



I want to be included.

for over 10 years, said there are some practical reasons for schools not to be “open” on this issue.

“Students may not be able to understand. And even if you explain it to them one by one, you never know how they are going to take it,” said Ms Wong.

Ms Wong has had a student with a mild intellectual disability, which is one of the special educational needs identified by the Education Bureau under this policy.

“Some students would laugh at her,” said Ms Wong. “They took photos of her and put them on the Internet. They even said in mockery that she was the most beautiful girl in the school. The girl misunderstood and believed what they said. It made more fun for them to further bully her.”

She said some students like teasing others. If the schools make it known that it admits SEN students, the situation might get even worse.

“If the school said some students are hyperactive, the other students might tease at them even more seriously, saying that ‘the school has also announced you are an idiot,’” said Ms Wong.

She also said that the problem is more serious in band three schools.

“Some kinds of SEN students, such as students with mild intellectual disabilities, usually have poorer academic results,” said Ms Wong. “Therefore, they would get into band three schools.”

Ms Wong said the students in these schools usually have a lower sense of achievement. They like to fool around and make fun of others, so students with mild intellectual disabilities become their targets.

She also said some parents of SEN students also do not want other students to know if there are SEN students on campus. “If other students talk about their children (with SENS), they think the school is trying to force them to drop school,” she said.

She said some parents even hid their children’s learning difficulty from the schools, which may deprive the students of needed assistance.

Ms Wong said when they suspected and questioned whether students have learning problems, they discovered that students had already been diagnosed in primary schools.

“Some parents just think that when their children are promoted to secondary schools, their learning problems would fade, so they do not let the secondary school know,” said Ms Wong.

Due to privacy, parents can choose not to provide past evaluation results and primary school reports to the secondary schools.

“The parents do not tell us, so help is delayed,” she said. “By the time we know it, the problem has already worsened. The students’ improper behaviour may have been made him labelled as ‘bad’ and their relationship with teachers will have been affected.”

When schools suspect their students have SEN, they can invite educational psychologists to help assess them, and see whether mainstream schools are the suitable for them.

According to Education Bureau’s instructions, students with two or more special educational needs and students with moderate intellectual disabilities are not suitable for entry into mainstream schools.

# more education, more integration

by Lina Leung and Winnie Tse

Integrating students with disabilities into mainstream schools has not been as seamless as Hong Kong’s education authorities might have wished. This may be due to the lack of “education” about the premise behind “inclusive” education.

According to the Education Bureau, about 18,000 students in Hong Kong have been identified as having Special Education Needs (SEN), meaning that they have at least one type of the eight learning disabilities.

Under the Disability Discrimination Ordinance, schools cannot reject SEN students from entering their schools through the present school places allocation system. These SEN students are “integrated” to

the mainstream schools, and the schools are responsible in providing appropriate support to them.

To facilitate integrated education, from school year 2008/09, all primary and secondary schools are required to adopt a “Whole School Approach”, to “create inclusive culture, produce inclusive policies and evolve inclusive practices.”

Most students at these schools do not know that their schools are taking part in integrated education. Kong Wang-chiu, a form five student in a Ma On Shan school, said he does not know what integrated education means and his teachers have never talked about it.

A form one student at another Ma On Shan school, who only identified herself as Wong, said she knows of a hyperactive student being bullied

by other students, but she and her classmates were not sure whether the student was a SEN student.

“He always screams in class and laughs after talking to himself. My classmates even think he is mentally ill,” she said. “Our class teacher never talks about this.”

Ms Wong, a social worker who has worked in different secondary schools



Miss Wong, a form one student, said she did not know whether her classmate is SEN student, but there was discrimination against him.



Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder is one of the eight types of Special Education Needs.

## 8 types of Special Education Needs

- Specific Learning Difficulties
- Intellectual Disability
- Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder
- Physical Disability
- Visual Impairment
- Hearing Impairment
- Speech or Language Impairment.

## Resources for helping SEN students

Under present funding mode, SEN students are divided into three tiers. For each of them, resources will be given to help their schools cater for the specific needs of SEN students.

Source: Education Bureau



**Target students:** Mild and transient learning difficulties

**Resources:** No extra resources. Depend on quality teaching



**Target students:** Persistent learning difficulties who need 'add-on' support

**Resources:** \$10,000 for each tier-2 student



**Target students:** Severe disabilities who need intensive support

**Resources:** \$20,000 for each tier-3 student



However, as stipulated in the Disability Discrimination Ordinance, schools cannot refuse students' applications or persuade them to apply another school because of their disabilities. Parents can insist that their children stay at a mainstream school even if they have been advised not to.

Lee Sau-ying, the principal of a primary school at Tsing Yi which admits SEN students, said that parents are concerned how their children are perceived if they attend a special school.

"They think that if their children are admitted to mainstream schools, others would not regard their children as 'stupid', but only 'less intelligent'," said the principal whose school is

reported to have over 40 identified SEN students.

Ms Lee said that she encountered a case in which the child has a moderate intellectual disability, but the parents insisted that he studied in a mainstream school.

"Actually the Education Bureau had advised that the child should not go to a mainstream school," said Ms Lee. "The child cannot communicate with schoolmates well."

She said the school had been putting effort into teaching him individually since the child entered primary four.

"From 8 to 9 a.m., the child studied in normal classes, and after nine, the child was taught by a teacher individually," said Ms Lee. "Eventually the parents found it was really not suitable, so the child left our school."

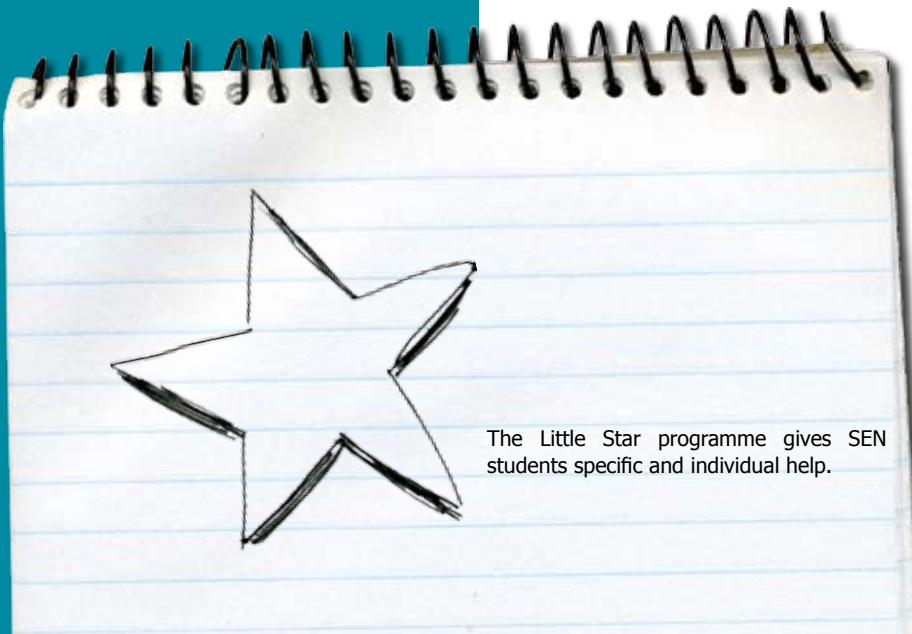
Ms Lee said if parents insist that their children who are really unsuitable for mainstream education attend such schools, it is wasting both the school's resources and the student's time.

"But primary schools are not allowed to reject students," said Ms Lee.

Meanwhile, many SEN students are benefiting from the policy. Tim, a primary six student from Ms Lee's school who has been diagnosed with specific learning difficulties, is one of the students who has benefited from the "Little Star" programme.



Primary school principal Lee Sau-ying said parents were worried about the labelling effect of special schools.



The Little Star programme gives SEN students specific and individual help.

The "Little Star" programme is a programme designed by school teachers, which consists of remedial lessons where students like Tim are separated from the class to receive specific and individual help.

"They help me correct how I hold my pen, making writing much easier for me", said Tim, who had difficulties in holding pencils and write in the past.

However, experts said separate classes are not good for students.

"Inclusion means having them all in the same class," said Christine Forlin, a professor in inclusive education at the Hong Kong Institute of Education. "It becomes a special class within a mainstream school."

She said the students would lose their ability to be included in their daily life at school.

Prof Forlin also said the schools should let other normal students know about SEN students, so as to let them know how they can support SEN students.

"Peer-to-peer support is very important," said Prof Forlin.

She added that Hong Kong schools should enhance cultural acceptance and positive attitude towards students with SEN.

However, she said the main challenges in implementing the policy is the rigid examination system in Hong Kong.

"Teachers now have to make sure all the students can achieve the exam result at the end. But we can't expect all students to achieve the same level, even with same type of input," said Prof Forlin.

She said the schools would better allow for different learning outcome and levels of learning outcome. For example, students should have flexibility in presenting their work in a variety of medium such as graphic and dance.

"A good inclusion should be good for all students, not just the SEN students," said Prof Forlin.

The government also said that it was ideal for the school to create inclusive culture.

"Schools should not conceal [integrated education] from the students," said Chum Chui-chi Hera, the Pricipal Education Officer (School Administration and Support) of the Education Bureau (EDB). "Introducing [integrated education] to them can help create an inclusive culture, facilitating their tolerance towards SEN students."

She said the government hope to improve socieity's and parents' knowledge on the characteristics of SEN students. ▽



Christine Forlin said peer-to-peer support was important for inclusive education.



Specifically designed teaching materials facilitate the learning of SEN students.