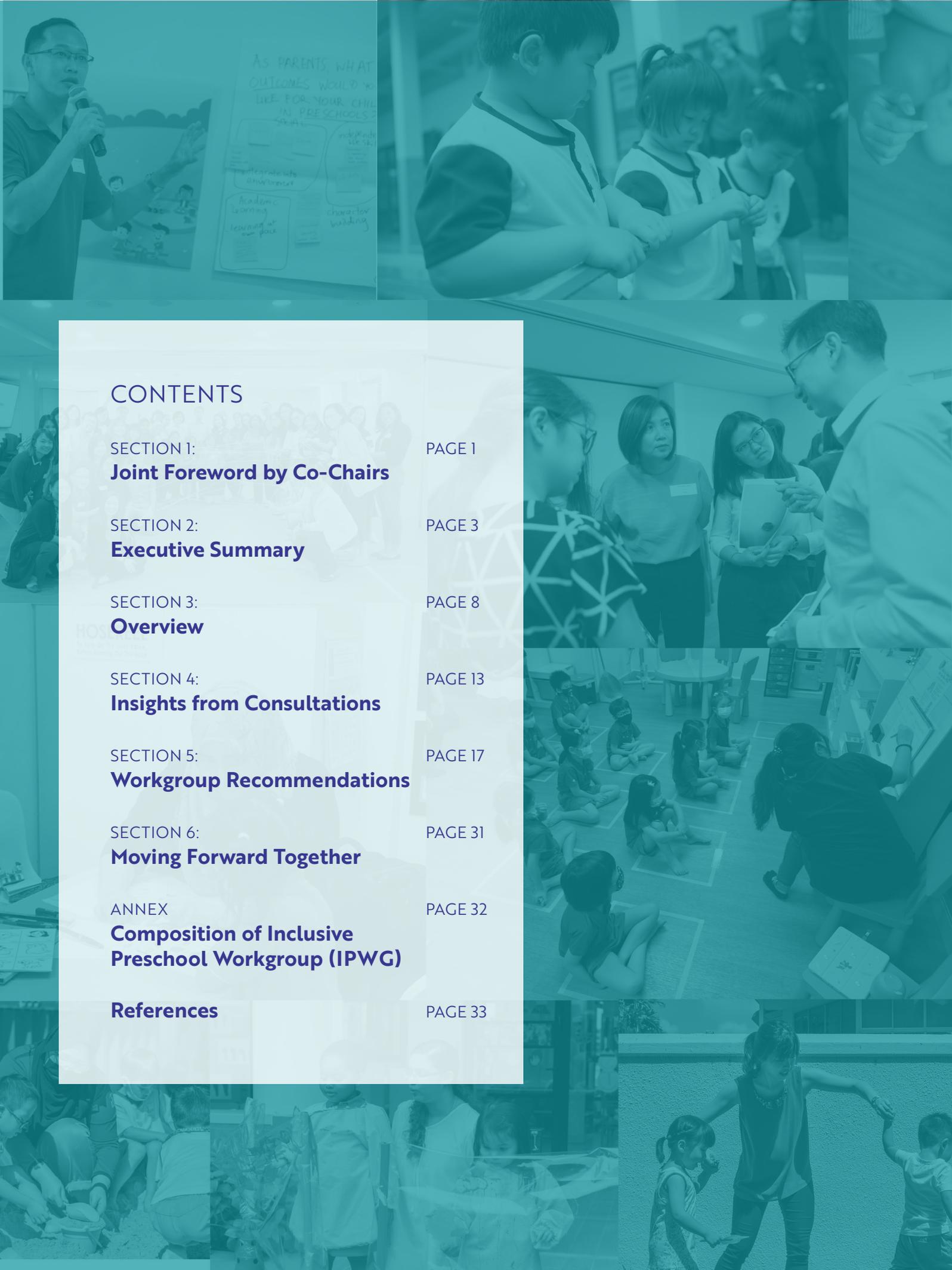


REPORT BY THE INCLUSIVE PRESCHOOL WORKGROUP ON

Enhancing Inclusion and Support for Children with Developmental Needs





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SECTION 1: **Joint Foreword by Co-Chairs**

Since the introduction of the first Enabling Masterplan in 2007, much progress has been made in making Singapore a more inclusive society and enabling persons of diverse abilities to live their lives meaningfully within the community.

A key effort that has been ongoing from the first to the third Enabling Masterplan (released in 2016) is the focus on enhancing early intervention and inclusion of children with developmental needs within our education system. Much has been done. For example, the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) had introduced the Development Support Plus (DS-Plus) programme and Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (EIPIC) Under-2s in 2019, to provide support better tailored to the varying needs of children.

To further our efforts on this front, MSF had convened the Inclusive Preschool Workgroup (IPWG) in April 2019 to study and develop recommendations to better support children with developmental needs, in particular those who require medium to high levels of early intervention support, within preschools¹. The IPWG is in part a response to the third Enabling Masterplan, which had called for efforts to enhance the integration and inclusion of children with special needs within the context of our education system, among its recommendations.

The members of the workgroup were drawn from across the people, public, and private sectors, providing a diverse range of perspectives and ideas. As part of the workgroup's study, a literature review was conducted to better understand critical success factors and challenges in supporting children with developmental needs within preschools. Members also visited local preschools and overseas systems to study good practices that could be applied to Singapore's context.

The workgroup also conducted focus group discussions with preschool operators, early childhood educators and early intervention professionals, as well as parents of both typically developing children and children with developmental needs. An online survey was also conducted to further gather perspectives from parents.

1. Prior to Aug 2020, the workgroup was co-chaired by former-Senior Parliamentary Secretary (Social and Family Development, and Education) A/P Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim.

Joint Foreword by Co-Chairs

This report documents the workgroup's findings and recommendations to better support early intervention and the inclusion of children with developmental needs. We would like to thank workgroup members for their efforts and contributions to the report. While the release of this report marks the conclusion of the workgroup, it does not signify an end to our efforts. Instead, it marks the start of the next chapter in our journey to further enhance the support and inclusion of children with developmental needs.

The journey ahead requires the collective efforts of all stakeholders – involving preschool and early intervention providers, early childhood educators and early intervention professionals, parents and the wider community. We look forward to growing and strengthening partnerships for the benefit of our children.

**Ms Sun Xueling**

Minister of State for Social and Family Development, and Education
Member of Parliament for Punggol West Single Member Constituency

Co-Chair of Inclusive Preschool Workgroup

**A/P Kenneth Poon**

Associate Dean (Education Research), National Institute of Education

Co-Chair of Inclusive Preschool Workgroup

SECTION 2: Executive Summary

In April 2019, former-Minister of Social and Family Development Mr Desmond Lee announced the formation of a cross-sectoral Inclusive Preschool Workgroup (IPWG) involving people, private and public sector partners, to study and develop recommendations to better support children with developmental needs in preschools. Under the ambit of the IPWG, 21 members from the health, education and social service sectors came together to co-create initiatives to enhance inclusion and support for children with developmental needs in preschools.

The IPWG's vision is for **children with developmental needs to learn, play, contribute and participate meaningfully, alongside their typically developing peers in preschools and in society.**

To help achieve this, the IPWG has mapped out a tiered framework to enhance support for children with developmental needs, depending on the level of early intervention support required. Within the tiered framework, the IPWG has put forth **seven recommendations** to enhance preschool and early intervention services and move towards better inclusion within preschools. A summary of these recommendations and MSF/ECDA's plans can be found in the table below and subsequent pages.

The IPWG recognises that the road to inclusion is an ongoing journey and calls for all stakeholders – government, preschools and early intervention providers, early childhood and early intervention professionals, parents and families – to play their part to make preschools more inclusive, and to ensure that all children can have a good start in life.



Source: Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY)



Source: Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY)

Focus group discussions in 2019 with (i) early childhood educators, early intervention professionals, preschool operators and early intervention service providers, as well as (ii) parents of preschool-aged children

Enhancing Inclusion in the Early Years



RECOMMENDATION 1

Work towards every preschool appointing a staff as an Inclusion Coordinator (ICO)

RECOMMENDATION 2

Expand the Development Support – Learning Support (DS-LS) and Development Support Plus (DS-Plus) programmes to more preschools, to support children requiring low levels of early intervention support



RECOMMENDATION 3

Pilot an Inclusive Support Programme (InSP) to integrate early childhood and early intervention services at preschools for children aged 3 to 6, who require medium levels of early intervention support

RECOMMENDATION 4

Enhance integration opportunities for children requiring high levels of early intervention support



RECOMMENDATION 6

Enable more timely and systematic identification of developmental needs

RECOMMENDATION 5

Enhance the inclusive education capabilities of early childhood educators and porosity across both early childhood educator and early intervention professional development pathways



RECOMMENDATION 7

Strengthen parental support through parent education

Summary of Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1

Work towards every preschool appointing a staff as an Inclusion Coordinator (ICO)

DETAILS

The Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF)/ Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) will provide training for ICOs and work towards every preschool appointing one of its staff as an ICO, beginning in the second half of 2023.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Expand the Development Support – Learning Support (DS-LS) and Development Support Plus (DS-Plus) programmes to more preschools, to support children requiring low levels of early intervention support

Since its launch in 2012, the DS-LS programme has expanded from 22 preschools to 600 preschools which enroll over 40% of resident preschoolers aged 5 to 6.

MSF/ECDA aims to expand outreach of the DS-LS programme to more preschools, covering 60% of preschoolers by 2025, and 80% in steady-state. To support the expansion, MSF/ECDA will work with providers to train more Learning Support Educators (LSEs).

MSF/ECDA will also increase the number of children to be transitioned from the Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (EIPIC) to the Development Support Plus (DS-Plus) programme over the longer term, so that more children can receive support in their preschools.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Pilot an Inclusive Support Programme (InSP) to integrate early childhood and early intervention services at preschools for children aged 3 to 6, who require medium levels of early intervention support

MSF/ECDA supports the InSP concept and will work towards piloting with selected preschool centres over the next few years.

In line with the IPWG's recommendation, ECDA will be developing the pilot with changes at 4 levels — child, class, centre, and community — to ensure that all children can benefit from a more inclusive setting.

Summary of Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 4

Enhance integration opportunities for children requiring high levels of early intervention support

DETAILS

The workgroup recognises there remains certain groups of children who require high levels of early intervention support and are better served by more intensive and specialised support at early intervention centres.

MSF/ECDA will work with early intervention centres and preschools to explore opportunities for purposeful interactions between these children and their peers.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Enhance the inclusive education capabilities of early childhood educators and porosity across both early childhood educator and early intervention professional development pathways

MSF/ECDA is working with the National Institute of Early Childhood Development (NIEC) to enhance the inclusive education component in existing early childhood pre-service training for students and continuing professional development for in-service professionals respectively.

MSF/ECDA is also developing a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) roadmap for early childhood educators with 'inclusive practice' as one of the focal areas. New programmes, such as the 120-hr Certificate in Inclusive Practice (CIP) and other short courses, will be introduced to help educators acquire inclusive strategies to support children with varying needs within preschools.

ECDA will also integrate the skills and career pathways for LSEds and early intervention teachers in the revised Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Skills Framework. This addition underscores the importance of strong partnership and collaborative teaming between early childhood educators and early intervention professionals, and encourages greater porosity across the pathways.

Summary of Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 6

Enable more timely and systematic identification of developmental needs

DETAILS

To increase take-up of Childhood Developmental Screening, MOH has extended subsidies to eligible Singapore Citizens to receive Childhood Developmental Screening at all Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS) General Practitioner (GP) clinics and polyclinics.

MSF/ECDA and MOE have released a set of professional practice guidelines in Feb 2021, to consolidate information on early intervention programmes and practice guidelines, to standardise and streamline assessments and referrals.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Strengthen parental support through parent education

SG Enable launched the Enabling Guide in July 2019 to provide information and advice on schemes, services, support and resources related to disability in Singapore.

ECDA will work with SG Enable to curate additional support resources and strategies for parents/caregivers, to be uploaded on the Enabling Guide. ECDA and SG Enable will also collectively explore ways to raise awareness of the Enabling Guide among parents/caregivers.

ECDA will also develop a version of the 'Professional Practice Guidelines' for parents.

SECTION 3: Overview



Source: Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA)

Child with developmental needs engaging in learning activity alongside his classmates

Literature Review on Benefits of Early Intervention and Inclusion

The early years of a child's life is a critical period for cognitive, social and functional development (Phillips & Shonkoff, 2000). In particular, for children who are at risk of developmental delays, or who have been identified to have developmental needs, **early intervention has been shown to be able to significantly shift the odds towards more favorable developmental outcomes** (Campbell et al., 2012; Estes et al., 2015; Hebbeler et al., 2007).

International literature further indicates that **enhancing support for children with developmental needs within inclusive preschool settings can benefit all children** (Noggle & Stites, 2018; Rafferty & Griffin, 2005). Children learn best from and alongside their peers as well as from the adult role-models around them (Aschermann, 2001; Kaiser & Hancock, 2003; Smith-D'Arezzo & Moore-Thomas, 2010).

- Children with developmental needs in inclusive classrooms are able to develop a sense of belonging and benefit from interaction with typically developing peers, compared to segregated classrooms, in areas such as social and emotional functioning, language and literacy skills, and cognitive development (Green et al., 2014; Holahan & Costenbader, 2000; Justice et al., 2014; Nahmias et al., 2014; Rafferty et al., 2003).

- Typically developing children in inclusive settings have been shown to acquire more helping and prosocial behaviours, demonstrate a higher level of emotional understanding, and were more socially accepting of children with developmental needs (Aguiar et al., 2010; Diamond, 2001; Diamond & Carpenter, 2000; Ogelman & Secer, 2012). A study conducted by Gallagher & Lamber (2006) also showed that there was no evidence that the development of typically developing children was negatively affected in the areas of literacy skills, and social and emotional functioning, from more inclusive preschool settings (Gallagher & Lamber, 2006).

Supporting more inclusive preschools also lays the foundation for a more inclusive society. Common experiences and interaction with others are important to building an environment that is conducive towards inclusion, and to allow inclusive mindsets to take root. Overseas literature suggests that efforts to seed an inclusive mindset from a young age require active participation from parents and teachers, who play a key role in shaping a child’s worldview and influencing children’s views and attitudes towards inclusion in adulthood (Denham et al., 2012; Hollingsworth & Buysse, 2009).

More inclusive preschool settings can also benefit educators and professionals within preschools. Overseas studies have found that educators in inclusive classrooms have stronger pedagogical skills and a sense of efficacy in teaching children, and better quality educator-student interactions (Voltz et al., 2010). Inclusive classrooms in the United States, Australia and Hong Kong showed that when implemented well, inclusive classrooms can have higher classroom quality in terms of programme structure and activities (Clapham et al., 2017; Hestenes et al., 2007; Leung et al., 2019).

While overseas literature presents promising benefits of early intervention and more inclusive preschool settings, the workgroup recognises that the findings may be context- and cultural-specific. It would be important to ascertain the validity of these factors in Singapore, to determine what would benefit children and families in our local context.

The Current Early Intervention Landscape

In Singapore, children from birth to six years old with developmental needs² currently can receive **a range of government-funded early intervention services** (see Figure 1). In 2020, about 5,600 children were served by government-funded early intervention services:

- 1,900 were served in the Development Support and Learning Support (DS-LS) and Development Support Plus (DS-Plus) programmes, which are delivered in preschools; and
- 3,700 were served in the Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (EIPIC), delivered in early intervention centres.

2. Developmental needs is an umbrella term referring to a range of developmental conditions where a child would benefit from early intervention support. These conditions can range from physical issues (e.g., muscular dystrophy), sensory issues (e.g., vision or hearing loss), and cognitive issues (e.g., autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disability), to behavioural and emotional issues (e.g., anxiety, sadness, and oppositional behaviour), as well as learning needs without accompanying disabilities (e.g., mild language developmental delays due to environmental factors).

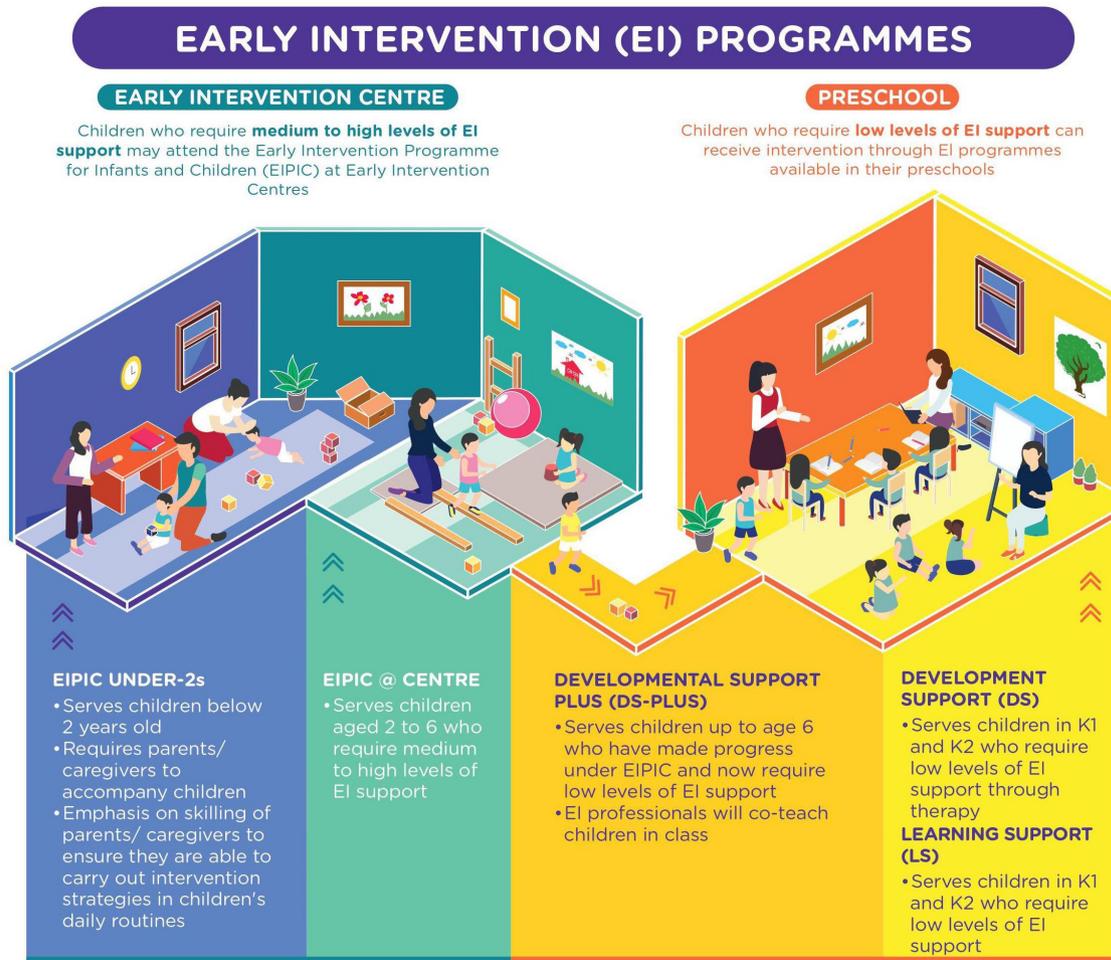


Figure 1. Levels of early intervention support for different types of early intervention programmes

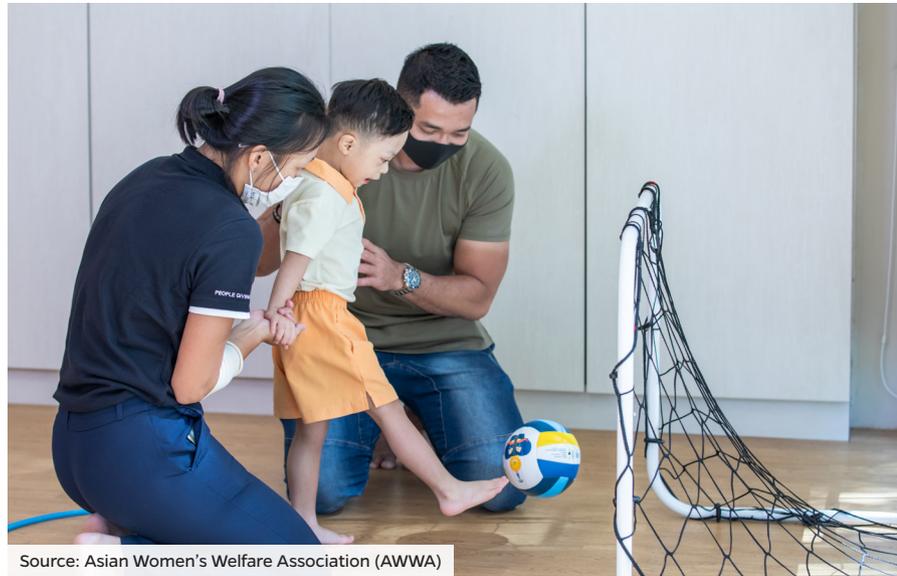
The DS-LS and DS-Plus programmes are provided in preschools, where children can receive intervention within their natural settings.

- Launched in 2012 (previously known as the Development Support Programme), the DS-LS programme provides targeted short-term support to children who require low levels of early intervention support³. The DS-LS programme is delivered within preschools by LSEs and therapists, who may be from regional therapy teams or directly hired by preschool operators. Early childhood educators would identify children with potential developmental delays to LSEs, who will then screen and work with pediatricians from KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) and the National University Hospital (NUH) to determine each child's needs and recommend a suitable support programme. Preschools which are appointed as DS-LS providers receive government funding to train their LSEs and procure therapy services from three regional therapy teams. In 2020, around 600 preschools offered the DS-LS programme, a 70% increase from 2017.
- Launched in 2019, the DS-Plus programme enables children who have made sufficient progress under EIPIC to receive intervention within their preschool setting, instead of an early intervention

3. More information on the levels of early intervention support for the various programmes could be found in Chapters 1 and 2 of the Professional Practice Guidelines: Developmental and Psycho-educational Assessments and Provisions for Preschool-aged Children, at the following link <https://go.gov.sg/guidelinesforprofessionals>

centre. Professionals from an early intervention centre will work with the child in his/her preschool up to twice a week, co-teaching the child alongside the preschool teacher. This allows the child to be equipped with skills within a larger class setting.

Children who require medium or high levels of early intervention support are referred to the **EIPIC programmes provided at early intervention centres**. EIPIC provides children with more intensive support than the DS-LS and DS-Plus programmes. There are currently 21 early intervention centres run by 10 Social Service Agencies (SSAs). **A significant proportion (about 3 out of 4) of children aged 3-6 who attend EIPIC are also enrolled in preschools.**



Source: Asian Women's Welfare Association (AWWA)

A child practises his gross motor skills with the support of his father, and the guidance of an AWWA therapist, as part of his intervention under EIPIC

- The EIPIC@Centre programme serves children aged two to six who require medium to high levels of early intervention support. The programmes are delivered at early intervention centres by a team of professionals, including early intervention professionals, therapists, psychologists and social workers. On average, children receive 5-12 hours of intervention (over 2-3 sessions) per week.
- The EIPIC Under-2s programme was introduced in July 2019 to provide more targeted intervention for children under two years old. The EIPIC Under-2s programme is tailored to the needs of younger children and requires children to be accompanied by their parents/caregivers, who will receive training to carry out intervention strategies in the children's daily routines at home. Such strategies embed learning opportunities throughout the children's daily lives, and lead to more sustainable outcomes. At the age of two, children will transit to the EIPIC@Centre programme which serves older children.

In 2019, to make early intervention services more affordable, the Government enhanced early intervention subsidies and broadened the income criteria for means-tested subsidies so that more families qualify. Out-of-pocket expenses for early intervention services have thus been lowered across all early intervention programmes, with reductions ranging from 30% to 70%. After subsidies, fees for early intervention for Singapore Citizen children currently range from \$5 to \$430 per month.

The Government also introduced a standardised benchmarking framework for early intervention centres. This comprises a combination of tools, including the Early Childhood Holistic Outcomes (ECHO) framework and Brigance Early Childhood Screens to better assess, support and track progress of the development of young children in areas like fine motor, gross motor, cognitive, adaptive, and social skills.

Current Training Efforts

Children with developmental needs are primarily supported by a team of professionals consisting of early intervention professionals and/or Allied Health Professionals (AHPs):

Early intervention professionals comprise LSEds from preschools and regional therapy teams, and early intervention teachers in early intervention centres.



Learning Support Educators

Learning Support Educators (LSEds) are primarily early childhood educators who have completed the Specialist Diploma in Early Childhood Learning Support (SDELS) offered by the National Institute of Early Childhood Development (NIEC). LSEds support children who require low levels of early intervention support under the DS-LS programme.



Early Intervention Teachers

Early intervention teachers are primarily Diploma or Degree holders with relevant experience and/or qualifications in early childhood or early intervention. Most early intervention professionals are required to complete the Specialist Diploma in Early Childhood (Special Needs) (SDESN) [formerly known as Advanced Diploma in Early Childhood Special Needs (ADESN)] offered by NIEC. Early intervention teachers provide intervention to children who require low to high levels of early intervention support.



Allied Health Professionals

LSEds and early intervention teachers work closely with Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) such as therapists and psychologists from SSAs to effectively support children with developmental needs.

As many children with developmental needs attend preschools, it is also important to equip preschool staff to better serve these children. To support preschool teachers, ECDA works with NIEC and other training institutes to equip them with basic skills to support children with developmental needs in the preschools. In pre-service training, early childhood educators are taught the basics of identifying and working with children with developmental needs, including avenues for additional support if needed. In-service teachers can tap on subsidised post-diploma training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses to deepen their knowledge and skills in this area.

SECTION 4: Insights From Consultations

To identify ways to better support and integrate children with developmental needs, the workgroup visited local and overseas preschools as well as conducted a series of public consultations locally. The workgroup heard from about 60 participants over two focus group discussions (in Nov 2019) and about 900 participants from an online survey for parents (from June to July 2020). Participants in the focus group discussions included early childhood educators, early intervention professionals, preschool operators, early intervention providers, as well as parents of preschool-aged children, both typically developing children and children with developmental needs. They shared with the workgroup their views on inclusion, challenges and ideas that can help improve the support and inclusion of children with developmental needs in preschools.

Perspective of the Child and their Parents/Caregivers

Parents/caregivers generally recognised that improvements have been made over the years in early intervention services, both in preschools and at early intervention centres. Based on the online survey conducted, majority of parents of typically developing children and children with developmental needs reported being open to inclusive preschools.



Source: Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY)

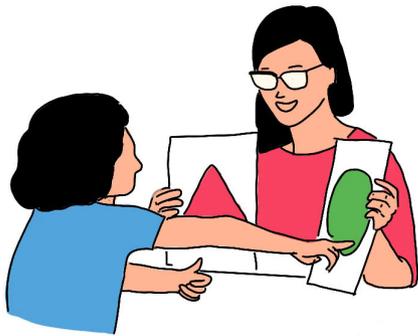
Focus group discussions in 2019 with parents of preschool-aged children

- 70% of parents with typically developing children indicated that they would enroll their child in an inclusive preschool, while 90% of parents with children with developmental needs would do so.
- Parents of typically developing children viewed an inclusive setting as a good opportunity for their children to develop social skills and moral character.
- Parents of children with developmental needs viewed this as a means for their child to be equipped with social and independent life skills. Some parents with children who require greater early intervention support suggested for some targeted support in separate classes within the preschool.

Ideas for further improvement raised include:



Providing more early intervention services at preschools to reduce burden on families. Currently, a significant proportion (about 3 out of 4) of children aged 3-6 who receive EIPIC services in early intervention centres (i.e those who require medium to high levels of early intervention support) also attend preschools when not in early intervention centres. Parents often have to shuttle their children between the preschool and early intervention centre. The shuttling results in strain for families, loss of preschool hours, and less effective early intervention sessions as children may be exhausted by the travelling. Siting more early intervention services at preschools could help to alleviate these issues.



Enhancing support to preschools in areas such as teacher training and infrastructure adjustments to better enable children with developmental needs to engage more meaningfully in preschools. Parents of children with developmental needs shared that these children may not be fully engaged in preschools, and some parents have faced difficulties finding preschool placements for their child. Providing support to preschools such as teacher training on inclusive practices or ensuring the environment is built according to children's needs will be helpful in ensuring children of all abilities are able to participate in the preschool's activities.



Promoting holistic learning that is differentiated based on a child's development to better support inclusion in preschools. Parents of children with developmental needs called for more emphasis on areas such as socio-emotional development for their children, with some asking for more latitude for their children's academic learning. Parents of typically developing children highlighted that a better understanding of the differentiated teaching provided would also help to give greater assurance that their children's development would not be affected.



Providing more information and support to parents of children with developmental needs to help them better support their children outside of preschool. This could include parent/caregiver training (to sustain intervention strategies at home), and more parent support groups to fortify social networks and support. Some parents also highlighted the need for better transfer of information between preschools and primary schools, to help children with developmental needs better adapt to their new school environment.



Source: Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF)



Source: Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF)

Focus group discussion in 2019 with early childhood educators, early intervention professionals, preschool operators and early intervention providers

Perspective of Early Childhood Educators and Early Intervention Professionals

As many children who currently attend EIPIC are also enrolled in preschools, many educators and preschool providers expressed an interest to better support children with developmental needs in their preschools. Ideas raised include:

Augmenting the manpower in preschools to better support a diverse range of children. For example, some called for preschools to have access to in-house or a centralised pool of early intervention professionals. Others called for more training of educators and 'hybrid' educators that are trained in both early childhood and early intervention. This would better help educators to identify developmental delays, link children and families to relevant resources, give appropriate advice to parents and better deliver differentiated teaching to cater to the varied learning needs of each child.



Supporting preschool leaders in developing a more inclusive culture. To enable this, leadership training and communities of practice could cover the topic of inclusive preschool education. This could include engaging preschool leaders on ways to put in place inclusive policies, processes and practices in their centres.



SUMMARY OF SUGGESTIONS FROM CONSULTATIONS

AREAS OF SUPPORT	
Children, Parents/Caregivers	Early Childhood Educators and Early Intervention Professionals
<p>Within preschools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more early intervention services at preschools to reduce burden on families • Enhance support to preschools in areas such as training and infrastructure adjustments to better support the inclusion of children with developmental needs • Promote holistic learning that is differentiated based on child's development <p>Within the community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more information on developmental needs and available support resources (e.g. caregiver training, parent support groups, managing transitions to primary schools) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Augment manpower at preschools with in-house early intervention professionals and more training opportunities for early childhood educators and early intervention professionals • Support leaders in developing a more inclusive preschool culture at preschools

SECTION 5: Workgroup Recommendations

Drawing on the takeaways from international experiences and local public consultations, the workgroup is of the view that there is scope to enhance the support and inclusion of children with developmental needs in preschools. This not only reduces strain on families logistically, but also, and more importantly, provides more integrated and holistic development opportunities for children with developmental needs. This also nurtures positive values and skills in all preschool children. The workgroup has developed a suite of recommendations, guided by the following vision and principles.

VISION



The vision is for children with developmental needs to learn, play, contribute and participate meaningfully, alongside their typically developing peers in preschools. When inclusion is done well, we expect to see the following desired outcomes:

- **CHILDREN:** A good start for every child (both typically developing children and children with developmental needs), where every child has access to appropriate support for learning and development, and opportunities to develop meaningful social interactions and friendships.
- **FAMILY:** Positive attitudes towards inclusion, given its benefits to holistic development for all children. Families of children with developmental needs are adequately supported. Families of typically developing children recognise that their children can also benefit from developing better social skills and efforts such as differentiated teaching, as typically developing children can also develop at a different pace for various domains.
- **EARLY CHILDHOOD AND EARLY INTERVENTION PROFESSIONALS:** Ready and confident in supporting children with diverse abilities, greater early childhood-early intervention collaboration, and positive attitudes towards inclusion.



This vision, in turn, will contribute to the third Enabling Masterplan's overarching vision for a caring and inclusive society, where persons with diverse abilities are empowered to achieve their fullest potential and participate fully as integral and contributing members of society.



Source: Asian Women's Welfare Association (AWWA)

Typically developing children and children with developmental needs participate in outdoor playtime together at Kindle Garden

The workgroup emphasises the following **key guiding principles** in designing recommendations to enhance inclusion in preschools:

Consideration For The Needs of Every Child

An inclusive preschool setting should consider the needs of all children (be they typically developing or children with developmental needs). The needs and development of one group should not be compromised for another group.

Sustainable Access To A Range of Early Intervention Services

This entails providing families with access to a range of affordable and quality early intervention services that would best meet the specific needs of their children. In providing these services, there should be a view towards optimising the use of resources and ensuring cost-effectiveness, so that early intervention programmes can be provided in a sustainable manner.

System-Level Support To Drive Inclusion

This includes enhancing training on inclusive practices for preschool educators and providing more coordinated support such as centralising information and resources for professionals and parents to support children with developmental needs.

A. Tiered Support Framework for Children with Developmental Needs

Based on the workgroup's vision and guiding principles, **the workgroup has mapped out a 4-tier framework to enhance support for children with developmental needs.** The tiered framework signals that all preschools have a part to play in enhancing support and inclusion for children with developmental needs. Please refer to Figure 2.

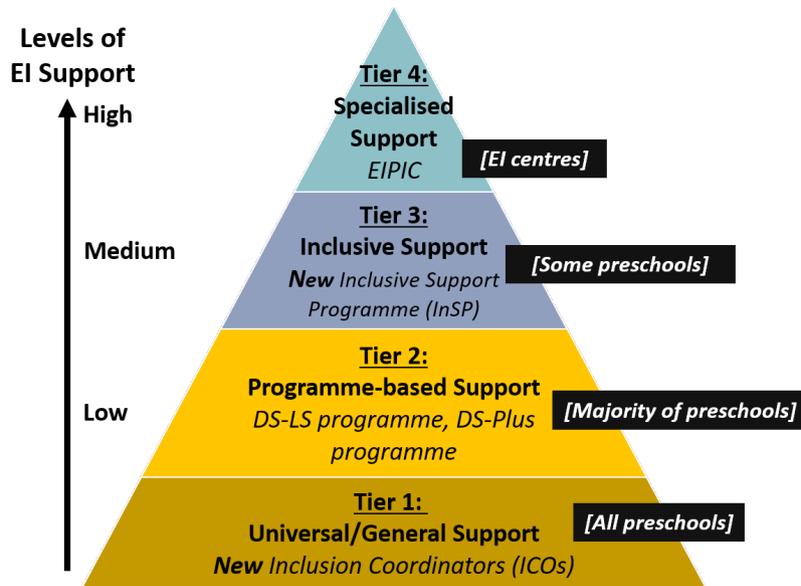


Figure 2. Tiered Support Framework for an Inclusive Preschool Sector



Under **Tier 1**, the workgroup calls for all preschools to be minimally able to identify children who may require some form of early intervention support, and refer children and their families to relevant early intervention information and services.



Under **Tier 2**, the workgroup calls for the majority of preschools to be able to screen and arrange short-term early intervention support in the preschool for children who require up to low levels of early intervention support, leveraging on programme-based support such as the DS-LS and DS-Plus programmes.



Under **Tier 3**, the workgroup calls for the Government to pilot a new Inclusive Support Programme (InSP) at selected preschools that brings together early intervention and early childhood services to provide integrated support for children who require medium levels of early intervention support.



Under **Tier 4**, the workgroup recognises that there may be a small group of children who will continue to require more intensive and specialised support at early intervention centres as they face challenges attending preschools. The focus for this group is to enhance early intervention support and explore integration opportunities with their typically developing peers, where appropriate.



RECOMMENDATION 1

Work towards every preschool appointing a staff as an Inclusion Coordinator (ICO)

The workgroup recommends for the Government to work towards having all preschools appoint one of its staff as an Inclusion Coordinator (ICO). ICOs will perform two roles:

- (i) work with early childhood educators to identify children with potential developmental needs for further assessment; and
- (ii) connect early childhood educators and parents to relevant early intervention resources and services.

To ensure that ICOs receive adequate support to perform the roles outlined above in their preschools, the workgroup also recommends for ECDA to establish a training programme to equip appointed ICOs with baseline knowledge and competencies.

Today, children's access to early intervention services via preschools can vary, depending on the preschool's familiarity with developmental needs and early intervention services available. The introduction of ICOs would help to establish and enhance the level of basic support for all children with developmental needs (e.g. Tier 1 support), as well as signal that every preschool has a role to play in strengthening inclusion.

The workgroup recognises that some preschools, such as those who provide DS-LS and DS-Plus programmes in their centres, may already have more established practices in place. **In such schools where awareness of early intervention services is already higher, ICOs could aspire to take on additional responsibilities** such as: a) working with centre management to facilitate implementation of early intervention programmes; b) facilitating centre-wide practices to nurture an inclusive mindset among children, teachers, and parents; and c) facilitating physical accommodations for children with developmental needs in the centre (e.g. procuring suitable equipment or making changes to classroom design).

MSF/ECDA will engage the preschool sector on training for ICOs and **work towards every preschool appointing one of its staff as an ICO, beginning in the second half of 2023. The exact timing will be announced later.** Beyond working with preschools to identify and train potential ICOs, ECDA will



Source: Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF)

Early childhood educator guiding children on an outdoor learning activity

also explore working with the sector to set up communities of practice so that ICOs can continue to deepen their knowledge and skills as well as leverage support from a community of like-minded peers to further their development. ECDA encourages all preschool leaders and educators to work in close partnership with ICOs in their preschools in order for preschools to truly advance in this inclusion journey.



RECOMMENDATION 2

Expand the Development Support – Learning Support (DS-LS) and Development Support Plus (DS-Plus) programmes to more preschools, to support children requiring low levels of early intervention support

Today, the key forms of early intervention support offered at preschools are the DS-LS and DS-Plus programmes for children who require low levels of early intervention support. To expand support to more children, the workgroup recommends that the Government work toward **expanding the outreach of DS-LS programme to the majority of preschools, and to increase the number of children from EIPIC to be transitioned onto the DS-Plus programme over the longer term.**

Since its launch in 2012, the DS-LS programme has expanded from an initial 22 preschools to 600 preschools which enroll over 40% of resident preschoolers aged 5 to 6 in 2020. The provision of DS-LS in preschools puts in place a systematic approach for early detection, where LSEds work closely with early childhood educators to identify children with developmental needs, and subsequently refer them to the appropriate early intervention programmes. Each child enrolled in the DS-LS programme has an Individualised Programme Plan (IPP) articulating specific support goals for the intervention. The vast majority of children on the DS-LS programme have demonstrated improvements in their IPP goals.

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In July 2019, MSF further rolled out the DS-Plus programme to support children who have made sufficient progress under EIPIC, to transit and receive intervention in a preschool setting. Under the DS-Plus programme, early intervention professionals from the early intervention centre work with the child in his/her preschool, co-teaching the child alongside the preschool teacher. This allows the child to be equipped with skills within a larger class setting. Such opportunities for co-teaching further encourage learning and sharing of strategies between early childhood educators and early intervention professionals. In the longer term, there is scope for more children from EIPIC to be placed on the DS-Plus programme.

The expansion of the DS-LS and DS-Plus programmes will enable more preschools to provide early intervention to children who require low levels of early intervention support. The workgroup is cognisant that the pace of expansion is contingent on growth in manpower supply (e.g. LSEs, therapists). As such, training could be stepped up to enable more preschools to implement these programmes for children in their centres who require these services. In addition, to reap the full benefits of the preschool-based early intervention programmes, preschool-based ICOs and early intervention providers can work together closely (see earlier section on recommendation #1) to ensure that the needs of children with developmental needs are properly cared for in preschools.

MSF/ECDA will work with service providers to train sufficient LSEs to support the expansion of the DS-LS programme to more preschools covering 60% of preschoolers by around 2025, and 80% in steady-state. Over the longer term, MSF/ECDA will also enable more children to transit from EIPIC onto the DS-Plus programme, when they are able to do so. This way, more children can receive early intervention support within their preschools.



Source: Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA)

Child receiving DS-LS speech therapy session in preschool



RECOMMENDATION 3

Pilot an Inclusive Support Programme (InSP) to integrate early childhood and early intervention services at preschools for children aged 3 to 6, who require medium levels of early intervention support

The workgroup recommends piloting a new InSP to bring together early intervention and early childhood services at preschools for children aged 3 to 6, who require medium levels of early intervention support. It is suggested that the pilot InSP preschools adopt certain key features at the **child, class, centre and community** levels, to realise the benefits of inclusive settings for both typically developing children and children with developmental needs.

The workgroup suggests that the Government start with a few preschools to pilot the InSP, in order to assess the benefits, sustainability and feasibility of scaling the programme to more preschools in the local context.

Today, the key forms of early intervention offered at preschools are the DS-LS and DS-Plus programmes, for children who require low levels of early intervention support. For children who require medium to high levels of early intervention support, they would have to enroll in early intervention centres for EIPIC services. A significant proportion (about 3 out of 4) of children aged 3 to 6 who currently attend EIPIC are also enrolled in preschools. These 'dual schoolers' can face various challenges as discussed in earlier sections.



Source: Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA)

Children playing with building blocks

Under the proposed InSP, these children will receive specialist support from in-house early intervention teachers and/or visiting allied health professionals⁴ at preschools, instead of at early intervention centres. The InSP also seeks to ensure holistic development and meaningful engagement for all children through differentiated instruction⁵, to foster the cognitive and functional development of typically developing children and children with developmental needs. As typically developing children and children with developmental needs learn and play alongside peers with diverse abilities, this fosters meaningful interaction between all children, and nurtures social-emotional competencies, as well as collaborative and communicative skills.

4. Allied health professionals refer to therapists and psychologists.

5. Differentiated instruction is recognised internationally as a good practice for early childhood education (not only in inclusive preschool settings), as typically developing children would also develop at a different pace in various developmental domains. Educators may use the same curriculum with children with diverse abilities, by varying content, materials and the environment to suit the child's readiness, interest and learning profile.

The workgroup has identified the following features to be adopted by InSP preschools:



Figure 3. Summary of Recommended Features for InSP pilot

(i) **Child - Supporting their early intervention needs within preschool**

- a. **Specialist support from full-time early intervention professionals and visiting AHPs:** The workgroup recommends for additional early intervention resources to be sited at InSP preschools, to strengthen in-school support for children requiring medium levels of early intervention support. These additional resources could be a shared responsibility between Government, providers and families, similar to the current provision of services at early intervention centres. For example, parents of children with developmental needs in pilot InSP preschools would pay early childhood and early intervention fees for their child, similar to how they would currently pay separate fees to preschools and early intervention centres.
- b. **Individualised Programme Plan (IPP)⁶ and case management for children with developmental needs:** Similar to EIPIIC, the workgroup recommends that children with developmental needs should each have an IPP. Each child's IPP could be implemented through a combination of in-class and pull-out support⁷, depending on the child's needs and progress made. This ensures that children receive the support that will enable them to make similar gains as that under EIPIIC.

6. Internationally and locally, an Individualised Programme Plan is commonly used to identify needs, plan intervention goals and a range of supports for children with developmental needs.

7. In-class support refers to support given to enable children requiring early intervention support to access the preschool curriculum in the same class and/or learning activities as their typically developing peers. Pull-out support refers to the provision of separate, specialised support to children requiring early intervention support, either individually or in small group sessions. Pull-out support may be provided during class or after class. For example, children with social-communication needs may receive speech and language therapy with a therapist through pull-out support, and the therapist may also work with early childhood educators to reinforce learning in class.

(ii) Class - Cultivating inclusive practices

- a. **Differentiated teaching practices and collaborative teaming:** The workgroup recommends that early intervention professionals and early childhood educators work towards co-planning and co-teaching classes and learning activities, implementing differentiated teaching practices to suit children's diverse learning abilities and embedding early intervention strategies in daily preschool routines for children with developmental needs.
- b. **Capability building for early childhood educators and early intervention professionals:** The workgroup recommends that InSP preschools place a strong emphasis on continuing professional development for early childhood educators and early intervention professionals, so that preschool staff continually enlarge their knowledge of evidence-based inclusive practices, and have opportunities to review their pedagogical approaches through peer-learning and mentorship.

(iii) Centre - Fostering an inclusive preschool ecosystem

- a. **Diverse mix of children in each preschool:** To ensure classroom dynamics remain diverse and led by typically developing children, the workgroup recommends capping the proportion of children requiring low to medium levels of early intervention support at 20% of a preschool centre's enrolment, with a sub-cap of 10-15% for children requiring medium levels of early intervention support for a start⁸.
- b. **Inclusive environment and culture:** The workgroup recommends that InSP preschools consider reducing environmental barriers to improve accessibility for children with developmental needs⁹. InSP preschools should also facilitate activities that will nurture an inclusive culture among staff, parents and children.

(iv) Community – Families as core partners

- a. **Family-centre partnerships:** As parents play a primary role in their child's development, the workgroup recommends that InSP preschool centres actively and regularly involve parents and caregivers as critical partners in shaping the child's development, progress and planning of support.

In selecting InSP pilot preschools, the workgroup notes that there is a wide range of developmental conditions. While some InSP preschools could cater to a range of conditions, there may also be value for some InSP preschools that only cater to specific developmental needs, to better facilitate peer-learning and allow for economies of scale in centralising specialised support¹⁰.

MSF/ECDA supports the piloting of InSP preschools and will work towards identifying the pilot preschools and parameters, with details to be released later in 2021.

8. The workgroup's recommended enrolment caps are based on similar practices observed in overseas and local preschools with inclusive programmes.

9. For example, this could include the use of tactile flooring, and enlarging the indoor play area for gross motor therapy.

10. For example, children with hearing impairments or visual impairments may require signing instruction or braille instruction respectively. These are low incidence developmental needs that require specialist expertise and adaptations to learning materials, and these children would benefit from practicing signing and braille skills with their peers.



RECOMMENDATION 4

Enhance integration opportunities for children requiring high levels of early intervention support

For children who continue to require high levels of early intervention support at early intervention centres, the workgroup recommends facilitating opportunities for purposeful interactions between these children and their peers in preschools.

The workgroup recognises that there remains certain groups of children who require high levels of early intervention support, and are better served by more intensive and specialised support at early intervention centres. For example, this could include those who are not able to enroll in preschools because they are much younger, medically frail, have very challenging behavioural issues, or who require intensive one-to-one early intervention support.

MSF/ECDA will work with early intervention centres and preschools to explore opportunities for purposeful interactions between these children and their peers in preschools. Such opportunities could involve partnerships between early intervention centres and preschools to develop planned, sustained activities for social interaction. Examples of such activities could include planned visits to each other's centre to learn and play, as well as joint events to celebrate festivals.



Source: Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA)

Children engaging in outdoor play

B. System-level Support for Early Childhood Educators, Early Intervention Professionals, Preschools and Families

Both local and overseas experts have emphasised the importance of enhancing system-level support for early childhood educators, early intervention professionals, preschools and families. Such efforts involve putting in place supporting systems for capability building, screening and referrals, as well as parent education. Today, NIEC plays a key role in the provision of training and resources to support professional development, while SG Enable provides information and referral (I&R) services for child disability schemes. The workgroup has put forth Recommendations 5, 6 and 7 on enhancing these system-level support structures.



RECOMMENDATION 5

Enhance the inclusive education capabilities of early childhood educators and porosity across both early childhood and early intervention professional development pathways

To realise our vision for children with developmental needs, our early childhood educators and early intervention professionals are key. **The workgroup recommends enhancing pre-service training and continuing professional development (CPD) for early childhood educators to strengthen professional capabilities in inclusive education.**

To ensure that early childhood educators and early intervention professionals are equipped with the relevant knowledge/skills, ECDA has been working with early intervention providers and preschool operators to look into various capability-building initiatives.

At the Early Childhood Conference in 2020, ECDA announced plans to integrate the skills and career pathways for LSEds and early intervention teachers in the revised ECCE Skills Framework. This addition underscores the need for



Source: Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF)

Early childhood educator conducting a class

strong partnership and collaborative teaming between early childhood educators and early intervention professionals, as we make our preschools more inclusive. The revised Skills Framework will encourage greater porosity of early childhood educators and early intervention professionals across different professional development pathways, and will allow for greater harmonisation of training programmes to facilitate the movement of early childhood educators and early intervention professionals across different career paths.

MSF/ECDA is working further with NIEC to enhance existing early childhood pre-employment training as well as continuing education and training for students and in-service professionals respectively. Beyond the existing modules which cover knowledge of exceptional needs, inclusion and differentiation, **NIEC will emphasise individual difference(s), an effective learning environment for all children, and re-examine the roles of educators so that supporting children with developmental needs (or diverse learning needs) is viewed as part of regular teaching and learning.**

Additionally, MSF/ECDA is working on a **CPD roadmap for early childhood educators with ‘inclusive practice’ as one of the key focal areas.** We will introduce new CPD programmes related to this focal area. For a start, **ECDA has worked with NIEC to launch a new 120-hr Certificate in Inclusive Practice (CIP) from June 2021.** This certificate aims to build on what early childhood educators learn in their pre-service training and help them acquire the skills to apply inclusive strategies to support children with varying needs in preschools. It is designed as a series of short skills-based modular courses which are stackable towards the full Certificate.



RECOMMENDATION 6

Enable more timely and systematic identification of developmental needs

Early detection and timely intervention for children with developmental needs are critical. **The workgroup recommends consolidating information on the range of early intervention programmes and practice guidelines, to standardise and streamline assessment and referral processes.**

Over the years, Singapore’s healthcare sector has introduced policies to enhance early screening and detection for children with developmental needs. Childhood Developmental Screening has been conducted as part of preventive care for all children with the aim of identifying children at risk of developmental delays for early intervention. Parents and healthcare professionals can refer to the key developmental milestones provided in the Health Promotion Board’s (HPB) Child Health Booklet, which

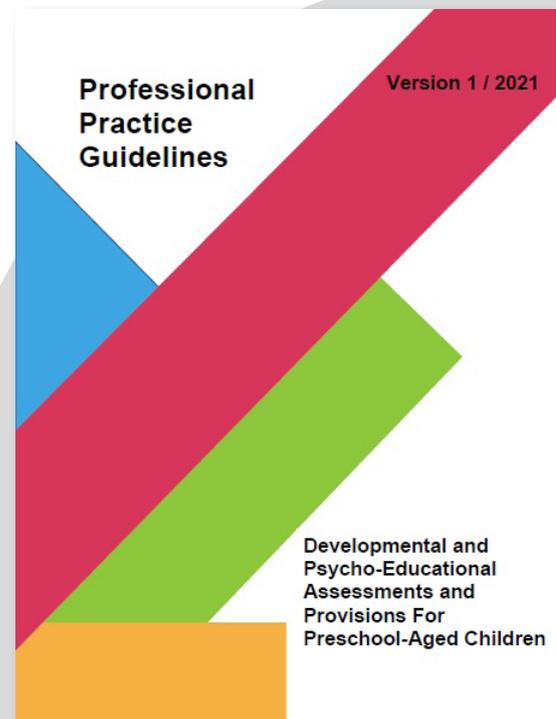
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recommends seven touchpoints¹¹ for screening spread across the first six years of life. Each screening visit includes a combination of growth monitoring, physical examination and developmental checks on key domains. These screenings are typically conducted together with the recommended childhood vaccinations, when possible.

More recently, since Nov 2020, MOH extended subsidies to eligible Singapore Citizens to receive recommended vaccinations under the National Childhood Immunisation Schedule and Childhood Developmental Screening at all Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS) General Practitioner (GP) clinics and polyclinics. With the increased convenience of accessing fully subsidised Childhood Developmental Screening, MOH envisions that the overall take-up rate by parents will improve. For school-going children, HPB's School Health Services and School Dental Services also support early detection to address growth, developmental, vision and oral health issues early, from Kindergarten 1 onwards. To further support timely identification of developmental needs so that children can be supported early, the workgroup envisages that the proposed ICOs at preschools could serve as another key touchpoint.

MSF/ECDA and MOE also recently released a set of professional practice guidelines for preschool-aged children in Feb 2021 - Professional Practice Guidelines: Developmental and Psycho-Educational Assessments and Provisions for Preschool-Aged Children (<https://go.gov.sg/guidelinesforprofessionals>). This guides professionals in providing consistent and reliable recommendations to children and their families for the appropriate early intervention support in the preschool years. The Guidelines also describe the transition process for children with developmental needs to school aged provisions, to better guide professionals in assessing children and to share practices for effective transition support to mainstream primary or Special Education (SPED) schools. The Guidelines will be reviewed and refreshed on a periodic basis to ensure its relevance.

Source: Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA)
Professional Practice Guidelines released by MSF, ECDA and MOE



11. The seven recommended touchpoints for Childhood Developmental Screening are at age 4 weeks, 3 or 4 months, 6 months, 12 months, 18 months, 30 months and 48 months.



RECOMMENDATION 7

Strengthen parental support through parent education

Parents and caregivers are the primary source of support for children with developmental needs. **The workgroup recommends to curate additional resources that will deepen parents' and caregivers' understanding of developmental needs, and provide information on support resources and strategies.**

During the focus group discussion, parents/caregivers raised suggestions for a centralised source of information (e.g. range of early intervention programmes and services, preschools that offered early intervention support) and resources and strategies for them to sustain support at home.

To address the call for more centralised and readily accessible information on disability services, SG Enable developed and launched the Enabling Guide in July 2019. The Enabling Guide is an online, first-stop resource portal which provides information and advice on schemes, services, support and resources related to disability in Singapore at various life stages (<http://www.enablingguide.sg>). The Enabling Guide includes information on early intervention services, caregiver support and training as well as links to external resources (such as HealthHub) that feature articles on childhood development, to equip parents/caregivers with knowledge.

MSF/ECDA will work with SG Enable to curate additional support resources and strategies that parents/caregivers can use at home to sustain their child's progress beyond the intervention provided at preschools or at early intervention centres. These will be put up on the Enabling Guide, to build up the pool of resources for parents/caregivers of children with developmental needs. To ensure that these curated resources and strategies will reach its intended audience, MSF/ECDA and SG Enable will also collectively look at ways to raise awareness of the Enabling Guide as a centralised information and resource portal among parents/caregivers.

To provide parents with a more comprehensive guide in supporting their children during the preschool years and in the transition to school-age provisions beyond that, **the Government will also be developing a version of the 'Professional Practice Guidelines: Developmental and Psycho-Educational Assessments and Provisions for Preschool-Aged Children' for parents.**

ANNEX

Composition of Inclusive Preschool Workgroup (IPWG)

1	Ms Sun Xueling	Minister of State, Ministry of Social and Family Development & Education [Co-Chair]
2	A/P Kenneth Poon	Associate Dean (Education Research), National Institute of Education (NIE) [Co-Chair]
3	A/P Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim	Former-Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Social and Family Development & Education [Former Co-Chair]

GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES

4	Ms Ng Mie Ling	Assistant Chief Executive, ECDA
5	Ms Lim Yi Jia	Director, Disability Office, MSF
6	Ms Lynn Koh	Director, Early Intervention, ECDA
7	Ms Cynthia Leow	Director, Policy & Sector Funding 1, ECDA
8	Ms Vivienne Ng	Chief Psychologist, MSF
9	Dr Mariam Aljunied	Principal Educational Psychologist, MOE
10	Ms Geraldine See	Director, Preschool Education, MOE
11	Mrs Loke-Yeo Teck Yong	Director, NIEC
12	Dr Mary Daniel	Head, Department of Child Development, KKH

PRESCHOOL SECTOR AND EARLY INTERVENTION SECTOR PARTNERS

13	Mr J.R. Karthikeyan	CEO, AWWA
14	Sr Theresa Seow	Supervisor, Canossaville Preschool
15	Dr Jacqueline Chung	Academic Director, Anglican Preschool Services
16	Ms Marini Khamis	Senior Director, Preschool Management Division, PAP Community Foundation (PCF)
17	Ms Phoon Chew Ping	Deputy CEO (Development), NTUC First Campus (NFC)
18	Mr David Lim	Executive Director, Presbyterian Community Services (PCS)
19	Ms Lily Yip	Head, Preschool and Curriculum, Research and Innovation Development, Association of Persons with Special Needs (APSN)
20	Ms Iris Lin	Senior Assistant Director, Fei Yue Community Services
21	Ms Amisarni Mohd Amin	Principal, Lighthouse School

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