

LCQ4: Special education

Following is a question by the Hon Lillian Kwok and a reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (October 18):

Question:

According to the information from the Education Bureau (EDB), the number of students with special educational needs (SEN students) increased by around 30 per cent from the 2017-2018 school year to the 2021-2022 school year. On the other hand, the EDB launched a teacher professional development framework on integrated education (IE) in the 2007-2008 school year to offer Basic, Advanced and Thematic Courses to teachers. However, among the overall number of teachers in public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools in the 2021-2022 school year, only 47 per cent and 37 per cent of teachers have received special education training respectively. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the numbers of teachers in public sector primary and secondary schools who have completed the Basic, Advanced and Thematic Courses respectively since the 2017-2018 school year; whether it will review the contents of such courses and other relevant professional development courses; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it will review the learning content of SEN students to enable them to adapt to the demands of society nowadays and further establish a career ladder for them; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will review the development of IE and the coverage of relevant subsidies, so as to cope with the demand arising from the continuous increase in the number of SEN students and support the parents and teachers of such students in facing pressure; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government has all along been attaching great importance to supporting students with special educational needs (SEN). In recent years, the expenditure on integrated education (IE) 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.

To assist public sector ordinary schools in supporting students with SEN, the Education Bureau (EDB) provided schools with additional resources, professional support and teacher training on top of regular subvention. The EDB also collaborates with non-governmental organisations to help schools

implement the Whole School Approach to IE.

Our reply to the Hon Lillian Kwok's question is as follows:

(1) The EDB places great emphasis on professional training on special education for teachers, actively enhances teachers' professional knowledge and capabilities, promotes the development of IE, and supports the diverse learning needs of students.

Starting from the 2007/08 school year, the EDB has launched a teacher professional development framework on IE to provide serving teachers with structured training programmes pitched at basic, advanced and thematic levels, commonly known as BAT Courses. From the 2017/18 to 2021/22 school years, the numbers of teachers having completed the basic, advanced and thematic courses are 4 314, 1 405 and 2 135 respectively, totaling about 8 000. It is worth noting that the number of teachers having completed the BAT Courses per year has increased from 1 485 in the 2017/18 school year to 3 331 in the 2021/22 school year, representing an increase of more than one-fold. From this, it can be seen that teachers are currently more enthusiastic in enrolling in the relevant courses than before the epidemic. As we expect that the number of teachers attending the BAT Courses will continue to rise, the EDB will increase the number of training places to meet the demand.

The EDB has been listening to the views of the sector to continually review and enhance the contents and arrangements of in-service teacher training programmes on IE, so as to cater for the needs of schools, teachers and students. Starting from the 2021/22 school year, we have organised a new online Basic Course to enable teachers to take the course more flexibly. We have also increased the number of training places for the BAT Courses so as to allow more teachers to receive the relevant training. In addition, the EDB has offered nine types of Thematic Courses, helping teachers focus on the understanding of different support strategies. We have also incorporated mental health into the Thematic Courses with a view to making the BAT Courses more comprehensive. Moreover, the EDB organises the training programme for new-to-role Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCO), and regularly conducts activities to facilitate professional exchanges.

On pre-service teacher training, the EDB collaborated closely with teacher education universities (TEUs) and introduced the Guiding Framework for Teacher Education Programmes in 2023, incorporating the knowledge and skills in supporting students with SEN as core elements of the programmes. When designing the pre-service training programmes, TEUs will cover contents of the Basic Course under the BAT Courses, so that newly-joined teachers can possess qualification of the Basic Course.

(2) IE is based on the spirit of "equal opportunities and teaching students in accordance with their abilities", allowing students with SEN to integrate into mainstream schools. Schools must fully utilise the schools' and other resources and adopt various adaptation and support strategies to cater for the different learning needs of students and help students with different abilities transit to multiple pathways.

Regarding the curriculum, under the principle of "one curriculum framework for all", schools can follow the central curriculum and systematically adapt the learning contents, processes and requirements in accordance with students' abilities, personal interests and learning traits to provide students with SEN with rich and diversified learning experiences. As for the senior secondary level, elective subjects in the curriculum are broad and diversified, including a series of applied learning courses to cater for students' varied interests, needs and abilities, thereby helping unleash their potential and facilitating articulation to multiple pathways.

In order to help students with SEN develop their potential according to their own strengths and interests and explore the suitable study or career pathways, the EDB launched the Strength-based Programme under the Project on Whole School Approach to Providing Tiered Support for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the 2021/22 school year to unleash the potential and strengthen the life planning of senior secondary students with ASD. The 2022 Policy Address has announced the expansion of the project to benefit about 100 secondary schools. Moreover, the EDB develops life planning education through various measures, such as the Business-School Partnership Programme under which diversified career exploration activities are organised for students. Many organisations in the service, retail and hotel industries have arranged activities for students with SEN. In addition, we also organise thematic seminars for teachers to equip them with the knowledge of life planning as well as the guidance skills and pathways for studies and career development of students with SEN.

(3) The EDB has been reviewing the development of IE and introduced a series of enhanced measures to further strengthen the effectiveness of IE in recent years. As regards the support for teachers, the EDB has, starting from the 2019/20 school year, extended the Learning Support Grant to all public sector ordinary schools and substantially increased the grant rates so that schools can flexibly deploy resources, employ additional staff or hire professional services to support teachers. On the manpower front, the EDB provides regular teaching posts of Special Educational Needs Support Teacher and upgrades the rank of SENCO in public sector ordinary schools with a comparatively large number of students with SEN, enabling SENCO to fulfil their leadership and coordination responsibilities more effectively. As regards the professional support, the EDB has further extended the Enhanced School-based Educational Psychology Service and created school-based speech therapist posts to implement the Enhanced School-based Speech Therapy Service. All of the above enhanced measures provide support to teachers and parents and facilitate schools in implementing IE more effectively.

As regards the support for parents, the EDB launched the "SENSE" website to promote the understanding of the development of IE among parents, schools and the public. Through the "Smart Parent Net" website, practical information on supporting children with SEN is also provided for parents, so as to facilitate them to establish good parent-child relationship and nurture children's physical and psychological development.

In sum, the effective implementation of IE relies on the concerted

efforts of all stakeholders. The EDB will continue to strengthen teachers' professional training and support for schools, teachers and parents and work hand in hand with different stakeholders to build a caring and inclusive society.

Thank you, President.