

LCQ2: Support for students with special educational needs

Following is a question by the Hon Lillian Kwok and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Education, Mr Sze Chun-fai, in the Legislative Council today (December 6):

Question:

The Education Bureau (EDB) implemented the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education (IE) in September 1997 with a view to enhancing the quality of IE and enabling students with special educational needs (SEN students) to attend ordinary schools. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that the EDB indicated in 2018 that it would implement the enhancement of the Special Education Management Information System (SEMIS) in the 2018/19 school year subject to the availability of resources, of the details and latest progress of the relevant work;

(2) whether it will make SEMIS available for use by the Health Bureau, the Labour and Welfare Bureau and the Hospital Authority, so as to provide cross-departmental support for SEN students; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it knows, in the past three school years, the specific direction of the post-school transition arrangements (including pursuing further studies, seeking employment and admission to hostels) made by special schools for SEN students and their follow-up actions, as well as the number of SEN graduates and, among them, the respective numbers of those pursuing further studies, taking up employment and admitted to hostels?

Reply:

President,

The Government attaches great importance to the growth and development of students with special educational needs (SEN) and has all along been providing public sector ordinary schools and special schools with additional resources, professional support and teacher training to strengthen schools' support for their students with SEN. In recent years, the expenditure on integrated education has increased by 147 per cent from about \$1.5 billion in the 2017-18 financial year to about \$3.7 billion in the 2022-23 financial year. As for the expenditure on special education, it has increased by 44 per cent from about \$2.5 billion in the 2017-18 financial year to about \$3.6 billion in the 2022-23 financial year.

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Lillian Kwok is as follows:

(1) and (2) The Special Education Management Information System (SEMIS) is a computerised information management system of the Education Bureau (EDB) for collecting and managing the information of students with SEN studying in public sector schools, including special schools, and schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS schools). The system enables the EDB and schools to understand the needs of students for educational services and the support provided to students, so that corresponding policies and measures would be introduced to support students with SEN. The EDB continues to review and upgrade the functions of SEMIS taking into account the education policies, the development of support measures as well as students' needs so as to assist schools in identifying and supporting students in need as early as possible.

The EDB has enhanced the SEN information transfer mechanism since the 2019/20 school year. Under the enhanced mechanism, the pre-school rehabilitation service units subvented by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) can log into an online platform provided by the EDB, prepare and store the electronic version of the Comprehensive Development Progress Report for Pre-school Children (Progress Report) with the consent of parents. The EDB will transmit the Progress Reports through SEMIS to the public sector or DSS primary schools based on their lists of Primary One (P1) students to ensure that the primary schools can understand the special needs of the students concerned as early as possible, so that appropriate support can be provided for their smooth integration into the learning environment of their primary schools. Schools should formulate support measures for the transition of P1 students and record them in the "Summary of Transition Support for P1 Students" in SEMIS. Through the relevant functions, officers of the EDB can understand from primary schools their planning of support measures and offer professional advice as appropriate. Moreover, the EDB established the SEN information transfer mechanism between secondary schools and post-secondary institutions under SEMIS in the 2021/22 school year, which allows public sector and DSS secondary schools to, with the consent of parents and students, directly transfer SEN information of school leavers to their recipient local post-secondary institutions or organisations through the "Transfer of SEN Information of Secondary School Leavers Online Platform" under SEMIS, thereby further enhancing the effectiveness of transition and adaptation of secondary school leavers to post-secondary education. At present, SEN information that can be transferred through SEMIS includes SEN type, tier of support required, summary of the support rendered, recommendations on special examination arrangements and medical reports. In sum, SEMIS provides a platform for information transfer from the pre-school through primary and secondary levels to post-secondary institutions or organisations, thus ensuring that the schools or education organisations concerned can provide support for students with SEN at different stages of education effectively.

At present, the main objective of SEMIS is to enable the EDB and schools to acquire the SEN information of students for educational purposes. As the related information involves students' personal data, the EDB cannot disclose it to any third parties, including other government departments, without the

written consent from the parents concerned.

(3) The EDB is very concerned about the exit pathways of special school leavers and has been providing special schools with resources and support to help students make good preparation for post-school arrangements. Special schools will help their students plan for their post-school arrangements in accordance with their interests, capabilities and needs. To prepare students for their adjustment to daily lives after they have left school, special schools would design school-based curricula with unique features for students, such as community training, workplace practicum and pre-vocational training, to nurture students' independent living skills, develop their potential, and integrate into society. Furthermore, special schools will also provide additional training relating to interview skills, vocational skills assessments, social etiquette, work attitude, and completion of personal particulars and application forms, etc for their students according to their individual abilities and aptitudes, with a view to preparing them for their future pathways.

When students approach the senior secondary level, schools' multidisciplinary teams will discuss with the parents on their children's options for post-school services and assist them in applying for appropriate post-school services. Schools generally arrange for school social workers to follow up with the school leavers for two years through various means. The arrangements include liaising with the parents or carers concerned to keep track of school leavers' adjustment to daily lives and, depending on their needs, referring the school leavers to District Support Centres for Persons with Disabilities or Integrated Family Service Centres subvented by the SWD, as well as helping them apply for Residential Respite Services under the SWD, while they are awaiting the services.

In the school years from 2019/20 to 2021/22, the numbers of special school students graduated from school upon completion of Secondary Six are 559, 584 and 516 respectively. According to information gathered from special schools, the numbers of their graduates pursuing further studies, including vocational training, in September of the following school year are 174, 197 and 175 respectively; the numbers of graduates being employed are 28, 30 and 14 respectively; the numbers of graduates receiving residential care service are 45, 50 and 47 respectively; the numbers of graduates receiving vocational rehabilitation services or day training services are 217, 196 and 149 respectively. It is worth noting that the above figures only reflect the situation in September at the respective times. Many graduates will be gradually admitted to receive the various services mentioned above in the middle of the year.

The EDB will continue to provide special schools with resources and support for helping students transit to adult life smoothly after they have left schools.

Thank you, President.