
Title	Parents' views on compulsory education of children with special needs in Singapore
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Parents' Views on Compulsory Education of Children with Special Needs in Singapore

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Introduction

In June 1997, the United States updated the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) by committing to provide “a world-class education for children” and that “once and for all children with disabilities have a right to be in the classroom”. Similarly, such practices were enforced in Japan where all children are required by law to attend school once they reach the age of 6 years, including disabled children.

Singapore's survival and economic progress in the 21st century depends on how well-prepared Singaporeans are for the challenges of globalization and technology. All children including children with special needs have also to be given a common core of knowledge and skills which will provide them an appropriate headstart and strong foundation for further education and training according to their abilities. By children with special needs, we refer to children with intellectual, sensory and physical disabilities. To date, compulsory education is only for children without disabilities attending regular schools in Singapore. It is not compulsory for children with special needs who have the ability to attend regular schools (e.g. physically disabled children with normal intelligence) or those who need to attend special schools catering to their special needs (for example, hearing impaired children). Thus, the responsibility of sending children with special needs to school is left entirely in the hands of their parents.

Special education in Singapore has taken a wide leap since the days when it was merely a few classes conducted by volunteers. To date, the management of the special schools consists of a tripartite arrangement involving the government, National Council of Social Services (NCSS) and the Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs). However, currently, there is no data on parents' views about compulsory education for children with special needs.

A survey was conducted from May to August 2003 with the primary objectives of this study being to:

- ascertain if parents are in favour of compulsory education for children with special needs;
- identify the concerns that parents have, should compulsory education be implemented for special children;
- identify the advantages of compulsory education from the perspectives of the parents;
- gather the resources needed before compulsory education for special children can be put into place.

In addition, the data was to be analysed to answer these questions:

1. Do parents of different age groups have different viewpoints?
2. Do parents with children of different age groups have different concerns?
3. Do parents with different exceptional children have different concerns?

It is hoped that the research will be able to address concerns that may surface.

Methodology

Subjects

All special schools in Singapore were invited to participate in the survey. Eighteen out of nineteen special schools and two service agencies working for the disabled responded. The principals / administrators in these special schools sought their teachers' assistance in distributing the survey to the children's parents¹ or caregivers. Over 90.5% of the parents responded to the survey. Some respondents did not provide complete data. However, the percentages reported here are for the total respondents of 2489. They consisted of 2253 parents (90.5%), 76 guardians (3.1%), and 160 unknown relationships to the child (6.4%). There were 873 males (35.1%), 1504 females (60.4%), and 112 with no information about gender (4.5%). 56.7% of these respondents were above 40 years of age (See Table 1).

Over 43% of the respondents had either primary or secondary school qualifications, including 31.5% with an "O" or "A" level qualifications. The racial composition of these respondents was 62.8% Chinese, 22.4% Malays, 8.2% Indians, 2.8% "others", 3.7% with missing data (See Table 1).

When asked about the number of children with special needs in the family, 85.0% said they had only one child with special needs, with a small percentage of 5.8% having 2 to 4 children with special needs in the family. However, 9.2% did not give this information. These responses gave a total of 2330 children with special needs reported in this study. On the other hand, the total responses to the question regarding the age groups of these children were 2297. This discrepancy could arise from missing information or misinterpretation of the questions.

Nevertheless, the 2330 children with special needs reported in this study easily make up to four schools of moderate size, which is a substantial issue calling out for urgent attention. Among the number of children with special needs, 78.0% were of school-going age, that is, from 7 years of age onward. The nature of their special needs, in ascending order of occurrences, was: visual (2.0%), physical (4.3%), hearing (9.0%), autistic spectrum disorder (10.8%), multiple disabilities (17.0%), and intellectual disabilities (51.1%) (see Table 1).

In classifying these respondents according to the different exceptional groups, the Mild Intellectually Disabled which comprises 1105 (44.4%) has the largest representation. The next highest exceptional representation is from the Moderately Intellectually Disabled group which accounts for 622 (25%) respondents. This is followed by the Multiply Disabled group which accounts for 476 (19.1%), the Hearing Impaired group with 209 (8.4%), the Visually Impaired group with 44 (1.85%) and the Physically Impaired with 33 (1.3%) respondents (Table 1).

¹ Parents in this article include 95% of respondents who are either guardians or with unknown relationships to the child.

Table 1. Bio-Data of Respondents in Frequency

	Hearing Impairment (209)	Visual Impairment (44)	Physical Impairment (33)	Mild ID (1105)	Mod ID (622)	Multiply Disabled (476)	Total (2489)
Relationship							
Parent	194	41	31	955	571	461	2253
Guardian	11	2	1	44	16	2	76
Others	3		1	51	20	6	81
Missing Data							79
Gender							
Male	79	19	6	399	240	130	873
Female	125	24	26	634	363	332	1504
Missing Data							112
Ethnic Group							
Chinese	139	33	24	623	401	344	1564
Malay	40	5	5	289	136	82	557
Indian	20	2	3	100	51	29	205
Others	8	2	1	31	15	14	71
Missing Data							22
Qualifications							
Primary	42	8	5	271	122	47	495
Secondary	56	11	9	251	172	84	583
“O”/“A”	67	17	10	319	197	175	785
Poly	14		3	37	39	61	154
B. Degree	11	4	2	64	38	59	178
Postgraduate	9	3	3	23	9	23	70
Others	7		1	42	15	12	77
Missing Data							147
Age of Parents							
Below 20	1			5	3	1	10
20 - 25	4		1	33	21	4	63
26 – 30	3		1	26	13	16	59
31 – 35	24	5	3	72	58	103	265
36 – 40	64	7	9	193	132	157	562
Above 40	110	30	19	696	373	183	1411
Missing Data							119
# Sp Children							
1	183	41	30	873	546	442	2115
2	16	1	1	55	26	17	116
3	4		1	16	5		26
4				1	1		2
Missing Data							
Child Age**							
0 – 6	12	1	3	18	93	230	356
7 - 12	122	24	27	379	265	194	1011
13- 16	63	9	2	365	150	28	617
16 & above	20	5		191	87	10	313
Missing Data							
Special Needs							
1 Intellectual	15	1		760	417	80	1273
2 Hearing	196		1	13	4	7	221
3 Visual	1	26	3	10	4	3	47
4 Physical			25	36	6	39	108
5. Multiple Disabilities	8	9	3	88	111	191	413
6 Autistic	3	4		68	49	145	268
Missing Data							159

Instrumentation

To measure the parents' attitudes towards compulsory education for children with special needs, a questionnaire entitled *Parent Attitudes toward Compulsory Education of Children with Special Needs* was designed by the researcher. There are altogether 24 items. Part I of the questionnaire consisted of 22 four-point Likert-type and two open-ended items. The 22 items form four factors, namely, positive perceptions (e.g. *I believe that my child with special needs can be made more independent through schooling.*), negative perceptions (e.g. *Schooling will cause my child with special needs to have lower self-esteem.*), transport concerns (e.g. *Transportation cost to school is too expensive as my child with special needs requires special services to travel.*), and other concerns (e.g. *The waiting lists in the special schools are far too long.*). Part II consists of data about parents and children already reported above.

Procedure

The questionnaire in English was translated into Malay, Mandarin and Tamil so that parents of different racial groups could better understand the questions asked. Knowledgeable translators for the different language groups, namely, Chinese, Malay and Tamil were used to translate the questionnaire into the three languages and another set of expert translators to re-translate the questionnaire back into English to ensure that the questionnaires were very similar to the English version. The questionnaires were then sent to all the special schools to be administered to the parents of children with special needs by the school administrator. The returns from the administrators were close to 90% from all special schools.

Results and Discussion

The percentages of the different types of responses to items 1 to 22 of the questionnaire are given in Table 2. There were different missing values from the items, ranging from a low of 33 (item 12) to 196 (item 18). The discussion will examine the four factors mentioned earlier.

Respondents' Positive Perceptions of Compulsory Education

In general, the respondents' attitudes towards compulsory education for children with special needs were very positive. About 98.2% agreed to strongly agreed that all children should attend school, and 95.9% believed that education should be made compulsory as every child has the right to be educated. For more specific advantages, most of them agreed or strongly agreed that compulsory education will make their children more confident (97.5%), independent (97.1%), and happier (97.7%). Their children would also make more friends with other children (96.0%), and such friendship could develop not only in schools but also in the neighbourhood (91.7%). They also agreed that the schools could provide more meaningful opportunities to learn (96.6%) because they have better educational programmes (98.6%), which will be beneficial to their children (98.3%). These experiences will make it much easier for their children to integrate within the community (95.2%).

Table 2. Respondents' Responses in Percentages

	Item	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4	Mean	SD
Positive Perceptions							
1.	All children with special needs should attend school.	0.6	1.2	33.8	64.4	3.62	0.54
6.	I believe that my child with special needs can be made more independent through schooling.	0.8	2.1	46.2	50.9	3.47	0.58
7.	I believe that schooling will make my child with special needs happier as he/she interacts with other children.	0.7	1.6	48.6	49.1	3.46	0.57
8.	I have confidence that my child with special needs will benefit from school.	0.6	1.2	44.3	54.0	3.52	0.55
9.	There are better educational opportunities for my child with special needs in schools.	0.5	2.0	52.1	45.4	3.42	0.56
10.	Children with special needs can find more friends in school than at home.	0.8	3.2	51.6	44.4	3.40	0.59
12.	Schools can plan and provide better educational programmes for my child with special needs.	0.4	1.0	52.3	46.3	3.44	0.54
13.	The education of children with special needs should be made compulsory as every child has the right to be educated.	0.6	3.5	38.1	57.8	3.53	0.60
14.	My child with special needs will have more meaningful opportunities to learn in school than at home or in his/her neighbourhood.	0.8	2.6	48.9	47.7	3.44	0.59
15.	The more time my child with special needs spends in school, the more likely that he/she will be able to integrate within the community.	0.5	4.4	55.8	39.4	3.34	0.58
16.	Schooling will enhance the confidence of my child with special needs.	0.6	2.0	56.0	41.5	3.38	0.56
19.	Children with special needs can develop a wider circle of friends in school than in their neighbourhood.	0.9	7.4	62.7	29.0	3.20	0.60
Negative Perceptions							
2.	I believe that it is better for my child with special needs to be schooled at home.	37.0	52.6	7.7	2.7	1.77	0.71
3.	It will not make a difference whether my child with special needs is in school.	47.0	44.1	5.9	3.0	1.65	0.73
4.	Schooling will cause my child with special needs to have lower self-esteem.	40.9	51.2	5.6	2.2	1.69	0.68
5.	The more time my child with special needs spends in school, the more likely that he/she will end up feeling lonely and left out.	37.2	55.0	5.0	2.7	1.73	0.68
20.	I will not enrol my child with special needs in school as he/she may be mistreated.	31.9	55.8	8.4	3.9	1.84	0.73
Transport Concerns							
11.	Transportation cost to school is too expensive as my child with special needs requires special services to travel.	3.8	21.9	47.7	26.6	2.97	0.80
17.	It is difficult to send my child with special needs to school as it is a long and tiring journey to the nearest special school.	11.1	42.2	35.4	11.2	2.47	0.83
Other Concerns							
18.	The waiting lists in some special schools are far too long.	3.2	27.0	54.1	15.7	2.82	0.72
21.	There should be trained professionals to meet the educational needs of my child with special needs in schools.	0.8	1.9	40.7	56.5	3.53	0.58
22.	I am willing to pay for my child with special needs to attend school.	2.0	8.4	67.2	22.4	3.10	0.62

Over seventy-one percent of the respondents provided reasons for indicating “Yes” that compulsory education should be made available to children with special needs as requested in question 23 (Table 3). They felt that education is important and that children with special needs may be able to gain more knowledge as well as benefit much from schooling (727 or 29.2%). A further 536 or 21.5% felt that children with special needs will develop independence and confidence in their daily living. Some respondents reported that it will allow the children to develop social skills as well as make friendships (429 or 17.2%). The needs of these children are also met should they go to school (276 or 11.1%) and that these children should be given equal opportunity as compared to their normal peers (201 or 8.1%).

Some respondents also perceived the importance of compulsory education as protecting and empowering the children from dysfunctional families. For example,

153/6: *Compulsory education will protect those children from disadvantaged or dysfunctional families where the caregivers lack the means or knowledge to maximize the child's potential whatever his/her functioning level.*

Respondents' Negative Perceptions of Compulsory Education

From the quantitative analysis (Table 2), approximately 10.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their children with special needs should be schooled at home (8.9%) probably because schooling may not make a difference in their children's learning. Others were concerned that schooling may cause low self-esteem (7.8%) or loneliness (7.7%) among their children and the probability that their children being mistreated in schools (12.3%). Yet, an insignificant percentage in the qualitative data of the respondents indicated “No” (3.0%) to compulsory education (Table 3). The reasons given were related to transport cost and waiting time or no interest. However, these responses were not significant in numbers. An example is:

16/12: *There should be sufficient resources to eliminate waiting list time as the child with special needs cannot wait to be educated. TIME is the biggest enemy for a child with special needs.*

Respondents' Concerns Regarding Transportation

From Table 2, 74.3% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that transportation was too expensive. Yet, only 46.6% agreed that it was difficult to send their children to school as the distance to the nearest school can be a long and tiring one. However, only 12% of these respondents responded qualitatively in Table 3. This may indicate that transportation was manageable and not a problem for some respondents. For example:

4/4: *Every Singaporean counts ...It gives the parents a sense of satisfaction and achievement in seeing them going to school. Sending them to school will greatly depend on the school fees and transport fees. If these fees are exorbitant and do not have the government support, we will be discouraged. We too pay income tax etc. and these children are Singaporeans. Do they have to incur high costs for being special which is no fault of theirs or ours i.e. the parents.*

Table 3. Qualitative Reasons for Choice of Compulsory Education in Frequency and Percentages (in brackets)

School		Hearing Impairment	Visual Impairment	Physical Impairment	Mild Intellectual Disability	Mod Intellectual Disability	Mu Ha
	Total Respondents	209 (100)	44 (100)	33 (100)	1105 (100)	622 (100)	476
	No Comments	4 (1.9)	3 (6.8)	12 (36.4)	141 (12.8)	122 (19.6)	352
	Yes Response	197 (94.3)	39 (88.6)	21 (63.6)	927 (83.9)	480 (77.2)	116
1	Education is important e.g. gain knowledge, develop full potential, more rounded personality, benefit child	71 (34.0)	9 (20.5)	4 (12.1)	308 (27.9)	197 (31.7)	138
2	Equal opportunity for all and avoid discrimination	20 (9.6)	9 (20.5)	2 (6.0)	73 (6.6)	58 (9.3)	39
3	Develop independence e.g. for survival in life, for confidence, better future, get job	38 (18.2)	8 (18.1)	9 (27.3)	218 (19.5)	157 (25.5)	106
4	Afraid of punishment / law if children are not in school	3 (1.4)			4 (0.0)	5 (0.0)	8
5	Needs of Children are met by teachers and therapists	14 (6.7)	6 (13.6)		89 (8.1)	94 (15.1)	73
6	Developing social skills e.g. make friends, happier in school	34 (16.3)	8 (18.1)	11 (33.3)	163 (14.8)	122 (19.6)	91
7	Time factor / Waiting time	2 (1.0)	1 (2.3)		2 (0.0)	2 (0.0)	2
8	Transport to school , distance and cost	2 (1.0)			4 (0.0)	4 (0.0)	2
9	Certification / Recognition by society			1 (3.0)	1 (0.0)		1
10	Test child	2 (1.0)			2 (0.0)	1 (0.0)	5
	No Response	8 (3.8)	2 (4.5)		37 (3.3)	20 (3.2)	8
1	Costs related	2 (1.0)			5 (0.0)	5 (0.0)	
2	Time spent / Waste time					1 (0.0)	1

27/1: *Transportation to school costs about \$140/- as the child is staying at Hougang. This is very expensive compared to normal buses to ordinary school. Can there be a subsidy for such school transport that the school can look into because parents are not earning much.*

Other Concerns

Respondents had also other concerns for their children with special needs being schooled (Table 2). For example, the long waiting list (69.8%), the importance of having trained professionals to meet their children's educational needs (97.2%). Despite these concerns, 89.6% were willing to pay for their children to attend schools.

Other major parental concerns that were raised in the qualitative data are:

- more special attention to the needs of children with special needs

4/6: *The Ministry of Education should also pay attention to these children to maximize their potential and not solely concentrate on normal schools.*

- more relevant and effective programmes in the special schools

18/6: *There should be more therapy programmes for children with physical difficulties*

75/11: *Not every special school in Singapore has linguistic therapists. Hope there could be improvement in future.*

- the need to educate the parents of children in the mainstream

65/2: *I feel that apart from getting the special needs children ready for compulsory education, there is also a need to educate the public or parents and children from mainstream schools about the special needs children and their disabilities.*

- the need for a centralized agency

17/3 *Pushing for a compulsory education for children with special needs is definitely one big step forward. Ensuring affordability and helping the schools, especially the regular schools to cope with having children with special needs in their school is another big challenge. In this respect, a centralized agency or department to take on this critical role will be very helpful.*

62/11: *It will be better if special schools are managed by MOE.*

15/1: *That special education should be under the ambit of the Ministry of Education in order to provide the best to such children and to be fair to them when compared to children in the mainstream who are fully supported by the MOE.*

- issues on special education teachers and school facilities

43/1: *Government must always aid the needs of special schools namely, facilities and good/caring teachers and volunteers. Good pay and career advancement. Analogy: "If you only pay peanuts, there will be only monkeys around".*

3/3 *Teachers should be given courses to handle these children with special needs as from my experience, teachers are not aware of these children and do not know how to handle these children.*

- make funds available

44/8 *The Singapore Government should not treat children with special needs as second-rate when compared to other 'normal' students. The treatment, such as subsidisation fees, teaching aids & equipment etc, should be equal to both 'normal' students & those with special needs. Buildings & facilities should be new & allow value-addition & these special schools should not be those abandoned premises left by 'normal' schools. The premises might not be able to cater to the requirements of the children with special needs.*

22/13: *Most of the special schools are in run-down or old buildings. Why aren't funds being provided to build brand new school buildings / facilities like the normal schools? Special school students deserve the best education & facilities like the normal children.*

- lower cost fees

26/20 *The school knows the child's needs. I hope the fees would be adjusted to satisfy people who cannot afford expensive fees.*

- given equal opportunities for education

195/8 *Every child should be treated equally, no matter what is his difficulty. ... No child should be deprived of education plus a change to integrate to the community.*

157/6 *Every child has a right to education. Being disabled doesn't mean he/she is unable to read, write, socialize, interact physically and mentally. He/She needs the exposure to improve and progress with the society like any other normal children. They did not choose to be born this way.*

18/10 *I believe that all children should be entitled to education including those with special needs. It is important for children with special needs to be provided with education for their future and be useful in society. If they are not taught the basic of living, social behaviours, right and wrong, there will be long term impact on the community.*

4/15 *Every child has a right to education. As Singapore takes pride in being a member of the World's most influential nations (e.g. member of the security council at UN), Singapore should consider how it looks after its weakest children, and not subject them to being neglected at the best.*

- more parental involvement

25/11: *Parents & educators should be able to communicate more often about the child's progress in school, school programmes & opportunities for the child to excel in.*

31/11: *I believe that there are many networks that could be created in special education. It is a highly professional domain & must be supported by various institutions. To maintain a well-balanced data, the questionnaires must cover parents' views on government (MOE), school (special education), public education, etc.*

Perceptions of Parents in Different Age Groups

Two significant differences of perceptions of parents in different age groups were reported in Table 4. Those below the age group of twenty were likely to strongly disagree with the statement that their children will not make a difference whether they are in school. Could it be that parents of different age groups held different views? Respondents aged 26 – 30 seemed to disagree most as compared to parents of other age groups. Could they be new parents trying to adjust to parenting problems and are more supportive of their children and are willing to stay home to train their children themselves? These 26 – 30 age range parents are also found to be more willing to pay for their children to attend schools. As supportive parents, they may also want the best for their children to be trained if necessary?

Table 4. Means of Significant Responses of Parents in Different Age Groups

	Item	Age Group of Parents					
		Below 20	20-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	above 40
3.	It will not make a difference whether my child with special needs is in school.	1.2	1.51	1.91	1.61	1.61	1.65
22.	I am willing to pay for my child with special needs to attend school.	2.22	3.13	3.25	3.22	3.10	3.07

Perceptions of Parents with Children of Different Age Groups

Table 5 showed that there are significant differences in the perceptions or concerns of parents with children of different age groups. In general, parents with younger children (aged 0 – 6) are more positive. They perceived schools being able to provide better educational programmes for their children and that the longer their children are schooled, they are more likely to be better integrated into the community and thus, enhance their children's confidence. They are also less likely to strongly disagree that school will not make a difference in their children or that their children will have lower self-esteem or be mistreated in school. They also expressed willingness to pay for their children's schooling and have trained professionals to meet their children's needs. Parents of primary school children aged 7 – 12 are more concerned with the expensive transportation cost.

Table 5. Means of Significant Responses of Parents with Children of Different Age Groups

	Age Group of Children			
	0-6	7-12	13-16	Above 16
Positive Perceptions				
12. Schools can plan and provide better educational programmes for my child with special needs.	3.55	3.46	3.44	3.42
15. The more time my child with special needs spends in school, the more likely that he/she will be able to integrate within the community.	3.43	3.36	3.31	3.35
16. Schooling will enhance the confidence of my child with special needs.	3.45	3.43	3.37	3.32
Negative Perceptions				
3. It will not make a difference whether my child with special needs is in school.	1.54	1.61	1.67	1.66
4. Schooling will cause my child with special needs to have lower self-esteem.	1.57	1.68	1.69	1.73
20. I will not enrol my child with special needs in school as he/she may be mistreated.	1.73	1.83	1.84	1.93
Transportation				
11. Transportation cost to school is too expensive as my child with special needs requires special services to travel.	2.95	3.05	2.94	2.79
Other Concerns				
18. The waiting lists in some special schools are far too long.	3.04	2.86	2.75	2.78
21. There should be trained professionals to meet the educational needs of my child with special needs in schools.	3.67	3.58	3.48	3.52
22. I am willing to pay for my child with special needs to attend school.	3.22	3.16	3.03	3.04

Perceptions of Parents of Children in Different Exceptional Groups

Parents’ perceptions were found earlier not only to be influenced by their own age group but also the age group of their children. However, Table 6 showed that parents’ perceptions or concerns may also be influenced by the exceptionality of their children. Parents of ASD children tended to raise the rights of their children being educated as well as other concerns, such as, trained professionals and the long waiting list. However, they also expressed more willingness to pay for their children’s schooling. Parents of hearing impaired children tended to express more regarding the distance from home to their special school.

Table 6. Means of Significant Responses of Parents of Children with Different Exceptionalities

Item	Intellectual Disability	Hearing Impairment	Visual Impairment	Physical Impairment	Multiply Disabled	ASD
13. The education of children with special needs should be made compulsory as every child has the right to be educated.	3.56	3.47	3.52	3.47	3.54	3.65
17 It is difficult to send my child with special needs to school as it is a long and tiring journey to the nearest special school.	2.45	2.63	2.53	2.57	2.45	2.35
18. The waiting lists in some special schools are far too long.	2.79	2.51	2.59	2.81	2.95	3.28
21. There should be trained professionals to meet the educational needs of my child with special needs in schools.	3.54	3.46	3.60	3.51	3.58	3.69
22. I am willing to pay for my child with special needs to attend school.	3.09	3.05	2.88	3.09	3.21	3.20

Conclusion

The survey included only parents of children with special needs who are currently attending special schools. There are no means available to identify parents of children with special needs who are not in schools. Although only parents who have children in special schools are respondents for this survey, it is a fair representation of the views of parents of children with special needs. Furthermore, in the registration for Primary 1 in 2003, only 3 children were not accounted for (Davie, 2003). From this information, it is reasonable to conclude that the number of parents of children with special needs who have been excluded from the survey is insignificant.

The research has shown that parents are highly in favour that compulsory education be enforced for even children with special needs. Their concerns have also been shown to not only be influenced by their age but also by their children’s age and exceptionality. The expensive cost of transportation and the long waiting lists are some of their major concerns.

Compulsory education is definitely seen as even more important for special children as compared to their normal peers if we are to reduce liability in the community.

Recommendations

As over 90% of respondents advocate compulsory education for children with special needs, some parents who are unable to send their children to school shouldn’t unnecessarily be penalized. They should be individually scrutinized to understand their problems. Some parents who didn’t send their children to school may be due to the long waiting list in schools or may be due to financial difficulties. If such is the case, the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) or the government may need to recognize potential problems of parents and to consider ways of assisting parents in resolving these problems. If there are hardship cases, may be schools should be subsidized with transport, therapy fees and school fees to assist these parents.

For special cases, parents can appeal for home schooling. In some cases, parents should be counseled to ensure the schooling of their children. If there is a centralized placement system, the waiting list may be more manageable. Children who are unable to attend school due to long waiting list could be directed to other appropriate educational settings.

More teachers and therapists must also be trained to serve the needs of the special schools. Training of Learning Support Coordinators (LSC) in regular schools must also be increased so that students who are integrated in regular schools are provided appropriate remediation to assist them in primary schooling. To date, this LSC scheme is only for Primary one and two. What happens when they reached Primary three? There is a lack of follow-through to higher primary levels. Then again, support services in terms of logistics, resources and highly specialized trained personnel are also lacking e.g. speech therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists etc. In the interim, before there is an adequate pool of local para-professionals that the schools require, the Ministry of Manpower should also be more flexible in the recruitment of foreign para-professionals from overseas.

Lastly, every pre-service teacher must undergo a course to familiarize them to the needs of special children in regular schools during their teacher training course. In-service courses should also be conducted for mainstreamed teachers to expose them to the needs of exceptional children. Courses for parents should also be considered to provide parents the expertise in facilitating the learning of their children.

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