentage points.
5. Secondary school SENCOs (83.5%) and teachers (39.3%) had to handle students with MI more

¹ Mental illness (MI) was only added to the category of SEN in the 2017/18 school year.

than primary school SENCOS (55.9%) and teachers (11.2%). In contrast, primary school teachers (35.1%) had to handle students with ID more than secondary school teachers (29.4%), while secondary school teachers (37.6%) had more cases of students with HI than primary school teachers (27.9%).

6. 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 MI, the stress experienced by SENCOS was significantly higher than that of teachers.
7. Overall speaking, SENCOS perceived that they were under the greatest stress while supporting students with MI, with the average score of 3.25 (3 represents that a bit stressful); secondary school SENCOS were under greater pressure while supporting students with MI, with the average scores of 3.38 and mean score of 3.07 for primary schools SENCOS. In contrast, primary school SENCOS were under the greatest pressure when supporting students with SpLI with the average scores of 3.27, while 2.71 for secondary school SENCOS.

Both primary and secondary schools have provided services or measures to cater for the individual needs of students with SEN, but the overall performance of secondary schools was relatively worse than that of primary schools in this regard.

8. In both primary and secondary schools, the priority of services or measures to cater for the individual needs of students with SEN is "Curriculum/Assessment Accommodation" (87.9%), "Hiring Teaching Assistants" (87.2%), "Providing Professional Therapy and Counselling" (84.4%) and "Hiring Support Teachers" (84.4%).
9. However, it is noted that secondary schools did not provide services or measures to cater for the individual needs of students with SEN as much as primary schools in general. For instance, "Designing School-based Curriculum" was less likely to be introduced in secondary schools (40.7%) than primary schools (71.7%) by 30 percentage points, "Small-Class Teaching" was less likely to be implemented in secondary schools (46.9%) than primary schools (73.3%) by around 25 percentage points, and "Setting up Individual Education Plan (IEP)" was less prevalent in secondary schools (56.8%) than primary schools (75.0%) by around 20 percentage points.

The three stakeholders also agreed that tight teaching schedules/heavy teaching workload and heavy administrative work were the major difficulties in implementing IE in schools.

10. All three major stakeholders agreed that the most difficult aspect of implementing IE was the tight teaching schedule / heavy teaching workload. Over 80% of surveyed principals (81.6%), teachers (85.3%), and SENCOS (85.8%) held similar views. Compared with their counterparts in secondary schools (77.8%), principals in primary schools (86.7%) perceived tight teaching schedules / heavy teaching workload as the most challenging.
11. Besides, over 70% of principals (70.2%) and SENCOS (70.9%) also expressed that the related administrative work brought about by IE was heavy. In contrast, 68.8% of the teachers surveyed considered the lack of manpower as the second difficulty in implementing IE.

iii) Self-evaluation from SENCOS and Teachers towards Integrated Education Practices

Secondary school SENCOS and primary school teachers showed a higher self-efficacy towards IE practices in general, indicating that primary school SENCOS and secondary school teachers still have a competency gap compared to the above two groups in the actual practices of IE.

12. For the self-assessment completed by SENCOs about their competency, out of 25 items, SENCOs in secondary schools scored at least 3 (3 represents agreement with the assessment description) on average in 11 items, while the respective figure for their counterparts in primary schools was 6. Among all the 25 items, secondary school SENCOs also had higher mean scores than primary school SENCOs in 16 items.
13. In the self-assessment about their competency in implementing IE completed by teachers in primary and secondary schools, the average scores of all items were generally less than 3.0. Among the 19 items of self-assessment, the average scores of secondary school teachers of 18 items were lower than those of their counterparts in primary schools.
14. The average scores of secondary school teachers' ratings of "I am familiar with the resources that students with SEN need for learning" and "I can accurately gauge the progress of comprehension of curriculum by students with SEN " were 2.42 and 2.47, respectively, which were lower than 2.50. The average score of "I am familiar with the resources that students with SEN need for learning" was 2.46 rated by overall teachers, indicating that the teachers surveyed do not know much about the resources that students with SEN require. The findings also show that secondary school teachers have difficulty in accurately grasping the progress of understanding of the curriculum by students with SEN.

iv) Evaluation of Integrated Education Policy Effectiveness

Schools believed that the Learning Support Grant (LSG) had provided resources for schools to employ different professional support personnel and purchase professional support services.

15. Principals thought that the LSG was the most helpful in purchasing external professional services (91.5%), followed by employing full-time and/or part-time teaching staff (85.1%) and full-time support staff (78.7%).
16. Both primary and secondary schools deployed LSG mostly on purchasing external services and hiring full-time / part-time teaching staff. 85.0% and 81.7% of primary schools respectively deployed the grant on purchasing external services and employing full-time / part-time teaching staff, while for secondary schools, the figures were 96.3% and 87.7% respectively. Overall speaking, secondary schools deployed more LSG resources than primary schools in various ways, except for strengthening home-school cooperation. While 55.0% of primary schools deployed the grant on strengthening home-school cooperation, only 53.1% of secondary schools did so, slightly lower than primary schools. In contrast, secondary schools (71.6%) deployed LSG more than primary schools (41.7%) in organizing learning or cultural integration activities.

The three stakeholders agreed that integrated education policy measures could generally achieve their supporting effect and assist schools in implementing integrated education, but their views were different.

17. Principals, SENCOs, and teachers also held positive opinions about the overall IE policy support 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). The post of SENST was deemed the second most effective support measure rated by principals overall, with a mean score of 3.44.
18. 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. "To provide SENCO posts" was rated second with an average score of 3.38, which the secondary school SENCOs rated a higher mean

score of 3.49, while the average score rated by primary school SENCOs was 3.22.

19. Teachers had similar views with SENCOs in the aspect of providing more systematic and adequate teacher training, while the overall mean score was 3.19, which teachers of both primary and secondary schools rated 3.19. Yet, they considered adding the post of School-based Speech Therapist as the most effective support measure with the highest mean score of 3.21, which primary school teachers rated a higher mean score of 3.24 than that of secondary school teachers (3.18).

v) Current Situation of Home-school Cooperation in Integrated Education

Home-school cooperation in integrated education is gradually improving, but still faces some difficulties.

20. The data showed that the most preferred means of communication between schools and parents are telephone and other instant messaging channels (92.9%), followed by Parent day meeting (90.8%) and arranging professionals to meet with parents (88.7%). Over 60% of primary schools would arrange parent courses/workshops (65.0%), however, it is not a common practice in secondary schools (43.2%).
21. The surveyed SENCOs and teachers mentioned the difficulties in dealing with the problems of students with SEN with their parents because parents were busy to support the needs of students with SEN after school and due to the lack of required skills and knowledge of looking after their children with SEN. The average agreement level of SENCOs and teachers regarding the lack of parental support after school were 3.25 and 3.10, respectively. The average agreement level of SENCOs and teachers regarding parents' lack of required skills and knowledge to take care of their children with SEN were 3.23 and 3.07, respectively.
22. Teachers in primary and secondary schools considered that parents resisted to seek professional help or advices, with the average agreement level of 2.63 for both. However, SENCOs disagreed about this view, with the mean score rated 2.38. Teachers also agreed that parents had difficulty in gathering information to support students with SEN while the overall mean score of agreement level rated by teachers was 2.52, though SENCOs disagreed about this point with the mean score of 2.21.

C. Results of Individual Interviews and Focus Group Interviews

I. Current Curriculum Implementation (Learning, Teaching, and Assessment)

Current primary and secondary school curriculum is considered as too tight.

1. Stakeholders in both primary and secondary schools (including principals, SENCOs, and teachers) indicated that the greatest problem in implementing IE was the “packed” curriculum plan. It is difficult for schools and frontline teachers to make enough time and space to cater for the needs of students with SEN effectively. They also agreed that requiring students with SEN to study mainstream curriculum and meet mainstream assessment reflected the inequality in the education system of Hong Kong. In addition, SENSTs had mentioned that some teachers did not have their sense of achievement when teaching students with SEN, a consistent phenomenon found in the results of the survey.

Students with SEN still face unified public assessments at different stages of learning.

2. Currently, students still face different unified public assessments, including Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA) for Primary 3, Primary 6, and Secondary 3 students, Pre-S1 Hong Kong Attainment Test (Pre-S1 HKAT), and the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE). This not only puts heavy pressure on schools but also affects the learning outcomes of students with SEN at different stages of schooling, as the curriculum is too challenging for them to catch up with the learning progress. Although there are different assessment accommodation measures available for students with SEN to apply for, these measures have limited effectiveness. However, since schools have a post of Primary School Curriculum Leader, SENCOS indicated that the assistance of the curriculum leader in enhancing the effectiveness of classroom support at Tier 1 was significant, which had helped improve the overall learning and teaching effectiveness.

II. Effects of Placing Resources in Integrated Education by the Government

Functions and roles of Special Educational Needs Coordinator

3. SENCOS reported that the work of handling students with SEN covered a wide range of aspects, including early identification, student support, and arranging IEP. These tasks could not be completed independently by SENCOS, who, in fact, require the support from students, parents, teachers, and other professional support personnel to implement the Whole School Approach (WSA). As SENCOS play the role of coordination, they are responsible for communicating and negotiating with different stakeholders. SENCOS also stated that the current school policies or the assistance of professional support agents were still insufficient. In the school context, SENCOS always have to collaborate with various subject teaching teams or administrative teams in providing different accommodations for students with SEN, but strengthening the cooperation among teachers was considered challenging due to lack of power. Principals in primary and secondary schools agreed that catering for the needs of students with SEN should not be solely the responsibility of SENCOS, which should be shared by all teachers.

Current status of implementation of professional support and Individualised Educational Plan

4. Although different professional support personnel, such as EPs and speech therapists, regularly arrange school visits to provide professional support, the resources are still insufficient. EPs indicated in their interviews that due to their insufficient school visits, it would not be possible for students with SEN to receive continuous assessment, making it difficult for the SENCOS to adjust their relevant support according to the changing needs of the students with SEN. Social workers also stated that given that EPs' visits could not be scheduled as routine, teachers and social workers in schools sometimes had to play the role of the EP in providing support to students with SEN.
5. In terms of IEP, SENCOS reflected in their interviews that IEP could bring noticeable results to students, but it required collaborative practice and engagement of different stakeholders. Therefore, SENCOS in primary and secondary schools expressed that schools had to identify students based on the urgency of their needs and situations to guarantee IEP could be effectively implemented. However, IEP was not a favorable practice in the secondary school context as indicated in school survey findings due to the constraints posed by HKDSE. In comparison, primary schools may have greater flexibility in identifying students with SEN supported by IEP.

Deployment of resources and its flexibility

6. Stakeholders in primary and secondary schools (including principals, SENCOs, teachers, and various professional support personnel) all expressed that the continuous increase in allocation of resources by the Government in recent years helped the schools promote IE. However, according to principals in primary and secondary schools, the scarcest resource is the human resources because it is hard to find suitable personnel to assist schools in implementing IE, especially the lack of professional support agents who are specialized in taking care of a particular type of students with SEN. Therefore, it is recommended to set up permanent professional support personnel positions to attract relevant professionals in providing support to the schools in need. Besides, principals had also pointed out that increasing resources alone without a change in the education system would not help overcome the current difficulties encountered in IE.
7. SENCOs pointed out that there were restrictions in the deployment of LSG, and SENSTs could not fully support their work. Moreover, most of the resources had been used to hire professional support personnel, which did not help to alleviate the overloaded administrative tasks and long working hours of SENCOs. Therefore, it is hoped that the Government could provide clear guidelines on using the LSG so that SENCOs could utilize resources more effectively and plan the development of IE in view of the school-based needs.

Teacher professional development for Integrated Education

8. Principals believed that professional training could deepen teachers' understanding of IE and their skills in taking care of students with SEN. Most teachers were also willing to receive training on students with SEN, which can help teachers, including the disciplinary and counselling team, life planning team, and class teachers, facilitate in understanding how to support students from different roles and reduce their over-reliance on the leadership of the student support team or SENCOs so that WSA could be adopted in the implementation of IE. However, the teachers also reported that they feel pressure on the training. At present, in-service teachers mainly improved their skills through training courses provided by tertiary institutions, but the quality and content of the courses would affect its overall effectiveness.

Role and current status of Government and tertiary institutions in supporting ordinary schools to implement Integrated Education through collaboration

9. The Education Bureau (EDB) and different tertiary institutions have been organizing various training activities, including sharing sessions, lectures, etc. However, the teachers mentioned that some of the courses emphasized too much on theory and lack practical ideas how that could be applied in teaching. Teachers could only make reference to the sharing of cases in the courses, but they might not be able to execute it in their teaching practices. In particular, course instructors might not have relevant expertise in various subject disciplines, making it difficult to provide practical support for teachers of different subjects simultaneously. SENCOs and principals commented that in addition to providing professional support, the Government could proactively collaborate with universities to conduct research on IE and improve its effectiveness by examining the current implementation in local schools.
10. With the increasing attention to IE in society and the education sector, principals in primary and secondary schools suggested that the Government could consider adding IE as a core subject in teacher education. It could benefit teachers in early identification in their future teaching and collaborating with professional support agents to apply theory into practice. Some EPs stated that the provision of training courses in supporting students with SEN had been implemented for several years. Nevertheless, with increasing attention and changes in treatment methods and

standards, the training courses have to be updated in time to align with the policy changes. Some parents believed that the success of IE implementation in schools depended on the vision of the principals. If the school lacks an open-minded and long-term vision for the development of IE, the results will not be fruitful.

III. Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic and Class Suspension on Integrated Education and Inclusive School

Challenges to students' mental health status and support

11. According to the interviews of primary and secondary school principals, schools have conducted various support activities to provide mental health education for students, parents, and teachers, increase the awareness of different stakeholders on this topic, and support students' mental health with preventive strategies. However, in respect of the reduction in face-to-face communication and the changes in life rhythm and habits due to COVID-19 epidemic, students' emotional problems were aggravated. Students in need might not actively seek help during online learning, which had made professional support harder. During that period, parents' insights and assistance became more significant.
12. Most interviewed social workers found that parental education could help them understand the information about mental health, such as symptoms of mental illness as well as the needs of students with mental problems, etc. Meanwhile, some schools had provided parents more opportunities and platforms for open discussions and enabled all stakeholders to face up to the mental health issues and gave support and assistance to students with mental health needs.

Cross-professional support to Integrated Education

13. The social workers stated in the interviews that identifying students with mental health needs often relied on observation by people around them, depending on whether they could attempt early evaluation and arrange a referral. It would also be affected by people's awareness level of mental health. Interviewed psychologists indicated that mental health cases may vary greatly. As far as parents are concerned, parents expressed that in coping with exceptional circumstances with their children, they were also confused about the methods to help their children. Some institutions or universities would organize related activities, such as lectures or training, to help parents and their children and create a supportive atmosphere in the community.
14. While mental health issues usually involve privacy issues, it is difficult for social workers to collaborate with the student support team to provide holistic support in academic, emotional, and growth aspects based on the needs of students. In addition, social workers in primary and secondary schools commented that the current waiting time for psychiatric diagnosis and evaluation was too long, obstructing immediate support for students. Besides, a doctor's diagnosis could only confirm the situation of students and might not be able to give some suggestions on the support and accommodations for psychological problems, which would make the school support difficult.

Views about inclusive schools

15. Principals of primary and secondary schools mentioned in the interviews that schools had actively promoted mutual help among students and built up inclusive and positive values. They had also tried to adopt peer support to deal with students' emotional problems. Establishing an inclusive atmosphere in the school is also subject to the participation of teachers. The teachers believed that all parties concerned should also pay attention to teachers' mental health and

handle their needs so that positive values could be gradually infiltrated into students through daily teaching.

16. With the development of IE, teachers may need to handle the learning diversity of students. However, while teachers need to spend much of their time in the classroom dealing with the issues of students with SEN, it is challenging to take care of all students in the class. This is also unfair to students who do not have SEN. Some principals of primary schools stressed that attention should also be paid to the teacher-student ratio in each class when implementing IE. However, given that the small-class teaching policy has not been officially adopted in secondary schools, it echos with the survey finding that small-class teaching policy is not the prevalent support strategy in secondary schools.

IV. Current Status of Parents' Taking Care of Children with SEN and Home-school Cooperation

Parents' motivation for seeking help increases. But timely service support may not be available due to financial difficulties.

17. Based on parents' interviews, it is more likely for the parents of students with SEN in secondary schools to accept their children with SEN and actively seek help, while their counterparts in primary schools still had slight resistance to accepting that their children were with SEN. Therefore, SENCOS and social workers pointed out that parental education was indispensable. They emphasized that enhancing parents' awareness of children with SEN at an early stage could help ease their wariness so that their children could be assessed and treated at the earliest possible time.
18. In the interviews, parents of primary schools mentioned that the waiting time for government services was too long, while private therapy services were extremely expensive and unaffordable, resulting in their children with SEN unable to receive timely service support. They commented that the inavailability of suitable support services was also a shortcoming of the existing professional support services.

Maturing of home-school cooperation

19. In terms of home-school cooperation, parents indicated that if they had regular and good communication with SENCOS, they would have greater confidence in schools and would allow their children to receive support. SENCOS also stressed that gaining parental trust was essential in promoting home-school cooperation and making it easier to support students with SEN. In addition, EPs stated that parent-child conflicts tended to increase during school closures due to the epidemic. How parents should improve communication and get along with their children in the future is a significant challenge for promoting home-school cooperation because it will affect behaviours of students with SEN at school and may bring burdens to school.

V. Deep-Seated Social Norms and Values

Impact of exam-oriented culture and social atmosphere on students with SEN

20. Some secondary school teachers still view receiving university education as the only goal of the study, putting much pressure on students with SEN. Furthermore, the entire Hong Kong environment places too much emphasis on academic performance, resulting in the negligence of the personal abilities of students with SEN. Some parents even argued that their children were

keener to take the HKDSE than they were, showing the great influence of the exam-oriented culture.

21. Some secondary schools have tried to assist students with SEN by providing the direction of a non-academic pathway of their children and career counselling to parents of students with SEN so as to eliminate their worries about the prospects of their children. As for primary schools, principals have said that students have to face many assessments, examinations, and tests under the current education system. What primary schools could do is to make students dislike learning less. In the long run, the test-taking culture may put students, teachers, or schools at a disadvantage.
22. Even though the social inclusion for students with SEN has been dramatically improved, there is room for improvement in social acceptance in general. In interviews, parents of primary schools pointed out that parents of other students were dissatisfied that their children were disturbed by students with SEN in class. SENCOS and social workers also shared similar views that some parents lied about their child that he/she was a student with SEN in order to benefit from the accommodation measures in examination. Some parents still hold reservation about letting their children study in special schools. It shows that Hong Kong society is not truly inclusive.

D. Results of Case Studies

Overview and characteristics of Integrated Education implementation in schools

1. All schools participating in the case study have adopted WSA in implementing IE. The student support team can assist all their school teachers and other relevant stakeholders in supporting students with SEN. The support measures include small-class teaching, after-school tutoring, IEP, various concentration improvement and social skills groups, homework, curriculum, and assessment accommodations, etc. Schools can also make full use of the government resources to purchase different professional support services so that students with SEN can receive professional support apart from teaching and learning.
2. Both primary and secondary schools have tried to provide diversified support services based on their respective school contexts and the types of students' SEN. With the support of the school management, some schools are able to build up an inclusive campus environment and cultivate the inclusive culture and atmosphere properly in alignment with their school vision and religious background.

Good exemplars of Integrated Education implementation in primary schools

3. Some primary schools are able to provide support through utilizing small-class teaching, reducing the number of students in each class, and implementing a pull-out approach. Since the schools have received additional resources to hire SENSTs, the pull-out classes are also taken charge of by SENSTs to provide more in-depth support for students with SEN.
4. Some schools cooperate closely with parents of students with SEN to alleviate their doubts and wariness by explaining to them in detail about their children's performance at school. In addition, some "relatively successful schools" invite parents to observe the lessons and participate in parent-child activities, which improves parents' perception of the school and enables teachers to observe parents' interaction with their children with SEN. It can help teachers further understand the family backgrounds of students with SEN and situations.
5. Some "relatively successful schools" focus on cooperating with the community and professional groups to enhance the overall effectiveness of the support by adopting a diversified support

model. Schools provide specialized support services and interventional treatment for different types of students with SEN through purchasing different professional support services to improve their social skills and help them adapt to school life and learning environment.

6. Those schools adopting a co-teaching approach create more space and capacity for teachers to exchange teaching ideas and co-plan lessons together by reducing the number of teaching periods of the teachers concerned. The teaching plan for students with SEN is personalized as much as possible, and teaching support based on the strengths of students with SEN is provided. Some “relatively successful schools” also keep track of the learning progress of students with SEN closely and make appropriate accommodations to actualize differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction refers to teachers’ adjusting the learning environment, content, process, and outcomes based on students’ learning conditions, abilities, and interests in order to improve their learning performance (Jockey Club “Diversity at Schools” Project, n.d.).

Good exemplars of Integrated Education implementation in secondary schools

7. Given the fact that secondary schools are not implementing small-class teaching at the moment, the high number of students in each class poses difficulties to teachers in supporting students with SEN. Therefore, schools provide support in a small-class teaching mode with the pull-out approach through a co-teaching strategy. The pull-out class approach enables teachers to cater to the learning difficulties of students with SEN with a teacher-student ratio of approximately 1:4 or 1:5. Teachers can also observe the other aspects of the students with SEN through the support during the pull-out classes, which is beneficial for student support team in providing more comprehensive support to those students.
8. School principals’ support is crucial for engaging the whole school in IE. On the one hand, SENCOs would be empowered to lead, integrate and coordinate all works related to IE more effectively. On the other hand, schools would encourage teachers to participate more in training related to IE and provide relevant school-based training opportunities.
9. Some “relatively successful schools” emphasize improving teaching and learning support at Tier 1; SENCOs lead teachers to conduct action research to review and improve the teaching and learning effectiveness in supporting students with SEN. The action research results would also be shared with different subject panels for feedback. Thus, the community of practice that promotes differentiated instruction in schools has gradually been formulated.

E. Recommendations

The successful implementation of IE relies on the integration of various aspects, including government policies, home-school cooperation and professional development of teachers. Therefore, based on the findings of this study and overseas experiences, policy recommendations are suggested under three domains: (1) Teaching and Learning, (2) Government Policy Measures Support, and (3) Professional Support and Home-School Cooperation.

i) Teaching and Learning

The following seven recommendations apply to both primary schools and secondary schools.

Recommendations Require the Government to Increase Resources or Change Current Policies

1. **Establishment of school-based SEN curriculum and assessment criteria: Schools can design school-based SEN curriculum and assessment criteria based on the abilities and learning levels of students with SEN within the school.** Through adjustments in teaching, learning, and assessment, it can avoid the continued difficulty of students with SEN in secondary

and primary schools in catching up with mainstream curriculum, which will weaken their learning motivation and lead to feelings of frustration.

2. **Establishment of the new position of “Curriculum Development Master/Mistress (Integrated Education)”**: The development of IE in Singapore indicated the a special new post entitled Allied Educator (Learning and Behavioural Support) [AED(LBS)] as a specially-trained personnel can have a positive impact in supporting students with learning and behavioural needs. Hong Kong should also establish a new allied professional post to support IE development in schools. As SENCOs are already overwhelmed by the current workload, **it is necessary to set up a new post with the title “Curriculum Development Master/Mistress (Integrated Education)” (CDMIE)** to provide significant support for designing school-based SEN curriculum and assessment criteria in ordinary schools. Apart from better preparing school-based SEN curriculum design, as well as the criteria of teaching, learning, and assessment, this new position can assist schools in implementing differentiated instruction, setting tiered curriculum and assessment content for students with SEN.

Recommendations to Optimize Existing Policies and Measures

3. **Promoting diversified or alternative assessment methods beyond paper-and-pen assessment**: At present, each student with SEN may still need to face public assessments which mainly rely on paper-and-pen at different stages of schooling, students with SEN (especially students with Specific Learning Difficulties and SpLD) are at a disadvantage. **It is recommended to adopt more diversified assessment methods in the public examinations in future, and avoid the excessive use of paper-and-pen assessment to measure the learning outcomes of students with SEN.** Schools can be further encouraged to minimize the frequency of students with SEN participating in unified examinations or assessments and substitute them with alternative and diversified assessment strategies.
4. **Comprehensive assessment of student abilities in student selection at different learning stages to reduce the impact of high-stakes examinations**: It is also important to reduce the impact of high-stakes examinations in student selection at different stages of schooling and **try to fully consider assessing students abilities comprehensively and accurately according to students’ strengths, interview performance, achievements of whole-person development, etc.**
5. **An increase in the number of school visits by EPs and establish a cross-professional of practice for integrated education**: Since SENCOs do not have the chance to communicate with individual professional support personnel on a regular basis, their opportunities for professional growth and learning are impeded. In particular, the insufficient stationing time for EP in schools greatly affects the students’ assessment progress and efficiency. **In addition to continuously increasing the stationing time of EP in schools, a cross-professional community of practice for IE should be established.**
6. **An increase in the number of visits by various professionals to schools and districts for exchanges**: The research team also recommends that **the Government should arrange more opportunities for different professional support personnel to visit schools and districts for more professional exchanges and conduct school-based/district-based teacher/parent development activities.** Professionals can also share their expertise with different stakeholders and frontline personnel who take care of students with SEN on a daily basis through teacher workshops, parents’ talks, seminars, etc.
7. **An increase in sharing of successful experiences and challenges in supporting students with SEN**: It is recommended that sharing more successful exemplars of implementing IE in schools (such as tracking the success cases and challenges encountered in supporting students with SEN,

as well as allowing SENCOs and teachers to witness the achievements of their efforts) as an empowerment for educators.

ii) Government Policy Measures Support

The following 9 suggestions are applicable to both primary and secondary schools, although Suggestion 13 is more suitable for primary schools.

Recommendations Require the Government to Increase Resources or Change Current Policies

8. **Increasing the flexibility of current school resource utilization:** With the continuous increase in the number of students with SEN, the current deployment and calculation methods of the LSG may not be able to meet the actual needs of different school contexts despite the fact that sufficient financial resources are provided. **The deployment of school resources should be more flexible.** The research team recommends that if some schools have too many students with SEN and their entitlements have reached the upper limit of Threshold 3, additional allowances could be allotted in proportion to the number of remaining students after calculation.
9. **Discretionary approval for schools reaching Threshold 2 or above for LSG to continue using some of the remaining funds:** When schools hire SENSTs, they need to deduct part of the LSG after the change of teaching posts. For some schools with a large number of students with SEN, this arrangement inevitably affects their support services and planning. Therefore, the research team recommends that **the Government could allow schools that reach Threshold 2 or above to continue using part of the remaining grant according to their individual school contexts to ensure that the school can provide sustainable support.**
10. **Allowing schools that are currently unable to hire school-based speech therapists to temporarily use related funds to hire other professional support personnel:** Due to the long-lasting shortage of speech therapists, some schools have not been able to hire School-based Speech Therapists, resulting in ineffective resource utilization. To this end, the research team suggests that **a transition period should be considered so that those schools that are currently unable to employ school-based speech therapists can temporarily use the relevant funds to hire other professional support personnel** to meet the immediate needs of schools.
11. **Setting up permanent posts for professional support personnel:** With reference to the establishment of the post of school-based speech therapist, the research team recommends **setting up permanent posts for professional support personnel so that schools can employ suitable professional personnel according to their school-based needs to fill these permanent positions**, such as counselors, occupational therapists, or other professionals, to increase the human resources for supporting IE.
12. **Promoting small-class teaching in secondary schools:** Although the Government has been actively promoting small-class teaching in the last decade, the emphasis is still placed on primary schools and has not yet been extended to secondary schools. The research team recommends that **the Government could further promote small-class teaching in secondary schools by reducing the number of students in each class in order to give teachers more capacity to take care of each student with SEN.**
13. **Encouraging primary and secondary schools that meet the Threshold 2 or above for LSG to implement small-class teaching and increase the teacher-to-class ratio in every ordinary school for supporting integrated education:** The findings of the case studies demonstrated that small-class teaching is a necessary factor for the implementation of cooperative teaching. The

research team recommends that **every primary and secondary school that reaches Threshold 2 or above should be encouraged to implement small-class teaching to support IE**. The maximum number of students per class should be reduced to 20, while at the same time there should be an increase in the corresponding number of teachers. In the long run, the Government can also consider **adjusting the teacher-to-class ratio upward in each ordinary school** by increasing the number of teachers to implement small-class teaching, making small class teaching one of the policy measures to support IE.

Recommendations Require Optimizing Existing Policies and Measures

14. **Increasing the quota for in-service teachers to receive training on integrated education, offering more related training courses, and improving teachers' understanding and skills on DDO, Codes of Practice, and integrated education:** Even though the Government continues to promote the professional development of teachers and provide different types of in-service teacher training on IE, there are still over 40% (45.2%) teachers who have not completed the relevant courses. The survey findings also reveal that their understanding of DDO and Codes of Practice on Education are relatively lower than principals and SENCOs. In this connection, the research team recommends **increasing the quotas of in-service teachers' training on IE and offering more IE training courses to increase teachers' understanding of DDO and Codes of Practice on Education, as well as knowledge and skills required for supporting students with SEN**.
15. **Strengthening university-school partnerships and promoting ongoing professional development:** In addition, the research team also suggests **strengthening university-school partnerships to enhance teachers' capabilities in providing professional support**. The Government can strengthen the collaboration with universities to facilitate teachers to review their teaching effectiveness in IE and seek advice and support from university consultants.
16. **Including integrated education as a compulsory course in pre-service teacher education:** Based on their fruitful experiences in Canada, a systematic professional development framework could be established to facilitate the IE development. Hence, the research team recommends **the pre-service teacher education in the future should include IE as a compulsory course**. Participating in related training on IE can also **help eliminate teachers' traditional elitist views and avoid overemphasizing the improvement of academic abilities of students with SEN**.

iii) Professional Support and Home-school Cooperation

The following 8 suggestions are applicable to both primary and secondary schools, although Suggestion 24 is more suitable for primary schools.

Recommendations Require the Government to Increase Resources or Change Current Policies

17. **Strengthening parent-school collaboration & public and parent education:** The questionnaire data indicated that parents are still unable to support the needs of students with SEN after school due to their busy schedules and lack of the skills and knowledge to care for children with SEN. Frontline teachers believe that parents still resist seeking professional help or advice. Parents indicated in the interviews that they have difficulty in accessing information on supporting their children with SEN. Since schools are the most easily accessible channels for parents of students with SEN to seek help, the research team recommends that **ordinary schools should actively promote home-school cooperation**, and the EDB should provide additional resources to promote parent education, enhance parent's awareness of IE and support for students with SEN, and break through the traditional notion that parents overly focus on the academic performance of their children with SEN.

18. **Educating the public to have more acceptance towards and inclusion of students with SEN:** It is recommended that **along with conducting more publicity, promoting integrated education, and improving the transparency of support information, the Government should educate the public to show more acceptance and inclusion of students** with SEN, and expand their pathway options for further education and career development, such as offering diversified pathways for further studies or vocational education. It is suggested to move away from emphasizing the success and failure of the HKDSE and promote Hong Kong as an inclusive society. According to the experiences of Singapore, an inclusive society requires continuous social acceptance. Therefore, the research team recommends the Government to consider setting a long-term policy direction to achieve a long-lasting inclusion in the community.
19. **Introducing cash allowance for parents of children with SEN to obtain therapy and assessment services, and establishing an electronic system for children with SEN:** For students with SEN and in a relatively difficult situation, parents from working-class families may not be able to afford the costly treatment and assessment services, as well as participating in different group activities. Therefore, the research team recommends the **disbursement of cash allowances to parents of students** with SEN so that their children can receive timely treatment and assessment services. According to the experiences of United Kingdom, every student with SEN would also be supported by IEP. Thus, the research team recommends **an electronic system for children with SEN should be established** so as to provide a comprehensive platform for their parents to track the school support and clinical treatment records of their children with SEN.
20. **Establishing a support network for schools, parents, and community support services:** Based on the above content, the research team recommends further **establishing a support network for schools, parents, and community support services**. Schools can refer to the principle of early identification and early support to enable parents of children with SEN to understand the support services and related resources currently available in the community at the earliest possible time. Community services can be regarded as a support for students with SEN outside school, and can continue to receive professional therapy services at the appropriate time.
21. **Strengthening mental health education through community support and implementing a "one school, one psychiatric nurse" scheme in the long term:** The SENCOs interviewed reflected that the "Student Mental Health Support Scheme" is an effective cross-team professional support programme, which is of great help in supporting students with mental health needs, but it does not guarantee sustainable benefit for students. If the Government could allocate more resources to increase the number of beneficiary schools, it would help schools provide more targeted support more effectively. Based on the current arrangements, the research team further suggests inviting **more social service agencies to join the programme, increasing the frequency of visits by psychiatric nurses to provide regular support, and considering the long-term establishment of a "one school, one psychiatric nurse scheme" to cope with the impact on students' mental health after the epidemic given there are sufficient human resources of related professional support personnel.**

Recommendations Require Optimizing Existing Policies and Measures

22. **Establishing a professional learning community of integrated education in ordinary schools:** The survey findings showed that teachers still have reservations about their confidence in implementing IE independently, and more than half of SENCOs (58.5%) and teachers (57.1%) also feel pressure in taking care of non-Chinese speaking students. It can be seen that when they have to deal with non-Chinese speaking students with SEN, the pressure they face will be greater. To this end, the research team recommends **establishing a professional learning community**

of IE in ordinary schools, supporting the learning experience and whole-person development of non-Chinese speaking students, identifying schools with rich experience in implementing IE to become seed schools, and combining the current professional network support from the EDB to promote exchanges and experience sharing among ordinary schools so as to enhance the professional competence of schools and teachers in taking care of students with SEN and non-Chinese speaking students .

23. **Establishing a support network for non-Chinese speaking students and their parents:** When nurturing seed schools, the Government could consider enhancing their competence in supporting a specified type of students with SEN, which helps gradually improve the school competence in improving support effectiveness. Referring to the network of schools, parents, and community support service mentioned above, **supporting non-Chinese speaking students and their parents could also be included as part of the support content to improve the learning and adaptation effectiveness of non-Chinese speaking students in ordinary schools.** In case non-Chinese speaking students with SEN are identified, early identification and early support can also be provided.
24. **Incorporating values education and personal growth education to enhance students' awareness of mental health:** Survey data reflected that SENCOS experience the greatest pressure when taking care of students with MI, and SENCO interviews also indicated that supporting students with MI is more complex and has a greater impact on overall support effectiveness. As the number of students with MI is increasing significantly, the research team recommends **integrating values education in personal growth education of primary schools in cultivating students' positive thinking and resilience, and to permeate mental and psychological health awareness into different subjects and school campus.**