

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN AN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY FROM HONG KONG****Twiggy Chan****Mantak Yuen***The University of Hong Kong*

*This case study provides an overview of current policy, practices and problems concerning inclusion in one international secondary school in Hong Kong. A total of 13 interviews were conducted with the school management team, teachers, students and parents, supplemented by 12 classroom observations and two 'student-shadowing' exercises. Findings suggest that the school has been reasonably successful in raising teachers' awareness of inclusive education principles, creating a whole-school culture of inclusiveness, and forming a partnership with parents. However, the commitment of individual teachers to implementation of inclusive practices in their own classrooms varies. Some teachers are not adaptive enough in their teaching approach, and have difficulties differentiating instruction and learning activities. Improvements are also needed in the way that teachers work with their education assistants (classroom aides). Implications for improvement are discussed.*

**Introduction**

Studies have shown that a 'whole-school approach' is required for high quality inclusive education (Lipsky, 2003; UNESCO, 2002). Within this approach, teachers and others share a common understanding of the purposes of inclusive education, and work together to deliver a differentiated curriculum with flexible teaching and assessment accommodations. In order to achieve this, collaborative involvement of school administrators, mainstream teachers, resource teachers, education assistants, students and parents are essential. As Dyson and Millward (1997) point out, the whole-school approach to inclusion requires the establishment of a system that facilitates cooperation among all teachers in areas of shared expertise, participatory decision-making, and in-class support teaching.

A key element in the concept of inclusive education is the belief that, as far as possible, all students with special educational needs (SEN) should be enrolled in their local schools, and provided with support services and education suited to their abilities and needs (UNESCO, 2002; Westwood, 2013). This belief builds on the fundamental principles of respect for human diversity, and the right to equal educational opportunities for all — as promulgated in the *Salamanca Statement on Special Needs Education* (UNESCO, 1994).

To implement principles of equality and respect for human rights, all inclusive schools must place the needs of the students at the centre in their policies and practices (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2007; UNESCO, 2002). In particular, there should be an emphasis on adapting instruction to accommodate significant individual differences among students. This process is usually referred to now as 'differentiation' (Lewis & Batts, 2005; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010; Tomlinson, 2014). Inclusive education requires the creation of a learning environment which enables students to benefit from a personalized approach.

In successful inclusive schools, the curriculum and teaching and learning processes are matched closely to the needs and talents of individual students (Forlin, 2007; Leadbeater, 2004; Miliband, 2004; Westwood, 2013). Tailoring the curriculum in this way provides students with a wider choice of study paths, and presents curriculum content that is

relevant and matched to students' interests and abilities (Hopkins, 2007). In terms of teaching methods, teachers vary their strategies for presentation and for student engagement during lessons (Lewis & Batts, 2005; Nordlund, 2003; Rock, Gregg, Ellis & Gable, 2008). Methods of assessment of learning may also need to be modified (Algozzine & Anderson, 2007). Underpinning these adaptations is a desire to create a supportive environment that respects and accommodates student diversity (Forlin, 2007).

#### *Inclusive education in Hong Kong*

In Hong Kong, the concept of inclusive education was first introduced in 1997, under a scheme titled *A Whole-school Approach to Integrated Education* (Education Bureau Hong Kong Special Administrative Region [HKSAR], 2008a). The original term was 'integration', not inclusion; but in line with international trends 'integration' gradually gave way to the broader concept of 'inclusion'.

In recent years the government has continued to demonstrate its commitment to developing inclusive education. For example, in the school year 2009-2010, 23 secondary schools and 282 primary schools in the public sector were provided with a Learning Support Grant to assist students with special needs within the whole-school approach (Education Bureau HKSAR, 2009; Education Bureau HKSAR, 2010). But even with these positive measures in place, inclusion is still very much a 'work in progress' in Hong Kong. To ensure the effective use of the extra funding and support from the government, it is crucial now to identify, and share among schools, the factors that contribute to successful inclusive practice.

Research on inclusive education in Hong Kong has so far focused mainly on mainstream primary schools, and has used quantitative data analysis (e.g., Dowson, 2007; Hong Kong Institute of Education [HKIE], 2003; Poon-McBrayer, 2004). For example, a case study of four 'integrated' schools showed that co-teaching, parent involvement, social interaction, and whole school approach are key factors contributing to success (HKIE, 2003). In addition, according to Dowson (2007), inclusion of students with special needs requires teachers to have professional knowledge for curriculum differentiation, flexible assessment methods, good classroom management, co-teaching skills, and willingness to collaborate with parents.

To provide more comprehensive insights into inclusive education there is a need also for *qualitative* research into the practices actually operating in schools and classrooms, and to identify specific challenges faced by secondary schools.

#### *Purpose of the study*

The purpose of the study was to identify factors contributing to the success of inclusion in a target school, to delineate the major challenges the school is facing, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the whole-school approach in implementing inclusive education principles. Findings from the study may help guide educators in other international secondary schools (and all other secondary schools in Hong Kong) when implementing inclusive education.

#### **Method**

##### *The school*

The school is one of more than twenty international schools operating in Hong Kong, and is well known for its whole-school approach to inclusive education. In one of their mission statements it is proclaimed that the school aims to *celebrate diversity in an inclusive and supportive international community*.

In the school, all curriculum subjects other than foreign languages are taught in English. Approximately 1700 students aged between 12 to 18 years attend, and come from over 45 different nationalities. Within this population, 200 students (12%) are registered as having mild to moderate levels of special educational need (SEN). These needs arise from intellectual disabilities (such as those due to Down syndrome or Autism Spectrum Disorders), and from physical disabilities such as cerebral palsy. Some other students have been assessed as having specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. Another 85 students (5%) in the school are classified as gifted, and are regarded as also needing differentiated teaching.

Some SEN students are placed in regular classes and receive support in that setting. There are also some special groupings and classes specifically for SEN students. When determining placement of students with SEN, the school assesses five domains of proficiency: self-help skills, independent living skills (e.g. feeding, drinking, eating and

toileting), communication skills, social skills, and basic skills of reading, writing and listening. Students with SEN are placed at one of five levels in these domains, to reflect the amount of accommodation they need. Level 1 and 2 students are placed in mainstream classes with support. Level 3 and 4 students whose needs are more complex are educated in the Learning Support Centre (LSC). Students at level 5 have very severe needs and are referred to the special school which operates under the same organization to which the school belongs.

Three departments have been established to address student diversity, namely: the Learning Support Centre (LSC), the Individual Needs Department (IND) and the Gifted and Talented Department (G & T). LSC is dedicated to implementing individualized curriculum for SEN students who could not cope with mainstream—such as those with intellectual disability. The IND supports students whose needs can be accommodated in the mainstream classes—such as those with dyslexia or attention deficit disorder. They are provided with in-class support and with extra classes in basic literacy and numeracy. In the academic year 2009-2010, 28 students were supported by the LSC while 200 students were supported by the IND. The G&T department supports the top 5% of students in each academic or arts subject by coordinating subject acceleration, curriculum compacting, and by holding extra-curricular activities. The three departments provide a clear division of responsibilities, allowing coordinated support to subject teachers, students and parents.

**Table 1. Policy and practices of inclusive education in the case school**

- (a) Inclusion and personalised learning were the major targets of the school and there was a clear policy to support students with SEN.
- (b) A professional resource team was tasked to coordinate inclusive education in the school.
- (c) A wide choice of curriculum was available, such as BTEC and ASDAN, to allow every student to find the most suitable path of development at his/her own pace. IEPs were adopted for students with SEN.
- (d) A central student register shared among teachers provides detailed information and record of students.
- (e) EAs were heavily relied on to provide individual support to students with SEN.
- (f) The school attempted to create an inclusive school environment.
- (g) Parents were frequently involved in the education of their children.

In this study, key aspects of the whole-school approach to inclusive education were explored, including school policy, staff roles, staff training, curriculum, teaching approaches, assessment, and partnership with parents.

#### *Interviews*

In this qualitative approach, 13 semi-structured interviews were conducted (in English) with selected key stakeholders—school management team, resource teachers, education assistants (EAs), mainstream subject-specialist teachers (mainstream classroom only), students with and without SEN, and parents of students with SEN (Table 1).

**Table 2. Stakeholders interviewed**

	Stakeholder group	Number of interviewees	Number of interviews	Group/ Individual
(a)	School management	2	4	Individual
(b)	Education assistants	2	1	Group
(c)	Mainstream subject teachers who teach students with SEN	4 (teaching PE, History, Art, English)	4	Individual
(d)	Students with SEN	2 (Year 8 and 10)	2	Individual
(e)	Mainstream students	2 (Year 10)	1	Group
(f)	Parents of students with SEN	1	1	Individual

The interview questions were based on guidelines from *Catering for student differences: Indicators for inclusion*, issued by the Education Bureau in Hong Kong (Education Bureau HKSAR, 2008b). Four areas of concern are covered, namely: management and organisation, learning and teaching, student support and school ethos, and student performance. The guidelines themselves are an adapted version of an instrument from the Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education in the UK (Booth et al., 2000; CSIE, 2002). Appendix I shows the Mainstream Subject

Teacher Interview Guide. Details of the interview questions are available from the corresponding author of this paper.

Semi-structured interview technique was employed in order to obtain more information where necessary. Additional questions were asked to follow up or probe responses, or to clarify answers and comments.

#### *Classroom Observation*

Twelve classroom observations were conducted to obtain first-hand information about how teachers actually interact with students in the classroom, how differentiation is practised in class, how education assistants (paraprofessionals) are used, and how teachers interact with students with SEN. Each lesson observation lasted for approximately 35 minutes.

The students observed ranged in age from 13 to 19 years (Grades 7 to 13). Some observations were conducted in classes solely for students with SEN, and others in mainstream inclusive classes containing around thirty students, including one to three students with SEN.

In the classes containing only students with SEN (six to eight students), both academic and non-academic subjects were observed—English, Chinese, Mathematics, Drama, Music and Brain Gym. Students were assigned to the small group teaching for one academic year. In mainstream inclusive classes (thirty students) subjects observed were Art, English/Reading, Physical Education and History. Teachers responsible for these classes were informed in advance that the lessons would be observed.

An observation schedule designed by Rao and Cheng (2009) was adapted for recording purposes. Time sampling observation was conducted every five minutes. No video-taping was used due to privacy concerns. Notes were taken of key events that happened during the lesson, and follow-up discussion with the teacher occurred later. The targeted behaviour to be observed was related to teachers' choice of the instruction methods, organization, classroom activities and materials used. Students at work, teachers' encouragement, and teachers' adaptation for specific disabling conditions were also observed. Appendix II shows the Classroom Observation Form. Details of classroom observation follow-up questions and checklists are available from the corresponding author of this paper.

#### *Student shadowing*

The aim of the student shadowing was to observe interactions between the selected student and his/her peers, both inside the classroom and during recess time. This included how actively the student was involved in class, whether there was any bullying and how EAs helped the student with their learning.

Two male students with Asperger Syndrome (Grade 7 and 8) were shadowed in class for a whole school day from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., covering 5 classroom periods. These mainstreamed students were nominated by the school. Field notes were taken throughout the shadowing period. The two students were subsequently interviewed with questions such as *Do you have learning goals that you are working on?* and *Have your teachers taught you useful ways of tackling assignments and class work?*

#### *Data analysis and interpretation*

For understanding the inclusion policy and practices of the school, information collected from interviews was analysed and categorized. This process is discussed in detail below under *Findings*.

Information supplied by different interviewees was counter-checked and clarification was sought from the relevant staff member where necessary. School documents were also reviewed to help understand school policy, supporting staff roles, funding, curriculum, and partnerships with parents. Primary information collected from classroom observation and student shadowing was used to supplement other data on learning and teaching and social inclusion.

The collated information assisted with a critical evaluation of the effectiveness of the whole-school approach, with an aim of identifying key factors influencing successful inclusion, and the challenges still faced by the school.

#### *Validity of data*

The case school sets out the major policies and practices of inclusion on its website and in relevant policy documents. All these sources were examined to counter-check information collected from interviews, classroom observation and student shadowing. A total of 13 semi-structured interviews with selected stakeholders were

conducted, with 12 classroom observation, and 2 student shadowing exercises. These sources of data allowed all information to be checked and confirmed from different perspectives. Supplementary information obtained through discussions with all participants also increased the credibility of the findings.

### *Findings*

This section first describes the general policies and practices evident in the school. Factors influencing the extent to which policies were actually implemented, and the challenges still ahead are then discussed.

#### *Inclusion policy and supporting structure*

It was noted that the school has a very clear policy of inclusion in its vision statement—namely to *celebrate diversity in an inclusive and supportive international community*. The school's SEN policy was readily available on its website for access by parents, students and members of the public. The policy reflected international best practice, as set out for example in the *Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs* in Britain (Department for Education and Skills [UK], 2001). The main thrust is to meet the needs of most students with SEN in mainstream classes, but also to provide more intensive support for students where necessary. This policy paved the way for whole-school collaboration, supported by a structured and dedicated team in the school.

In order to facilitate information sharing and collaboration among teachers of various school subjects, the school maintains a central computer register of information about all students with SEN (student's strengths, weaknesses and special needs). In most cases, strategies for support are also suggested; and where relevant the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) is shown. Using online access, teachers can update data, such as concerns over a student's emotions or behaviour, or any recent improvements in the student's work or social interaction with classmates. This process ensures consistency in the assistance provided for a student across different curriculum subjects.

#### *Parent involvement*

As suggested by Forlin (2007), partnership with parents is required to support inclusion in school. An effective whole-school approach must involve parents, who play a significant role in assisting teachers to meet the needs of the students by sharing important information and by helping students at home. For instance, using suggestions from a parent, the school successfully included a Grade 13 student with Down syndrome into a mainstream class by modifying his programme.

The school policy states that all parents of students with SEN should be treated as valued partners. It was noted that parents were invited to attend school meetings, particularly for discussing IEPs and evaluating their child's progress. Parents also receive emails from teachers on the performance of their children. Interviews with parents indicated that this involvement has enabled the school to provide more personalised education suited the needs of students.

#### *Differentiated curricula*

In some cases, students with special needs did not require any modification to the mainstream curriculum in any subject, but benefited instead from extra in-class support. Peer assistance is very helpful in this respect. In addition, some students simply attended a part-time support class for basic literacy, numeracy and time management.

Classroom observation indicated that differentiated curriculum and support could take various forms. The most common was modification to mainstream content (reduction or simplification). In one example, a student with poor literacy skills was provided with simpler tasks and different learning materials. Classroom observations (and the shadowing of two students) also revealed that the availability of differentiated curricula to suit SEN students plays a very important part in achieving inclusive education in the school. Every SEN student was provided with an Individual Education Plan (IEP), based on learning needs, interests and strengths. IEPs are reviewed annually in consultation with student and parents.

In addition to modifying mainstream curriculum, the school also offers 'alternative routes' to learning that put less emphasis on academic skills. Courses accredited by ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) with a focus on life skills, were offered to students where appropriate. Students in Grades 12 and 13 were offered the option of an 'advance diploma', or a more basic award. For students with more severe disabilities receiving direct support from LSC, a 'vocational foundation diploma' is available.

*Personalised assessment*

Differentiation in assessment strategies was practised in the school. For internal formative assessments, students were often given a choice of assignments that they felt would allow them to demonstrate their knowledge in a certain subject. For instance, a student with poor writing skills was allowed to use oral and filmed presentation to demonstrate what he had learnt from field work. This approach avoided students being excluded from the mainstream curriculum simply because of deficiencies in literacy skills.

While the forms of assessment are varied, the criteria for assessment are standardised as far as possible, to reflect all students' abilities at true levels. Students with SEN are often assigned tailor-made tasks to test their achievements. For instance, in the Literacy Target Group (an English class designed for students with learning difficulties) alternative assessments such as creating a PowerPoint presentation, designing an advertisement, or drawing a Mind Map were used to supplement general assessment. These assessments were intended to reveal more about each student's abilities, and to give students confidence in their own potential to succeed.

When standard examinations were necessary, it was noted that students with SEN were given 25% extra time to complete tests. Some were allowed to use laptops, and others had access to someone who read aloud the test questions.

**Table 3. Lesson delivery types observed during lessons**

<i>Lesson</i>	<i>Lesson delivery types</i>
English language	Oral presentation by teacher
Physical education	Oral presentation by teacher, plus practical tasks
Art	Oral presentation by teacher, plus drawing
Mathematics	Oral presentation by teacher and project-based learning
Chinese language	Oral presentation by teacher; audio-visual materials; rote copying; discussion
English language	Use of library and discussions
Music	Oral presentation by teacher; audio visual material; drawing
Brain gym	Oral presentation by teacher; discussion; practical activities
Art	Oral presentation by teacher; drawing
Physical education	Oral presentation by teacher; practical tasks
ASDAN	Oral presentation by teacher; discussion
History	Oral presentation by teacher; project learning

In addition to employing differentiation in assessment, the school also personalised student report-cards to some extent, by describing in detail students' learning outcomes and their personal strengths. Learning outcomes were recorded using conventional grades from A to E, but personal achievements had detailed comments and targets for improvement. A mainstream teacher remarked: *...we try to give as full a picture as we can*. This form of assessment seems to strike a good balance between recognising genuine efforts of students with SEN, and ensuring overall fairness in assessment.

*Learning and teaching*

The key to differentiation is the use of a wide range of methods, activities, resources, and lesson organisation (Spillman, 1991; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010; Westwood, 2013). When compared with differentiation in curriculum and assessment, it was observed that differentiation in teaching was less well developed in the school. This was also a finding in an independent assessment of the school by the Council of International Schools. Several overseas and local studies have also concluded that teachers do not find it easy to adapt their style of teaching in mixed-ability and inclusive classrooms (e.g., Chan, Chang, Westwood & Yuen, 2002; Janney & Snell, 2004; Vogt & Rogalla, 2009; Yuen, Westwood & Wong, 2005).

Table 2 provides a summary of the lesson delivery types observed during lessons. It was apparent that oral presentation by teacher remained the predominant method used in 11 out of 12 lessons observed. Oral presentations tended not to be adapted at all to individual differences among students; and this passive 'transmissionist'

communication style was difficult for students with SEN. These students normally need to be much more actively involved in the learning process. In most cases, oral presentation was supplemented by some form of classroom activity, including drawing, practical tasks, discussion, or project learning. But only in a few classes were activities differentiated according to ability of the students, or any use made of ability grouping. Overall, very little effective differentiation in teaching was observed. For example, in an English reading class all students were required to answer the same set of questions.

Mainstream teachers tended to rely on education assistants (EAs) in the room to interpret lesson content, and to explain instructions to students with SEN. The teachers appeared not to have differentiated in advance the way in which skills, knowledge and concepts were to be presented. Nor were they actively responsive to students' difficulties. An EA commented that responding at an individual level is very important to students with SEN:

*Instead of just saying Do this! you need to ask the student: What do you need to do now? How are you going to do that? What is the best way? Then students will think for themselves, and will realise that they are able to do all that.*

One case of collaborative teaching was observed. The Learning Support Director commended the effectiveness of this type of partnership, where the SEN specialist and the English Teacher can co-plan, co-deliver, and co-assess. In Grades 7 and 8, students with weak English skills were withdrawn from the mainstream English classes to form Literacy Target Groups (around 24 to 30 students), co-taught by an English mainstream teacher and a support teacher. An education assistant was also present. This arrangement was highly valued by the mainstream English teacher, as she had support in carrying out differentiation and responding to individual differences. She remarked:

*We run many lessons under 'guided learning'. We try to do that as much as possible because we have three adults in the classroom (or two at least). For a mainstream teacher, the job is then producing resources that can be differentiated. So you may set a common task, but you may have three different versions of it. Or you can set different outcomes for each group based on their ability, and ask them to choose which target they work towards.*

#### *Support from education assistants*

It was noted that the school relied heavily on the support of dedicated education assistants (EAs) to achieve inclusion in mainstream classrooms. Their roles focus on support for individual students, including ensuring their safety, giving encouragement, providing clarification of instructions, and interpreting course content. EAs also encourage social interaction between LSC students and others; and their importance was widely recognized by the mainstream teachers—a finding typical also in overseas studies (e.g., Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, & Webster, 2009).

While international research has suggested that EAs contribute much to inclusion, it is also evident that their roles must be clearly defined in order to facilitate their efficient cooperation with teachers (Kerry, 2005; Rose & Forlin, 2010). Equally important, guidelines must be provided to ensure that mainstream teachers understand how best to cooperate with EAs and use their services effectively (Ainscow, 2000). In this school, EAs and mainstream teachers considered that sometimes there is lack of mutual communication. The EA pointed out that some teachers did not feel completely comfortable working with them. They suggested that guidance was required for mainstream teachers in utilising and relating better to EAs.

EAs and mainstream teachers interviewed here considered that for inclusion to work successfully, teachers and EAs should *co-plan lessons*. As suggested by the Learning Director,

*...the SEN specialist and the English Teacher co-plan, co-deliver, co-assess, co-report, so that is a really good model of partnership teaching.*

A main obstacle seemed to be that mainstream teachers had difficulty finding mutually convenient times to discuss lessons in advance with EAs, and that EAs considered that some mainstream teachers were not really prepared to do so. Since the training for EAs do not include lesson planning, the idea of *co-planning lessons* may better be replaced simply by discussion between teachers and EAs before lesson. EAs should be able to access to the lesson plans before class for better understanding of the content and expectation of each lesson.

Resource constraints had also limited the effectiveness of EAs in this school. Four full-time EAs and four part-time EAs worked exclusively to provide in-class support for 28 students with special support needs. This ratio of staff to students, while sounding generous, actually means that not all LSC students can have support from an EA for every

lesson. This lack of support at times created a problem in continuity, some students finding they were unable to cope. In addition, part-time EAs were usually not present for the full curriculum, and therefore had to spend extra time familiarising themselves with missed lesson content.

*Awareness, commitment and knowledge of mainstream teachers*

In this research, involvement of mainstream teachers in inclusive education can be perceived from three dimensions—namely awareness, commitment and knowledge. Findings revealed that the school has achieved success in raising awareness of all staff on the principles of inclusion; but the commitment of individual teaching staff varies. The school had attached importance to helping every staff member embrace the idea of inclusive education. For instance, every new staff member is required to attend an introductory talk about the concept of ‘access’ and support. The teachers were also informed of the various types of students they were likely to encounter, with additional details on the computer register. Some basic advice was also available on how to differentiate curriculum and teaching, and how to utilise EAs in class. This had created an ‘inclusive culture’ in the school, and had raised teachers’ awareness. All teachers interviewed were therefore fully aware of the school’s mission to provide inclusive education to all students. However, despite the above measures, interviews with teachers revealed that while most appreciated the goal of inclusion, not all of them were committed to its full implementation in their own classrooms. A teacher expressed her difficulties as lack of time for such necessities as differentiating activities and resources:

*Most students can just read the handout that I photocopy from a book. If I need to differentiate it, then I need to rewrite the whole passage. It is not practical to do this all the time, because it will take you a long time to rewrite for just one student. Time is the limitation! I am not saying it’s not worthy ....but with many lessons to prepare you will just automatically think about the majority students. If you don’t have time, you just can’t do it.*

Lack of commitment was perhaps related to lack of skills needed to carry out efficient differentiation of teaching methods. Classroom observations, and the student shadowing exercise, suggested that teachers’ practical knowledge for differentiation was generally insufficient. Some teachers remarked that they found it difficult to adapt their teaching styles to address the different needs of students. This suggests that there is room for improvement in the preparation of mainstream teachers so that they possess the necessary practical skills to facilitate inclusion in their subject areas. The school is aware of this problem; and it was noted that, further to the initial orientation session for teachers, a range of other training opportunities are being provided by the Access Faculty (e.g., skills sharing and demonstration of teaching techniques).

Teachers who are more heavily involved in teaching SEN students are provided with additional professional development opportunities, including chances to attend professional development activities outside school. The evidence suggests that more teachers need to be encouraged to participate in training with a focus on adaptive teaching techniques. When teachers have the pedagogical knowledge and skills to teach effectively in an inclusive environment, their level of genuine commitment to inclusive principles is likely to increase. Awareness of the concept of inclusion is a necessary *but insufficient* condition to ensure effective classroom practice (Tarra, Tsokovab & Takkunen, 2012).

*Practical implications for inclusive education in Hong Kong*

The Education Bureau in Hong Kong promotes a whole-school approach to inclusive education in local primary and secondary schools. The findings from this study support a view that the whole-school approach should indeed be adopted as the means of achieving the underlying goal of inclusion. However, it is clear that implementing an inclusive approach at classroom level is not easy, given the typical academic demands of secondary school curricula, and teachers’ current level of skills in adaptive teaching and in working with paraprofessionals.

Currently this school relies fairly heavily on the services of EAs for supporting students with special needs in the classroom. According to the Education Bureau, EAs are expected to offer professional support to teachers in their lesson preparation, classroom duties and class follow-up and assessment work (Education Bureau HKSAR, 2008c). Their officially specified duties include helping design learning activities and materials, supporting students in classroom learning activities, providing individual support for homework, training students with SEN in the use of assistive aids, helping students with writing problems to take notes, collecting data and records of student progress and liaising with parents (Education Bureau HKSAR, 2008c). At the moment, in this school some EAs report that they are not actively involved in lesson planning or designing learning activities, rather they are simply



required by the teacher to help out spontaneously in a general way during a lesson. It is likely that the services of EAs could be maximised if all teachers receive detailed guidance in how to utilize this human resource most effectively. Similarly, education assistants would benefit from more in-service training in the preparation of differentiated teaching materials to supplement the central theme of a lesson. It is essential that reference also be made in the school policy to the most efficient and productive ways of using paraprofessional support—particularly in co-planning and co-teaching of lessons.

Similarly, all subject specialist teachers in secondary schools need to receive additional in-service training in how to adapt their subject matter for different ability levels. This important aspect of adaptive teaching has not been a traditional part of most teachers' initial preparation; however, it represents essential knowledge for planning inclusive lessons. One way of raising the profile of adapting instruction is to provide opportunities for teachers and EAs to engage in school-based sessions in which practical ideas for differentiation are shared among colleagues.

The effective implementation of the whole school approach requires teachers and other personnel to confer closely on a range of matters pertinent to students' needs. For this reason, adequate time must be made available for professional liaison to occur.

### Conclusion

Inclusive education respects human diversity and equal opportunities. To achieve an inclusive approach, differentiation of curriculum content, teaching methods, and assessment have to be practised. In reality, this is difficult and challenging, and needs the support of a whole-school approach, implemented by a committed and knowledgeable teaching and support team.

This case study provided a window on the positive and less positive aspects of inclusive education practices in one international school. Future research should investigate policies, practices and problems associated with inclusive education in other local secondary schools and colleges in Hong Kong. If a lack of pedagogical skills for personalized teaching appears to be the major obstacle in these schools, there are clear implications for pre- and in-service teacher education courses. These courses need to move beyond the rhetoric associated with the *idea* of inclusion, and deal actively with the *'how to'* aspects.

Practical implications stemming from this study include: the need to increase teachers' commitment by putting inclusive education at the top of the agenda for staff training; to enhance communication among teachers, paraprofessionals and parents; and to equip teachers with more diversified teaching strategies. Teachers should also engage EAs more fully in co-planning and co-teaching lessons. The case school is well on the way to implementing inclusive education, but much more still needs to be done.

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### **Appendix I Mainstream Subject Teacher Interview Guide**

1. Is there a channel for you to go through when you need extra support and/or materials for your class? How do you go about getting them? Do you have a mentor to share ideas and challenges?
2. How often are you required to attend staff development? Are any of your development activities related to students with diverse learning needs? Does the school provide you with extra staff development opportunities, or are you responsible for locating them on your own? Do you think the school's staff development is useful? Does it usually have follow up?
3. Since starting inclusion, have you made any changes to your classroom to cater for students with diverse learning needs? Do you feel the school gives you enough resources to make the room accessible for SEN students?
4. Do you think your curriculum is suitable for all students? How does IB help to make lessons accessible to all students? How do you use IB along with differentiating instruction in your class, especially students with SEN and students who are gifted?
5. Do you have different rubrics for SEN students and gifted students? How frequently are the students assessed and by whom? How do you make sure all parents and students think is fair? What's assessed on a report card? Is it a letter grade or an effort grade? Are students ever retained in a grade when learning goals are not met?
6. Were you given any guidelines for the layout of your classroom? Are these guidelines from the school or from EDB?
7. How is ICT use in your teaching? What kind of adaptive curriculum materials do you have access to? Do you find it difficult to locate resources that you need in Hong Kong? Where do you get your resources in Hong Kong?
8. Do you have a learning assistant? If so, are they assigned because of certain students or is it because of numbers? Do the learning assistants participate in planning of instruction?
9. What kind of strategies do you teach the students how to learn? How do they check for their own understanding? Are library skills taught to them, in high school or elementary? How do you teach students how to take notes in class? Who would the students approach when they need extra help?
10. What kind of discipline policy is in place? Are there special accommodations to these policies for SEN students?
11. Does the school have an anti-bullying policy? How do you ensure the SEN students are not being bullied? Will they voice their concerns directly to you or do they usually approach their own parents first?
12. Please comment on the peer relationships of your students, with and without disabilities, inside your classroom.

**Appendix II Classroom Observation Form**

**CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FORM**

NAME OF SCHOOL \_\_\_\_\_ CLASS \_\_\_\_\_ NAME OF TEACHER \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS: \_\_\_\_\_

NUMBER FROM IDENTIFIED GROUP: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDITIONAL ADULTS IN ROOM ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

TIME IN ROOM ( ) MINS \_\_\_\_\_

ROLE :

NUMBER OF CHILDREN SERVED ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

Accommodation/Accessibility:

Diaplays: Central theme/ student's work/ learning strategies

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
<b>1. What is the teacher doing?</b>																		
<b>2. What kind of instruction organizational is the teacher using?</b>																		
Whole class teaching																		
Large group teaching/ learning (6-8)																		
Small group teaching/ learning (2-3)																		
Independent																		
Collabrative teaching																		
Multi-level instruction																		
<b>3. What kind of activities is teacher using?</b>																		
Discussion																		
Oral presentation																		
Writing																		
Drawing																		
Problem solving																		
Use of library																		
Audio visual materials																		
Practical tasks																		
Mechanical copying																		
Project learning																		
<b>3. What materials is the teacher using?</b>																		
Textbook																		
Blackboard																		
Audio visual materials																		
Large print/Braille																		
Active write board																		
Others																		
<b>5. What students use to record their work?</b>																		
Writing																		
Digital media																		
Drawings																		
Photographs																		
Tapes																		
<b>6. Does teacher encourage students to participate in the lesson?</b>																		
Checks students' understanding																		
Requests student's reponse																		
Teacher acknowledges any (correct and wrong) response																		
Elaborates task-related comment																		
Praise																		
Criticism																		
<b>7. Does teacher engage adaptations for specific disabling conditions?</b>																		
Curriculum modification																		
Instructional adaptation																		
Material adaptation																		