

Report of the Advisory Panel on the  
Implementation of Compulsory  
Education for Children with Special  
Educational Needs

17 NOV 2017

Ng Chee Meng  
Minister for Education (Schools)

Dear Minister,

In November 2016, you appointed an Advisory Panel to study the implementation of compulsory education (CE) for children with special educational needs (SEN), and make recommendations in the areas of exemption from CE and the placement of children with SEN in appropriate educational settings.

Recognising the diversity of the SEN support landscape, my colleagues on the Panel and I engaged various stakeholder groups, including parents of children with SEN, school leaders, voluntary welfare organisations in the Special Education sector and other advocates for children with disabilities. The rich insights and experiences shared by these stakeholders informed our discussions and subsequent recommendations.

What was clear from these conversations is a consensus for the principles that underlie the inclusion of children with SEN within CE. Specifically, stakeholders agreed that we should continue to support children in the school settings appropriate for their needs, and recognised that parents assumed primary responsibility for ensuring that their child attends school. In forming our recommendations, my colleagues on the Panel and I also recognise that we are building on the strong foundation of our current SEN support landscape across Government-funded schools. Both the Government and the community should sustain these efforts, both to implement CE smoothly and to continue uplifting support provisions for SEN, in both the mainstream and SPED spaces.

We are pleased to present the enclosed recommendations for your consideration. We trust that the recommendations are a meaningful contribution to MOE's overall efforts to implement CE, and best serve the educational interests of Singaporean children.



Dr Janil Puthucheary  
Chairperson



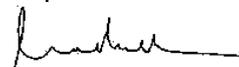
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Vice-Chairperson



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Mr Ang Wei Neng



Ms Chia Yong Yong



Mdm Ruby Chiew



Dr Chong Shang Chee



Mr Gerard Ee



Mr Ho Jack Yong



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Mdm Law Li Mei



Dr Lee Tung Jean



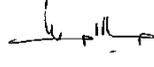
Mrs Pek Kwee Lan



Ms Suzana Binte Soo



Mrs June Tham-Toh Syn Yuen



Mr Wong Siew Hoong



Dr Faye Yang Phey Hong

17 NOV 2017

Dr Janil Puthucheary  
Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Communications and Information  
Chairperson, Advisory Panel on the Implementation of Compulsory Education for Children with Special Educational Needs

*Dear Janil,*

I would like to place on record my appreciation to you and the members of the Implementation Advisory Panel for your time and effort in undertaking this study.

I note that in developing the recommendations, the Panel has sought and considered the views of a wide range of stakeholders. My MOE colleagues and I are heartened that the discussions focused on the educational interests of our children, and affirmed the key principles underlying the inclusion of children with special educational needs (SEN) within our compulsory education framework, including that of supporting children in the school settings appropriate for their needs.

On behalf of the Ministry, I am pleased to accept the recommendations of the Panel. MOE will build on these recommendations and work towards putting these measures in place from 2019, when the first cohort of children to come under the revised compulsory education framework – which will apply to children born after 1 Jan 2012 – are due to enter Primary One.

These recommendations support MOE's commitment to ensure the smooth implementation of compulsory education for children with SEN. As part of this commitment, we are working with our community partners to ensure that from the 2019 Primary One cohort, any Singaporean child who is able to access formal education will be given a place in a school appropriate for his or her needs - whether in a mainstream primary school or one of our Government-funded special education schools. We will also improve the guidance and advice provided to parents, to enable them to make informed decisions regarding the appropriate type of school for their child. In parallel, both the Government and the community will work together to uplift the SPED sector. More details on our efforts will be announced in due course.

We look forward to a continued partnership with parents and the community to improve our national support for children with SEN, and to enhance the quality, affordability and accessibility of Government-funded special education.



Ng Chee Meng  
Minister for Education (Schools)

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. Singapore's Compulsory Education (CE) framework is established by the CE Act, which was passed by Parliament in 2000 and implemented in 2003. In Singapore, all Singapore Citizens (SCs) who are residing in Singapore and are of "compulsory school age"<sup>1</sup> are required to regularly attend a national primary school<sup>2</sup>, unless they have been granted exemption. The Act places the responsibility for ensuring that children regularly attend school on the parents, and parents are considered to have fulfilled their CE obligations if their children complete primary education.

2. A Committee on CE was set up in 2000 to make recommendations to the Ministry of Education (MOE) on the parameters for CE. At the time that the framework was established, the Committee recognised that, if CE were to include education in special education (SPED) schools for children with moderate-to-severe Special Educational Needs (SEN), the enforcement of CE may be unduly harsh on the parents of such children. This is particularly since the Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs) running the SPED schools were then not yet able to ensure the quality, accessibility and affordability of SPED. Hence, the 2000 Committee on CE recommended that children who were unable to attend any national primary school due to any physical or intellectual disability be exempted from CE.

3. Since then, MOE has continued to work closely with key stakeholders to enhance the quality, accessibility and affordability of SPED. Compared to 2000, the VWOs running SPED schools, in partnership with MOE and the National Council of Social Service (NCSS), are now better able to assure the accessibility, quality and affordability of SPED. There is now a spectrum of differentiated support for SEN available across the education landscape to suit the diversity of needs. The Government is committed to working with the community to support the efforts of persons with disabilities to realise their potential.

4. Today, based on MOE's records, there are about 1,770 children with SEN per age cohort, of which about 75% (or about 1,330) are children with mild SEN, who are able to learn in mainstream primary schools. They are thus already under the ambit of the CE Act. The remaining 25% (or about 440) are children with moderate-to-severe SEN, who are exempted from CE as they are unable to attend any national primary schools due to their disabilities. While it is currently not a requirement for them to do so, the majority of children with moderate-to-severe SEN attend Government-funded SPED schools.

5. There is a small number of children with SEN (of about 40) who do not appear to be enrolled in any educational institution, for various reasons. The implementation of CE for children with moderate-to-severe SEN will provide MOE with a lever against parents who do not ensure that their children with SEN attend school. This in turn helps MOE to ensure that *all* Singaporean children who can access learning opportunities do so in an appropriate school, and that the educational interests of our children are safeguarded.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 2 of the CE Act defines a child of "compulsory school age" as one who is above the age of 6 but below the age of 15.

<sup>2</sup> Section 2 of the CE Act defines a "national primary school" as any institution that provides full-time primary education that is (a) a school organised and conducted directly by the Government; (b) a school in receipt of grant-in-aid under the Education Act; (c) a school specified in any order made under section 3(1) of the School Boards (Incorporation) Act (Cap. 284A); or (d) such other school as may be prescribed.

## Formation of the Implementation Advisory Panel on Compulsory Education for Children with Special Educational Needs

6. In November 2016, MOE announced that Singaporean children with moderate-to-severe SEN who are of compulsory school age will be included within the compulsory education framework established by the CE Act. This change will take effect from the 2019 Primary 1 cohort (i.e. those born after 1 Jan 2012). Parents of these children will be able to fulfil their CE obligations by enrolling their children in the primary- or junior-level sections of Government-funded SPED schools, and ensuring that their children regularly attend school and complete their primary education there.

7. The inclusion of children with moderate-to-severe SEN within the compulsory education framework is an important milestone in Singapore's continuing drive towards national inclusiveness. It is also a testament to the SPED sector's considerable progress in improving accessibility to better quality SPED, given the significant improvements in the areas of curriculum, teaching and learning, teachers' professional development and infrastructure.

8. Even as MOE works towards the smooth implementation of CE, there is a diversity of SEN profiles, support provisions and range of stakeholders in the landscape, which requires further study on how the needs of all children with moderate-to-severe SEN could be met as far as possible. Firstly, as children with moderate-to-severe SEN can no longer be exempted from CE on the basis of their SEN alone, there is a need to consider how existing provisions for exemption can be adapted to accommodate children who still require exemption, while safeguarding their educational interests to the extent possible. Secondly, beyond merely requiring parents to ensure that their child regularly attends school, it is imperative that parents are supported in making an informed decision, such that children with SEN can complete their compulsory primary education in a school with the support relevant to their educational needs.

9. Given these implementation challenges, Minister Ng Chee Meng appointed an Implementation Advisory Panel (IAP) to study them more closely, and make recommendations that would best serve the needs of children with moderate-to-severe SEN. The list of members appointed to the IAP can be found in [Annex A](#).

10. The terms of reference of the IAP are:

“To make recommendations to MOE in the following areas:

- a. Exemption from CE for children with SEN; and
- b. Criteria and processes for placement of children in appropriate educational settings.”

## Review and Consultation Process

11. In addition to regular meetings to inform their recommendations, the IAP held two waves of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and consulted a wide range of stakeholders such as, parents and caregivers of children with SEN, SPED school leaders and staff, mainstream school leaders and staff, as well as VWOs and advocates for children with SEN. A total of 186 stakeholders were consulted over 9 FGDs, with some participating in both waves of FGDs to allow for more in-depth discussions on the issues relating to the implementation of CE. A breakdown of participant profiles is at [Annex B](#).

12. The IAP has now completed its study. Its findings and recommendations are presented in the subsequent chapters.

## CHAPTER 2: EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

1. The IAP discussed the current educational support landscape for children with SEN. The IAP acknowledges that considerable efforts have been put in to shape and improve the provisions for children with SEN to optimise their potential, in order for them to lead productive and meaningful lives as contributing members of society. The IAP agrees with MOE's approach to supporting students with SEN, which is to place them in an appropriate school that can best serve their educational needs and optimise their potential. Those with mild SEN, who have the cognitive ability to access the national curriculum and have adequate adaptive skills to learn in mainstream school settings, are supported in mainstream schools. The IAP is glad that MOE recognises that children with moderate-to-severe SEN require intensive specialised support to fully realise their potential. These children are thus supported in Government-funded SPED schools run by VWOs, which are equipped with customised facilities and staffed by trained teachers and allied professionals.

### Educational Provisions for Students with SEN in Mainstream Schools

2. The profile of students with mild SEN attending mainstream schools includes students with:

- a. Learning Disabilities (e.g. dyslexia, specific language impairment);
- b. Developmental Disabilities (e.g. mild Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)); and
- c. Physical and Sensory Disabilities (e.g. hearing loss, visual impairment).

3. To support students with mild SEN in mainstream schools, MOE has worked with the National Institute of Education (NIE) to introduce specific content on special needs in the compulsory pre-service training for all beginning teachers. This equips all teachers with a basic understanding of supporting students with mild SEN and learning differences. In addition, all schools are supported by a core group of teachers in special needs (TSNs) who are equipped with a deeper understanding of SEN. Recognising that specialised manpower is required to better support students with learning needs, MOE has also resourced all primary schools with at least one Allied Educator (Learning and Behavioural Support) (AED(LBS)), who is trained in special needs intervention. Where needed, schools can also refer students with suspected SEN to MOE Educational Psychologists for assessment, diagnosis and advice on intervention strategies.

4. To provide additional support for students with specific learning disabilities, there are also various programmes available in schools outside of regular curriculum hours. For example, the School-based Dyslexia Remediation programme has been made available in all primary schools since 2016. MOE has also made provisions to support students with sensory and physical impairment in mainstream schools through infrastructural accommodations, deployment of resource teachers, use of assistive learning devices and making available itinerant school-based specialised educational services run by VWOs.

### Educational Provisions for Students with SEN in Government-funded SPED schools

5. MOE, together with NCSS, funds and supports the VWO-run SPED schools, which cater to children with moderate-to-severe SEN who require more intensive specialised support.

6. SPED schools customise their curriculum and programmes to meet the diverse educational needs of their students. These include the teaching of social-emotional skills such as emotional awareness, self-control and social skills to help students interact and communicate with their peers. There is a clear emphasis on teaching skills for independent living e.g. personal grooming, self-management, home and community living. Students are also given opportunities to develop their interests and talents (e.g. in sports or the arts). In addition, the SPED curriculum covers six developmental domains in cognitive skills, gross motor skills, fine motor skills, communication & language skills, social & emotional skills and adaptive skills. Class sizes are kept small so that teachers can provide closer attention and support to individual students. For children who are able to access the national curriculum with intensive specialised support, there are some SPED schools (viz. Pathlight School, Canossian School and Lighthouse School) that prepare students for the national Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE).

7. Increasingly, SPED students are being prepared for entry into the workforce. A few SPED schools now offer vocational training programmes (viz. Metta School and Delta Senior School) that lead to nationally-recognised certification. Students may also be trained for job placement in local businesses (e.g. food and beverage, health, retail, hospitality, and horticulture industries). Through satellite partnerships between mainstream and SPED schools, students also benefit from meaningful integration activities. Joint activities, and in some cases joint lessons, are planned for the students so that mainstream and SPED students can interact and learn from one another.

8. In terms of physical facilities, SPED schools are equipped to cater to specific educational needs of students. For instance, there are sensory integration rooms with special equipment for students to explore their senses and learn sensory integration skills. There are also vocational training rooms for students to learn work skills. SPED students receive support from allied health professionals such as psychologists or therapists too.

9. There are 19<sup>3</sup> SPED schools serving students with a range of disability profiles (see details in [Annex C](#)). Among students enrolled in SPED schools, the most common disability profiles are ASD (~49%), Mild Intellectual Disability (~26%) and Moderate to Severe Intellectual Disability (~12%).

### Alternatives to Government-Funded Education

10. Even though the majority of children with SEN are attending Government-funded schools, about 2% of each cohort of primary-age children with SEN (or about 40 children) are not enrolled in any Government-funded school<sup>4</sup>. These children may be enrolled in private educational institutions, have migrated overseas, learn at home, or are not receiving any educational provisions at all. It is also possible that amongst this group, there may be children with complex SEN or medical conditions who require full-time care.

### Progress in SPED Sector

11. Over the years, MOE has worked closely with the SPED schools to enhance the quality, accessibility and affordability of SPED to enable each student to optimise his potential and achieve better outcomes.

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<sup>3</sup> 2 out of 19 SPED schools (viz. Delta Senior School and Tanglin School) do not cater to children under the age of 13.

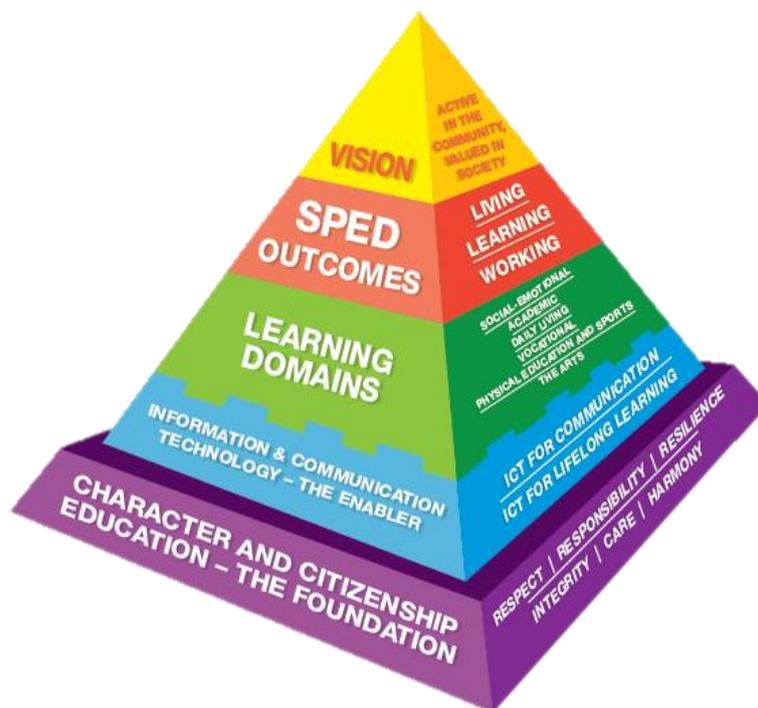
<sup>4</sup> Based on MOE's data of students enrolled into mainstream and SPED schools.

## a. Quality

12. The Government-funded SPED schools, with the support of MOE and NCSS, has enhanced the quality of education and student outcomes through:

- a. **Professional Training:** All SPED teachers are required to complete a Diploma in Special Education (DISE) at NIE as a condition to be registered as trained teachers by MOE. The DISE training is fully funded by MOE. In addition, MOE also supports some members of the management team in the SPED schools to attend the MOE Management and Leadership in Schools programme at NIE.
- b. **Continuing Professional Development:** In-service SPED teachers are provided with professional development opportunities to build up their teaching competencies. SPED teachers who wish to deepen their knowledge and skills can enrol for the Advanced Diploma in Special Education at NIE, or apply for MOE scholarships to pursue a Masters in Special Education. Schools have Professional Learning Teams to foster a culture of professional dialogue and learning amongst teachers. There are also ongoing efforts to develop communities of practice within and across schools to promote the sharing of best practices in teaching and learning.
- c. **Curriculum:** All SPED schools are guided by MOE's SPED Curriculum Framework to customise a holistic curriculum in order to achieve the desired SPED Living, Learning, and Working Outcomes for all students (see details in [Figure 1](#) below<sup>5</sup>). MOE also provides support to schools in the form of curriculum resources, funds, facilitation of expert consultation and training, and direct support in programme design and implementation.

Figure 1: SPED Curriculum Framework (2012)



<sup>5</sup> More details on the SPED Curriculum Framework can also be found at <https://www.moe.gov.sg/education/special-education/sped-curriculum-framework>

- d. Transition Programmes and Planning: SPED schools are guided by MOE's Transition Planning Guide (2017) to better understand the interests, preferences and strengths of students, and plan for a positive and meaningful transition to a post-school environment. The schools also work closely with students, their families and service providers to develop Individual Transition Plans for every student, and to customise the relevant curriculum and systemic support in order for them to attain their post-school goals. The School-to-Work (S2W) Transition Programme, a collaboration amongst MOE, MSF and SG Enable, provides more customised training pathways-cum-work options for students who may not benefit from vocational certification but are capable of work, and will be scaled up to all SPED schools serving students in the secondary/senior ages from 2018.

## b. Accessibility

13. Over the years, MOE has been expanding the capacity of SPED schools' campuses to meet increased need for SPED. In September 2017, MOE announced that AWWA School, Eden School and Rainbow Centre School will be opening an additional campus each, to offer more places for children with moderate-to-severe ASD requiring a customised SPED curriculum. This is in response to the increase in the reported number of Singaporean students with moderate-to-severe ASD who require specialised and intensive intervention to support their learning. MOE has also introduced admissions guidelines and a Multi-Agency Advisory Panel<sup>6</sup> to improve coordination and efficiency of admissions to SPED schools, to ensure the timely and appropriate placement of children requiring SPED. With the inclusion of children with moderate-to-severe SEN under CE, MOE will continue to ensure adequate physical provisions and resourcing to make available affordable formal education to children with SEN.

## c. Affordability

14. The following schemes have been introduced to ensure affordability of Government-funded SPED:

- a. SPED Financial Assistance Scheme (FAS): Similar to financial support for students in mainstream schools, the SPED FAS ensures a basic level of assistance for SPED students from low income households to help defray the cost of education, such as fees and school uniforms. Students on SPED FAS are also eligible for the School Meals Programme which provides meal subsidies to students for breakfast, recess or lunches in school.
- b. Discretionary Financial Assistance: Since 2011, SPED schools have been given additional funds to provide further targeted assistance to FAS recipients, and other Singaporean students who require assistance but are not eligible for the FAS. SPED schools are also provided with additional funding through Opportunity Fund grants to support the co-curricular development opportunities for Singaporeans students from lower income households.

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<sup>6</sup> The Multi-Agency Advisory Panel comprises allied professionals from the Ministries of Education and Health, the National Council of Social Service, and the Government-funded SPED schools.

# CHAPTER 3: KEY ISSUES IN IMPLEMENTING COMPULSORY EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

## Principles and Broad Parameters

1. The IAP recognises the following key principles for including children with moderate-to-severe SEN in CE framework:

- a. A differentiated approach is needed to support the wide spectrum of needs of children with SEN; hence children who are able to access education should do so in a setting with appropriate provision for their needs. This means that children with mild SEN, who can access the national curriculum and learn in a large group setting, can be supported in mainstream schools whereas most children with moderate-to-severe SEN can be supported in Government-funded SPED schools; and
- b. Parents should remain responsible for ensuring that their children regularly attend school.

2. In its deliberations on the implementation of CE for children with moderate-to-severe SEN along the principles outlined above, the IAP has also taken reference from the parameters in place for the implementation of CE for children without SEN or with mild SEN. Where necessary and relevant, the IAP has recommended flexibility in recognition of the different and diverse needs of children with moderate-to-severe SEN. The IAP's recommendations seek to strike a balance between ensuring that the implementation would not be overly onerous for parents, and safeguarding the educational interests of the children.

3. The IAP understands that MOE adopts a counselling-first approach<sup>7</sup> towards enforcement of CE, recognising that the issues behind non-attendance at school can be multi-faceted, and that our efforts should be geared towards facilitating the child's attendance in school. The CE Act also provides for a CE Board, which comprises representatives from the community and government agencies to investigate persistent cases of non-compliance. The Board is given legislative powers to request parents to produce information and attend mandatory counselling.

## Duration and Requirements of CE Obligation

4. With effect from the 2019 Primary 1 cohort, children with moderate-to-severe SEN of compulsory school age will be required to regularly attend school until they complete primary education. Like their peers currently attending mainstream primary schools, they will be required to complete their primary education<sup>8</sup>. The IAP notes that children will be deemed as having completed compulsory primary education depending on the type of Government-funded school he/she is enrolled in, as follows:

- a. Students in mainstream primary schools are required to attain PSLE results that would qualify them to progress to secondary school or reach 15 years old; and

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<sup>7</sup> MOE works with parents, schools, the community, Self-Help Groups and relevant agencies, such as the Ministry of Social and Family Development and Family Service Centres, to counsel and support the family and help all students attend school.

<sup>8</sup> The IAP recognises the Government's acceptance of the 2000 recommendation by the CE Committee that CE should be up to Primary 6, and that the duration of CE defines the *minimum* period of education for all Singaporean children rather than the *ideal* duration from an educational perspective.

- b. Students enrolled in SPED schools will be required to complete the 'primary' or 'junior' programmes in their respective schools<sup>9</sup> or reach 15 years old.

5. The IAP notes that the above approach would impose similar requirements on students in mainstream primary schools and SPED schools, while recognising that it is not educationally meaningful to impose a standardised gateway qualification for the 'secondary'/ 'senior' phase of education for students attending SPED schools.

### Completion of Compulsory Primary Education in SPED Schools

6. The IAP notes that MOE intends to recognise government-funded, VWO-run SPED schools as appropriate educational settings to support the learning of children with moderate-to-severe SEN, by designating the primary/junior-level sections of government-funded VWO-run SPED schools as national primary schools where parents can enrol their children in to fulfil their CE obligations. The list of government-funded VWO-run schools where children with moderate-to-severe SEN can complete their compulsory primary education is as follows:

- i. APSN Chaoyang School
- ii. APSN Katong School
- iii. AWWA School
- iv. Canossian School
- v. Cerebral Palsy Alliance Singapore School
- vi. Eden School
- vii. Grace Orchard School
- viii. Lighthouse School
- ix. Metta School
- x. MINDS Fernvale Gardens School
- xi. MINDS Lee Kong Chian Gardens School
- xii. MINDS Towner Gardens School
- xiii. MINDS Woodlands Gardens School
- xiv. Pathlight School
- xv. Rainbow Centre - Margaret Drive School
- xvi. Rainbow Centre - Yishun Park School
- xvii. St. Andrew's Autism School

### Responsibility of Ensuring that Children Attend School

7. In imposing a requirement on parents of Singaporean children to ensure that their children regularly attend school, the Government has taken the responsibility of providing mainstream school places for all Singaporean children who are able to meaningfully access education in these schools. Similarly for children with moderate-to-severe SEN, there will be school places in appropriate educational settings for all such children who are able to access formal education meaningfully. However, parents remain responsible for ensuring that their children access these places provided, no different from the parents of children without SEN taking on the primary responsibility, as the implementation of CE for children with SEN should not be taken to mean that the Government takes over the entire responsibility for the education of the child.

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<sup>9</sup> The 'primary' or 'junior' programme in SPED schools typically lasts six years, like the primary course of education in mainstream primary schools.

## Recommendations from the IAP on Implementation of CE to Children with Moderate-to-Severe SEN

8. The IAP was appointed to make recommendations to MOE on (A) Exemption from CE for children with SEN and (B) Criteria and processes for placement of children in appropriate educational settings within the context of providing differentiated educational support for children with SEN and MOE's existing partnership with VWOs in SPED. The rest of the chapter outlines the Panel's recommendations.

### A. Exemption Issues

#### i. Home-Schooling

9. Today, children without SEN or with mild SEN who are able to learn in mainstream schools will only be exempted to be home-schooled if their parents are able to (i) meet certain educational qualifications; and (ii) satisfy MOE that there are sufficient arrangements to support the educational needs of their child. Parents are required to declare their intended curriculum, and agree to home visits by MOE. These children are required to sit the PSLE, and meet a PSLE benchmark pegged at the 33<sup>rd</sup> percentile aggregate score. They are also required to pass the National Education quiz before they sit the PSLE.

10. The IAP holds the view that to ensure parity with children without SEN or with mild SEN applying for exemption for home-schooling, broadly similar criteria should be applied for children with moderate-to-severe SEN. However, there should be some flexibility for the detailed requirements and conditions imposed on parents of children with moderate-to-severe SEN. For example, it would be difficult to impose a common assessment benchmark akin to the PSLE for children with moderate-to-severe SEN, given their diverse educational needs.

11. To ensure that the educational interests of home-schoolers with moderate-to-severe SEN are safeguarded, the IAP proposes for home-schooling parents to meet certain conditions. Rather than focusing on the parents' educational qualifications, MOE should consider relevant skills and competencies required by the delivery of the Individualised Education Plan (IEP) to support the education of a child with SEN (see para 12). This is especially since parents are still expected to personally deliver the educational aspects of home-schooling, without entrusting this responsibility to others, or expecting Government support. However, home-schooling parents should be allowed to engage external assistance for specialised services in SEN that can only be provided by appropriately recognised professionals (e.g. speech therapy, occupational therapy).

12. Similar to how home-schooling parents today are required to submit a proposed curriculum to MOE, the IAP also proposes that parents who wish to home-school a child with SEN submit a proposed IEP for approval. The IEP should reference the broad principles and desired outcomes found in recognised special education frameworks, including (but not restricted to) MOE's SPED Curriculum Framework. Such outcomes should include areas such as socialisation and life skills. MOE should issue additional guidelines on what it expects from an adequate IEP, drawn from recognised standards and practices of IEP internationally, as well as referencing the processes that currently exist within SPED schools. This would ensure that the requirements put in place for this group of parents are sufficiently stringent to ensure that the children exempted would continue to receive high quality education to support their needs.

13. The IAP agrees that it is not practical to impose a formal assessment on home-schoolers with moderate-to-severe SEN. The IAP recommends that MOE should receive annual progress reports from parents on the child, similar to the requirements for today's home-schoolers. These progress reports should also include an updated IEP for the following year. MOE should also make periodic home visits to ensure that the home-schooling environment is safe and conducive for learning. MOE should retain the prerogative to withdraw the exemption when conditions are no longer met. MOE should also regularly review its criteria for exemption to ensure that they are adequate in ensuring that the educational interests of the home-schoolers are safeguarded.

## ii. Unsuitable to Attend any National Primary School

14. Today, children who are deemed unsuitable to attend any national primary school are granted exemption from CE. These children have unique circumstances, including those with complex and/or severe medical needs. Parents of these children are required to provide evidence of their child's unsuitability to attend school, or to justify why their child's needs would be better served in an alternative setting compared to a national primary school.

15. The IAP recognises that there will continue to be a small number of such children with complex or unique profiles, whose needs could be better served outside of the national school system, including Government-funded SPED schools. The IAP recommends that such children still be considered for exemption from CE and parents be similarly required to justify why their child's needs would be better served in an alternative setting compared to a national primary school. The IAP recommends that MOE should introduce monitoring processes to ensure that the child's educational interests remain safeguarded in the alternative setting. One possibility is to grant exemption contingent on the child's continued enrolment in the alternative setting. Should parents wish to place their child in another alternative setting, they should be required to re-apply for exemption.

16. As a general principle and in the spirit of CE, the IAP also recommends that MOE allow children with moderate-to-severe SEN who have been exempted (including those who are home-schooled) to return to the national school system, if they have been assessed as suitable and ready to access learning in a national primary school.

## B. Placement Issues

17. Generally, at any juncture along a child's education journey, once allied health professionals diagnose the child's SEN and recommend an appropriate education setting for the child, parents will then register the child in a suitable type of school (e.g. mainstream school or SPED school). Children with mild SEN, who can learn in a large group setting and access national curriculum, can be supported in mainstream schools. Hence, parents can register these children in the mainstream schools. Parents of children with moderate-to-severe SEN may apply directly to any one of the Government-funded SPED schools.

18. The importance of appropriate placement cannot be overstated. Although some parents may perceive mainstream schools as the desired environment for their child, the outcomes of mainstreaming children with severe SEN are not always positive. A preliminary recent local study<sup>10</sup> by the National University Health System (NUHS) Department of

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<sup>10</sup> Tang, Crystal Jieyi & Law, Chung Ning Evelyn (2015). Children with developmental disabilities and quality of life related to school: Does entry into special education school matter? Paper presented at MOE SPED Conference 2016 (Singapore) by Dr Chong Shang Chee (Child Development Unit, NUHS)

Paediatrics showed that children with developmental disabilities in SPED schools have significantly higher school Quality of Life compared to children with similar SEN in mainstream schools. Several studies<sup>11,12</sup> have highlighted that a single (mainstream) curriculum may not adequately meet the wide range of learning needs of children with SEN. It has also been observed that when children with severe SEN are placed in a mainstream school, there is more often very limited opportunity for engagement with peers, and consequently, they may also have poor social and emotional outcomes<sup>13</sup>.

19. The Panel recommends greater efforts to educate parents, health professionals and the general public about the SPED landscape and post-SPED pathways to address the stigma of SPED schools and enable parents to make informed decisions on placement. The lack of awareness of post-SPED pathways and outcomes could lead parents to favour placement in mainstream schools over SPED schools, or make a mainstream-to-SPED transition difficult. Health professionals could lack updated information about developments in SPED schools, leading to inappropriate recommendations, which is indicative of a need to improve information provision. The IAP thus feels that there is a need to better support parents in making an informed first decision on the appropriate educational setting for their child (between mainstream and SPED, or within the SPED sector).

### Recommendations on Placement

20. The first choice made by parents is critical in (a) registering their children in a mainstream or SPED school, or (b) seeking exemption from CE, and it is thus important to make available the right professional advice and resources. The IAP recommends that MOE develop a range of upstream measures to (i) strengthen guidance and advice given to parents before they decide on the placement of their child at Primary 1, and (ii) improve public confidence in SPED and reduce stigmatisation.

21. MOE should offer parents sufficient information, resources and evidence to help them make informed decisions. MOE could work with the VWOs to strengthen SPED schools' professional quality and communications, and leverage a network of SPED parent advocates. The IAP also recognises that there continues to be stigmatisation associated with SPED. To overcome this, there needs to be continuous work in professional development and public education.

22. Currently, MOE bases its placement recommendations on the Professional Practice Guidelines (PPGs), which set the standards on the psycho-educational assessment and placement of students with SEN. Already, these guidelines are being adopted by practitioners in publicly-funded hospitals. MOE could further engage other medical and allied professionals involved in advising parents, to enhance awareness of these guidelines.

23. Even with these efforts, it is still possible that a child's SEN diagnosis, and thus the appropriate school for him/her, is not clear at the outset. While the child is in school, once it is ascertained that a child is not appropriately placed, MOE should assign a counsellor to understand parents' concerns and support them in their exploration of more appropriate schools. For children who were in mainstream schools but might be better suited for SPED

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Department of Paediatrics). Study intended to look at mild, moderate and severe SEN and mainly involved children with autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disability, or both.

<sup>11</sup> Eaves, L.C & Ho, H. (1997). School placement and academic achievement in children with autistic spectrum disorders. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, 9 (4), 277 – 291.

<sup>12</sup> Warnock, M. (2005). *Special Educational Needs: a new outlook*. London: Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain.

<sup>13</sup> Frederickson, Norah., Simmonds, Elizabeth., Evans, Lynda & Soulsby, Chris. (1997). Assessing the social and affective outcomes of inclusion. *British Journal of Special Education*, 34 (2), 105 – 115.

schools, MOE could also consider offering trial classes in SPED schools to allow parents to observe their child in a SPED setting. Where needed, external professionals (outside of MOE) could also be engaged to provide professional inputs.

24. The IAP notes that in some jurisdictions, the law allows the State to prescribe a school setting for a child with SEN. Should MOE elect this option, the IAP is of the view that a legislative lever should only be used as a last resort.

## CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

### Recommendations

1. The IAP's recommendations are summarised as follows:
  - a. Exemption should continue to be granted to the following groups of children with moderate-to-severe SEN even with the implementation of CE:
    - i. Those receiving home-schooling – These children will only be granted exemption from CE to be home-schooled provided the parents are able to satisfy MOE that they are able to provide quality education for their child. Parents are to propose an IEP based on MOE's guidelines, provide a suitable home environment and show evidence of competencies to execute the IEP. Parents should be required to submit annual progress reports and updated IEPs for the following year and submit to home visits as necessary; and
    - ii. Those deemed unsuitable to attend any national primary schools (including Government-funded SPED schools) – Parents would be required to justify why the child's needs cannot be met in a national primary school and be responsible for making education and/or care arrangements for their child. Where the child is receiving an education outside the national school system, parents need to adhere to monitoring processes, e.g. granting exemption contingent on the child's continued enrolment in the alternative setting, and requiring parents to re-apply for exemption if they wished to withdraw their child from the selected alternative setting.
  - b. Where there has been evidence that the child's educational interests are not being met in the alternative educational setting, MOE should consider revoking the exemption granted and require the child to be placed in an appropriate education setting, where possible, or be referred to social support agencies.
  - c. The IAP recommends for MOE to adopt a range of measures to facilitate placement of children into the school that is most appropriate to meet the child's educational needs as follows:
    - i. To develop a range of upstream measures to (i) strengthen guidance and advice given to parents before Primary 1; and (ii) improve public confidence in SPED schools and reduce stigmatisation; and
    - ii. To strengthen existing platforms and processes to support parents in (i) obtaining a diagnosis for their child; and (ii) making appropriate placement decisions. Any intervention to place a child in a more appropriate educational setting should be done only after the child has been observed in his/her original school setting.

### Observations

2. In the course of our work, the IAP discussed issues that were not *directly* related to the implementation of CE. These issues were either observed by the IAP, or raised by FGD participants. The IAP would like to surface them for MOE's perusal, as they have an impact on the provision of SPED. For instance, it was observed that there are different models of providing education to children with SEN. Some participants suggested for the provision of

after-school student care in SPED schools to facilitate further learning, and to provide respite for parents. For children with SEN attending mainstream schools, the support provided to them needs to continue to be improved, and partnerships between mainstream and SPED schools should be strengthened. The stigmatisation and bullying of children with SEN in mainstream schools is also a concern that should be examined. On accessibility of SPED, it was observed that there are long waitlists at certain SPED schools, and these should be addressed. There are also significant challenges for parents to access a suitable SPED school due to the geographical locations of SPED schools, each catering to specific SEN profiles. Some participants supported a centralised placement process to manage the long waitlists, while others preferred the current decentralised model. Affordability was also a concern raised by participants as a factor that may affect the placement of children in appropriate educational settings.

## Conclusion

3. The inclusion of children with moderate-to-severe SEN in the CE framework is a testament to the considerable progress that has been made in the SPED sector, the dedication and commitment of VWOs and the strong partnership between the Government and the community. The IAP recognises that in order to smoothly implement CE for this group of children and their parents, MOE must give due consideration to the children's diverse needs, as well as the diversity of the SEN support landscape. The community, parents and the Government will need to continue working together to bring out the best in every child, to help our children with SEN achieve their Living, Learning and Working goals and prepare them to participate and pursue a productive and meaningful life in our society.

## Annex A: Members of IAP

1	Dr Janil Puthucheary (Chairperson)	Senior Minister of State Ministry of Education
2	Ms Denise Phua (Vice-Chairperson)	President Autism Resource Centre
3	Dr Mariam Aljunied	Principal Educational Psychologist Ministry of Education
4	Mr Ang Wei Neng	School Management Committee Member Grace Orchard School
5	Ms Chia Yong Yong	President Society for the Physically Disabled
6	Mdm Ruby Chiew	Principal AWWA School
7	Dr Chong Shang Chee	Senior Consultant and Head NUH Child Development Unit
8	Mr Gerard Ee	School Management Committee Chairman Canossian School
9	Mr Jack Ho	Assistant Director, Diversity and Inclusion Office Singapore Management University
10	Ms Tina Hung	Deputy CEO National Council of Social Service
11	Mdm Law Li Mei	Principal Fairfield Methodist School (Primary)
12	Dr Lee Tung Jean	Deputy Secretary Ministry of Social and Family Development
13	Mrs Pek Kwee Lan	Principal Endeavour Primary School
14	Ms Suzana Bte Soo	Principal Lee Kong Chian Gardens School
15	Mrs June Tham-Toh Syn Yuen	Former Executive Director Rainbow Centre
16	Mr Wong Siew Hoong	Director-General of Education Ministry of Education
17	Dr Faye Yang Phey Hong	Senior Principal Psychologist KKH Department of Child Development

## Annex B: Breakdown of participant profiles

FGD No.	Stakeholder Group	No. of Participants
Wave 1: April 2017		
1	Parents and caregivers of children with special educational needs	38
2	Special education (SPED) school leaders and leaders of SPED Social Service Organisations	23
3	Allied health professionals	24
4	Mainstream school leaders and staff	29
Wave 2: July to August 2017		
1	Parents and caregivers of children with special educational needs	38 (over 2 sessions)
2	SPED school leaders and leaders of SPED Social Service Organisations	20
3	SPED school leaders and staff	38
4	Mainstream school leaders and staff	26
5	Advocates for children with disabilities	9

## Annex C: Government-funded SPED schools

	<b>VWO</b>	<b>Government-funded SPED School</b>	<b>Disability</b>
1	Association for Persons with Special Needs (APSN)	Chaoyang School Katong School Delta Senior School <sup>14</sup> Tanglin School <sup>15</sup>	Mild Intellectual Disability Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
2	Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS)	Woodlands Gardens School Lee Kong Chian Gardens School Towner Gardens School Fernvale Gardens School	Moderate to Severe Intellectual Disability ASD
3	Canossian Daughters of Charity	Canossian School	Hearing Loss
4	Cerebral Palsy Alliance Singapore (CPAS)	Cerebral Palsy Alliance Singapore School	Cerebral Palsy Multiple Disability
5	Singapore Association for the Visually Handicapped (SAVH)	Lighthouse School	Visual Impairment Hearing Loss
6	Asian Women's Welfare Association (AWWA)	AWWA School	Multiple Disability ASD
7	Rainbow Centre (RC)	Yishun Park School Margaret Drive School	Multiple Disability ASD
8	Metta Welfare Association (MWA)	Metta School	Mild Intellectual Disability ASD
9	Presbyterian Community Services (PCS)	Grace Orchard School	Mild Intellectual Disability ASD
10	Autism Resource Centre (ARC)	Pathlight School	ASD
11	Autism Association (Singapore) (AAS)	Eden School	ASD
12	St Andrew's Mission Hospital (SAMH)	St Andrew's Autism School	ASD

<sup>14</sup> Delta Senior School admits students aged 17 and above.

<sup>15</sup> Tanglin School admits students aged 13 and above.