

EDB to enhance support for students with autism spectrum disorders

The Education Bureau (EDB) announced today (October 3) that with effect from the 2020/21 school year, a multi-disciplinary, evidence-based and whole-school-involved tiered intervention model to support students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) attending public sector ordinary schools will be vigorously implemented. About 10 000 students are expected to benefit from this initiative.

A spokesman for the EDB said that the EDB has been actively implementing integrated education (IE) by providing additional resources, professional support and teacher training for schools to support the diverse learning needs of their students with special educational needs (SEN).

In view of the surge in the number of students diagnosed with ASD in the past 10 years in Hong Kong and that schools in general find it very challenging to teach students with ASD, the EDB has been conducting a pilot project since 2011, trying out numerous evidence-based ASD-specific strategies in 89 primary and secondary schools in phases. It has yielded an effective and evidence-informed three-tiered intervention model under the "Whole School Approach to supporting students with ASD" for local schools to help students with ASD develop emotional regulation, social communication and learning adaptation abilities, and relieve stress faced by their teachers and parents.

The spokesman said, "The EDB has consolidated the strategies with proven effectiveness appropriate for junior primary to junior secondary students into support manuals and related resource packages. They have been distributed to all primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong for application. Regarding the resource package for senior secondary school students, it will be distributed to all secondary schools in Hong Kong in mid-2020.

"Given the significant efficacy of the aforesaid pilot project, the EDB will deploy additional resources to assist all public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools in phases to implement the above-mentioned tiered support model and related strategies so as to enhance the support for students with ASD."

He said, "The EDB will arrange a team of multi-disciplinary professionals comprising educational psychologists, school development officers and inspectors to provide school-based consultation, participate in case discussion and conduct lesson observation with feedback to be given, as well as arrange workshops and networking activities among schools and more to support schools to create an ASD-friendly learning and teaching environment in class (tier-1 support) and implement individual education plans (tier-3 support).

"In addition, with a view to making more room for schools to improve their professional capacity and the competence of their teachers in catering for students with ASD, the EDB will provide an addition of \$62 million per year to enable schools to collaborate with non-governmental organisations in arranging supplemental small group training (tier-2 support) on enhancement of social adaptation and learning ability of students with ASD."

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The spokesman added that the EDB is committed to supporting and catering for students with different types of SEN. Starting from this school year, the EDB has introduced several enhancement measures in IE, including restructuring the funding programmes for IE and extending the Learning Support Grant, upgrading most of the posts of the Special Educational Needs Coordinators to a promotion rank, extending the Enhanced School-based Educational Psychology Service and implementing Enhanced School-based Speech Therapy Service, as well as providing additional resources for public sector ordinary schools admitting non-Chinese speaking students with SEN.